



Empowerment and Conceptual Clarity in Research Integrity

Comment to David Shaw, *The Quest for Clarity in Research Integrity: A Conceptual Schema*, *Sci Eng Ethics* (2019) 25: 1085–1093

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David Shaw rightly states in his contribution that we need more conceptual clarity in discussions on research integrity (Shaw 2019). We agree with Shaw, but fear that his strategy is not helpful for two reasons. Firstly, Shaw makes distinctions to help structure the conceptual debate on research integrity. One is to distinguish between scientific and research integrity, which are, next to academic integrity, both often used. Yet, instead of embracing a distinction between *knowledge* (science) and *relations with other researchers* (research), a more inclusive approach covering all disciplines and activities in research practice is more helpful. E.g. the notion of research integrity is not restricted to natural or life sciences and is commonly used in codes of conduct. For the same reason, a distinction between external and internal integrity is not fruitful, especially if it leads to the conclusion that ‘integrity training can only ever teach about external rules...’ (Shaw: 1087). This is at odds with many educational programs that aim to stimulate responsible behavior and an upright attitude of academics. The same lack of inclusiveness is missing when we continue to distinguish between research ethics and research integrity. Narrowing down research ethics to research with human subjects has a pragmatic background in the history of bioethics, but should not be conceived as substantially different from research integrity. Both are part of a practice where ethical values are underlying to human actions and decisions and it is a mistake to believe that research integrity is only about professional standards, and not about ethics, as Shaw and others assume (e.g. Steneck 2007).

Secondly, Shaw argues that we need to broaden the scope of integrity cases. In his view, the scope of misconduct should be broadened beyond Fabrication, Falsification and Plagiarism (FFP) cases, and include what has been described as an area of questionable research practices (QRP). We think that this claim can be detrimental to research practice. To view individual researchers as potential wrongdoers is not doing justice to actual research practice. So, passive bystanders are not

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misbehaving, forgetting to acknowledge people in your article is neither elegant nor wrong, and making a mistake in your analysis is a human error that urges one to be more cautious. Instead of turning all academics into ‘anonymous wrongdoers’ it is time to stimulate responsible behavior by showing that each researcher in practice will undeniably experience dilemmas and make mistakes that need not always be condemned immediately, but urges for reflection and cautiousness. The take home message in research integrity debates should be to stimulate openness and transparency, not branding all as potential offenders. We should empower (future) researchers instead of floating them in a corner of misconduct. Thus, broadening the scope of integrity requires one to focus on what responsible conduct of research entails and conceptual clarity should start from an inclusive awareness of both good, questionable and bad behavior in research practices. That will be, in our view, much more fruitful.

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