

Bartlett, Michele L.

From: Eugenie Reich [eugenie.reich@gmail.com]
Sent: Tuesday, February 07, 2006 10:56 PM
To: Martin Bertodano
Cc: Lefteri Tsoukalas; Joshua C. Walter
Subject: RE: interview today, tomorrow?

In my view, upholding the value of the scientific method involves a certain amount of frankness with the press in this situation. Professor Tsoukalas himself helped convince me of this yesterday and today. My understanding is that we are in a situation where we have been seeing constant and repeated press releases on bubble fusion (not recently from purdue, but APS possibly has a longer press release list for science reporters). You are meanwhile knowing you could not reproduce something, from your own experience knowing also about problems with Professor Taleyarkhan's methods, while Nature and all the other science venues and PRL all the other places are publishing and press releasing work that you know to have major problems. Public money is going into the work, and other groups are wasting time. Other people are probably holding back their own manuscripts on negative results because they are afraid to get attacked like Saltmarsh. Somebody has to speak some time. In the BBC film, for example, it was only Putterman and Suslick's agreement to mention details of an unpublished results that prevented the film getting out of hand!

I understand there are scientific concerns for unpublished information. In the situation, I believe firmly your unpublished and unreviewed information is more important than 90% of published and reviewed information (especially when reviewers are getting ignored) Regarding the draft, which Professor Tsoukalas has given me -- I am very sorry I do not want to get him in trouble with you -- I think it seems very solid. I do not suggest reporting in detail on those results. I do not want to pre-empt it scientifically.

I do suggest saying you have had some negative results and that you have held them back because of the reasons you did, and including that you had an experiment dissembled, samples go missing, and some press release in weird circumstances apparently referring to your same experiment (see Xu and Butt 2005).

This kind of trajectory has to be headed off at some point. The rewards systems are all screwy. Clearly we do not know if Professor Taleyarkhan has ever been faking data, and my story is unlikely even to mention this. But, we all know that has to be considered as a possible interpretation. Another possible interpretation is he cut corners badly.

In any major fraud or hoax case I have studied, and I studied a few, the press played a crucial role in letting things get out of hand. Not running interviews about the troubles of interim reproducibility efforts by other groups was part of that.

Further, if you believe in the scientific method, don't you believe there should be articles about it? The whole problem is that we only ever write articles about results. And the reason for that is that nobody wants to talk until they have a result because the journals are telling them not to because they want to sell themselves as containing "new" discoveries. But there are no really new real new discoveries; but only very hard-won ones that took people a really long time. And we never write about those details!

We just copy the wretched press releases!

My suggestion is that you would talk to me about this story, let me write it down, send it you, and if you think it is saying too much about details of your results, I will cut that out because basically I respect this point about the manuscript being unsubmitted. I can even add. "They refuse to discuss details of the results because the manuscript was not submitted."

This will however only work if you will let me say that broadly speaking there are negative result (which is the thing that I argue is in the public interest to know now). It will not work otherwise, because otherwise, no one would understand a possible incentive to remove the experiment by Dr Taleyarkhan or your incentives to be cautious submitting (submitting negative results is hard for everybody. because you don't know if you are the ones making the mistake).

Also think that the utter discretion around unpublished results applies far more strongly to positive claims of discoveries and far less strongly to null results.

Finally, I am uncomfortable relying on only one spokesman for a situation like this for obvious reasons. If I am going to say an experiment was removed, I would like to speak to someone who saw it as soon as it was removed, not someone who heard later.

Best Wishes,
Eugenie

-----Original Message-----

From: Martin Bertodano [mailto:bertodan@purdue.edu]
Sent: 07 February 2006 21:42
To: Eugenie Reich
Cc: Lefteri Tsoukalas; Joshua C. Walter
Subject: Re: interview today, tomorrow?

Dear Eugenie,

The results of the experiment have not been published yet and so they have not gone through the rigorous peer review process. Furthermore the experiment was carried out by a group of researchers, not just me. Therefore, I believe that it is not appropriate for me to communicate the results to the press at this time. All I can say is that as a group we all worked very hard to do our job and uphold the value of the Scientific Method. Since the leader of the group was Dr. Tsoukalas I recommend that you contact him to request further information.
Sincerely,

Martin Bertodano

Eugenie Reich wrote:

> Dear Professor Martin Lopez de Bertodano,

> I called today hoping we could speak about your involvement with an attempt to reproduce bubble fusion at Purdue. I am a freelance reporter in Boston. I spoke recently to Professor Tsoukalas and it is likely I will send a story to /Nature/ about the work. If you would be willing to speak about it this would be great.

> You can reach me on 617 354 0329 or feel free to drop a line when is good to talk. I would like to talk and then I will send quotes by email later I would like to use.

> Please feel free to look on my website below for other examples of my work.

> Best Wishes,

> Eugenie

> Eugenie Samuel Reich

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