**Book Review: Bazerman, Max.** Inside an Academic Scandal: A Story of Fraud and Betrayal. **Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2025. 200 pages, eBook, $32.95.**

Max Bazerman's new book *Inside An Academic Scandal: A Story of Fraud and Betrayal* provides a detailed narrative of how data fabrication in social science research casts doubt on the validity of social science. Two experts of behavioral ethics, Francesca Gino of Harvard Business School (HBS) and Dan Ariely, Duke University behavioral economist offered a new perspective for making people report information more honestly. The presumption was that making people sign their signature at the top before filling a form rather than at the bottom was a powerful way to nudge them to report information more honestly.

The narrative dates back to 2012 when Bazerman, along with four co-authors, published a groundbreaking paper showing that "signing first" as it came to be known produced greater honesty than signing afterward. In 2021, almost a decade later, research findings revealed that two of the experiments in the published paper were fraudulent. The paper claimed to have discovered a simple but effective way to make people self-report data more honestly. The authors hypothesized that the simple intervention tested in the paper nudged participants to provide accurate answers. Two experiments conducted by Francesca Gino at Harvard University showed that the effect of signing first worked under laboratory conditions. This was corroborated by a follow-up randomized experiment conducted by Dan Ariely at Duke. Bazerman, an academic collaborator of Gino, made theoretical contributions but was only tangentially involved in the paper's experiments and, hence, was not implicated in the data fraud. The study was an unusually successful hit with widespread popularity and huge sales. Businesses, governments, and universities enthusiastically welcomed the finding.

The 2012 publication was busted after a series of failed replications and increasing suspicion of malpractice. Eagle-eyed authors of the *Data Collada* blog, pioneers of what is now referred to as “forensic metascience,” provided incontrovertible evidence that Ariely’s data was corrupted. Later, in coordination with Harvard, *Data Collada* published evidence that Gino’s data both in this publication and other studies showed signs of deliberate data fabrication. Eventually, Francesca Gino and Dan Ariely conceded that they tampered with their data but, in their self-defense, continued to maintain their innocence. On her part, Gino blames an anonymous saboteur. Harvard’s investigations concluded that Gino had intentionally, knowingly, or recklessly committed research misconduct. Initially, Harvard Business School placed Gino on administrative leave and later withdrew her tenure and discharged her. In his defense, Ariely claimed that the fabrications in his data were committed by the insurance company with whom he had partnered. The partnership with the insurance company involved testing the signing-first idea in which drivers reported total mileage driven in a year. The reports ranged from 35,000 to 50,000 miles a year, which were far beyond the realm of possibility. The insurance company rejected Ariely’s allegation and released what it contends is the original dataset. Nonetheless, after investigations, Dan Ariely remains on the Duke faculty.

Gino and Ariely, already stars in their respective fields, collaboratively published several more studies. In some of their work, they explained why people cheat. In fact, they argued that creativity and dishonesty are strange bedfellows. Chapter 11 of the book, *Why People Cheat*, broached the philosophy of Contemporary Moral Problems. The author briefly introduces several prominent cases of data fraud, not only in the social sciences, but also in the natural and medical sciences, and attempts to highlight teachable lessons about why people behave unethically. The following questions are germane: why would academics whose names already evoke fame engage in data manipulation? Why would someone risk their career to falsify research? Human nature? If it were, then everyone would be inclined to engage in fraud. Or the insatiable quest for more veneration and homage? It seems more like a character trait unique to certain personality types. Fraudulent activity, more so, among famous academics evokes a wealthy shoplifter, who pilfers not out of need but compulsive habit.

Bazerman's account of fraud in a published paper undermined faith in academic research and publication. The vivid narrative in the book provides a closer look at the crisis of replicability in social science and, by extension, all academic research. The book examines the role relationships and trust played in enabling fraud in academic research. It also describes Bazerman's own part in the scandal, though marginal, in terms of what he did and didn't do to stop the data manipulation in the 2012 signing-first publication. What is clear is that making people sign honest pledges at the top, rather than at the bottom, of paperwork didn't hold up under scrutiny. The fallout of the scandal illustrates how well-intentioned researchers can become involved with others in wrongdoing. Consider these: If Bazerman hadn't done follow-up research; or if the data hadn't been made public; or if anonymous researchers hadn't tipped off *Data Collada*, the data manipulations might never have been discovered. We can only imagine how much research fraud goes undetected.

By his own admission, Bazerman's primary motivation for writing this book is "to set the records straight" and thereby restore his and others' professional reputations. His account of research misconduct is personal and candid, particularly from someone very close to the events. *Inside An Academic Scandal: A Story of Fraud and Betrayal* should be recommended reading for all researchers who have a stake on integrity issues.

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