

# Ethics in Research Scenarios: What Would YOU Do?

**KEY INSIGHT:** James Davis and Susan Madsen (former co-chairs of AOM's Ethics Education Committee (EEC)) have developed four ethics in research scenarios, which they, EEC members and journal editors have taught to multiple doctoral consortia at the AOM annual meetings since 2008. In this blog posting, Jim and Susan introduce their scenarios. A short annotated list of internet resources on teaching research ethics follows. We hope that these resources will stimulate discussion about research ethics among the faculty and doctoral students at your institution. *The Ethicist* has migrated from AOM Connect and "gone public"; the blog is freely available for reading and download at <http://divtest.aom.org/ethics/>. Comments are welcome, and you are encouraged to circulate this blog posting (and earlier ones) to your colleagues and students.

## 1. ANNOUNCEMENT: WE'VE MOVED!

First, I am delighted to report that in December 2012 *The Ethicist* migrated from the AOM Connect intranet; the blog has moved and "gone public". It is now freely available for reading and downloading at <http://divtest.aom.org/ethics/>. All the postings have been migrated to the new website. Kathy Dean Lund, Paul Vaaler and I want to thank the AOM Executive and AOM Headquarters for their support of this initiative, and in particular Terese Loncar who almost single-handedly managed the transition from AOM Connect to our new website.

You can read more about the background and purpose of this blog here: <http://divtest.aom.org/ethics/about/>. If you would like an email notification each time a new blog post is added, you can subscribe to the RSS feed at: <http://divtest.aom.org/ethics/>; just type your email address in the little box in the lower right hand corner of the page. We hope that the move will open up our postings to a much wider audience and encourage more discussion about ethical dilemmas that we all face as scholars, educators and professionals. Come join us in the conversation!

## 2. WHAT ARE ETHICAL SCENARIOS?

Are you confident that you and your colleagues – and your PhD students – can handle the typical ethical dilemmas that affect scholarly research and publishing; dilemmas such as the ones that [Michael A. Hitt discussed in \*The Ethicist's Thought Leader Series\*](#)? Ethical issues vary widely and can affect a variety of decisions including, for example:

- Whether to include an author and how to decide the order of authors;
- Whether chairs should co-author research coming out of their PhD students' dissertations;
- Who owns a dataset developed by two or more authors;
- Whether it is OK to "slice and dice" projects into multiple papers, and if so how to do this appropriately;
- How to avoid plagiarism and self-plagiarism concerns in one's own work, and what

to do if you find evidence that someone else appears to have done this.

Rather than deal with ethical violations after the fact, **pre-training in ethical scenarios** can help faculty and PhD students become more aware of possible ethical complications, think through ethical dilemmas before they occur, and point out where to turn for extra support.

When Jim Davis and Susan Madsen were co-chairs of AOM's Ethics Education Committee (EEC) they developed several ethics scenarios, which they, other EEC members and journal editors taught to multiple doctoral consortia at the AOM annual meetings starting in 2008. Each scenario was a little example of one or more ethical dilemmas, and was designed to motivate discussions about ethical issues in the research process. The goal of the ethics training was to raise the consciousness of the participants, stimulate a dialogue, and serve as an introduction to AOM's ethics resources:

- [Code of Ethics](#)
- [Ethics Adjudication, Ethics Education and Ethics Ombudsperson Committees](#)
- [Ethics of Research & Publishing Video Series](#) (developed by Susan and Jim)
- [Policies and Procedures for handling ethical violations](#)
- [The Ethicist Blog](#)

At the annual AOM meetings, two members of the AOM Ethics Education Committee (typically Susan or Jim and one other member), together with a journal editor from one of the top-tier scholarly management journals, visited each doctoral consortia. Copies of the scenarios were distributed to the participants at the beginning of the session. Each table of 4-10 participants was asked to focus on one of the scenarios, and debate among themselves how they believed the situation should be approached from an ethics standpoint. This small-group discussion was then opened up to the full group, with individuals from the small groups presenting their views and the journal editor and discussion leaders also commenting on the scenario.

Below, Jim Davis and Susan Madsen share some comments on their experiences with this project; their scenarios follow. I follow with a short list of recommended internet-based resources that can be used as, or to provide background reading for, ethics in research pre-training should you decide to develop additional scenarios for use at your institution.

### 3. THE DAVIS-MADSEN ETHICAL SCENARIOS

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The ethics scenario topics were developed after a pre-conference symposium held at the national Academy of Management meetings in 2007. At that symposium a panel of journal editors described ethical violations in publications they had experienced. Audience members, consisting of doctoral students and faculty of all ranks and backgrounds, described the ethical problems they had experienced and the professional dilemmas that resulted. We were surprised by the breadth and complexity of the ethical

violations, and also by the confusion about what the participants could and should do.

We left that symposium convinced that those stories should not end with that symposium, that they needed to be shared with the Academy.

The cases capture the ethical issues discussed in the 2007 AOM symposium. While the stories were real, the identity of those involved was protected. The cases were designed to stimulate discussion. As described above, the cases were presented in one-hour training sessions at twelve divisional doctoral consortia the year following the symposium. The emotional and passionate discussions that took place during the training were amazing. Both the consortia faculty and students engaged in heated discussion about the ethical issues in the cases. Surprisingly, in some of the consortia the faculty and/or students claimed that there were no ethical violations in a particular case, despite the fact that the cases were grounded solidly upon the Academy of Management Code of Ethics!

To provide further evidence that the ethical violations described in the cases were indeed violations, we made a series of videos, in our role as co-chairs of the AOM Ethics Education Committee; these [Ethics in Research videos can be found on the Academy website and also on YouTube](#). The videos show Academy officers, thought leaders and journal editors discussing the ethical issues found in the cases. We have found that the cases open up lively discussion and that the videos bring closure by making the ethical codes associated with the cases absolutely clear.

We strongly encourage faculty to review the cases and the videos. Ignorance of ethical standards is a poor defense of ethical violations in the Academy of Management. Our profession is grounded upon the highest academic ideals and ethics. It is essential that those entering the Scholarly profession understand the code of ethics they must abide. We have found that the cases and videos are ways of learning and teaching the Academy of Management Code of Ethics.

Below are the four scenarios we developed in 2007 and have used at various AOM meetings since then. We welcome your comments and hope they stimulate discussion among your colleagues.

### **Scenario 1: The Data Sleuth**

Professor Data has been a very productive scholar; he has been publishing in major journals for many years. Because of his productivity, he is now known as one of the thought leaders in your field of study. You have recently begun to work with Professor Data and discovered that he has an interesting approach to research. He typically begins by gathering and analyzing data (which may include using a student data set) to “see if the data have anything to say.” You have found that Professor Data often manipulates the data and changes the dependent variable to ensure a statistically significant result and increase the probability of a major publication.

1. *Have you seen this type of research before?*
2. *Is Professor Data’s approach to scholarship ethical? Why/why not?*
3. *Is there anything you could/should do?*

### **Scenario 2: Too Much of a Good Thing? Multiplying Your Productivity**

Professor Re Peat’s resume is long and impressive. She had an endless list of conference

presentations and publications. Upon closer examination you realize that much of the research seems to be quite similar. One day you met Professor Peat and commented on her impressive body of work. She said that she never writes anything that doesn't get as much ink and attention as possible. Among other things she said that she may change the name of some of her papers to get them into conferences. She also said that she spends so much time gathering data she finds that she can be more productive by using the same data and theory on multiple studies.

1. *Can one plagiarize oneself?*
2. *How often can data be used ethically?*
3. *Can the same paper be submitted for publication and for a conference?*

### **Scenario 3: It's Good to be the King: Authorship Dilemmas**

Three PhD students (Chi, Square, and Pearson) were chatting one evening about their frustrations during their doctoral work. Chi said that she had written a final paper for a doctoral course taught by her advisor. She had asked him if the paper was worthy of submitting to a conference. Her advisor advises that it is worth submitting and suggests the insertion of a few references. He then requests that he be listed as co-author on that paper. Square stated, "That's nothing! Let me tell you about my advisor's request." He then explained that he had just finished writing his dissertation with some wonderful support from his advisor, Ms. Mean. She had recently insisted on being first author on all publications coming out of the dissertation research. Pearson trumped all three by saying that her advisor said that he owns the data and all intellectual property coming from the dissertation because he consented to supervise the research.

1. *How is authorship resulting from your dissertation determined?*
2. *Who owns the intellectual property and data from your dissertation?*

### **Scenario 4: Creative Problem Solving In Scholarly Research: Desperately Seeking Significance**

You are on the horns of a dilemma. You have been working on your research for some time and have nothing but disappointing results. Your work pushes the theoretical boundaries of internal and external strategic alliances in ways that advances knowledge in extraordinary ways. Your problem lies with your inconclusive, mixed, and just plain bad empirical results. When you wrote the theory you argued that performance using two particular, theory driven metrics would be influenced by the characteristics of alliances you developed. One afternoon, out of frustration, you found that when you manipulated one of the variables by making it a dichotomous rather than continuous variable you could get the results you desired. You also found that by restricting the range of the other variable you could also get better results (more than just removing outliers and the relationship is not curvilinear) that might increase the chances of producing a major publication.

1. *Do you believe you should move forward with these changes? Is there an ethical problem?*

2. *When does data analysis become data snooping?*

3. *How should you proceed with your research?*

#### 4. A SHORT LIST OF INTERNET RESOURCES ON ETHICAL SCENARIOS

The Davis-Madsen scenarios are a wonderful way to initiate an ethics in research discussion in one's department/university and with one's students. If you need supplementary resources – other scenarios and background reading materials – I recommend the following internet resources. The list is incomplete and other recommendations from readers of this blog would be most welcome; please post your comments and additions as follow-up comments on the blog post. Thanks!

- Banja, John. **Ethical Dilemmas in Scientific Research and Professional Integrity**. Atlanta Clinical & Translational Science Institute, Emory University. Multiple short cases on research ethics, where each case is followed by an expert opinion on how to resolve the issue. The cases are intended to be used for teaching purposes.

[http://www.actsi.org/areas/ethics\\_reg/ethics/index.html](http://www.actsi.org/areas/ethics_reg/ethics/index.html)

- **COPE (Committee on Publication Ethics)**: <http://publicationethics.org/>. A forum for editors and publishers to discuss publication ethics. The COPE [resources](#) and [cases](#) are helpful resources for authors and reviewers, not only editors and publishers. The cases, for example, include discussions on gift and ghost authorship, data fabrication, author mistakes, overlapping publications, multiple submissions, etc.
- **Office of Research Integrity**, US Department of Health & Human Services: <http://ori.hhs.gov/>. This federal government website provides not only federal policies and regulations, but also training resources on what is and how to handle research misconduct, [case summaries involving research misconduct](#) (these make for sobering reading) and free [forensic tools](#) (e.g., for detecting plagiarism).
- **Resources for Teaching Research Ethics**. Poynter Center for the Study of Ethics and American Institutions, Indiana University, Bloomington. <http://poynter.indiana.edu/tre/tre-resources/>. An extensive website of resources related to research ethics, including a [Short List of Useful Resources for Teaching Research Ethics](#) that covers websites, books and journals, among other items. The website also includes essays, slides and PPT handouts, syllabi, and a large number of [case studies](#) and [role playing exercises](#) on research ethics. For example, there are instructions by Kenneth Pimple on [running small-group assignments in teaching research ethics](#).

- Stern, Judy E. and Deni Elliott. 1997. **The Ethics of Scientific Research: A Guidebook for Course Development**. Hanover and London: University Press of New England. Useful monograph about teaching research ethics by two professors at Dartmouth who taught an ethics in research course. See [http://www.dartmouth.edu/~ethics/archives/Stern\\_Elliott.pdf](http://www.dartmouth.edu/~ethics/archives/Stern_Elliott.pdf).

There are, in addition, many useful **journal articles on ethics in research** that can be used for scenario training and discussion purposes, which have been made freely available for download by their journals and publishers. For example:

- The “Author Resources” provided by the **Academy of Management** journals include several editorials that deal with ethics in research. See, for example:
  - **AMJ**: <http://aom.org/Publications/AMJ/Author-Resources.aspx>.
  - **AMR**: <http://aom.org/Publications/AMR/Author-Resources.aspx>
- See the *Code of Ethics for Authors, Editors and Reviewers*, which I and my editors wrote and adopted in July 2007 for the **Journal of International Business Studies**: [http://www.palgrave-journals.com/jibs/jibs\\_ethics\\_code.html](http://www.palgrave-journals.com/jibs/jibs_ethics_code.html). Also useful is my 2010 “Letter from the Editor-in-Chief: Scientists behaving badly”, *Journal of International Business Studies*, 41: 561-566. Available from Palgrave at: <http://www.palgrave-journals.com/jibs/journal/v41/n4/pdf/jibs20109a.pdf>.
- All 10 articles in the “Editors’ Forum: Research and Publishing Ethics”, **Management and Organization Review**, published in English and Chinese (Nov. 2011, Vol. 7, Issue 3, pp. 389-518) are downloadable from Wiley at <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/more.2011.7.issue-3/issuetoc>.

## 5. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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past many years, have participated in ethics case analyses and have helped to build understanding of ethics in those entering the academic profession.

**To download this blog post as a PDF, click here: [THE-ETHICIST-EDEN-BLOG-2013-02-ETHICS-SCENARIOS](#)**

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