



NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2021

Dear <<First Name>>,

Happy December 1st! Welcome to the November/December 2021 edition of the Research Ethics Monthly. **Happy holidays from the AHRECS team!**

This is a free email newsletter about human research ethics and research integrity, in Australasia and beyond.

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Expertise in ethics, research ethics or review?

Colin Thomson AM

Discussions of expertise in human research ethics review tend to focus on expertise in ethics or expertise in research ethics. The former has been described as understanding and producing logical arguments, identifying logical and practical implications of particular positions, detecting invalid inferences and counter-arguments, clarifying and analysing moral concepts to support sound arguments, and knowledge of moral theories, utilitarianism, deontology etc.[1] Douglas regards these features to be a workable model and a necessary but not sufficient condition for ethical expertise of HREC members.

Expertise in research ethics emphasises knowledge of research practice across a range of methodologies, of issues and debates in research ethics and of the legal framework within human research occurs.[2] Gillam considers that research ethics experts, aware of the debate about methodology as an ethical issue, should be able to identify whether a proposed methodology raises ethical problems and how, in general terms, a project could be amended to address these.

Other views are that experience alone is insufficient to ensure expertise and that expertise can be either interactional – the ability to discuss issues arising in a research field– or contributory – acquired through experience and contextual knowledge. [3] These debates will be familiar to HREC members. Equally familiar to them will be the experience that lack of ethics expertise is not as common a cause for complaint from researchers as lack of research expertise, timeliness, consistency, clarity, justification, courtesy and respect – all deficiencies in the review process itself. Some of these deficiencies may be due to a lack of ethics or research ethics expertise but not all and, even if so due, these also show a lack of expertise in review.

Expertise in review

The HREC review task differs in a fundamental way from review in the familiar fields of literature, music, film or art. There, review is of a completed project, and the review principles require that the response of the reader, listener or viewer be taken into account. By contrast, ethics review is of a proposal – a

needed for human research ethics review?

Endnotes

[1] Douglas, P. (2012) "Ethical expertise and Human Research Ethics Committees (HRECs)", *Monash Bioethics Review*, 30(2), 81-101

[2] Gillam, L. (2004) "Expertise in research ethics: Is there any such thing?", *Monash Bioethics Review*, 23 S58-S64

[3] Sellers, C., Samuel, G. and Derrick, G. (2020) "Reasoning "Uncharted Territory": Notions of Expertise Within Ethics Review Panels Assessing Research Use of Social Media", *Journal of Empirical Research on Human Research Ethics*, Vol. 15(1-2) 28-39

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Position vacant

Head, Ethics and Integrity (Specialist)
The Walter and Eliza Hall Institute
Melbourne CBD & Inner Suburbs
Healthcare & Medical Management
Contract/Temp

About the position

The Strategic Plan 2019 - 2023 highlights the WEHI's commitment to maintaining the highest standards of ethical conduct, integrity and good scientific practice. There is commitment to ensuring that our research practices are transparent, that we can create an environment in which all staff and students are given an opportunity to flourish professionally, as well as personally, and that we embed sound ethics into everything we do. Creating an ethical research organisation does not stop at conducting ethical research, it is much broader than that. It is about building a strong culture of ethics across all of WEHI. It is about how we make ethical business decisions, how we engage with each other through respectful working relationships, how we carefully manage our funds whilst being mindful of the ethical implications of our investments, and how we interact with external bodies and the community.

WEHI is a publicly funded institute and has an obligation to maintain the highest ethical standards. The Head, Ethics and Integrity (Specialist) will partner with the Head, Ethics and Integrity (Faculty) to provide strategic leadership centered on building ethical best practice across the Institute. This will include how we think, behave and make decisions across the whole organisation. The Head, Ethics and Integrity (Specialist) will be a member of WEHI's Strategic Cabinet and will support the development and delivery of the Institute's strategic plan and represent the Institute externally.

Key initial focus areas for the Head, Ethics and Integrity (Specialist), in partnership with the Head, Ethics and Integrity (Faculty) will include:

Officer, Head, Governance, Risk and Compliance, Head, Laboratory Operations and other Professional Services leaders to develop a structure that brings together the different ethics and integrity activities (e.g. Animal Ethics, Human Research Ethics, Scientific Integrity, Ethics Education) within the Institute allowing a holistic approach to be developed.

- Developing a strategy to support the Institute in overseeing, discussing, educating and improving its ethics and integrity practice in all areas.
- Collaborating with colleagues across the institute, develop, implement and continually improve programs that will deliver on the newly developed Ethics and Integrity strategy and report progress against this strategy and operational plan to Senior Management and the Board.
- Participating in the design, implementation and ongoing management of an ethics and integrity framework at WEHI
- Leading the development and delivery of training in ethics and integrity, working closely with People and Culture in the implementation of this training

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Think of, and treat, consent as a powerful and complex verb, not a strictly defined and constrained noun

Gary Allen

Consent has a long history deep in the DNA of human research ethics. Failure in consent strategies is at centre stage in some of the biggest scandals and ethical missteps in modern history; it was present in cases like the atrocities in Nazi Germany, the Tuskegee Scandal, Obedience to Authority experiment, Stanford prison experiment and the Tearoom Trade research project, which are often used (and overused) to justify the development of research ethics review processes.

I say overused because the cases are unlikely to inspire researchers across the wide scope of disciplines found in modern research to modify their research

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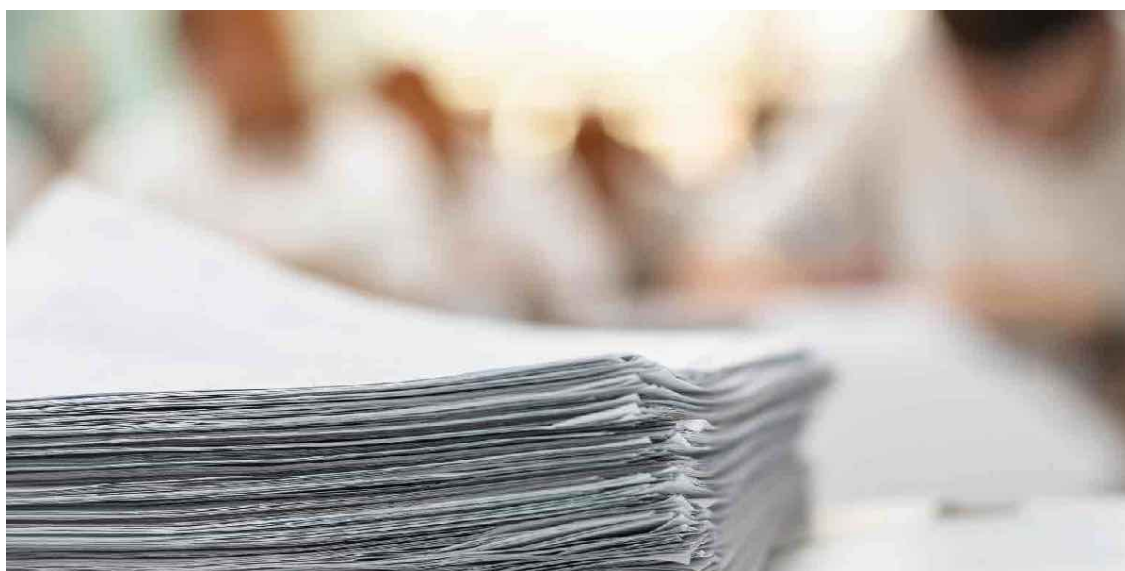
Some jurisdictions, like the United States, strictly define valid consent strategies, even have finely detailed template consent forms. In their worst form, these guidelines present a template consent form that must always be used.

Often, institutional guidance material can treat consent as a tightly defined noun. Consent is a neat single step transaction where participants sign once to indicate their willingness to participate in a project. Alternatively, consent becomes something that is done to participants – ‘participants were consented’.

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Recognition of colleagues

Since the start of the COVID pandemic, we have lost many colleagues from the higher education and research sectors. In many countries, this loss has been as a direct result of the fatal impact of the virus. In Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand, we have been far more fortunate. But the economic impact of COVID has been significant. Over 40,000 staff have left the higher education sector in Australia, many involuntarily. Research Ethics Monthly would like to recognise the work of those who contributed to research ethics and research integrity. If you would like Research Ethics Monthly to list people who worked for ten years or more in research ethics and research integrity and have now retired or left the sector, please send their names plus a Tweet-length sentence on their contribution to Human Research Ethics and Research Integrity in your country.



What do HREC members think and do when deciding about children's

Results from the MESSI survey

Stephanie Taplin

Under the [National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research](#) (National Statement), HRECs are required to abide by the values of: respect for human beings, research merit and integrity, justice and beneficence. In addition, specific guidance is provided in relation to research with children and young people, with emphasis placed on their capacity to understand what the research entails; their possible coercion by parents, peers, researchers or others to participate in research; and potentially conflicting values and interests of parents and children (p.65). Further safeguards are generally required to undertake research with children and young people, such as institutional approvals and parental consent.

Some authors have commented that there is little transparency about HREC processes and decisions, which are usually not published or shared (see, for example, Lynch, 2018). Little research has been undertaken on HRECs themselves, and the limited studies to date have rarely asked HREC members directly about their role (see, for example Guillemin et al., 2012). Even fewer studies have examined HREC member expertise and decision-making in relation to research with children, which likely contributes to lower levels of transparency and consistency. Furthermore, there is little research exploring the levels of training and experience that HRECs obtain to assist them in making decisions about research with children, nor their views of the research that involves children and young people.

The *Managing Ethical Studies on Sensitive Issues (MESSI)* study aimed to address some of these research gaps. This paper explores the decision-making of Australian HREC members and HREC managers when considering research applications to conduct social research studies with children (aged 7-14 years) as participants. It focuses on their responses to survey questions about their role, training, processes and recent experiences in reviewing social research studies involving children as research participants, and their views about research with children.

The responses of 229 HREC members and 42 HREC managers to an online survey conducted in 2017 are reported here. HREC members responded in similar proportions to the distribution of HRECs nationally and across Australian states and territories, with the largest proportions from Victoria (21.0%), NSW (28.8%) and Queensland (21.0%).

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Gary's favourite Friday Arvo Funny

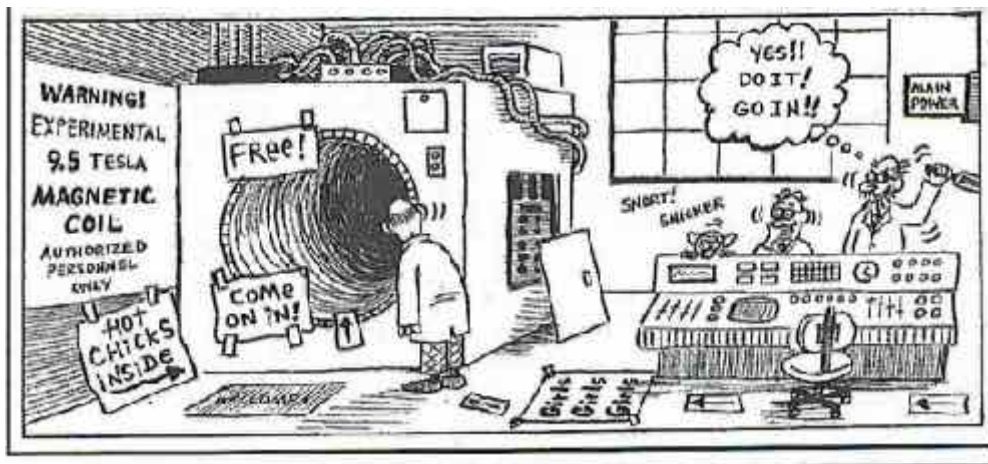
consultants, so we will let him get away with it.



Artwork © 2003 by Don Mayne. All Rights Reserved. Unauthorized Duplication Prohibited. Contact: dontoon@aol.com

Friday afternoon's funny - Group consent, peer-group pressure and risk –

Published on: Oct 13, 2017 – Why he liked it: It is such a great demonstration of peer pressure and social risk.



Friday afternoon's funny - Catching participants with trickery –

Published on: Jun 19, 2020 – There is no getting around this, Gary has a decidedly slapstick UK (definitely low-brow) sense of humour.

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Friday afternoon's funny - Recruitment and good timing – Published on: May 5, 2017– We refer you to our previous explanation about Gary's dodgy sense of humour and that this is a good example that some risks are risks that affect researchers/recruiters

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Our Newsroom

01. [‘Give up freedoms’ to solve reproducibility crisis, says expert – Times Higher Education](#)
02. [Where is artificial intelligence taking publishing? – Research Information](#)
03. [\(Australia\) University investigates claims of research misconduct in studies on ageing – Sydney Morning Herald](#)
04. (UK) [UUK ‘should sue predatory publishers over tsunami of spam’ – Times Higher Education](#)
05. (US) [Blood, Lies, and a Drug Trials Lab Gone Bad – WIRED](#)
06. [Publishing paper in top journal costs about \\$1,000, says study – Times Higher Education](#)

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09. (Africa) 'Authorship parasitism' informed by neo-colonial science? – University World News

10. Why scientific journal authorship practices make no sense et al. – Science

There were more than 50 more great items in the last 60 days. Follow us on social media to get an alert when new items are added ([LinkedIn](#) | [Twitter](#) | [Facebook](#))

Our Resource Library

01. The unbearable lightness of scientometric indices - Paper

02. A Survey-Weighted Analytic Hierarchy Process to Quantify Authorship - Paper

03. A phenomenographic study of scientists' beliefs about the causes of scientists' research misconduct - Paper

04. The gendered nature of authorship - Paper

05. A billion-dollar donation: estimating the cost of researchers' time spent on peer review - Paper

06. Advancing data-intensive research in Australia – Australian Academy of Science - Guidance material

07. (Australia) Retraction of a peer reviewed article suggests ongoing problems with Australian forensic science - Paper

08. Inconsistent and incomplete retraction of published research: A cross-sectional study on Covid-19 retractions and recommendations to mitigate risks for research, policy and practice - Preprint paper

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