The Ethics and Etiquette of Research Dissemination

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Unethical behavior (e.g., fictionalizing data) is relatively uncommon in health professions education (HPE); nevertheless, recent highly publicized stories1 should prompt HPE researchers to reflect on our community’s ethical standards. Disseminating research broadly and promptly has led some researchers to make unethical choices. The ethical dilemmas HPE researchers face often stem from the subtle nuances inherent in interpreting ethical codes of conduct related to dissemination (i.e., how scholarly work is communicated to the broader community) of research. We explore these ethical and etiquette considerations by addressing two dissemination situations that HPE researchers commonly encounter.

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<th>Research Dilemmas</th>
<th>Ethical Considerations</th>
<th>Etiquette Considerations</th>
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<td>How can I justify multiple publications and/or presentations of the same body of work? What is the difference between “building on previous work” vs. “recycling”?</td>
<td>• Creating publications with a family resemblance involves recasting data presentations to address different outcomes of the same study or alternative research questions underlying the study.2 • Always provide attribution to the original presentations.</td>
<td>• Contact the journal’s editorial staff or the conference’s program staff to discuss your study’s particular circumstances since journals/conferences may differ in how they interpret the rules. Their staff members’ insights can help you determine if your findings are inappropriately repetitious.</td>
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<td>How do I know when I’ve pushed too much data into a paper (i.e., it is too dense) vs. when I have divided the data across too many papers (i.e., salami slicing)?</td>
<td>• Aim to present significant findings and rich data and to offer novel and noteworthy insights.3 • Dividing one significant finding into several publications (i.e., salami slicing4) can distort the value of the work. This runs the risk of the findings being counted twice in meta-analyses and literature reviews.</td>
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Recommended Guidelines
1) Duplicate publications are unethical.
2) Duplicate presentations fall in a gray zone.
3) When in doubt, ask the editor, or just don’t do it.
4) Prioritize quality of publications over quantity.

For a list of institutional Web sites or publications relating to ethical conduct, please see Supplemental Digital Appendix 1 at http://links.lww.com/ACADMED/A396.

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References:

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