

Tricks of the Trade

A September 30, 2012 article in [*The Chronicle of Higher Education*](#), Fake Peer Reviews, the Latest Form of Scientific Fraud, Fools Journals, is interesting. Initially, consider a quote from the article, which reads like a script for a Saturday Night Live skit:

Scientists appear to have figured out a new way to avoid any bad prepublication reviews that dissuade journals from publishing their articles: Write positive reviews themselves, under other people's names.

In incidents involving four scientists—the latest case coming to light two weeks ago—journal editors say authors got to critique their own papers by suggesting reviewers with contact e-mails that actually went to themselves.

The glowing endorsements got the work into *Experimental Parasitology*, *Pharmaceutical Biology*, and several other journals. Fake reviews even got a pair of mathematics articles into journals published by Elsevier, the academic publishing giant, which has a system in place intended to thwart such misconduct. The frauds have produced retractions of about 30 papers to date.

"I find it very shocking," said Laura Schmidt, publisher in charge of mathematics journals at Elsevier. "It's very serious, very manipulative, and very deliberate."...

Pressure on both authors and journal editors is a major factor in this new type of fraud, observers say. Authors need publications to advance their careers, and as grant money and the job market tighten, some appear willing to lie. "I think this is probably on the rise, but we don't really know the extent," Ms. Schmidt said.

Comment:

"Very manipulative, very deliberate"? Sounds like marketing and public relations strategies. There are other ways to manipulate publications than the academic equivalent of robbing a gas station. Authors might simply publish in vanity journals, as is often done by my colleagues at the School of Accountancy, College of Business, University of Southern Mississippi.

How does that advance the careers of my colleagues? No one reads their journal articles and when faculty specifies journal rankings -- as is the case at my school, vanity pubs miraculously become quality research. Tenure and pay raises follow quite nicely since USM administrators haven't the time or inclination to do anything but count numbers of publications. It is common practice at bottom ranked schools like USM.