eon
editorial office news

The official newsletter of the International Society of Managing and Technical Editors

IN THIS ISSUE

ARTICLES

Releasing Schrödinger's Cat

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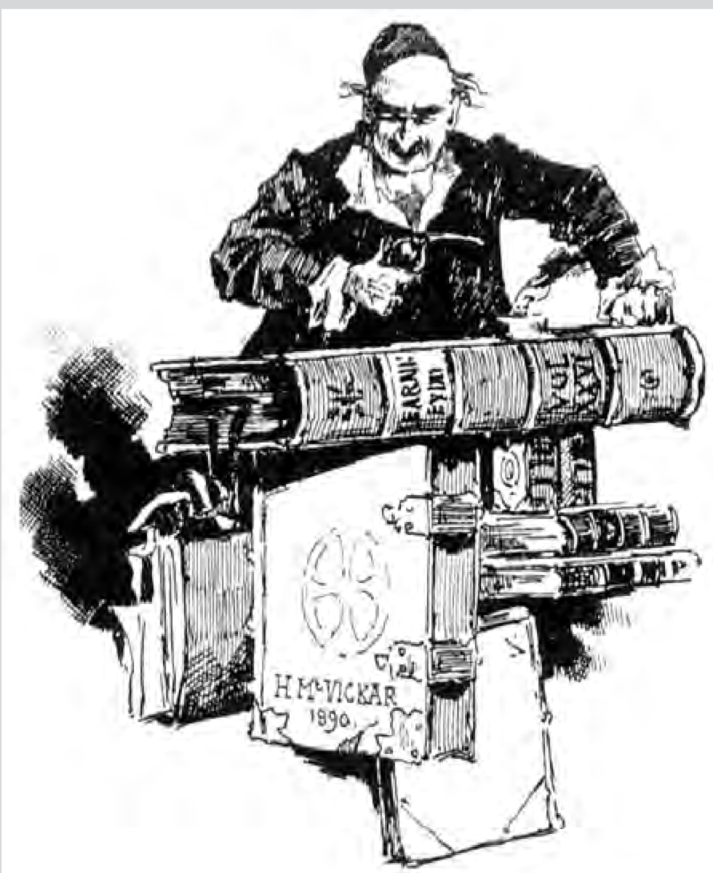
Have you ever heard of Schrödinger's cat? It was a thought experiment, conducted in 1934 by an Austrian physicist named Erwin Schrödinger. He suggested that if you close a cat up in a box along with a vial of poison that may or may not break at any moment, killing the cat if it does break, then until you open the box, the cat can be thought of as being *both* dead and alive. For those moments, before you open the box, myriad possibilities are before you, both good and bad. We face these situations every day, where we know that a decision we make can result in something great or something terrible. It might be an email that we fear to open, a phone call that we hesitate to return, or a new initiative that we procrastinate putting into place. One of my favorite iPad apps for helping me through these moments is "Unstuck," an app that helps get your creative juices flowing and your procrastination tendencies squelched when you are feeling stuck, by leading you through exercises. This month I am happy to welcome an article by Unstuck's own Nancy Hawley. Her suggestions are sure to help you whether your inaction is due to a creative block or to procrastination. I urge you to put her suggestions to use the next time your own Schrödinger's cat is stuck in the box.

Also in this issue, Kristin Overstreet talks about adopting a conflict of interest disclosure for one of her journals. If your journal is considering putting a COI form into place, learn from Kristin's experience. Erin Dubnansky tells us about an upcoming webinar on detecting image manipulation, a problem that is showing up increasingly in scholarly publishing. This webinar, to be held on November 7, will teach you what to look for when you view your journal's submitted images. The session is going to be FREE for ISMTE members, so I can't imagine why anyone wouldn't want to register for it.

Have you conducted a survey for your journal? You will be more likely to consider one after reading the Whistling in the Dark article by Sarah McCormack and Elizabeth Blalock on "7 Suggestions for Survey Success." And Ira Salkin, our Ethics Editor, discusses whether Open Access author fees pose ethical issues for journals. His thoughts on the subject make an interesting article whether your journal is considering that path or not.

I hope to see many of you at the ISMTE conference in August; if you haven't already signed up, please do it right away. Seek me out when you are there and tell me of any ideas you have for *EON*; I'm very much open to suggestions. And as the summer winds down, keep Schrödinger's cat in mind. Releasing it can be scary, but it can also be the best way to make great things happen in your life, both personally and professionally.

The Philosophy of Editing



From The Big Bang Theory, Season 3, "The Psychic Vortex"

Raj: Why don't we just go to the Galleria and walk around?
Sheldon: I don't need anything at the Galleria.
Raj: We could just walk around and see what's what.
Sheldon: That's a semantically null sentence.

What a great phrase: a semantically null sentence. This could describe many sentences in scholarly writing; in other words, a sentence that means nothing. Is this something that you look for as you read through your journal's articles? Every sentence should mean something and should not exist merely to try to impress the reader with inflated language that adds nothing to the authors' message.

Getting Stuck Can Be Great for Your Career

by Nancy Hawley

Getting stuck is a regular part of life. It can feel bad, maybe even like we're failing. But it's actually a sign of good things to come. It means we're pushing the boundaries of the status quo by trying to create something new or better.

When we get stuck, it's because we're not running on all four cylinders: See, Believe, Think, Act. These are the fundamental ways we participate in the world, but if we experience a gap in one of these areas, our efforts can fumble.

To help you get back on track when you're stuck, we've pulled together some tips for potential SBTA gaps that editors and writers commonly experience.

See things differently. Sometimes we get stuck when we focus too hard on an issue, trying to stare it down until the answer appears. That hardly ever works because we naturally reinforce what we already know, blocking entry for new information. So instead of narrowing in, we find it helpful to take a giant step back and look for possibilities.

Let's say you'd like to start engaging your readers on Facebook, but the dark cloud of "How do I do this?" is blocking your vision. In this case, try putting a new lens on what you know is true about your journal, its mission, and its readers, approaching it from a Facebook point of view.

TRY THIS: Use your editorial skills to interview yourself (or a colleague) about the situation. Start with questions that zoom out and help you look at the situation strategically. You know your own situation best, but here are some thought-starter questions:

- What is the allure of Facebook to people in general?
- Why do you want to participate in Facebook as a brand page? What do you hope to achieve?
- Why is Facebook more suitable for us than other forms of social media, such as Twitter, Pinterest, Linkedin, or a Tumblr blog?

This is a good time to pause and use your answers to craft a purpose statement. But if you're on a roll, keep asking and answering questions, this time zooming in a bit on the situation. You might ask:

- What Facebook brand pages across all markets do you admire and why?
- What types of content seem to be most popular on Facebook?
- What do you like on your personal Facebook page?

At this point, ideas should start percolating about how you can translate your journal's assets (people, photos, content) to the Facebook platform. That's because you've approached the problem with a wide-angle lens that lets you see more broadly. Time to bring in your staff to brainstorm away the question "How do I do this?"

Test what you believe. Editors are hired for their vision, judgment, and decisiveness. They set forth a mission they believe in, and execute with that in mind. Ah, if it were that straightforward. You and your editorial staff are thrown curveballs all the time: Late-breaking news, disappointing contributions, a new publisher with a new way of working.

Sometimes, in the face of all that change, our resilience gets stuck so we don't know how best to adapt. This is when it helps to gut-check our beliefs. The key is to not overthink. You want to tap into your instincts to guide your decisions.

TRY THIS #1: Ask yourself if this change compromises who you are and what you stand for. Probably not, in which case, go to Try This #2. If it does, consider it a message that it's time to make your own changes.

TRY THIS #2: Imagine you love the change (even if you don't). List all of the reasons why it's good. Set a timer to make sure you spend no more than three minutes on this. What items on your list hold true, despite your resistance to the change? Are those positives going to outweigh the negatives in the long run?

TRY THIS #3: Think of two or three trusted advisers, people whose opinions you respect. As if you were talking to them, write each a note explaining the change and what you might do about it, varying your plans with each person. Spend no more than five minutes per note—no drafts or revisions. Take a break, then review your notes. How does each plan feel: Right? Wrong? Just okay? Do you believe any of your plans create circumstances you can adapt to?

Think differently so you can imagine success. Publishing is in the midst of an evolution. It's not enough for an editor to be an editor. You're compelled to think and act like marketers, web producers, salespeople, and social media experts as well. There's also the burgeoning need to keep up with trends in the publishing and digital realms—on top of what you already track for your publication's industry.

With this seismic shift come new requirements for skills, resources, and strategies. In short, what has worked well in the past is not working so well today. That's a lot to think about, and when it gets to be too much, you can get stuck. Let's think about it differently so you can come up with a realistic plan.

TRY THIS #1: To quell the sense of being overwhelmed, chop up your new responsibilities into smaller pieces. Now chop those pieces into smaller bits. Then prioritize those bits. This gives you an achievable to-do list and a steady path toward success.

TRY THIS #2: Once you chop up your problem, pick your top priority and prepare to be playful. Let's say your topic is to start a blogging program. Ask: What would be the wildest way to make that happen? We're talking crazy here, like buying The Huffington Post. What would be the mildest way to start blogging? Work your way toward the middle, coming up with increasingly less wild and mild ideas. Then look for kernels of possibility within those ideas. Likely, you can't afford the asking price for The Huffington Post, but you might be able to foot the cost of contracting one of its writers.

Act in a new way so you can go for it. Rare is the editor who doesn't practice procrastination. The reasons may vary, but the results are similar: a constant, low-level nagging that can sap the joy out of your job. So why do we persist in this negative behavior?

Some sort of fear is usually at the core of it, but as smart professionals, we're able to tell ourselves any number of stories to justify delay.

- "I can't do this until I have two free hours in the day, or when my copy editor comes back from vacation, or when the printer gets fixed." Waiting for the perfect time practically guarantees you won't get around to doing it.
  TRY THIS: When you find yourself with unscheduled time, even if it's 15 minutes between meetings, start the project. Continue squeezing in small spurts of progress throughout the day or week.

- "I work best under pressure." Frankly, you don't, but if that's how you usually operate, it's easy to convince yourself of this.
  TRY THIS: Focus on the success you will achieve and the joy you will feel by completing the task. Allow these positive emotions to spur you into action sooner, rather than the negative pressure of a deadline later.

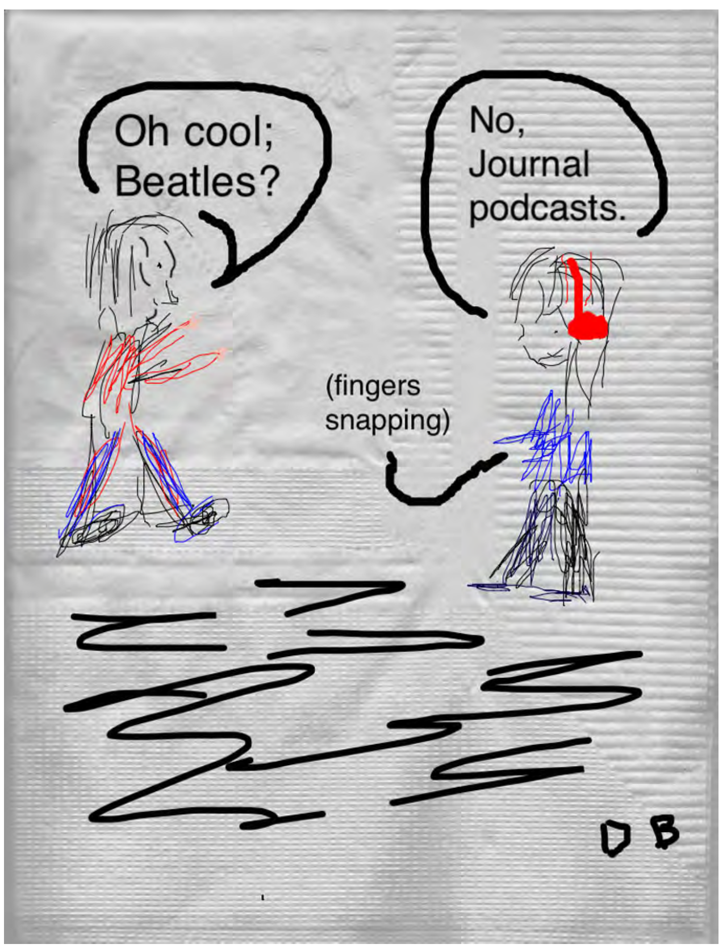
- "Before I can do this, I need to organize my files, create a Twitter account, clean up the lobby, and make dinner reservations." Sure, those are valid to-do items, but are they the right to-do's to do right now?
  TRY THIS: Make a smart to-do list by including *only* the items you are putting off and assign deadlines to them. If any item seems overwhelming, chop it up into smaller pieces and do them right away. Each small accomplishment will encourage you to keep going.

- "I'm not sure if I should write this in first-person or conduct expert interviews for the cover story." If you don't decide on a plan of action, you won't be able to take action.
  TRY THIS: List all the reasons for one choice, then all the reasons for the other choice. Then, in five seconds or less, review each list, pick the best one, and stick with it.

Congratulations! Simply by reading this article, you've taken a big step toward getting unstuck. As you push through your stuck moments, remember that it takes time. And not every situation calls for the same method. Be persistent, be creative, and try not to go it alone.

Nancy Hawley is Vice-President of Content and Community for Unstuck, a free iPad app from SYPartners, a consulting firm that helps industry leaders transform their companies. Before joining Unstuck, Nancy held editorial positions at Martha Stewart Living Omnimedia, Real Simple, Epicurious.com, and Mademoiselle.

Unstuck is designed to help you work through any stuck moment so you can live better every day. You can learn more about the Unstuck app at www.unstuck.com.



Adopting the ICMJE Form for Disclosure of Potential Conflicts of Interest

by Kristen Overstreet
Associate Managing Editor, *AJKD*

Following complaints from both authors and the editorial office staff, I began the process of reviewing the disclosure forms for one of my journals. I had two goals in mind: (1) based on the feedback I had received from authors and staff, I needed to streamline the process, and (2) I needed to determine what was currently considered necessary information to collect on our disclosure form(s) and ensure our current or new form(s) required authors to provide this information.

Background

Honestly, it had been a while since I had last reviewed best practice in this area. I performed a search on disclosure forms, focusing on best practice as suggested by publishing industry societies, such as the European Association of Science Editors (EASE), the World Association of Medical Editors (WAME), Council of Science Editors, (CSE), and, of course, ISMTE. The journal is a medical journal, so I also looked at what industry leaders such as JAMA, the New England Journal of Medicine, and competitor journals in the field were doing with their disclosure forms. I found the best information in the same place I had years ago, on the ICMJE (International Committee of Medical Journal Editors) website.

According to the ICMJE, editors should ask authors to disclose "all relationships that could be viewed as potential conflicts of interest" (ICMJE, 2009b, ¶ 2) and publish this information for the readers. Each author of a paper should be required to disclose any actual or potential conflicts of interest. The ICMJE developed a "uniform" disclosure form for this purpose: the *ICMJE Form for Disclosure of Potential Conflicts of Interest* in 2009.

I had heard about the ICMJE disclosure form when it was in its pilot phase in 2009. The form was revised following the pilot phase and is available now in its second version (ICMJE, 2009b). While searching for information on best practice for disclosure forms, I discovered that JAMA had adopted the form in November 2010.

My journal's disclosure forms had included a statement about conflict of interest, asking the author to declare that he/she did or did not have an affiliation or involvement with an organization/entity that has/had an interest or conflict with the subject matter and to specify any conflicts on the title page of the manuscript. However, the editorial office staff were too often required to check back with authors who stated no conflict of interest on the disclosure form but listed conflicts of interest on the title page, or had one author in the group who declared a conflict but then chose no conflict for the statement that would publish with the manuscript. The editorial office staff were also taking calls from authors who were confused about which statement to choose.

In reviewing the ICMJE form, I determined that the specific nature of this form would help authors understand what may or may not be considered a conflict of interest and provide them with a worksheet, of sorts, to list all relevant information.

The ICMJE form is comprehensive and four pages long. However, it is neatly formatted and the questions are separated into four sections, including demographic information, information about the manuscript being submitted, relevant financial activities not directly related to the manuscript, and other. Because a number of medical journals are requiring the ICMJE form, my journal's authors can save and update the form as needed for future submissions to our journal and a number of others.

Goals

My first goal in this process was to streamline the disclosure submission and check-in processes. The journal's process required three forms and authors complained of not understanding how to complete the forms or not understanding which form was required when.

The first form was completed by the submitting author and signed on behalf of all co-authors. The second form was completed by each author of a submission at the time of revision if the manuscript had received a reject and resubmit decision. The third form was completed by each author of a submission at the time of revision if the original submission received a no decision (major revision) or accept with minor revision decision. All three forms asked the authors to certify authorship responsibility for the submitted work, to warrant that the manuscript is an original work and has not been accepted by or submitted to another journal, that institutional review board (IRB) and/or animal care committee (ACC) approval has been granted if applicable, and that the author(s) agrees to transfer copyright to the journal owner. The forms also included a section on work prepared by a US federal government employee, a section to choose the appropriate disclosure statement to publish with the accepted manuscript, and a statement to choose if the manuscript contained information about medical devices.

I had hoped that we might be able to streamline our process by requiring only one form; however, my second goal had been to determine what was currently considered necessary information to collect on our disclosure form(s) and I determined that I could not achieve both goals with one form.

Collecting conflict of interest information is extremely important and defining conflict of interest is not easily done. The second version of the ICMJE form helps authors to inventory their actual and potential conflicts of interest and report them better than any other form I found in my research. Therefore, I decided that we should adopt the ICMJE form as our disclosure form. However, the ICMJE form collects only conflict of interest information. The ICMJE also recommends that authors indicate if they have received IRB and/or ACC approval for their studies (ICMJE, 2009d), justify authorship (ICMJE, 2009a), and take a strong stance on redundant or duplicate submissions (ICMJE, 2009c). The journal's three disclosure forms contained language on each of these ethical issues as well as copyright transfer certification. Based on the recommendations of the ICMJE on these subjects and the fact that many of the other journals' disclosure forms that I had reviewed were requiring this information, I was not willing to delete any of these items from our current forms, so it became evident that we would not be able to streamline our process by using only one form. At that point I made the decision to adopt the ICMJE form in addition to the journal's specific disclosure forms.

One Step Back, Two Steps Forward

The disclosure forms for this journal predated my hire, so this was my first time to research, review, and justify or change the current forms and process. To this point in the review process, I had determined that I wanted to adopt the ICMJE form for disclosure of conflicts of interest, and I would not be able to collect all necessary information on one form, but did we need all three of the journal's disclosure forms?

After careful review of the three forms and discussion with the editorial office staff, the purpose for a unique form for submission of a manuscript that was revised following a reject and resubmit decision was not clear. Therefore, I determined that the journal would no longer use this form and instead, the corresponding author (only) would submit the same form as for an original submission. The journal's rejection rate was around 75% at this time and fewer than 3% of manuscripts submitted after a revise and resubmit decision were accepted after the next round of review. Therefore, it made sense to only require each co-author to complete an individual disclosure form following an accept-pending-revision decision.

Still anxious to make the disclosure form submission process easier, I reformatted the disclosure forms for original and revised submissions, placing all sections requiring certification and the copyright transfer section on the first page, followed by one required signature.

An additional instruction was added that said, “Please sign below confirming you have read and guarantee the above 4 bulleted sections.” Previously, each individual section had required a signature and authors frequently failed to sign for all sections, requiring editorial office staff to chase them for proper completion of the form. The section regarding government employees now follows the signature line at the bottom of page 1 on these two reformatted forms.

On the original submission disclosure form, page 2 includes checkboxes for the financial disclosure and device statements. On the revised submission form, page 2 includes only the checkboxes for the device statement. The financial disclosure section was kept on the form for original papers because the journal prints a financial disclosure statement with published papers. After completing the ICMJE form, the author can choose the appropriate statement from the journal’s disclosure form and include it on the title page to be published if the paper is accepted. The financial disclosure section was removed from the form for revised papers because each author will now submit the ICMJE Form for Disclosure of Potential Conflicts of Interest, making disclosure for each individual author on the journal’s disclosure form obsolete. Editorial office staff will check the ICMJE forms received from all authors against the statement chosen by the submitting author to ensure correspondence.

During the review process of the disclosure forms, the editorial office staff suggested that the journal also change its policy regarding the disclosure statement and allow both statements to be published with the article, if applicable, listing the last names of the appropriate authors in parentheses after each statement (see Fig 1). The staff felt this would further help authors understand the disclosure requirements if they were not required to choose a statement for the article as a whole when authors had different disclosure statuses.

Summary

My goals for reviewing the disclosure forms and process for my journal were to 1) streamline the process based on the feedback I had received from authors and staff, and 2) determine what was currently considered necessary information to collect on our disclosure form(s).

I achieved the first goal by removing one of the journal’s required forms and reformatting the remaining two forms. The corresponding author is now required to complete the form for original submission and the ICMJE conflict of interest form when submitting the original manuscript. When submitting the revised manuscript, the corresponding author submits both the form for revised submissions and the ICMJE form for each co-author. Although the corresponding author now has to complete two forms for an original submission, the ICMJE form can be saved, filed, and updated periodically. The author may also submit it to other journals that require that form. The co-authors also have to complete two forms now versus one, but they will only have to do so just prior to final acceptance.

I achieved the second goal by researching current best practice and then adopting the ICMJE form for disclosure of conflicts of interest. Our original forms collected the other necessary information and so the combination of the two adequately required our authors to provide the necessary information.

As managing editors, we rarely have extra time in our day, and finding time to devote to the research and review of my journal’s disclosure forms and process wasn’t easy, but it was time well spent. I am now certain that we are collecting the necessary disclosure information from our authors and that the process is more efficient for authors and the editorial office staff than it had been. We began requiring the new forms on July 1, and I will be checking in with the staff at three and six months to determine if they and the authors are finding the forms easier to complete. We will collect author feedback and review our forms and process again in 12 months.

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International Committee of Medical Journal Editors. (2009b). Uniform Requirements for Manuscripts Submitted to Biomedical Journals: Ethical Considerations in the Conduct and Reporting of Research: Conflicts of Interest. Available at http://www.icmje.org/ethical_4conflicts.html

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International Committee of Medical Journal Editors. (2009d). Uniform Requirements for Manuscripts Submitted to Biomedical Journals: Ethical Considerations in the Conduct and Reporting of Research: Protection of Human Subjects and Animals in Research. Available at http://www.icmje.org/ethical_6protection.html

Figure 1.

Financial Disclosure: Choose one or both of the following statements, listing the names of the appropriate authors in parentheses following the statement. Insert the selected Disclosure statement(s), including the author names, into the title page of the manuscript submission. If you are uncertain what constitutes a conflict of interest, please see the ICMJE's definition (http://www.icmje.org/ethical_4conflicts.html) or contact the editorial office: archivesmail@archives.acrm.org

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ISMTE's Debuts First Webinar!

Defend Your Journal Against Image Manipulation and Fraud
November 7, 2012 2–3PM Eastern Standard Time

Are you protecting your journal from the rising tide of inappropriate image manipulation—and in the worst case—image fraud? There are simple steps you could be taking right now to ensure the scientific accuracy of the content you publish, guaranteeing the soundness of your journal's reputation. ISMTE is pleased to provide you with these steps, as well as a wealth of additional information, in our first-ever webinar "Defend Your Journal Against Image Manipulation and Fraud." Our subject matter expert for the webinar is Lindsey Brounstein, publications and graphics manager for the American Gastroenterological Association. Ms. Brounstein manages the image screening process for the AGA's journals and was instrumental in developing their image manipulation policy.

Why should you and your editorial staff be concerned with this issue? Firstly, image manipulation and fraud have become more tempting for authors with the widespread and relatively easy use of PhotoShop and other image manipulation tools.[1] Therefore, it's possible that your journal is receiving more manipulated images than ever before. And unfortunately, such manipulation is often difficult to detect with the naked eye, especially by reviewers who are reading printed manuscripts versus carefully perusing the content via a computer with zooming and side-by-side comparison functionality. The good news, however, is that journals no longer have to rely on the eyes of their reviewers and editors—most journals' workflows are now electronic and thus editorial staff can be equipped to detect and handle manipulated images.

Secondly, authors are sometimes unclear as to what constitutes acceptable image modification and what crosses the line into unethical alteration—it's therefore imperative for journals to publicize clear guidelines.[1] Image-screening pioneer *Journal of Cell biology* advocates that all journals have an image handling policy and screening process. The editors of *JCB* believe that journals have a responsibility to protect the published record and with simple image screening tools, they can now "do something beyond peer review."[1]

Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, unethical manipulation of images ultimately deceives the scientific community—the members of which assume basic scientific honesty.[2]

There are myriad ways unscrupulous authors might inappropriately alter their images.

An article in the journal *Arteriosclerosis, Thrombosis, and Vascular Biology* clearly delineates several examples [3]:

- Cutting a lane from a gel blot and splicing it together with another independent gel, giving the false impression that the entire gel is an original.
- Using a control blot from one experiment as the same control for an independent experiment.
- Enhancing or reducing the contrast of a selected region of a gel or blot.

By attending ISMTE's webinar "Defend Your Journal Against Image Manipulation and Fraud," not only will you see examples of the above forms of misconduct, but you will also learn to:

- Evaluate image screening software needs and costs
- Use image software to screen images
- Develop a screening policy

Don't delay—register for the webinar today. It's free for ISMTE members and costs just $25 for nonmembers.

References

1. Rossner M. How to guard against image fraud. The Scientist 2006;20:24–25.
2. Rossner M and Yamada KM. What's in a picture? The temptation of image manipulation. The Journal of Cell Biology 2004;166:11–15.
3. Miano JM. What is truth? Standards of scientific integrity in American Heart Association journals. Arteriosclerosis, Thrombosis, and Vascular Biology 2009;30:1–4.

Whistling in the Dark
7 Suggestions for Survey Success

A conversation with Sarah McCormack and Elizabeth Blalock

Elizabeth: If you're like me, a lot of the work you do is likely performed in a vacuum. I work closely with my Editor and Publisher to develop the journal, but often there is no response to the changes we make or to the new features we develop, and we often make decisions based on editorial goals, without input from a larger community. As an example, for one full year, we published patients' art on the cover of the journal, instead of the usual scientific images. We were sure the January 2011 cover, and its accompanying editorial, would surprise our readers. So we waited for feedback . . . and waited. . . . (we're still waiting).

After 14 years in this business, I have come to the conclusion that authors and readers will complain if they don't like something, but they are unlikely to contact the journal about anything else. And so I have come to liken silence with applause . . .or at least with a sense of general satisfaction among the journal's many constituencies. But sometimes you really want (or need) to know what your audience is thinking. And then it's time to conduct a survey.

Sarah: Before you send that email to a thousand or so of your closest friends, here are some things to consider.

1) Define your goals

Elizabeth: Think carefully about what you want to know and how the responses will be used. It is not advisable to send a survey simply out of curiosity or because you have the technology to do so easily. If you're going to ask for the time and thoughts of over-committed experts whose input you value, know what you're going to do with the information! You could inspire some who might otherwise ignore your request to respond by including your intentions in your cover letter. A well-defined goal will also help you to write good questions and to assess the success of your survey once it's completed.

Sarah: Take for example my recent survey, meant to evaluate one of our new journal features of video summaries about manuscripts. We wanted to know whether users liked the feature, how they found it most useful, and to market the feature to people involved with the journal who might not yet know about the video. However we didn't have questions relevant to people who had not heard of the new journal feature. That was a mistake! I had to weed through so many text responses telling me that the respondent had never heard of the feature and couldn't possibly evaluate it! Branching would have been really helpful —a redirect to a different set of questions as soon as the respondent told me they'd never used the product.

2) Know your audience

Sarah: Ok, really? Asking everyone who signed up for journal announcements what they think of our videos? That's way too many people peripherally involved with the journal! People who are closely involved with the journal are more likely to respond. If you can rely on self-reported demographics, and you can't, our editors were proportionally the most likely to respond.

Elizabeth: We serve many constituencies—professional societies (as journal owners or sponsors), authors, reviewers, editorial board members, society members, those publishing and researching in the specialty, the broader research community, and the public, to name a few. It may be appropriate to contact certain of these rather than others.

3) Express yourself clearly

Sarah: Remember those editors who were so likely to respond to the survey? Well, some of them gave their email addresses and when I looked them up, the most enthusiastic of them hadn't served as editor for our journals at any point in time! Keep those demographic questions explicit! (Although really, I listed our journal titles in the question!)

Elizabeth:

- Keep questions short
- Ask questions in an order that makes sense
- Ask questions in increasing order of difficulty
- Use clear language
- Avoid jargon (and provide definitions when needed)
- Keep non-native English speakers in mind
- Avoid open-ended questions (and provide lists of possible responses) as much as possible
- Use branching (customized questions based on previous responses) to your advantage
- Ask for appropriate demographics at the end, when users have seen what the survey is about and feel OK revealing information about themselves
- Before distributing it, test your survey . . . on yourself, insiders, and outsiders
    - Revise questions that are repetitive / confusing / open to interpretation
    - Ensure the questions are appropriate for your intended goal—and for your intended respondents
- Link the final screen of the survey to your journal home page, Facebook page, anything you want to draw respondents' attention to. You have their attention, so do something with it.

4) Keep them interested—and informed!

Sarah: Incentives are a great way to do this! Remember those dozens of responses I had to read through from people who had never seen our article videos? At least 19% of the respondents who waded through all 11 survey questions to enter the drawing for a free journal subscription didn't even know about the videos before the survey.

Elizabeth: You can also try things like showing a progress bar and giving an accurate time estimate for completing the survey. Consider offering to share the results with the participants—I always find this an incentive when I'm asked to complete a survey.

5)Legal Concerns

Elizabeth: And for all of you non-scientist English majors (or in Sarah's case, German majors, which she says is really just an English major in another language), don't forget that a survey is a research project. Your participants are covered by the Protection of Human Subjects rules.

Sarah: And for researchers like me trying to get by with free survey software, keep in mind rules about spamming. Some of the people who I asked to evaluate our video program had been involved with the journal but hadn't expressly asked to be included in correspondence. Only when I was ready to send out the survey did I notice that the free software I was using permitted me to email people only if they had opted into receiving the communication. Trying to stay on the right side of the law, I sent the message as a mail merge from my own e-mail account. It must have taken over an hour for all of the messages to send, and much longer than that to read through the out-of-office messages, the requests to unsubscribe, and the very few but important genuine responses asking for more information.

6) Sending the survey

Elizabeth and Sarah: Get someone else to do it if you can—an assistant or your communications or PR department!

7) Do your research! Isn't that our job?

Elizabeth:

How to Conduct Surveys: A Step-by-Step Guide. 4th edn. Arlene Fink. Copyright 2009 Sage Publications Inc., Thousand Oaks, CA

How to Conduct Self-Administered and Mail Surveys, 2nd ed. Linda B. Bourque and Eve P. Fielder. Copyright 2003 Sage Publications, Inc. 8) Thousand Oaks, CA

Sarah:

SurveyMonkey [Internet]. Palo Alto: c1990-2010 [updated 2011; cited 2012 Jun 22]. Smart Survey Design; [36 pages]. Available from: http://s3.amazonaws.com/SurveyMonkeyFiles/SmartSurvey.pdf.

Where There's Smoke – Is There Really A Fire?

by Ira Salkin, Ethics Editor

A relatively recent posting by Kent Anderson in the Scholarly Kitchen raised, in his view, a new ethical issue relative to scientific publishing.[1] It is best summarized by the title of his piece, "Where there's smoke - Is sponsorship of open access author fees a new type of conflict of interest?" Mr. Anderson suggests strongly that it could be and warns that corporate payments to publishers present a "potentially problematic approach to funding the literature."

Mr. Anderson reported that BioMed Central (BMC; www.biomedcentral.org), a United Kingdom-based, for-profit scientific publisher (owned by Springer Science/Business Media) that specializes in open access journals (over 200 titles) allows institutions to become members and prepay the entire or defray part of the article publishing fees (APC, otherwise known as the author fee) for their research staff members. More than half of the current 396 members are located in 4 countries, i.e., the United States (35%), Germany (12%), the United Kingdom (8%) and Canada (6%). The vast majority of all members are academic or scientific organizations. However, of particular concern to Mr. Anderson is the fact that ten (2%) of the members are commercial companies, including eight related to the pharmaceutical industry, one of which is a processed food and candy manufacturer and the last, a tobacco company.

Three of the five membership categories posted on the BMC Web site that are relevant to this discussion are the following:

- Prepay Membership
  Enables an institution to cover the whole cost of publishing with no additional fees paid by their authors. Discounts apply.
- Shared Support Membership
  The cost of publishing is split between the institution and author (author's note - 50% of the costs are provided by the institution). Discounts apply.
- Supporter Membership
  Members pay a flat rate annual Membership fee based on the number of science and medical researchers and graduate students at their institution. A 15% discount on the article-processing charge (APC) is given when publishing in the journals.

The fact that six corporations held prepay membership raised—in Mr. Anderson's view—the question as to whether this constituted a conflict of interest. He suggested that it would be possible for these companies, through some nefarious scheme, to develop a base of papers that support the companies' positions and distort the literature. I suggest that by the same token could not the papers by authors at academic and scientific organizations "ultimately create the impression of a body of literature fomented by strategic publication planning?" However, such "conspiratory" theories lose sight of the fact that all papers submitted to BMC research journals, regardless of their source, must be peer-reviewed and accepted by the editors before they are published irrespective of the type of membership held by the authors' institutions.

In addition, a quick review of the BMC membership lists indicated that, depending on the country, the majority of all types of institutions were supporters, followed by those that were prepay members. The least fell into the shared support group. For example, analyses of the published membership categories for the three countries with the highest number of members indicate that 24% of institutions in the United States (142 members) were prepay members, but 92% of the 47 German member institutions were prepay members and 56% of United Kingdom 32 member organizations were also in this category. Mr. Anderson indicated that six of the ten for-profit companies (60%) were prepay members, one held a shared support membership (10%) and the remaining three were supporters (30%). These findings reveal that the types and percentage of memberships held by these ten companies are quite close to those of institutions in the United Kingdom. However, Mr. Anderson goes on to note, quite correctly, that the membership percentages of academic/scientific institutions in Australia (18 members), Spain (13 members), Sweden and the Netherlands (9 members each) were quite different from those of the for-profit corporations. Specifically, as a group, 28% of the facilities held full prepay membership, 4% were shared supporters and 68% were supporters or percentages quite close to those noted for member institutions in the United States. However, as noted, the information readily available on the BMC Web site evidences that the types of membership and percentages held by for-profit companies are less than (Germany) or equal (UK) to those of academic and research facilities in other countries. Furthermore, it should not be forgotten that these companies constitute only slightly more than 2% of the total BMC membership.

A second issue raised by Mr. Anderson was whether the membership of the indicated companies in BMC should be disclosed in the papers of their research staff that are published in BMC journals? Mr. Anderson noted that while the authors reported that they were employed by the companies, they did not, for the most part, indicate a conflict of interest due to either their employment or their companies' BMC membership. However, my cursory examination of approximately 50 papers published by authors at academic and scientific institution which are unaffiliated with for-profit companies demonstrated that they also failed to provide clear and straight forward disclosures as to the source of funding of their APC fees. Therefore, it would appear that the vast majority of authors whose work is published in BMC journals do not consider that their institutions' membership or the sources of their APC fees constitute a real or perceived conflict of interest that could be interpreted as affecting the conduct or reporting of their work.

Further, Mr. Anderson could not provide an example of a society or publisher owned journal that accepted advanced "lump sum" payments for the costs associated with the publication of papers. It should be noted, however, that many of these journals require prepayment of non-refundable submission fees for papers to be evaluated as to their acceptability for publication. In addition, both the six for-profit companies and the academic and scientific organizations that hold prepaid memberships pay all of the APC fees for the publication of papers by their research staff in BMC journals. Furthermore, these same companies and a percentage of the not-for-profit institutions fund the submission, publication and/or other associated fees of their researchers to have their work published in non-open access STM journals? I fail to see an ethical difference between pre- or post-payment of publication fees of employees of any commercial, for-profit companies or academic and scientific institutions. Furthermore, I don't believe that the source of payment, either private or publication institutions raises similar ethical questions. If fees paid by corporations to an open access journal publisher constitute a conflict of interest, then couldn't publication charges presumably paid to a non-open access STM journal also be construed as a conflict of interest?

In my estimation, there are five questions to be considered:

- Does the membership program of the BMC in and of itself raise ethical issues?
- Do other publishers that provide open access of accepted papers offer similar prepaid plans?
- Should payment of the BMC journals' APC fees be noted in the conflict of interest statements of papers authored by employees of for- profit companies and academic/technical/medical institutions, e.g., as part of their grant support statements?
- Should the source of publication costs associated with open and non-open access journals be noted regardless of the authors' primary employers?

- Does the publication of papers of the staff of the indicated for-profit companies or any private company, whether published in BMC journals, other open access sources, on-line STM journals or print publications, *a priori* call into question the validity of the data presented in the publications?

I believe these are significant questions and quite appropriate for this column as we continue to explore, Ethical Questions to Ponder.

[1] http://scholarlykitchen.sspnet.org/2012/05/02

File name – ISMTE/ethical questions to ponder – June, 2012

Finish this sentence...

Here are the answers we received from last month's question:

An Editor can only enjoy a 4th of July picnic if…

… 2 of 3 reviewers agree the picnic is enjoyable. (Adam Etkin)
… she's deleted all the ants and "stet"ed the potato salad. (Beverly Lytton)
... the menu is spelled properly. (Wendie Howland)
…all political signs on the parade floats were punctuated correctly. (Anonymous)
... the conversation is grammatical, even after several beers. (Wendie Howland)
... somebody else does the clean-up, since she did all the set-up! (Wendie Howland)
… she corrects the handwritten sign on the potluck table that says "Firewokrs at 9 pm!" (Barbara Skalak)
… an accurate flow chart shows exactly who is doing what! (Lucia Steele)

That was a tough one. Try this one for next month:

I feel like Alice in Wonderland every day when…
A sample answer:
…what the Editors say sounds like Jabberwocky.

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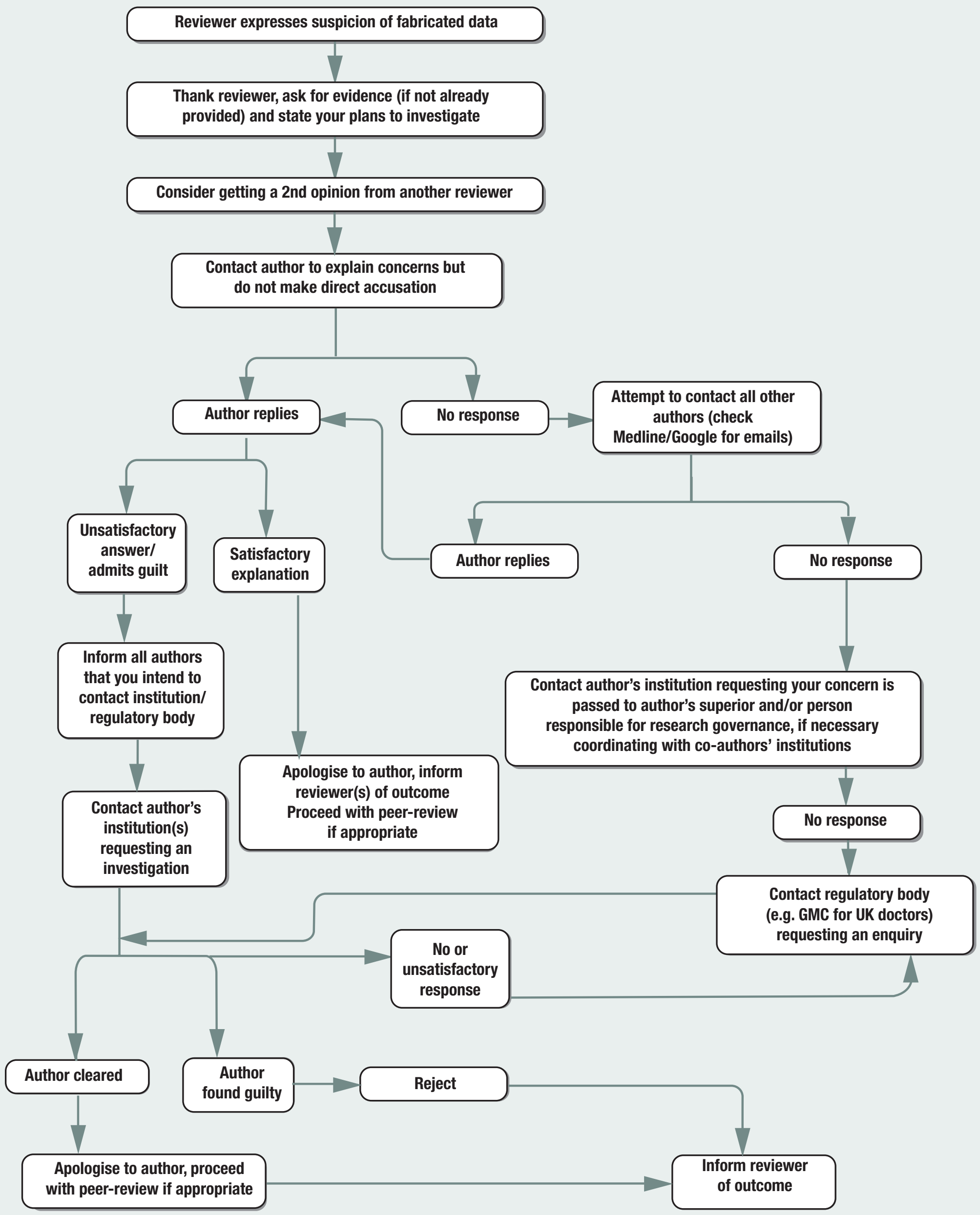
WWW.PUBLICATIONETHICS.ORG

What to do if you suspect fabricated data
(a) Suspected fabricated data in a submitted manuscript



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Revised May 2011

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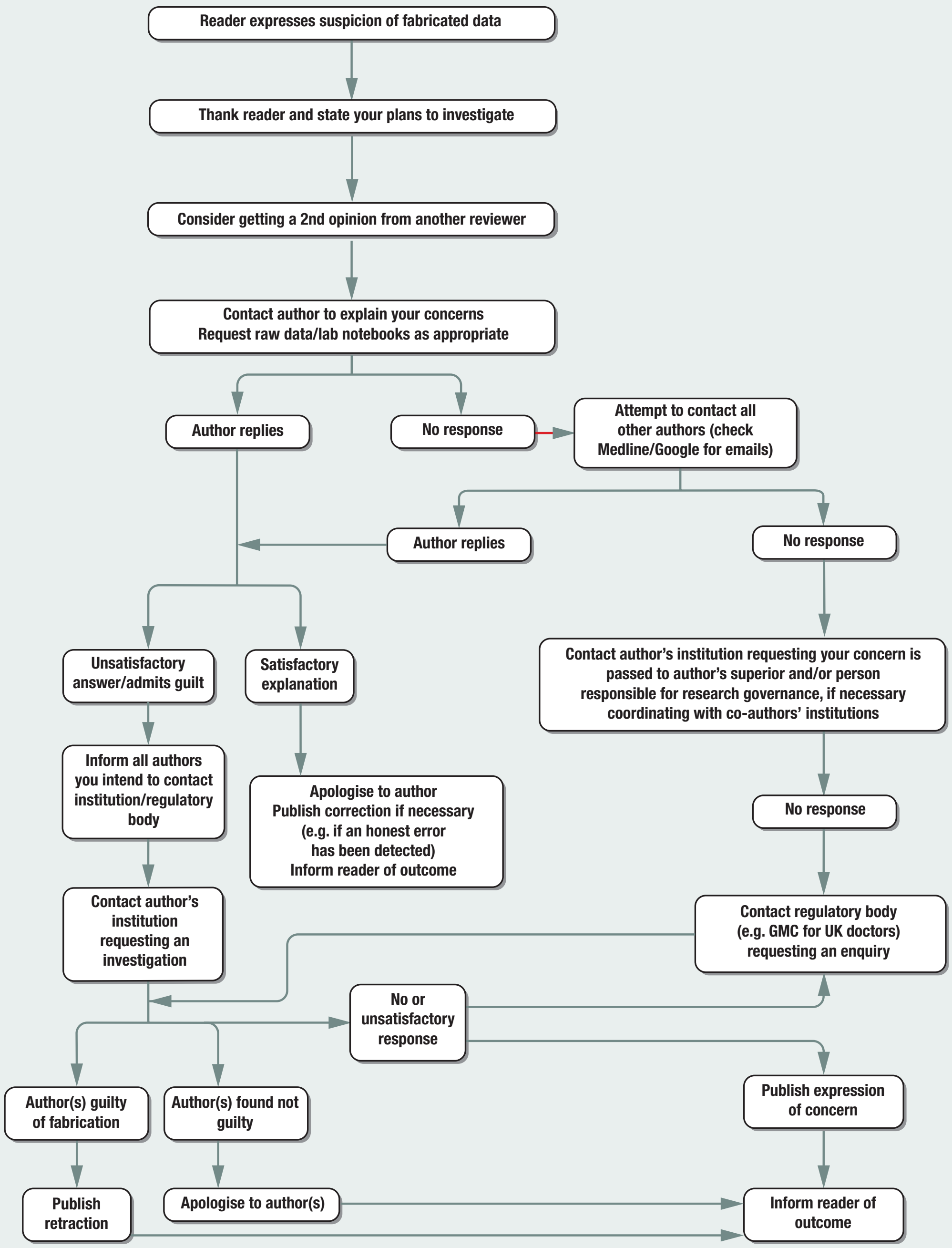
What to do if you suspect fabricated data
(b) Suspected fabricated data in a published article



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Revised May 2011

Calendar of Events

ISMTE Conferences: Be there!
ISMTE U.S. Conference
August 14–15, 2012
Washington, D.C.
http://www.ismte.org

ISMTE European Conference
October 23, 2012
Oxford, UK
http://www.ismte.org

Effective Journal Editorial Management
September 25, 2012
http://www.alpsp.org

Journal Development 2: Strategic Development for Journal Managers
October 2, 2012
http://www.alpsp.org

Getting the Most from Journal Publicity
October 25, 2012
http://www.alpsp.org

Beyond the Rhetoric: New Opportunities in Open Access
November 20, 2012
http://www.alpsp.org

Editorial Manager User Group Meeting
December 3, 2012
London, UK
http://www.editorialmanager.com/

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