

MARCH 2021

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Welcome to the March 2021 edition of the Research Ethics Monthly. If you are a subscriber to this publication, your name should appear above. Let us know if there are any mistakes.

If you aren't named above, please [subscribe](#) to the *Research Ethics Monthly*, because it would definitely make our day.

More information about the Research Ethics Monthly can be found on the [blog pages](#). Also there are links to our previous editions all the way back to May 2015.



Tongue in Cheek

Farida Fozdar, University of Western Australia

The Tower of Babel ([Allen and Israel, 2021](#)) is a compelling image when considering issues to do with translation and interpreting and the ethics of social research. Even when we speak the same language, we may not be 'speaking the same language', so to speak (excuse the triple metaphor). Talking past each other occurs in many ways but, in communicating the clear purpose and potential risks of one's research, clarity is vital. Here, I outline a few issues from personal research experience, arguing that the communities themselves may be best placed to identify ethics issues and solutions to translation and interpreting dilemmas.

When working with those from a language different from that of the researchers, it may be the case that the idea of research is not well understood in the culture of origin. Therefore, explanations may need to start at a more fundamental level, with more time dedicated to ensuring participants understand the nature of research generally, as well as the specific project, expectations, rights and so on. Thus, rather than a shorter summary of the project than that offered to other participants, those using other languages may require more extensive explanation and information, provided in a cultural frame that makes sense to each group of participants. Often researchers and research ethics committees may be unaware of these cultural differences, leading to difficulties recruiting participants, and inadequate levels of understanding among those who do agree. On the other hand, research ethics committees can also take an overly paternalistic approach to ethnic minority populations, seeking to protect a presumed vulnerable set of participants, rather than taking a 'layered' approach that recognises internal diversity (e.g. second generation young people of refugee backgrounds with good English language skills and an understanding of the social research context) and agency (see [Humpage et al. 2019](#)). A one size fits all rule can't be applied.

The issue of language and research ethics is complex, and ethics committees may need to defer to researchers about the best way to approach the issue in the circumstances of a particular project. Some years ago a seasoned colleague, seeking exemption from being required to provide a written information sheet and signed consent for some sensitive research in a nearby non-English speaking country, was asked by his institution's committee to provide a written outline of what he would say to inform participants, with whom he had built a strong relationship of trust over decades, and who understood his research and its value, about the project. With tongue firmly in cheek, he wrote the information out and presented it to the Committee in the language in which he would be communicating with participants. It is unlikely the Committee would have had the expertise to understand the language, or paid for the document to be translated into English. Ultimately, the committee took it on faith that he would be conveying the information appropriately, something they could have done in the first place.

The gold standard in translation is backtranslation – to translate into the language of participants, and then have that translation translated back into English, to ensure that the meaning has not been distorted or lost in any way. In practice, however, it is difficult enough to secure funding to include one-way translation of ethics information, research instruments and responses, let alone backtranslation. Pragmatics often mean that researchers have to take the simpler route, managing with single translation and shorter information.

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A commitment to professional development

One tangible way a research ethics committee can be seen to have a commitment to sustainable and positive practice is a clear attention to the professional development of members (new and continuing). Example strategies can include:

1. An annual event for new member orientation and a continuing member refresher.
2. In-meeting briefings and discussion activities.
3. A [Resource Library](#) with links to interesting/relevant papers, [news items](#) and resources.
4. Periodic workshops on topical matters and emergent needs.
5. Discussion activities with a standard item in the agenda where members will share their reflections and ideas.

While AHRECS provides services and supports in these areas (see below) it is by no means the only source of assistance (a free subscription to [Refraction Watch](#) could yield a tonner of value/costs).

AHRECS produces [discussion activity](#) sheets and commentaries about topical human research ethics and research integrity matters. These are creative commons documents for institutional subscription to access this area costs \$350 a year. The [AHRECS Resource Library](#) ([www.ahrecs.com/resources](#)) and [Newsroom](#) ([www.ahrecs.com/feeds](#)) are free resources where we post links to such matters. We also post alerts to our social media pages as we add new items to the library and newsroom.

Going global

AHRECS is in the process of establishing a presence in the United Kingdom and we are currently working with the University of Canterbury in New Zealand. For the last few years, we have done pro bono and academic work internationally (in both Europe and Asia). While we will continue this work, it is terrific to have paying gigs outside Australia.

If you are based in another country and would like to discuss engaging AHRECS drop us a line to [enquiry@ahrecs.com](#) – even if it would be a free engagement.



Why university research ethics committees are vital

A remarkable case reveals the dangers of conducting historical research about events in living memory

by Daniel Sokol

When I sat on the Ministry of Defence's Research Ethics Committee, some research projects were potentially dangerous. The risks of testing a new piece of military diving equipment, for example, are obvious. If it malfunctions, the volunteer could drown or suffer brain damage. The risks of historical research can be more subtle but they are nonetheless real, as shown by a recent case involving the University of Warwick.

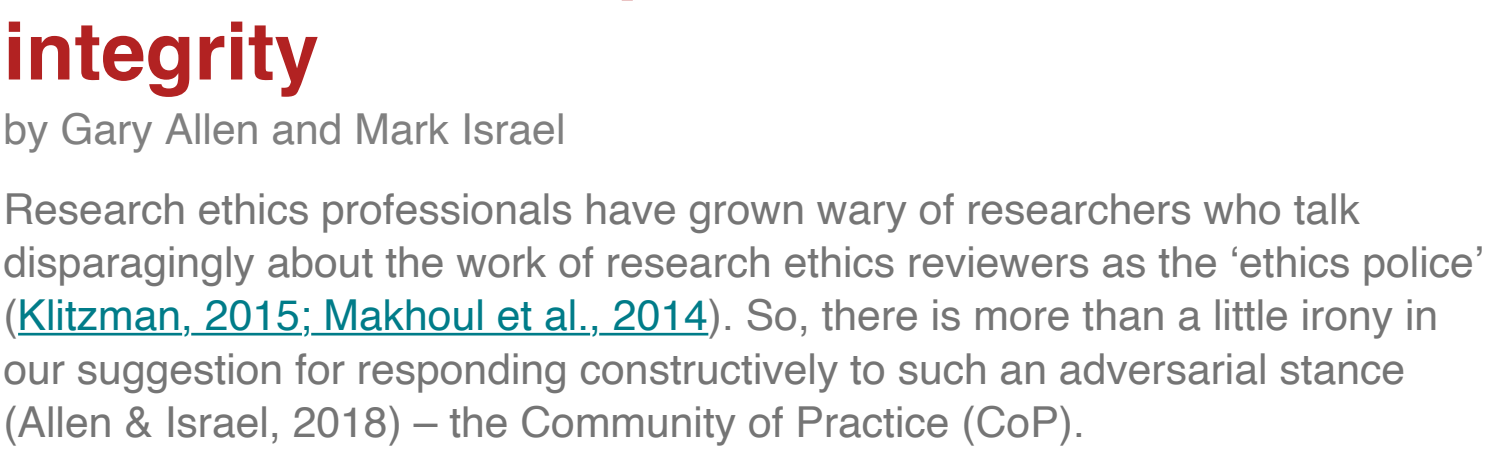
Dr Anna Hájková, an associate professor of modern continental European history, researches the queer history of the Holocaust. She claimed that a Jewish prisoner may have engaged in a lesbian sexual relationship with a Nazi guard in Hamburg in 1944.

After the war, the prisoner worked as an actress and emigrated from Germany to Australia. Although she died 10 years ago, her daughter successfully took legal action against Dr Hájková in a German court last year for violating her mother's dignity. The court prohibited the historian from using the prisoner's name or photograph and claiming that she had a sexual relationship with the SS guard [1]

After starting legal proceedings in Germany, the daughter approached me for help. She wanted to complain against the University of Warwick on the grounds that Dr Hájková had breached her ethical duties as a researcher.

[1] [https://www.theguardian.com/education/2020/oct/08/survivors-daughter-sues-historian-claim-lesbian-liaison-nazi-guard](#)

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Ethics CoPs not Ethics Police: Building communities of practice in ethics and integrity

by Gary Allen and Mark Israel

Research ethics professionals have grown wary of researchers who talk disparagingly about the work of research ethics reviewers as the 'ethics police' ([Klitzman, 2015](#); [Makhoul et al., 2014](#)). So, there is more than a little irony in our suggestion for responding constructively to such an adversarial stance (Allen & Israel, 2018) – the Community of Practice (CoP).

A CoP is characterised by a shared area of knowledge and set of practices within which experiences and insights can be shared and learning can be fostered ([Wenger et al., 2002](#)). Done well, a CoP can result in continual improvement across and beyond the institution through mutual engagement, joint enterprise and the creation of a shared repertoire (Wenger, 1998). An institution's research ethics reviewers, Research Ethics Adviser and Research Integrity Adviser networks and its research community should be regarded as fertile fields for the fostering and supporting of CoPs.

In the human research ethics and research integrity spheres, seeding and supporting virtual and physical CoPs can deliver a number of tangible benefits:

1. Improving the awareness/knowledge of that academic and professional community;
2. Improving the satisfaction of the group;
3. Improving the retention of the group; and
4. Ensuring the knowledge and experience of the group informs institutional practice.

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Social media update and new papers/resources

AHRECS currently has 2924 followers on LinkedIn, which terribly exciting. If you have a LinkedIn account and are not currently a follower of AHRECS, please consider following us ([https://www.linkedin.com/company/181715463](#)). It would be fantastic to hit 3000 followers, but it also might be useful to you...on LinkedIn we also have a page for the Resource Library ([https://www.linkedin.com/showcase/39166132](#)) where we post alerts when we add a new paper/resource to the library.

While you are here...

Did you enjoy this edition? **Would you like to support the work we do?** If so, please consider helping us cover the cost of matters such as hosting the Research Ethics Monthly and other web development by becoming an AHRECS Patron.

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INDIVIDUAL

Subscriptions start at USD1/month and USD15/month gives you access to all materials. See [https://www.patron.com/ahrecs](#)

A few profiled items from the subscribers' area:

1. [Responding to criticisms of precedent](#) – A Human Research Ethics commentary
2. [Artificial Intelligence and your job – A Human Research Ethics/Research Integrity commentary](#)
3. [Recruitment and risk](#) – A Human Research Ethics Discussion activity
4. [Principles of Māori & Indigenous research ethics](#) (An annotated bibliography by Dr Lily George) – [A Human Research Ethics resource](#)
5. [Who watches the watchers?](#) – A Human Research Ethics discussion activity
6. [It's a slippery slope to research misconduct](#) – [A Research Integrity resource](#)
7. [An Australian history of human research ethics](#) | A ppt produced by Colin Thomson AM - A Human Research Ethics resource
8. [Is my application ready for research ethics review?](#) - [A Human Research Ethics resource](#)
9. [Duped](#) - A research integrity commentary
10. [Setting up a monitoring arrangement for human research](#) - [A human research ethics talk by Kim Giffins](#)

Please join us in saying a big thank you to our new Gold Patrons:

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- University of Melbourne
- The University of Sydney Ethics Office

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Things You May Have Missed...

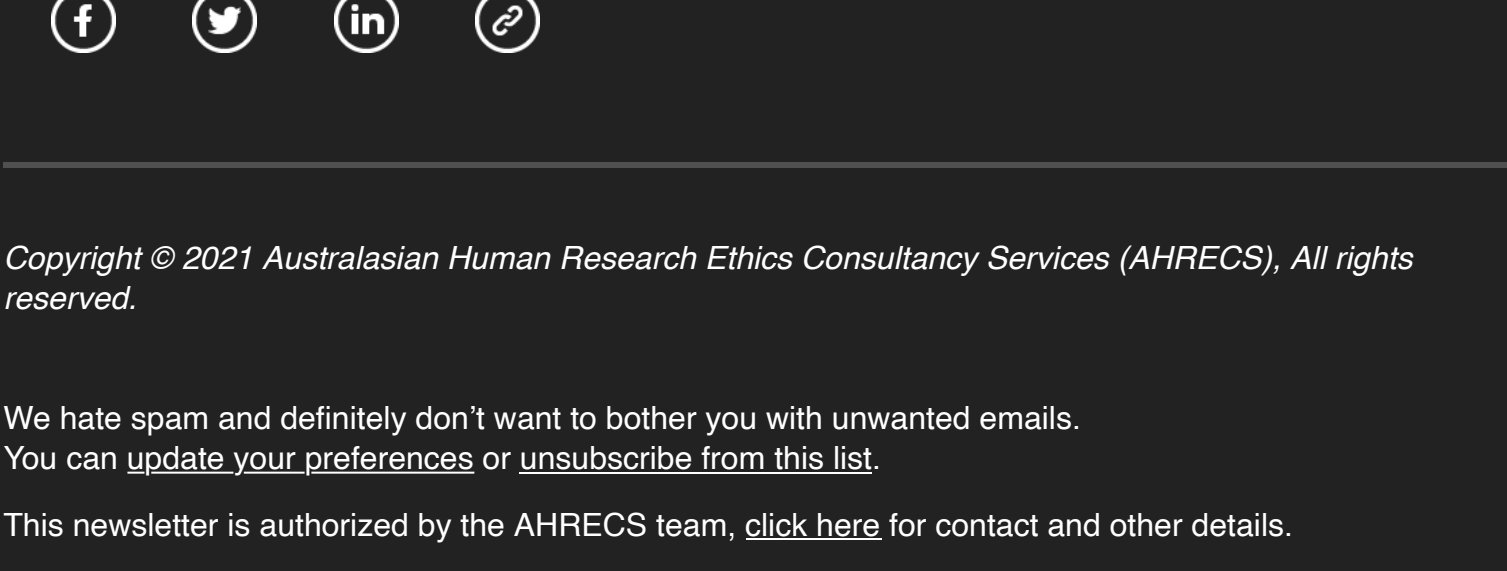
Our Newsroom

01. [The \\$450 question: Should journals pay peer reviewers?](#) – Science
02. (China) [Chinese excellence drive 'may make universities weaker'](#) – Times Higher Education
03. (EU) [What is research misconduct? European countries can't agree](#) – Science
04. [New bot floos scientific studies that cite retracted papers](#) – Nature Index
05. [Text Recycling Research Project update March 2021](#) – COPE
06. [How COVID-19 could make science kinder](#) – Nature Index
07. (China) [China renews red lines for medical research integrity](#) – Shine
08. (US) [Self-Plagiarism, Fraud and iThenticate: A Complicated Relationship](#) – Inside Higher Ed
09. [Elsevier journals ask Retraction Watch to review COVID-19 papers](#) – Retraction Watch
10. (Australia) [What happened when a group of sleuths flagged more than 30 papers with errors?](#) – Retraction Watch

There were more than 50 more great items in the last 30 days. Follow us on social media to get an alert when new items are added ([LinkedIn](#) | [Twitter](#) | [Facebook](#))

Our Resource Library

01. [Predatory Publishing in Scopus: Evidence on Cross-country Differences](#) - Paper
02. [Ten principles for generating accessible and useable COVID-19 environmental science and a fit-for-purpose evidence base](#) - Paper
03. [Assessment of transparency indicators across the biomedical literature: How open is open?](#) -- Paper
04. [Song From Myself: An Anatomy of Self-Plagiarism](#) - Paper
05. [Research integrity codes of conduct in Europe: Understanding the divergences](#) - Paper
06. [A survey of national ethics and bioethics committees](#) - Paper
07. [Expanding Research Integrity: A Cultural-Practice Perspective](#) - Paper
08. (US) [A secure procedure for early career scientists to report apparent misconduct](#) - Paper
09. (Australia) [A framework for preferred practices in conducting culturally competent health research in a multicultural society](#) - Paper
10. (US) [Informed Consent in the U.S.: Indigenous Peoples Context: A Systematic Literature Review](#) - Paper



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Got an idea for a post or a suggestion for a guest? Send an email to [gary@ahrecs.com](#)

Do you have a view, feedback or some constructive criticism on this or other posts? Every item has comment link so you can have your say and continue the conversation.