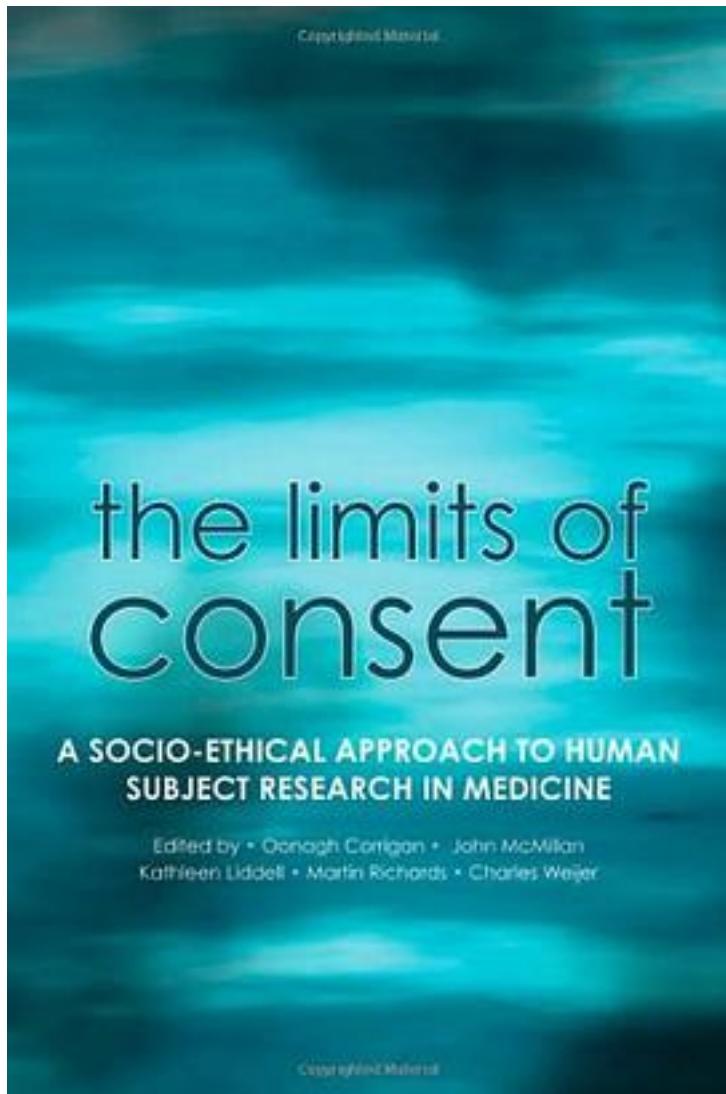


The Limits of Consent



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Since its inception as an international requirement to protect patients and healthy volunteers taking part in medical research, informed consent has become the primary consideration in research ethics. Despite the ubiquity of consent, however, scholars have begun to question its adequacy for contemporary biomedical research. The Limits of Consent explores this issue, reviewing the application of consent to genetic research, clinical trials, and research involving vulnerable populations. For example, in genetic research, information obtained from an autonomous research participant may have significant bearing on the interests of family members who have not consented to the study. This casts doubt on the adequacy of consent for such studies. The Limits of Consent also questions the assumptions that informed consent is essential and that it satisfactorily protects the principle of individual autonomy. It reviews recent empirical studies that challenge the possibility of truly informed consent and highlights the extent to which consent is governed by social norms and expectations. It also investigates how consent might be of secondary importance in some circumstances, for example when a research project appears to protect a public or community interest. Building on these observations, the authors make bold attempts to outline constructive solutions to the problems identified with perspectives from medicine, law, philosophy and sociology. This fascinating and provocative exploration of the limits of informed consent will appeal to ethicists, social scientists, health lawyers, clinical researchers, research ethics committee members, policy makers, and others with an interest in bioethics.

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