Magn. Reson. Discuss.,
https://doi.org/10.5194/mr-2020-28-AC3, 2020

Open Access MAGNETIC RESONANCE Discussions

Interactive comment on "Open Access: Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats. An Editorial" *by* Geoffrey Bodenhausen

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Received and published: 20 December 2020

In reply to Nino Willi's comments: when we started writing our 'editorial', the initial idea was merely to attract attention to the 'opinion' of the Ethics Committee of the French CNRS, in the hope that our readers would immerse themselves in the subtleties and intrinsic contradictions of Open Access (OA). Our use of the pronoun 'we' (also mentioned in Daniela Goldfarb's review) is known as 'pluralis majestatis', which prescribes the use of a plural pronoun when referring to a single person, commonly employed by persons of high office. This does not mean that we aspire to be recognized as a monarch. My marvelous, though delightfully old-fashioned high-school teachers in Geneva taught me to avoid the use of the singular 'I' when writing papers. For the sake of clarity, I will stray from their prescriptions in the next few paragraphs.

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Discussion paper

The idea of writing an extensive SWOT analysis of ‘Magnetic Resonance’, let alone of Open Access, would run against my principles. In fact, I used the expression SWOT ironically, for I believe that granting agencies and other incarnations of management who insist on compiling unwieldly SWOT tables are invariably spoon-fed with the same evasive excuses. SWOT is one of those inherently inadequate ‘management tools’ that can only lead us astray from our lofty objectives.

Clearly, authors who are serious about biology should publish in biology journals. As Nino Willi must realize all too well, it is pointless to twist the arms of bio-authors in the hope that they submit their work to ‘Magnetic Resonance’. Indeed, their papers may well be out of scope, as Nino rightly presumes. As for the admittedly inimical comment about the “unbridled passion for impact factors” that I attributed to some of the biomolecular community, this is indeed a strictly personal perception, supported by my judgment of the dubious role of Nature, Cell, PNAS, etc., and the ruthless ambition of some prominent bio-NMR colleagues. Like the rebellious Prometheus who stole the sacred fire of Olympus against Zeus’ wishes, bio-NMR specialists are forever condemned to seek financial support for their expensive hobbies. Not surprisingly, bio-NMR pundits have become remarkably proficient in attracting both recognition and plentiful resources, not least by publishing in highly visible journals. Their fate of perpetual money-seekers is surely less cruel than Prometheus’ who was ruthlessly punished for his gift of fire to mankind by having his liver picked by Zeus’ eagle day after day through an open wound in this belly. Perhaps the equivalences

specialists of bio-NMR = Prometheus

magnetic resonance = sacred fire

biologists = mankind

reveal my simplistic taste for structuralism-for-beginners. Besides, none of the editors of ‘Magnetic Resonance’ claim Zeus’ authority to inflict punishment.

The condescending tone that Nino Wille found 'irritating' was thus intended. Mind you, I have high regard for some people working in bio-NMR, not least in my own lab in Paris, where some team members occasionally remind me, ever so kindly, that the triumphant days of pure methodology may well belong to the past. Yet I cannot deny that I have been disappointed by the lack of creativity of many bio-lectures that I followed via Zoom in the last 10 months. There are only so many structures of proteins and their complexes that I can watch before their soporific effect sets in. In many cases, though not in all, I have grave doubts whether their structure really allows one to understand their function, which is the underlying hypothesis of much of this work. In terms of entomology, describing the anatomy of an ant doesn't necessarily allow one to understand how an ant colony functions.

Perhaps my irritability is fueled in part by the fact that I myself tried hard to contribute to bio-NMR. I'm not thinking about trivial inventions such as HSQC, but about relaxation-allowed coherence transfer (RACT), cross-relaxation with suppression of spin diffusion (QUIET NOESY), curious consequences of cross-correlation (CCCC), tensor operators of rank l and coherence order p (Tlp) as tools to expand density operators for methyl groups, etc. By and large, these attempts to contribute to bio-NMR (I dare say: heroic attempts, from my perspective) have sunk into oblivion without a leaving bubble. Most bio-NMR pundits are trying too hard to compete against real biologists to educate themselves on spectroscopy.

Intrigued by Nino Willi's question, I checked that NONE of the corresponding authors of the first 25 papers published in 'Magnetic Resonance' are working in the USA. So far, 'Magnetic Resonance' has enjoyed support from Australia (1 paper), New Zealand (1), the Netherlands (1), the United Kingdom (1), Austria (1), Sweden (1), Israel (1), Russia (1), France (2), Switzerland (5), and Germany (9). The last number can be attributed in part to Elsevier's unwillingness to strike an agreement with the German DEAL. In my opinion, none of the first 25 papers can be ranked as 'biological', although some describe applications to biological samples.

‘Magnetic Resonance’ would be glad to receive, publicly review and publicly comment papers from bio-NMR and non-bio-NMR colleagues alike, in the Americas, Africa, and Asia, and publish them for a mere 80 € per page if the paper is formatted in Word, reduced to 75 € per page if submitted in LaTex, and further reduced to naught if a waiver is requested and granted. Encouraged by the quality of the first 35-odd submitted papers, we shall work with Copernicus Publications to implement some improvements of the web pages, to make sure that the authors are not confused by the unusual aspects of publicly accessible reviews, and to make the editorial processes run even more smoothly.

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