Authorship Problems

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IUPAP Conference on
"Scientific Misconduct and the Role of Physics Journals in its Investigation and Prevention"
London, October 13 and 14, 2003
• Definition of an Author

• Authorship Misconduct

• Role of Journal
Definition of an Author

- Notional understanding:
  - Author = One who contributed significantly to the research being published.

- Some common practices:
  - Large experimental collaborations: Out of 500 authors, one might expect large variations in the degree and amount of research contribution. Might some of the “co-authors” not have even read the paper carefully?
Some common practices (contd):

- Experiments with samples: The provider of a sample (e.g. crystal, meteorite, mouse) is frequently a co-author of every paper based on work done with that sample.

- The guide of a student, or a lab director: Sometimes this person is listed as a co-author on every paper written by that student, or from that lab.
Definition of an Author

- Has the **definition** of authorship **changed** over the years?

- Should this be **formalised/codified**?
Authorship Misconduct

- Forced inclusion: Senior worker (e.g. guide or lab director) forces coworkers to make him/her a co-author even when not appropriate. Sometimes he/she does not know the details of what is in the paper, or isn’t even qualified in the field.

- Forced exclusion: Senior worker removes coworker’s name from paper, though the latter was expecting to be an author.

- Inclusion without knowledge/consent: Junior workers add a senior author’s name hoping to gain easier acceptance of the paper, or other benefit.
Authorship Misconduct

These situations admit considerable variation in the degree of acceptability.

- **Senior workers**: Might genuinely be the best judge of who should/should not be an author. At the other extreme, the senior member may act from narrow self-interest and personal bias.

- **Junior workers**: May genuinely feel a senior colleague’s inclusion is appropriate, despite a relatively “small” contribution. But others might cynically include a name for their personal benefit. Depending on prevalent sociology, they may also assume they are required to add senior’s name.
Authorship Misconduct

- Lifting from student’s thesis: A scientist took an entire chapter of his student’s Ph.D. thesis and submitted it verbatim as a review article under his own name.

In this example, the student said he had no objection!
Role of Journal

- Detection: Require signed statement from all authors?
- Inquiry: Investigate pro-actively, or only following a complaint?
- Response: How to respond when a case is detected? (see also punishment session). Can journals share information? Defamation issues?
http://www.geocities.com/physics_plagiarism