# Author's Commentary on "Related Research"

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Related Research

This case is intended for a graduate level audience in any field of investigative research. Researchers can become very protective of their own work. Their ultimate goals do no necessarily depend on the success of their peers. Credit is often assigned to a few, maybe only one person - the fewer the persons, the more prestige. A successful dissertation also requires sufficient results. At the same time, it is vital that the research group work well together. A lot depends on a successful working relationship, including the group's reputation, advancement of research and, ultimately, getting publications/grants.

What this case really gets at is the issue of *ownership of ideas*. Ideas are (in theory) cannot be copyrighted or patented, and university research should be open and available to all (a debatable point). Most professors would probably read this case and state at worst, "There is no problem here," or at best, "The problem is just a lack of communication." The professor often believes that he/she owns the work and that problems of this sort should be solved by the group members. Graduate students implicitly have very little power when it comes to owning ideas; however, they do have a lot of work at stake in these ideas. In many cases, interpersonal relations within the group are not a sufficient mechanism to solve these subtle ownership issues.

The case is designed to start discussion about the hierarchy of control within a group - who should control research, what should be understood by every group member about the mechanism of control? Research groups have many implied social and professional arrangements. It is important to know who is in charge and to what degree they control the work before one begins a research project.

Swen's action, while it seemed innocent enough to him, has harmed members of the group. Discussion should involve the consequences of Swen's decision, which should help to illustrate the potential problems. One obvious problem is that Jeremy will

now receive credit for part of Beverly's original idea. This acclamation is valuable and raises the issues as to what type of *value* can be used to qualify work at the university. Has Beverly been deprived of something valuable without her knowledge or consent? Furthermore, Swen has used his position to steal Beverly's ideas, in some sense. To what degree this is *theft* is debatable. Swen's obvious motive or whether he had prior knowledge of Beverly's attachment to her work does not really change this essential question.