

COMMENT and RESPONSE TO COMMENT

on Sensationalism and the short memory of science journalism

David Hosansky and Carl Drews comment on the article by D. Nof and N. Paldor

Comment on Sensationalism and the short memory of science journalism (published in The EGGS No. 34 [at http://www.the-eggs.org/articles.php?id=146](http://www.the-eggs.org/articles.php?id=146))

We were surprised to read the article in your 8 March 2011 Newsletter No. 34 (<http://www.the-eggs.org/articles.php?id=146>) in which Drs. Nof and Paldor characterize our recent press release on the parting of the Red Sea as sensationalizing the science. Our intent was to popularize work in this area and make it accessible to the public. We certainly did not mean to imply that Drews and Han were the first to do scientific research on the subject. In fact, Paldor and Nof are explicitly acknowledged in the release, as are subsequent researchers. The attention the release received demonstrates how inherently appealing this topic is. The subsequent media coverage should elevate the visibility of everyone's work in this area.

David Hosansky, Head of Media Relations, NCAR / University Corporation for Atmospheric Research
and
Carl Drews, Atmospheric Chemistry Division, National Center for Atmospheric Research

Response to comment

We appreciate Hosansky and Drew's helpful and useful comments. We have several things to say about them, however.

To begin with, our original EGGS article was not about the NCAR media office sensationalizing science per-se but rather about that office sensationalizing the science done at NCAR. In that context we note that referencing an earlier article in passing does not give the quoting authors permission to claim

the earlier work as their own, which is essentially what was done in the NCAR press release. Had the press release stated that more than 50% of its content (and indeed its most important conclusions) were made earlier in our 1992 article, then there would have been no issue. But then, there would have been no need for the press release in the first place.

Hosansky and Drew claim that the press release (to be distinguished from the PLOSone article) original intent was merely to "popularize science", not popularize the work done in NCAR. It is hard to believe that journalists, whose business is writing, cannot make their intentions clear in the first place. It seems to us that this "intention" was identified after the fact as a means of responding to our EGGS article without publishing at least a partial retraction (which would have been more appropriate in this case). We realize that the original press release was not done in malice. Rather, the NCAR media office was probably simply not familiar with what appeared before in both the scientific and popular literature. Namely, this is just another case of recycled news.

The message here to the scientific community at large is perhaps best summarized by a (slightly edited) quote from my colleague Dr. David Mountain (University of Arizona): "With funds getting tighter-and-tighter the competition will continue to expand from focusing merely on the quality of the science to focusing on the public image, name brand, and colorful packaging of the institution. A new, additional challenge emerges for researchers--to have integrity not only in their science but also in the spin that is sent out about it by the public relations representatives of their institutions".

D. Nof and N. Paldor