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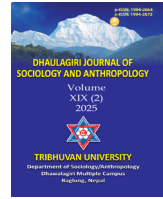
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<u>Dhaulagiri Journal of Sociology and Anthropology</u>

Editorial
Authorship and Contributorship in Publication Ethics and Guidelines: The Publishers' Perspective

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Introduction

Authorship and contributorship are among the most important, sensitive, and complex areas of academia and thus demand critical awareness among the authors, editors, and readers. The primary concern of ethical authorship is maintaining integrity in scholarly publications. Kambhampati and Maini (2023) emphasized that maintaining transparency, fairness, and responsibility in communicating research findings to the academic community are the core elements of authorship ethics. Osborne and Holland (2009) presented ten thematic issues regarding authorship, including: authorship, authorship credit, student authorship, recognizing contributors, agreement of contributors, plagiarism, seniority, authorship policy, review/approval of manuscript, and authorship order. Many academic disciplines set ethical criteria to be recognized as an author. Among others, the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE), also known as the Vancouver Guidelines, "Authorship confers credit and has important academic, social, and financial implications" (https://www.icmje.org/recommendations/browse/roles-and-responsibilities/defining-the-role-of-authors-and-contributors.html). The ICMJE focuses on four elements to qualify as an author: Substantial Contribution (conception, design, data acquisition, analysis, or interpretation), Drafting or Critical Revision (for important intellectual content), Final Approval (of the version to be published), and Accountability (agreement to be accountable for all aspects, ensuring integrity).

Academic publications are the cornerstone for professional development, fueling competition among scholars for career advancement and institutional recognition. Most importantly, the "publish or perish" culture puts pressure on researchers to publish papers in high-impact journals and in high volume, which often results in unethical practices in authorship, such as 'Gift/Guest Authors' and 'Ghost Authors.' The first one refers to individuals who do not meet the ICMJE criteria but are listed as authors either to secure funding or lend credibility or get favor from the editor; while the latter 'Ghost Authors' are persons who meet the ICMJE criteria but are excluded from authors' list, often due to being a junior researcher (Feeser & Simon, 2008; Mandal et al., 2016; Resnik & Smith, 2023; Shah, 2015). Gift authorship is also linked to trading authorship, in which authorship is gifted in exchange for a favor, and to coerced authorship, in which junior researchers are forced to include senior figures (Resnik & Smith, 2023). Another variant of gift authorship is Mutual Support Authorship (Abbas et al., 2022; Gureev et al., 2019), in which academics mutually agree to place each other's names on their respective research papers to increase their publication counts artificially. Because of the prevalence of such practices in modern authorship and

contributionship, it is a critical concern for journal editors (Pruschak et al., 2022).

This editorial note attempts to answer: Who should be recognized as authors? Who is the most responsible agency to control it, whether a publisher or academics? Based on a review of literature and policy documents, this note provides an overview of authorship types and their significance, followed by a comparative analysis of authorship criteria established by the Committee of Publication Ethics (COPE), American Psychological Association (APA), Elsevier, and ICMJE. Specifically, this editorial aims to raise awareness among early-career researchers about authorship and contributionship, and encourage them to practice ethically and with integrity in scientific journals, in general, and in the *Dhaulagiri Journal of Sociology and Anthropology* (DJSA) in particular. Additionally, it aims to inform them of the issues and challenges regarding authorship and contributorship, as well as the ethical practices outlined in the journal's guidelines and procedures. We present this paper from a publisher's perspective, i.e., a part of the author's guidelines of the DJSA. This discussion is expected to limit unethical practices among researchers and maintain the highest standard of ethical conduct. As this editorial

Conceptualizing Authorship and Contributorship

Before we delve into the main content, we explore definitions of authorship and contributorship. Osborne and Holland (2009) emphasize that authorship varies across disciplines, reflecting its relevance to the scholarly context. Simkhada et al. (2022) also remind us that different academic disciplines have different traditions regarding authorship, which they argue is particularly important for authors working in interdisciplinary teams. For this purpose, we refer to the definitions provided by the Committee of Publication Ethics (COPE) and the American Psychological Association (APA). According to COPE, "Authorship can refer to individuals or groups that create an idea or develop the publication that disseminates intellectual or creative work." (https://publicationethics. org/guidance/discussion-document/authorship) Similarly, the APA asserts that "Authorship is reserved for persons who make a substantial contribution to and who accept responsibility for a published work. Individuals should take authorship credit only for work they have performed or to which they have substantially contributed (APA Ethics Code Standard 8.12a, Publication Credit). Furthermore, the National Library of Medicine (https://www.ncbi.nlm. nih.gov/books/NBK236202/) has defined authorship as:

Authorship refers to the listing of names of participants in all communications, both oral and written, of experimental results and their interpretation to scientific colleagues. Authorship is the fulfillment of the responsibility to communicate research results to the scientific community for external evaluation. Authorship is

also the primary mechanism for determining the allocation of credit for scientific advances and thus the primary basis for assessing a scientist's contributions to developing new knowledge. As such, it potentially conveys great benefit, as well as responsibility.

Both definitions share similarities but differ in focus. COPE highlights contribution and responsibility, while APA stresses the same. Authorship and contributorship relate only to contribution level and credits.

Authorship Types

Many terms are used to denote distinct author positions, such as primary author, contributing author, senior author, last author, and/or corresponding author. Typically, the principal author who contributes most to the writing is placed first, and in some disciplines, the senior author is placed last.

Authorship issues are often contentious, and inappropriately including or excluding authors is considered academic misconduct. The key questions are: Who should be an author of the paper, and who should not? Mishra et al. (2018) proposed three criteria for authorship: taking responsibility, substantial involvement in the paper's production, and approval of the final version by all listed authors. However, scholars have identified several types of authorship, which are typically unethical, such as gift/guest authorship, ghost authorship, and honorary authorship (also discussed above). According to Elsevier (https:// researcheracademy.elsevier.com/uploads/2018-02/2017_ ETHICS_AUTH02.pdf), "guest authors" are individuals listed without meaningful contributions, often intended to enhance the chances of publication; Ghost authors are those who make substantial contributions but remain unacknowledged; the "gift / honorary" authors, also referred to as "Coercion/Hostaged Authors" (Abbas et al., 2022; Rivera 202), or as "promiscuous authorship" (Strange 2018), are those who are included solely based on tenuous affiliation. The "Mutual Support Authorship" is another unethical practice in which researchers from different projects mutually agree to place each other's names on their respective research to artificially increase their number of publications (Gureev et al., 2019). Gureev et al. (2019) also reported the 'Sold Authorship', a most significant violation of the criteria for authorship, in which payment for a place in the byline is involved. Based on these examples and substantial contributions required to qualified and be acknowledged as authors, the issue is fundamental to scientific publishing.

We stress that inappropriate authorship (Mishra et al., 2018) significantly affects the integrity of scientific communication. Unethical practices undermine credibility, accountability, and transparency. Key questions include: How should contributors with minimal involvement be acknowledged? What criteria determine the appropriate sequence of authors? What are the most critical areas to

which an author should contribute? Who is responsible for dealing with these ethical issues while writing and submitting a paper to a journal? Since academic journals must be aware of various misconduct in the course of editing and reviewing papers, the journal family may or may not trace this misconduct; however, as academics are expected to maintain the highest level of ethical standards, they should be made aware at an early stage of their career so they do not follow an unethical path knowingly or unknowingly.

Comparative Review of Authorship Criteria

Authorship and contributorship standards vary across disciplines and publishers (Table 1). CRediT Taxonomy recognizes both roles in Table 2. It is recognized that with multiple authors or researchers, determining each author's responsibilities and deciding on authorship order can be challenging (Carver et al., 2011).

Table 1
Comparative matrix of authorship criteria (ICMJE, Elsevier, and COPE)

Organization/System	Focus	Core Authorship Criteria
ICMJE (International Committee of Medical Journal Editors)	Defining Authorship (Widely adopted by many journals/ publishers and academia).	All 4 must be met: 1. Substantial Contribution (Conception, design, data acquisition, analysis, or interpretation). 2. Drafting or Critical Revision (For important intellectual content). 3. Final Approval (of version to be published). 4. Accountability (Agreement to be accountable for all aspects, ensuring integrity).
Elsevier	Publisher Policy	Generally, adopts and aligns with the ICMJE criteria for defining authorship.
APA (American Psychological Association)	Disciplinary Guideline (Social Sciences)	1. Making a substantial contribution to the work (e.g., conceptualization, design, data analysis, interpretation). 2. Writing the manuscript or revising it critically. (Similar to ICMJE 1 & 2)
COPE (Committee on Publication Ethics)	Ethical Guidance for Publishers/Editors	Focuses on minimum requirements and ethical issues: 1. Substantial contribution to the work. 2. Accountability for the work and its published form.

Based on Table 1, above, the following summary could be made:

ICMJE: The most stringent criteria; failure to meet even one criterion means the individual should be listed in the Acknowledgements. Emphasizes responsibility.

Elsevier: Actively encourages the use of the CRediT taxonomy (see below) to provide a transparent declaration of individual contributions, in addition to meeting the authorship criteria.

APA: Places a strong emphasis on relative contributions and order of authorship, recommending that these decisions be made early and formally. Less prescriptive than ICMJE on the "four-criteria" model, but upholds the same core principles of contribution and responsibility.

COPE: Provides flowcharts and guidance for handling disputes (e.g., ghost, guest, or gift authorship). It supports journals in developing transparent policies, with ICMJE as a reliable model.

Table 2
CRediT role category and description

Role Category	Description
Conceptualization	Ideas formulation or evolution of overarching research goals.
Methodology	Development or design of methodology.
Software	Programming, software development, or implementation.

Role Category	Description
Validation	Verification of results/ components.
Formal Analysis	Application of statistical, mathematical, or other techniques.
Investigation	Conducting a research process or investigation, data collection.
Resources	Providing study materials, reagents, equipment, patients, etc.
Data Curation	Maintaining, annotating, and archiving data.
Writing – Original Draft	Creating the initial draft of the manuscript.
Writing – Review & Edit	Reviewing and revising the manuscript.
Visualization	Preparation, creation, or presentation of visual materials.
Supervision	Oversight and leadership responsibility for research activity planning and execution.
Project Administration	Management and coordination of the research activity.
Funding Acquisition	Acquiring financial support for the project.

There are disciplines and countries/regions with higher rates of unethical authorship practices. The Biomedical/ Health Research (Medicine) field has a high prevalence of inappropriate authorship, such that 75% of biomedical researchers have experienced the addition of an undeserving author, i.e., gifted authorship (Storms 2024; Marušić, et al., 2011). Almost half of the researchers from Psychology / Social Sciences disciplines also reported experiencing 'gift authorship' (Gureev et al., 2019; Storms, 2024).

Unfortunately, gift autho,rship and mutually agreed authorship are still too common. Moreover, issues around inappropriate authorship order remain common. One of the authors of this editorial (RP) experienced in the early stage of his career that the journal editor to whom a manuscript was submitted had listed his name as the first author, although he had never been involved in the research nor in the manuscript development. In fact, he has not edited even a single word in the manuscript. This form of malpractice ruins the legacy of true researchers. At a less catastrophic level, all authors of the editorial have experienced the inclusion of co-authors who might have been grant holders, but were not much involved in the research or the writing of the paper. More borderline is the inclusion of researchers who worked hard on another part of the study but did not contribute to the actual research

in the paper, nor to the writing of the paper on which their names are added.

A less discussed issue is unethical authorship omission. For example, one of the authors of this editorial (MS) had contributed substantially (such as designing the study, analyzing data, and writing sections) to University Grant Commission-funded institutional research in Tribhuvan University, Nepal. The principal investigator (PI) published a sole-authored book based on research MS contributed to, not including MS. The PI might have thought that he would receive higher marks if he submitted a sole-authored book to the service commission for his professorship. ICMJE emphasizes that denying rightful authorship constitutes academic misconduct. Furthermore, misrepresenting who contributed undermines trust in the research process and violates the principles of fairness, transparency, and accountability in scholarship.

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DJSA affirms its commitment to follow rigorous scholarly standards. It adheres to four authorship criteria of ICMJE (Table 1) principles of responsible and accountable authorship four criteria of ICMJE. The DJSA follows no discrimination or bias toward authors on the basis of their socio-economic origin and cultural background. Carver et al. (2011) argued that institutions should adopt formal policies on misconduct, including authorship and plagiarism. The DJSA has not yet publicly disclosed full authorship criteria; however, the members of the editorial board are well aware of the issue and repeatedly inform and request prospective authors that they are required to disclose their contribution to the manuscript, acknowledge their contribution, declare a conflict of interest, and obtain final approval and acceptance of the revised paper. In the past, our reviewers have traced the gift authorship based on language editing, especially pronouns used inconsistently in the text; it is quite difficult to trace the ghost author(s). Similarly, tracing AI-generated papers is challenging. The authors are requested to use AI as a 'library' or a tool for improving their written text, not as the 'creator.' The DJSA is committed to maintaining scholarly merit through legitimate contributions to scholarly work, ensuring that academia maintains its ethical standards and morale, which have eroded in many areas.

Conclusions

Complexity and challenges are observed in authorship and contributorship. There are several models. The two tables above present different ideas of authorship. Both authors/academics and publishers must work collectively and diligently to maintain ethical publication standards to avoid promiscuous authorship.

Declarations

Ethics approval and Consent to Participate
Not applicable
Consent for Publication
Not applicable

Availability of Data and Materials
The datasets generated and analyzed during this study are available on reasonable request.

Competing Interests
There is no competing interest on authors.

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Authors' Contributions
The research undertaken by four authors. The first author developed the concept and wrote the first draft, while other authors added their knowledge and experiences to complete the manuscript.

Use of AI
AI was used to improve the language.

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