

Re: Publication not so important in mathematics

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From: Michael J Hardy (mjhardy_at_mit.edu)

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jstevh@msn.com wrote:

- > *Those people who believe he proved Fermat's Last Theorem, probably*
- > *believe that the publication process has something to do with that*
- > *belief.*
- >
- > *Math people might disagree, claiming that all that scrutiny from around*
- > *the world is really what it's about, as if he were wrong *someone**
- > *somewhere in the world would speak up and holler about the error.*
- >
- > *I say they wouldn't necessarily, as the system is broken.*

With most publications, an error might escape notice for a long time, maybe even if it was fatal to the idea of the paper. But in Wiles, case, such a huge number of mathematicians took such great interest in understanding it that I suspect if there were a serious error, someone would have said something.

- > *Now for those of you who are still wondering, the issue here is that*
- > *math folks have basically been admitting that they don't necessarily*
- > *count publication of a paper in math journal for much, with the poster*
- > *I'm replying to claiming that the purpose of publication is not to show*
- > *correctness, but to get people acquainted with the material, and to*
- > *help academics build up their publications, basically for their*
- > *careers.*
- >
- > *My point is that for some of you that might be a surprise.*

Maybe to you that's a surprise. But I'd have thought common sense alone would suggest that the main purpose of publication is to make the ideas in a paper known to whoever is interested.

— Mike Hardy