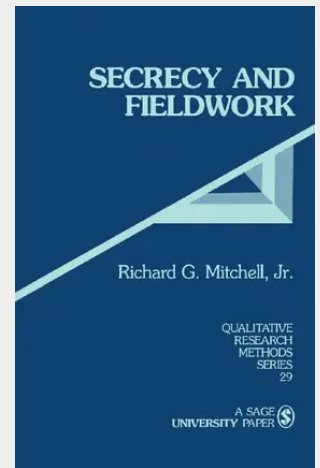


Secrecy and Fieldwork

This book is one in the popular series of slim volumes entitled 'Qualitative Research Methods' from Sage Publications and, like the others in the series, it provides an excellent introduction to its field. As the ethics of research come under increasing scrutiny the appearance of this book makes a timely and salutary contribution, arguing cogently that there will be occasions when secrecy in research is required and that codes of practice for researchers which attempt to rule out secrecy are undesirably limiting. For me, Mitchell's respect for context and subjects brings him closer to qualitative research ethics than the liberals; his is an ethics which is grounded in reality. This interesting and useful book sets an agenda which researchers will have to address for themselves. -- Keith Morrison in *Evaluation and Research in Education* "The book offers communication researchers some of the best recent work on qualitative inquiry in the human disciplines. Published by Sage, the leading publisher of qualitative research in the social sciences today, Richard G. Mitchell Jr. outlines a humane, compassionate ethical position that accepts the givenness of secrecy in everyday life, while arguing for the creation of existential trust as a primary given in all social research. This work brings the communication scholar up-to-date on where qualitative methods are in current sociological and educational discourse." --Norman K. Denzin in *Journal of Communication* "This book is a stunning achievement, a major statement on ethics, fieldwork, and the politics of inquiry. Discourse is lifted to a new level. It will become the point of reference for all future discussion of ethics and the social sciences." --Norman K. Denzin, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign "Mitchell provides a refreshing and powerful analysis of the long-standing debate over secrecy in fieldwork." --New Ethnographies "A thought-provoking and fairly complete methodological study of risky social research. Mitchell's *Secrecy and Fieldwork* is the more challenging work. Indeed, it establishes a new standard for approaching sensitive research topics. His approach is valuable, stimulating, and likely to be quite controversial." --Contemporary Sociology "It is a most thought-provoking essay, very well-grounded in the literature on methodology and philosophy of the social sciences, yet reasoned out more thoroughly and profoundly than any other work I know in this field. It is elegantly and tightly written-a work of great cogency and erudition as theory, but most persuasive as an empirical report because of its regularly apt illustrations from research. It should be well reviewed and highly influential, upsetting some sacred cows, debunking some platitudes, and inspiring sociologists that they can be good scientists even when not doing statistics." --Daniel Glaser, University of Southern California. Institutional review boards, codes of ethics and professional standards notwithstanding, openness and honesty is not always the best means of protecting the rights of either researcher or subject in fieldwork. Richard Mitchell explores the ethical and practical quagmire of revelation and concealment in the field and attempts to arrive at a more useful set of norms for fieldworker behavior than the bureaucratic solutions in existence. What should the researcher tell, and not tell, informants? Is fieldwork inherently an activity requiring covert behavior by the researcher and subject alike? Are honesty and openness at odds with effectiveness in the field? Drawing from his own work with mountaineers and survivalists, as well as examples from the successful and unsuccessful fieldwork of others, the author examines these questions and concludes that secrecy is "risky but necessary business."

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