Ethical issues related to scientific publishing: Reflections of a journal editor

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THE SOCIETY FOR THE SCIENTIFIC STUDY OF SEXUALITY

JSR aims & scope:

"designed to stimulate research and promote an interdisciplinary understanding of the diverse topics in contemporary sexual science"



Research Misconduct



 are professional guidelines and organizations focused on many aspects of publication ethics

many ethical issues arise that are outside of "misconduct"

Will focus on 3 issues:

Journal requirements for ethical approval of research

 Tension between journal metrics and mission/aims of journal

Gender representation on journal editorial boards

1. Journal requirements for ethical approval of research

As part of JSR submission process:

 authors need to confirm that the research on which their article is based was reviewed by an IRB or human subjects committee

we adhere to guidelines from
 Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE)





Code of Conduct

"Editors should seek assurances that all research has been approved by an appropriate body (e.g., research ethics committee, IRB) where one exists"

Problems arise when one doesn't exist!



Report on "The ethics of research related to health care in developing countries" (2002)

"externally sponsored research projects should be subject to independent ethics review in the sponsors' country(ies) in addition to the country(ies) in which the research is to be conducted" recent increase in research involving human subjects carried out in low and middle income countries

 concern expressed about presence and adequacy of ethics review systems in low and middle income countries for ex., of 42 sub-Saharan African countries, 1/3 did not have a national IRB/research ethics committee (Zielinski et al. 2015)

 1/2 did not have any policies on research ethics



- but... some have also questioned whether use of U.S. criteria should always be used – criteria that might not be relevant in the cultural context (Gilman & Garcia, 2004)
- what are editors advised to do when they receive manuscripts where no ethical review was undertaken?

Dworkin et al. (2015) JSR commentary "Sexuality in the Global South: Inclusions, Omissions, and Future Possibilities"

 a very small percentage (5%) of published articles in JSR focused on the Global South

 lack of ethics review may be one of the barriers to increasing the proportion of articles from authors from the Global South submitted to the journal

2. Tension between journal metrics and aims/scope of journals



- Journal Impact factor (IF) is a measure reflecting the yearly average number of citations to recent articles published in that journal
 - IF widely criticized as a poor indicator of quality and impact of individual articles
 - despite these limitations, the IF is influential!
 - used by publishers, authors, funding agencies, and librarians as measure of journal quality



- criticisms have also focused on effect of the IF on behavior of researchers, editors, and other stakeholders
- known that editors at some journals implement strategies to increase their IF ('playing the impact factor game')
- questions raised by editors "should we care about our IF and do all we can to increase it?" [PLOS Medicine Editorial, 2006]



- IF is frequent topic of discussion among editors, reviewers, and authors
- is important to authors in considering which journal to submit papers to
- newer metrics suggested include "usage factors," article-level metrics and Altmetrics to provide information on the impact and reach of individual articles

Clearly, assessing an individual article's worth should not rest solely on the number of citations received or any one measure of impact

 but.... there is a tension between working to improve any of these metrics and journal aims/mission

 known that in some disciplines there are fewer citations to articles

some articles will receive few citations but may be very influential in changing policy or are of educational value

3. Gender representation on editorial boards of journals



- survey of gender representation on editorial boards: of 435 journals in mathematical sciences-8.9% of the editorships were held by women (Topaz & Sen, 2016)
- survey of 60 major medical journals: women were under-represented on editorial boards and only 16% of editors-in-chief were women (Amrein et al., 2011)
- not aware of any similar survey of sexuality/gender journals

- experience as editor of JSR suggests one possible reason for gender imbalance:
- men put themselves forward and ask to be invited on the editorial board much more than women do

JSR currently has:

- 7 associate editors (4 are women)
- 44 consulting editors on editorial board (26 are women)

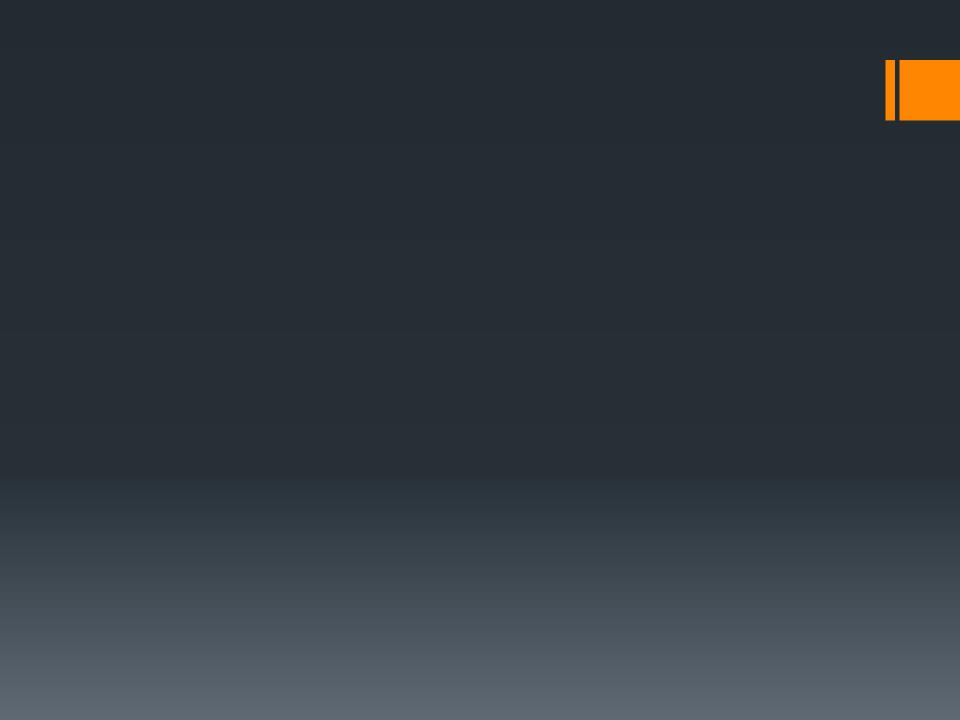


- no answers to some of the issues raised but they should be considered/debated, particularly as there is no training for becoming an Editor!
- these issues are ones confronted on a regular basis, whereas issues related to ethical misconduct are encountered much less often



Thank you!

and thank you to New View Campaign and to Leonore and Stephanie



COPE COMMITTEE ON PUBLICATION ETHICS

- a voluntary organization, initially set up by biomedical editors for editors
- now a multidisciplinary international organization, primarily for editors and publishers, with 10,000 members worldwide
- includes many resources e.g., flowcharts for ethical decision-making, discussion forum, code of conduct and best practice guidelines