



**[Ethical Guidelines for Statistical Practice: Report of the Ad Hoc Committee on Professional Ethics]: Comment**

Herbert Solomon

*The American Statistician*, Vol. 37, No. 1. (Feb., 1983), p. 15.

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cles by Student were a part of the discipline of statistics and Gossett was here evidently following standard academic practice concerning dissemination of scholarly findings. The application of statistics to, say, improving the yield of malting barley was a different matter, and here perhaps Gossett's motives were primarily those of a statistical practitioner advancing his employer's profit-making objectives.

Would Gossett's behavior, assuming the motives ascribed to him here, be consistent with these guidelines, particularly those in Section II.A? Did "private interests . . . inappropriately affect (Gossett's) development or application of statistical knowledge"? Did Gossett

"disclose any financial or other interests that may (have affected his) professional statements"? This is unclear. Certainly, the Student publications included no such disclosure. Must methodologic work in statistics include such statements for ethical reasons? Do the discipline and the profession of statistics involve slightly different considerations with respect to ethical standards?

In general, the guidelines as currently evolving appear to be helpful. Statistics, the profession, needs behavioral standards that reflect its willingness to be held accountable; it is most appropriate that our profession is moving to do so.

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## Comment

### HERBERT SOLOMON\*

I believe it is a mistake to have "Ethical Guidelines for Statistical Practice," and a committee to administer it. The American Statistical Association would do well to let existing institutions of society handle our behavior without creating another bureaucracy. There are already enough constraints—economic, social, and legal—that operate to keep us responsible in our efforts. The abuses of such a system would far outweigh any gains.

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During the McCarthy era when I was program chairman for an annual meeting, I offered to resign because the ASA office was making it difficult for a politically unpopular speaker to appear at a session. Some ASA officials thought it would be best to bar him and I can see an ethics committee responding in similar fashion. In our zeal to do right we can do some awful things. Fortunately this did not occur.

I think the ASA should keep on doing what it does well: publish journals, organize meetings, develop chapters, develop educational activities, and render statistical advice to government agencies. The notion of having a court available to resolve matters of individual behavior in statistics is anathema to me.

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## Comment

### SAMUEL W. GREENHOUSE\*

A scientific or professional society may proclaim in broad generalities the ethical standards required of its members. One would have hoped that such a declaration would be unnecessary, that such external reminders of the need for honesty and integrity in a sense degrade the individual's moral character. However, recent experience in science and in other fields of human activity clearly indicates that an individual's unacceptable conduct is apparently not outside the bounds of that individual's ethical norm. Clearly the individual's own norms were wanting. Therefore there is a justification for the ASA to establish ethical guidelines for statistical practice. Although the published guidelines emphasize practice, that area of statistical work relating to data collection, analysis, and reporting and also to

consulting, it is noticeable that no reference is made to statistical research proper. Are there no guidelines needed for theoretical research and its reporting? I wonder.

In my view, the broad statement of ethical guidelines should be separate from specific references to rules of conduct. Thus I would have a preamble and a statement of general guidelines. I would follow this with an appendix, so to speak, of rules or principles of conduct, such as are given in Sections II.B, C, and D. I suggest this because although the statement on general guidelines may constitute a completed entity and may be non-controversial and acceptable to all members, the specification of rules of conduct may not be. Furthermore, the rules as given are questionable and require more work.

However, whatever form this document takes, I do believe it requires very careful wording and should reflect precisely the rule of acceptable behavior and its

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