

# Editor at Journal 'Science' Doubles Down on Double Standard



By Alex Berezow, PhD — February 12, 2020

*The scientific publishing industry is thoroughly dishonest and corrupt, and the American Association for the Advancement of Science and the journal Science are now also a part of the problem. Here's a disturbing case in point.*



Science [1]

The journal *Science* publishes a weekly column in which scientists write about various challenges they have faced in their careers. I submitted my story about how I became a junk science debunker, and it was initially accepted for publication.

Yet, after two months of work and nine revisions, the column (which now can be read [here](#) [2]) was spiked at the last minute by senior editor Tim Appenzeller. Mr. Appenzeller, who holds a bachelor's degree in English and has no formal training in science, heads up the news division at the journal. I was told that ACSH is controversial "because it has accepted money from corporations," and therefore, *Science* refused to publish my article. (See story [here](#) [3].)

Of course, *Science* publishes papers from industry scientists and gleefully begs corporations to send them money, so I had a few questions of my own that I submitted to Mr. Appenzeller:

1) *The Science Careers page has published columns by scientists who work or worked for industry, one of them rather prominently titled, "Three lessons from industry that I'm taking back to academia." So, your stated reason to reject my article ("corporate money") is false. What's the real reason for the rejection? Is it political?*

2) *The journal Science itself happily accepts corporate donations in the form of advertising revenue. Please explain this contradiction.*

3) *Do you believe that corporate science is inherently untrustworthy? If so, then why does Science publish papers written by industry co-authors?*

4) *Do you believe that ACSH is dishonest or untrustworthy? Do you believe that I am dishonest or untrustworthy? If so, why?*

5) *During the editing process -- 9 revisions, to be precise -- [the associate editor] added an anti-conservative insult to my career story, which I asked her to remove. Are anti-conservative sympathies part of the culture at Science and AAAS?*

To my surprise, he answered my email. But, as I suspected, he was neither honest nor did he answer the hardest questions, specifically #1 and #2. What follows is his response, with emphasis and footnotes added. Following his response is my commentary.

*Dear Dr. Berezow,*

*I understand your annoyance. I'm sorry we (Katie and I) put you through those revisions before deciding against publishing your column. The reasons are as she said: **ACSH has been the focus of controversy, and your association with it would undoubtedly have led to heated discussions if we had published the column. We're not afraid of controversy (1)**, as you might know from the stories that appear in Science's news section. But the Working Life column is about personal career journeys, and **your message might well have been lost in the commotion about ACSH (2) and allegations (on which we have no position) that some of its positions reflect the interests of its funders. (3)***

*So no, this has nothing to do with politics or anti-conservative bias. **Science is as concerned about junk science as you are**; we've published many stories about the damage done by vaccine skeptics and climate deniers, and **our coverage has emphasized that many concerns raised by anti-GMO activists are not based on available evidence (4)**.*

*Nor do we have any reason to think that you are untrustworthy, or that industry-*

*funded science is automatically suspect.*

*The “anti-conservative insult” you refer to was an editing mistake, which you had a chance to correct during revision. We would not intentionally introduce bias into anyone’s article.*

*Best regards*

*Tim*

My commentary:

(1) They are not afraid of controversy, unless that controversy involves "corporations." Then, they hide.

(2) Because my message might have been lost in a controversy that he fabricated, it's better not to publish it at all. Makes sense.

(3) The allegations made about my organization are complete lies and distortions. We are unabashedly pro-vaccine, pro-GMO, pro-medicine, and pro-technology. We oppose junk science, alternative medicine, and snake oil salesmen. In short, [we are pro-science, not pro-industry](#) [4]. (We believe all science is great, be it from academia, industry, or government.) If *Science* is incapable of having a position on that, then the journal is cowardly and should be closed down, and Mr. Appenzeller should be pulling espresso shots at a drive-through coffee stand. Let's finally put that English degree to its intended use.

(4) Right, *Science* cares about junk science and GMOs. That's why AAAS gave an [award to two anti-glyphosate conspiracy theorists](#) [5]. (The award was "reassessed" after a massive outcry from scientists on Twitter.)

There are two more important points to add:

First, science journalists claim to want transparency. I have always been fully transparent about who I am and what I do. Yet, those of us who are transparent are accused of having a conflict of interest. That's non-sensical.

Second, it should be noted that *Science* has no problem publishing blatant conflicts of interest. For instance, *Science* once published an article by a consultant who makes money by consulting for the government on chemical regulations. The topic of his article? The need for more chemical regulations. That's a smack-you-in-the-face obvious example of a self-dealing financial conflict of interest. [Science didn't even bother to mention it](#) [6].

### **What Do Other Scientists Think?**

I asked some of my friends in science communication what they thought of Mr. Appenzeller's response. The best one goes to a PhD geneticist who asked for anonymity because of his penchant for unvarnished, undiplomatic truth-telling:

*"That's the most chickensh\*\* ludicrous dollop of fetid apologetics I've ever seen."*

Big points for creativity. Here are how others responded:

 **Stuart Smyth** @stuartsmth66 · 5h

Epic fail by Science. When did it become fashionable to politicize science?

 **Editors at Journal 'Science' Call Me a Corporate Shill**  
I pitched a column to the journal Science titled, "How I Became a Junk Science Debunker." It was initially ...  
[acsh.org](https://acsh.org)

 **Liza Dunn** @DrLizaMD · 1h

Hey @sciencemagazine - I'm not sure I understand why industry support is so vilified that you can't publish a personal story.

After all, companies are how great scientific ideas get out of the lab & available to the public.

Science is science.

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[acsh.org](https://acsh.org)



**Cami Ryan, PhD** @CamiDRyan · 3h

Exhibit A 📌 @AlexBerezow's article passed through @sciencemagazine's peer review process - this, over the course of a couple of months.

But - in the end - editors cried "NO! NO! COI! COI! COI!" #CorporateShill



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The [scientific publishing industry is thoroughly corrupt](#) [7], and AAAS and *Science* are now also a part of the problem. If and when all government-funded research is mandated to be released free of charge upon publication, journals like *Science* may go out of business. Good riddance.

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**Source URL:** <https://www.acsh.org/news/2020/02/12/editor-journal-science-doubles-down-double-standard-14569>

**Links**

[1] <https://science.sciencemag.org/>

[2] <https://www.acsh.org/news/2020/02/12/how-i-became-junk-science-debunker-14568>

[3] <https://www.acsh.org/news/2020/02/12/editors-journal-science-call-me-corporate-shill-14566>

[4] <https://www.acsh.org/news/2019/06/18/acsh-isnt-industry-friendly-were-science-friendly-14103>

[5] <https://www.acsh.org/news/2019/02/05/aaas-runs-dishonest-glyphosate-story-then-deletes-it-politics-blame-13786>

[6] <https://www.acsh.org/news/2018/09/04/stinking-pathetic-double-standard-heart-scientific-journals-13377>

[7] <https://www.acsh.org/news/2018/09/27/something-rotten-journal-public-health-policy-13455>