Editor’s Note

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Editor’s Note

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I am truly delighted to have had the opportunity to collaborate with guest-editors Drs. Ian Shrier and Russell Steele from McGill University (with collaborators Tibor Schuster and Mireille Schnitzer) on this special issue of Observational Studies titled “Rebels with a Cause: Monologues from Heckman, Pearl, Robins, and Rubin”. This special issue features in-depth interviews with four of the most prominent and influential leaders in the field of causal inference: James Heckman, Judea Pearl, Jamie Robins, and Don Rubin (in alphabetical order).

This project was a true labor of love. The seed for the project began at the 2015 annual meeting of the Society of Epidemiological Research (SER) where Ian had a conversation with Pearl and Robins about the different schools of thought in causal inference. This was a springboard to the idea of having leaders in the field write up a brief summary of their approaches and experiences and provide a historical perspective. After many conversations with peers (such as Steve Feinberg, Steve Stigler, and Enrique Schisterman), Ian and Russ undertook the task of narrowing the scope to four leaders (there was really no doubt in their minds who they should be) and then to invite them to participate (they all readily agreed). The authors were each given carte blanche to discuss whatever they wanted about their own work. Understanding that the time required to write such articles might cause a challenge, Ian and Russ offered to interview them as an alternative. Each leader would be allowed to edit the interviews to ensure they appropriately reflected their ideas. The interviews with Pearl, Robins and Rubin were done by phone in the years before Zoom became popular. Heckman preferred to write his article, so he was supplied with general questions that matched the other interviews. Seven years later, we present the end-product of Ian and Russell’s hard work and dedication. And I think you will agree with me that it was well worth the wait.

We follow these fascinating interviews with perspective pieces from celebrated causal researchers Drs. Vanessa Didelez (Leibniz Institute), Fabrizia Mealli (University of Florence), and Eric Tchetgen Tchetgen (University of Pennsylvania), who comment on how Heckman, Pearl, Robins, and Rubin have impacted their own work and the field of causal inference more broadly over the years.

I would also like to extend my thanks to Dr. Joanna Harton for her help in assembling this issue.

Be sure to set aside a few hours to enjoy this Special Issue because you won’t want to put it down!

Enjoy!

Nandita Mitra  
Editor-in-Chief

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