

Live discussion on *Retraction Watch* - "Journal to feature special issue on scientific misconduct, seeks submissions" - with CEO Dietrich Rordorf regarding MDPI's reckless publication and possible retraction of the *Australian Paradox* paper - August 2013

Here's my proposed "Retraction notice" for the *Australian Paradox* paper, as posted on *Retraction Watch*, below:

In an attempt to fast-track what so far has been an unreasonably slow process, Dietrich, here is my proposed draft of what MDPI's Publisher Shu-Kun Lin should publish when announcing the retraction:

Abstract: *It has been brought to our attention by a reader of *Nutrients* that the conclusion of "a consistent and substantial decline" in per-capita sugar consumption between 1980 and 2010 in "The Australian Paradox: A Substantial Decline in Sugars Intake over the Same Timeframe that Overweight and Obesity Have Increased" is based in part on data for 2000-2003 that was falsified by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). MDPI has a strict "zero tolerance policy" towards the use of falsified data in our manuscripts, whether the authors were aware of the invalidity of the data or not. Moreover, there were various other serious errors and misinterpretations that damaged the credibility of the manuscript's conclusion of "an inverse relationship" between sugar consumption and obesity. Taking public-health considerations into account – particularly the growing evidence that excessive sugar consumption is a major contributor to global obesity and type 2 diabetes, together the greatest public-health challenge of our times: <http://care.diabetesjournals.org/content/33/11/2477.full.pdf> – the Editorial Team and Publisher have determined that this manuscript should be retracted. We apologize for any inconvenience this may cause". (Readers, you can scroll down to view similar Abstracts: http://www.mdpi.com/search?article_type=retraction).*

There you go, Dietrich. Such a result would be fair to everyone concerned, even allowing you to hold your head high again in fora such as these. An added bonus is that you would probably never hear from me again.

Regards,

Rory

<http://retractionwatch.wordpress.com/2013/08/22/journal-to-feature-special-issue-on-scientific-misconduct-seeks-submissions/?replytocom=61954#respond>

And here's my latest note to the University of Sydney on this matter:

----- Forwarded message -----

From: rory robertson <strathburnstation@gmail.com>

Date: Sat, Aug 24, 2013 at 2:26 PM

Subject: fyi: Where is The New York Times?: "Live" on RetractionWatch about Australian Paradox with Dietrich Rordorf, CEO of MDPI journals (publisher of faulty University of Sydney paper)

To: jenzie.brandmiller@sydney.edu.au , alan.barclay@gisymbol.com , Peter.Howe@newcastle.edu.au , vice.chancellor@sydney.edu.au , dvc.provost@sydney.edu.au , chair.academicboard@sydney.edu.au , stephen.simpson@sydney.edu.au , Michael.Spence@sydney.edu.au , Stephen.Garton@sydney.edu.au , Derrick.Armstrong@sydney.edu.au , Shane.Houston@sydney.edu.au , John.Hearn@sydney.edu.au , Jill.Trehwella@sydney.edu.au , Ann.Brewer@sydney.edu.au , Gwynnyth.Llewellyn@sydney.edu.au , Kathryn.Refshauge@sydney.edu.au , Chris.Peck@sydney.edu.au , Bruce.Robinson@sydney.edu.au , Jill.White@sydney.edu.au , debbie.bowman@sydney.edu.au , tim.payne@sydney.edu.au , rebecca.murray@sydney.edu.au , jane.oakeshott@sydney.edu.au , meryl.bradford@sydney.edu.au , vc.admin@sydney.edu.au , kim.bellanderson@sydney.edu.au , helen.agus@sydney.edu.au , tony.weiss@sydney.edu.au , a.weiss@usyd.edu.au , soumela.amanatidis@sydney.edu.au , margaret.allmanfarinelli@sydney.edu.au , iain.campbell@sydney.edu.au , dee.carter@sydney.edu.au , ian.caterson@sydney.edu.au , charles.collyer@sydney.edu.au , arthur.conigrave@sydney.edu.au , stuart.cordwell@sydney.edu.au , ben.crossett@sydney.edu.au , gareth.denyer@sydney.edu.au , tom.ferenci@sydney.edu.au , k.downard@sydney.edu.au , mitchell.guss@sydney.edu.au , vanessa.gysbers@sydney.edu.au , ruth.hall@sydney.edu.au , dale.hancock@sydney.edu.au , hush_n@chem.usyd.edu.au , noel.hush@sydney.edu.au , jill.johnston@sydney.edu.au , katherine.jukic@sydney.edu.au , philip.kuchel@sydney.edu.au , vincy.li@sydney.edu.au , tim.newsome@sydney.edu.au , kieron.rooney@sydney.edu.au , tim.gill@sydney.edu.au , hannah.nicholas@sydney.edu.au , anna.rangan@sydney.edu.au , reeves@angis.usyd.edu.au , peter.reeves@sydney.edu.au , margaret.sunde@sydney.edu.au , s.truswell@mmb.usyd.edu.au , peter.waterhouse@usyd.edu.au , peter.waterhouse@sydney.edu.au , jjb_anderson@unc.edu , enrico.bignetti@unipr.it , jeffrey.blumberg@tufts.edu , d.cameron-smith@auckland.ac.nz , francesco.capozzi@unibo.it , karenc@uow.edu.au , fdunshea@unimelb.edu.au , wrcraig@andrews.edu , vflood@uow.edu.au , faye@cirad.fr , haub@ksu.edu , bengt.jeppsson@med.lu.se , kmecklin@uoguelph.ca , kuhlensc@illinois.edu , leidyh@missouri.edu , mjplemay@gmail.com ,

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Good afternoon/morning/evening,

Below is a "live" discussion on *Retraction Watch* about its latest post by Grant Steen: "**Journal to feature special issue on scientific misconduct, seeks submissions**".

My initial contribution prompted a response from the CEO of MDPI publishing, Dietrich Rordorf. The discussion so far is reproduced below. Or you can **read it online at** <http://retractionwatch.wordpress.com/2013/08/22/journal-to-feature-special-issue-on-scientific-misconduct-seeks-submissions/#comment-62012>

Readers, if you think I have my facts wrong or am being unreasonable, please join in and be very critical of me. If you are a journalist, then I think you have the ingredients for a great story about sausage-making in high-level science. Where is *The New York Times* when it is needed?

Why I am making such a fuss

To be clear about my motivations - for those who think I might be a mad person - this all matters because modern rates of sugar consumption - including via sugary drinks - are a key driver of global obesity and type 2 diabetes, together the greatest public-health challenge of our times: <http://care.diabetesjournals.org/content/33/11/2477.full.pdf>

Importantly, outsized rates of sugar consumption – alongside alcohol and tobacco – are a major driver of the unacceptable “gap” in life expectancy between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians: see the bottom row of Box/Table 2 in <https://www.mja.com.au/journal/2013/198/7/characteristics-community-level-diet-aboriginal-people-remote-northern-australia>

I am making a fuss because the University of Sydney's faulty *Australian Paradox* paper is seeking to (falsely) exonerate sugar and sugary drinks as a menace to public health. Here is its final sentence: "The findings challenge the implicit assumption that taxes and other measures to reduce intake of soft drinks will be an effective strategy in global efforts to reduce obesity": http://www.mdpi.com/journal/nutrients/special_issues/carbohydrates

Readers, Professor Jennie Brand-Miller and Dr Alan Barclay's findings are hopelessly wrong, based as they are on falsified FAO data and confusion between up and down in simple charts (see specific details in the discussion below). And their policy conclusion is recklessly wrong, according to such notables as the Heart Foundation, Cancer Council and Diabetes Australia:<http://www.rethinksugarydrink.org.au/>

Interestingly, **the University of Sydney's Glycemic Index (GI) operation** - separating good foods and beverages (good = low GI = 55 and under) from bad (bad = high GI = over 55) - suggests that **GI=53 Coca Cola is a good food: search "coca cola"** in <http://www.glycemicindex.com/foodSearch.php>

In turn, the company really liked the *Australian Paradox* paper: <http://www.smh.com.au/national/health/research-causes-stir-over-sugars-role-in-obesity-20120330-1w3e5.html> And has been keen to sponsor getting the good word out (first 10 seconds): <http://www.livepositively.com.au/Webinar?id=5>

Of course, if your food product is high GI then the University of Sydney for perhaps \$6000 a pop can add super-low-GI=19 fructose - the "sweet poison" half of table sugar - to make it low GI and "Healthy": p. 5 at [http://www.foodhealthdialogue.gov.au/internet/foodandhealth/publishing.nsf/Content/D59B2C8391006638CA2578E600834BBD/\\$File/Resources%20and%20support%20for%20reformulation%20activities.pdf](http://www.foodhealthdialogue.gov.au/internet/foodandhealth/publishing.nsf/Content/D59B2C8391006638CA2578E600834BBD/$File/Resources%20and%20support%20for%20reformulation%20activities.pdf) (if the link doesn't work, google "barclay pdf glycemic reformulating") and pp. 10-11 at <http://www.gisymbol.com.au/cmsAdmin/uploads/Glycemic-Index-Foundation-Healthy-Choices-Brochure.pdf>

To me at least, this is all very disturbing.

Good reading and best wishes,

Rory

New comments have been made since that email was distributed on Saturday 24 August 2013. Comments can be viewed and made online at <http://retractionwatch.wordpress.com/2013/08/22/journal-to-feature-special-issue-on-scientific-misconduct-seeks-submissions/?replytocom=61954#respond>

20 Responses

it'll be interesting to see at what point the literature on retractions will become large enough to see its own first retraction



omnologos

August 22, 2013 at 12:37 pm

Ironically, Jeffrey Beall called MDPI a controversial publisher (<http://scholarlyoa.com/2013/05/16/more-controversy-over-open-access-publisher-mdpi/>), which makes this special issue particularly challenging, and raises some interesting queries about the choice of publisher and publishing venue.



JATdS

August 22, 2013 at 4:37 pm

Grant,

I hope you will not be publishing any of your work in the "Special Issue" of which you are "Guest Editor". That would be a mistake.

There is a certain irony about an MDPI special issue on scientific misconduct. Or does the MDPI's business model involve the publication of faulty papers for a fee, and then charging another fee to publish further papers about the faulty papers?

That is, my main experience of a "Special Issue" of the MDPI publication "Nutrients" is that it had little or no competent quality control, and that resulted in the publication of the clownish Australian Paradox paper: <http://www.australianparadox.com>

The publication of the obviously faulty paper with a spectacularly false conclusion was overseen by an influential University of Sydney author operating as "Guest Editor" of the "Special Issue": http://www.mdpi.com/journal/nutrients/special_issues/carbohydrates

Here's the Editorial that the Editor-in-Chief of Nutrients wrote - <http://www.mdpi.com/2072-6643/4/4/258> - as he allowed his unreliable authors/"Guest Editor" to restate their self-published nonsense in a fluffy, factually incorrect rebuttal that did not address the substance of my correct critique: <http://www.smh.com.au/business/pesky-economist-wont-let-big-sugar-lie-20120725-22pru.html>

Readers, seeking the correction or retraction of the obviously faulty Australian Paradox paper has been a saga, leading to what I see as strong evidence of research misconduct, featuring "persistent negligence" (including in the handling of falsified data), mismanaged conflicts of interest and seriously false information promoted on the public record, in the critical debate on the origins of obesity and type 2 diabetes, together the greatest public health challenge of our times:

x <http://www.australianparadox.com/pdf/AustParadoxfalsifieddata.pdf>

x <http://www.australianparadox.com/pdf/22Slideshowaustraliangoestoparadoxcanberrafinal.pdf>

x <http://www.smh.com.au/national/health/research-causes-stir-over-sugars-role-in-obesity-20120330-1w3e5.html>

x <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/health-science/a-spoonful-of-sugar-is-not-so-bad/story-e6frq8y6-1226090126776>

Any thoughts, anyone? Please be very critical of me if you think I have my facts wrong or am being unreasonable in any way.

[rory robertson former fattie](#)

August 22, 2013 at 5:04 pm

Great critique Rory!!

The paper you pulled apart was nearly as appalling as some of the dendrochronology papers that have appeared over the last few years.



[asecretcountryMike Williams](#)

August 22, 2013 at [8:01 pm](#)

I didn't read your links but I wouldn't be at all surprised if your correct in your assertions. I am also not surprised that people fake data and are self serving. The real question here is why are they allowed to get away with it, particularly when in many cases they are publicly funded. The answer (as you already know) is that everyone from the University to the Govt funding bodies have nothing to gain by uncovering fraud and a great deal to lose.



Phronesis

August 22, 2013 at [11:00 pm](#)

Dear Rory,

It is up to the authors' university to commission an investigation into your claims of potentially falsified data. If the Publisher receives an official note from either the university or the academic editor to retract the paper, the paper will be taken down. Note that MDPI is an adhering member to COPE – the Commission on Publications Ethics – and that we strictly operate according to industry standards. We can not simply retract papers based on blog posts.

Kind regards,

Dietrich Rordorf



Dietrich Rordorf

August 23, 2013 at [9:49 am](#)

[RR ff] *Dietrich, I see that you are the CEO of the MDPI stable of journals: <http://www.mdpi.com/about/team>*

Thanks for the lame effort to try to defend your clownish MDPI "journal" Nutrients.

To be clear, I have not made a claim about "potentially falsified data". I have stated that the data clearly are falsified, and have documented that fact. The "clue" that the series is falsified is that it involves a line segment that is dead flat. Dietrich, your incompetent journal published flat-lining falsified data as fact, and recklessly refuses to correct the scientific record.

Readers, one of the extraordinary aspects of the Australian Paradox scandal has been that Dietrich's authors – supposedly wrestling with a "paradox" – never thought to remark upon the most remarkable thing in this episode. I say remarkable because, as you would know, perhaps the rarest thing in nature – and thus rare in real-life scientific observations of humans, animals and plants – is a dead-straight flat line. Indeed, the term "flat-lining" is associated with things not living but dead.

In Dietrich's negligent Australian Paradox paper, the flat-lining data series was a strong and correct hint of falsified figures. That is, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) sugar series is conspicuously flat in the 2000s because the FAO began falsifying its Australian series after 1998–99, after the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) discontinued its series as unreliable after 60 years. Again: after spoon-feeding sugar data to the FAO for decades, the ABS after 1998–99 simply stopped counting, stopped providing data to the FAO and everyone else. So there are no valid data after 1998–99. Full stop. The FAO responded for several years, year after year, by simply writing down the same, unchanged, ABS figure from 1998–99. The FAO did not want to

print the unsightly words "Not available" in its "dataset". That is why we have falsified flat lines for the early 2000s:<http://www.australianparadox.com/pdf/FAOfalsifiedsugar.pdf>

Dietrich, what is the role falsified data in "peer reviewed" science? In this case, it is the basis for your clownish MDPI journal's high-profile Australian Paradox "finding". Nice one. Your journal claims to have "a zero tolerance policy" towards falsified data – MDPI Publication Ethics

Statement:<http://www.mdpi.com/journal/nutrients/about> – yet you tell me you can do nothing about the falsified data in your journal? You can, and you should, in my opinion.

Readers, when does the inadvertent publication of false information deliberately left uncorrected – to protect the reputation of one's journal and that of its editors – become simple fraud? <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fraud>
Meanwhile, Dietrich, not one of your authors, your "Guest Editor", your "Editor-in-Chief" nor your independent reviewers – if there were any – can count or spell correctly with consistency. My guess is that no-one but the authors actually read through the error-ridden paper before they pressed the "self publish" button. Remember, readers, Dietrich's lead author was operating as Dietrich's "Guest Editor": http://www.mdpi.com/journal/nutrients/special_issues/carbohydrates How's that for maximum scientific integrity?

Readers, for those keen on self-published science, try this ~600 g "fact" for size: "Overall, there was a decrease in sugar contribution from nutritively sweetened carbonated soft drinks to the Australian food supply, amounting to 12,402 tons (~600 g per person per year, Figure 6) from 2002 to 2006" (p.498 in <http://www.mdpi.com/2072-6643/3/4/491>).

Yes, that's 12,402, 000,000 grams in total over four years, shared between some 20 million Australians. So, dividing by four, that's roughly 3,000, 000,000 grams per annum shared between roughly 20, 000,000 people. Cancel seven zeros and that's 300 grams per year between two people. Or ~150 g per person per year, not "~600 g per person per year".

Yes, that "~600 g" figure is wrong only by a factor of four, but it's still sitting there published and uncorrected in Dietrich's negligent pay-as-you-publish-whatever-you-like Nutrients "journal". It's only "peer reviewed" science, so what does it matter?

Dietrich, your authors' self-published, fluffy and false "rebuttal" of my correct critique includes my name spelt as "Roberston" (final paragraph of p. 3 at <http://www.australianparadox.com/pdf/nutrients-03-00491-s003.pdf>).

Is it too much to ask that your reckless journal spell my name correctly while your authors and Editor-in-Chief blacken it with their clownish rebuttal of my correct critique? <http://www.australianparadox.com>

Dietrich, you have the capacity to instruct the editors of your journals to correct obvious errors of fact, and to remove falsified data from the scientific record. So please don't show up here pretending you are operating a responsible journal and generally doing the right thing. Your clownish journal Nutrients is a disgrace.

Dietrich, please correct or retract your "shonky sugar study" – the Australian Paradox paper that would never have been published in a real journal with real quality control – before it does further damage to Australian public health:<http://www.smh.com.au/national/health/research-causes-stir-over-sugars-role-in-obesity-20120330-1w3e5.html>

Readers, please be very critical of me if you think I am being unreasonable.



[rory robertson former fattie](#), August 23, 2013 at [1:23 pm](#)

[Dietrich Rordorf, CEO of MPDI replies] I can only say one thing with certainty: your claim of "self-publication" is wrong. The editorial decision making regarding this article was made by the Editor-in-Chief of the journal Nutrients based on the comments of two independent expert referees. The identities of the referees were of course not revealed to the authors (one of which happens to be the Guest Editor of the special issue where the article appears). As the publisher of this journal, we have to rely on the judgments from the peer-review referees, the Editor-in-Chief and the academic editors.

[Dietrich Rordorf](#), August 23, 2013 at [5:38 pm](#)

[RR ff] *Again, Dietrich, please do not keep pretending you are operating a responsible journal. If you were we would not be having this conversation a year and a half after I drew major errors in the University of Sydney's Australian Paradox paper to the attention of your authors, editors, editorial board and publisher.*

And what we know "with certainty" about your "peer review" process, Dietrich, is that it was either non-existent, incompetent or ignored by your lead author operating as "Guest Editor". We know that with certainty because of what I explained above: sitting there in your clownish Nutrients journal is an obviously faulty paper featuring a spectacularly false "finding" – "a consistent and substantial decline" over the 1980–2010 timeframe – based on a combination of falsified data and confusion about up versus down in a series of simple charts.

For example, how about this for an eye-popping error, an error self-published and still uncorrected: "Food industry data indicate that per capita sales of low calorie (non-nutritively sweetened) beverages doubled from 1994 to 2006 [correct: from 15L to 30L] while nutritively sweetened beverages decreased by 10%" [oops, that's a 30% increase, from 35L to 45L]? Slide 20 in <http://www.australianparadox.com/pdf/22Slideshowaustraliangoestoparadoxcanberrafinal.pdf> Dietrich, any competent independent review – like this one now – would have noticed those dominating errors. After all, up versus down – and recognising falsified flat lines – is not rocket science. Can we agree at least that the authors' four valid charts – reproduced here in <http://www.australianparadox.com> – all trend up not down in the relevant timeframe? Dietrich, when I say "valid" I mean "not falsified".

Dietrich, the University of Sydney paper you published and now are defending is an academic disgrace, a menace to public health and part of a case-study in research misconduct. Perhaps it should be the feature article in the coming "Special Issue" on "Misconduct in Scientific Publishing". Grant?

In any case, Dietrich, your "shonky sugar study" should be corrected or retracted without further unreasonable delay. While the faulty paper and its false conclusion are supportive of the authors' business of stamping particular brands of sugar and sugary treats as Healthy (for up to \$6000 a pop – see Slide 12 in the Canberra link above), I'm not sure that publishing and defending obviously shonky science for a small fee is good for your publishing business, a business where credibility eventually matters.

Dietrich, you should know that I am 47 years old and in pretty good health. Some 18 months into this growing Australian Paradox scandal, I am still warming up. Please just correct or retract the paper, Dietrich, so we both can move on to other things.

Again, readers, please be very critical of me if you think I have my facts wrong or am being unreasonable.



[**rorv robertson former fattie**](#)

August 23, 2013 at [8:05 pm](#)

[Separate reader responding to Dietrich] We can not simply retract papers based on blog posts." — I humbly think one should. Anyone can pinpoint relevant defects on scientific literature, and published studies should be taken down based on whatever sound evidence, doesnt matter the source. Why, Science is for scientists, not for bureaucrats.



CR

August 26, 2013 at [10:21 pm](#)

[New contributor on another aspect of discussion] I am somewhat new to this higher education business and the paper writing games still mystifies me. I am appalled at the lack of punishments to the offenders of scientific research and publishing. I will rely on the theory, (put forth by many interrogation schools) called M.I.S.E. (pronounced mice), which stands for Money, Ideology, Sex and Ego. Another version uses the acronym M.I.C.E. (the C standing for coercion) and is usually applied to espionage .

In general, the theory goes, everyone does everything based on one or more of those four things.

Having been around college campuses and viewing the PH.D's you can pretty much rule out the sex aspect. Which leaves money, ideology and ego.

The money aspect would be the next item to be ruled out as a physician will make many times more than a college professor with about the same amount of effort to obtain a Ph.D. As it does to become an MD. But more on the money aspect later.

People like Diederik Stapel and others mentioned in retraction watch were first driven by Ideology. If someone were to do a thorough search of his oldest papers would find they were probable produce with good/reliable research with only minor hedging of the numbers (nothing that would stick out to a peer reviewer). After several papers being published and being praised for his/her work by peers of like minded ideology, over time his/her papers change, to ego driven. Which is much more dangerous, as each paper must be bigger, better and bolder. The small fabrication that were present in the first papers became bigger and bigger, his/her reputation covered up many defects in the research. These people write books, get recognized and the cycle continues, much the same as a drug addict until it all falls in on them. These, now, well known researchers, will use young, inexperienced or naive co-authors who fail to detect the inaccuracies or are afraid to challenge the data collected because of the reputation, (one co-author in a paper mentioned in RW said she didn't have access to the data used to write a paper she took credit for when it was first published, in this age of computers, email, electronic file transfers, how do you not have the data).

The money aspect comes into play by the universities. As colleges are run for the money (sorry if you thought it was for learning), as much as half of all grant monies go to the universities and the other half actually goes to the research.

Deans/chancellors place a tremendous amount of pressure on the faculty to produce papers, do research and above all obtain grants, much the same as football/basketball programs are pressured to win.

I am appalled at the lack of punishment handed out by the authorities to the offenders, In the united states the ORI hands out less than 20 sanctions a year and are so meaningless as to be no deterrent (you can not tell me that there are only a handful of fraudulent paper writers in the US). Its my understanding that Diederik Stapel worked out a deal to preform a few hours of community service and a fine. Stapel will make 10 times the amount of his fine, on his new book that he is probably writing as I type. The Ph.D. Students who wrote their thesis's on fraudulent data based on Stapel's work, all get to keep their doctorate. Some of these people like Stapel resign, only to be hired by other colleges and universities. Very few are fired.

Universities get to keep all the grant money that were obtained by persons who committed fraud (I have only seen that a handful of universities have ever had to give back grant monies). The book publishers don't offer refunds on books written with faulty/fraudulent data. The magazines that publish these articles don't refund the subscription money nor the advertiser money, and what about the people who peer reviewed the papers, they still remain anonymous. Not much seems to happen to anybody

In the meantime government policies are changed, private company policies and directions are changed, in the medical field, research is misdirected and countless millions of dollars in public and private monies are wasted because of these people, and in some cases actually cost people their lives. Other researches should be outraged because these people have misused/abused grant money, that could have gone to honest researchers. The sad part is that this subject is almost a taboo subject on campus, but just like cancer if it is not talked about and treated it will not go away and only get worse.

I think RW is doing a fantastic job and should be an encouragement to others to take up the good fight.



scott allen

August 22, 2013 at [7:23 pm](#)

[RRff] *Scott, as an economist, I'm attracted to your M.I.S.E. approach. Yes, incentive structures matter. In the Australian Paradox scandal discussed above, however, it seems as though a simple lack of competence in data analysis – including mistaking up for down, and errors in simple calculations – was the main driver of the problems: <http://www.australianparadox.com>*

There are, of course, (i) serious financial conflicts of interest, (ii) ideological “blinkers” via the low-GI approach to nutrition and (iii) major egos involved (after three million pop-sci diet books sold!), so perhaps it was the simple lack of competence that facilitated the original paper, and now M.I.S.E explains why the under-supervised University of Sydney authors refuse to retract their nonsense-based paper, or even concede any of the obvious errors, including the promotion of flat-lining falsified figures as

fact: <http://www.australianparadox.com/pdf/AustParadoxfalsifieddata.pdf>

Scott, is it your M.I.S.E catch-all that has forced Dr Michael Spence, the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Sydney, into the unreasonable and unenviable – reckless? – position of defending an obviously faulty paper – featuring falsified data and a spectacularly false conclusion – as top-notch “peer reviewed” science? (Sections 8 and 9 in the initial link above)

Readers, these episodes are hard to forecast. I would have expected the University of Sydney to have been keen to ensure its science featured only competence and integrity, given it is about to open the \$500 million taxpayer-funded Charles Perkins Centre research into obesity and related maladies: <http://www.smh.com.au/national/university-sets-up-500m-centre-for-obesity-research-20130724-2qjq8.html>

But alas. Awkwardly, the University’s highest-profile obesity research and its highest-profile obesity researchers have put a dark cloud over the new \$500m Charles Perkins Centre even before it has opened for business.



[rory robertson former fattie](#)

August 22, 2013 at [11:42 pm](#)

[A post here on another aspect of the topic was not reproduced.]

A Special Issue? The monster is much bigger than that. The Journal should devote itself entirely to the issue for the indefinite future.



Brian H

August 23, 2013 at [5:00 am](#)

[New contributor] I would safely say that Rory Robertson has stated one of the most prophetic remarks on the state of the publishing industry: “when does the inadvertent publication of false information deliberately left uncorrected – to protect the reputation of one’s journal and that of its editors – become simple fraud?” Sheer brilliance and obvious insight. When a publisher publically claims to profess a set of standards but then practices an opposite set of standards (even if it is an isolated case), then this is a form of fraud (*sensu lacto*). From reams of proof in the agricultural and plant sciences, I would say that fraud is rife right now. If, in plant science, lower to mid-tier journals were to have to create an erratum for the errors in their papers, I estimate very roughly that at least 80% of papers would require an erratum including at least 5 minor errors, but errors nonetheless. At the reality versus practicality crossroad, no journal or publisher is even going to bother issuing such a high level of errata, unless a claim, complaint, or request come directly from the authors or from the institute where they work. Very recently, two of my own Elsevier papers were riddled with errors introduced by the Elsevier proof typesetters in India (ironically called Thomson Digital). Had I approved the proofs, confiding in the ability of the world’s No. 1 publisher to actually do its job professionally, then maybe I too would have been the “victim” of an erratum or retraction due to errors introduced by the publisher. When I issues formal complaints to Elsevier, the main publishing manager in Germany responded by indicating (paraphrased) that the staff in India was overworked having to pump out more than 5000 proofs a day. Immediately one gets images of Walmart and Bangladeshi clothes factories where profits and fame are placed above ethics, values, competency, oversight and publishing integrity. I advocate, without fear, to expose the fraud that Mr.

Robertson so correctly alludes to, by the publishers. Not by all publishers, and not equally by those that do commit it. Very often, when making an anonymous complaint about the academic quality of an already published paper, marketing managers QUICKLY respond, usually within 24–48 hours, silencing the editors, in a desperate attempt at damage control. However, extremely little is done to actually correct the literature. Imagine, just last week, after showing clearly plagiarized data in a 2009 journal A by a 2012 journal B, and after contacting the editor about this overlap (partial) in data, the attitude was to sweep the problem under the carpet, send some long excuse that the peer review process was thorough and professional and then to leave the academic record corrupted. I should state that journal A is top tier and journal B is extremely respectable (in the field). This kind of attitude is inexcusable. When editors-in-chief exhibit such arrogant attitudes towards post-publication peer review, and when their cover-up is supported by the publisher, how can this not enrage the scientific community and the public? When justice is not displayed by publishers with regard to their “own crimes”, except to primarily expose the fraud by the authors, then it is time to impose a new order of justice, one regulated and displayed publically by the scientists. It is very, very rare to find a retraction notice where the publisher apologizes for its error and pays the price for that error. Enough is enough of these shenanigans by publishers to cover up their own “fraud”. I suspect that my post will be heavily moderated and critiqued. But what am I to say when what I say is based on facts? Related to this specific post, it will be curious to see how Dietrich Rordorf, CEO of MDPI, handles the claims made by Rory Robertson (this case should be followed by the blogosphere). Finally, I understand, from years of experience, how difficult it is to publish error- and fraud-free journals. However, when publishers are making profits, and some of them are making 6 or 7 figure profits, then I state that the scientific community should adopt a zero tolerance policy towards publisher fraud and cover-ups.



The Hat Tipper

August 24, 2013 at [5:41 pm](#)

The Hat Tipper: never just contact the journal that has the paper that has plagiarized, but also the journal that has the paper that is plagiarized. In case you didn't do so, contact journal A, too. They may be a bit more concerned about others stealing 'their' citations.

Marco

August 25, 2013 at [2:10 am](#)

[Dietrich Rordorf, CEO of MPDI returns] I am not sure if Dr. Rory Robertson previously submitted a full Comment on the “Australian Paradox” article to the journal Nutrients. From his message here I understand that he was in contact with the Editorial Office, the Publisher and the (or some) Editorial Board members of the journal some one and a half years ago.

We would like to point out the possibility that readers of our journals can prepare complete Comments on previous articles and submit them via the susy.mdpi.com editorial system. Comments should expose all factual arguments, and will be sent for editorial review for a possible publication in the journal. The Comments – once published – will be offered to the academic editors of the journals for their feedback. Based on their feedback, the Publisher will be able to decide on how to proceed. Usually corrections or retractions result of the initiative of the academic editors (the Editorial Board members or the Editor-in-Chief), the authors themselves or the institutes that employ them. However, as Publishers we want to ensure the possibility that readers can publish comments on previous articles and expose their arguments provided these are reasonable and likely to be correct.

On a side note I want to mention that MDPI is committed to a philosophy of openness. All commentaries, retractions and corrections that we published are very easily available from our website (links below). All academic editors of our journals are listed on the journal websites and clearly identified with full contact information (e-mail address and telephone numbers given). All authors that publish in our journals are asked to provide their full contact information, including all co-authors' e-mail addresses (which are also published on the papers). Our retractions provide the reason for the retraction and include an apology from the Publisher or the authors to the readers of the journal. A recent example is <http://www.mdpi.com/1996-1944/5/12/2816/>.

Links:

http://www.mdpi.com/search?article_type=correction

http://www.mdpi.com/search?article_type=article-commentary

http://www.mdpi.com/search?article_type=retraction



Dietrich Rordorf

August 25, 2013 at 5:29 am

[RR ff] Thanks, The Hat Tipper, for your supportive post.

Dietrich,

Sorry to be persistent but you and your MDPI journal Nutrients really do struggle with facts. I am neither a PhD nor an MD. I'm not "Dr. Rory Robertson".

I am simply a competent member of the public – an economist – who noticed that pro-sugar campaigners in Australia – Slide 11 in <http://www.australianparadox.com/pdf/22Slideshowaustraliangoestoparadoxcanberrafinal.pdf> – with a pro-sugar business that exists in part to charge food companies up to \$6000 a pop to stamp particular sugar and sugary products as Healthy – Slide 12 – were able to self-publish on the scientific record in 2011 a ridiculously faulty pro-sugar paper, featuring falsified data, simple mistakes confusing up with down and a spectacularly false conclusion: there is "an inverse relationship" between sugar consumption and obesity (Slides 7, 8 and 13–22).

The University of Sydney authors were able to self-publish that outrageous attempt to exonerate sugar as a key driver of obesity, Dietrich, because your negligent MDPI journal Nutrients had no competent quality control.

Your authors already had falsely exonerated added sugar as a key driver of type 2 diabetes in their pop-sci diet books, of which they reportedly have sold over 3 million: <http://www.australianparadox.com/pdf/diabetes.pdf>

A self-published pop-sci book. A self-published pay-as-you-publish-whatever-you-like journal article. What's the difference? Well the difference is that the latter is supposed to be fact-based, not nonsense based.

Dietrich, over the past 18 months, I have written to your authors. I have written to your editors. I have written to your board of editors. I have written to your publisher. I have written to the University of Sydney's senior management. To several of them, I have written several times. As you saw, I've documented critical errors small and large in my earlier comments above, and in more detail in <http://www.australianparadox.com>

You now say (above), "We would like to point out the possibility that readers of our journals can prepare complete Comments on previous articles and submit them via the susy.mdpi.com editorial system".

Dietrich, why would I not assume that is a sham announcement? In my long, tedious experience with MDPI, those managing your journal Nutrients have been utterly unresponsive to critical facts as plain as the noses on their faces.

Again, your authors, your editors, your board of editors, your publisher – and now you – already know about the problems, large and small, in the Australian Paradox paper, yet continue to choose to do absolutely nothing to correct the public record.

Dietrich, there is no need for further formal communications. This is not rocket science. This is incompetent science. This is self-published science. This is simple stuff that would not have been published if someone competent had merely read through the University of Sydney's spectacularly faulty paper – while also checking that the authors' various charts trended down as required, not up – before it was self-published in an MDPI journal.

Readers, as you can see in my comments above, I have fully documented (i) a "600 g" error (the correct figure is only 150 g); (ii) the authors' error in claiming a 10% decrease in sales of sugar softdrinks when their chart clearly shows a 30% INcrease (from 35L to 45L); and (iii) the remarkably flat and obviously falsified figures in a critical Australian Paradox chart (Slides 21 and 22 in the Canberra link above).

More broadly, the authors concluded down, despite their five valid (not falsified) indicators of sugar consumption – in their own published charts (Slides 13–17) – trending up!

Dietrich, your journal claims to have "a zero tolerance policy" towards falsified data – MDPI Publication Ethics Statement: <http://www.mdpi.com/journal/nutrients/about> – yet you and your authors and editors have done nothing to correct the public record.

In my opinion, readers, the MDPI journal *Nutrients* – falsely exonerating sugar as a health hazard, and for a year and a half refusing to correct the public record – is both an academic disgrace and a menace to public health: <http://www.smh.com.au/national/health/research-causes-stir-over-sugars-role-in-obesity-20120330-1w3e5.html> ; <http://www.smh.com.au/business/pesky-economist-wont-let-big-sugar-lie-20120725-22pru.html>

Dietrich, now that you personally know the detail of these various major errors, please instruct your negligent *Nutrients*' authors and editors to correct or retract MDPI's "shonky sugar study" without further unreasonable delay.

In an attempt to fast-track what so far has been an unreasonably slow process, Dietrich, here is my **proposed draft** of what MDPI's Publisher Shu-Kun Lin should publish when announcing the retraction:

"Abstract: It has been brought to our attention by a reader of *Nutrients* that the conclusion of "a consistent and substantial decline" in per-capita sugar consumption between 1980 and 2010 in "The Australian Paradox: A Substantial Decline in Sugars Intake over the Same Timeframe that Overweight and Obesity Have Increased" is based in part on data for 2000–2003 that was falsified by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). MDPI has a strict "zero tolerance policy" towards the use of falsified data in our manuscripts, whether the authors were aware of the invalidity of the data or not. Moreover, there were various other serious errors and misinterpretations that damaged the credibility of the manuscript's conclusion of "an inverse relationship" between sugar consumption and obesity. Taking public-health considerations into account – particularly the growing evidence that excessive sugar consumption is a major contributor to global obesity and type 2 diabetes, together the greatest public-health challenge of our times: <http://care.diabetesjournals.org/content/33/11/2477.full.pdf> – the Editorial Team and Publisher have determined that this manuscript should be retracted. We apologize for any inconvenience this may cause". (Readers, you can scroll down to view similar Abstracts: http://www.mdpi.com/search?article_type=retraction).

There you go, Dietrich. Such a result would be fair to everyone concerned, even allowing you to hold your head high again in fora such as these. An added bonus is that you would probably never hear from me again.

Regards,

Rory



[rory robertson former fattie](#)

August 26, 2013 at [4:02 am](#)

Bravo, Rory. Although it took courage for the CEO of MDPI to actually come forward and defend his company, it is going to be extremely difficult now for him (and MDPI) to ignore this public disclosure of facts and evidence that you have provided. I would be surprised if this issue is not resolved within a fortnight. Why not suggest (or impose) a time limit, considering the evidence is so clear, and damning? Facts are, after all, on your side. Wouldn't it be nice to see the CEOs of Springer, Elsevier, Taylor and Francis + Informa, Wiley-Blackwell and others to actually join this blog?



JATdS

August 26, 2013 at [6:15 pm](#)

[RR ff] Thanks for your support, JATdS. Actually, it occurred to me overnight that I may have been a bit harsh with MDPI's CEO Dietrich Rordorf in our conversation above.

My guess is that Dietrich probably is a hard-working, competent and honourable person. I think he may have been somewhat shocked to discover, here on Retraction Watch, the extent to which the people he depended on to operate his *Nutrients* journal competently – his authors, guest editor, editor-in-chiefs and editorial board – have comprehensively let him down: <http://www.mdpi.com/journal/nutrients/editors>

Now that he personally has a strong appreciation of the problems, JATdS, like you, I will be surprised if Dietrich does not do what is required to start retrieving MDPI's reputation for competence and integrity.

Beyond the retraction I have proposed – my proposed retraction notice for Australian Paradox is in draft form above – the other obvious thing needed is an industry-wide rule that bans any “Guest Editor” from publishing her/his own work in the edition they oversee. That seems to have been a key part of the problem in the Australian Paradox scandal.

Finally, I think it would make sense for all independent reviewers to be listed at the bottom of any published manuscript, to boost the credibility of the “peer review” process. In some cases, simply to provide evidence that there was one! I wouldn’t die in a ditch for the end of anonymity for reviewers, but I think it may be a good way forward to help to improve the quality of the modern scientific record.

As well as being named, I would also want reviewers to be paid for their efforts. The payment necessarily would be relatively small and somewhat symbolic. Perhaps, readers, Dietrich should front for the cost of a nice bottle (case?) of wine for every competent reviewer who worked hard during the year to keep him and his business out of the muck?



[rory robertson former fattie](#)

August 26, 2013 at [7:05 pm](#)

<http://retractionwatch.wordpress.com/2013/08/22/journal-to-feature-special-issue-on-scientific-misconduct-seeks-submissions/?replytocom=61954#respond>

Readers, all that and now probably more can be found in the *Retraction Watch* link, above. If you have a strong view on this matter – either way - why not make a contribution to the discussion? Certainly, if you think I have made any major errors or am being unreasonable towards the University of Sydney authors or management - or the journal *Nutrients* - in any way, please be very critical of me here and elsewhere.

For the record, the worst that has been said of my analysis in the first year and a half of this episode is that I am long-winded. Yes, guilty as charged! Perhaps like Mark Twain I should apologise for writing “a long letter” because I didn’t have time to write a short one.

Regards,

Rory

rory robertson

[economist and former-fattie](#) 😊

Join the push to give all kids a fairer start in life: <http://www.australianparadox.com/pdf/Sugary-Drinks-Ban.pdf>

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Strathburn Cattle Station is a proud partner of YALARI, Australia’s leading provider of quality boarding-school educations for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teenagers. Check it out at <http://www.strathburn.com/yalari.php>

Comments, corrections, questions, compliments, whatever - all welcome

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