



Censorship or inclusion?

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We were interested to read Clark et al.'s paper about prosocial motives underlying scientific censorship (1). While we share many of the authors' frustrations with the academic publishing model and the opacity of editorial decisions, we have concerns about their attribution of blame.

Despite acknowledging that "*Academics have long discriminated against various types of people (e.g., women and scholars of color)*" causing "*exclusion of minority scholars and their ideas,*" the authors suggest that increased participation of women and people from diverse backgrounds in academia increases censorship due to these colleagues' concerns about harm to marginalized groups and because women are more harm-averse and more protective of the vulnerable. The absence of these voices and viewpoints from academia has limited scholarship much more than exclusion of potentially harmful discourses. Harm arising from poorly informed or conducted scholarship is not merely a concern but a reality (2). Increased awareness of this is not a weakness but an opportunity.

To support concerns about limits on academic freedom, Clark et al. cited a non-peer-reviewed New Zealand survey (3). The authors reported that half of New Zealand academics felt constrained from stating controversial or unpopular opinions, or raising differing perspectives, particularly in relation to race, colonialism, and sex and gender. This survey received responses from just 458 of the 16,000 academics invited to participate. A formal complaint to the Research Association New Zealand was upheld, finding that the survey methodology fell short of appropriate scientific principles as required by their Code of Practice (4).

As there are relatively few New Zealand scholars with expertise in race, colonialism, and sex and gender studies, it is likely that most respondents were unqualified to pursue scholarship or offer opinions in these domains. The use of fundamentally flawed evidence to construct a marginalizing

narrative is more likely the reason behind academic rejection of some work than censorship of high-quality scholarship. Poorly informed scholars opining outside their domain of expertise not only invites academic rejection but also wastes resources and undermines trust in academic institutions.

The authors outline directions to improve transparency and accountability. It is noteworthy that virtually all of these affect structures and processes developed at a time during which women and people from diverse backgrounds were excluded from academia. None of the solutions proposed address underlying problems that give rise to prosocial concerns.

Censorship to protect "vulnerable" groups would be unnecessary if these groups were actively involved in scholarship affecting their communities. Including more perspectives enables more complete exploration of issues and impacts, consideration of potential faults and flaws, and interpretation of findings in a wider context. The quality of health research and the translation of research findings into real-world health gain is improved when people with lived experience of these health conditions are involved as partners in the research process (5). All research pertaining to specific communities should involve active participation of those communities.

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