

Review

Kees Schuyt:

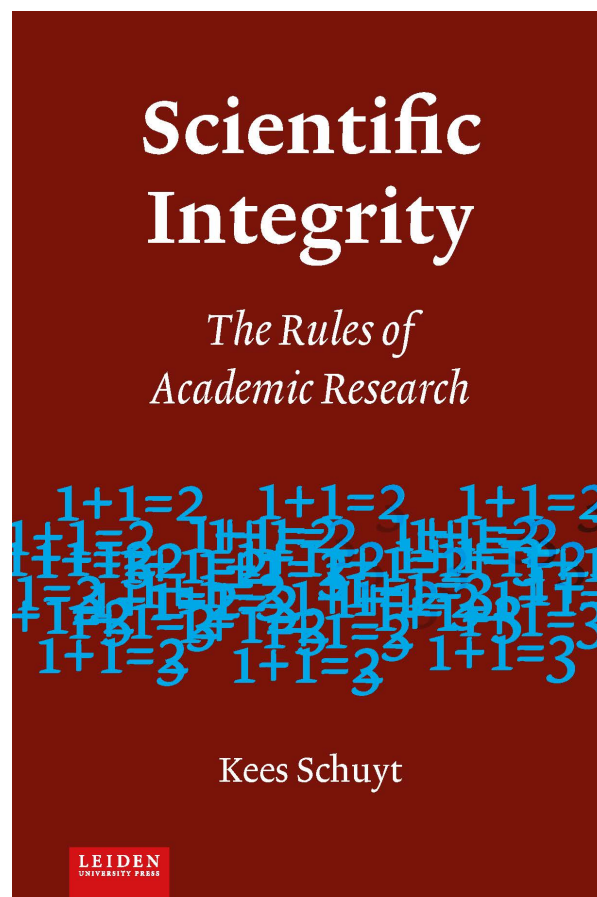
Scientific integrity: The rules of academic research

Maghiel van Crevel (trans.)

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Reviewed by Will C. van den Hoonaard



Given the important theme of *Scientific integrity*, I am bound to explain my own inadequacy to review this volume. I conduct qualitative research (and my interests and knowledge are far removed from the kind of science that Kees Schuyt describes in his book). I can only offer some tangential remarks. What is more, I have always upheld the notion that the imposition of the medical research-ethics framework on the social sciences is a form of colonization.

As a book primarily intended for the academic community, *Scientific integrity* is a “scientific essay from which one can draw inspiration for one’s own work” (10). Chapter 1 describes the concept of integrity and the social values behind it. Chapter 2 details the standards of integrity in terms of the relevant codes. Chapter 3 focusses on fraud and dishonest behaviour in scientific research and if there has been an increase in those violations. Chapter 4 reveals how the academic community in the Netherlands handles such violations. Chapters 5 and 6, respectively, touch on plagiarism and the distinction between “sloppy” and “dishonest” research. Chapter 7 examines how universities self-regulate integrity and how the “scientific spirit” of integrity can be passed on to the next generation of researchers.

The book represents a culmination of the author’s analysis starting in 2006 when Kees Schuyt served as Chair of the Netherlands Board on Research Integrity. It was a 14-year term, but, as he said, the topic “continued to fascinate” him (7). It is a study of the new codes, especially since 1985 when these codes became current. The book also relates to his discovery of “suspected violations” many of which he was asked to investigate. Schuyt connects these violations to the development of research-ethics policies in the Netherlands.

For me, several aspects of *Scientific integrity* stand out. First, the author is interested in the extent to which fraud is committed in science (and that speaks to the urgent need for policies that govern the avoidance of fraud). Second, there are abundant references to those who committed scientific fraud. Third, the idea how the social structures in the community of scientists account for the rise of fraud is merely hinted at. Fourth, *Scientific integrity* leaves out any consideration of the social sciences.

Using other sources of information, Schuyt informs us that 1-2% of scientists are guilty of fabrication and falsification. If one extends the notion of fraud, between 3% and 30% of scientists are guilty of fraud (62). One self-reported survey involving American criminologists said that 2% have committed “some form of plagiarism” (62) (there is no escape from the irony that plagiarism is considered theft). In Belgium, “one in twelve” physicians reported to have carried out some form of data manipulation (59). However, Schuyt tells us that, “[t]he best conclusion that we can draw [...] is simply that we just don’t know how much fraud is taking place in the scientific world” (25).

In contemporary times, *Scientific integrity* specifically names eleven researchers in medicine, four biologists, three clinical psychologists, three physicists, two economists, one political anthropologist, one historian, one political scientist, and one writer/illustrator. Schuyt mentions the names of at least 27 people (I do not list them here given the fact that some of them have already been rehabilitated; and I have no interest in perpetuating the names of others). Two in this cluster were women; and *Scientific integrity* describes in some detail one woman as a whistle blower. The book also mentions the work of governmental agencies in altering data or findings.

The author of *Scientific integrity* does not delve directly into the social system that sustains fraud (beyond the culpability of certain individuals), but he leaves us with some hauntingly key hints as to the composition of such a social system. As a sociologist (like the author himself), I find it fascinating that throughout the book Schuyt leaves us with the notion of how the social structure of the community of scientists impacts their behaviour, including fraud. He speaks of power relations in research centres (29), the existence of well formulated and unambiguous ethical rules (42), the promulgation of the “Protocol” (43), the treatment of colleagues and subordinates (44), relations among scientific practitioners and with students (47), about not delaying or hindering the work of other researchers (53), about decisions concerning what constitutes the number of publications (57), competition for scarce resources (63), the linkages among editors, assessors, professors, and so on (64), the role of individual universities, the causal relationship between this pressure and scientific fraud, the intensification of competition (65), the power of prestige (66), the pressures to perform (67), the relationship between scientific research, industrial exploitation and economic application (69), the characteristics of the social system (75), the role of supervision and mentorship (77), relentless university gossip (88), the lack of time (105), an exaggerated administrative formalism in science, the unfortunate consequences of today’s overly competitive scientific world (116), power relations (119), the lack of social control in large research projects, the pressure to accumulate as many publications as possible (134), and peer pressure, supervision, compulsory courses, bonuses, and punishment (168) – all these denote the active presence of a social structure that constitutes the sinews of the behavior of scientists, whether for good or bad. The remainder of the book contains more of such incidental references to the existence of a social structure of sorts. Each of these observations deserves a full treatment if Schuyt decides to offer a new volume on the topic.

I was pleased with the fact that *Scientific integrity* left out the notions of ethics in the social sciences (with a few rare exceptions). As explained above, I have for a long time felt that the medical research-ethics frame is quite inappro-

appropriate for the social sciences (excluding psychology that seems to uphold the medical frame of research ethics). In my own personal list of bibliographies, there are probably some 800 scholarly articles (and some books) that have a tangle with the medical framework; and there are probably some 30 scholars worldwide who are furthering the distinctive frame of the social sciences (with some averring that doing away with any ethics codes is probably the most handsome approach to this dilemma). Terms like “protocol” (for example, 43) misrepresent the structure of say, ethnographic, inductive or qualitative research. Yet, all these scholars do academic research (referring to the subtitle of *Scientific integrity*).

Scientific integrity is a skillful presentation of placing the frauds of researchers in the context of how the academic community in the Netherlands has come to terms with them. Schuyt provides a detailed historical analysis. It is probably beyond the scope of *Scientific integrity* to step outside inventing motives of those committing fraud, to use in-depth ethnographic/qualitative studies of these individuals to see how or why they committed fraudulent behavior. Those studies do not seem to be available, let alone carried out as empirical studies. We cannot invent their motives; we need to learn from them what steps or process they went through.

On a final note, it struck me that the index should have covered more topics. A good proofreader might have also caught the mysterious references in the literature to “the Buck” (79). Even Schuyt’s own voluminous work deserved to be further referenced, either as “2014a” or “2014b” in the bibliography, or “2006a” or “2006b” within the text itself. These are minor distractions, however, especially in light of *Scientific integrity*’s attempts to give substantial coverage to what the Netherlands has done to curb scientific fraud or to encourage scientific integrity.

About the reviewer

Will C. van den Hoonaard is professor emeritus in sociology at the University of New Brunswick in Fredericton, New Brunswick (Canada). He earned his Ph.D. from the University of Manchester (U.K.) in 1977 and has been a longstanding field researcher who has investigated marine resource management policies in Iceland, the social history of the Bahá’í community, and the world of mapmakers. His areas of research have covered qualitative and ethnographic research, research ethics, gender issues, human rights, and multiculturalism. He has served on the (Canadian) Interagency Advisory Panel on Research Ethics. He is also a Woodrow Wilson Fellow and an author of 13 books. His book *The seduction of ethics: Transforming the social sciences* (University of Toronto Press, 2011) was listed by *The Hill Times* news service as one of the top 100 annual Canadian non-fiction books. It also received an Honorable Mention by the Charles H. Cooley Award Committee of the

Society for the Study of Symbolic Interaction in 2012. The same Society awarded him the 2017 George Herbert Mead Award for Lifetime Achievement. Currently, he is engaged in writing another book on the problem of ethics in the social sciences, as well as a new children's book about the mapping of the dark side of the moon.

