

CLOSEOUT FOR M92090037

This case was brought to the attention of OIG on September 18, 1992 by [REDACTED] program associate in the [REDACTED] Program, at the request of [REDACTED] Director of the Division of [REDACTED] at NSF. The allegation, prompted by the subject's persistent refusal to share data, was data fabrication or falsification. The subject, [REDACTED] of [REDACTED], received a 1973 award [REDACTED] from NSF for research whose results formed the basis of a widely cited book. Subsequently, two other researchers challenged the accuracy of the subject's findings and requested access to the data on which they were based. The subject was repeatedly unresponsive to their requests and they eventually published an article arguing that her data were inaccurate. When one of the other researchers reviewed a research proposal submitted to NSF by the subject in 1988, he wrote to the program officer about the subject's failure to make her 1973 data readily available for reanalysis. NSF raised this concern with the subject in the course of discussions about her pending career development grant proposal, and delayed processing the award until the subject promised to deposit the data at the [REDACTED] at [REDACTED] (the archive). Shortly thereafter, she deposited the computer tapes and not the raw data, although she told the NSF program officer in charge of the [REDACTED] Program that the archive had all the data.

Two years later, after prodding from the archive, she deposited the raw data, but attached highly restrictive conditions to their use. These were explained as enabling her to do further analyses, but she refused to permit the archive to give yet another researcher access to certain restricted variables to redo the original analyses. Her unwillingness to make her data available for reanalysis led OIG to consider the possibility that the data had been falsified or fabricated.

The subject's actions were clearly inconsistent with the commitment of NSF and the scientific community to open communication. NSF policy, unanimously adopted by the National Science Board, explicitly recognizes the importance the community attaches to openness by "expect[ing] investigators to share with other researchers, ... within a reasonable time, the data... gathered in the course of the[ir] work" and encouraging NSF program managers to implement this policy of openness in "the proposal review process [and] through award negotiations and conditions." (Grants for Research and Education in Science and Engineering, page 17). OIG considered the possibility that the subject's persistent refusal to share data might itself constitute misconduct because it violated community norms regarding openness.

After an exchange of letters in which NSF program officers threatened various severe sanctions if the subject refused to release her data, the subject capitulated and made the data freely available. Her action brings her into compliance with community norms about data sharing and we decided that the subject's earlier reluctance to share her data did not, as such, rise to the level of misconduct. Because the suspicions about data fabrication and falsification were based solely on the circumstantial evidence of the subject's refusal to share data and

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because the subject's subsequent actions seem motivated by her embarrassment at how she coded and analyzed her data (evidenced in her warning to other researchers about possible inaccuracies in coding and analysis and her promise to account for and correct these errors), we now have less reason to worry that the data are not genuine. Moreover, if there was indeed misconduct in data collection or reporting, other researchers will now have direct access to evidence of it and can bring that evidence to our attention. With the data open for scrutiny, the normal processes of scientific evaluation can be counted on to raise issues of misconduct if the newly available facts warrant it.

OIG has determined that there is no reason to continue to pursue this matter. This case is closed without further action.



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