



Self-plagiarism? When re-purposing text may be ethically justifiable

In an institutional environment where researchers may be coming under increasing pressure to publish, the temptations to take short cuts and engage in duplicate or redundant publication can be significant. Duplicate publication involves re-publishing substantially the same data, analysis, discussion and conclusion without providing proper acknowledgement or justification for the practice. Such behaviour is often condemned as ideoplagiarism or self-plagiarism, locating this practice as a parallel activity to that which appropriates other people's ideas and words and reproduces them without due acknowledgement.

There are good reasons for censuring self-plagiarism – it distorts the academic record where meta-analyses are not aware of the duplicate publication, and provides an unfair advantage when academics' track records are being compared. In an earlier publication

(Israel, 2015), I detailed some examples of social scientists who engaged in self-plagiarism. However, I also argued that 'It may be appropriate to publish similar articles in different journals in order to ask different research questions, link to different literatures or reach new and different audiences' (p.163). I would like to explore some of the situations that I have encountered in the last few years where I believe re-use of text might not be inappropriate and, indeed, might actually be the ethical thing to do.

Global rankings and national assessments of universities are largely based on research inputs and outputs. Mostly, the output indicators privilege publications in international higher-ranking journals; the vast majority of those only publish in English. However, there are several good reasons why research outputs should also appear outside English-language journals. First, researchers may be funded by research councils from countries that are not Anglophone. Those research councils may indeed want to maximise their international impact by publishing in English. However, they may also recognise that they have an obligation to support researchers in their countries who are not fluent in English; indeed, they ought to be supporting the maintenance of their own languages and ensuring that scholarly discourse continues to be conducted in their native tongues. This is a policy supported by the National Committees for Research Ethics in Norway (2006), for example.

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Consumer Co-design for End of Life Care Discharge Project

In this issue, we are publishing an account of an end-of-life project in whose design there are some features that add to its ethical interest. Many of us are familiar with institutional policies about consumer engagement in human research and have served on project reference groups, but perhaps have less experience with the successful - and ethical - implementation of these. This project may add some valuable understanding of these matters, including:

- What insights do the design and information groups offer into the practice of research co-design?
- Do those insights help to clarify the distinction between co-design and participatory action research?
- Do those groups have advantages in demonstrating the project's fulfilment of ethical principles of beneficence, respect or justice
- Could those groups have a role in overseeing the ethical conduct of a project?
- Given the subject of this research project, what sort of projects might make best use of groups such as those in this project?

We have invited the author and the research team to provide some follow-up reflection on issues such as these as the project progresses and is completed

The End of Life Care Discharge Planning Project is led by Associate Professor Laurie Grealish from Griffith University. This research project partners with consumers at all stages, allowing consumers significant contribution. As part of the Queensland Health End of Life Care Strategy, Gold Coast Health is developing a process to support discharge for people near end of life who would like to die at home. A Productivity Commission Report in 2017 noted that although over 70% of Australians prefer to die at home, less than 10% do. This is attributed to the need for improvement in the transition between hospital and community care.

For the research design stage, three groups were established: 1) Project reference group, 2) Project design group, and, 3) Project information group..

The outcomes of this study are expected to include: (1) an evidence-based discharge process and infrastructure to enhance the transition from hospital [medical wards] to home for end of life care; (2) end of life care information brochure for patients and their family carers; (3) stakeholder feedback to indicate that the process is feasible and satisfactory; and (4) a health service and non-government organisational partnership network to monitor the discharge process and enhance future integrated models of end of life care. Ethical approval has been granted by the Gold Coast Health Human Research Ethics Committee and Griffith University Human Research Ethics Committee.

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New research integrity professional development resource

All Australian research institutions that receive NHMRC or ARC research funding or otherwise operate under the auspices of Universities Australia should be steadily working toward implementing the 2018 version of the [Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research](#) by 30 June 2019.

We'd argue that all other Australian research institutions should also be working on implementation.

As you will have seen from the countdown on the [AHRECS website](#), we're down to the last 50% of the time to implement the Australian Code (2018). We understand that in many institutions research staff and management are stretched and that the recent cuts in research infrastructure funding will do little to help that. We are not trying to provoke panic or undue stress, but believe that a commitment to research integrity (like research ethics) involves long-term, consistent and coherent planning and investment and not erratic and unsustainable bursts of 'excitement'. Those institutions that are still struggling with the 2007 Code should see that as an indication that they need to take the 2018 Code seriously and not hope that its demands will go away.

[Read more](#)

New recommended reads

Re-Reasoning Ethics: The Rationality of Deliberation and Judgement in Ethics

Barry, Hoffmaster and Cliff Hooker, The MIT Press, Cambridge. 2018.

David Finlay, Emeritus Professor
Chair, La Trobe University HREC.

Women are advised by Genetic Counsellors that they may give birth to a child with a serious condition. The counsellor assigns a percentage to the likelihood of this occurring. Hoffmaster and Hooker use published research to show that the process of decision making by the women in this case study is far more involved than simply accepting the probabilities presented to them. In another researched case study, children with a terminal illness are caught in an in-between-world where significant adults (parents, doctors) collude in order not to tell the children of the degree of their illness while the children on their part know the seriousness of their illness through their own problem-solving abilities but keep this knowledge from the adults.

These and other case studies are used to argue that rule or logic-based Ethics systems are not rich enough to cope with the moral/ethical situations people find themselves in, nor are they able to describe in anywhere near the complexity required, the processes that people go through in making what for them are ethical decisions. In place of rule or logic-based systems the book aims to develop a rational process of deliberation.

The authors bring a variety of experience to the task at hand. Hoffmaster is described as a Professor Emeritus of Philosophy and bioethicist and Hooker a Professor Emeritus of Philosophy and a philosopher of science. With these backgrounds the book contains a critique of Western Philosophical traditions as applied to ethical problems and uses this critique together with the “real-world” case studies summarised above to develop a four-part system to better characterise ethical decision-making comprising: observation; the use of both formal and informal reasoning procedures; constrained but creative construction and systematic critical appraisal. The degree to which such a four-part decision-making approach characterises the way in which science is done as a parallel to ethical decision making is argued strongly.

In Science the four-part characterisation is enhanced by its development within research teams and it is argued that the same communal approach enhances Ethical decision making.

The book and its basic thesis will have distinct interests for different readers of AHRECS: Research Ethics Monthly. For readers with a background in Philosophy the development of argument behind the Re-Reasoning of Ethics will be instructive. For members of HRECs the overall thesis together with the case studies and the especially the discussions around them will be particularly useful and interesting. The question arises whether the four-part approach describes the workings of Human Research Ethics Committees or whether the deliberations of HRECs would be improved by consideration of such a model. Generally, the approach is compatible with HREC practices to the extent that there is consideration of

Guidelines rather than Rules, that there are broad principles to guide members thinking that can lead to formal and informal reasoning and there is the ability to weigh-up cost-benefit aspects of research. Certainly the communal discussions arising from the diverse membership of HRECs , although guided by the NH&MRC Guidelines, are still sufficiently individual to ensure the final decision about a project is not based on a rule based approach but brings the various viewpoints, background experiences and reasonings to bear on the ethical implications of particular Research projects.

Publisher

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Resource Library (<https://ahrecs.com/ahresources>)

1. [Of Parachutes and Participant Protection: Moving Beyond Quality to Advance Effective Research Ethics Oversight](#) - Paper
2. [Blowback Against a Hoax](#) – Inside Higher Ed
3. [Even potential participants of a research integrity conference commit plagiarism, organizers learn](#) – Retraction Watch.
4. [Is it time for a new classification system for scientific misconduct?](#) – Retraction Watch
5. [Amid ethics outcry, should journals publish the ‘CRISPR babies’ paper?](#) – STAT

Blog (<https://ahrecs.com/blog>)

1. [The Retraction Watch Database has launched. Here’s what you need to know](#)
2. [Ten ways of ensuring affordable professional development in your institution](#)
3. [Griffith University’s implementation of the Australian Code \(2018\)](#)
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