“You’re a monster!”

How to embrace public criticism of your research, and end up making new friends
Physics & Biology, about 10 years of research in theoretical, experimental neuroscience (Germany, France, Portugal)

Molecular research: mechanical force-balance biochips in drug development

Animal experiments, in juvenile rats: basic research on audio-tactile integration

Computational neuroscience: basic research on haemodynamics, neural networks

Animal experiments, in zebrafish larvae: basic research on visuomotor circuits
  + lectures (mathematics, data analysis)
  + science communication
My position on animal experiments

1 | Animal research, in principle, is **useful**.
2 | It also raises tough **ethical** questions.

*We* conclude that most experiments are morally justified.  
*Others* disagree, for often non-trivial reasons.  
*Most others*, however, simply are at a loss... or they don’t care.

3 | Scientists, staff and students know more than most others,  
   have **responsibility** to share, and be held accountable.

Institutions, more often than not, struggle to shoulder this responsibility.
With or without us, the public debate is happening.
PR campaigners are having a field day

"10 reasons to protest animal experiments"
9. Heimlichkeit

Tierexperimentatoren dürfen selbst bestimmen, ob sie ihre Versuche bekannt machen. Wir dürfen ihnen nicht zusehen. Deshalb wissen viele Menschen nicht, was mit den Tieren passiert, wie wenig Tierversuche nützen und wie viel Schaden sie anrichten. Tierschutzorganisationen fordern, dass alles, was mit Tierversuchen zu tun hat, gezeigt und veröffentlicht werden muss.

Alle Menschen bezahlen mit ihren Steuern Tierversuche, dürfen sie aber nicht sehen und erfahren oft nicht einmal ihre Ergebnisse.
Effective channels of communication

The Problem with Lab Mice
975,853 views

CollegeHumor
Published on 15 Nov 2017

Mouse trials are easy, cheap and apply to humans less than 80% of the time.
Pro-Test Deutschland e.V.
Pro-Test Deutschland e.V.

- non-profit
- non-affiliated
- volunteers only
- funded exclusively by small, private donations
- shared values & experiences, but different opinions
- consensus-driven
A bunch of individuals...
...showing their names and faces.

- Yasemin Gültekin
- Renee Hartig
- Konstantin Hartmann
- Florian Hohnstein
- Felicitas Horn
- Peter Kraemer
- Carsten Klein
- Andrew Lee
Why do we need basic research?

Every aspect of applied research – be it the development of drugs, machines or any other methods – is based on the knowledge of basic underlying principles. In order to invent light bulbs, we first needed to understand the physical principles of electricity. In order to develop antibiotics, we first had to understand the metabolic pathways present in bacteria, and also how bacteria could cause infectious diseases! Applied research projects grow like tree branches from the trunk of basic knowledge.
currently 70-75 volunteers
Hosted by YouTube channel “mailab”
Traditional media
Talking about animal research

Scientists and their institutions need to communicate more proactively to counter claims of mistreatment by animal rights activists

Katrin Weigmann

In June 2015, the extremist group Animal Liberation Front (ALF), destroyed two trucks belonging to Halton Laboratories by Ontario, Canada. In the same month, Nicole Vergnolle, a research neuroscientist at the Max Planck Institute for Biological Cybernetics in Tübingen, Germany, announced that he would abandon his research on brain-gaze after months of harassment and slander from animal rights activists. In May 2014 and April 2015, animal rights activists forced their way into the Pharmacology Department of the University of Milan, Italy. They spread putty broke glass, and removed information tags from animal cages, destroying years of work. In April 2014, the Verein zur Erhöhung menschlichen Lebensqualität Deutschland placed a full-page advertisement in a number of Germany’s national and regional newspapers, accusing neuroscience Andreas Kron of the University of Freiburg of “murdering” monkeys in “pseudo-scientific” experiments.

...relevance to speak up leads to a paucity of information about the use of animals in research, which benefits animal rights activists.

However, this reluctance to speak up leads to a paucity of information about the use of animals in research, which benefits animal rights activists. “We delivered an informational video to the public and then stepped aside to allow flexibility to sit in with all kinds of citizens,” said Candy Backhausen, Director of the Center for Comparative Medicine at Bayreuth College of Medicine in the USA and Chair of Americans for Medical Progress, a charity that promotes public understanding of the use of animals in biomedical research. Animal rights groups.

...this information void is filled with lies and fear of animals in biomedical research. The debate is strongly polarized, making it difficult for scientists to present a more nuanced view. Speaking some might think in public, or they might fear that they will draw themselves to the attention of activists. If scientists and institutions want to escape the vicious circle of misinformation and fear, they need to tell the public their side of the story. "This philosophy of blocking our hands in the sand is fatal, because it becomes the myth of the animal rights activists that scientists have something to hide," said Christine Beck, Head of the Press and Public Relations Office of the Max Planck Society in Munich, Germany.

German animal rights group SOKE Tierschutz informed the Max Planck Institute in Tübingen in September last year, determined to produce video material that could be used to demonstrate cruelty against animals. The German broadcast magazine Stern TV made the issue public in a highly manipulative context intended to stir up emotion. SOKE Tierschutz organized a demonstration in Tübingen, which was attended by 1,500 participants, while researchers and their families were threatened and threatened. Nicole Vergnolle, Director of the institute, eventually announced that he would stop working with primates. Although Christine Beck is located in Munich, where the Max Planck Society has its administrative office, she took over the communication seal at the Tübingen Institute, which did not have a press office at that time.

...if scientists ever want to escape the vicious circle of misinformation and fear, they need to tell the public their side of the story.

Communication during a crisis is extremely difficult and follows its own rules that are distinct from common practice in science. "There is no room to explain things at length, you have to resort to simple and clear claims, or you have to be aware that your arguments are perceived as a very emotional."
What we need to do

Enable a more enlightened debate.
Provide facts and figures to fuel the debate – not to “win” it.
Establish a personal rapport, share thoughts and feelings.

Earn the trust of others.

No fuzziness or euphemisms, clearly voicing our own opinion.
Stay intellectually honest, never oversimplify.
Open-minded, respectful, diverse opinions within.
You.
Pro-Test Deutschland e.V.

florian.dehmelt @ pro-test-deutschland.de
info @ pro-test-deutschland.de