

The 'Journal of Controversial Ideas' Is a Fantastic Idea



By Alex Berezow — November 26, 2018



Credit: Storyblocks

Should scientific research ever be judged by the name of the scientist who performed it? Most people, scientists included, would answer "no." The quality of the research is far more important than the name of the researcher who performed it.

That's the ideal, anyway. In practice, it never works like that. Scientists are only human, after all, and they allow their opinions to be influenced by the prestige of the names and institutions listed at the top of a research paper.

Even worse, some ideas are off-limits in science. Each field has taboos that are not to be breached. Woe unto any academic who dares challenge the "consensus" or utters an unpopular opinion; it can literally be a career-ending move. Just ask David Zaruk, a [professor who lost his job because he supports GMOs](#) [1].

Clearly, there's a problem. Plenty of bad papers are accepted as true because the academic who wrote it is famous. On the flip side, many good papers are never written out of the fear that it could cost an academic his job. So, how about we just eliminate real names and publish papers under fake ones instead?

That's the fundamental idea behind a new journal, not-so-subtly called *The Journal of Controversial Ideas*, set to launch next year. This idea is so good, I wish I'd thought of it first.

***The Journal of Controversial Ideas* Is a Fantastic Idea**

As one might expect, *The Journal of Controversial Ideas* is, well, controversial. An [article](#) [2] written for *The Conversation* lists several reasons, the most compelling of which is this:

"Holding authors responsible functions as part of academic quality control. If researchers know that producing bad work has social and career consequences, this incentivises more careful and diligent work. Similarly, holding authors morally responsible motivates a healthy degree of caution on topics which might cause real harm."

Furthermore, the critics contend that authors will quickly claim credit for papers that receive praise but will deny responsibility for any papers that are criticized.

Indeed, that is a fair point. However, a cursory glance at the current state of academic research shows that their argument is not persuasive. There is so much shoddy research already in existence, that the fields of psychology and biomedical science are facing a reproducibility crisis. Putting the real authors' names on these papers hasn't prevented bad research from being published.

Additionally, just because a paper is pseudonymous does not necessarily mean that the papers will be of poor quality. Consider *The Economist*. Every article is published anonymously. Yet, the newspaper is highly trustworthy because the institution is concerned with maintaining its own credibility. Likewise, the editors of *The Journal of Controversial Ideas* likely will want to maintain a good reputation for their journal, which would incentivize them to publish responsibly.

A Necessary Innovation

It is simply a matter of fact that, in 2018, academics are routinely harassed, bullied, and threatened not only by other academics but by the "social media mob." Offering a layer of protection, while still allowing for controversial ideas to be discussed, seems to be a necessary innovation for the 21st Century.

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[2]

https://www.realclearscience.com/articles/2018/11/26/why_the_journal_of_controversial_ideas_is_reckless_110812.htm