Journal of Trauma & Dissociation, 10:377–384, 2009

ISSN: 1529-9732 print/1529-9740 online
DOI: 10.1080/15299730903140499

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

EDITORIAL

Journal Ethics and Impact

JENNIFER J. FREYD, PhD
Department of Psychology, University of Oregon, Eugene, Oregon, USA

Editing and publishing a peer-reviewed journal offers numerous opportunities to ponder issues of ethics and impact. Thanks to Taylor & Francis, the *Journal of Trauma & Dissociation* (*JTD*) is now a member of the Committee on Publication Ethics. The Committee on Publication Ethics (http://publicationethics.org/) offers guidelines and consulting for maintaining ethical procedures. In a similar spirit, we have recently updated our system for ensuring compliance with various important ethics guidelines in publication. One aspect of this updating is our new Author Assurances and Submission Checklist, which authors are required to fill out prior to peer review. This form allows the corresponding author to confirm compliance with a number of important *JTD* policies, including those established for research involving the use of human participants, case study presentations, originality of publication, and disclosure of any financial or nonfinancial conflict of interest.

For journal submissions that include case studies, we also emphasize in our Case Presentation Checklist (http://dynamic.uoregon.edu/~jjf/jtd/casechecklist.html) that client or patient informed consent and confidentiality is a professional and ethical imperative. *JTD* requires that patients give informed consent to have their cases written up and that client identity be adequately disguised in published articles. At the same time, case presentations must have epistemological integrity—they should not be fictionalized, but rather identity should be disguised while retaining the fidelity of essential case information. If the disguising is accomplished correctly, the client should be able to recognize himself or herself, but others should not. If the client's life experiences are unique yet sufficiently critical to the presenting problem and/or treatment as to prevent the case from being adequately

---

Received 14 June 2009.

Address correspondence to Jennifer J. Freyd, PhD, Department of Psychology, University of Oregon, Eugene, OR 97403-1227. E-mail: jjf@dynamic.uoregon.edu

disguised, then the author should obtain a separate signed publication release from the client. That separate release should be founded on the client having actually read the case presentation, agreeing with the manner in which his or her identity is presented, and confirming that the case description is adequately truthful. Because of our value on authenticity and the veracity of crucial case information, *JTD* does not publish composite case studies.

As part of the ethical treatment of human participants in research, we request on our assurance form that authors indicate explicitly that participants gave informed consent and that the research was approved by an institutional review board. Our intention is to set expectations based on sound ethical principles and decision-making procedures. Under unusual circumstances there may be reasons for exceptions to these expectations, for example when research must be conducted in locations or contexts without an available institutional review board or when there are valid reasons for waiving informed consent (see, e.g., Department of Health and Human Services Protection of Human Subjects, 2005, §46.116). In these cases, there must be a compelling justification for the exceptions, which will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis.

Three fundamental principles of the ethical treatment of human participants were articulated in the Belmont Report (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979): respect for persons, beneficence, and justice. Ethical decision making about research with human participants involves a risk/benefit analysis in which "risks to subjects are reasonable in relation to anticipated benefits, if any, to subjects, and the importance of the knowledge that may reasonably be expected to result" (Department of Health and Human Services Protection of Human Subjects, 2005, §46.111).

Authors submitting to *JTD* are also encouraged to review the American Psychological Association (APA; 2002) guidelines for ethical research with human participants. Although the APA ethics code is a helpful guide for making ethical decisions about research with human participants, it is an evolving document, and there is room for clarification and improvement. For instance, I recently discovered a source of possible confusion under Section 8.05, "Dispensing With Informed Consent for Research" (APA, 2002). I made this discovery while corresponding with an author who had submitted an article to this journal. The author claimed that her research group had "dispensed with informed consent" per APA guidelines.

Under most circumstances, providing informed consent is a central aspect of ethical research practice. It relates directly to respect for persons, one of the three central principles in the Belmont Report. Given the nature of the research, I was initially concerned to learn that no informed consent had been provided. When I pressed for more information, I discovered that the research group had in fact fully informed their participants but had waived signature requirements for documentation of that informed consent process. Although the researchers who contacted me did not collect signatures from participants, participants were instructed not to proceed with the research unless they felt comfortable doing so after having read a description of the process, having read their rights, and so on. That is, they were informed not to continue if they were uncomfortable after having read a description of the research. Waiving written documentation of informed consent is different from waiving informed consent itself. A waiver of written documentation was arguably appropriate in this particular case, as it increased anonymity for the participants in a data collection situation in which loss of confidentiality was the most significant risk to participants. In my opinion, the researchers did not dispense with informed consent, but they apparently thought they had based on the APA ethics code.

Investigating further, I learned that the authors of the submission had found the phrase "anonymous questionnaires" in Section 8.05, and that had led to what I saw as a significant confusion about what "dispensing" with informed consent actually entails.

> 8.05 Dispensing With Informed Consent for Research Psychologists may dispense with informed consent only (1) where research would not reasonably be assumed to create distress or harm and involves (a) the study of normal educational practices, curricula, or classroom management methods conducted in educational settings; (b) only anonymous questionnaires, naturalistic observations, or archival research for which disclosure of responses would not place participants at risk of criminal or civil liability or damage their financial standing, employability, or reputation, and confidentiality is protected; or (c) the study of factors related to job or organization effectiveness conducted in organizational settings for which there is no risk to participants' employability, and confidentiality is protected or (2) where otherwise permitted by law or federal or institutional regulations. (APA, 2002)

It appears that Part (1)(b) of Section 8.05 of the APA ethics code inadvertently blurs the separate issues of dispensing with informed consent and waiving the requirement for a signature by including "anonymous questionnaires" with very different situations such as "naturalistic observations." I have written to the APA Ethics Director to recommend that more clarity be brought to these issues in future versions of the APA code, such as by drawing a distinction between true dispensing of informed consent versus the waiving of certain forms of documentation of informed consent. These situations can have very different rationales and very different implications for participants and researchers. The fact that a questionnaire is anonymous is no justification per se for dispensing with informed consent, but only a possible justification for dispensing with certain kinds of documentation that informed consent has occurred when anonymity is particularly important.

This example serves as a reminder that no set of ethics codes can substitute for thinking through ethical issues on a case-by-case basis.

A quite different set of ethical issues arise from the use of bibliometric indices in evaluating the performance of journals and authors. *JTD* authors occasionally question (and sometimes pester) me about *JTD*'s "impact factor." At times it seems that there is a belief that the *JTD* staff or our publishers can simply calculate and report an impact factor. However, what is usually meant by the phrase "impact factor" is a particular metric provided by the Thomson Reuters corporation known more accurately as the Journal Impact Factor (JIF). *JTD* is not currently provided with a JIF, but it may be in the future.

Briefly, the JIF is calculated by dividing the number of current-year citations to items published in that journal during the previous 2 years by the number of published items. However, the devil is in the details. Thomson Reuters (owners of the Institute for Scientific Information [ISI]) controls and keeps partially secret the JIF calculation process. Which journals "count" for citations and even which articles go into the numerator and denominator of the calculation obviously determine the factor. These variables are largely under the control of Thomson Reuters for the JIF calculation.

Taylor & Francis will soon be submitting an application requesting that *JTD* be indexed by Thomson Reuters, a necessary first step in the calculation of a JIF. They must submit three consecutive issues of *JTD* for Thomson Reuters to review to gain acceptance into the Social Science Citation Index (SSCI) so that eventually a JIF can be calculated. Factors Thomson Reuters will consider include timeliness of publication, editorial board strength, international diversity of authors and editorial board members, and how well a journal meets normal publishing standards. For each of these factors I believe *JTD* is in very good standing. I have been informed that citations to *JTD* in SSCI journals is the largest factor Thomson Reuters will consider. Citations to *JTD* in journals not yet included in the SSCI will not be factored into their analysis.

The recent switch to Taylor & Francis should be beneficial to *JTD*'s evaluation by ISI. Apparently, journals published by Haworth Press (our former publisher) were often not selected for indexing by SSCI. The print version of *JTD* is as citable now as it was when it was at Haworth, but the digital version of the journal is more accessible now. The digital version offered through Taylor & Francis's Informaworld is easier to search, *JTD* is carried in new consortium deals, and International Society for the Study of Trauma and Dissociation members all now have digital access to the journal. Selecting the right time to submit an application is an important task for Taylor & Francis, because were our journal to be rejected for SSCI indexing would mean a lengthy delay before the next application could be submitted. ISI imposes a 2-year waiting period before they will reconsider a title after a rejection.

Assuming all goes well, it will likely be approximately 3 years before *JTD* gets a full 2-year JIF. This is because it will take about 1 year for the initial review and then 2 years of tracking citations to *JTD* in other SSCI journals. ISI releases their citation record only once every June. Thus, if *JTD* is accepted for entry in July 2010, it would be June 2011 before the journal would be able to tout its first partial JIF (covering 2010 citations), and it would be June 2012 before it would be able to publicize a full (2-year) JIF (covering 2010 and 2011 citations).

Although we will soon be beginning the process to receive a JIF, readers should be aware of the many limitations of this metric. There is a growing literature analyzing the role of bibliometrics in scientific and scholarly publishing. Numerous authors (e.g., Bowman & Stergiou, 2008; Brumback, 2009; Lawrence, 2008; Simons, 2008; Todd & Ladle, 2008) have raised serious concerns about the limitations and misuse of bibliometric indices. Among the limitations and misuses are the following:

1. The secrecy and proprietary nature of the specific information ISI uses for calculating the JIF is a limitation. Good science is transparent and is subject to replication.
2. The JIF is not validated.
3. There is error and ambiguity in the citation databases. Errors in citations within papers, authors with identical or similar names, and inconsistent journal name abbreviations are a few of the many problems.
4. Journals and journal editors can and do game the system. For instance, publishing a larger percentage of review articles, requiring authors to cite papers published in the same journal, or changing the percentage of “citable items” that are likely to enter the JIF equation are well-known ways to manipulate JIFs.
5. The 2-year citation counting period rules out measuring the enduring impact of some papers that may be cited for years to come.
6. Ideas that are very influential may become standard in the field, no longer requiring citation. This means that papers with groundbreaking ideas and techniques may not be cited at all because their influence is absorbed into the field.
7. ISI only counts citations in some journals, and that selection is controlled by a proprietary entity, not an open community of scientists or scholars. Journals in emerging cross-disciplinary fields and international journals are less likely to be indexed. Furthermore, the percentage of journals ISI counts varies by field, so journals in some fields will necessarily have higher impact factors than those in another field.
8. Counting citations is not a direct measure of quality. At best, it is a metric of utility. There are many reasons a paper may get cited that are not directly about quality. For instance, some famous papers in our field are routinely cited as an example of a problematic approach. Review papers

are cited more often than original papers because it is efficient to do so, but that does not mean that the review papers have more value than the original works.

9. The absolute value of a JIF is not meaningful. At best, it must be interpreted in context, because some fields overall have much higher impact factors, perhaps because of the percentage of journals indexed and the citation behavior in those fields.
10. The JIF is designed to be a measure of journals, not individual authors who publish in those journals. One or two oft-cited articles per issue can raise the impact factor substantially, even if the other articles are never cited. To use the overall impact factor for an article that is not itself cited is clearly a misapplication. Similarly, to use JIFs in hiring or promoting individuals is a misapplication of the metric and an abrogation of our duty to evaluate the actual intellectual merits of the candidate's work.

Some of these issues arise because of the particular citation database, whereas others are specific to the JIF. The SSCI database is used by several indexes of journal impact, including the Eigenfactor (Bergstrom, West, & Wiseman, 2008) and the JIF. There are also alternative bibliometric services that do not depend on the SSCI database. Perhaps the best known is Google Scholar (http://scholar.google.com/), which does include *JTD* articles in its database. Google Scholar does not currently offer a journal impact measure, but it does allow for citation tracking with a much more inclusive database. *JTD* has also been selected by other important databases and indexes of scholarly publications (e.g., Medline and PsycINFO) that do not currently offer citation analyses or measures of journal impact. Being indexed is very good for a journal's visibility and actual intellectual impact. The work is more likely to be discovered by other researchers and cited when it is included in major indices. SSCI's Web of Science is a particularly useful tool. It would thus certainly be good for *JTD*'s visibility and impact on the field to be selected for indexing by the SSCI.

Many of the problems with the JIF discussed here can be corrected with better bibliometric approaches, but it will remain important that we not let citation-counting trump intellectual analysis and evaluation. There is simply no substitute for the intellectual evaluation of scholarship. Speaking of intellectual impact, in prior *JTD* editorials I have mentioned our efforts at the University of Oregon to digitize important papers in the field of trauma and dissociation. Digitizing such material and making it available for free to the world through open-access Web publication is one way to increase the impact of our work in this field. I was pleased to learn recently that in June 2009 the Dissociation and Trauma Archives digital collection (http://boundless.uoregon.edu/digcol/diss/index.html) was selected as a featured collection by the OCLC Online Computer Library Center (http://www.oclc.org/contentdm/default.htm).

I am proud of the innovative, insightful, and intelligent work we have the privilege of publishing in *JTD*. With this final issue of Volume 10, our transition to Taylor & Francis is also complete. Online content for all volumes of *JTD* is available on Taylor & Francis's Informaworld. We are pleased with the new journal size, the new cover, and the reliable production schedule offered by Taylor & Francis.

JTD welcomes the following new editorial board members for Volume 11: Carolyn Allard, PhD, Andrew Moskowitz, PhD, Ellert Nijenhuis, PhD, and Oxana Palesh, PhD. These individuals are already hard at work helping us select the papers that will appear in 2010. The quality of our peer review is a result of the excellence and integrity of our editorial board and reviewers complemented with our peer-review process. *JTD* sends papers out for anonymous review only after de-identifying them by removing authorship information. This practice has an important ethical and practical motivation: It is intended to reduce bias that could lead to both injustice and poor selection processes. For instance, Handelsman and Grymes (2008) reviewed empirical evidence that de-identification in the peer-review process demonstrably reduces gender bias. De-identification also means that submissions from new scholars will receive the same attention as submissions from established authors.

As always, I invite you to send us your best work for future issues. Authors should check http://dynamic.uoregon.edu/~jjf/jtd/ for submission information, links, updates, and announcements. I hope you enjoy reading the articles in this issue of *JTD*.

REFERENCES

American Psychological Association. (2002). *Ethical principles of psychologists and code of conduct*. Retrieved June 12, 2009, from www.apa.org/ethics/code2002.html

Bergstrom, C. T., West, J. D., & Wiseman, M. A. (2008). The eigenfactor metrics [Electronic version]. *Journal of Neuroscience, 28,* 11433–11434. Retrieved June 13, 2009, from www.eigenfactor.org/BergstromEtAl08.pdf

Bowman, H. I., & Stergiou, K. I. (2008). The use and misuse of bibliometric indices in evaluating scholarly performance. *Ethics in Science and Environmental Politics*, *8*, 1–3.

Brumback, R. A. (2009). Impact factor wars: Episode V–The empire strikes back. *Journal of Child Neurology*, *24*, 260–262.

Department of Health and Human Services Protection of Human Subjects, 45 C.F.R. § 46 (2005). Retrieved June 13, 2009, from www.hhs.gov/ohrp/humansubjects/guidance/45cfr46.htm

Handelsman, J., & Grymes, R. A. (2008). Looking for a few good women? *DNA and Cell Biology*, *27*, 463–465.

Lawrence, P. A. (2008). Lost in publication: How measurement harms science. *Ethics in Science and Environmental Politics*, *8*, 9–11.

National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research. (1979, April 18). *The Belmont report: Ethical principles and guidelines for the protection of human subjects of research*. Retrieved June 13, 2009, from www.hhs.gov/ohrp/humansubjects/guidance/belmont.htm

Simons, K. (2008, October 10). The misused impact factor. *Science*, *322*, 165.

Todd, P. A., & Ladle, R. J. (2008). Hidden dangers of a "citation culture." *Ethics in Science and Environmental Politics*, *8*, 13–16.