



DFFU sekretariat
Statsbiblioteket
Tangen 2
8200 Aarhus N

Returneres ved varig adresseændring



DIN MENING

WE HAVE NO CHOICE BUT TO CANCEL ALL SUBSCRIPTIONS

AF: BJÖRN BREMBS, PROFESSOR OF NEUROGENETICS, INSTITUTE OF ZOOLOGY, UNIVERSITÄT REGENSBURG

We the faculty have managed to get ourselves stuck in a rut. We have perverted the “only subscribe to high-ranking journals”, born out of the necessity of library budgets not keeping up with the proliferation of journals into “only publish in high-ranking journals”, born out of the necessity of tenured positions not keeping up with the proliferation of scientists. Today, scientists risk their jobs and/or their funding if they do not play the Impact Factor Games (“*And may the odds be ever in your favor!*”). Given that hundreds and sometimes thousands of scientists compete for any given slot, the entire scientific community that has become entirely risk-averse. The scholarly community abounds with desperation: desperation to get the next grant just to keep the lights on, desperation to publish the high-impact paper to get the tenured position.

When we have made *where* you publish more important than *what* you publish, it is not surprising that the highest ranking journals are also host to most of the scientific misconduct. However, such misconduct is just the tip of the iceberg. Analysis over analysis has shown that even the non-fraudulent work in the top journals is not methodologically stronger than work in other journals. On the contrary, there is a number of such analyses which show that work in ‘top’ journals is, on average, methodologically weaker than work in ‘lower’ journals. This is the scholarly nightmare: perhaps it is more than just a coincidence that after a generation of hiring scientists who publish in the journals which publish the least replicable work, talk of a “replication crisis” is emerging?

Discovering causes and consequences for the disaster is easier than acting to mitigate it: Early career scientists are powerless, as long the established ones evaluate them according to journal rank. Established

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scientists are powerless, as long as their lab depends on funders which use journal rank. Funders are powerless as long as search committees at institutions use journal rank for hiring, tenure and promotion, politicians demand evidence for the way funders spend public money, and grant reviewers use journal rank as a proxy for track record. Politicians are powerless, as long as institutions use their autonomy for their own decision-making.

I propose that all involved parties collaborate to tackle the heart of the problem: journal rank. Not only does journal rank prevent action on behalf of the abovementioned stakeholders, inasmuch as these journals charge exorbitant subscription fees, they also bind funds needed to implement replacement technology. The only way to rid the world of the pernicious impact of journal rank is to abolish journals and replace them with a modern information infrastructure. Canceling subscriptions is necessary for both of these tasks. There are now a whole host of established and emerging tools at our disposal which allow collaborating institutions to let all their subscriptions run out and still provide their users with at least similarly spotty access to the literature, as before the cancelation. With the freed funds, we can establish a scholarly commons from which we can derive solutions for the many other problems which have been left untackled since the digital revolution more than 20 years ago.

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