

Cross-border data exchange - a case study on international collaboration gone wrong

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The subject of ethics in science has become a hot topic recently (Gleick, 2011). As publication pressure on researchers increases and use of the internet allows faster turn-around, the quality of the peer review process has suffered. This presentation describes one case of scientific ethics violation in which the editors of a high-ranking scientific journal improperly permitted publication of a paper that was based upon unethical acquisition of data and failed to acknowledge scientific collaboration and exchange of intellectual property.

We will present “Case description” and “Ethical issues” with a hope that our experience draws attention to important ethical issues in international collaborative research, and prevents such misconduct in the future.

Since international research involves cooperation and coordination among many people in different disciplines and institutions across national borders, ethical standards should promote values that are essential to integrity and collaborative work, including trust, accountability, mutual respect, and fairness. One lesson to be learned is not to engage in collaboration without a written agreement stating clearly who is responsible for what and how the results of collaborative research are to be shared. This is especially important in cases of international collaborations, particularly those involving smaller or developing nations who often do not have the high-tech facilities of developed nations.

There is also need to establish clear regulations regarding co-authorship on papers in which intellectual property and significant financial investment was made to allow the research to proceed. As such, a system of ethics to guide the practice of science from data collection to publication and beyond is timely and much needed to protect the integrity of scientific collaboration. It will keep science moving forward by validating research findings and confirming or raising questions about results.

References

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Gleick, P. 2011. AGU’s new task force on scientific ethics and integrity begins work. *EOS* 92(47): 22.
Guidelines for responsible conduct of research. [http://www.provost.pitt.edu/documents/GUIDELINES FOR ETHICAL PRACTICES IN RESEARCH-FINALrevised2-March 2011.pdf](http://www.provost.pitt.edu/documents/GUIDELINES%20FOR%20ETHICAL%20PRACTICES%20IN%20RESEARCH-FINALrevised2-March%202011.pdf)