

Academic Betrayal in Authorship and Publication Ethics – A Personal Case and Scholarly Reflection

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1. Abstract

This reflection is based on a deeply disappointing experience involving a former PhD student who published a paper using data entirely derived from a research project that was fully supervised, funded, and designed by me. The paper, presented at the ASEE 20XX Conference, omitted my name and instead included unrelated co-authors. This is not just unethical; it is an absolute outright betrayal of academic trust. Authorship misconduct, including ghost authorship, false funding attribution, and exclusion of supervisors, reflects a growing trend of eroding integrity within academic publishing. Supported by current literature, this paper explores authorship ethics, data misrepresentation, and emotional consequences on the supervisor-mentee relationship. Institutions must urgently uphold ethical standards, protect intellectual contributions, and treat such actions as academic violations. Publishing for career advancement must not override the fundamental values of honesty, respect, and gratitude.

2. A Deep Personal Wound

In 2012, I proudly saw my first PhD student complete his doctoral journey under my supervision. His project was fully supported by my Fundamental Research Fund XX, with data collected through countless hours of fieldwork, analysis, and intellectual discussions. It was a collaboration built on trust, mentorship, and shared goals for scientific contribution.

However, I was recently shocked, and deeply saddened to discover a conference paper published in the ASEE 20XX Conference Proceedings, which appears to be based entirely on the dataset from that very PhD research. Despite the origin of the data, I was neither credited as an author nor acknowledged in the scientific contribution. Even more alarming was the attribution of financial support to my Fundamental Research Fund XX Vote No. 5X2XXX, a grant number I have never held. This is not merely an oversight. It is a false attribution of funding and a

clear act of misrepresentation. An absolute outright betrayal of academic trust!

The emotional toll of discovering such a betrayal is difficult to describe. Anger. Sleepless nights. A deep sense of being publicly wronged without recourse. Every time I see the paper, I feel not only misused but erased from my own intellectual labour. Be noted that he was not the only PhD graduated student when I applied for my full professorship in my university. I raised that project from nothing, mentored the process, and was deeply involved in the ideas behind the work. That the fruits of this guidance could be so easily severed from me in the public domain is a stark reminder of how fragile integrity becomes when trust is broken.

This note is not about revenge. It is about drawing attention to a larger issue: the duty of ethical conduct in academia. As mentors, we dedicate ourselves not only to building skills in young researchers, but to cultivating values. When those values are compromised, the damage extends beyond individuals and it threatens the very foundation of scientific credibility. I still believe in mentorship [1]. But I also believe accountability must be taken seriously. Without it, research loses its soul and becomes meaningless even though you are a world class scientist.

I was completely excluded from the author list. Worse, two other names were listed-individuals who were not part of the project during its conception, implementation, or supervision. This is not a misunderstanding. It is a deliberate act of exclusion-an unethical appropriation of supervised research for personal academic gain. An absolute outright betrayal of academic trust!

3. Authorship Misconduct: A Violation of Mentorship and Ethics

Figure 1 provides a comprehensive conceptual framework illustrating the process of authorship misconduct and its violation of mentorship and research ethics. The diagram differentiates

between ethical authorship, which requires genuine intellectual contribution and ethical responsibility, and the observed misconduct in the case of the ASEE paper, where the supervisor's name was intentionally excluded. This exclusion constitutes ghost authorship, as defined by global standards [2-4]. Furthermore, the diagram rejects justifications based on cultural miscommunication or procedural mistakes, highlighting that such actions are direct breaches of academic etiquette and research integrity, ignoring established guidelines like those from the ICMJE and CReDiT taxonomy [5,6].

The framework in Figure 1 also addresses the critical issue of funding and project origin. As the diagram indicates, the validation of a claim for an independent study would require demonstrable differences in research design, field sites, and methodologies. However, the observed evidence of near-identical replication of the doctoral project—using the same data and methodologies developed under the supervisor's guidance—points to a falsified claim of funding and origin. This constitutes a severe breach of research integrity [7,8]. The diagram thus effectively captures the complex interplay between mentorship, ethical responsibilities, and the tangible indicators of misconduct in academic publishing.

Authorship is not a gift to be granted, a favour to be exchanged, or a token of hierarchy. It is a recognition of genuine intellectual contribution and a marker of ethical responsibility. The exclusion of my name from the ASEE paper, despite the use of data and methodology developed entirely under my supervision, constitutes a clear case of ghost authorship—the intentional omission of individuals who have made substantial contributions [9,10].

This incident is neither a cultural miscommunication nor a procedural mistake. While it is well-documented that PhD candidates may sometimes feel coerced into including unmerited authors, this case represents the opposite: the rightful supervisor was deliberately removed and replaced with individuals who had made no discernible contributions. Such an act is not only a breach of academic etiquette, but also a direct violation of global standards of research ethics. Both the ICMJE guidelines and the CReDiT taxonomy provide clear definitions of what qualifies as authorship, and those standards were ignored.

If, as claimed, the study was conducted independently using a separate grant, it would not have replicated the same research design, field sites, and methodologies as those of the doctoral project. The near-identical replication strongly suggests a falsified claim of funding and origin, which constitutes a serious breach of research integrity.

This breach can be poignantly captured in the following Malay Pantun:

Papan lapis dibuat kereta tipu,
 Duduk sombong tiada tahu;
 Jika ilmu disulami tipu,
 Rugi dunia akhirat pun tahu.
 (Plywood is shaped into a deceptive carriage,
 Sitting in pride, yet knowing nothing;
 When knowledge is woven with deception,
 Loss follows in this world and the hereafter)

Using deception in the realm of knowledge—whether through misappropriation or false claims—leads not only to professional disgrace, but also to moral and spiritual loss, in both this life and the next.

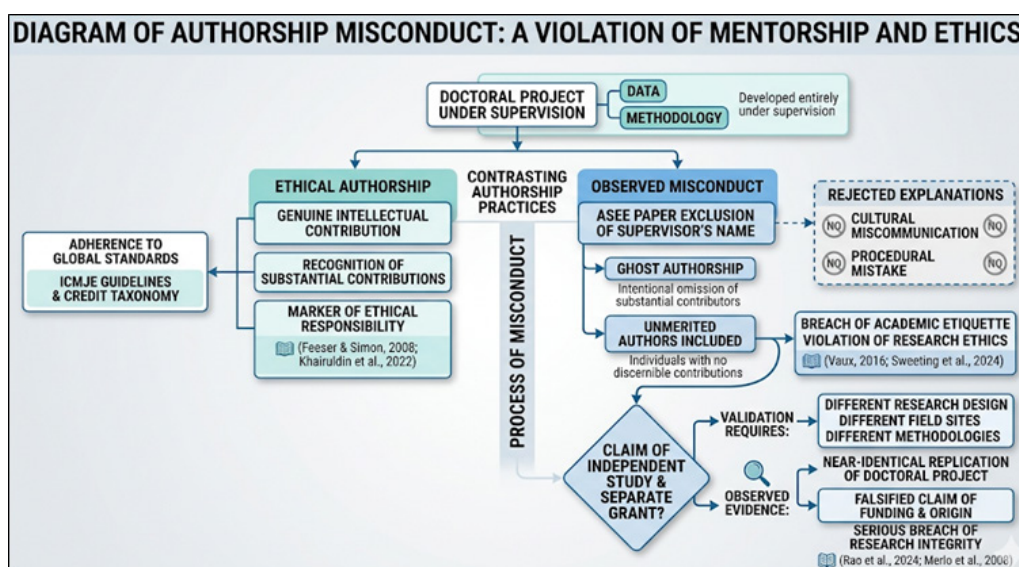


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of Authorship Misconduct and Ethics Violation in a Supervisory Context. Note: This diagram is generated using Google Gemini.

3. When Plagiarism and Misrepresentation Are Dressed as Progress

Figure 2 provides a systematic deconstruction of academic misconduct, specifically addressing instances where plagiarism and misrepresentation are framed as professional progress. As the diagram illustrates, plagiarism extends far beyond mere text duplication; it encompasses the unauthorized acquisition and reuse of foundational research components such as data, methodologies, and laboratory resources that were developed through years of mentoring and intellectual labor under a supervisor's guidance. Emphasizes that this form of intellectual misappropriation is a severe ethical violation, where core components are repackaged without acknowledgment for the perpetrators' benefit. The framework visually organizes these actions as distinct breaches of research integrity, highlighting the misuse of concepts like "academic freedom" to rationalize the unethical exploitation of a mentor's expertise and resources.

The consequences of this misappropriation, as mapped in the diagram, ripple through multiple dimensions of the academic ecosystem (Figure 2). There are clear personal impacts, including the erosion of trust and substantial damage to the mentor's reputation. At an institutional level, these actions undermine the value of collaborative scholarship. Furthermore, as shown by the bottom section, this abandonment of moral obligation and professional gratitude is symptomatic of wider systemic pressures. Wallace and Siersema (2015) point to the toxic nature of the "publish-or-perish" culture as a significant driver of such behavior. Further argue that this environment distorts the academic ecosystem, prioritizing output metrics over ethical standards and genuine scholarly contribution, ultimately leading to a betrayal of the mentorship relationship.

Plagiarism is not confined to the act of copying text. It extends to the unauthorized use of data, supervised research efforts, and laboratory resources especially when these have been developed through years of mentoring, intellectual labor, and funded research. The paper in question reused core components of a study

I personally designed: PCR primer sequences, transplantation methods, and protocols for heavy metal profiling. These were all developed under my direct supervision and supported by my Fundamental Research grant.

In scholarly discourse, such behavior is categorized as intellectual misappropriation—a serious form of misconduct in which foundational ideas, data, or methods, often from a supervisor or mentor, are repackaged without acknowledgment for the benefit of the perpetrator's academic trajectory. The consequences of this are not merely personal. They cut across dimensions—damaging the mentor's reputation, eroding trust, and undermining the institutional value of collaborative scholarship.

What deepens the pain is the misuse of the notion of academic freedom to rationalize these unethical actions. Publishing should embody gratitude and transparency, particularly from students who have benefited from their supervisors' time, expertise, and trust. When that moral obligation is abandoned, what remains is a betrayal that reflects the erosion of scholarly values. Such behavior is symptomatic of the increasingly toxic publish-or-perish culture that now distorts the academic ecosystem.

The moral failing here is captured in this poignant Malay Pantun:

Nibong lurus dibuat rang,
 Terpajak dalam halaman atas;
 Ilmu tinggi adabnya kurang,
 Bak api besar tiada pelita di atas.
 (Straight nibong is shaped into a fence,
 Set upright within the upper yard;
 Great knowledge with little decorum,
 Like a blazing fire with no lamp to guide it.)

Knowledge without manners is like a blazing fire without a lamp—uncontained and directionless. This reflects a core Malay principle in education: adab mendahului ilmu—manners must come before knowledge.

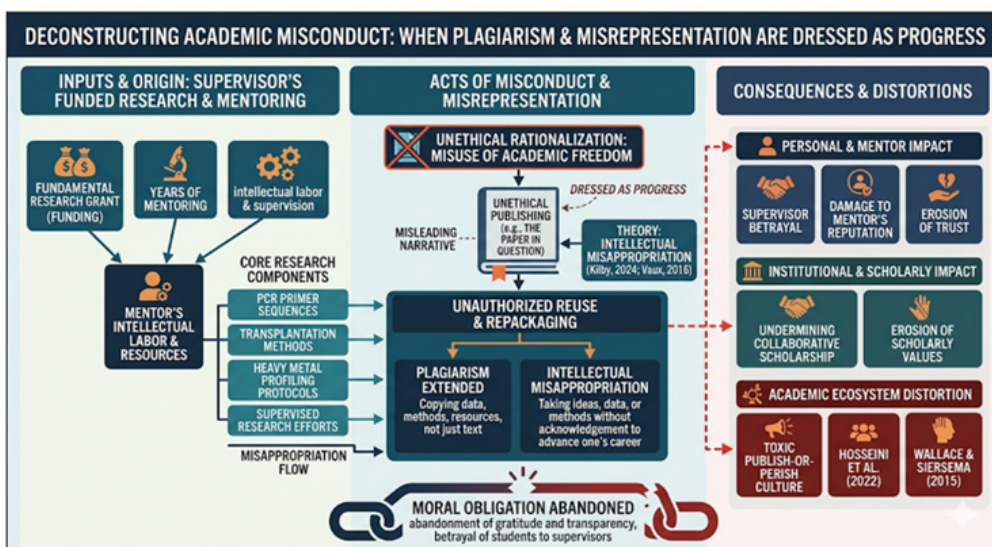


Figure 2: Detailed Breakdown of Intellectual Misappropriation and Data Reuse in Academic Misconduct. Note: This diagram is generated using Google Gemini.

4. The Ethical Fragility of Collaborative Research and Mentorship

Figure 3 translates the textual argument about the fragility of collaborative research into a structured visual format. It establishes that while collaboration is essential, it creates an “ethical minefield” when its foundational pillars are compromised. The diagram maps the core elements of ethical collaboration—culture of respect, transparent roles, and academic trust—as prerequisites for research integrity. It then details the primary breaches, focusing on the critical vulnerability within the supervisor-student dynamic where the erasure of legitimate contributors and the failure to define roles constitute a profound betrayal of academic trust.

Figure 3 further illustrates the direct escalation of these ethical breaches into serious consequences, categorizing the removal of supervisors and insertion of non-contributors not as independence, but as unethical conduct. These actions directly correlate to violations of research ethics and potential intellectual property theft, with specific references to supporting literature. Finally, Figure 3 highlights the systemic effects—the corrosion of institutional credibility and the integrity of science itself—while emphasizing the duty of academic institutions to enforce safeguards that protect original contributors and go beyond mere procedural neutrality.

Collaboration is at the heart of modern academia. Yet when its ethical foundations are undermined—especially in the context of the supervisor–student relationship—collaboration becomes an ethical minefield. One of the gravest breaches is the failure to define authorship roles transparently or, worse, the erasure of legitimate contributors. This is not merely a procedural flaw; it is a profound betrayal of academic trust and the values that un-

derpin mentorship.

Research integrity does not rest solely on institutional guidelines or authorship forms. It is upheld by a culture of respect, honesty, and accountability. Institutions must go beyond procedural neutrality. They have a duty to enforce safeguards that protect supervisors from being written out of the very projects they conceived, funded, and guided. These are not personal grievances to be dismissed. They are clear violations of research ethics and, in many cases, constitute intellectual property theft.

Let this be stated plainly: removing the rightful supervisor while inserting uninvolved individuals as co-authors is not an expression of academic independence. It is unethical conduct that compromises the moral core of collaborative research. When such actions go unchallenged, they corrode the credibility of academic institutions and the integrity of science itself.

The moral weight of this transgression is well captured in this Malay Pantun:

Padi masak tunduk ke palungmu,

Tanda rendah hati sejati;

Ilmu dicuri cemari ilmu,

Rosak amanah hilang bererti.

(Ripened rice bends low into the hollow,

A true sign of humility;

When knowledge is stolen, it damages the self,

Trust is broken and meaning is lost.)

Just as ripened rice bows to the earth in humility, true knowledge must be grounded in integrity. When knowledge is stolen, and names are misused, trust is broken, and the meaning of academic honour is lost.

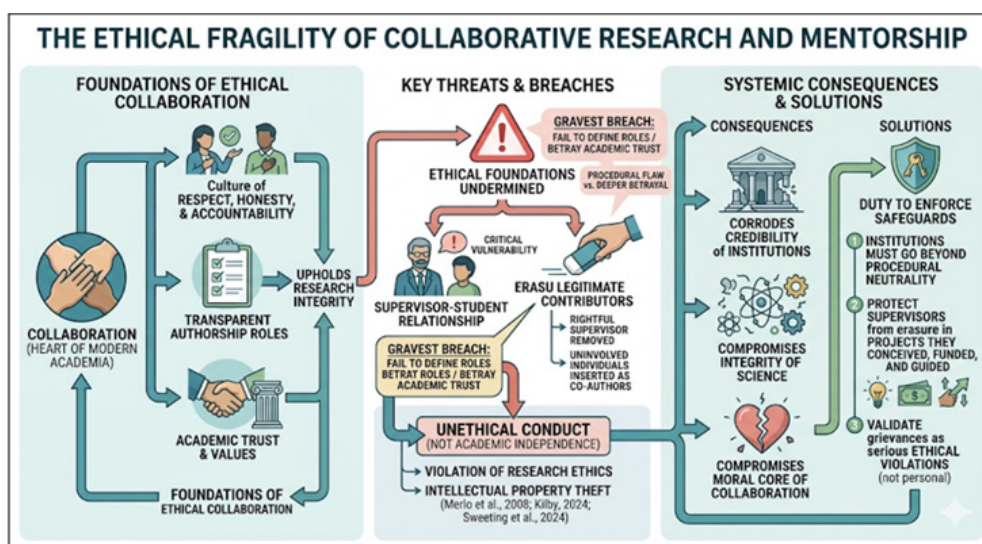


Figure 3: Visual Analysis of the Ethical Erosion in Academic Collaboration and Mentorship. Note: This diagram is generated using Google Gemini.

5. Conclusion

This is more than a personal disappointment-it is a violation of everything academic supervision stands for. I trained this student with sincerity. I shared my resources. I opened professional doors. I ensured the success of his PhD. In return, I was erased.

That pain cannot be undone. The damage to academic integrity is real, but the emotional betrayal cuts even deeper. Let this paper serve as a record and a lesson. Not for revenge, but for education; for future students, researchers, and institutions to understand: You do not climb the ladder of success by stepping on the shoulders of those who carried you.

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