



Carleton Gajdusek & Kuru

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Supplement: Allegations of Sexual Abuse



For Gajdusek, his "adoptions" in Papua-New Guinea were genuine in spirit. But the crossing of cultural boundaries also proved problematic. When Gajdusek returned to the U.S., he brought some of his adoptees with him. He provided for their education and well being. Eventually, over several decades, he assumed the role of foster parent for 56 children, mostly boys. But in the 1990s, allegations of improper sexual conduct with the boys emerged. Further complaints subsequently emerged from a former neighbor, who alleged being molested over a long period of time during his youth (1970s). Gajdusek himself admitted to having sexual encounters with between 200 and 300 boys. However, he said that he never forced himself upon the children and that the boys consented to all actions. In 1996 Gajdusek was arrested and charged with child molestation. He pleaded guilty and spent 12 months in U.S. federal prison.

THINK (12). *How should this episode shape our perceptions of Gajdusek's scientific claims and of Gajdusek as a scientist? Consider:*

- *Were the relationships Gajdusek established important to his scientific work?*
- *What responsibilities did Gajdusek have to his "adoptees" in Papua New Guinea, especially when he planned to return to the U.S.?*
- *Whose cultural norms should guide a judgment of what is "appropriate" in this case?*
- *In what ways, if any, are Gajdusek's scientific work or achievements relevant when assessing his sexual behavior? In what ways, if any, is his alleged molestation relevant to his science or how we regard Gajdusek as a "scientist"?*
- *Scientists are inevitably human: How should we integrate the personal and professional dimensions of their identity? In parallel, what principles should guide how the scientists themselves integrate these coupled identities?*

This dimension of the case is addressed in a 2009 film documentary, "The Genius and the Boys," by Bosse Lindquist and co-produced by the BBC, Arte, SVT, NRK and DR.