

Editorial

Credit where credit is due

I know you not, C Mader¹ and RM Esberard²—but please forgive me. In 1979 I published in *Quintessence International* what I believed at the time to be the first publication documenting restoration of fractured maxillary central incisors by bonding the fractured teeth fragments back in place using the acid-etch technique.³ I followed this with a 1982 publication⁴ in the *Journal of the American Dental Association*. However, I was later surprised to learn that these were *not* the first publications on this topic.

Perhaps I could be forgiven, in 1979, of being unaware of two previous publications on the same technique from the year before. I hope that I am not clutching at straws by suggesting that my paper may even have been submitted for publication prior to the other reports appearing in print. Be that as it may, there is no excuse for my failing to be aware of the earlier reports of a similar procedure in my second publication—I should have searched, and I would have found. In 1982, I simply assumed there were no papers predating my 1979 publication.

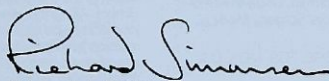
I have felt badly about this lapse ever since I discovered the earlier reports several years later. I still feel badly about it. The only good part is that I never claimed in my publications that I was the first to report on this technique. However, I must admit, I took some measure of satisfaction from personally believing that I had published “first” on this technique. Fortunately, I heeded my mother’s admonition from my upbringing in England: Better to let one’s achievements speak for themselves. A good lesson many would do well to heed.

John McLean’s letter, published in this issue, spurred me to discuss this topic. It is an important principle. Giving credit where credit is due is the honorable and honest, albeit unenforceable, rule that everyone who publishes in the scientific literature should follow. Dr McLean, one of the grand old men of dentistry—(having some weeks ago reached 70 years of age, I hope he will not be offended by the title!)—is attempting to set the record straight on some publications that predate the classic 1955 report of Buonocore⁵ on the phosphoric acid treatment of enamel. Clearly, any report that relates to new breakthroughs should be referenced, for few thoughts are truly from one mind. Most are molded from

perhaps forgotten acquisition of knowledge from other sources. However, while some reports may, in hindsight, appear to be early reports of subsequently reported techniques, the earlier author may not have had the knowledge or the vision of the later author who put all the pieces of the puzzle together.

The basic principle, however, should be taken to heart by all. Everyone—authors, reviewers, editors—must try to screen papers for appropriate attribution of credit. Recently I have seen two publications (embarrassingly, one earlier this year in *QI*!) where the credit for the conceptual development of wet dentinal bonding was not attributed to John Kanca⁶ as it should have been. It does not feel very good when someone fails to give one credit for earlier, perhaps pioneering, publications. However, I think it feels worse to accidentally omit giving credit where it is due. The error runs the risk of becoming “fact” as other authors quote the new publications that omitted the pioneering paper. The pioneering paper then becomes lost in the sheer volume of the later publications, as has happened, perhaps, with some of the work of Haggar, Castan, Kramer, and McLean.

We should all do our best. I wish I had been more vigilant. We must give credit where credit is due.



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