The Case of Simultaneous Submission: “Flying too Close to the Sun”

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In the hallowed halls of academia, peer-reviewed publication is the “bitcoin” of the realm. The more you have, the higher your “worth.” Publication is the most important metric by which promotion and tenure committees determine whether a faculty member is promoted. In many institutions, the phrase “publish or perish” is not an abstract concept, it is a stark reality. Publication also is an important factor in assessing the qualifications of an investigator in a grant application. Moreover, publications bring favorable publicity, prestige and by extension, donations, to a department or an institution. Given the high stakes involved, it should come as no surprise that sometimes authors and investigators “cross the line” in trying to accumulate these precious “bitcoins.”

Several months ago, the *Journal*, was informed by a reviewer of a manuscript that she had just reviewed an identical paper for another journal. Virtually every scientific journal does not allow simultaneous submission. In the *Journal*, this prohibition is explicitly stated in the instructions to authors, “Manuscripts must not be concurrently submitted to any other publication, print or electronic.”¹ Although one could plead ignorance by indicating that they had forgotten to read the instructions to authors, the cover letter to the *Journal* for the manuscript in question stated “This manuscript has not been published and is not under consideration for publication elsewhere.” Thus, not only did the authors simultaneously submit their paper to two different journals, they were untruthful. After consultation with some of the other editors and some members of the editorial board of the *Journal*, I instituted a 2 year ban on submissions

to the *Journal* for all of the authors of this paper and notified the editor of the other journal of our action. Why did I ban all the authors and not just the senior or corresponding author? Because a co-author is also accountable for the contents of the manuscript, not just the lead author. Therefore, before agreeing to be a co-author of a paper, one should remember that with “glory comes responsibility.”

Finally, I would like to emphasize that the editors, editorial board and the staff of the *Journal* are not the scientific writing police. This action occurred because of an alert reviewer. It is likely that others also are “crossing the line” in search of those publishing “bitcoins” and engaging in similar or worse scientific misconduct. Unfortunately, the likelihood of being caught is small. Like many behaviors, ethical conduct occurs when there are good role models, well-known ethical guidelines and significant consequences for violations. In the world of academic publishing, we may not be there yet, but we still need to identify and sanction violators when they become known.

CITATION

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REFERENCE

1. Author Center, Journal of Clinical Sleep Medicine. <http://www.aasmnet.org/JCSM/Authors.aspx>