Reviewer's report

Title: MAPPING, FRAMING, SHAPING: A FRAMEWORK FOR EMPIRICAL BIOETHICS RESEARCH PROJECTS

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Reviewer: Sabine Salloch

Reviewer's report:

The article outlines a framework for empirical bioethics research using the landscaping metaphor of "Mapping-Framing-Shaping". In contrast to many contributions which dominate the current debate on empirical bioethics this is a concrete approach of how to conduct an empirical-ethical study. It is illustrated using the examples of a range of projects conducted at the Centre for Ethics in Medicine at the University of Bristol. I see the paper as an excellent contribution on the concrete shape of empirical-ethical research projects. Some minor issues may contribute to further sharpen the paper's focus and better integrate it into the already existing debates.

1) At the beginning of the article (p. 4) different ways of using empirical data in bioethics are mentioned. If I understand correctly in the remainder of the article the authors particularly focus on "attempts to fully integrate empirical analysis into ethical theorizing" and introduce their own methodology in this field. There are more comprehensive lists (or even classifications) of what empirical research can contribute to bioethical analysis in the literature which could be cited here, e.g.


2) The role of ethical theory could be addressed more in detail which would also contribute to further clarify in how far the suggested methodology is specific for empirical bioethics. There are already some nice methodologies which more explicitly describe issues of normative-empirical interaction at different stages of a research process (e.g. Leget 2009; Frith 2012). They are cited in the paper. Compared to this the "Mapping-Framing-Shaping" framework seems to be less complex: "Mapping" mainly refers to literature review, "Framing" to the empirical research and "Shaping" to the drawing of normative conclusions. Even if I understand that the present paper does not explicitly focus on normative-empirical interaction the authors could comment on why they suggest a comparatively simple methodology which widely separates normative and empirical parts of the project.

3) My third concern relates to a point which is already addressed in the limitations section: the framework does not seem to be very specific for empirical bioethics. Even the drawing of normative conclusions is not something special. Instead formulating implications for practice is a typical part of the "conclusions" section of biomedical and many other types of research. What might be specific in empirical bioethics is the explicit dealing with normative theories and the clear focus on ethically controversial issues. Highlighting in how far this is mirrored in the "Mapping-Framing-Shaping" framework might make even clearer that a framework for empirical bioethics is presented here and not a framework for other fields of research.

**Are the methods appropriate and well described?**
If not, please specify what is required in your comments to the authors.

Yes

**Does the work include the necessary controls?**
If not, please specify which controls are required in your comments to the authors.

Unable to assess

**Are the conclusions drawn adequately supported by the data shown?**
If not, please explain in your comments to the authors.

Yes
Are you able to assess any statistics in the manuscript or would you recommend an additional statistical review?
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Not relevant to this manuscript

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