Book Review

van den Hoonaard, W.C., & Hamilton, A. (Eds.). *The ethics rupture: Exploring alternatives to formal research ethics review*. Toronto, ON, Canada: University of Toronto Press.

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In master-level social work programs there are a near ubiquitous presence of one or two courses centered on conducting research with human participants, but since only a small percentage of social workers are active researchers, the minutia and details of the painstakingly meticulous processes necessary for administering human research is not fully explored. We save such particulars for those who wish to pursue doctoral education or professional research. *The Ethics Rupture* speaks to social workers whose principal or significant activity involves research. In their ambitious attempt to collaboratively express the unspoken sentiments of social researchers, the authors candidly and artfully describe their experiences with research and express their views and frustrations with the status quo of ethics review and research procedures. The book reads like a list of grievances, but these grievances are well presented. Each is provided with historical context as well as implications of such problematic systems, many of which are undoubtedly often experienced by most of those involved in conducting research with human subjects.

However, it is not just to the distressed investigators that the authors write. If anything, the book is more of a call to those that perpetuate the current system. The authors issue a wake-up call to members of internal review boards and committees for the protection of human subjects at universities, hospitals, and other institutions, as well as to funders, and the governing bodies that regulate and certify such boards. The authors present the argument that in the area of research ethics, the policies, decisions and structures of these and other institutions are inconsistent, onerous, constrained or compelled by ulterior factors, and at times out of touch with the realities of social research. Frequently, the authors expose the uninformed nature of ethics regulation due to its overseers being removed from the communities, individuals and mechanisms that they monitor. Furthermore, the social and educational costs of these systems are illustrated in great detail, as are some alternatives and potential amendments to make social research more efficacious and beneficial to all.

In the book's first section, "Strains in Research Ethics Review Processes," the authors detail their and others' dissatisfaction with the existing structures for ethics review; specifically the human and intellectual costs of current ethics review systems as well as the corruptive forces influencing research. Robert Dingwall, for instance, notes in his article "The Social Costs of Ethics Regulation" that universities and other research-oriented institutions guide their practices based on values of reputation management and legal considerations, not on human- or intellectual-centered values. This section of the book critically stresses how one-size-fits-all biomedical models of research regulation and ethics review stemming from the Belmont Report constrain researchers.

The book details how social scientists often find themselves compelled to work within parameters that create structural barriers for participants. Often, members of review boards do not understand subjects hailing from communities that differ from those of review members. As Rena Lederman and

Laura Stark point out, review boards repeatedly behave in culturally tone-deaf manners, failing to appreciate the linguistic and communicative differences and norms of communities outside of their own. Bilingualism and indirect communication, for example, are normative behaviors for many cultures, yet review boards may attempt to impose their own communicative standards, hindering rather than facilitating understanding by the very human subjects they are attempting to protect. This creates undue complications for the researchers, who frequently better understand the groups that they are studying.

Part II of *The Ethics Rupture* explores new methodologies and 'frontiers' of research. Heather Kitchin Dahringer raises intriguing questions surrounding the advent of the internet as an extension of personal identity. In this process, online spaces have become depositories for personal information that is frequently provided voluntarily and for social research purposes. Invariably, this phenomenon raises many ethical questions with regards to social investigations. Readers are moved to ponder what is private and what is public in a digital public space. Furthering this effort to drive readers to explore their own take on subjective nuances of social interpretation, Julie Bull examines the interpretive nature of engaging communities and individuals. She specifically addresses the ethical issues that arise in working with aboriginal communities and stresses the need for understanding that research methods can be applied through multiple lenses. She emphasizes that self-awareness and the awareness of the researcher's own point of view or perceptual lens are crucial to interacting with such populations as researchers in the social sciences and helping professions.

Section III of the book arguably addresses some of the most prevalent and uncomfortable topics facing students and educators of social science. The book tackles the bureaucratic hurdles that frequently arise in large organizations such as universities, governmental agencies, and others. The resulting systems may appear harmonious and to work well, and the bureaucratic structures may even be necessary to organizational functioning, but they often place barriers to scientific research (often intentionally). Often, systems created by funding sources, public policies, university policy makers and others "enmesh," as Kirsten Bell puts it, making the prospect of scaling back review boards all the more daunting, if not impossible, of a task. Lisa-Jo Kestin Van Den Scott also posits that graduate students and other inexperienced researchers are among those most negatively affected by this. Since review boards frequently prioritize the interests of outside, more powerful groups and persons, over the research interests of graduate students, creativity is discouraged and opportunities for new modalities and fields of study are missed. The authors and editors of this book issue a call to action to protect research creativity and innovation and to educators to protect the interests of their students. The final segments of *The Ethics Rupture* examine several real world conflicts and potential solutions to the current dysfunctions of ethics review processes. Among these struggles are the challenges to engage populations that have developed "adversarial" relationships (as the authors state it) to researchers, such as in Australia. These conflictual dynamics are, in the eyes of the authors, mostly attributable to the lack of expertise on the part of ethics regulators, implying a need to reorganize the procedures and institutions responsible for guiding social inquiry. Zachary M. Schrag and Ann Hamilton issue the most compelling arguments regarding the need for reform. They indicate that review boards should be held more accountable so that members must justify proposed changes to research projects and the ethical and rigorous research reasons underpinning these changes. Delving even further into this cry for responsible management, Scharg and Hamilton suggest that social scientists should resist the ineptitude of review boards and seek to halt the blind expansion of their influence. Policies, regulatory bodies and the universities that supposedly oversee ethics review groups should be re-examined, if not restructured.

While the testimony of the authors' personal experiences offer insight into the trials and tribulations of social investigators, the final product could ultimately be interpreted as lacking direction. Its contributors have no shortage of frustrations to share, but the regulations do not follow from the evidence the authors have provided. *The Ethics Rupture* would better accomplish its goal of facilitating change within the ethics review system by offering readers engaged in these processes more concrete solutions to their concerns.

The Ethics Rupture is, overall, a necessary text that should be read and considered by both newcomers to social analysis and seasoned researchers alike. More importantly, all members of ethics review bodies should read the book with great consideration. The editors and contributors provide specific critiques of the review process as well as important insights. *The Ethics Rupture* truly illustrates the direct impact of ethics review constraints, bringing the concerns presented as concrete and real issues rather than abstract matters. Young scholars interested in pursuing higher education in the social sciences would also benefit from the text, informing them of what to expect should they enter the field. Or, as perhaps the authors would prefer they view it, what they should seek to change.