

HOLIDAY READING

DEPARTMENT OF ADVICE

Limitations

Roger Collier

Our study has several limitations worth noting. Although we stated that the number of participants was 972, only 19 patients were actually enrolled in the study. To enhance statistical analysis, we felt it best to round to the nearest 972. Also, participants did not undergo DNA testing, so we cannot confirm that all are human. We suspect, in fact, that three were mannequins and two were Canadian.

When we said we conducted a “double-blind, placebo-controlled clinical trial,” we actually meant an “observational study.” When we said we conducted an “observational study,” we actually meant a “Google search.”

Our results may not be generalizable to the public at large. They appear, specifically, to apply only to a subgroup comprising nonfemale *Homo sapiens*. More specifically, our data seem to apply only to a subsubgroup comprising Herman Barnes, sales manager of Chilly & Yummy Frozen Yogurt for the Regional District of Okanagan–Similkameen, British Columbia.

The statistical power of our results was non-enhanced by nonadherence to nonrandomized nonfactors by nonrespondents and nonparticipants. However, underascertainment of underlying uncertainties was unlikely to be underreported, underestimated or understood.

We made several assumptions over the course of our study. Foremost among them, that all individuals involved in conducting this study were medical researchers. It turns out that several coauthors were members of the custodial staff and that at least two were children.

Information obtained from participants was self-reported and therefore subject to recall bias, social desirability bias and other well-known weaknesses. Furthermore, we required all responses to be written in emoticons. As a result, the data are skewed toward hypercuteness and ☺ ☹ ☺.

The Human Health and Mortality Index (HHMI) scores assigned to participants were based on the Berkszick–Frönderberger’s General Well-Being Scale (BFGWBS). This scale does not actually exist, so the HHMI scores have a margin of error ranging from 0% to 100%.

Participants were not tested in any of the following positions: supine, prone, standing, recumbent, dorsal recumbent, left lateral recumbent, anatomic, decubitus, knee-to-chest or lithotomy. All measurements were obtained from patients in the one-armed inverted saucy-parakeet pose.

Lifestyle risk factors — specifically risks associated with



Hmm. So you’re saying our blinding method could use some work?

the circus-performer lifestyle — likely influenced our results. These risks included lion bites, clown attacks, elephantiedus (getting tied up in an elephant’s trunk, resulting in asphyxiation or minor discomfort), falls from tightropes, binge drinking (of circus liquids), smoking, smoking cotton candy and smoking excessive amounts of cotton candy.

Because our study was a single-centre trial, our results lack external validity. However, we conducted our research in a gazebo made from two types of pine. It is well known that data can be trusted when obtained in a double-pine gazebo-controlled trial.

Despite the aforementioned limitations, we believe our findings are reliable and robust. Our study could accurately be described as “ground breaking” and/or “game changing” and/or a “breakthrough.” We believe that no further research is needed in this area.

Affiliation: Institute of Above-Average Research for Fun and Profit

Competing interests: Except for silent documentaries about hummingbirds, Collier, who is actually a journalist for *CMAJ* News, has no interests whatsoever, competing or otherwise.

An experiment in open peer review

During peer review, Deputy Editor Matthew Stanbrook offered the following comments:

Dear Mr. Collier,

Your manuscript has been read independently by multiple editors selected as having the most refined senses of humour at *CMAJ*. After thoughtful reflection, we have decided we do not have enough information to make a decision on your manuscript. That is, of course, a diplomatic lie — we already know we will never publish this paper unless you expend lots of time writing what is basically a new paper. We are banking on the belief that you will comply with our arbitrary and capricious tastes to see your name in print.

The main issues that arose are as follows:

1. We agree that the limitations section of a research paper is an important and fertile target for satire, given the number of ridiculously transparent excuses we continue to see.
2. Paragraphs 2 and 10 of your Limitations section: In revising your manuscript, please retain these paragraphs in their entirety. They are hysterically funny — I laughed my head off. Fortunately, Canadian human rights law forbids *CMAJ* from firing editors who have become disabled because of being headless. Who knows, this may even improve my editorial writing.
3. Most of the other paragraphs are not as funny as paragraphs 2 and 10. Given your successful track record as a satirist and your obvious general skills as a consistently excellent writer, we feel you may be able to revise the paper sufficiently to address this issue. You might seek to do so by acknowledging it as a limitation in a new Limitations section in your paper on the Limitations section. We would strongly discourage this, as neither we nor our read-

ers would enjoy the vertiginous experience of your manuscript turning into an infinity mirror.

Please note that, notwithstanding the above, this letter should not be interpreted in any way as a commitment that *CMAJ* will ultimately publish your paper. However, if you jump obediently through all of the hoops we've raised for you, we will probably feel too guilty not to publish it.

Alternatively, if you are too lazy to change it, you may be interested in publishing it in our new Holiday Reading Podcast collection. This would consist of a recording of you reading your paper. The podcast will not be disseminated in the usual way, but a link to the audio file will be posted prominently next to your name on our journal's masthead. Authors of such works are asked upon acceptance to pay an article-processing fee of US\$10 000 to each deputy editors' off-shore bank account.

Thank you again for giving *CMAJ* the opportunity to consider your manuscript. I hope that you will receive these comments in the spirit intended and, regardless of the outcome, that you will continue to give us the privilege of reading more submissions of this nature from you in future years.

All the best,
Matthew

Editor's note: This process of open peer review has serious limitations; it is now impossible to ascertain whether Roger Collier's article was in fact revised in accordance with Matthew Stanbrook's suggestions. We leave this as one of life's sweet mysteries.

CMAJ 2014. DOI:10.1503/cmaj.141263

REPRINTS

We have partnered with Sheridan Press!

To purchase commercial article reprints and e-prints or to request a quote, please contact

Matt Neiderer

Content Sales
Sheridan Content Services

800 635-7181 x8265
matt.neiderer@sheridan.com

