â??The Truth Wears Offâ?• & â??More Thoughts on the Decline Effectâ?•

Description

Tweet

These two articles by Jonah Lehrer in the New Yorker (13/12/2010, 03/01/2011) provide a salutary reminder of the limitations of experimental methods as a means of research, when undertaken by mere mortals, with their various limitations. They do not, in my reading, dismiss or invalidate the use of experimental methods, but they do highlight the need for a longer term view about the efficacy of experimental methods, and one which situates their use within a social context.

Many thanks to Irene Guijt for bringing these articles to my attention, and others, via the Pelican email list.

â??In â??The Truth Wears Off,â?• Lehrer â??wanted to explore the human side of the scientific enterprise. My focus was on a troubling phenomenon often referred to as the â??decline effect,â?• which is the tendency of many exciting scientific results to fade over time. This empirical hiccup afflicts fields from pharmacology to evolutionary biology to social psychology. There is no simple explanation for the decline effect, but the article explores several possibilities, from the publication biases of peer-reviewed journals to the â??selective reportingâ?• of scientists who sift through dataâ?•

In â??More Thoughts on the Decline Effectâ?• Lehrer responds to the various emails, tweets and comments posted in reply to his article. Amongts other things, he says â??I think the decline effect is an important reminder that we shouldnâ??t simply reassure ourselves with platitudes about the rigors of replication or the inevitable corrections of peer review. Although we often pretend that experiments settle the truth for usâ??that we are mere passive observers, dutifully recording the factsâ??the reality of science is a lot messier. It is an intensely human process, shaped by all of our usual talents, tendencies, and flawsâ?•

There are also many interesting Comments following both posts by Lehrer

Category

1. Uncategorized

Tags

1. experimental methods
2. replication

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