BACKGROUND INFORMATION

**Principals in development and validation of the Ethical Lens Inventory (ELI)**

**Catharyn A. Baird, J. D.** Baird is the founder and CEO of EthicsGames, a company that provides a family of web-based ethics and compliance simulations that can be used for education, training, or individual professional development. Baird is also Professor Emerita of Business at Regis University, where she taught law, ethics, and public policy. The author of *Everyday Ethics: Making Wise Choices in a Complex World*, 2nd ed., she co-developed the Ethical Lens Inventory, which assists people in determining the primary ethical perspective they use to make decisions.

**Jeannine M. Niacaris, M.A.** Over the course of a 30 year career, Niacaris has acquired extensive experience as an executive and consultant in human resources and has held several board positions, including President, for Bay Area Human Resources Executive Council, a chapter of SHRM. As the COO of EthicsGame, Niacaris co-developed the Ethical Lens Inventory.

**Kerry McCaig, Ph.D.** A Research Consultant to EthicsGame, McCaig has extensive experience in assessment and research in higher education. McCaig’s statistical background and expertise in validation provides the structural foundation for the process of validation of the ELI.

**Robert Forrest, MBA.** Director of Research for EthicsGame, Forrest has extensive experience designing, conducting, and analyzing marketing research studies in multiple industries, including high tech, telecommunications, not-for-profit, higher education, educational services, publishing, and entertainment. He manages EthicsGame’s ongoing program for validating learning tools.

**Current Usage**

Based on more than 20 years of research, the ELI was designed and tested in 2007. The formal launch of the instrument was in 2008. Since that time, more than 205,000 participants have completed the instrument. Because the ELI is foundational for many academic programs, more than 7,000 participants complete the ELI every month.

**The theoretical background**

The organizing question for Baird’s research over a 20 year period was: why do people of good will and thoughtfulness have such different understandings of what specific behaviors count as “ethical” in our community?

This question lead to a stream of research that was a meta-analysis of the predominant ethical theories taught in Western business schools and philosophy departments. The first stage of this work culminated with the publications of *Everyday Ethics*.

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1 Baird, Catharyn, *Everyday Ethics: Making Wise Choices in a Complex World*, 2nd ed. Denver, Co: EthicsGame Press, 2012. Currently, 20 universities use the text for a variety of ethics classes. More than 5,000 copies of the text have been sold since its publication in 2005. The work provides the foundation for the EthicsGame family of simulations, which have been used in classrooms by more than 150 universities and since launch have been experienced by more than 225,000 participants.
From that research emerged the notion that four predominant approaches to ethics exist, which are combinations of the following two domains:

- **Rationality/Sensibility Tension**: Each ethical perspective privileges one of two forms of analysis of ethical dilemmas — either rationality (using one’s head) or sensibility (using one’s heart or intuition).
- **Autonomy/Equality Tension**: Each ethical perspective privileges either autonomy (the principles and/or goals an individual pursues as they live independently in community) or equality (the supports and constraints the community imposes to facilitate interdependence among its citizens).

The various ethical theories were then mapped on the grid. The ethical lenses, or perspectives, differ based on the reference point for determining correct ethical behavior:

As a result, the rationality-sensibility continuum posited value contrasts such as consistent vs. flexible and scrupulous vs. benevolent. The autonomy-equality continuum posited value contrasts such as authoritative vs. evenhanded and free vs. equitable.

The value concepts and corresponding descriptors were gathered from the seminal texts of representative theorists from each of the four lenses. As Baird began watching for patterns of words or concepts that were valued by the theorists, the contrasts began to pop. Baird has a background in literary analysis, so those skills were used to compile the lists of contrasting values.

**FOUR STAGES OF VALIDATION**

**Content validity**

Baird’s research experience led her to hypothesize that, while in the ordinary course of things we balance competing values, when push comes to shove, we will tend to choose one value over another based on our personal world view and understanding of ourselves. This hypothesis led Baird to design an instrument with forced choices.

Baird and Jeannine Niacaris reviewed the format of many different instruments to find the one(s) that were similar. In the end, the format of the Meyers-Briggs Type Indicator® (MBTI) with its forced choices seemed to be the most similar to what EthicsGame was trying to achieve.
The next step was to validate the pairings. Armed with a thesaurus, Baird and Niacaris found pairs of antonyms that were commonly accepted in the English language as well as found in seminal texts on ethics. Baird was careful to use words that were current in our language (as opposed to those that were not used frequently) and that had a commonly agreed-upon meaning.

To validate this process, Baird checked the antonyms against five or six different dictionaries/thesauruses to assure commonality of meaning.

Baird, Niacaris, and Kerry McCaig, an outside expert in instrument validation, then carefully tested the forced pairs and the mini-scenarios to make sure that the instrument contained the same number of pairs for each of the two continua and that the language was clear.

**Face validity**

The standard for this step of the validation process is to determine whether, as people used the ELI, their understanding of themselves matched the descriptions of people who fell within that lens.

The first phase of validation was completed with students from the University of Nebraska, Lincoln. Out of 532 people who took the instrument, 96% found that the placement on grid represented their lens; 96.8% found that the ethical strengths were accurately reflected; 95.7% found that their ethical values were accurately reflected; and 89.3% reported that their ethical challenges were accurately reflected.

EthicsGame conducts periodic surveys, as requested by various faculty members. The data consistently demonstrates that more than 90% of those who complete the ELI and the survey report that the placement on the grid is accurate and that the description matches their ethical values and preferences.

**Inter-instrument reliability (part 1) — Non-ethics instruments**

- **Myers-Briggs Type Indicator**
  Reports from participants who had previously taken the MBTI test revealed a high correlation between that instrument’s Thinking/Feeling construct and the Ethical Lens Inventory’s Rationality/Sensibility continuum.

- **Herman Brain Dominance Instrument**
  Initial data revealed a high correlation between the four segments of the brain dominance and their corresponding ethical lenses. The sample size on this one is currently too small. Baird will be working with a colleague to get more robust data.

- **Emotional Intelligence Inventories**
  Preliminary work would indicate that those with high emotional intelligence would score in the Results or Relationship Lenses. The team at EthicsGame has made theoretical parallels, but no systemic research has been done.

**Inter-instrument reliability (part 2) — Ethics instruments**

- **Ethical Awareness Indicator**
  Published by the Williams Institute for Ethics and Management, Scottsdale, Arizona, the instrument was designed by Linda M. Williams, PhD, whose research and background is in ethics and public policy.

  - This particular instrument uses the same four ethical perspectives as the ELI. To determine one’s ethical preference, a participant has 24 items that are ranked by preference for a statement that is representative of one of the ethical perspectives.

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2 These personality inventories tend to measure the way that people function in the world, their personalities, or methods of cognition.

3 These inventories measure sensibilities and ethical preferences.
**Ethical Orientation Questionnaire**

Designed by Dr. James Avery and published by the Center for Ethics and Business at Central Washington University, this instrument seeks to measure the difference between how men and women analyze ethical dilemmas.

- The theoretical foundations are a comparison between Kohlberg’s masculine way of thinking and Gilligan’s feminine way of thinking. This roughly correlates with rationality (masculine) and sensibility (feminine).
- Our research has not found as striking a difference between the genders as this instrument would indicate. Further, we have not found that labeling a particular way of thinking as “masculine” or “feminine” is useful in teaching people how to resolve ethical dilemmas.

**Ethical Type Indicator™**

Published by Louis V. Larimer, JD, this instrument identifies six primary ethical approaches and, through a rating system, helps the taker determine how strong the preference is for each of the six.

- The ethical approaches include two of the ones included in the ELI (utilitarianism and deontology — the Results and Rights/Responsibilities Lenses, respectively). The other four (egoism, existentialism, divine command, and conformism) also focus on the individual.
- The instrument does not include any of the community focused theories such as justice, virtue ethics, or common good, which we consider a serious omission.

**Reliability**

**Core Values Learners**

Over the course of about a two year period, more than 100 learners completed the ELI twice within a three week period. While the analysis of this data is still preliminary, the results would indicate that the ELI results for most learners were within one to two points of each other. These results would indicate high reliability within a short period of time.

**Ethical Maturity**

A more interesting question is whether one changes ethical perspective over time. A study of about 60,000 learners explored how learners tracked to the ethical lenses based on type of university and academic level. In one data slice of about 4,600 Freshman/Sophomore learners, about 15.5% of them landed within the middle of the scatter plot, indicating no preference for a particular lens. A data slice of about 1,800 graduate students showed that about 13.5% of them landed within the middle. Thus, the preliminary data would show that as one continues through the education process, one’s ethical foundations become more solid.

**EMERGING TRENDS AND FURTHER RESEARCH**

**Guardians of the Lenses**

Our preliminary work indicates that certain career fields tend to adopt as their core values the values of different lenses. For example, HR professionals tend to be in the Reputation Lens and attorneys and accountants tend to be in the Rights/Responsibilities Lens. We are just completing the data collection on this particular study.

**Demographic Variables**

We have just completed data collection (234 observations) in partnership with Thunderbird University and New York Institute of Technology to see whether nationality, economic status, or religious preference informs which ethical lens is preferred. The report on the data will be available at the end of 2013.