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Research Errors and Fraud Case study 2

[The COPE Report 2003, case 98/24](#)

Surprising results and a new area of research for a senior author?

A paper described an unusual approach to disease modulation in an experimental animal model. The apparently clear cut findings were somewhat surprising. The authors also seem to have used high and low power photomicrographs of the same tissue sections to illustrate completely different experiments within the study.

This occurred twice in the paper. Furthermore, this particular area of study was a complete departure from the previous work of the first and senior authors. The editor wrote to the authors pointing out that the photos were the same. He received a garbled response, saying that computer photomicrographs got muddled up. There were 15 authors, all of whom were faxed. The first author responded immediately.

Discussion/Advice

- Need to pin down author responsibility and responsibility for data collection.
- This is either an author muddle or fraud.
- Editor should ask to see the raw data.

Outcome

Further correspondence took place between the editor and the corresponding author, and two further sets of figures were received for consideration. The editorial team were unsure as to whether this constituted fraud and rejected the paper on the grounds that they "had lost confidence in the data." The rejection letter was sent to all the authors.