Graduate Students as Authors*

Professor Ashley Jefferson studies U.S. Southern culture and is at work on a study of race and lynching. By all accounts, this study will receive wide attention when it is finished. Jefferson relies on graduate students to examine archives and to conduct some interviews. One of those graduate students, Patrick Rowe, conducted three in-person interviews with Sadie Jones, an elderly African-American woman who witnessed several lynchings in her youth, including the killing of her cousin.

Through a friend, Rowe learns that Jefferson gave a presentation about these interviews during an academic conference on race and quoted Jones's poetic statements about brotherhood and redemption. Rowe said this was odd, because in the interviews he handed over to Jefferson, Jones had done little more than quote Scripture and talk about God's will. In fact, he doesn't remember that Jones said anything worth while at all. Where had these memorable statements come from? He was at a loss to say, because Jefferson never sent him a copy of the presentation.

The friend suggests that Rowe look into the matter because Jefferson mentioned him as a coauthor. Because Rowe discusses the matter with a number of friends in his department, word about his concern filters back to Jefferson. Jefferson recommends to the department head that Rowe not be rehired, saying his interviews were shallow. What's more, Jefferson says he himself had to reinterview Jones to have her open up and share her sharp insight and clear recollections of the lynchings. The department head raises no concern here, but he does remind Jefferson that the student should be listed as a coauthor on any publications to which he contributed. Jefferson assures him he has already seen to this.

The department head then asks whether Jefferson's tape recordings of interviews with Jones could be made available for an online presentation of the department's works. The department head says it would be scintillating to hear that woman talk about the lynchings in her own voice and with her own charged language. Jefferson regrets he can't help the department, because his tape recorder wasn't working when he telephoned Jones. He has only some of the notes he took immediately after their conversation.

Questions

1. As a graduate student and employee, Patrick Rowe faces certain hurdles in trying to clarify the origin of interviews ascribed to Sadie Jones. What actions should he take if he believes that the content of the interviews has been falsified?

2. Professor Jefferson is not under obligation to record every interview on audiotape. Because he has not recorded his calls to Jones, do you believe that misconduct or evidence of retaliation could be meaningfully ascertained if an investigation were to be launched?

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**Suspecting Misconduct**

*Part A*

Armstrong is a first-year graduate student in a molecular biology laboratory, and Hayes is her scientific idol. Hayes, who is just finishing his thesis work, has a golden touch. Every experiment he does produces clean, crisp data: the lines fall through the points, scatter is less than or equal to theoretical predictions, etc. Because his experiments seldom need to be repeated, Hayes has produced an awesome thesis, full of new, fascinating, and demonstrably correct results. Indeed, the laboratory has already followed up on many of these leads with telling success.

One day Armstrong notices Hayes leaving the scintillation counter and can’t help noticing that he has 80 vials. This barely registers in her subconscious until later in the day when he shows her the—typically beautiful—experimental results with 40 data points. When she asks about the missing points, he explains that it is standard practice to eliminate outliers from the analysis. “What!” Armstrong says, shocked, “50 percent of your points were no good?” “Mind your own business,” Hayes replies sweetly, going about his.

Armstrong is a bit distraught. But at last she summons up her courage and tells their professor this story. He can barely suppress his boredom and his annoyance—he had expected her to present him with results from experiments she has been procrastinating about for two months.

**Questions**

1. Is this really Armstrong’s business? If so, what can she do?
2. Suppose you are Jones, the department chair. After failing with the professor Armstrong comes to you. What can you do?
3. Suppose that you are an interested reader of this work. The data strike you as too good to be true, and you write to the professor asking to see copies of the original data (counter tapes and lab notebook pages). You think there may be an error of interpretation. Does the professor have a responsibility to give these materials to you?
4. Suppose as chair you make the same request, saying you have reason to suspect fraud on Hayes’s part. Does the professor have any responsibility to show them to you?
5. Let’s suppose that the chair succeeds in proving the fraud before any thing has been published. Hayes agrees to leave graduate school, and because he doesn’t force the issue, no formal hearing is convened. (No one wants to do the paperwork.) Nothing more is said. Are there any problems with this solution?

*Part B*

Let’s suppose that Armstrong does nothing, and Hayes’s work eventually fails. After
publication, other labs try hard to repeat it, and despite the original impression that it was all demonstrably correct, no one can get things to work as he did. After an unimpressive postdoc, Hayes has gone on to a good job as a stockbroker, and the professor has moved on to other research topics. Now Armstrong mentions her story to another member of the faculty. The story suggests that the problem wasn’t simply unavoidable error, but fraud.

Questions

1. Does anyone have any responsibility at this point?
2. Can anything be done? Should anything be done?