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iMechanica Blog

Discussion of fracture paper #21 - Only 6% of experimentalists want to disclose raw-data

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Experimental data availability is a cornerstone for reproducibility in experimental fracture mechanics. This is how the technical note begins, the recently published

"Long term availability of raw experimental data in experimental fracture mechanics", by Patrick Diehl, Ilyass Tabiai, Felix W. Baumann, Daniel Therriault and Martin Levesque, in *Engineering Fracture Mechanics*, 197 (2018) 21–26.

It is five pages that really deserves to be read and discussed. A theory may be interesting but of little value until it has been proven by experiments. All the proof of a theory is in the experiment. What is the point if there is no raw-data for quality check?

The authors cite another survey that found that 70% of around 1500 researchers failed to reproduce other scientists experiments. As a surprise, the same study find that the common scientists are confident that peer reviewed published experiments are reproducible.

A few years back many research councils around the world demanded open access to all publications emanating from research financed by them. Open access is fine, but it is much more important to allow examination of the data that is used. Publishers could make a difference by providing space for data from their authors. Those who do not want to disclose their data should be asked for an explanation.

The pragmatic result of the survey is that only 6% will provide data, and you have to ask for it. That is a really disappointing result. The remaining was outdated addresses 22%, no reply 58% and 14% replied but were not willing to share their data. The result would probably still be deeply depressing, but possibly a bit better if I as a researcher only have a single experiment and a few authors to track down. It means more work than an email but on the other hand I don't have 187 publications that Diehl et al. had. Through friends and former co-authors and some work I think chances are good. The authors present some clever ideas of what could be better than simply email-addresses that are temporary for many researchers.

The authors of the technical note do not know what hindered those 60% who did receive the request and did not reply. What could be the reason for not replying to a message where a colleague asks you about your willingness to share the raw experimental data of a published paper with

others? If I present myself to a scientist as a colleague who plan to study his data and instead of studying his behaviour, then chances that he answers increase. I certainly hope that, and at least not the reversed but who knows, life never ceases to surprise. It would be interesting to know what happens. If anyone would like to have a go, I am sure that the author's of the paper are willing to share the list of papers that they used.

Again, could there be any good reason for not sharing your raw-data with your fellow creatures? What is your opinion? Anyone, the authors perhaps.

Per Ståhle