

RETRACTION WATCH IS APPARENTLY NOT INTERESTED IN RETRACTIONS

Abstract

Retraction Watch (www.retractionwatch.com) is a blog that focuses on retractions. Surprisingly, hints about published retractions, even on a paper dedicated to leaving hints about retractions not yet covered by this blog, are not approved. This paper provides evidence of this biased moderation and thus calls into question what the true motives of Retraction Watch, and its co-founders, Ivan Oransky and Adam Marcus, are, if not to welcome hat tips about published retractions that could educate colleagues and the public.

Key words: Adam Marcus; Alison McCook; bias; Center for Scientific Integrity; comment and hat tip manipulation; Ivan Oransky; lack of transparency; opacity; pseudo-journalism; Rolf Degen

Retraction Watch not interested in tips about retractions

Retraction Watch¹ is a blog that claims to research retractions as a “window into the scientific process”. As the blog title suggests, the focus is, or should be, on retractions. As would be logically expected, if the true focus is not on retractions, then the title of the blog should be altered. Even though the parent organization of Retraction Watch, The Center for Scientific Integrity (CSI)², a charity, has received US\$ 830,000 in charitable donations from two US-based foundations and one trustee^{3,4}, the co-founder and President of CSI, Dr. Ivan Oransky, still believes that it is correct to ask for the free and voluntary services of the public, including the suggestion of information about retractions, while still begging publicly for additional monetary support⁵. Apparently, Rolf Degen⁶, a relatively unknown psychologist of sorts and of no consequential importance, is a major contributor of information and hat tips related to retractions for Retraction Watch, leading them to laud him as “one of science publishing’s sentinels”⁷ (Fig. 1A), a title that does not seem to be supported by any other literature or organization. There is clear moderation bias at Retraction Watch: when Degen Tweets information about a retraction, or when he contacts Retraction Watch about a new retraction, he is given red carpet attention and treatment. In fact, there is a page on the Retraction Watch blog dedicated to adding information about retractions that have not yet been covered by Retraction Watch. It is entitled “Help us”, and states clearly: “With something like 500-600 retractions per year, and a constant flurry of publishing news to keep up with, our small staff stays busy – and can’t always immediately post on every new retraction that we discover. We’ve created this page to show you some of what’s on our current to-do list. If you have any tips for us about the nature of a retraction, expression of concern, or correction you see here — or know of any other retractions by the same authors — please let us know in a comment.”⁸ (Fig. 1B). On at least three occasions, information about retractions that have not yet been covered by Retraction Watch, but which would surely be of interest to the readers and the public, were left on that page created especially for this purpose (Fig. 1D-F). However, those suggestions were not approved, even though they were purely factual. In other words, suggestions about retractions that had not yet been covered by Retraction Watch were not welcomed, or approved, by Retraction Watch.

Interpretation of the Retraction Watch biased moderation

This odd red-tape, unreasonable, unexplained and inadmissible moderation is of great concern to the scientific community who believed that this was a science journalist organization, led by Oransky and his CSI secretary Adam Marcus⁹, that took pride in respecting all scientists’ views and contributions, and that moderated and approved or rejected them based on clear, opaque and objective criteria. Instead, Retraction Watch displays, as has been clearly

shown in Fig. 1, unfair bias for or against select members of the public, and thus a false sense of fairness, an aspect which is essential for good journalism, but which has, through evidence in this letter, not been displayed by Retraction Watch. If the objective of Retraction Watch is not to be receptive to information regarding retractions that it has not yet covered, then what precisely is the objective and purpose of Retraction Watch?

It is already well known that this web-site or blog exists to smear science and scientists that have made errors in their careers, or who hold retractions to their names, in the form of proud public shaming, in their self-proclaimed nickname “The Watchdogs”¹⁰. It is also abundantly clear that Retraction Watch, which sees massive (in the hundreds of thousands) monthly web traffic, serves purely as a fortification to the Oransky journalistic empire he is attempting to create, already having, among other journalistic enterprises and positions, another blog, Embargo Watch¹¹. And it is also more than abundantly clear that funding in the hundreds of thousands of US dollars are being used, not to exclusively create a retraction database, as has been stated publicly on a number of occasions (e.g. ³), but instead to support personal endeavors by Ivan Oransky to trumpet his retraction-disguised anti-science rhetoric.¹²

Ivan Oransky and Adam Marcus have appointed themselves as science watchdogs, but these science watchdogs need to be carefully observed and monitored.¹³ Their self-imposed mandate in science is to verify retractions and how these might influence the publishing process. However, with evidence (Fig. 1D-F)^{8,14} that suggestions about retractions are not welcomed by members of the public, or that a biased favoritism is publicly displayed towards Rolf Degen (Fig. 1A; for whatever reason), or against me (see disclaimer), or in support of strongly opinionated or silly comments that bring no value to the conversation about retractions (Fig. 1C)⁸, then what is the objective and true purpose of this “charity”, and does it truly serve the best interests of science? The latest deviation from the central theme of retractions comes in the form of a tongue-in-cheek blog post that might confuse non-native English-speaking scientists, in fact.¹⁵ Can scientists feel that this is a site and organization that merits their trust and respect if their opinions – made strictly about retractions – are discarded and moderated out in an act of aggressive (because relevant comments are moderated out) journalistic bias?

Disclaimer and conflicts of interest

The author is not associated with any academic institute, blog or web-site. The author was profiled multiple times, often unfairly and considerably aggressively, by Retraction Watch.

Fig. 1 Comments and hat tips related to retractions not yet covered by Retraction Watch are blocked (not approved) by Retraction Watch. Why not? (A) Comments and hat tips by Rolf Degen are happily accepted⁷, and even silly comments by *herr doktor bimler* or strongly opinionated ones by *Neuroskeptic*, a pseudonymous blogger with questionable ethics¹⁶ (B), but not retraction-related comments by me (C-E). (C) Comment on June 5, 2016¹⁴ not approved. (D) Comment on October 18, 2016⁸ not approved (comment # 1145202). (E) Comment on November 24, 2016⁸ not approved (comment # 1193552).

INTERNATIO

Retraction Watch **A**

Tracking retractions as a window into the scientific process.

Meet one of science publishing's sentinels: Rolf Degen

with 2 comments

To many Retraction Watch readers, the name Rolf Degen will sound very familiar – for the last few years, he's earned quite a few "hat tips" by alerting us to retraction notices published across a wide range of fields of research, as well as research on trends in science publishing. We spoke to him about his passion for "truth, wisdom, and the scientific enterprise."



Rolf Degen

Retraction Watch: Your name with be familiar to many readers, so can you tell us a bit about yourself?

Rolf Degen: As a freelance science writer living in Germany's former capital Bonn, since the early 1980s I have had the pleasure to share my enthusiasm for psychology, neuroscience and evolutionary biology by writing articles for major German newspapers and magazines as well as several popular science books. I always found it a privilege to make a living by pursuing questions like "Who am I, how did I become that way – and why am I not Brad Pitt?" For the longest part, my engagement was driven by unbridled obsession and a naive, unswerving trust in that incorruptible voice of truth and wisdom, the scientific enterprise. That is, until Retraction Watch and related voices disseminated the sobering recognition that, all too often, the so-called incorruptible voice has a skeleton in the closet. In my case, that painful insight turned long-standing blind infatuation into a love-hate-relationship.

RW: What motivates you to search for retraction notices?

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Jaime A. Teixeira da Silva November 24, 2016 at 1:22 am

A retraction in the Medical Journal Armed Forces India (MJAFI) (Elsevier):

[http://www.mjafi.net/article/S0377-1237\(15\)00064-7/fulltext](http://www.mjafi.net/article/S0377-1237(15)00064-7/fulltext)

"This article has been withdrawn at the request of the editor. The Publisher apologizes for any inconvenience this may cause."

E

Comment awaiting moderation.

[Link](#)

[Reply](#)



Jaime A. Teixeira da Silva October 18, 2016 at 9:58 pm

Retraction/erratum cluster for Kyung-Hee Paek as senior author.

Molecules and Cells July 2012, Volume 34, Issue 1, pp 43–52

First online: 13 June 2012

RETRACTED ARTICLE: Nicotiana tabacum Tsp1-interacting ferredoxin 1 affects biotic and abiotic stress resistance

Sung Un Huh, In-Ju Lee, Byung-Kook Ham, Kyung-Hee Paek

<http://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10059-012-0066-6>

"This article has been retracted due to potential misconducts mainly concerning manipulation and repeated uses of hotomicrographs [sic] of control data internally along with mislabeling and/or externally in multiple publications."

But listed as erratum

<http://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10059-013-3066-2>

"Members of the editorial board have un-announcedly agreed to retract the article DOI/10.1007/s10059-012-0066-6 [Mol. Cells 34 (2012) 43–52] for potential misconducts mainly concerning manipulation and repeated uses of hotomicrographs of control data internally along with mislabeling and/or externally in multiple publications. As specified in the "Instructions to Authors", Molecules and Cells (Mol. Cells) explicitly prohibits mis-representation or falsification of experimental data including duplication of previously published data. In the article, photomicrographs in Fig. 53A have been previously published in Plant Cell Physiol. 45 (2004) 1537–1542, Plant Mol. Biol. 59 (2005) 981–994, Plant Cell Rep. 25 (2006), 359–364, Biochem. Biophys. Res. Commun. 339 (2006) 399–406, and Biochem. Biophys. Res. Commun. 340 (2006), 228–235."

Retraction Note

Molecules and Cells February 2013, Volume 35, Issue 2, pp 174–174

First online: 21 February 2013

Retraction note: Induction of a pepper cDNA encoding SAR8.2 protein during the resistance response to tobacco mosaic virus

Erratum

Plant Molecular Biology

June 2013, Volume 82, Issue 3, pp 301–302

First online: 10 April 2013

Erratum to: A novel TMV-induced hot pepper cell wall protein gene (CaTin2) is associated with virus-specific hypersensitive response pathway

Ryong Shin, Chang-Jin Park, Jong-Min An, Kyung-Hee Paek

<http://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11103-013-0048-x>

DOI: 10.1007/s11103-013-0048-x

Original

Plant Molecular Biology

March 2003, Volume 51, Issue 5, pp 687–701

A novel TMV-induced hot pepper cell wall protein gene (CaTin2) is associated with virus-specific hypersensitive response pathway

Ryong Shin, Chang-Jin Park, Jong-Min An, Kyung-Hee Paek

<http://link.springer.com/article/10.1023/A:1022599213648>

DOI: 10.1023/A:1022599213648 (cannot link to PubPeer)

PMID: 12678557

"Due to an unfortunate turn of events, incorrect versions of Figs. 3A, 3C, 4, 5A, and 5B have been used in the above mentioned publication. The authors apologize for inserting incorrect rRNA control pictures and have provided corrected versions in Figs. 3a, c, 4, and 5a, b that should be treated as definitive by the reader."

Comment awaiting moderation.

[Link](#)

[Quote](#)

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B

Help us: Here's some of what we're working on

with 46 comments

With something like 500–600 retractions per year, and a constant flurry of publishing news to keep up with, our small staff stays busy – and can't always immediately post on every new retraction that we discover. We've created this page to show you some of what's on our current to-do list. If you have any tips for us about the nature of a retraction, expression of concern, or correction you see here — or know of any other retractions by the same authors — please let us know in a comment. Note: Once we've posted about a retraction, we'll bump it down to the bottom of the list.



Neuroskeptic March 15, 2016 at 5:55 pm

Re: "Why money meanings matter in decisions to donate time and money", this was retracted following Hal Pashler et al.'s querying aspects of the data in Study #3 (out of 3 in the paper.)

The authors denied wrongdoing. They requested a partial retraction of Study #3 however on the grounds of unspecified "coding errors" in the dataset. The editor of Marketing Matters decided to retract the whole paper, however.

My blog post with links & my additional analysis of the problematic data is [here](#).

The case is related to the social psychology replication crisis because the paper was about a form of social priming, aka 'money priming'.

[Link](#) [Quote](#)

[Reply](#)



herr doktor bimler March 15, 2016 at 11:22 pm

If you have any tips for us about the nature of a retraction, expression of concern, or correction you see here

Will you accept suggestions for bad puns to use in the post titles?

[Link](#) [Quote](#)

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D



Anonymous June 5, 2016 at 9:57 am

<https://www.pubpeer.com/publications/76796E1DA68EB81F6C48B823295F91>
<https://www.dovepress.com/retraction-post-dural-puncture-headache-peer-reviewed-article-JIGM>

"A reader has highlighted the extensive similarities between:

1) Ahmed Ghaleb, Arjang Khorasani, and Devanand Mangar. Postdural Puncture Headache. Anesthesiol Res Pract. 2010; 2010: 102967.

And

2) Ghaleb A, Khorasani A, and Mangar D. Post-dural puncture headache. Int J Gen Med 2012;5 45-51.

Our investigations supported the readers claim of extensive and unreferenced text re-use and, as a result, the paper has been retracted."

Comment awaiting moderation.

[Link](#) [Quote](#)

[Reply](#)

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Author & Affiliation

Jaime A. Teixeira da Silva

Retired/independent scientist, P. O. Box 7, Miki-cho post office, Ikenobe 3011-2, Kagawa-ken, 761-0799, Japan