

# Book Review

Nichols-Casebolt, A. (2012). *Research Integrity and Responsible Conduct of Research*. NY: Oxford University Press.

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Dr. Nichols-Casebolt has been a faculty member of the social work school at Virginia Commonwealth University since 1993, has had several previous academic appointments, and has served as associate dean at that school. She is currently the associate vice president for research development in the Office of Research in that university. She has been engaged in research and teaching for many years and has a good number of research publications in print. She has served as chair of the board of the Institute for the Advancement of Social Work Research.

The purpose of this book is to discuss the ethical and professional issues that arise in all phases of the research process and most of the latter have ethical implications as well. The first chapter discusses such broad issues as what is meant by “research integrity” and its relationship to ethics, the federal regulations that seek to promote this, and the nature of ethical decision making. The following chapter deals with the process of “mentoring,” as this often precedes the development of a research project especially for newcomers to that activity. The role of the mentor is described in detail as well as the role of the protégé and the responsibilities of each party. The ways that diversity is manifested in this relationship are discussed. A very useful chart is also included that presents the skills involved in mentoring.

The next chapter discusses another topic that often arises and is seldom dealt with in the research literature—the professional conflicts that arise in the research process. Of great importance, and raised at several places in the book, is the issue of conflict of interest. This may take many forms in addition to the financial ones and includes personal conflicts, time commitment conflicts, and value conflicts. Useful strategies for the solution

of such conflicts are prescribed. As in all other chapters, Nichols-Casebolt provides well-developed vignettes in which these issues arise; these are complex and “real” enough to stimulate an in-depth consideration of the ethical and professional solutions to the problem posed.

Chapter four describes the very contemporary issue of collaboration, including collaboration between new and seasoned researchers and scholars from different disciplines. These can create conflicts that grow out of power differences and these can be among the most challenging to resolve. Another related issue is created when the collaborators are members of the community rather than professional colleagues and such persons are often neglected when issues of authorship and contributions to the research process occur. I believe we are seeing more examples of community participatory research, which is very healthy for social work researchers who, however, may not have sufficiently thought through the ethical and professional responsibilities of the researcher in these circumstances. Another useful table is presented in this chapter that outlines the many ethical and professional issues growing out of this type of collaboration related to roles, responsibilities, and decision making.

Chapter five deals with the all-important topic of protection of human subjects. This is typically discussed in research books and articles, yet Nichols-Casebolt brings fresh insight to the process of Institution Review Board approval, when it is needed, and how research is presented to boards and what this review entails. A useful section of this chapter discusses the risks and benefits that are generated by the kinds of research engaged in by social work investigators, especially with

vulnerable populations such as children, students, and those who are economically oppressed. A discussion that is especially relevant to social work research and is included in this chapter is the risks and benefits to communities.

Ethical issues in data acquisition, management, sharing, and ownership are presented in the following chapter. This includes protecting subject confidentiality and privacy as well as the subject's control of what data might be obtained as a result of their agreement to participate in the study. Many years ago I agreed to participate in a study of why I and others decided to remain in or leave a particular field of service. I was not informed that the investigator, whom I knew, would have access to my personnel records in the agency in which I had once been employed. When I learned of this, I complained to the agency but to no avail.

Chapter seven presents issues arising from publication and authorship, particularly the topic of authorship credit. I have been aware of many conflicts arising from the last issue, especially when these are not resolved prior to the creation of the publication and when incorrect assumptions are made by the various authors. A practice that

yields many concerns is that of including persons in authority, especially heads of departments, who assume the right to be named as authors in publications by members of the department.

The final chapter discusses emerging issues in the responsible conduct of research such as by technological advances in collecting and sharing data and the encouragement of faculty to engage in entrepreneurial activities. In these discussions as well as those throughout the book, the author demonstrates her thorough grasp of the topics covered based on her many years of experience as an author as well as administrator.

This book is destined to become a classic in the literature on the ethics of social work research. Both new investigators as well as the seasoned ones will find much to ponder in what is a relatively short book. It covers every topic I can think of in the research process in which ethical issues can arise. As I stated earlier, it provides useful vignettes that facilitate the reader's consideration of these issues. It suggests further reading on each of the topics as well as excellent examples of each. It should be included on the syllabi of every research course in social work as well as, perhaps, in the social sciences.