“Planning Ethically Responsible Research, 2nd Edition”
Joan E. Sieber and Martin B. Tolich, 2013, 238 pages, SAGE Publications, $64.00
Review by Norman M. Goldfarb

“Planning Ethically Responsible Research, 2nd Edition” should be required reading for anyone involved in human subjects protection related to social and behavioral research. Current debates about the relevance of IRB ethical review to social and behavioral research would be well informed by the authors’ thoughtful perspectives. Their ethical analysis of controversial research by Milgram, Zimbardo and others demonstrates the subtleties that must be addressed in ethical review.

The book also provides important insights on human subjects protection in biomedical research, for example:

The researcher must engender a strong sense of rapport, trust and mutual respect. He or she must be responsive to the concerns of the subject and facilitate adequate decision-making. Let us analyze these and other elements of communication:

**Rapport.** Because informed consent procedures are administered to many subjects, it is all too easy to turn the process into a singsong routine that is delivered without any sense of commitment to interpersonal communication. A friendly greeting, openness, positive body language, and a genuine willingness to hear what each subject has to say or ask about the study are crucial to establishing rapport. The amount of eye contact one should employ depends on various circumstances. Extensive eye contact can interfere with the subject’s ability to think and would be considered rude in some cultures. Too little eye contact may signal avoidance, however. Lack of rapport communicates disrespect.

**Congruence of verbal and body language.** The sociologist Erving Goffman termed this incongruence *expressions given* and *expressions given off*. The usual example is of a man professing his love for his girlfriend (expressions given) as his eyes wander following another attractive woman (expressions given off). Words can mean one thing, while the manner in which they are delivered can say the opposite. Congruence in the communication of the researcher means that all channels of communication must convey respect and openness. The congruent communicator of informed consent uses vocabulary that the subject can easily understand, speaks in gentle, direct tones at about the same rate of speech that the subject uses, breathes deeply and calmly, stands or sits straight and relaxed, and is accessible to eye contact. Even if the researcher is feeling stressed, he or she takes time to relax so as not to make distracting movements, show impatience, or laugh inappropriately. To communicate congruently, one’s mind must be relatively clear of distracting thoughts.

**Trust.** If subjects believe that the investigator may not understand or care about them, there will not be the sense of partnership needed to carry out the study satisfactorily. The issue of trust is particularly important when the investigator has considerably higher status than members of the target population or is from a different ethnic group. It is often useful to ask representatives of the subject population to examine the research procedures and make sure they are respectful and acceptable to the target population.
The book consists of 13 chapters:

- Introduction: Research Governance and Research Ethics
- Why We Need Ethics: Assessing Vulnerability, Risk and Benefit
- The Relevance of Ethical Theory to Institutional Review Board Practice
- A Retrospective Institutional Review Board Review: Rehabilitating Milgram, Zimbardo and Humphreys
- Journalist's Ethics ≠ Social Scientist's Ethics
- Community-Engaged Research and Ethnography: Extreme Misfits With the Medical Model
- Communicating Informed Consent and Process Consent
- Degrees of Nondisclosure
- Strategies for Assuring Confidentiality
- Hired Hands: Invisible, Powerless and Vulnerable Research Assistants
- Why Institutional Review Boards Have an Important Place: The Autoethnographic Experiment
- Evidence-Based Ethical Problem Solving: A Research Agenda
- Making Ethics Review a Learning Institution: Ten Simple Suggestions

The book is available in bookstores.

**Reviewer**

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