



Hidden Data: The Blind Eye of Science

Helene Z Hill

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In 1999, research scientist, Helene Hill, saw what she thought might be scientific misconduct – fabrication of experimental data – on the part of a scientist in the laboratory in which she worked. She reported it to the laboratory supervisor who was unconvinced so she let it pass. The spurious data were used to support a grant application to the National Cancer Institute which was subsequently funded. A year or so later, another scientist was added to the laboratory staff. This individual later expressed to Dr. Hill that he had similar suspicions about the first fellow. Hill, fortified by additional independent observations, reported her suspicions to the Campus Committee on Research Integrity. There then followed a long odyssey of failures. The Campus Committee thought that she and her co-worker were lying and turned her down. The Office of Research Integrity (ORI) of the US Public Health Service subsequently turned her down. She turned to the Federal Court, the judge said she was quixotic and turned her down. But now she had overwhelming evidence that experiments recorded in eight scientific publications and used to support government grants worth two and a half million dollars were extremely likely to have been fabricated. Trying again at the University and the ORI, she was turned away again. She appealed the judge's decision and failed again. Her only recourse was to write this book. It has been written to demonstrate to scientists, to law makers and to the public at large that the way our country deals with scientific misconduct simply does not work.

Miscreants who are caught get away with nothing more than a slap on the wrist. Scientists turn a blind eye when it comes to other scientists – many of whom are their friends and colleagues – who are falsifying data. Many scientists are too busy to care – until it happens to them. Millions of dollars are misspent every year. Only a few of the cheaters are caught and even fewer of those are punished. Journals fear challenges to published works lest they be sued. This book is a wake-up call. How could one individual have gotten away with so much untenable data? How can so many so-called reasonable scientists turn a blind eye? Much of it lies in knowing what is in it for them. Scientists need to get large research grants to get promoted, to get offers of better, more prestigious jobs, to win the admiration of their colleagues. They are the big shots and control the field. This book is a call for reform. If people on Wall Street go to jail for mismanaging other people's money, why shouldn't scientists who intentionally misuse public funds suffer the same punishment? If doctors, nurses, dentists, veterinarians are overseen and disciplined by state boards, why aren't research scientists subject to the same oversight? Why do we, the scientists, continued to let the fox, our fox, watch the hen house? Why are universities, medical facilities, research institutes not called to account when their scientists cheat? Shouldn't these organizations have to return the misspent funds and then some? Wake up, America! It is time for a new paradigm for truth in science!

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