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A personal take on science and society

World view

A toast to the error detectors



By Simine Vazire

Let 2020 be the year in which we value those who ensure that science is self-correcting.

Last month, I got a private Twitter message from a postdoc bruised by the clash between science as it is and how it should be. He had published a commentary in which he pointed out errors in a famous researcher's paper. The critique was accurate, important and measured – a service to his field. But it

“Scientific criticism must not be conflated with bullying.”

knowledge, to check everything thrice or more, to discard false hypotheses and so to move ever closer to truth. Thus, when you find an error, you trust that it's okay to point it out. And then you find yourself accused of being a destructive, sanctimonious second-stringer – all for applying the 'scientific values' that you'd been taught.

Yes, error detectors can make research less comfortable – but that discomfort is healthy. We should feel responsible for minimizing errors in our work, and worried that we might have missed some.

GEORF MACDONALD

Ist es nicht tragisch, wenn das nicht mehr selbstverständlich ist?

Irgendwie sieht Pubmed mit dem Pubpeer Plugin doch viel intelligenter aus.

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