

# Anatomy of a Retraction

STM

April 30, 2014

Washington, DC

Ivan Oransky

Co-Founder, Retraction Watch

VP, Global Editorial Director, MedPage Today

@ivanoransky

# The Euphemisms

“unattributed overlap”

# The Euphemisms

“unattributed overlap”  
an “approach”

# The Euphemisms

“unattributed overlap”

an “approach”

“a duplicate of a paper that has already been published” ...by other authors

# The Euphemisms

“unattributed overlap”

an “approach”

“a duplicate of a paper that has already been published” ...by other authors

“significant originality issue”

# The Euphemisms

“unattributed overlap”

an “approach”

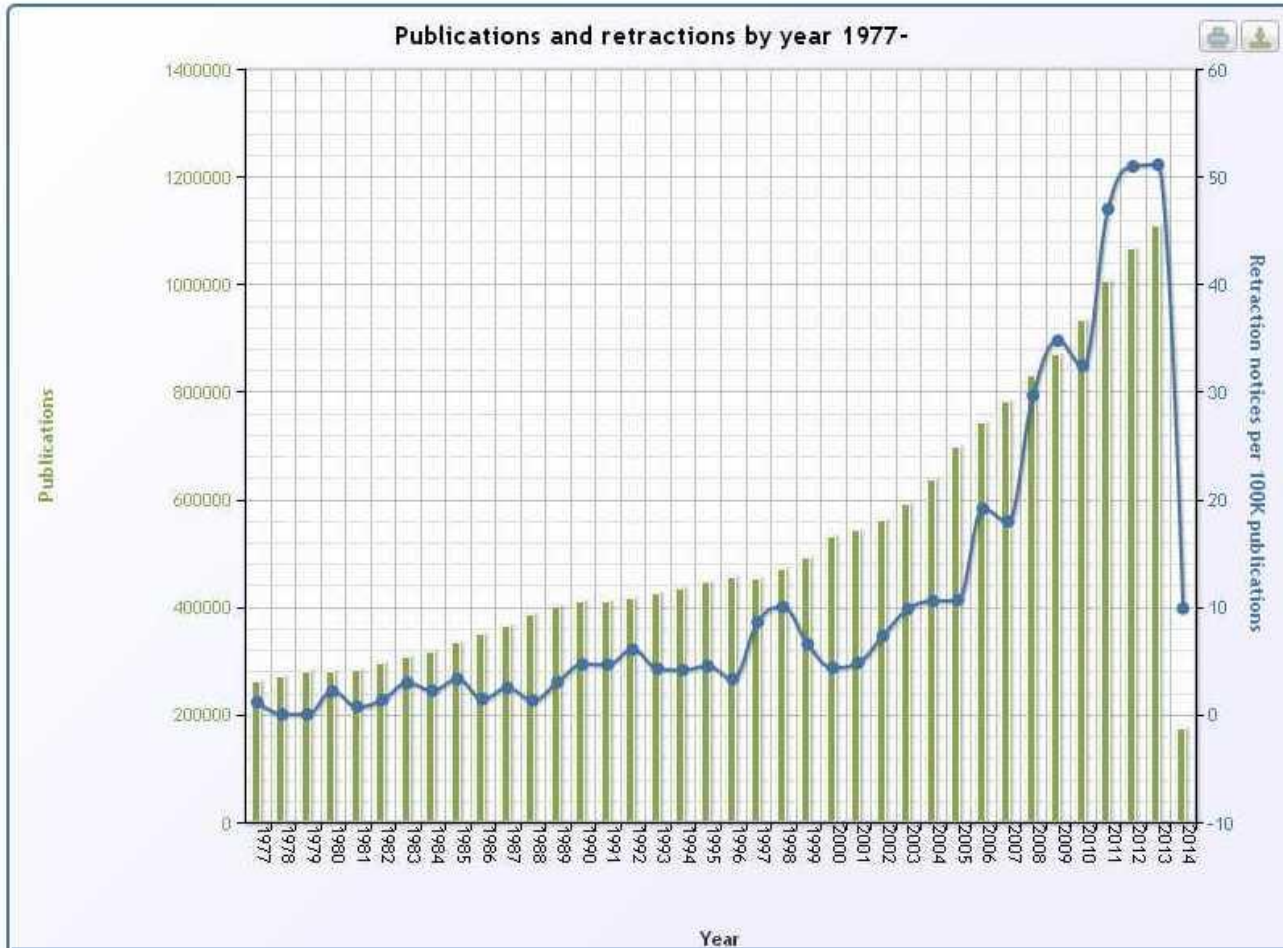
“a duplicate of a paper that has already been published” ...by other authors

“significant originality issue”

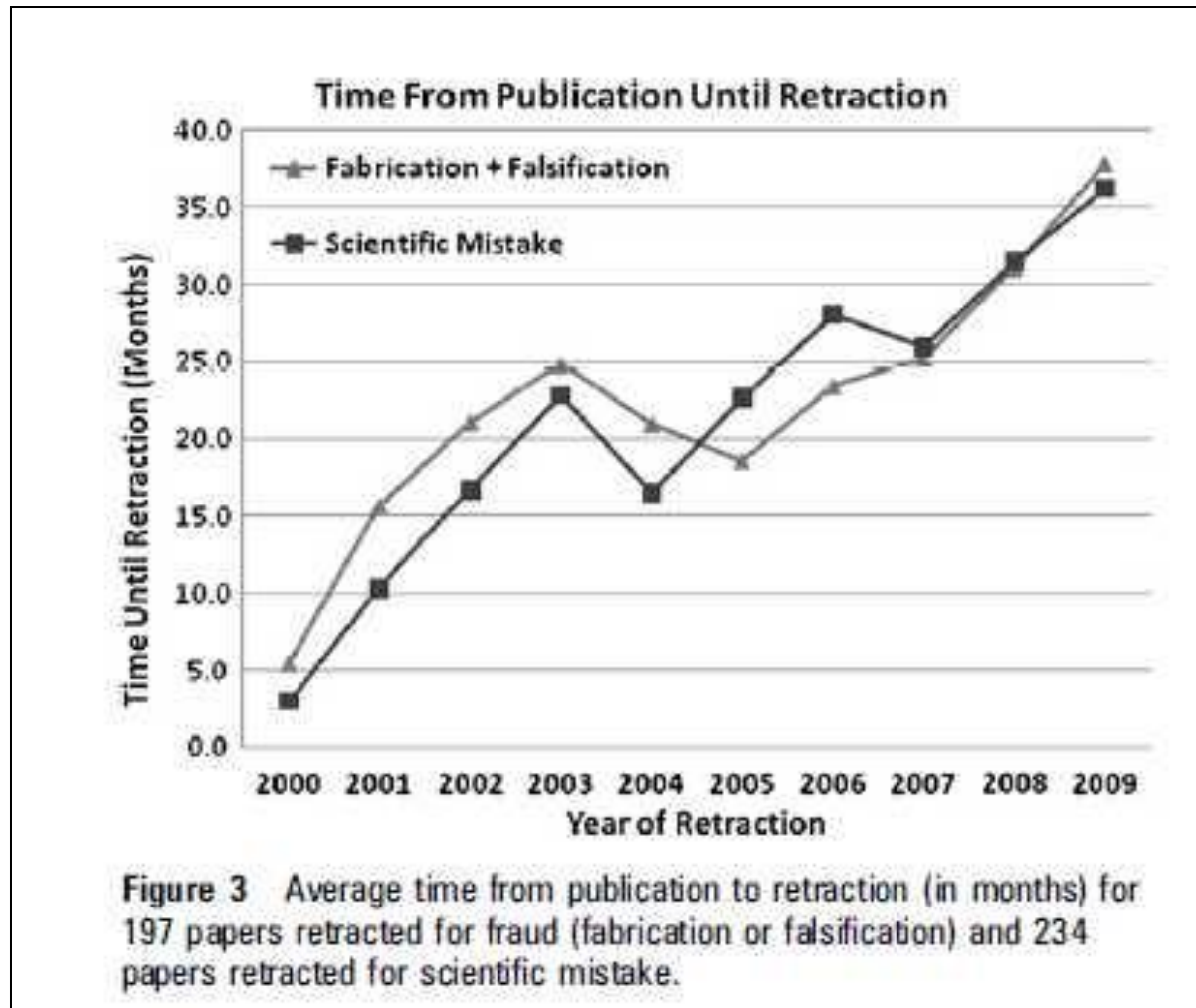
“Some sentences...are directly taken from other papers, which could be viewed as a form of plagiarism”

# Retractions on the Rise

## PubMed Retraction Notices - By Year



# How Long Do Retractions Take?





# Anatomy of a Retraction

## Retraction Watch

Tracking retraction process

### At long last, disputed dance study retracted from Nature

with 9 comments

A 2005 *Nature* study that has vexed one of its authors since 2007 is finally being retracted.

The [notice](#) for "Dance reveals symmetry especially in young men," by William M. Brown, Lee Cronk, Keith Grochow, Amy Jacobson, C. Karen Liu, Zoran Popovic & Robert Trivers, says very little:

“

We retract this Letter, which reported strong positive associations between symmetry and dancing ability in a group of young Jamaican men. K.G. could not be contacted.

However, a lot of ink and pixels have been spilled over the years on this story, from [Trivers' own website](#) to his 2009 book, *The Anatomy of A Fraud: Symmetry and Dance*, and many stories in the popular press. A [May story in Nature](#), for example, revealed that Trivers had been temporarily banned from



# Anatomy of a Retraction

## Retraction Watch

Tracking retraction  
process

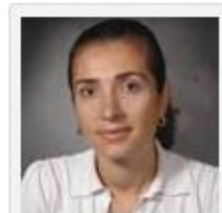
### McGill committee says Nature figures were “intentionally contrived and falsified”

with 116 comments

An associate professor at Montreal’s McGill University is correcting two papers, one of them in *Nature*, after a university committee found evidence of falsification, Retraction Watch has learned.

Concerns had been raised about four papers by [Maya Saleh](#) and colleagues:

- [Caspase-12 modulates NOD signaling and regulates antimicrobial peptide production and mucosal immunity](#), published in *Cell Host & Microbe* in 2008 and cited 49 times, according to Thomson Scientific’s Web of Knowledge
- [Cellular inhibitors of apoptosis cIAP1 and cIAP2 are required for innate immunity signaling by the pattern recognition receptors NOD1 and NOD2](#), published in *Immunity* in 2009 and cited 87 times
- “[Confinement of caspase-12 proteolytic activity to autoprocessing](#),” published in PNAS in 2008 and cited



Maya Saleh, via  
McGill

# Anatomy of a Retraction

## Retraction Watch

Tracking retraction process

### Nature corrects figures McGill committee found had been “intentionally contrived and falsified”

with 15 comments

The second of two corrections by McGill researcher [Maya Saleh](#) for what a university committee called “intentionally contrived and falsified” figures has run in *Nature*.

We [reported in January](#) that the McGill committee concluded that

“two figures in [a] *Nature* paper had been “intentionally contrived and falsified.” One of those figures was duplicated in a PNAS paper, which also contained an image that had incorrectly labeled some proteins.

The committee recommended corrections for both of the papers. The PNAS correction [ran in February](#). Now, the [Nature Corrigendum has appeared](#):



“The immunoprecipitation lanes in Fig. 4c of this Letter were incorrectly derived from figure 6 of ref. 1 (which was generated prior to publication of this Letter). Also, some input lanes (“Total Casp12”) were

# Anatomy of A Retraction

## Retraction Watch

Tracking retraction process

### Nature corrects a correction

with 13 comments

Last year, we reported on a [Nature correction of a paper](#) for what a McGill University committee had earlier called “[intentionally contrived and falsified](#)” figures. It turns out that the correction — like the original paper — left some *Nature* readers puzzled, so the journal has run a [correction of the correction](#):

“

Owing to an error in the production process, some details were omitted from the [advance online publication version of this Corrigendum](#): this is the complete version. When our Letter was under consideration at *Nature*, we originally showed co-immunoprecipitation between caspase-1 and wild-type caspase-12 or catalytically inactive caspase-12 (C299A) as part of Fig. 4. In response to reviewers’ comments, requesting co-immunoprecipitation with other caspases for specificity control, this original figure was removed from the manuscript and was later published as part of figure 6 of ref. [1](#). It was recently brought to



# Anonymity



Photo: zettibellin / Source: PHOTOCASE

*What's behind paper retractions? (6)*

## Who Are You?

Editors should stop ignoring anonymous whistle-blowers.

Clare Francis is a thorn in many journal editors' sides. His – or maybe her; more on that in a moment – modus operandi is simple: he uses plagiarism detection software to compare various papers, then sends his findings to journal editors, often with a request for a retraction.

Many editors ignore him. Others sift through his complaints and respond.

Those that do reply often dismiss the alleged overlap, saying the paper might have been the full version of a conference abstract published earlier, or that it was simply a review. Francis doesn't like those responses and makes that clear in his own replies to editors.

destabilizing force" and a "smear campaign". The wife of Alirio Melendez, who is being investigated by the National University of Singapore and has already had one paper retracted, with another subject to an Expression of Concern, also used the latter phrase to describe the anonymous tips that led to the scrutiny of her husband's work.

In a perfect world, we'd love to know who Francis and these other whistle-blowers are. (We think Francis uses various aliases, some with men's names, which is why we hedged on gender). Understanding someone's motivations for speaking out can add a great deal to a story. In the case of industry-funded medical research, it's critical.

But we're baffled as to why editors and institutions ignore private emails from anonymous whistle-blowers. Unless, of course,

# Anonymity

“I think it is critical that people identify themselves in order for the EIC to know who is bringing about the accusation with regards to misconduct. As my students ... can tell you, misconduct, including self-plagiarism, can and has ruined careers. Hence, it is imperative that these cases are handled appropriately and often this includes contacting the accusing party.”

– Eric Murphy, editor-in-chief, Lipids

paper might have been the full version or a conference abstract published earlier, or that it was simply a review. Francis doesn't like those responses and makes that clear in his own replies to editors.

a great deal to a story. In the case of industry-funded medical research, it's critical.

But we're baffled as to why editors and institutions ignore private emails from anonymous whistle-blowers. Unless, of course,

# The Rise of Post-Publication Peer Review

## Retraction Watch

Tracking retractions as a workflow process

### Cell attributes image problems in cloning paper to “minor” errors; sees no impact on conclusions

with 39 comments

Yesterday [we reported](#) that *Cell* was looking into problematic images in a recent paper on human embryonic stem cell cloning. We’ve now heard from the journal about the nature of the inquiry.

Mary Beth O’Leary, a spokeswoman for Cell Press — an Elsevier title — tells us that:

“

Based on our own initial in-house assessment of the issues raised in PubPeer and in initial discussions with the authors, it seems that there were some minor errors made by the authors when preparing the figures for initial submission.

While we are continuing discussions with the authors, we do not believe these errors impact the scientific findings of the paper in any way.

O’Leary also dismissed the notion that rushing the article into print compromised the review and editorial processes:

“

A number of comments about these errors in articles and blogs have drawn connections to the speed of the peer review process for this paper. Given the broad interest, importance, anticipated scrutiny of the claims of the paper and the preeminence of the reviewers, we have no reason to doubt the



Page

[About](#)

[About](#)

[The R  
includ](#)

[The R](#)

[The R  
Trans](#)

[Upcon  
Watch](#)

[What  
Retrac](#)

Search

[RSS -](#)

[RSS -](#)

Email

Enter

# The Rise of Post-Publication Peer Review

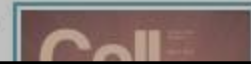
## Retraction Watch

Tracking retractions as a workflow process

### Cell attributes image problems in cloning paper to “minor” errors; sees no impact on conclusions

with 39 comments

Yesterday we reported that *Cell* was looking into problematic images in a recent paper on human embryonic stem cell cloning. We’ve now heard from the journal about the nature



Page  
[About](#)  
[About](#)  
[The R](#)  
[includ](#)

...but runs a 739-word correction involving most of the figures.

and in initial discussions with the authors, it seems that there were some minor errors made by the authors when preparing the figures for initial submission.

While we are continuing discussions with the authors, we do not believe these errors impact the scientific findings of the paper in any way.

O’Leary also dismissed the notion that rushing the article into print compromised the review and editorial processes:

“A number of comments about these errors in articles and blogs have drawn connections to the speed of the peer review process for this paper. Given the broad interest, importance, anticipated scrutiny of the claims of the paper and the preeminence of the reviewers, we have no reason to doubt the

[What i](#)  
[Retrad](#)

Search

[RSS -](#)

[RSS -](#)

[Email](#)

Enter



# Does Public Scrutiny Matter?

The image shows a screenshot of a PeerJ article page. The top navigation bar includes the PeerJ logo, a search icon, and links for ARTICLES, PREPRINTS, Q&A, SUBMIT, and SIGNUP & PRICING. The article title is "Internet publicity of data problems in the bioscience literature correlates with enhanced corrective action" by Paul S. Brookes. The left sidebar contains a table of contents with links to Introduction, Methods, Results, Discussion, Supplemental Information, and Additional Information and Declarations. Below this are icons for Peer Review history, Citations in Google Scholar, Questions (2), and Links (5). The main content area shows a quote: "Also see the author interview with Paul Brookes for more insights." Below the quote are expandable sections for "Author and article information" and "Abstract". A "Read for yourself" button is visible in the bottom right corner of the article content area.

PeerJ

ARTICLES PREPRINTS Q&A SUBMIT SIGNUP & PRICING

Follow Download as

Introduction  
Methods  
Results  
Discussion  
Supplemental Information  
Additional Information and Declarations

Peer Review history  
Citations in Google Scholar  
Questions (2)  
Links (5)

Subject areas  
Ethical Issues

## Internet publicity of data problems in the bioscience literature correlates with enhanced corrective action

Paul S. Brookes

“ Also see the [author interview with Paul Brookes](#) for more insights.

> Author and article information

Abstract

Several online forums exist to facilitate op

**Read for yourself**

<https://peerj.com/articles/313/>

# Solutions

- Stop the proliferation of pre-publication peer-reviewed journals
- Embrace post-publication peer review
- Hire better lawyers
- Change scientific incentives