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Publication Practices and Authorship

**MariaGoretti Chidiebere
Njoku**

and

Mary Gloria C. Njoku, PhD
Godfrey Okoye University, Enugu

Abstract

One ethical issue that borders on the product of research is publication practices and authorship. Publication and authorship are concerned with writing a book, an article, blogs and note for public consumption. There have been indications that the integrity of publication and authorship is sometimes violated through plagiarism, fabrication and award of authorship credits for honorary reasons or as gifts. These unethical practices impact credibility of research outputs such as research and book publications. This paper reviews publication and authorship issues for the purpose of highlighting ethical and unethical practices.

Address Correspondence to:

Mary Gloria C. Njoku, **PhD.**,
Academic Planning Unit,
Godfrey Okoye University,
P.M.B. 01014, Thinkers' Corner,
Enugu, Nigeria.
[email:caelisgloria@sbcglobal.net]

Ethical Issues in Publication and Authorship

Publication involves writing a book, an article or note for consumption by the general public. It can be in the form of handouts, pamphlets, brochures, notes or textbooks. Sharing of thoughts in the web or making a public speech constitutes publication. To publish means to make information, experiences or thoughts that may add value to the public. It may also apply to visuals (texts and images) or audio visuals (*e-books, compact discs, MP3s and websites*). Publication, according to the Universal Copyright Convention, is "the reproduction in tangible form and the general distribution to the public, of copies of a work from which it can be read or otherwise visually perceived." Publications are a special kind of property. A person who buys them can own them physically but only the publisher or author retains the right to its content (*MLA Handbook for Writers of Professional Papers*, 7th ed.).

The Sixth Edition of the *Publication Manual of American Psychologists Association* reports duplicate publication and piecemeal publication as problems to publication. *Duplicate publication* being the misrepresentation of facts as original when they have been previously published, thereby distorting the knowledge base and misleading others to think that there is more information available than already exists. Piecemeal, on the other hand, is the unwarranted division of the

findings from one research effort into several articles.

Dimensions to Publication

Consider a poet who has been asked to write poetry on love for a newly married couple. Will this publication be for the purpose of making money, prestige authenticity, precision, equity or control? It might be for profit-making but there are some elements of precision, control, prestige and authenticity. This is because even though that money will be paid for the work, it does not mean that the work will not be done truthfully and genuinely. According to Goodman (2007), publishing involves social and ethical dimensions. Social dimensions include status, prestige, profit and control. The ethical dimensions are veracity, transparency and equity.

Publication Offences

Publication offences include plagiarism and falsehood.

Plagiarism

This is derived from the Latin word *plagiarius* meaning "kidnapper." It also means "To commit literary theft" and to "present as new and original an idea or product derived from existing source" (Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary 11th ed.;2003; print). The Sixth Edition of the *Publication Manual of American Psychologists Association* identifies plagiarism and self-plagiarism. Plagiarism is when

researchers refuse to acknowledge the works and ideas of others that they used, while self-plagiarism is when researchers present their past published work as a new work without making reference to the previous publication.

Plagiarism is a form of deceit, cheating and lying. It is unethical and dishonourable. For instance: *Jen is writing a paper on the effects of violence on the society; she comes across a textbook on violence. She sees the definition of violence and types it verbatim without acknowledging the textbook and the author. Oops, Jen just made a huge mistake, what did she do?*
Plagiarism.

Also *Victor found some material in the internet that will help him write an article on the beauty of sleep. He highlights the paragraph that explains that eight hours sleep a day heals the skin of impurities. He copies it from the web and pastes into his paper. He also goes ahead to change the font style and size so that it will match the rest of the report.*
Mh, Plagiarism again.

Plagiarism, according to Modern Language Association (2009), involves two kinds of wrong. Making use of another person's ideas, information or expressions without acknowledging that person's work amounts to intellectual theft and passing off another person's ideas, information or expressions as your own to get a better grade or gain some other advantages make up fraud. Every research article, paper or presentation has a major function; that is advancing knowledge. When this is not the case, problems

may arise. Plagiarism has many consequences both to the individual involved and to society. It is ethically and morally wrong. Ethics and morals involve the principles of right and wrong action. They explain the "why" of our behaviour. They justify the reason why an action is right or why it is wrong. For instance, one cannot tell a child that stealing is not good; there must be a reason why the child should not steal.

The side effects of plagiarism and other violations of publication and authorship on society are injurious or harmful. If a student goes through medical school, copying and falsifying papers, there are chances that the student will not do well in that chosen profession; moreover, no one will ever want to be treated by a medical doctor who obtained his/her certificate through fraudulent means. Students involved in plagiarism may face punishment which may include suspension or outright dismissal. Also, instead of fostering unity and rapport between teachers and students, lack of trust and discord will set in because of plagiarism committed by either the teacher or students. Teachers exposed as plagiarists will lose their integrity and trust both from students and the school administration.

Furthermore, an institution that is well-known to graduate students that cannot defend themselves in real-life situations loses its credibility and faces rejection by the general public. Its reputation may take a long period of

time to redeem. A writer who indulges in plagiarism will lose integrity, status, profit and trust of readers and the general public. No sane person will want to read a fabrication of tales. This is why it is misleading. Plagiarists are often seen as incompetent, dishonest people who can deceive others for their own gain. The serious consequence of plagiarism reflects the value the public places on trustworthy information. (Modern Language Association, 2009).

Falsehood

To falsify means to tell lies intentionally for personal gains. Falsehood is that which does not correspond with known facts. Misrepresentation of the truth is misleading and has damaging effects on all concerned. When an alteration is made on a document, it is rendered invalid and unreliable. If a student who dropped out of school because of misbehaviour suddenly produces a certificate from nowhere to secure a job, the action will be seen as falsification. He/she has falsified some documents deliberately so as to mislead people.

All deception in the course of life is, indeed, nothing else but a lie reduced to practice, and falsehood passing from words into things (Robert Southey in Brainy Quotes). Falsification, in this context, is an academic misconduct, a transgression or an offence that involves telling untruths and half truths deliberately for personal gains.

Falsehood, unlike plagiarism, is not just ethically, but also legally wrong, meaning that one can be prosecuted for falsifying documents, papers or credentials. Falsifying data is tantamount to misconduct, which is unacceptable due to different degrees of their being either lies or alterations of the truth. Also using some methods of presentation which give a biased notion of the significance of the data is misconduct. (Hart, 2005). Falsehood is a statement that hides the truth in order to deceive and mislead people.

Researchers may decide to make up respondents of their questionnaires, or even fill it themselves. This is falsehood because its intent is to mislead people. When professional writers like journalists engage themselves in telling lies to the public about the government, a company or an individual in order to make name and profits, they are sued and dragged to a law court. Some teachers, when faced with a difficult question in the classroom, tell untruths so as to save face, thereby betraying their profession. When students find out the truth, they lose interest and trust in the teacher. Inexact impressions are the results presented or made public as truthfully representing the results of a research investigation (Goodman, 2007).

Authorship

To be an author involves writing a book, making valuable contributions to a research work, writing an article for

publication and being a creator of an idea. *The APA Guidelines for Professional Conduct* states that authorship should be limited to those who have made a significant contribution to the concept, design, execution or interpretation of the research study. Everyone who has made significant contributions should be offered the opportunity to be listed as an author. Substantial contributions may involve formulating the problem or hypothesis, constructing the experimental design, organizing and conducting the statistical analysis, interpretation of the results or writing a great portion of the research. (American Psychological Association, 2009; Council of Biology Editors, 2002; Maronpot, 2011).

The importance accorded to publications for academic appointment, promotion, status and other things and the economic reward obtained from publications have led some people to engage in unacceptable ways of getting their names on books and articles. Some of the ways highlighted by Goodman (2008) through which authors have attempted to cheat the system are; (a) authorship by authority, (b) authorship as a gift or appreciation, (c) authorship as politics and (d) ghost authorship.

Authorship by authority denotes ascribing authorship credit to individuals by virtue of their position such as being Dean of the Faculty or Head of the Department of the true author of the paper. Authorship as gift reflects a situation where authors

accord credit to their colleagues or students/mentees with the hope that their colleagues and students/mentees will also give them credit for work to which they did not contribute. Authorship for political reason occurs when certain persons must be given authorship credit for work they did not contribute to merely because it is the politically correct thing to do and if not, the colleague will feel offended, be angry and may hurt the rightful authors. Ghost authorship happens when authorship credit is given to an individual who did not contribute to the study for a fee or for minimal contribution made to the work. All these ways of gaining authorship credit are deceitful and corrupt or militate against academic integrity (Flanagin, Carey, Fontanarosa, Phillips, Pace et al., 1998).

On the issue of determining how to assign authorship credit to contributing individuals, the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (2001) has established guidelines for true authorship. The criteria indicate that authorship credit should be based on (a) considerable contribution to the conceptualization, design, data collection, analysis and data interpretation, (b) preparation and revision of drafts of the work and (c) participating in final approval of the work. Authorship credit cannot be given for collection of data alone. Every author on a paper must contribute adequately and be responsible for a part of the work in order to receive authorship credit

(Drenth, 1998; Hoen, Walvoort, Overbeke, 1998; Tarnow, 1999).

In terms of ordering of the authors, the contribution of individuals to the criteria listed above is to be used for determining the order of authors. The first author must make the most contribution to criteria a and b. The other authors should be ordered according to their level of contribution with the last author being the person with the least contribution (Goodman 2008; Maronpot, 2011).

Issues to Consider in Authorship

Respect is an important element that must be considered in authorship. When writing on people, consider getting their permission because what you are about to write may have adverse effects on them. Forcing subjects, colleagues or students to release information is a form of bullying and exploitation of position with potential for litigation and also exposing them to stressful situation without permission can be regarded as infringement of human rights and freedom. (Hart, 2005). Another essential issue in authorship is the protection of important information. Revealing the names and identities of subjects involved in a research when they have been guaranteed of their confidentiality have both ethical and legal effects on the author. It will be viewed as a violation of privacy, a breach of trust and breaking the terms of agreement (Njoku, 2011). Next is the issue of recognizing people who

contributed to the work and giving them due credit. Hart (2005) submits four issues to consider while reporting a research. These issues are full attribution of ideas, ensuring the integrity of data, safeguarding confidential information and maintaining standard of authorship.

With regard to full attribution of ideas, Hart (2005) expressed that presenting the words, information and ideas of another as yours without citing them amounts to plagiarism, which is not only misconduct but a criminal act and infringement of copyright. Ensuring the Integrity of Data suggests that data must not be distorted. Fabrication or omission of data is misconduct and cannot be accepted. Ownership of, and access to, data and facts produced by a research project done in a public institution needs to be specified and clarified before the beginning of the work; and destroying data generate by a project within five years after the end of a project is bad practice as it hinders any subsequent analysis or challenge. Concerning the safeguarding of confidential information, Hart (2005) explained that the use of information about a person or a group without their approval may be violations of laws covering data protection and can be seen as a breach of trust; divulging or selling confidential data to a third party will violate data protection laws. Lastly, in considering the maintaining of standards of authorship, Hart suggested that refusing to recognize all persons and organizations involved in a research work constitutes bad

practice; publishing duplicate or nearly duplicate articles of the research in several journals alters citation indexes and is ethically wrong; and, including the name(s) of persons who had little or nothing to do with the work constitutes deception.

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