



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Who wants to be the corresponding author?!

Awareness of and efforts to reduce inappropriate behavior in publishing scientific works are the competence of the ethics committees in universities and research institutes. As an editor-in-chief of some Springer journals and a member of such committees, I, together with my colleagues, make mechanisms that help us in promoting professional and ethical conduct in research. I believe that one of the main problems of our scientific community is the incomplete understanding of the concepts of “author” and “corresponding author.” People sometimes even consciously disregard these concepts and engage in misconduct, which causes many difficulties in our society.

Regarding papers, various reports of violations of publication ethics have been sent to the editors-in-chief of journals and ethics committees. One of them consists of removing the names of those who have played an important role in the research. Another is to add to the list of authors the names of people who have not played a significant role in the research, such as research sponsors, data providers, and laboratory supervisors.

According to the international standards of research ethics, a person can be considered an author of a paper when he/she agrees to be an author of the paper and has cooperated in all of the following three activities (see [1],[2]):

1. **Conducting the research:** To be substantially involved in presenting a research idea, designing and conducting research, processing data, or analyzing and interpreting research results.
2. **Writing the paper:** To be involved in the writing, the critical evaluation, or the modification of the scientific content of the paper.
3. **Approving the content:** To be accountable for all aspects of the paper such as novelty, originality, and accuracy; to read and approve the final paper before its submission to a journal.

The names of others who partially contributed in any other manner to the existence of the paper may be mentioned in the acknowledgments in the published paper.

In different disciplines of science, authors follow various traditional rules. In some disciplines, such as mathematics, authors’ names are simply listed in a happy and healthy tradition, that is alphabetical order. It is due to “ideas grow

from complex discussions among all partners” [3]. In such fields, one small idea contributed by one author can be quite significant for the work although his/her contribution seems tiny.

In most disciplines, however, the name of the person who has the most significant intellectual contribution to the research is listed as the first author of the paper, and similarly, the names of other people appear as subsequent authors proportional to their contribution to the research. In some experimental research papers, however, the names of the senior researchers are included at the end of the list of authors. Nowadays, in some countries, as a consequence of specific regulations for the promotion of academic members and project sponsorship laws, such classical rules are somewhat neglected.

For a long time, in many academic fields, the first author has been considered the main author of the paper. Recently, in some universities, being the corresponding author has become essential when an academic member applies for promotion to a higher rank or applies for grants from research foundations.

The corresponding author is a key person in leading the project or research team. This author is the main one responsible for the overall content of the paper and the main respondent against any questions or objections. Before submitting a paper, he/she should make sure that the ethical aspects of the research have been observed.

On behalf of all authors, the corresponding author is responsible for correspondence with the journal at all stages of submission, revision, and publication of the paper (including determining the publishing model), and for approval of publication forms concerning copyright and non-conflict of interest.

The corresponding author is responsible for managing the relationships between the authors of the paper. The corresponding author is expected to clearly define the role of each author in the research. In the final version of the paper, and before sending it to a journal, the names and the order of the authors are determined by the corresponding author within the conventional framework of the pertinent scientific discipline. Under specific circumstances, for instance, in a case when the effective contribution of another person in the team overpasses that of the leader, this title can be delegated to other authors.

*We invite readers to submit letters to the editor at notices-letters@ams.org.

Overall, the traditional role of the corresponding author has been nowadays extended from simple communication with a journal to a serious and difficult responsibility.

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References

- [1] Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE): <https://publicationethics.org/>
- [2] International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE): <https://www.icmje.org/>
- [3] 2004 Statement: The Culture of Research and Scholarship in Mathematics: Joint Research and Its Publication: <http://www.ams.org/profession/leaders/CultureStatement04.pdf>

—*Mohammad Sal Moslehian,*
President of the Iranian Mathematical Society;
General Director in Research,
Ferdowsi University of Mashhad, Mashhad, Iran;
Editor-in-chief of Banach J. Math. Anal.
and Ann. Funct. Anal.;
 moslehian@um.ac.ir; moslehian@yahoo.com;
<http://profsite.um.ac.ir/~moslehian/>

Letter to the Editor

I am writing to suggest that the AMS officially declare that it will not hold the Annual Meeting in any state which has eliminated the reproductive rights that were once a constitutional guarantee in this country. I tried out this suggestion (referring at that time to states that intended to outlaw abortion if the opportunity arose) in November 2016, testing the waters by consulting with two acquaintances, one a member of the AMS Council and one an officer of the AMS. They both told me that my suggestion was not likely to get very far, because there was a general reluctance within the AMS to appear to politicize the organization, a reluctance which I share. So I did not attempt to make the suggestion to the AMS Council, as had been my original intention. But in the meantime the situation has changed, and politicization is no longer even an issue. The only issue is whether the AMS will adhere to its “Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Statement” adopted by the April 2019 Council. The statement prevents the AMS from excluding women who happen to be pregnant, and it also prevents the AMS from inviting the participation of pregnant women in conferences if their participation might be life-threatening for them. In case anybody has forgotten why the term “life-threatening” is appropriate here, the article “How an Abortion Ban Trapped a Tourist on Malta” (*New York Times*, June 23) can serve as a brutal reminder. Replace Malta by San Antonio or New Orleans and Mallorca by Los Angeles or Denver and you get the picture. The AMS should not be

encouraging women to travel to conferences in states where they could be denied urgent medical care if they need it.

In principle the same policy should apply to the sectional meetings of the AMS, but in the case of, for example, the southeastern sectional meeting, such a policy might be impossible to implement unless the meeting were held virtually.

—*David E. Rohrlich*
Boston University

In connection with the preceding letter, see the document on p. 1430 of this issue. This is one in a suite of documents developed by the AMS Office of Government Relations that provide a brief background and recommendation on a specific policy issue. They are for advocates to use when interacting with legislators.

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