

Defining or Re-Defining PI

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HIGHLIGHT

PI should be the principal investigator. But many times PI has been assigned to other roles played in a research.

ABSTRACT

As the principal investigator PI should be responsible for all the responsibility for a publication that his/her name is assigned as a corresponding author. When a PI took all or the most credit for a publication when that publication was glorified s/he should also be held responsible for all or major mistakes communicated in that publication.

KEY WORDS

PI, Principal investigator, Corresponding author, Contribution, Honor, Responsibility, Misconduct

PI in scientific research world usually means the Principal Investigator.

In the old days, PI not only found the money to support the research but also did the investigation in the research. Thus, when a paper is written (mainly by the PI) for publication, the corresponding honor and also the responsibility for the publication is naturally assigned to the PI. If the publication reveal a real truth that is very important discovery then the PI will be the undisputable candidate for any award given for that discovery.

However, if the corresponding author really being assigned to the Principal Investigator in all the scientific publications today?

No! It is absolutely not.

It is hard to argue that many corresponding authors are not the Principal Investigators when the publications are in their glory phase. As a matter of fact, all the corresponding authors of these publications will claim themselves as the Principal Investigators and will not decline any award given

for their discovery. But the pseudo-PI status can be easily exposed when the publication is under fire. Then the paper PI wrapped around the discovery will evaporate/escape first and leaving behind the true research PI to suffer the burn. We have seen such “corresponding” author from decline any investigator’s role in the famous stem cell scandal (see http://im1.biz/albums/userpics/10001/SE2006V1N1_A10_Schatten.pdf) last year in *Science*. Now we see “corresponding” author Nilsson has denied his investigation role in a then “discovery” and now “misconception”. Interestingly, Nilsson has not yet declined the 2007 Marcus Wallenberg Prize that was awarded for his (not Huang’s) discovery reported in the now retracted 2005 Science paper.

In my observations, many PI assigned corresponding author honor are not any true sense PI - the Principal Investigators. They are more like the Principal Investors (actually investing received money to his/her subordinate’s investigations) or the Principal Invitors (inviting others to join a

collaborative research investigated by his/her research team). The major roles played by these PIs may be supported by their political capability or power to grab financial resources and/or organize research collaboration. They may also play a key role in securing a publication, especially a publication in some high impact factor journals. But their intellectual contribution to the invention-side or their research contribution to the investigation part of the study may be very limited.

So these PIs really have a reason to complain themselves being held up for any investigation error or misconduct for any publication that does not contain their discovery. But they deserve such blame because they choose to take the Corresponding author's honor and thus should be held responsible. To be more frank, they should not deserve the glory for the discovery that it is not their investigation but should deserve the punishment for the publication of any lies that they signed off as the corresponding authors.

Because there are many meanings practically under the name of a PI, I suggest all journals take a procedure to identify who is the true PI - the Principal Investigators and clearly assigned this honor and also responsibility to the appropriate author(s) up front at the publication time. If there is a need to separate PI from the corresponding author, then distinction should also be made clearly at the publishing time, too. In this way, readers as well as prize selection committees will have a much easy time to identify the respective contribution to a scientific publication and find correct responsible authors for their true contribution to the discovery or fakery.