

Some Thoughts on Shameless Bullies

Sorry, but I just can't figure out how to reduce these paragraphs to 140 characters.

I've watched responses to my tweet about "shameless little bullies" with interest. The responses are of two kinds. The first come by twitter and are largely critical (and creative -- who knew there were so many ways to abbreviate the word *asshole*?). The second come by email and are supportive. But they are also a little bit frightening. Here are two examples:

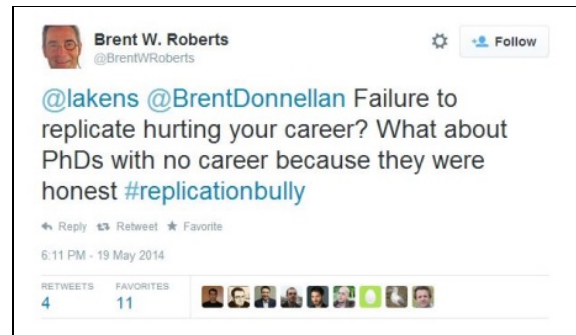
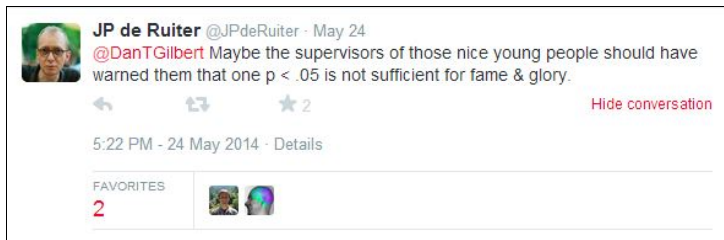
- No need to write back. Just wanted to thank you for being brave. I'm too much of a coward to get involved in this discussion about the motives and approach of the replication police. But I'm grateful that you're not.
- Just a note to convey my appreciation for your comments on Schnall's SPSP blog post. As it plays out, "Replication" is looking more and more like some grim McCarthyite nightmare than anything resembling Science as I know it. Very chilling and I fear there's more yet to come. You have my sincere admiration and thanks for speaking out.

Most of the people who sent me emails are young and untenured (as are both of the writers quoted above). Why are they also afraid?

Once upon a time, a bunch of mainly tenured professors with mainly good jobs, big labs, big grants, and their very own special issue of a journal to fill, decided to replicate the work of a young, untenured lecturer named Simone Schnall (see **Note 2** below). She felt honored and bent over backwards to help them. Their replication attempt mainly failed. That's science.

Then it went bad. Before publishing their results or sharing them with Schnall, they posted them on a blog (<http://traitstate.wordpress.com/2013/12/11/go-big-or-go-home-a-recent-replication-attempt/>) and took the opportunity to taunt her ("an epic fail as my 10 year old would say") while making bellicose threats to the rest of us ("go big or go home"). When Schnall pointed out problems with their data (which underwent no peer-review), they decided she would not be allowed to publish a timely response -- despite the fact that they initially secured her cooperation by suggesting that she would be able to do exactly that. (See **Note 3** below). You can read all the editorial correspondence at https://docs.google.com/document/d/1ew7X0RaCIU5_Ev4Ns3Uyn0I7PmjzP_Z1wKlnza_3Fe0/edit). There was apparently plenty of room in the special issue to say in great detail why she was wrong, but not a single page for her to explain why she was right.

And then it got ugly, because showing that Schnall was wrong wasn't going to be enough. She had dared to object to her treatment, dared to suggest that there was something wrong with the way the entire process had unfolded, and therefore she must be attacked personally. So her adversaries took to social media to suggest that Schnall was never really motivated to find truth, but rather, was seeking undeserved "fame and glory" (see below) and that the failure to replicate her results was an indication that she was dishonest (see below). There was more, much more, and the entire incident is laid out in sad detail at <http://www.spsblog.org/simone-schnall-on-her-experience-with-a-registered-replication-project/> .



But what does any of this have to do with me? Schnall risked a lot by publishing a clear-eyed account of her travails, and she has suffered for it. She spoke truth to power, and when I stumbled across her account, I knew I'd be ashamed of myself if I didn't stand up for her. Unlike Schnall, I took no risk in speaking out because I'm an old tenured guy. But I'm not so old that I can't be inspired by someone young.

Schnall calls what happened to her "bullying" and I agree. Furthermore, the people who did it appear to be proud of their actions, not ashamed. So calling them "shameless little bullies" was at least 2/3 correct. I admit that I don't know how tall they are, so I hereby take back the word "little."

I hope they will apologize to Schnall (see **Note 1** below) so I can also take back the word "shameless." And if they stop bullying people, and stop advertising their pleasure in in other's misfortunes, I'll shut up entirely -- which should be sufficient incentive for anyone.

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Note 1 Update 5-28-14 at 12:30 PM: I am told that both Brent Roberts and Brent Donnellan have now apologized to Schnall for their remarks. I appreciate and respect them for it.

Note 2 Update 5-28-14 at 12:50 PM: I am told that Schnall is a Senior Lecturer and does have tenure. My mistake.

Note 3 Update 6-2-14 at 6:58 AM: I wrote: "they initially secured her cooperation by suggesting that she would be able to do exactly that [write a reply]." Brian Nosek disagrees. He wrote to me and said: "[It] is not a matter of opinion of whether we made a promise when 'securing her cooperation' -- there was no event that qualifies as 'securing cooperation.' If you mean sharing her materials, the authors asked her for those independently of the editorial process -- they have no basis to make such a promise (and the emails they released don't show any evidence that they did)." Rather than debate this issue, I'll just say that all the editorial correspondence is now available and anyone can decide for themselves whether Schnall was or was not promised the opportunity to reply, and whether her cooperation was conditioned on it.