

Open Access Publishing: The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly*
or
Caveat scriptor*

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Consider the goals of scholarly publication: Why publish?

- Because you have to for promotion or tenure or to impress your boss
- Responsibility to community of scholars
- To share discovery
- To contribute to medical knowledge
- To advance profession
- To enhance health & welfare of society
- Other reasons?

What is open access publishing (OAP)?

- Online journals without subscriptions
- Anyone can access the articles Charge fee to authors or their institutions to publish the articles
- Established publishers and emerging publishers, some reliable, others deemed predatory

The barrage of spam invitations

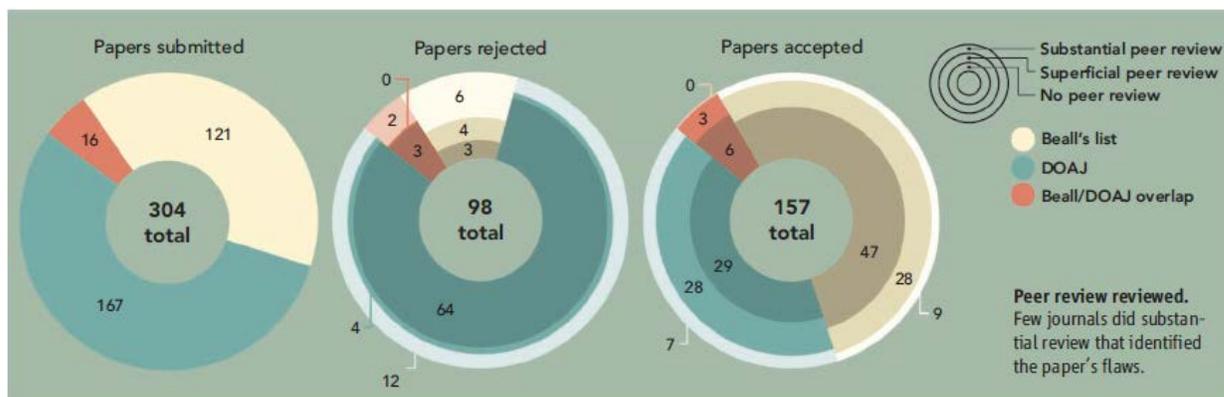
- Grey et al. (BMJ 2016;355:i5383) analyzed how many spam invitations 5 academics got, how relevant and how easy to suppress
- Avg: 312 spam emails /month for 3 months.
- 80 times more than non-spam invitations
- Unsubscribed: # dropped 39% next month, but was only 20% down by a year later.
- “>75% ... were of no or low relevance”

Lessons of the Bohannon (2013) article

- Links to publishers, papers, and correspondence at <http://science.sciencemag.org/content/suppl/2013/10/03/342.6154.60.DC1>
- Of 304 submissions, 157 accepted, 98 rejected, 29 were non-responsive, 20 said paper was still under review
- ~60% of 255 had no indication of peer review
- Of 106 with some peer review, 70% accepted, only 36 commented on scientific problems, 16 of which were accepted anyway

How the papers broke out

*With thanks to Swann Adams for the first subtitle, and to Dr. Richard Rothenberg, former Editor, *Annals of Epidemiology*, and Sean Lind, Digital Librarian, then at Georgia State Univ., now Univ. of Minnesota, for Latin alternate title and some slides.



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Interpreting the diagrams: Shades of blue are journals listed on DOAJ (Directory of OA Journals); cream / tan are journals on Beall's List of Predatory Journals; orange are journals on both lists. Concentric circles from outside in reflect decreasing level of review. Note large number of the rejections came from DOAJ journals with no review, likely because editors recognized paper wasn't worth sending out.

- Acceptance without review is much worse than rejection without review.
- Article stirred debate: Concerns that print pubs not targeted and focus on OA rather than peer review
- Is OA a good thing?
- For balanced perspective, see Ann Emerg Med:
[http://www.annemergmed.com/article/S0196-0644\(13\)00547-7/fulltext#copyright](http://www.annemergmed.com/article/S0196-0644(13)00547-7/fulltext#copyright)

Why should we care?

What does it mean to be a profession?

- Three characteristic of professions:
 1. Commitment to expertise in a discipline and excellence in its practice
 2. Commitment to a set of shared values
 3. Commitment to accountability and responsible conduct
- Different professional roles or specialties may place more or less emphasis on a particular ethical value or obligation

Excellence in Practice

- Valued because the violation of it, i.e., sloppy work, is also contrary to the goal of the research enterprise
- Violation is also contrary to our mutual obligations to the profession, the broader scientific community, and society
- Violation has consequences with moral weight, so a valid topic for ethical consideration

Knowledge as responsibility

- By pursuing knowledge we commit to its value
- Committing to its value implies a responsibility to nurture it
- Responsibility implies an obligation to take positive action to increase our knowledge and understanding.

- Therefore, publication in reliable journals with strong peer review and reliance only on publications that have undergone such review is necessary.

More to the story

- Even highly regarded print / subscription journals often have publication charges, typically a per page charge for papers over a certain length.
- Print / subscription journals also moving to providing open access for articles if you pay a fee, often a substantial one.
- Without open access, unless the publisher decides to make it freely available or has a policy of opening access after an embargo period (as in agreements with federal funders) people without subscriptions run into a “paywall” requiring a fee to access the article.
- Check out PubMed Central

Even More to the story

- Richard Harris in *Rigor Mortis* (Basic Books, 2016) bemoans increasing emphasis on quantity over quality in publication that leads to sloppy papers that are not reproducible – numerous examples
- Not a fan of impact factors either: argues the so-called top journals are not a guarantee of quality, validity, or reliability
- Journals hate retractions about as much as authors do, so sometimes difficult to point out errors or make or call for corrections or retractions (pp. 182-3)
- When retractions occur, erroneous papers continue to be cited, sometimes widely
 - Over 7,000 studies claiming to be HEP-2 or Int-407 cell lines long after they were shown to be HeLa (p.96)
 - Another study shown to be methodologically flawed by a batch effect remained and was cited >300 times (p. 185)
 - See Tatsioni A, Bonitsis NG, Ioannidis JPA, *JAMA* 2007; (298(21):2517-26.

Evaluating open access publishers

- Is the publisher a member of the Open Access Scholarly Publishers Association (OASPA.org)?
- Is the publisher for-profit or not-for-profit?
- How many titles does the publisher publish?
- Is the publisher on Beall’s List? (<http://bealllist.weebly.com/> is an archived list. Beall was forced to remove his original: see (Thanks to Janet Evatt for finding this.) <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2017/01/18/librarians-list-predatory-journals-reportedly-removed-due-threats-and-politics>)
- Does the publisher adhere to one of the recognized OA statements of principles? <http://digital-scholarship.org/cwb/oaw.htm#statements>
- Is there a submission charge or publication charge? (May vary by journal within a single publishing group)
- What advertising and solicitation methods does the publisher use? Are they credible?

- Don't be swayed by emails that are designed to feed your ego but are clearly blast emails, aka SPAM.

Evaluating open access journals

- Is the journal listed in the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ.org)? (No guarantee, as Bohannon discovered)
 - Is the journal listed in [Ulrich's Global Serials Directory](#)? (Check for link through your library.)
 - **Is the journal indexed by major databases like PubMed?** (OAJs now have their own indexing services)
 - What is the journal's subject coverage?
 - Does the journal have an impact factor? What is it? (Journal Citation Reports)
 - What are the journal's peer review guidelines?
 - Who is on the editorial board? (Not always truthful. Check with members to verify.)
 - How many issues does the journal publish each year? In the last year?
 - How many articles are typically in an issue?
 - **Beware of ostensibly personal invitations to submit an already published article in a longer or slightly modified form or edit a special issue.**
 - Librarians can be excellent source of information and advice – call on them

Evaluating open access articles

- Are author affiliations listed?
- Does the subject matter, length, or quality of articles vary greatly?
- Are there multiple articles by the same author(s) in the same issue?
- Are many articles by editorial board members?
- Are the articles being cited? (use Web of Science or Science Direct or Google Scholar or other tools)

Thinking about open access issues

- Is it more difficult today to be an author or a reader?
- Are scholarly journals produced to serve publishers, editors, authors, or readers?
- What is the purpose of peer review? Validation? Evaluation of importance and/or relevance? Evaluation of scientific rigor or validity or merit?
- What is the goal of a medical journal or public health journal?
- How will scholarly journals continue to facilitate the dissemination of knowledge and the creation of new ideas?

*Inspired (in part) by: Anderson, K. (2013). Have we forgotten readers in our worries over access? The Scholarly Kitchen. Available at:

<http://scholarlykitchen.sspnet.org/2013/08/13/have-we-forgotten-readers-in-our-worries-over-access/>

What about career advancement?

- Legitimate concerns about the value placed on open access publications by administrators or committees who make determinations about professional progress and advancement.

- Online-only journals often unfairly disparaged or depreciated
- Some online-only journals have strong peer review and good impact factors
 - e.g. PLOS Medicine in 2013: IF: 14.00; 5-yr IF: 17.945
 - Ranks 6th among general medical journals
- If you have pubs in good OA journals, give data to your supervisor / chair / head to substantiate status and impact (IF of journals, citations of articles, etc.)
- Ask supervisor or lead / chair and dean to inform those up the line about legitimate and reputable OA journals
- Don't publish in predatory or crappy journals

Choosing where to publish (not all of equal weight or importance)

- Has most generous allowance for tables & figures
- Has fast turnaround time
- Has highest impact factor
- Most relevant to my field
- Likely to be read by colleagues
- Investigate options for making print articles accessible
- Ask a librarian – often much more helpful and knowledgeable than other researchers
- Reputation for timely, helpful review
- Affiliated with professional society
- Has published similar topics
- Journal I cite in my paper
- Other factors?

Finally: Other resources about authorship and reviewing

- Mulford Health Science Library at the Univ. of Toledo that has links to hundreds of journals' instructions for authors pages.
 - <http://mulford.utoledo.edu/instr/>
 - Also has links to resources below
- Perhaps best known are the recommendations from the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (**ICMJE**): <http://www.icmje.org/recommendations/> but don't deal with open access issues
- See the Committee on Publication Ethics (**COPE**) guidelines, including for authors, reviewers, editors, publishers (including how to handle authorship disputes)
 - <http://publicationethics.org/resources/guidelines>
- Also of interest: European Association of Science Editors (**EASE**) guidelines: <http://www.ease.org.uk/publications/author-guidelines>, again more for other help than for open access issues
- Note that the Mulford site has links to all of these
- Finally, I couldn't find anything from the European Acronym Society Yearbook, though you would think it would be, well, you know . . .