

**Honorary authors and unwitting:
Personal experience with a journal from a publisher
included in the Beall's list of predatory publishers**

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**3rd International Conference
Plagiarism across Europe
and Beyond 2017**
24th–26th May 2017
Brno, Czech Republic

Implications of academic authorship

Authorship of abstracts, articles, books and book chapters, patents, etc. are the basis for individual credit and reputation among peers as well as more in general at the societal level.

Authorship has important implications for academic career, social acknowledgement and popularity, economic and financial revenues, etc.

From a societal point of view, academic authorship is one of the main fundaments of scientific research accountability.

Unethical allocation of authorship credit is considered as a kind of **scientific misconduct**.



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Criteria for authorship assignement

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

AND

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

AND

iii. Final approval of the version to be published;

AND

iv. 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.

In addition to being accountable for the parts of the work he or she has done, an author should be able to identify which co-authors are responsible for specific other parts of the work.

In addition, authors should have confidence in the integrity of the contributions of their co-authors. All those designated as authors should meet all four criteria for authorship, and all who meet the four criteria should be identified as authors.



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Unethical allocation of authorship credit

Type	Description
Guest authorship	One has not done any significant work towards the paper but has his name as one of the authors.
Gift authorship	A kind of guest authorship in which the authorship has been gifted to a person by other author/s, to receive some other favours in return from the 'gift author' (e.g., the gift author is a senior researcher involved in promotion and salary of other authors).
Pressured authorship	Also known as "publication parasitism", it occurs when a senior colleague forces the original researchers to include his/her name due to the fear of his/her authority in the institution.
Ghost authorship	The named author is not the actual author of the article. It typically occurs in industry-academic partnerships, e.g. whenever drug companies would like to mask their involvement in the research thereby hiding their conflict of interests.
Honorary authorship	Similar to gift authorship, except that it does not necessarily imply any favours in return. For instance, biologists may routinely put supervisors or lab heads last in an author list, while organic chemists might put them first, and in some countries it is standard for the department head to take credit on a paper regardless of contribution.



A novel type of misattributed authorship

Inclusion of senior colleagues as co-authors without their knowledge.

Often occurring together with data fabrication/falsification.

It may aim at increasing the impact of the manuscript as well as the reputation of the author.

S/he will indeed appear to have conducted fruitful collaboration with well known senior colleagues.

Dyer, C., (2017).

Junior doctor reinstated after suspension for fabricating research data.

BMJ, 356, j989.

McCook, A., (2016).

A new way to fake authorship:

Submit under a prominent name, then say it was a mistake.

RetractionWatch (<http://retractionwatch.com/2016/11/28/new-way-fake-authorship-submit-prominent-name-say-mistake/>, last accessed: 13 march 2017).



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CASE STUDY



Immunophysiological Significance for Differential Receptor Expression of Melatonin (Mell1aR/Mell1bR), Cytokine(s) (IL-2R/IL-10R/TGF- β R) and Tyrosine Hydroxylase (THR) in Lymphocyte Sub-Population: A Novel Crosstalk between Melatonin and Catecholamines

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CASE STUDY

1. The beginning: asking to delete authors' names

Data were used without knowledge and permission, and in previous discussions we defined them as inconclusive and in need of replication experiments.

The paper also failed to acknowledge:

- * the role of another colleague, who substantially contributed to the conception and design of the work, and assisted in performing some assays;
- * the role of the colleagues and staff, who extensively supported the first author in her work and performed many of the assays;
- * the fellowship grant received from the hosting University during her stay in our lab.

Finally, among the co-authors was listed another colleague, who had been first author's mentor and was not aware as well of the existence of the Paper.



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CASE STUDY

The Editor-in-chief replies

In less than 24 h, stating that "*we take issues such as the ones you've raised above very seriously and we will take the appropriate measures*".

However he also added that before proceeding with any action, he would like to know from us "*whether or not the data presented in this paper ... meets the scientific rigor that you would have expected had [the first author] seen fit to have you look at the paper prior to its submission*".



CASE STUDY

2. Further step: reviewing the paper and identifying serious misconduct in data analysis and reporting, supporting a retraction request

Main flaws:

- (i) Several figure legends were mistakenly attributed. In the legends it was stated that $n = 5$ replications were performed, however according to our records only one sample was assayed in duplicates;
- (ii) In legends to other figures, it was stated that $n = 5$ replications were performed however, according to our records, samples from only 2-3 different subjects were assayed;
- (iii) In the methods used for cell proliferation, the use of 3H thymidine was mentioned, however no results were subsequently provided. Indeed, no experiments with 3H thymidine were ever planned, also because the technique was not available in our lab.

We detailed our findings in a subsequent email to the EIC, concluding that as a whole the Paper suffered from many serious violations of scientific integrity, including **data falsification**.



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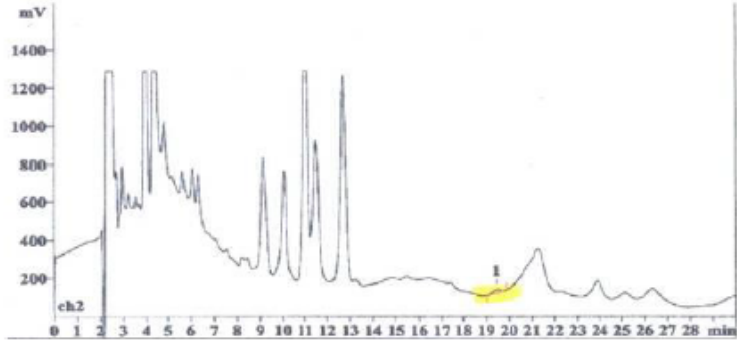


Figure 2b: Chromatogram showing high endogenous Melatonin concentration $9771.68 \text{ Pg}/1 \times 10^6$ in T_{eff} lymphocyte (T_{effector}) sub-population of 5 separate experiments. Sample Flow rate- 1 ml/min.

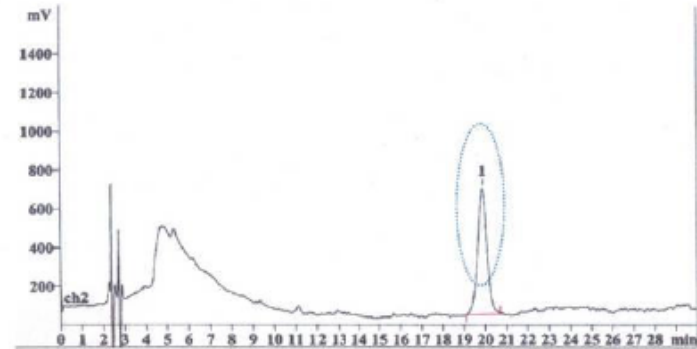


Figure 2e: Chromatogram showing effect of Epinephrine (E) supplementation in T_{eff} Lymphocytes ($T_{\text{effs}}: T_{\text{effector}}$) cultures. Epinephrine diminished the endogenous peak of melatonin with a concentration $39.12 \text{ Pg}/1 \times 10^6$ cells. No. of experiments=5.



CASE STUDY

The Editor-in-chief replies

This time, the EIC replied stating that he completed the analysis of our request and that **his decision was to retract the paper.**

To this end, he asked that we will write a short paragraph regarding the retraction, for publication in the next available issue of the Journal.

He also added that "*[he] decided that, indeed, [SR] has committed "scientific misconduct." However, due process dictates that she will have an opportunity to indicate if she does or does not agree to the retraction of this paper. This formality is in keeping with standard procedures regarding matters such as these. I anticipate that she will not sign on to the retraction, but nevertheless **the paper in question IS TO BE RETRACTED** [uppercase in EIC's email]*".

We soon sent the required paragraph, which the EIC forwarded to the Editorial Office (?) of the Journal 10 days later, stating in the email that he "*will await [first author]'s response. She can disagree with the retraction. However, **this paper is hereby retracted.***"



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CASE STUDY

3. Indefinite procrastination

We informed officialy **the Rector of our University**, which originally provided the fellowship grant to the first author and that was mentioned in the Paper as our affiliation.

We also informed **the Chancellor and the Vice Chancellor of the University in India** where the first author was currently working.

We wrote also to **the President and to the Secretary of the Society for Scientific Values in India**, providing them with all the information about the case. They quickly answered in less than 24 h, stating that the first author *"appears to be guilty of fabrication of data, forgery and cheating. In any case, the journal should retract the paper on the complaint of the two co-authors who were not involved in clearing the manuscript."*

They however also added *"Please let me know when the Journal retracts the paper. We will, thereafter, take up the case with the Vice Chancellor"*.



CASE STUDY

3. Indefinite procrastination

As a final step, more than 6 months after our official request for retraction and nearly 9 months after our initial report to the Journal, we contacted **RetractionWatch**, a blog that reports on retractions of scientific papers to increase the transparency of the process.

In an interview, they allowed us at least to clarify that we were very frustrated by the delay in the retraction of the Paper and that we worried very much about the possibility "*that anyone might retrieve this paper e.g. **while reviewing a submitted manuscript or even a grant application** from my group. It will be never possible to establish whether, when and how it might happen, but **clearly this is a serious possibility as long as that paper will remain out on the web.***"



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CASE STUDY

4. Finally an end, maybe

The case came to an apparent end only at the beginning of 2017, when the first author contacted us by email to inform that her University in India was going to take serious sanctions on her based on the allegations received in the previous months.

The University in India never acknowledged the receipt of our email and/or surface mail sent by courier.

We replied stating that "*I sincerely hope that you will not suffer any excessive consequences from this very sad situation. From the personal point of view I remember you during your stay in our institute as a very serious and hard working researcher, as it is also stated in the letter of support which I was pleased to provide you in 2008. I can easily believe that **the subsequent events were due mainly to lack of experience and excess of naivety.** Nonetheless, I am also confident that at this point you can very clearly perceive the seriousness of what happened.*"

After some weeks the Paper was finally retracted and the retraction note now available on the Journal website states that "*soon after publication of the paper in the Volume ..., the authors of the paper would like to retract the paper for their personal reasons.*"



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Retraction Note

The article entitled “Immunophysiological Significance for Differential Receptor Expression of Melatonin (Mel1aR/Mel1bR), Cytokine(s) (IL-2R/IL-10R/TGF- β R) and Tyrosine Hydroxylase (THR) in Lymphocyte Sub-Population: A Novel Crosstalk between Melatonin and Catecholamines” has been accepted for publication in the Journal of Clinical and Cellular Immunology.

Soon after publication of the paper in the Volume 6 Issue 4, the authors of the paper would like to retract the paper for their personal reasons. Therefore, the journal publisher disowns the paper from the issue 4 of volume 6. Hereafter the content of the paper may not available online in any of the publisher’s websites or related weblinks.



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CASE STUDY

4. Finally an end, maybe

We are not aware of any **specific agreement or transaction** eventually occurred between the first author and the EIC of the Journal.

We also don't know about any eventual result of the putative **disciplinary procedure** at the first author's University in India.

Meanwhile, the first author has published **three more papers on this same Journal.**



Who is actually in charge of authorship attribution?

"The individuals who conduct the work are responsible for identifying who meets these criteria and ideally should do so when planning the work, making modifications as appropriate as the work progresses.

*It is the collective responsibility of the authors, **not the journal to which the work is submitted**, to determine that all people named as authors meet all four criteria [mentioned in the Introduction section];*

***it is not the role of journal editors** to determine who qualifies or does not qualify for authorship or to arbitrate authorship conflicts."*



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Who is actually in charge of authorship attribution?

"You may ask a journal to withdraw your name from a paper if it has been included against your wishes.

However most editors are reluctant to get involved in disputes about omitted authors since they do not have enough information to judge such cases.

Some journals have an ombudsman, but they deal with cases of alleged misconduct by the journal.

*Similarly, **COPE** only hears cases submitted by journal editors and **is not an appeal body for cases of disputed authorship.**"*



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Who is actually in charge of authorship attribution?

Scientific institutions where the work is performed

Journals and **publishers**

And ...

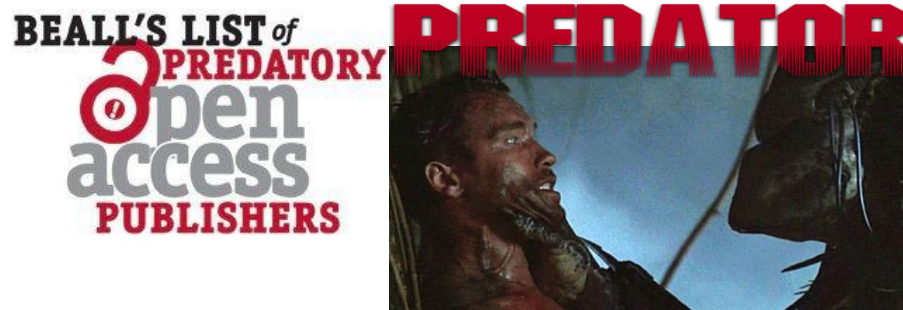


Who is actually in charge of authorship attribution?

Scientific institutions where the work is performed

Journals and **publishers**

And ... what about **predatory publishers**?



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Neuroimmune pharmacology
Clinical pharmacology and pharmacogenetics
Pharmacoepidemiology and pharmacovigilance
Pharmacology of herbal medicines