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Credit for data sharing

M. McNutt (“#IAMAResearchParasite,” Editorial, 4 March, p. 1005) can be proud to be a “research parasite.” The creators of this term, Longo and Drazen (1), miss the very point of scientific research when they write that researchers may “even use the [open] data to try to disprove what the original investigators had posited.” It is at the core of the scientific paradigm that researchers take nothing as final truth. In fact, using research data to try to disprove a result is good scientific practice, especially in the light of the replication crisis (2–4).

However, Longo and Drazen are right that scientific data sharing deserves recognition. They suggest that credit for data sharing should take the form of co-authorship. Although this is true in particular cases, co-authorship as the sole instrument of credit will unnecessarily restrict the potential of data sharing and could be a detriment to the original researcher (for instance, if the resulting publications lack quality) (5). In the case of replication studies and meta-analyses, co-authorship makes no scientific sense.

A more suitable instrument for giving credit where credit is due would be a much higher appraisal of data sharing by research communities through citations of data sets, awards, and the consideration of data “production” in career prospects, funding applications, and evaluations. With this end in mind, research parasites are beneficial for the organism as a whole.

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