

Peer-Review comments and author responses

Reviewer 1:

Comment: This study documents a cluster of nine peer-reviewed papers in the journal Bioengineered that were initially retracted for ethical and data-integrity concerns and then simultaneously reinstated (de-retracted) on 1 March 2024. The retraction notices, de-retraction notices and accompanying publisher statements all use identical, templated wording, which raises concerns about a potentially routinized or “industrialized” approach to issuing such notices. The paper presents concrete cases and thoughtfully draws attention to the procedural and transparency issues that this episode highlights.

Response: *Thank you for this accurate understanding and appreciation of the cases being presented.*

Comment: Although this manuscript is primarily descriptive and therefore raises no major methodological objections, I have several minor points that should be addressed to improve clarity and reproducibility. First, please state how the nine papers were identified: was a specific, reproducible search strategy or inclusion criterion used?

Response: *As the reviewer noted, there was no systematic procedure or method. Rather, quite by chance, being in constant and regular monitoring of the post-publication spaces, such as PubPeer, Retraction Watch and For Better Science, one or more of the Bioengineered retractions caught my attention, revealing the nine-paper “cluster”. A short description about this was indicated in the paper.*

Comment: Second, the term “industrialization” is interpretive, define precisely what you mean by it and clearly separate observed facts (e.g., identical notice wording, synchronized dates) from interpretive claims about motives or processes.

Response: *Use of this term is of course symbolic, and not literal, but a short description of why this term was employed has been provided.*

Comment: Third, you refer to non-engagement with COPE; please cite the specific COPE guidance that you believe was not followed and explain how the notices appear to be inconsistent with those elements of the guidance.

Response: *This is not quite accurate. Allow me to try and explain. Although the retraction notices all claim to have followed COPE retraction guidelines, evidently, logic informs us that for all of the nine papers to be de-retracted, and then for two of them to be newly re-retracted clearly indicates either some failure on behalf of those (e.g., editors, publisher) claiming to follow the COPE retraction guidelines, or some failure with one or more of the guidelines themselves. Obviously, not being privy to these confidential procedures, it would be unwise to try and postulate which guidelines were not properly followed, or which guidelines might be ineffective. We may never know where the failure occurred, unless Taylor & Francis transparently offers full and detailed insight into these nine cases. One can expect that one and a half years after these initial retraction notices appeared, that a transparent understanding and explanation will never be forthcoming.*

Comment: Finally, please report whether the authors, editors, or publisher were contacted for comment and, if so, summarize their responses; if they were not contacted, state this explicitly as a limitation of the study.

Response: *To avoid professional retaliation, the publisher and editors were not contacted. The authors were contacted on 16 November 2025, with a request to respond by 19 November 2025. The appropriate limitations have been noted.*

Comment: Define COPE at first mention: Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE).

Response: *This was done in the abstract, it was already defined at first mention in the main body of text, and it was also done in the reference list.*

Comment: “Between March and 13 May 2024...”: specify the exact March date. If you mean the de-retraction cluster, that is 1 March 2024 (as stated elsewhere); change the sentence to: “Between 1 March 2024 and 13 May 2024...”

Response: *All dates were verified and clarified.*

Reviewer 2:

Congratulations on the paper, which raises a fascinating and necessary discussion.

Comment: Regarding item 6 (lines 112-119). Did any of the authors object to or disagree with the retraction (Teixeira da Silva, 2024a) at the time when the RNs were issued? Conversely, did all of the authors explicitly agree with the retractions before they were issued, i.e., was there due process? Considering that email addresses only appear for the corresponding authors (CAs), that the indicated emails are mostly generic emails (possibly suggesting third party involvement), that authorship or the identity of authors cannot be fully verified

(at least not using Open Researcher and Contributor ID (ORCID)), how did the publisher contact the authors, and how did the authors respond?

Response: *Naturally, as readers of these papers and these retraction notices, we would expect the publisher and notices to provide this information. This is, sadly, not the case. Rather, we are forced to try and guess or extrapolate what the truth might be. The editors and publisher were not contacted in 2024 or in 2025, even though it is their responsibility to provide such background information in the retraction notices. In response to the reviewer's request, the authors were contacted on 16 November 2025, with a request to respond by 19 November 2025.*

Comment: The most important issue here is not if the authors “disagree” with the retraction, but whether the publisher installed the due process to ascertain that the papers’ retractions were established only after all means of argumentation were exhausted. Disclosing if and whose authors responded and in what depth to the questioning is necessary.

Response: *One will likely never know the truth, unfortunately, since neither the procedures have been outlined by the publisher, nor do the notices or publisher's statements for all nine cases reveal what the opinion or position of the authors is/was. For this reason, this case study serves a very important function, post-publication accountability of the relevant parties.*

Comment: “Considering that email addresses only appear for the corresponding authors (CAs), that the indicated emails are mostly generic emails (possibly suggesting third party involvement)”, I would suggest clarifying this sentence; it is not true for most journals that publishers only have access to the corresponding author’s email. It is more common in the submission process that the emails of all authors go into the submission file, even if the other authors’ emails do not appear in the published version. Stating that a third party obtained “generic emails” to contact the other authors is a long-shot affirmation (which is clarified down in the discussion that are not being from institutions). If this paper does not prove that the identity of authors cannot be fully verified in the analyzed cases, this could weaken the presented arguments because of these inferences.

Response: *This was an excellent and astute observation. Indeed, all co-authors' emails may have been provided to the publisher at the point of submission on the online system, although there is no way of knowing what the submission requirements were for this journal in 2024 (or more accurately in about 2021, when these papers were originally and initially submitted). The text has been modified to reflect these possibilities.*

Comment: Regarding this affirmation: “The cases were last analyzed in April 2024, so it is possible that additional changes may have taken place between then and the time of publication of this paper”. Would it not be better if the authors check any status updates in the retraction list? This way, readers would have a better insight into what happened next.

Response: *Of note, the information was accurate and up-to-date when this paper was submitted. However, this paper has been in review now at PPCR for about 1 year now, making some of the facts outdated. Thus, a tremendous effort was made to revisit all nine cases, examining all relevant websites: journal/publisher, PubMed, Retraction Watch, PubPeer, Google Scholar, to allow the text, table and figure to be duly updated. Major edits and modifications resulted in these documents as a result (see blue text).*

Comment: Another question I have: what are the reasons for the new retraction in the two re-retracted files? If there is no explanation for the last retraction, I think this should be emphasized, especially because it reinforces the total lack of transparency in the retraction process for the journal. Another suggestion is to see the journal metrics (as a whole), adding to the discussion about the impact this particular journal achieves.

Response: *The new retraction notices are as opaque as their initial ones, and offer very little new insight. I decided not to enter the camp of metrics-related penalties, since not all background facts are known, so it would be premature to be fully critical. With the publication of this paper, and attention drawn to the case, maybe the publisher might grow some conscience and address the issues, even if it is ~2 years after the fact. Once fully resolved, then the necessary bodies like WoS, Scopus, Clarivate, etc. can reflect on the importance of taking action, e.g., indexing, metrics, etc.*

Comment: I missed a comparison in the discussion with the overall rates of retraction for papers in journals of the same field.

Response: *This is far beyond the objective of this paper and would distract from the focus on the nine cases. Consequently, such information was not added, also because the topics of the nine papers themselves range quite widely, despite being “bioengineering”.*