



# Framing Integrity Resolution: An Integrative Approach to Academic Ethics

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## Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to explore an integrative approach to academic ethics research. Academic ethics is known as professional commitment towards ethical decision-making in education, research, and innovation. It has been practised in multiple forms, including academic integrity and research ethics within a larger educational and research landscape. Despite having several intertwining and overlapping features and principles of practice, higher education institutions all over the world have considered academic integrity and research ethics as two distinct subjects of practice. Although the developmental history, guiding values, and principle-based practices of both academic integrity and research ethics have led us to separate theoretical and methodological understandings, the concurrently emerging threats towards ethical integrity in education, research, and innovation require an integrative approach to academic ethics. In this conceptual paper, I propose an integrative approach to academic ethics research based on the theoretical concepts/constructs and methodological practices of both academic integrity and research ethics in higher education. The integrative approach frames an Integrity Resolution, a positionality framework for academic ethics researchers. It aims to assist researchers and research practitioners of academic ethics to be aware of their own positioning while investigating ethical decision-making practices and misconduct in education and research.

**Keywords** Positionality framework · Academic integrity · Research ethics · Equity · Academic misconduct · Research misconduct

## Introduction

Academic integrity is considered a core of educational affairs, encompassing the real-world practice of ethical decision-making, including honesty, trust, fairness, and justice in educational contexts. Eaton (2024a) defines academic integrity as a transdisciplinary

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field of research and scholarship, where researchers from across academic disciplines come together to solve complex problems. Academic integrity, however, perpetuates ethical integrity of research and innovation. Ethical integrity in research (known as research ethics in this paper) intends to protect research participants and research community from possible harms and exploitation due to the research processes and results (Akuffo, 2023; Kara, 2018). It refers to the protection of participants' perspectives including their dignity, spirituality, Indigeneity, and all forms of individual and social identities. It requires researchers' ethical decision-making and cultural humility as essential skills and competencies (Quigley, 2016). With these viewpoints, as Eaton (2024b) integrates in her comprehensive academic integrity (CAI) framework, both academic integrity and research ethics could be well understood and investigated through an integrative approach in higher education contexts.

Developmental history of academic integrity and research ethics has led us to distinguish between their theoretical understandings, primarily in relation to distinctly defined values and principles of practice. Due to separate policy documents, principles of practice, support units, and distinct provisions of preventing misconduct, the academic integrity and research ethics in higher education institutions are considered as two different subjects of practice. However, despite some methodological differences, real-world practices of academic integrity and research ethics in higher education institutions have several intertwining and overlapping implications. Academic integrity broadly focuses on the *character* of individuals involved in education and research whereas research ethics focuses on ethical acceptability of research and innovation (see ICAI, 2021; Kara, 2018). The ethical acceptability of research could directly be influenced by the characters and behaviors of the individuals involved in research activities. Similarly, ethical integrity in education is only possible when the individuals involved in education and research perform ethically acceptable behaviors. Such epistemic intertwining and overlap between academic integrity and research ethics raises a question against their separate provisions, practices, and research priorities in higher education – how can academic integrity and research ethics be practised in an integrated manner for investigating and promoting ethical decision-making in education and research?

This conceptual paper is epistemologically positioned to answer the above-mentioned question, exploring the overlapping implications of academic integrity and research ethics in higher education. The overlapping implications are explored from the perspectives of: (i) new dimension or priority in both academic integrity and research ethics (Eaton, 2022b; Ibrahim, 2014; Ruzycski & Ahmed, 2022), (ii) breaches of both academic integrity and research ethics (Hall & Martin, 2019; Tauginienė et al., 2019), and (iii) ethical decision-making as central concerns in both academic integrity and research ethics (Eaton, 2024b; Hyytinen & Löfström, 2017; Sivasubramaniam et al., 2021). This conceptual exploration broadly aims to consolidate the scattered ideas and discourses regarding the scholarship of academic integrity and research ethics.

Both academic integrity and research ethics share two common practical aspects. The first aspect concerns the *competency* of individuals involved in the practice of academic integrity (Eaton, 2021b) and research ethics (Kara, 2018). In contrast, another aspect concerns individuals' *involvement* in various forms of academic misconduct (Tauginienė et al., 2019) and research misconduct (Hall & Martin, 2019). It is reasonable to consider these two aspects from the perspectives of ethical decision-making, and the reasons behind people's involvement in such misconduct. People's ethical decision-making competency and their

involvement in misconduct may not always have an inverse relationship, as competency does not matter if someone is intentionally involved in academic and research misconduct.

However, based on the analysis of intertwining and overlapping implications of academic integrity and research ethics, this conceptual paper proposes an integrative approach to academic ethics research by framing an Integrity Resolution (IR). I use the term *academic ethics* to indicate both academic integrity and research ethics, similar to how Jordan (2013) explored academic ethics broadly by including both responsible conduct of research and academic integrity. The integrative approach is not a new definition of academic ethics, instead it is a positionality framework, where researchers of academic ethics can be well positioned themselves while investigating three related topics. First, the reasons behind individuals' involvement in the breaches of academic ethics. Second, the multi-layered (individual, departmental, institutional, and community) competencies towards academic ethics. Third, the effects in technological advancement, sociocultural and institutional practices, and environmental sustainability from both people's involvement in misconduct and their competencies towards ethical decision-making.

In addition, IR as an integrative research platform allows researchers and research practitioners in academic ethics to exercise and promote ethical decision-making in larger educational and research contexts. It introduces three zones: a zone of breach, a zone of effect, and a zone of resolution, which are discussed later in this paper. While framing IR, this conceptual paper is organized in a way that facilitates multiple entry points to look over research ethics and academic integrity through an integrative lens.

## Shifting Priorities in Academic Ethics

With the increasing use of advanced technologies including artificial intelligence and neuro-educational technology in education and research, it has become crucial to explore the shifting priorities in academic ethics measures. To add to the integrative discourse in academic ethics, this section explores a radical shift in research ethics (Ibrahim, 2014; Kara, 2018) and new priorities for academic integrity (Eaton, 2022b). This section also helps to understand similar shifting priorities in both research ethics and academic integrity.

Ethical issues in research are not static, and there is an increasing focus on issues of rights, identity, and Indigeneity-based approaches in research and innovation. Every stage in research can be ethically challenging for all researchers, regardless of their experience and expertise. Ethics, in terms of research, is constituted by the practices of a predefined set of principles and a method of reasoning (Birch et al., 2012; Guillemin & Gillam, 2004). The practice of predefined principles or a set of rules could serve to advocate a *one-size-fits-all* approach in research ethics. In contrast to the *one-size-fits-all* approach, Msoroka and Amundsen (2017) presented the concept of universality with diversity in research ethics. They argued "actions that are assumed as 'right' in reference to ethical norms endorsed in one culture or society may not always be considered 'right' in reference to ethical norms in another culture or society" (p. 1). This implies the *one-size-fits-all* approach in research ethics does not work appropriately in all cases, contexts, and cultures. For instance, Msoroka and Amundsen (2017) explored exemplary case of New Zealand, Akuffo (2023) reflected fieldwork experience in Ghana, and Dahal (2024) unpacked research data withdrawal case

in Nepal. These are only a few examples that reference the new direction seeking radicalization of research ethics.

The new direction in research ethics is all about human sensitivity and humility towards the research context and community culture. Research ethics has become more a method of reasoning in relation to the research community context than practicing a set of pre-defined rules/principles (Birch et al., 2012). In this regard, Plummer (2001) discussed researchers' ethical absolutist and situational relativist positionality in research. The ethical absolutist intends to establish a set of rules/principles that should direct all research studies, whereas the situational relativist argues, "ethical dilemmas of the social scientist are not 'special' but coterminous with the problems of living in everyday life" (Plummer, 2001, p. 227). Similarly, Guillemin and Gillam (2004) defined two dimensions of ethics in research: procedural ethics and ethics in practice.

The two dimensions of research ethics defined by Guillemin and Gillam (2004) could be helpful to researchers in simplifying the abstract concept of ethical positioning in research. The situational relativist ethical positioning and ethics in practice are two fundamental concepts of the new direction in research ethics. As Kara and Pickering (2017) state, the new direction in research ethics goes "beyond the usual preoccupations to explore ethics throughout the research process, from teaching ethics to presenting research findings" (p. 239).

### Radical Shift in Research Ethics

Scholarly proposal for a new direction in research ethics is not new; it has a long discourse in terms of decolonizing research methodology and ethics review. Research ethics review processes and practices in several institutions around the world are filtered through a colonial gaze and hegemonic mindset (Akuffo, 2023; Grenz, 2023). In contrast, Ibrahim (2014) focused on decolonizing research ethics, and proposed a *new era*, which he called "radical research ethics" (p. 11). Radical shift in research ethics operates to decolonize our individual and institutional practices of assessing ethics in research. Ibrahim's concept of radical research ethics also aims to decolonize the institutional hegemonic power structures that are embedded in research ethics review processes. In addition, as Chilisa (2019) and Kovach (2021) explicitly discuss that research ethics, in terms of decolonizing research, emphasizes the researchers' cultural humility to implement four R's – respect, relevance, reciprocity, and responsibility throughout their research.

Decolonizing research ethics aims to transform institutional research ethics practices and make them conducive to recognizing, protecting, and respecting all historical knowledge heritages. Grenz's (2023) reflective exploration regarding university ethics boards and their readiness for Indigenous scholars includes pragmatic issues that demonstrate why decolonizing research ethics is essential and practically significant. Decolonizing research ethics promotes equity and justice in production, mobilization, and transformation of knowledge. In this regard, any changing practice in research ethics review, such as adapting culturally sensitive, context responsive, and reciprocity-conscious approaches, could be considered as one form of radical shift in institutional research ethics.

Scholarly discourse about the radical shift in research ethics is predominantly embedded with ethics in Indigenous methodology, decolonizing research, creative research, community participatory research, and sensitive research. Radical shift in research ethics may only

make researchers and the researched community stronger and more confident because, as Chambers (2004) discussed in a different context, such *paths* have heart – heart of both the researcher and the researched. The radical shift in research ethics is reciprocal to everyday ethics and cultural humility. It implies context and culturally embodied measures of interpersonal conduct, which is beyond regulatory compliance (Israel, 2015). Moreover, it could also be considered as the development of human soft skills, which are essential to the researcher. The ethical consequences in research are not always raised as researchers expect or plan; they could face brand new ethical challenges during their research.

However, a radical shift in research ethics could be considered as *value-based* practices. As Ruzycski and Ahmed (2022) emphasized, the ethical conduct of research could only be possible when researchers have equity, diversity, and inclusion as fundamental research skills. In addition to the researchers' skills, the socio-cultural, economic, political, and sometimes religious conditions and conflicts in the researched community have a decisive role in defining what counts as ethical conduct in research (Akuffo, 2023; Msoroka & Amundsen, 2017). Value-based practices consider ethical conduct in research to be reciprocal to the researchers' cultural humility, including their context and case sensitive actions, reactions, and interactions. Through this frame, ethical conduct could be influenced by the researchers' relationality, emotion, creativity, honesty, respect, and broad humanity as per the fluidity and diversity of the researched community, case, and context (Clarke et al., 2015; Dahal, 2024). Without researchers' honest, respectful, and fair behaviors in interpersonal conduct, value-based practices in research may create discouraging and harmful results for both the research participants and the researched community.

### **New Priorities in Academic Integrity**

As with research ethics, academic integrity in higher education could also be considered a value-based subject of practice. As Eaton (2022b) states, academic integrity cannot be possible without equity, diversity, and inclusion in scholarly practices. Similar to the radical shift emphasizing value-based practices in research ethics, the new priorities for academic integrity could also be considered as value-based subjects of scholarly practice. Eaton (2024b) further states “definitions [of academic integrity] may depend on values, principles, virtues, and culture (including, but not limited to, ancestral or organizational cultures)” (p. 3). In addition, neoliberal gazes, including socio-economic status, geo-political interferences, and immersion of advanced technologies, have potential to influence the practice of academic integrity in higher education (Kezar & Bernstein-Sierra, 2024). However, both the radical shift in research ethics and the new priorities for academic integrity are informed by the emergence of equity, diversity, inclusion, decolonization, and Indigenization in broader educational and research landscapes (Eaton, 2022b; Ibrahim, 2014; Poitras Pratt & Gladue, 2022; Ruzycski & Ahmed, 2022).

Along with the fundamental values of ethical integrity, such as honesty, respect, fairness, welfare, justice, and reciprocity (Bos, 2020; ICAI, 2021), knowledge equity, diversity, inclusion, and accessibility could also be considered as essential commitments to uphold academic ethics in higher education (Eaton, 2022b; Parnther, 2024). Since the increasing use of advanced technologies in education and research, the issues of equity and diversity in knowledge production and mobilization have become more prominent in terms of academic ethics. The emerging discourse on equity, diversity, inclusion, decolonization, and Indi-

genization in both academic integrity and research ethics seems to be reframing the definition of academic ethics. However, the radical shift in research ethics and the new priorities for academic integrity are seen as innately similar but their historical discourses have not been clearly linked and the lines between them are still blurred (Eaton, 2022a; Hyytinen & Löffström, 2017).

In addition to the radical shift in research ethics and new priorities for academic integrity, Eaton (2024b) has presented a CAI framework, where she mentions eight overlapping and intertwining elements of ethical decision-making in higher education, including everyday ethics, research ethics, and publication ethics. Research ethics is considered as a core element of the CAI framework. It means the discussion of a possible integrative approach to academic ethics is already in place.

## Breaches of Academic Ethics

The previous section explored the similar shifting priorities in both academic integrity and research ethics. This section explores how breaches of academic integrity and breaches of research ethics are similar in higher education contexts. There is no single definition that covers all types of breaches of academic ethics, but it is commonly known as academic misconduct and research misconduct in higher education. In this conceptual paper, the breaches of academic integrity and the breaches of research ethics are called academic misconduct and research misconduct respectively (Hall & Martin, 2019; Tauginienė et al., 2019). This section helps to understand the similarities between academic misconduct and research misconduct in academic life.

Research studies on academic misconduct and research misconduct have a long history. Even though they have several common features and types, both have been investigated separately for a long time in higher education institutions. It has yet to be explored whether research misconduct differs from academic misconduct. If it is, what sort of epistemological and methodological differences do they have? The debate is not about which one is more important, but it is rather a discussion of how both concepts are treated separately despite having several common features and types, and what could be possible to consider through an integrative approach.

## Integrity Literacy and Misconduct

A researcher needs adequate literacy in integrity and ethics to accomplish responsible research by ensuring honesty, trustworthiness, applicability, adaptability, responsibility, and reciprocity. Literacy in terms of academic ethics inclusively combines the values, ethical behaviors, decision-making practices, and all scholarly skills necessary for *success* in education, research, and innovation (Bos, 2020; Eaton, 2021a). Academic integrity literacy is a motivation for students, researchers, faculties, and institutions to adapt misconduct detection strategies at their own pace (Eaton, 2021a; Hossain, 2022).

Misconduct in academia is caused by human (mis)behaviors, which could be both intentional and unintentional. Unintentional misconduct is *elusive*, and human awareness and self-reflexivity could change it (see Hess & Pickett, 2017 for automaticity and unintentional behaviors). It could happen due to a lack of adequate literacy – ideas, knowledge, and skills

of ethical integrity in education, research, and innovation. In contrast, intentional misconduct has become an all-time challenge in academic success and research. People may commit it by ignoring established academic principles, norms, and practices (Luck et al., 2022). In their studies, Curtis (2023), Ferguson et al. (2023) and Luck et al. (2022) explored the driving factors behind students' involvement in academic misconduct. The lack of ethical or applied decision-making skills in individuals is also considered as one of the major reasons (Penaluna & Ross, 2022). Applied decision-making may demand a moral foundation for human action. Although morality is distinguished from ethics (Sivasubramaniam et al., 2021), academic misconduct is positioned in a moral frame when it happens intentionally (Eaton, 2021b).

### Misconduct Detection

The practice of academic integrity and research ethics in any institution aims to detect all kinds of misconduct, and then make their research and academic outcomes as beneficial as possible to people, including research participants and the researched community. Beyond the detection of research misconduct, the radical shift in research ethics promotes social justice, reciprocity, sensitivity, cultural humility, spirituality, and collective wellbeing (see Hayward et al., 2021; Quigley, 2016). All of these are reciprocal to researchers' competencies in avoiding or detecting harmful activities, making research optimally beneficial, and contributing to long-term societal justice. However, the fundamental essence of academic ethics in higher education institutions is to identify interested people, including professors, researchers, and students, to practice knowledge, science, and technology responsibly in a sustainable manner.

The individual competencies towards honest, fair, respectful, trustworthy, and responsible actions are not only essential to detect academic misconduct but also equally crucial to detect research misconduct from the perspectives of responsible research conduct (Feenstra et al., 2021; Hyytinen & Löfström, 2017). Responsible research practices are fundamental in terms of upholding comprehensive academic integrity in higher education (Eaton, 2024b). Therefore, individuals' literacy towards academic ethics, with the "habit of studying and carrying out academic work with justice and coherence" (Guerrero-Dib et al., 2020, p. 3), must be required to detect various types of misconduct in education and research. With this regard, the ethical decision-making competencies of each stakeholder in higher education could be considered as *all-in-one* to detect possible misconduct. Although there is theoretical differentiation in overall ethical decision-making, as Bos (2020) highlighted, the normative rules, communality, (individual and collective) moral responsibilities, and human behaviors are common aspects in academic ethics to detect possible misconduct in both education and research.

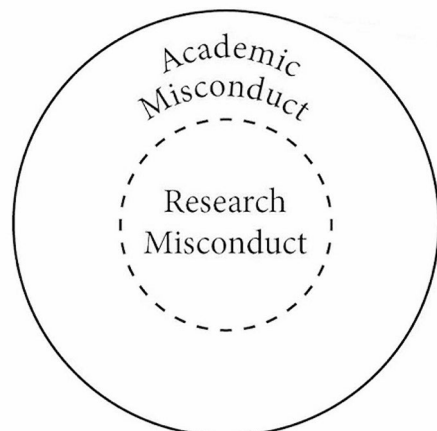
### Misconduct in Integrative Lens

Although it is difficult to distinguish between research misconduct and academic misconduct, both can occur in higher education institutions. There is no universal definition for diverse forms of academic misconduct and research misconduct. However, Tauginienė et al.'s (2019) taxonomy of academic misconduct, and Hall and Martin's (2019) taxonomy of research misconduct, provide explicit insight. For instance, institutional leaders could

perform their roles and responsibilities questionably by violating institutional rules, regulations, and their positional ethics. Similarly, professors, instructors, and supervisors are responsible for integrity supervision (Pizzolato & Dierickx, 2022), but they could challenge their own/each others' professional and publication ethics. Likewise, research students may engage in questionable activities within their researched community by ignoring its established norms, practices, and social sensitivities (Bos, 2020). However, as Acharya and Dahal (2023) argued, students' involvement in questionable activities or misconduct has multi-layered sociocultural determinants, such as peer level, family/community level, and institutional level – “socially prescribed perfectionism” (Curtis & Clare, 2024, p. 1654).

Various terminologies are used to indicate different types of misconduct in education and research. The terminologies regarding academic misconduct are presented in the form of taxonomies (Tauginienė et al., 2019), which include but are not limited to fabrication, falsification, plagiarism, cheating, honorary authorship, contract cheating, collusion, admission fraud, fake degrees, fraudulent credentials, research misconduct, and questionable research. On the other hand, Bos (2020) listed some possible types of research misconduct including, but not limited to, plagiarism, fabrication, falsification, cheating, forgery, ghost writing, contract cheating, self-deception, and bias with data, participants, and publications. Duplicate publication, self-plagiarism, citation manipulation, and false authorship are also considered forms of research misconduct (Feenstra et al., 2021). However, research misconduct can be categorized into FFP (i.e., Fabrication, Falsification and Plagiarism) and QRPs (i.e., Questionable Research Practices) (Abdi et al., 2021). QRPs include, but are not limited to, HARKing, salami publishing, excessive self-citation, resemblance to previous publications, and data massaging (Bos, 2020; Hall & Martin, 2019). These all show that academic misconduct and research misconduct are almost inseparable in higher education. As Tauginienė et al. (2019) suggested, research misconduct in higher education could be considered as a subset of academic misconduct. The CAI framework further proves this explanation because research ethics is considered as a core element of comprehensive academic integrity (Eaton, 2024b) (Fig. 1).

**Fig. 1** Notes All forms of research misconduct to be academic misconduct, not all forms of academic misconduct are research misconduct in higher education institutions





## Ethical Decision-Making: A Theoretical Concern

This section explores ethical decision-making as a common theoretical concern in both academic integrity and research ethics. Theory in the educational context could be considered as a bundle of concepts, beliefs, and/or frameworks (Cohen et al., 2018). For example, theoretical concepts and constructs of academic integrity includes human behaviors, social justice, academic misconduct, and workplace learning leadership or institutional integrity (Curtis & Clare, 2024; Eaton, 2021b). Similarly, theoretical concepts and constructs of research ethics includes protection of human subjects, social responsibility, reciprocity, research misconduct, social justice, cultural humility, and research leadership (Bos, 2020; Chilisa, 2019; Ibrahim, 2014; Kara, 2018). Both examples seem to suggest that individuals' competencies towards ethical decision-making are essentially required to uphold academic integrity and research ethics in the larger educational and research landscape. Considering theory as an explanatory framework or a way of looking at *ethical* phenomena (Cohen et al., 2018), this section helps us to understand the concepts and constructs of academic integrity and research ethics as a coherent whole – ethical decision-making to uphold academic ethics in higher education.

### Theoretical Concepts and Constructs

Theories in social science are a phenomenon of the modern human world. The theories in social science represent the concepts by which humans try to understand the world they have created. As Carter (2003) states, the stories we create are our theories and methods for understanding the reality we find ourselves in. In a similar vein, the theories that we consider for academic integrity and ethics scholarships do not exist beyond our academic and research practices. However, historically there is an assumed distinction between the concepts of academic integrity and research ethics. The debate is not about the historical legacy in the development of theoretical understandings, but about reconsidering theoretical concepts and constructs as a step towards developing an integrative approach to academic ethics.

The literature listed in Table 1 and throughout this conceptual paper has discussed either misconduct or ethical integrity, or effects from both misconduct and ethical decision-making, in education and research. The listed literature has substantial foundations in conceptualizing the integrative approach to academic ethics research. Table 1 presents some theoretical concepts and constructs that are already discussed or used in both academic integrity and research ethics literature. It also presents an explanatory throughline, marking strong alignment between the theoretical concepts/constructs and the three zones of IR (see [Integrative Approach to Academic Ethics](#) section below for further details). The concepts and constructs presented in Table 1 result from a rapid review of the relevant literature conducted while conceptualizing IR, a positionality framework for academic ethics researchers. The categorized information in Table 1 includes examples and appropriate literature for reading, not an exhaustive list.

Table 1 shows that no single theoretical framework is used in all cases and contexts of academic ethics. As Eaton (2022a) presents, the theoretical foundations in academic ethics are important but not essentially required in all research studies centered around academic integrity and ethics. However, researchers have been using theory in academic ethics to

**Table 1** Theoretical concepts and constructs in academic ethics

Concepts and constructs	Already used or discussed in		Appropriate explanatory concepts and constructs for		
	Academic integrity	Research ethics	Zone of breach	Zone of effect	Zone of resolution
Virtue and value	ICAI (2021)	Kara (2018)	√		
Taxonomy of misconduct	Tauginienė et al. (2019)	Hall and Martin (2019)	√		
Equity, diversity, and inclusion	Eaton (2022b)	Ruzycki and Ahmed (2022)		√	
Decolonization and Indigenization	Poitras Pratt and Gladue (2022)	Chilisa (2019)			√
Reciprocity and relationality	Poitras Pratt and Gladue (2022)	Kovach (2021)		√	
Cultural humility, spirituality, and wellbeing	Lindstrom (2022)	Quigley (2016)		√	
Framework, and mental map	Eaton (2021b)	Opfermann (2022)			√
Ethical and planned (mis)behaviors	Curtis et al. (2018)	Sivasubramanian et al. (2021)	√		√
Literacy and competency	Hossain (2022)	Bos (2020)	√		√

*Notes* The theoretical concepts and constructs already used or discussed in literature from both academic integrity and research ethics. The most appropriate literature for reading, based on the theoretical concepts and constructs identified from a rapid review, while developing the concept of IR. The theoretical concepts and constructs that can be used as conceptual foundation in each zone in the IR

understand and interpret experiences, social behaviors, societies, cultures, (un)ethical decisions, critical discourses, and many more cross-cutting issues of academic ethics (Cohen et al., 2018). Studies by ethicists, ethics practitioners, and researchers have used and discussed diverse range of human (mis)behaviors, including a few normative frameworks of ethical decision-making in education and research. In an examination of ethical decision-making in research planning, fieldwork, research reporting, and result dissemination, Kara (2018) categorized theoretical concepts and constructs into two worldviews: Euro-Western and Indigenous. In the Euro-Western worldview, theoretical foundations of research ethics are divided into different concepts and constructs, such as consequentialism, deontology, virtue ethics, and value ethics (Kara, 2018). Similarly, in the Indigenous worldview, theoretical understandings of research ethics are interpreted into concepts and constructs, such as respect, connectivity (or communality), and reciprocity (Chilisa, 2019; Kara, 2018; Kovach, 2021). These Indigenous ethical concepts and constructs are also used and interpreted in academic integrity in terms of Indigenous epistemology and ethical decision-making in Indigenous community contexts (Lindstrom, 2022; Poitras Pratt & Gladue, 2022). However, as presented in Table 1, such theoretical concepts and constructs, regardless of different worldviews, provide explanatory frameworks to investigate and understand ethical decision-making in education and research.

Since ethical decision-making is becoming more complex in the age of advanced technologies, it is essential to consider equity, diversity, and inclusion as foundational skills, including the skills in ethics of care and ethics of justice in education, research, and innovation (Eaton, 2022b; Ruzycki & Ahmed, 2022). Scholars further emphasize, in subsequent approaches to decolonizing and Indigenizing both academic and research activities

in higher education, to regard ethical decision-making as competent human resources for the future (Chilisa, 2019; Eaton, 2022b; Kovach, 2021). Likewise, priorities are also given to individuals' competencies towards cultural humility and spirituality, including wellbeing and reciprocity (Poitras Pratt & Gladue, 2022; Quigley, 2016). These all show ethical decision-making in higher education is not a discipline-specific skill but interdisciplinary and complex.

## Frameworks in Academic Ethics

Explanatory theoretical concepts and constructs are used as mental maps in both academic integrity and research ethics. In terms of research ethics, Opfermann (2022) explored an integrated research ethics framework that includes reciprocal ethics, procedural ethics, and relational ethics. In Opfermann's (2022) words, it "allows researchers to conceptualize and address the various ethical demands in an interconnected and holistic way" (p. 1129). Siv-subramaniam et al. (2021) considered moral behaviors are fundamental pillars in responsible research practices. The integrated research ethics framework explored by Opfermann (2022) also emphasized underlying moral values in ethical decision-making to ensure mutual benefits, no harms, individual dignity, and social justice in research. The discourse of moral or ethical behaviors has been extended into conflating concepts: academic integrity and academic misconduct (see Curtis et al., 2018; Walsh et al., 2021). Moral behaviors in terms of academic integrity are understood as individuals' *behavioral* commitment towards the fundamental values of academic integrity: honesty, trust, fairness, responsibility, respect, courage (ICAI, 2021). In addition, moral behaviors in education and research could also be considered as positive attitudes or intentions that help in sustaining science and protecting knowledge heritages. However, the integrated research ethics framework explored by Opfermann (2022) is considered as an underlying basis for IR.

In addition to the various theoretical concepts and constructs, the 4 M framework for academic integrity explicitly explored by Eaton (2021b) proposed a holistic approach to academic ethics in higher education. 4 M framework is informed by four interacting levels: micro, meso, macro, and mega. These levels can be used as indicators for analyzing ethical decision-making practices in higher education. Micro-level analysis denotes individuals' competencies and responsibilities in ethical decision-making. Similarly, meso level denotes departmental, macro level denotes institutional, and mega level denotes community or external organizations' competencies and responsibilities in upholding academic ethics. The 4 M framework is used as a conceptual foundation to explore and interpret ethical academic and research *affairs* within and beyond higher education institutions (Eaton, 2024c). In this regard, Curtis and Clare (2024) state, "4 M framework perspective provides a coherent theoretical model (and, importantly, mental model) for practitioners and scholars of academic integrity to draw upon in understanding the various influences on ethical and unethical academic practices" (p. 1664).

However, the above-mentioned frameworks – integrated research ethics framework and 4 M framework for academic integrity – have different foundations, but both can be used as conceptual or theoretical models to investigate ethical decision-making practices in education, research, and innovation. These frameworks are only two of the examples in academic ethics. Along with such frameworks, the roots of theoretical concepts and constructs in academic integrity and research ethics may differ, but the pragmatic purposes are simi-

lar: ethical decision-making in education and research to protect science and innovation by detecting possible misconduct, fraud, and unethical behaviors. “Theories may [...] serve as obstacles along the way insofar as they may constrain discussion” (Haug, 1999, p. 7), but it might be different in the case of academic ethics because theoretical concepts and constructs may help everyone to position themselves to make ethical decisions within a particular community, case, and context. However, as presented in Table 1, similar theoretical concepts and constructs are evident, and they are already explored in both academic integrity and research ethics.

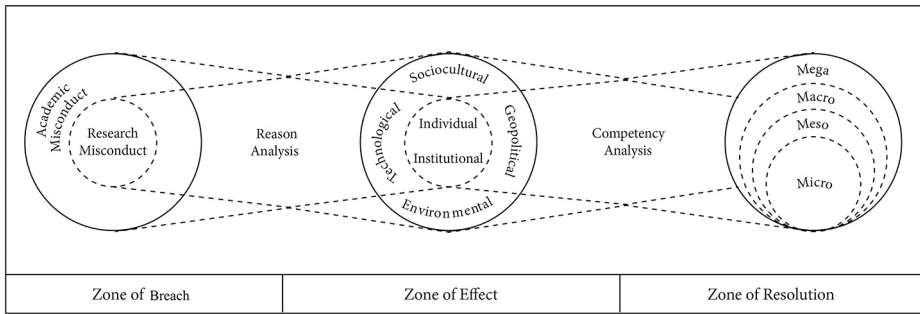
The above discussion includes common shifting priorities in academic integrity and research ethics, common breaches of academic integrity and research ethics, and ethical decision-making as common theoretical concerns in academic integrity and research ethics. Based on such common features, an integrative approach to academic ethics in higher education suggests that both the practice of academic integrity and the practice of research ethics can inclusively be explored in three different zones: zone of breach, zone of effect, and zone of resolution.

## Integrative Approach to Academic Ethics

In the social world, nothing is a universal absolute; everything is contextual and contextually contested. The theoretical concepts and constructs of academic ethics become meaningless unless they are contextualized. On the one hand, technological development, artificial intelligence, and innovation in education highlight epistemic, pragmatic, and pedagogical integration between research ethics, academic integrity, and scholarship of teaching and learning. On the other hand, the radical shift in research ethics (Ibrahim, 2014; Ruzycski & Ahmed, 2022), new priorities for academic integrity that include knowledge equity, diversity, inclusion, decolonization, and Indigenization (Eaton, 2022b; Parnter, 2024), and ethical decision-making as central concerns in both academic integrity and research ethics (Eaton, 2024b; Opfermann, 2022) are requiring an integrative platform for scholarship of academic ethics in higher education.

Integrative approach to the scholarship of academic ethics is an existing idea that supports consolidating the scattered issues and research practices of academic integrity and research ethics in higher education. It integrates discrete fields of practices, which have shared values and principles, with theoretical and pragmatic perspectives. The integrative approach does not claim to be a complete and/or absolute framework that is absolutely used in all cases and contexts in scholarship of academic ethics; it can be contextualized or adapted as per the purposes, cases, and contexts in education and research.

Since research scholarship in academic ethics is growing (see Eaton, 2024a, b), researchers’ positions, based on their research purposes and focuses, have become crucial. Their research may focus either on breaches of academic ethics, or the knowledge and skills for ethical decision-making in education and research, or the effects in the larger social and educational landscapes from both breaches and ethical decision-making. It is not necessary to draw lines that separate research positions or focuses, but *positionality* in any educational research addresses relationships, powers, and ethical matters in constructing and transforming knowledge (Cohen et al., 2018). However, this integrative approach to academic ethics



**Fig. 2** Notes Integrity Resolution, a positionality framework for academic ethics researchers to be well positioned themselves while investigating issues related to academic ethics, including academic integrity and research ethics. The zone of resolution is conceptualized adapting Eaton’s (2021b) 4 M framework for academic integrity.

aims to assist researchers and research professionals to create their definite research position proposing three different zones (Fig. 2).

IR defines three zones for researchers and research practitioners of academic ethics: a zone of breach, a zone of effect, and a zone of resolution. The two connectivities, *reason* analysis and *competency* analysis, connect each zone to one another. Reason analysis connects zone of breach and zone of effect, while competency analysis connects zone of effect and zone of resolution. The zone of effect is a result zone representing both negative effects in relation to the breaches of academic ethics and positive effects in relation to the zone of resolution. Researchers and research practitioners of academic ethics could use different theoretical concepts and constructs as presented in Table 1 for both reason analysis and competency analysis. For example, the analysis of reason may assist researchers to understand underlying causes behind people’s involvement in misconduct (see Curtis, 2023; Ferguson et al., 2023), and the negative effects in education, science, and society from such misconduct. Similarly, the analysis of competency might help researchers in exploring individual, departmental, institutional, and community level resources, knowledge, and skills towards promoting ethical decision-making practices (see Eaton, 2021b, 2024c), and the positive effects in education, science, and society from such ethical decision-making practices. Thus, IR conceptualized the zone of effect as a result zone.

**Zone of Breach**

The zone of breach is conceptualized based on four theoretical concepts and constructs as presented in Table 1. It encompasses various types of misconduct, including research misconduct as classified by Hall and Martin’s (2019) taxonomy of research misconduct, and academic misconduct as classified by Tauginienė et al.’s (2019) taxonomy of academic misconduct. Misconduct often happens when someone behaves against the basic values and virtues of academic ethics (ICAI, 2021; Kara, 2018). Researchers in this zone investigate reasons behind people’s (im)moral and/or (un)ethical behaviors, including their involvement in various types of misconduct in education and research (Curtis et al., 2018; Sivasubramaniam et al., 2021; Walsh et al., 2021). Misconduct also happens due to unintentional human behaviors. To analyze the reasons behind people’s involvement in such unintentional

human behaviors, it is crucial to explore their literacy towards academic ethics (see Eaton, 2021a; Hossain, 2022).

However, as the CAI framework proposes academic integrity with a broader scope that includes research ethics as a core component (Eaton, 2024b), the zone of breach in IR conceptualizes the scope and tendency of academic misconduct as broader than research misconduct. Academic institutions around the world often consider research activities to be part of their academic activities, and some research may involve multiple institutions. However, while IR considers all forms of research misconduct to be academic misconduct, not all forms of academic misconduct are research misconduct. For example, admission fraud, fake degrees, fraudulent credentials (Eaton et al., 2023) and corruption in education can be considered as academic misconduct but not as research misconduct. For common types of misconduct, the taxonomy of misconduct highlights plagiarism, fabrication, falsification, and contract cheating (and ghost writing) (Hall & Martin, 2019; Tauginienė et al., 2019). Therefore, academic ethics researchers in this zone must be well informed about the scope and tendency of various types of (im)moral and/or (un)ethical behaviors in education, research, and innovation. The zone of breach in IR is conceptualized as inversely proportional to the zone of effect.

### Zone of Effect

The zone of effect is conceptualized based on three theoretical concepts and constructs as presented in Table 1. This zone is for exploring and analyzing negative effects in education, science, and society from people's involvement in various types of misconduct or unethical behaviors in education and research. Similarly, this zone is also for exploring and analyzing positive effects in education, science, and society from people's competencies, knowledge, and skills in ethical decision-making practices in educational contexts. In this zone, researchers and research practitioners of academic ethics are supposed to be well-informed about the new priorities for academic ethics: equity, diversity, and inclusion (Eaton, 2022b; Ruzycski & Ahmed, 2022), including reciprocity, relationality, cultural humility, spirituality, and wellbeing (Chilisa, 2019; Poitras Pratt & Gladue, 2022; Quigley, 2016). Knowledge and skills in the new priorities of academic ethics help researchers and research practitioners to explore the *effects* of research from the perspectives of social justice, geopolitical affairs, environmental sustainability, and technological advancement.

However, the zone of effect introduces *inner* effects and *outer* effects based on educational and research practices within and beyond higher education. The impacts on individual dignity/wellbeing and on institutional productivity/reputation are considered as *inner* effects. Similarly, the impacts on sociocultural practices, geopolitical relations, technological advancement, and environmental sustainability are conceptualized as *outer* effects. Effects have two dimensions, either negative or positive. If the ethical decision-making competencies, knowledge, and skills are increased, positive changes will appear in the zone of effect. Conversely, if people's involvement in breaches of academic ethics are increased, negative changes will appear in the zone of effect. Thus, zone of effect is a result zone in IR, where researchers and practitioners of academic ethics could experience both negativity in breaches of academic ethics and positivity in competencies towards ethical decision-making. The zone of effect is conceptualized as inversely proportional to the zone of breach, and directly proportional to the zone of resolution.

## Zone of Resolution

The zone of resolution is conceptualized based on four theoretical concepts and constructs as presented in Table 1. This zone is fundamentally informed by the 4 M framework as explicitly explored by Eaton (2021b) and used by Eaton (2024c) as a conceptual foundation to promote ethical decision-making competencies, knowledge, and skills in scholarly activities. In terms of developing researchers' competency in ethical decision-making in research, this zone could also be understood through the integrated research ethics framework (Opfermann, 2022). Researchers and research practitioners of academic ethics in this zone explore individual, departmental, institutional, and community level commitments and priorities towards developing academic ethics-literate human resources for moral or ethical behaviors in education, research, and innovation (see Bos, 2020; Eaton, 2021b; Hossain, 2022). In addition, since the long historical experience of epistemic injustice and knowledge inequity due to colonization and systemic exclusion of Indigenous people from education and research (Chilisa, 2019; Grenz, 2023), it is crucial to explore or examine individual competencies, departmental, institutional, and community-level provisions and practices towards decolonizing and Indigenizing academic and research activities (Eaton, 2021b, 2022b; Poitas Pratt & Gladue, 2022). Therefore, the zone of resolution in IR is conceptualized as a competency development zone towards ethical decision-making in education, research, and innovation, including decolonization and Indigenization. However, ethical decision-making competencies as discussed in this zone should not be a means for creating any kind of hierarchy.

Everyone engaged in academic and research activities, regardless of their level, bears equal responsibility to protect science, innovation, humanity, technology, and environmental sustainability. Thus, it is crucial to develop everyone's competencies, knowledge, and skills towards ethical behaviors and/or ethical decision-making in education and research to protect science, knowledge, and innovation for the futures. Zone of resolution is itself integrative to enhance ethical decision-making competencies. It is conceptualized as directly proportional to the zone of effect.

## Conclusion

IR presents a conceptual foundation for the integrative practice of academic integrity and research ethics in higher education. Both academic integrity and research ethics are core for minimizing misconduct and optimizing the quality of academic and research work. The IR, as an integrative approach to academic ethics research, defines three zones that helps researchers to position themselves while investigating issues related to academic integrity and research ethics. It is not a completely new concept for academic ethics; it is an existing but extended integrative notion to assist in consolidation of the scattered research practices in both academic integrity and research ethics. It is not a new solution for concurrently developing challenges or threats for academic ethics in higher education. Instead, it helps researchers of academic ethics to explore and inspect such concurrently developing challenges by positioning their research in three different zones: zone of breach, zone of effect, and zone of resolution. The researchers can adapt an informed research position within any zone in the IR based on their research purposes and questions. Such positioning guides them

to signify that their research contributes in an integrative manner to minimizing misconduct, and thereby promoting a culture of academic ethics in educational contexts.

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