

CASE 2: Authorship Antics¹

YoungFemaleScientist (YFS) agreed to a collaboration with scientists in her field working at another university. Her collaborators originally wanted her to do one experiment, and fast. She wanted more papers so she could apply for jobs, so she was more than eager to get something easy to contribute and let someone else do the hard part. They were going to submit the paper shortly thereafter.

After YFS finished this experiment and shared the results with her collaborators, months went by. She talked to them once or twice and they said they had gotten some really exciting new results and wanted to follow up on those in order to write a paper they could publish in a higher-impact journal. Since YFS's job applications weren't due for six months, and a higher impact paper might help her with those publications, she agreed to the delay.

More months went by with no word from her collaborators. As YFS was updating her CV and preparing her job applications, she contacted her collaborators. "Oh yeah," they said, "We're going to send it next week."

YFS reminded her them that, as an author on the paper, she was supposed to be involved and drafting and revising the manuscript prior to revision. They responded, "We'll send you a copy the day before it goes out."

There is little chance that in 24 hours YFS will be able to give the manuscript the careful reading it deserves, nor that there would be time for her collaborators to incorporate any changes to the manuscript she might suggest. At this point, with job applications due next week, the paper will not do much for YFS's job prospects. However, she did take the time to do the required experiment, and the results of that experiment are an important part of the project her collaborators are doing; were she to withdraw her contribution, they could not proceed with their plans to submit the manuscript to a high impact journal.

In the back of YFS's mind, as she considers her options, is the plight of a researcher she knows who is having a really hard time getting her grants, after having to retract some collaborative papers she published with a coauthor who later got caught for fabricating results. Given that this collaboration is across disciplines, YFS doesn't know how she could be sure about the results her collaborators are contributing to the project.

Should YFS ask to have her name removed from the paper as an author? Why or why not?

¹ From YoungFemaleScientist, "Authorship antics", <http://youngfemalescientist.blogspot.com/2005/10/authorship-antics.html>