

### Keep Research Ethics Dirty! A comment and responses

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# Keep Research Ethics Dirty!

## Current Debates

Martin Sökefeld

In social and cultural anthropology, the institutionalised discourse on research ethics began in the late 1960s after it transpired that plans had been made by the US army to enlist anthropologists, in order to provide data for anti-insurgency operations in Latin America. The harsh criticism of this “Project Camelot” was a major departure from earlier positions. In 1919, Franz Boas was heavily attacked by the American Anthropological Association (AAA) when he condemned the collaboration of anthropologists with intelligence agencies during World War I, and he was only “uncensored” by the AAA in 2005 (AAA 2005). However, the debate ensuing from the critique of Project Camelot resulted in the association’s adoption of a *Statement on Problems of Anthropological Research and Ethics* in 1967, followed by the more comprehensive *Principles of Professional Responsibility*, adopted in 1971 (AAA 1971). The Principles endorsed fundamental ethical axioms such as the rejection of covert research and the principle of doing no harm. No one should dismiss such axioms; they are simple and well-intentioned – but deceptively so, as I shall argue. Since then, the debate on ethics has broadened, and, significantly, it has become supplemented by institutionalised practice.

In this short contribution, I focus on anthropological practices, experiences and reflections concerning research ethics, because anthropologists work more often with real people than in the archives – with real people from all ranks and backgrounds, in “natural” contexts and not in some controlled, sterile lab. The methodology of anthropological fieldwork is first of all based on interaction with our research partners, and like all social interaction, it is potentially replete with ethical issues and dilemmas, even more so because anthropological research is fundamentally open. More often than not, we do not have hypotheses

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to test, we do not know our “samples” in advance, and we do not have a fixed mechanism with which to draw a sample. Even our research questions develop and often change considerably in the course of fieldwork. While hypotheses-based disciplines may regard such changes as invalidating research, we regard this as a positive outcome, as a consequence of knowledge gained.

We are increasingly required to obtain an ethics clearance before starting research. In the US and the UK, this is often standard, even for graduate students’ research. In Germany, we lag slightly behind, and such clearance is largely required for EU-funded projects only. The procedure for ethics clearance was originally designed for research in the medical sciences and related disciplines, and it was meant to prevent human research subjects from harm. That is, “Institutional Review Boards” or “Ethics Committees” initially worked for hypothesis-testing disciplines with fixed methodologies, but they have now been extended to encompass many other disciplines involving human research subjects. The impetus for this extension has not come from the disciplines themselves but from funding institutions and universities.

I do not deny the utmost importance of weighing potential ethical issues before embarking on research, but I doubt that standardised procedures are always helpful in this respect. To put it very succinctly: First, such routine procedures may be designed more to protect institutions from harm than to actually protect the subjects of research. Second, having obtained ethical clearance, this milestone may suggest that any ethical issue has been successfully resolved. I will not dwell here on the first point, but the second is decisive, since any such assumption might turn out to be an illusion; in fact, ethical issues begin only once the review process is over. While fieldwork is fundamentally open and largely unpredictable, the ethics clearance procedure requires us to pretend to know in advance what is at stake in the field.

The fallacy of ethical clearance may be aided by the structure of professional ethics codes, to which such procedures respond. Usually, the ethics codes of professional associations have the form of a collection of norms that should be followed. Norms are abstractions meant to provide orientation for how to deal with situations in real life, and they abstract from the inconsistencies and dilemmas with which real life has to deal. However, while norms should be clear and convincing, their application to life is often not so; for example, the norms of not doing covert research and of informed consent are deeply anchored in anthropological fieldwork ethics. They are clear and convincing: of course, the people we interact with during fieldwork should know and understand what we are doing, and they must also have the right to withdraw from the research. Yet, problems start in the field when we have to consider who exactly needs to be informed about our research, and to what extent. Everyone? There are limits of practicality, but this is not the most pressing issue. Doing fieldwork in a highly surveilled field, for instance, might require deceiving some

actors in order to protect others (Sökefeld / Strasser 2016), and other considerations have to be taken into account in dangerous fields (Kovats-Bernat 2002). Is it permitted, for instance, to deceive in order to protect oneself and others? And, if so, to what extent? Where are the limits? Perhaps we come to the conclusion that our main research partners must not be deceived. But then, what about an ethnography like Nitzan Shoshan's about young neo-Nazis in Berlin? Shoshan, an Israeli Jew, assumed the fake identity of an US-American anthropologist in order to work among his radical research participants. The social workers whom he accompanied, and who introduced him to the field, had required him to do so for obvious reasons (Shoshan 2016: xi). Judged by the standards of anthropological fieldwork ethics, however, it was a serious infringement, even if it could be justified and yielded extraordinary insights.

Of course, ethical codes are not fixed once and for all but are sometimes changed and amended. They tend to become more complex and to grow in length over time, in order to do justice to the complexities of their practical implementation. The current *Statement of Ethics* of the AAA, adopted in 2012, is the fifth version after the original statement of 1967. The 1971 version emphatically stated:

In research, anthropologists' paramount responsibility is to those they study. When there is a conflict of interest, these individuals must come first. Anthropologists must do everything in their power to protect the physical, social, and psychological welfare and to honor the dignity and privacy of those studied. (AAA 1971)

The current statement of 2012 is a bit more cautious and restrained, asserting that "obligations to research participants are *usually* primary" (AAA 2012, emphasis added). For Benjamin Teitelbaum, for instance, the qualification introduced by the word "usually" is unacceptable. In his view, obligations to research participants remain paramount even if, as in his case, they are what he calls "radical nationalists" whom others might call "neofascists" (Teitelbaum 2019: 414). Teitelbaum relates that while he intended to do fieldwork among these people in Sweden as a "neutral observer", research drew him into close relationships of reciprocity and solidarity with persons whom many others would strictly reject because of their political ideas and actions. For Teitelbaum, the strict endorsement of primary obligations to research participants whom perhaps most others would see as unlikeable and as "repugnant others" (Harding 1991b) was not the consequence of an abstract norm but an outcome of field experience, which made him challenge the dilution of the original rule.

These examples show the difficulties of applying codified norms to practice. While I do not know whether Shoshan's or Teitelbaum's fieldwork projects required ethics approval, it is safe to assume that the clearance of their research practices would have been difficult. And while I would not necessarily endorse their approaches, both have significantly advanced our knowledge in a research field that is unfortunately growing significantly in importance.

After an extended debate about ethical guidelines, the German Anthropological Association (GAA) chose another approach (cf. the interview with Hans-Jörg Dilger in this issue, pp. 505–518). With the goal of contributing “to the formation and improvement of the ethical judgement” of fieldworkers, the association compiled not a fixed set of rules and norms but a list of six questions intended to enable the reflection of and “differentiated engagement with the ethical dilemmas of ethnographic work” (DGSKA 2016). As a list of open-ended questions, this *Frankfurt Declaration of Ethics in Social and Cultural Anthropology*, adopted in 2009, mirrors the open research methodology of the discipline. It also reflects the insight that often the relevance of questions lasts longer than the particular answers given to them.

Recently, the GAA unfortunately lost the courage to take an unconventional approach to fieldwork ethics. In a kind of anticipatory obedience to potential future requirements of German funding agencies, it adopted a seven-page questionnaire listing all sorts of potential ethical issues and pitfalls to be used for ethical reflection on future fieldwork. It looks a bit like a manual of confession to be filled in for the soul-searching of not yet committed fieldwork sins. Seemingly following the Christian doctrine that no one is without sin, it supplements the question “What are the major ethical issues connected with your research, and what steps will you take to address them?” with the directive: “Please do not write ‘none’” (DGSKA 2021). This small instruction perhaps shows that the authors themselves anticipate a potentially rather strategical and routine use of this questionnaire. I regard this as highly problematical, because such routinisation carries the danger of being less attentive – or of being attentive to formality only – and not taking things seriously. And we know that once a routine has been established, it is very difficult to abandon it again.

Anthropology is not concerned with fieldwork ethics only. In recent years, ethics, or moralities, have also become a subject matter of fast-growing significance for the discipline. I suggest taking inspiration from Didier Fassin’s anthropology of ethics for the debate on fieldwork ethics. Fassin points to the “purification” through which ethical norms are “extracted from the course of human activities” and by which “social scientists, in particular anthropologists, have tended to reproduce what philosophers generally do when they isolate moral principles or ethical dilemmas” (Fassin 2015: 177f). He also points out that in contrast, the “moral and ethical dimensions of human action are empirically and normatively impure” (ibid.). Fassin emphasises that what contaminates ethics is ultimately politics.

This also holds true for research ethics. Remember that the debate on research ethics was sparked by the political question of whether anthropologists should collaborate with intelligence agencies and the military, or not. The ethical dilemmas of Shoshan’s and Teitelbaum’s ethnographies also resulted from their intersection with politics. For instance, there would have been no

need for covert research, in Shoshan's case, had he not worked with a politically highly problematic and dangerous group of neo-Nazi youngsters. And nobody would have objected to Teitelbaum's emphasis on the primacy of researcher-informant solidarity had he not insisted on solidarity with a group totally at odds with anthropology's "liberal settlement" (Mazarella 2019). Solidarity is an important concept here, as it intimately links ethics with politics. In our research fields, we cannot show solidarity with everyone. The question of who deserves our solidarity, and who does not, is not only an ethical question but also a political one. It is coupled with our political ideas and goals. This is most obvious in cases of engaged anthropology that select a particular group for one's solidary engagement, albeit at the expense of others.

I venture to assert that in most cases, ethics cannot be uncoupled from politics. Ethics of research is at the same time politics of research, and so we have to turn as much to the political reflection of any research as we have to attend to its ethical consideration. The formalisation and routinisation of research ethics in guidelines and review processes attempts to purify the field by separating ethics from what actually creates ethical issues. But "the moral and ethical realms are not pure – and can only be purified artificially", emphasises Didier Fassin (2015: 205). We should resist the urge toward purification as much as possible, I think, in order to truly attend to the real and messy mix of ethical and political issues rising in the field – and this is of course also a political stance. Let's keep research ethics dirty!

## **A Peek into Institutional Review Board (IRB) through an Ethical Lens**

Tabassum Fahim Ruby

In "Keep Research Ethics Dirty!" Martin Sökefeld persuasively argues that the ethics of research cannot be uncoupled from the politics of research. He makes this argument in the context of the presumption to protect human research participants from any perceivable harm by requiring a research ethics clearance from Institutional Review Board (IRB). Sökefeld does not object to "weighing potential ethical issues before embarking on research" (p. 520). However, he argues that "the ethics clearance procedure requires us to pretend to know in advance what is at stake in the field" (ibid.) and may falsely suggest that "any ethical issue has been successfully solved" even though they "begin only once the review process is over" (ibid.), that is, during and after fieldwork.

Sökefeld raises these concerns against the backdrop of Germany recently institutionalising a research clearance procedure that “carries the danger of being less attentive – or of being attentive to the formality only – and not taking things seriously” (p. 522).

As I concur with Sökefeld’s arguments, I contribute to this conversation by further discussing shortcomings of ethical clearance typical for social sciences research. I argue that the United States IRB standards exhibit discipline hierarchies by commanding a clearance model for social sciences research that is more suited for medical sciences research. The IRB protocols also raise some ethical concerns when researching communities who may follow different ethical norms, and they seem to protect the institution against any perceivable bureaucratic allegations and lawsuits more than the research participants, provoking further ethical questions.

The most recent version (21 January 2019) of the IRB application in the United States requires ethical clearance for research that involves collection of “blood samples”, “biological specimens”, “data through noninvasive procedures” and “research involving materials” (WCU 2019). These descriptions demonstrably show that the form is intended for medical research even when one would argue that social sciences research involves collecting data by recruiting human participants. The question thus is why a more appropriate IRB application has not been developed for social sciences research. Is it because academia and the public regard medical sciences more highly and consider them as “objective” knowledge, in contrast to social sciences research, which they often render as “subjective”? If this is the archetype, then are not we reinforcing discipline hierarchies that feminists have long been critiqued, such as when they show the subjective nature of medical research (Code 1991, Harding 1991a, Haraway 1991).

The COVID-19 global pandemic has further powerfully exposed the subjectivity of the medical field as healthcare professionals learn through trial and error how to treat the virus and develop vaccines for it. They do not magically know when the pandemic will be over, what long-term effects of the virus are on the survivors, how long the vaccines will be effective, or if they will be effective against the new variants. All these questions have yet to be answered. However, if the IRB application is imposing a medical research model not because it regards this model as superior and objective, but because of the wildness and unpredictability of social sciences research that makes it difficult to draft a more fitting ethical clearance, then it remains unclear whether such ethical clearance addresses ethical issues when conducting social sciences research, as Sökefeld argues.

Based on my research experience, I also wish to ask how ethical it is to apply the IRB standards to fieldwork in communities that may hold different ethical standards. For instance, the United States IRB application emphasises

that, prior to conducting research, a consent form must be obtained that informs participants about the scope and use of the data, their rights, and assurance of data confidentiality. While on paper these measures seem important, acquiring a consent form according to the IRB protocol may be problematic in different cultural settings where participants hold informal consent to be trustworthy. On the day of the interview, asking them to consent yet again may leave participants disenchanted because, in their understanding, they already had agreed to participate. They may see yet another need for confirmation as violation of the trust that the researcher and the interviewee have developed. This can be a particular issue where communities regard verbal dealings as an ethical commitment, even if these do not fulfil the IRB protocol. Rather than building trust, such a process seems to weaken it and appears counterproductive. Further, hypothetically, even if the researcher let the participant know in advance that a consent form would be required according to the IRB standards, are we not imposing foreign ethical models onto others?

Since I have encountered precisely such problematic and awkward situations during my fieldwork in the global South, the need to obtain a consent form according to the standards of the global North seems to serve only to reinforce colonial relationships. There is a body of literature (cf. Tomaselli 2016, DiPersio 2014, McCracken 2020) that underscores the limitations of consent forms: they take the outlook of paternalism, intimidate participants, make them feel ignorant and do not take into account any distrust of written documents. To this can be added the fact that such forms fail to acknowledge the participant's initial consent to participate in the study.

Further, the IRB data confidentiality protocol is built to protect individual rights, but in closely knit communities it may not be possible to conduct research privately where other people cannot hear/know the participant's views. Or the participant may deem the holding of a private meeting to be unethical due to sociocultural and religious norms. What should the researcher do in such situations? Should the research be quit, which may mean not acquiring important information? Or would adopting a culturally suited ethics be more ethical, which may mean abandoning some aspects of IRB protocol when engaged in fieldwork? These scenarios underscore the fact that the IRB standards raise more ethical concerns than they aim to resolve, especially when conducting research across different communities that may hold different ethical standards.

As I have obtained IRB approval at several different institutions, I have come to realise the ways IRB standards seek to protect institutions from potential lawsuits in the name of protecting participants. For instance, a couple of years ago my home institution insisted that I obtain a research clearance from the country I was travelling to for my international fieldwork. Since I already had conducted phase I of this research at a different institution that did not ask for such paperwork, I tried to convince the authorities that an external ethical



clearance was not needed for my research. They told me that their funding could be revoked if they approved my application without an overseas clearance, and that my previous institution had illegally approved my phase I research. However, the national board of the IRB where I was planning to conduct my research would not grant me research clearance because it did not fall within their jurisdiction. After months of delay, a senior faculty member suggested that I seek help from the federal office for Human Research Protections. They told me that if my research was not federally funded, I did not need to obtain an ethical clearance from overseas. While their email satisfied my home institution, in the meantime I had wasted the whole summer. I had to delay my research until the next summer and ask for an extension on my internal research funding.

Frankly, with some hurdles, I could have obtained an external clearance through personal contacts, as the IRB board asked me to obtain a document from any university or ministry, even one that had nothing to do with my research. I knew some colleagues who did obtain such a document because they did not want to delay their research and fight the ugly battle. I did not want to opt for that route until I had exhausted all other options because to me it seemed unethical, and antithetical to the whole purpose of IRBs. In the end, it was worth the effort. I wanted to set the record straight and to pave a smoother path for my colleagues and myself for conducting international research next time. One might assume that it was only my university IRB board that did not know the federal requirements, but studies show that IRB boards are often concerned about protecting their institutions (Hessler et al. 2011). Thus, it should not be too much of an ask: let's be more ethical and clearly state in the IRB application whose interests the IRB protocols really aim to protect.

To conclude, it seems to me that the IRB standards are entrenched in the bureaucratic structure of the institution. Therefore, despite their best intentions and genuine desire to safeguard the rights of participants according to an imagined landscape that may even take the form of ethnocentrism, IRB boards must protect their institutions first and foremost against potential lawsuits. To that end, I contend that the IRB protocols are less about attempting to “purify” ethical issues, as Sökefeld argues, and more intended to shield institutions legally, at least in the United States. However, I agree with Sökefeld that “ethics of research is at the same time politics of research” (p. 523). Not only our choice of research topic, but also whose stories we wish to tell, and how we want to communicate them and represent our research participants, are ethical decisions as well as political ones because researchers choose and privilege certain issues, narratives and representations over others. One way to be clear about both our ethics and politics is to engage in the reflexivity that feminists have long advocated (Avishai et al. 2012, Nagar 2003, Nencel 2013, Rajan 2018).

## Surveillance, Guidelines or Reflections? Research Ethics Re-considered

Chien-Juh Gu

In his comment “Keep Research Ethics Dirty!” Martin Sökefeld questions the growing trend of routine procedures of ethics reviews in Germany. His discontent centres around two reasonings. First, he contends that the standardised ethics review is designed to protect institutions but is less effective at protecting subjects of research. Second, the “ethical clearance” granted by institutional reviews rarely solves the real ethical issues and dilemmas during fieldwork. Martin Sökefeld ends his essay with resistance against the “purification” of institutional reviews and politics of research. In this response, I reiterate and illustrate his first point by providing examples from my Human Subjects Institution Review Board (HSIRB) submissions. However, I contest his second point that uses dichotomous notions of *pure* versus *dirty* in perceiving research ethics.

I work at a large research university in the U.S. Midwest region, at which HSIRB reviews are a standard practice to ensure the ethical conduct of research. While acknowledging that an HSIRB review can vary by discipline and institution, I base my discussion on my personal experiences. As a sociologist who frequently conducts in-person interviews and ethnographic observations, I have submitted numerous HSIRB documents in the past decade. In this common practice for institutional reviews, researchers must detail the research purpose and procedure; subject recruitment process; anticipated risks, costs, and benefits; and preparations for reducing risks or handling unexpected situations. In U.S. society, in which lawsuits are common, the language used in consent documents and research protocols reveals much about an institution’s intent to prevent potential lawsuits. Once in my protocol, I explained that a possible scenario during my interview was that my interviewees might show signs of distress when recalling negative life events. If this should happen, I would stop the interview and provide a list of local counselling services in case my subjects needed the information. My protocol was returned by the HSIRB, which demanded that I added the following language to both my protocol and consent form: “If you [subject] decide to use these counselling services, you will be responsible for the cost.” This requirement exemplifies the institution’s intent to protect itself and avoid potential lawsuits and financial impacts.

Another major problem of bureaucratic screening lies in reviewers’ lack of research expertise. Most of those who review research protocols are not researchers. The few researchers who serve on the review board are often not in

the same field as the scholars who submit proposals for review. As a result, the review comments and revision requests are rarely helpful. Once, my protocol was returned and I was asked to explain my qualifications for conducting the research, although I was already a tenured faculty member and experienced researcher. Another time, I explained in my protocol that I would save my interview recordings on my computer. The review board commented that this phrasing was not specific enough. My application was returned, and I had to add: “After each interview, I save the recording on a USB drive and on my personal computer. I will store the USB drive and subjects’ information in a locked drawer in my office to which only I have access.” For another protocol, I was asked to describe the step-by-step process after an interview is completed: “I will bring my files and recording to my car right after each interview and drive back to my office without stopping by other places to prevent losing the data.” Often, the requests for additional detailed descriptions took 2–3 months of back-and-forth communication when I was revising a protocol for approval, which significantly delayed my research. The truth is, after receiving an approval, I never remembered those step-by-step procedures I wrote in my protocol, nor did anyone from the review board ever check on me to see if I followed those steps. Nevertheless, without those tedious descriptions, I would not have been able to proceed with research. The bureaucratic review process is not only exhausting but also useless for addressing real ethical issues. Power play is also on full display when HSIRB reviewers assume that researchers are incompetent to secure their own data or to conduct research in their own fields of study.

While I agree with Martin Sökefeld that research ethics is rarely a clear-cut, black-and-white matter, I caution against his call for “keeping research ethics dirty” as an opposition to institutional reviews and the use of the dichotomous concepts of *dirty* versus *pure* in perceiving ethics. Naming matters. The terms we choose to convey ideas can sometimes give an unintended impression. The word “dirty” could be misunderstood as “playing dirty,” which could be misleading without careful consideration. In my view, research ethics involves professional principles that serve as “honour codes” in conducting research. Our professional principles not only serve as research guidelines, but they also provide the foundation upon which judgement calls are based, especially when encountering unforeseen circumstances in the field. As Martin Sökefeld accurately explains, ethical considerations are often messy and complex. I argue that making good judgement calls in such grey areas requires knowledge of professional principles, deep reflections on the issues, and research experience.

Several years ago, I witnessed a researcher from another university “trick” Burmese refugees into filling out her survey. At the community town hall earlier that day, she spoke as a representative of a government council whose mission was to advocate for Asian-Pacific Americans in the region. At the town hall, many refugees raised concerns about various difficulties they had encountered,

with the hope of receiving government assistance. At the end of the event, the representative announced that she would gladly continue the conversation in another smaller room. As many refugees moved to the other room, the representative's assistants began to hand out an English survey concerning Asian Americans' health behaviours. As most Burmese did not understand English, a bilingual assistant helped translate the questions and filled out the questionnaires for them. Meanwhile, many refugee women asked questions about child-raising issues. The researcher/representative, who did not have a background in education or refugee studies, provided all kinds of advice. My assistant and I were stunned by what we saw because the content in the consent document distributed to participants differed from what was conveyed at the town hall event.

In my opinion, this case exemplifies how researchers could “play (dirty?) tricks” in the field to accomplish their research objectives. Some might argue that the “harm” this researcher caused to her subjects is insignificant, but several questions warrant careful considerations. Was the deception necessary? Was the deception used only to make data collection easier for the researcher? When I initiated a conversation with the researcher afterwards about ethics, I was told that I had no right to judge or intervene in her research. Apparently, we held different values about what constitutes ethical conduct. Later, I used this incident in my research methods class to discuss research ethics.

While institutional reviews have increased in many Western societies, ethics regulations vary across the globe. During my college years in Taiwan in the mid-1990s, the only discussion I heard about research ethics lasted less than one minute in a sociology methods course, when the professor told the class to check the Code of Ethics on the American Sociological Association's website (see ASA 2018). During my master's study in Taiwan, research ethics was never taught or discussed, and institutional reviews were nonexistent (as in some other Asian countries). With the absence of institutional regulations, conducting research seems “easier,” but students and researchers miss an opportunity to learn and reflect on how to conduct responsible research and how to protect subjects' well-being. As a contrast to the intensifying “institutional surveillance” in Western academia, this “research freedom” might be desirable for some, but researchers can also exploit their subjects without realising it if they omit ethics considerations. Neither of the systems is of much benefit in training researchers or conducting actual fieldwork.

In contrast to Martin Sökefeld's viewpoint that researchers cannot show solidarity with others, I consider researcher-informant solidarity appropriate and necessary in some research contexts. For example, studying undocumented immigrants requires researchers' commitment to conceal subjects' identity and not report them to the authorities. Such a commitment is not only an ethical requirement to maintaining confidentiality but also a demonstration of soli-

ilarity. Other marginalised groups in society, such as LGBTQ individuals, social welfare recipients, and people of colour, all deserve researchers' solidarity and compassion. Sociologists' core concern for social inequality places us in solidarity with the powerless, although some reveal their political stances more than others. Sociologists' liberal ideology often prompts many to advocate for socially disadvantaged groups and criticise those in power. During fieldwork, most researchers remain neutral or express their political views implicitly, but sociologists who use a participatory action research (PAR) approach usually embrace their insider's position in collaboration with activists or non-profit organisations. To me, showing solidarity with those who are vulnerable to inequality and injustice reflects sociologists' core mission to advocate for the powerless; understand, uncover and challenge social inequality; and, eventually, help create a better world – a practice that Iain Wilkinson and Arthur Kleinman (2016) call the “critical humanism” rooted in the history of sociology.

In summary, I argue that research ethics is essential training in our profession. Codes of ethical conduct are guidelines for conducting conscientious research, which provide the foundation for making good judgement calls in the field. Although institutional reviews are an unavoidable trend, researchers can make recommendations to their institutions to improve the review process and policies. In fact, my university's HSIRB review process has improved in recent years as a result of incorporating researchers' feedback. In my opinion, ideally, professional associations should form peer committees that offer consultation, which could provide precious support when researchers encounter ethical dilemmas. It would also be beneficial to create more resources for discussing ethical issues for both teaching and research. So far, teaching materials for ethics are fairly limited, and discussions of ethics are not always valued in academia (Gu 2020). As explained above, I strongly believe that researchers must take reflexivity and accountability seriously, and ethics deliberations offer important opportunities to practice both. It is my sincere hope that research ethics will gain more scholarly attention, not in a backlash against institutionalised reviews but as a way to pursue excellence in research.

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