

Previous post

The tale of the tail: measuring dinosaurs is tough when bones are missing

Next post

First nuclear material is out of Fukushima

NATURE NEWS BLOG

ORI: Former Harvard postdoc guilty of misconduct

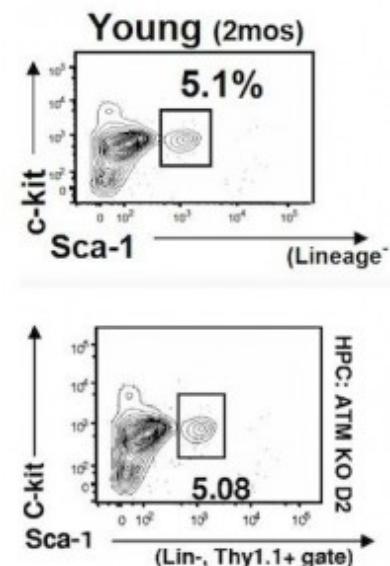
29 Aug 2012 | 18:31 BST | Posted by Brendan Maher | Category: Biology & Biotechnology

Shane Mayack, a former postdoctoral researcher at the Joslin Diabetes Center, an affiliate of Harvard Medical School in Boston, Massachusetts, engaged in research misconduct by duplicating figures in a pair of publications and poaching figures from other sources, according to the US Office of Research Integrity (ORI), which investigates fraud in federally funded research. The misconduct decision, noted yesterday in the *Federal Register*, concludes an investigation into the scientist's work, which included two papers that were retracted during the past two years, one from this journal.

Mayack "neither admits nor denies ORI's finding of research misconduct", according to the note in the *Federal Register*. But she had previously argued in a post on the blog Retraction Watch that her publication in *Nature* was retracted hastily and without her consultation. Mayack has agreed to sanctions from the ORI that include close supervision for any work she might perform with federal funding in the next three years.

Amy Wagers, Mayack's co-author and mentor, has been a rising star in the stem-cell field for her research on blood precursors. In August of 2010, she approached *Nature* editors with concerns about her group's paper showing that age-related changes in adult mouse stem cells can be reversed by exposure to blood from young mice. The paper was retracted on 14 October and the following day, the journal *Blood* issued a notice of concern about a paper by Wagers and Mayack published in that journal. A comparison of the two papers by *Nature* reporters revealed that experimental data from the earlier *Blood* paper had been relabelled and reused to represent different experimental results in the *Nature* paper. Wagers was lauded by for quickly retracting the papers soon after problems were noted.

Soon after, Mayack wrote a guest post for the blog Retraction Watch in which she denied intentional wrongdoing. She took responsibility for errors in the paper, but said that they were a result of poor archiving.



Flow cytometry data plots were re-used in two different papers by Shane Mayack.

MAYACK, S. R., SHADRACH, J. L., KIM, F. S. & WAGERS, A. J. *NATURE* 463, 495–500 (2010); MAYACK, S. R. & WAGERS, A. J. *BLOOD* 112, 519–531 (2008).

"I believe these errors occurred due to mistakes made in data retrieval that were a cause of a poor, but not a unique, data management and archiving system," she wrote.

Mayack went on to criticize the decision to retract as too hasty: "An inquiry, not an investigation, had been established. The inquiry was based solely on noted duplications of figures, not fabrications." And she intimated that she was being forced to take the blame for a "dysfunctional system" of publication and subsequent investigation.

The ORI findings, however, mention not only the duplications of her own figures, which Mayack had attributed to error, but the misappropriation of two figures — one in each paper — from unrelated experiments. The *Nature* paper had a figure (Supplemental Figure 2C) taken from an online protocol, and the *Blood* paper copies an image (found in Figure 2B) from an unrelated experiment by a Taiwanese group without attribution. Both findings represent a clear falsification of data in the research record, according to the ORI.

Neither Wagers nor Mayack responded to a request for comment.

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Next post

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Comments

30 Aug 2012 15:59 BST

Brendan Maher said: By way of an update: Wagers did respond to an email I sent by saying that she has nothing to add to the ORI's conclusions and is "glad the matter is concluded." Mayack, meanwhile, released a statement, through a lawyer, to the blog Retraction Watch saying that the mistakes made on the papers "were not due to fabrication, falsification, or plagiarism of scientific results." Worth noting, that directly conflicts with ORI's conclusion of research misconduct.

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