I’m not going to apologize for being a company. I don’t think that determines whether the journal impact factor has done more harm or good. We all have a business model, and there’s nothing wrong with providing a service that people find valuable enough to pay for. I will say that the immense amount of work that goes into creating the JCR, and the Web of Science, is expensive, but necessary, in order to maintain high-quality, reliable data.

As far as the calculation itself, I can’t discuss every point in three minutes. But I will remind us of the Leiden Manifesto principles, such as using a variety of metrics to see the full picture, using the appropriate metric for what you are trying to measure, and normalizing for field differences. I think we should take a holistic view of research activities looking at not just publications, but presentations, patents, clinical activity, datasets, grad student training, policy and societal impact, etc. The existence of the journal impact factor does not preclude these things or disadvantage them, nor does the holistic view prove that the journal impact factor has done more harm than good. And I’d like to point out that Web of Science citation counts are used by Altmetric.

As far as gaming goes, any metric can be gamed. It’s a fact of life we all need to be aware of. Social media metrics can be gamed just as much as citation metrics can. Part of the service we provide is monitoring for such activity in the literature. We suppress journals from getting a journal impact factor if they exhibit suspicious citation practices. And we drop journals from Web of Science Core Collection when they cease to meet our standards, whether for ethical or other reasons. I think this is more good than harm.

As for the western research industrial complex. Modern, institutionalized science is not unlike most other institutions in that it was started by white, Anglo-Saxon males since those were the people in charge. But journal impact factor has evolved as scientific publishing has evolved. Today, we cover 18,000 journals in the Web of Science Core Collection, including over 5,000 in the Emerging Sources Citation Index. These 5,000 represent non-mainstream journals that still meet ethical and technical standards, but are not highly cited and don’t necessarily have global authorship. These journals represent authors from over 200 countries, with 80% of the papers from outside North America. 35% of the articles are Gold open access and 19% are in a language other than English. Citations from ESCI contribute to the journal impact factor. As the research world evolves and gets more diverse, that diversity is then reflected in the published literature and therefore in the journal impact factor. And I will add that we are making open access articles more discoverable through a partnership with
Impactstory, whereby we will link from the Web of Science to gold and/or green versions of millions of OA articles.

And to say Dr. Garfield was a son of the privileged ecosystem is not entirely fair. Yes, he was white and male. But he was raised by a single teenaged mother, worked various blue collar jobs, and was truly a self-made man. He was known for his generosity, both in his business where he employed many minorities and promoted women into leadership roles, but also in scholarship, where he was a financial and intellectual benefactor to many globally, especially researchers from regions underprivileged by the Western research industrial complex.