The publication of academic research serves the dissemination of scientific discoveries and insights and ultimately the advancement of science and knowledge. Through publications, researchers communicate the outcomes of their work to the larger research community so that subsequent work can build on it and extend the basis of the community's existing knowledge. As a result, scientific progress becomes possible and the community's knowledge base expands.

This process of scientific advancement, though, requires researchers to conduct and publish their work in an ethical manner. This entails researchers upholding high standards of research integrity, responsibility, and respect for the rights and dignity of people. The major professional associations in different academic disciplines have developed codes and guidelines that outline ethical conduct for reporting and publishing scientific work. For example, in the United States the two most relevant ethical standards for reporting and publishing in the field of industrial and organizational psychology are arguably the Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct of the American Psychological Association (APA) (of which the Society of Industrial and Organizational Psychology is a subdivision) and the Code of Ethics of the Academy of Management (AOM). Members of these two professional associations agree to follow and abide by these codes of conduct when they join the associations. However, these codes of ethical conduct apply equally, albeit indirectly, to nonmembers, given that academic journals and funding and academic institutions all look to existing codes of conduct to inform their own guidelines for ethical behavior. Similar codes of ethical conduct exist for industrial and organizational psychologists in a variety of countries around the world.

Furthermore, journals and groups of journal editors have created codes of ethical conduct that govern their operations during the peer-review process. Examples are the Journal Editor Ethics initiative that has now published the second edition of its Editor Ethics code, or the Committee on Publication Ethics, which published its most recent code of conduct for journal editors in 2011. The common purpose of these codes of conduct is to ensure that the peer-review publication system in fact contributes to the pursuit of good science, meaning science that is based on competent, methodologically appropriate, and rigorous research, the outcomes of which are reported as a true and accurate representation of the actual findings. The responsibility for ethical conduct during the peer-review process rests with all the parties involved, that is, the authors of the scientific work, the journal editor, and the reviewers. The specific requirements for ethical conduct differ for each of the involved parties.

**Author Responsibilities in the Publication Process**

Authors have several, crucial responsibilities for upholding their ethical contract. These responsibilities revolve largely around the requirement that authors need to present an accurate reflection of their work and that they must not abuse or manipulate the peer-review process. The following are examples of ethical issues that codes of conduct frequently cover and a summary of the respective recommendations for ethical conduct.

**Plagiarism**

When preparing their manuscripts, authors need to appropriately acknowledge and give credit to the work of others, which includes identifying and referencing the work of others (e.g., written work, data, or any other material). Using somebody else's work, published or
unpublished, without appropriate attribution and reference to them is considered an act of plagiarism. Similarly, when authors reuse their own material from a prior work without proper recognition of and reference to this work, they commit an act of self-plagiarism.

Appropriate Authorship Credit

When collaborating with other researchers on a publication, it is important that the assigned authorship credit reflects the significance of each coauthor’s contribution and significance to the work. Authorship credit should be assigned only to individuals who have in fact contributed to the research. Several codes of conduct explicate that particular characteristics of researchers such as seniority and status should not determine authorship credit, but rather the actual significance of the contribution that each researcher made. The APA and AOM codes also explicitly state that work that is derived substantially from a doctoral dissertation needs to list the PhD student as the first author of the piece.

Fabrication of Data and Falsification of Results

All codes of conduct expressly state that it is unethical to falsify results. Falsifying results can take on a number of different forms, such as data fabrication, omission of data or parts of the data, omission of some of the findings (i.e., cherry-picking, see below), manipulation of data analysis, and other forms of distortion. Falsification and fabrication are especially problematic violations of ethical codes. Given that the purpose of the publication process is to disseminate knowledge and advance science, the publication of false findings is detrimental to scientific progress. Of course, authors sometimes make honest mistakes with regard to data analysis or reporting. The codes of conduct acknowledge this possibility and recommend that authors take the necessary steps to rectify the mistake (e.g., via a correction statement or erratum).

Omissions in Reporting

An issue related to falsifying results is the “cherry-picking” of findings to report in manuscripts. For example, a researcher might start a project with six different hypotheses about relationships between the variables of interest, but the researcher might find support for only four of the relationships. Instead of reporting the findings for all six hypotheses, the researcher might decide to alter the manuscript so that it contains only the four hypotheses for which the author found supporting evidence. This is problematic because the author is withholding from the community of researchers important information about disconfirmed hypotheses. By not reporting the negative results, the author misrepresents and distorts the knowledge obtained from the research.

A similar issue is created when authors decide to “salami-slice” the reporting of their research. This happens, for example, when a researcher has conducted data collection based on a larger theoretical model and that included a range of independent and dependent variables, but decides in his or her publication strategy to split up the findings between multiple manuscripts instead of writing one paper that reports on the findings of the whole model. This is called salami-slicing because the author tries to get multiple publications out of the same data collection. This can be problematic if, for example, relationships between variables that are reported in a given manuscript are in fact dependent on other variables that were included in the data collection but were not included in the specific manuscript. As such, the authors cannot report on the influence of these variables on the relationships between variables in the current paper. The reported findings in the manuscript are then distorted relative to the actual
relationships between variables that the authors have uncovered. In addition, by engaging in salami-slicing, the authors essentially use the same data set multiple times and create redundant publications of the same data.

Submission of Manuscripts

When authors submit a manuscript to a journal for peer review, they are prohibited from having the same journal article concurrently reviewed by another journal (called “shot-gunning”). Authors are also prohibited from publishing the same article or material in two different journals, unless express permission was obtained from both journals. Authors further need to refrain from submitting the same work twice to the same journal, for example, when an article has previously been rejected by the same journal.

Editor Responsibilities

Editors and reviewers have dual functionality in the peer-review process. On the one hand, they act as gatekeepers to ensure that only rigorous and meaningful research emerges from the review process. On the other hand, editors and reviewers have a duty to help authors to improve their manuscripts. Editors, in particular, have to manage the peer-review process so that it is timely, is fair, and advances scientific knowledge. At the same time, they also need to protect the mission and interests of their journal.

When editors make decisions about manuscripts, they also influence the fate of specific pieces of research. Their decisions thus need to be fair and ethical. Editors, for example, decide whether a manuscript enters the review process or whether it gets “desk rejected” (i.e., is rejected by the editor without having been sent to reviewers). A manuscript might be desk rejected when it does not fit with the proclaimed mission and direction of a journal or when the manuscript is not of sufficient quality.

If a manuscript is sent out to a set of reviewers, the editor selects the reviewers. Editors need to choose reviewers with the necessary expertise to provide helpful reviews but also with the capability to assess a piece of research critically to ensure that its flaws are uncovered. Editors further need to prevent conflicts of interest, for example, by not assigning reviewers who might have strong theoretical objections to the piece of research given their own work. Along similar lines, editors also need to maintain the anonymity of authors and reviewers. This process is essential so that the identities of authors and reviewers do not influence and bias the outcome of the review.

Editors need to uphold ethical standards for conducting and reporting research. This includes refraining from practices that do not contribute to the research, such as the promotion of coercive citations or HARKing. Coercive citations occur when editors request that authors include citations to articles in the same journal even though the articles do not relate to or advance the topic of investigation. HARKing stands for “hypothesizing after results are known.” Editors shall not persuade or encourage authors to include hypotheses after the fact, given that this undermines the hypothetico-deductive approach to hypothesis testing.

Reviewer Responsibilities

Reviewers are crucial in the publication process. They provide the necessary expertise to determine whether a submitted piece of research was conducted with the appropriate amount
of rigor to advance scientific knowledge. Like editors, they act as gatekeepers but also as facilitators to improve manuscripts. In their role, reviewers need to provide developmental feedback so that authors can improve their work and address issues with the work that the reviewers have identified. In this process, reviewers are advised to abstain from becoming so involved that they essentially coauthor the paper.

To fulfill their tasks, reviewers need to be experts on one or more aspects of the manuscript. Reviewers should not overstate their expertise for aspects of the paper with which they are not familiar. Instead, they should disclose when they are not equipped to review a specific piece of research or aspects of a given manuscript. Furthermore, reviewers need to disclose potential conflicts of interest, for example, when they know the authors or when they have fundamental, personal issues with the premises of the research. Reviewers should abstain from trying to identify the authors of a piece of research, in order to maintain the double-blind nature of the review process.

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See also Academy of Management; American Psychological Association, Association for Psychological Science; Coercive Citations; Ethics in Industrial and Organizational Research; Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology

Further Readings


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