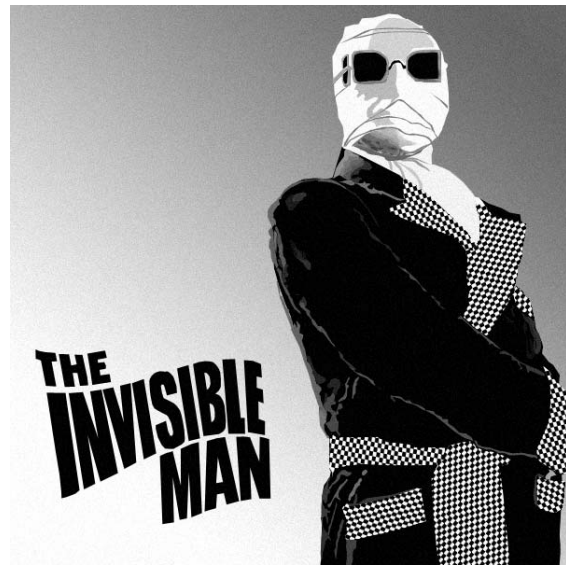


FOIA and FOIA'ed Again

The new age of transparency for
public scientists



Conflicts of interest

- A financial tie or a non-financial connection or loyalty that *may* compromise professional activities and objectivity
- The perception of compromise = compromise?
- COI should be disclosed—what does “disclosed” mean?

Some examples of COI in academia

- Financial ties
- Mentor, coauthor, or collaborations for grant proposals, manuscript review
- Interests affecting or potentially affecting employee status
 - Start up companies
 - Consulting
 - Investments

These all require appropriate disclosure—especially for public researchers, including those funded with public sources

Some examples of COI for university employees—disclosed in the Outside Interests Disclosure Form each year

- Directorship or employment outside UT
- Honoraria/consulting salary $>$ \$10,000
- IP/patents
- Investments $>$ 5% ownership
- UT employees/students performing personal services

All of the above also applies to spouse/children



What are the *expectations* of *transparency* for public employees?

- Starts with UT disclosure form, which identifies some, but not all, areas of compromise
- The realization that everyone has opinions/points of view = not completely objective
- **WHAT THE PUBLIC THINKS IT IS**



Neal Stewart

OR



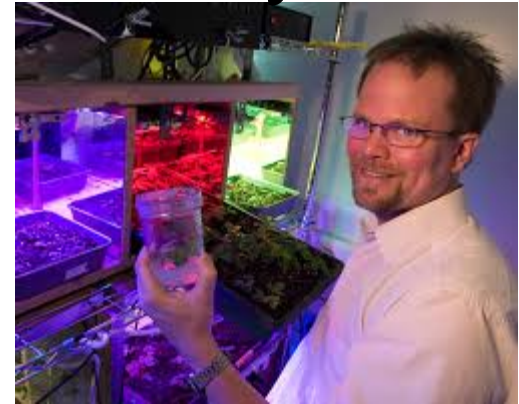
Neal \$tewart

US Freedom of Information Act and Sunshine Laws

- “The Freedom of Information Act (FOIA; 1967) is the law that allows individuals to gain access to federal records. Some records may be withheld or partially withheld if the information falls under one, or more, of nine exemptions and three exclusions.”
- Sunshine Laws (State ‘FOIAs’), e.g., Tennessee Open Records Act: “§ 10-7-503. Records open to public inspection – Schedule of reasonable charges -- Costs (a)(1) As used in this part and title 8, chapter 4, part 6, “public record or records” or “state record or records” means all documents, papers, letters, maps, books, photographs, microfilms, electronic data processing files and output, films, sound recordings or other material, regardless of physical form or characteristics, made or received pursuant to law or ordinance or in connection with the transaction of official business by any governmental agency.”

FOIA request of Kevin Folta's and 39 other professor's emails over 5 years

- Made by Gary Ruskin, US Right to Know
- Professors who contributed answers to questions submitted to GMO Answers
- GMO Answers is funded by large ag companies involved in agbiotech, including Monsanto
- Folta and others are listed as “independent scientists”
- September 6 New York Times article



Why was this news?



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GMOAnswers.com will solicit feedback from experts across a wide range of disciplines in order to provide consumers with balanced, fact-based responses to their questions. The expert resources we've identified include conventional and organic farmers, agribusiness experts, scientists, academics, medical doctors and nutritionists from a wide range of studies. These are the leaders in their fields, respected for their subject matter expertise and their unique insights. They are not affiliated with the Council for [Biotechnology](#) ([/glossary#Biotechnology](#)) information or its member companies, but have volunteered to address questions because they believe in transparency and consumers' rights to make informed choices about the food they serve to their families.

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GMO Answers works with a number of experts from the biotechnology companies who founded GMO Answers to address your questions. These company experts are sourced from a range of disciplines, from toxicology to public affairs to weed management, to answer questions related to their expertise. They also address questions about their company products and practices.

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To tweet or not to tweet?



[@kevinfolta](#)

TWEETS 10.1K
[FOLLOWING 317](#)
[FOLLOWERS 8,661](#)
[FAVORITES 3,298](#)



[@neiltyson](#)

TWEETS 4,528
[FOLLOWING 44](#)
[FOLLOWERS 4.16M](#)
[FAVORITES 1](#)
[LISTS 9](#)

Hill Genome Biology 2014, 15:424
<http://genomabiology.com/2014/15/1/424>



COMMENT

The Kardashian index: a measure of discrepant social media profile for scientists

Neil Hall

Abstract

In the era of social media there are now many different ways that a scientist can build their public profile; the publication of high-quality scientific papers being just one. While social media is a valuable tool for outreach and the sharing of ideas, there is a danger that this form of communication is gaining too high a value and that we are losing sight of key metrics of scientific value, such as citation indices. To help quantify this, I propose the 'Kardashian Index', a measure of discrepancy between a scientist's social media profile and publication record based on the direct comparison of numbers of citations and Twitter followers.

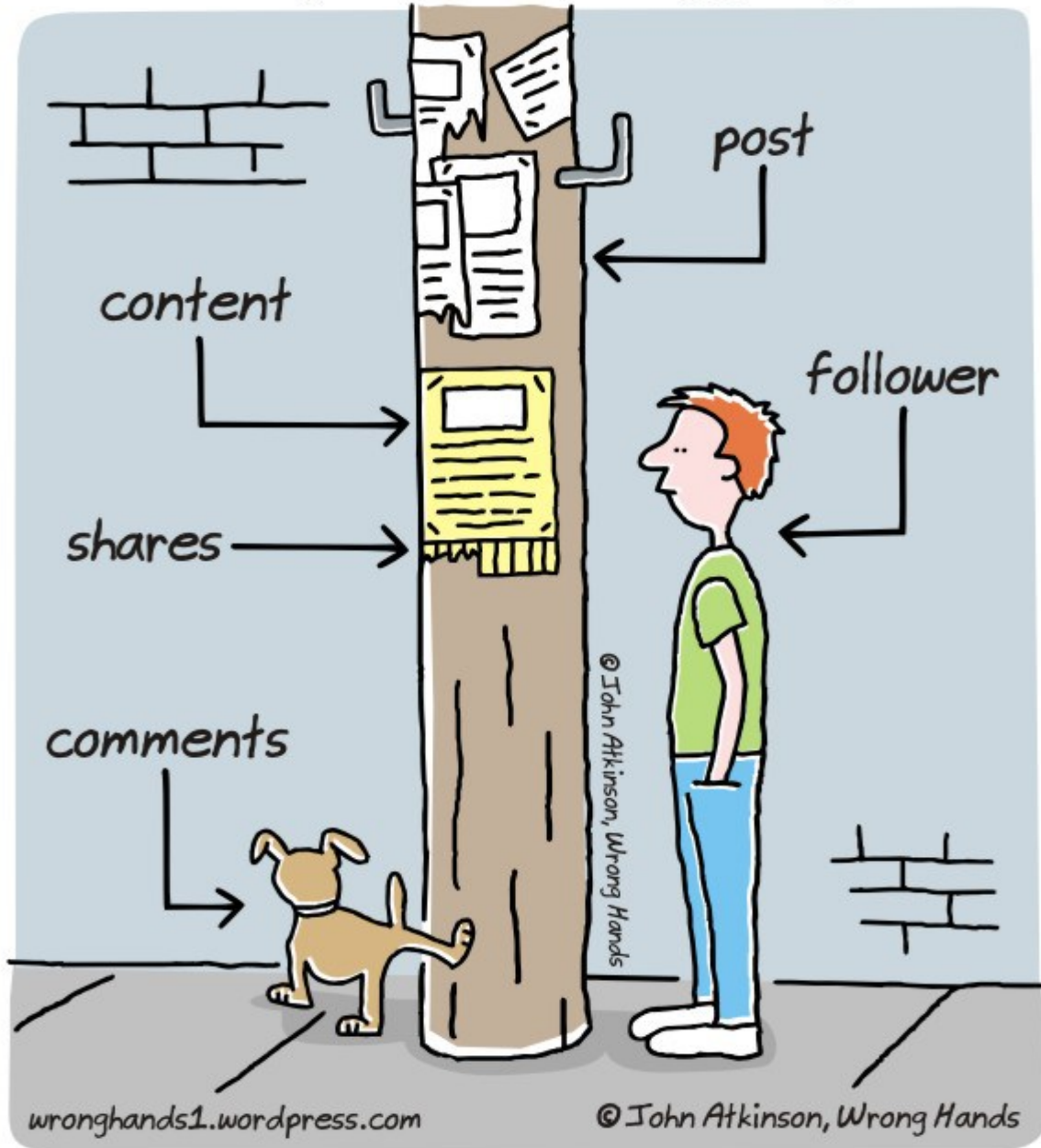
Introduction

There are many scientists who, with hindsight, did not get much recognition for their achievements while they were alive. Consider Mary Anning, a fossil collector and paleontologist who lived in the early 19th century. Her meticulous recording and prolific findings contributed to the fundamental changes in our understanding of natural history, including the accepted view of extinction events. Yet, because of her sex and religious beliefs, much of her work was never recognized by her peers, and I expect you have never heard of her. Or Ada Lovelace, the daughter of Lord Byron, who is credited with writing the first ever computer program for the Analytical Engine, a mechanical computer designed by Charles Babbage. Despite her contribution, and obvious genius, she is much less well known than her male contemporaries. For a long time, the same could be said of Rosalind Franklin, whose work on

Now consider Kim Kardashian; she comes from a privileged background and, despite having not achieved anything consequential in science, politics or the arts (although apparently she does have a scientific mind [1]), she is one of the most followed people on Twitter and among the most searched-for person on Google. Her notoriety is said to have stemmed from an inadvertent internet release of a video featuring her and a boyfriend in a private moment. While her Wikipedia entry describes her as a successful businesswoman [2], this is due most likely to her fame generating considerable income through brand endorsements. So you could say that her celebrity buys success, which buys greater celebrity. Her fame has meant that comments by Kardashian on issues such as Syria have been widely reported in the press [3]. Sadly, her interjection on the crisis has not yet led to a let-up in the violence.

I am concerned that phenomena similar to that of Kim Kardashian may also exist in the scientific community. I think it is possible that there are individuals who are famous for being famous (or, to put it in science jargon, renowned for being renowned). We are all aware that certain people are seemingly invited as keynote speakers, not because of their contributions to the published literature but because of who they are. In the age of social media there are people who have high-profile scientific blogs or Twitter feeds but have not actually published many peer-reviewed papers of significance; in essence, scientists who are seen as leaders in their field simply because of their notoriety. I was recently involved in a discussion where it was suggested that someone should be invited to speak at a meeting 'because they will tweet about it and more people will come'. If that is not the research community equivalent of being a Kardashian endorsement, I don't know what is.

simplified blogging



Recommendations

- In any situation, think about spirit of a real or potential COI: choose transparency
- Use publically-posted CV as a vehicle for disclosure—update yearly—past 5-10 years of COI should provide a clear picture
- Volunteer disclosure of relevant COI or potential COI before asked—say, at the beginning of a public presentation
- Remove surprise of discovery



We underestimate our COI

We underestimate how
important the public view
COI and entanglement

Recommendations, continued

- In most cases, research should be published
- Disclose funding in acknowledgments of published papers: grants, contracts, and gifts
- Think about public vs private goods
- Be introspective: how much of my research is funded by companies vs public sources
- Faculty should not be or seem to be agents of companies

Value of private interactions & funding of public institutions

Positive

- Arguably part of the land grant funding model and mission
- Potentially useful to translate research into products for the public good
- Comes in many flavors
- Valuable for training

Negative

- How much (\$/%) of a faculty member's program be funded by companies?
- Less valuable (ethical) when tied to specific private platforms or products
- Are UT employees simply used as discounted labor for industry?
- Publication rights and transparency