

Can you spot a fake? The trend of fake peer reviews

Committee on Publication Ethics North American seminar

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Philadelphia

A familiar story, with familiar faces



Houston, we have a problem

- 319 total counted since 2012. That's **10-11%** of all retractions.
- Every major publisher affected: Elsevier, Springer, Taylor & Francis, SAGE, Wiley, Informa

What do publishers call fake peer review?

- The peer review process has been “compromised”
- “The report was submitted from a fictitious email account”
- “A systematic and detailed investigation suggests that a third party was involved in supplying fabricated details of potential peer reviewers for a large number of manuscripts submitted to different journals.”

Not all fakes are “fake”

- “Using a fictitious account, a review was submitted under the name of a known scientist without their knowledge. Consequently, the Editor supervising the review process was misled into accepting the paper based upon a review he assumed was performed by a well-known expert in the field.”

November 26, 2014

NEWS FEATURE



THE PEER-REVIEW SCAM

When a handful of authors were caught reviewing their own papers, it exposed weaknesses in modern publishing systems.

BY CAT FERGUSON, ADAM MARCUS AND IVAN ORANSKY

Most journal editors know how much effort it takes to persuade busy researchers to review a paper. That is why the editor of *The Journal of Enzyme Inhibition and Medicinal Chemistry* was puzzled by the reviews for manuscripts by one author — Hyung-In Moon, a medicinal-plant researcher

how to improve the papers. What was unusual was how quickly they were completed — often within 24 hours. The turnaround was a little too fast, and Claudio Sgarbi, the journal's editor-in-chief, started to become suspicious. In 2012, he confronted Moon, who readily admitted that the reviews had come in so

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Profile: Hyung-In Moon



- plant researcher in South Korea
- Editor asked why so many of his reviews had been returned to so quickly – within 24 hours
- Moon “readily” confessed
- Fallout: Informa (journal publisher) retracted 28 of Moon’s papers; editor resigned.
- Total retraction count to date: 35

Profile: Peter Chen

- 2013: Editor gets suspicious. SAGE launches 14-month investigation that identified 60 articles with evidence of peer-review tampering, or had been citing each other at a higher-than-average rate (or both).
- One author at the center of the ring: Peter Chen, an engineer then at the National Pingtung University of Education (NPUE) in Taiwan, a co-author on practically all of the papers in question.
- A family affair: His brother, Cheng-Wu Chen, lost 21 papers in that episode, and has continued to lose more for the same reason

COPE statement: December 19, 2014

- *“The Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) has become aware of systematic, inappropriate attempts to manipulate the peer review processes of several journals across different publishers. These manipulations appear to have been orchestrated by a number of third party agencies offering services to authors.”*

Word is spreading

- “Scholarly journal retracts 60 articles, smashes ‘peer review ring’”, *Washington Post*, July 10, 2014



Policy + Publicity = Action?

- What role does media attention play? Is there a way for COPE and media to work together?

Warning signs

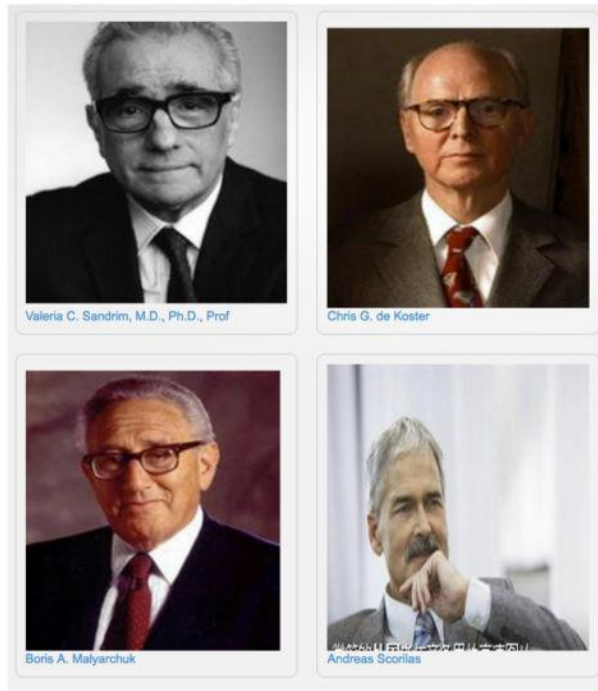
- Non-institutional email address for reviewer
- Recommended by author
- Review returned quickly, often within 24 hours
- All three (!) reviewers like the paper.

What are publishers doing about it?

- Looking for tell-tale signs: No non-institutional email addresses
- No more reviewers recommended by authors

Glimpses into the process

- [“Organised crime against the academic peer review system,”](#) A. Cohen et al. 23 MAY 2016, DOI: 10.1111/bcp.12992. *British Journal of Clinical Pharmacology*



Remember – not all reviews are faked

- Roughly **700** retractions/year
- 2-3 million papers published/year
- Roughly **0.03%** of papers are retracted
- But still – only **0.003%** of all papers found to have fake reviews.