The Perceptions of Researchers Working in Multidisciplinary Teams on Authorship and Publication Ethics

Zubin Master, Elise Smith, Lisa Campo-Engelstein, David B. Resnik, Devin Midura, and Bryn Williams-Jones

WCRI 2017
May 30, 2017
Amsterdam, NL
Outline

- Authorship Ethics and Disagreements
- Multi/Interdisciplinary Authorship Practices
- Common Themes in Authorship Practices in Multi/Interdisciplinary Teams
Why is Authorship So Important?

• Authorship credit is a researcher’s currency to rewards in academia

• Publications may be necessary for:
  ➢ graduate degree
  ➢ obtaining a job
  ➢ tenure and promotion
  ➢ grants and contracts
  ➢ awards and prizes
  ➢ speaking opportunities
  ➢ providing expert testimony

• Authorship is equally important for reasons of accountability for aspects of the research undertaken

• The quality and quantity of publications and citations are important
Unethical Authorship Practices

Honorary/Gift/Prestige Authorship
- Individuals are given authorship credit when undeserved
- E.g., as professional courtesy, personal favor, prestige, or to foster collaborations

Denying Deserved Authorship
- Denying someone who earned authorship credit

Ghost Authorship
- Placing authors who were not part of the research (and removing others) to give authenticity to the research

Plagiarism
- Using words, pictures, data as if they were one’s own without attributing appropriate credit
Authorship Disagreements

• Meta-analysis shows 29% of researchers reported that they/their colleagues experienced authorship misuse.

• Authorship disagreements have been shown to be as high as 27%, 36% and 66%.

A Systematic Review of Research on the Meaning, Ethics and Practices of Authorship across Scholarly Disciplines
Ana Marušić¹, Lana Bošnjak², Ana Jerončić¹

PREVALENCE OF SCIENTIFIC MISCONDUCT AMONG A GROUP OF RESEARCHERS IN NIGERIA
PATRICK OKONTA AND THERESA ROSSOUW

Faculty–Student Collaborations: Ethics and Satisfaction in Authorship Credit
Jeffrey C. Sandler and Brenda L. Russell
Authorship in Different Disciplines

- Authorship assignment also shows disciplinary trends

- In many areas, authorship ranking is based on decreasing order of contribution (Bennett & Taylor, *Emerg Med* 2003)

  - Senior (last) authorship and corresponding author positions for PIs demonstrates the leader of a group


  - Single author papers are revered as they demonstrate intellectual rigor
What About Authorship in Multidisciplinary Teams?

Is there a greater divergence in practices?

Is there more conflict due to differences in values?

Do standards of authorship sufficiently consider different methodologies?
The ICMJE recommends that authorship be based on the following 4 criteria:

1. Substantial contributions to the conception or design of the work; or the acquisition, analysis, or interpretation of data for the work; AND

2. Drafting the work or revising it critically for important intellectual content; AND

3. Final approval of the version to be published; AND

4. Agreement to be accountable for all aspects of the work in ensuring that questions related to the accuracy or integrity of any part of the work are appropriately investigated and resolved.
Research Aim

To explore the views of public health researchers on the norms, values, practices and knowledge of authorship

- Semi-structured qualitative interviews of public health researchers in the U.S. (21) and Canada (23)
- 30 Faculty and 14 trainees
- 26 Female and 18 Male
- Recruitment: purposive sampling with bibliometric analysis of publications + snowball

Sets of Interview Questions

1) Authorship Assignment and Ranking (7 questions)
2) Authorship Disagreements (3 questions)
3) Knowledge on Authorship (3 questions)
Authorship Assignment & Order

Multi-Disciplinary Experience

Disciplinary Background

Institutions

Individual Values

Authorship Model and Practice of Authorship
Contribution, Need, Opportunity

While all authors mentioned that contribution determined order, in some cases need and opportunity influenced whether someone becomes an author and their position.

• Giving opportunity to a graduate student, research assistant or a junior faculty member

“A lot of times it will be kind of that last author as sort of an undergrad research assistant who’s just not really prepared to make the crucial contributions to it but did...some background research and participating [sic] in those meetings that served as a learning experience to them. And then also to give them the experience of authorship and that sort of thing. We don’t always have those sorts of students but often there’s a sort of interest in including them but it’s hard to do anything beyond the last author for contributions are fairly minor.” (Participant 1-Faculty)
Negative & Positive Hallmarks of Need

While researchers recognized that institutional requirements place a *need* for key authorship positions, there were both positive and negative impacts of giving authorship based on need.

“a paper that...I would argue I had the more substantial contribution to and we had a very explicit conversation about it. And I was like ‘Well no, you need this, you should be corresponding author on this one.’” (Participant 3-Faculty)

“But I did see my colleagues basically getting shafted. Because they were students, it was like ‘Oh well, the postdoc needs it because they’re applying for jobs. So yeah, you designed the study and did most of the work but my postdoc is going to go first and you can go second.’ Things like that. Or ‘you’re just a genetic counselor, you don’t need it, you’re clinical, so we’ll put this other person first.’ And you know so I was in a powerless position but it evoked rage basically, about injustice and unfairness and that sort of thing.” (Participant 3-Faculty)
Outcomes of Authorship Disputes

• All respondents reported that authorship disagreements and disputes can lead to negative outcomes:

- Ruin team dynamics
- Increase competition within team
- Ends collaboration
- Lose respect and not recommend students
- Teaches bad habits (to trainees)
- Alters normative understanding (to trainees)

“I'm just recounting how I would handle something like that...I would then not carry out further research with these people. It just really puts an end to that collaboration” (Participant 4-Faculty).

“I mean those first kinds of experiences with authorship and how that kind of plays out, I think it forms the foundation of how you are going to do things in the future” (Participant 7-Trainee).
More Egregious Misbehaviors

- Feelings of anger, resentment
- Retribution e.g., sabotage
- Research misconduct

“I really do truly believe that that senior PhD student didn’t put me on that [paper] because I think he was bitter about the review article and purposely overlooked me” (Participant 7-Trainee).

“for some people, the idea of failure or something like that may overtake any sense of guilt” and permit sabotage or misconduct (Participant 7-Trainee).

“[About misconduct] I'm sure it could. I mean you know you hear stories about people just completely inventing their data with Photoshop” (Participant 9-Trainee).
Take Home Messages

- Disciplinary background, experience & institutions impact individual values and authorship practices
- Contribution is important but *need* and *opportunity* are used to justify authorship
- Authorship disputes may lead to more egregious misbehaviors
Acknowledgements

• Research Grant

Zubin Master  Elise Smith  Lisa Campo-Engelstein  David B. Resnik

Devin Midura  Vincent Larivière  Bryn Williams-Jones

• WCRI 2017 Organizers for this opportunity

• Various artists for images found on the web
Thank you!

zubin@zubsplace.com