Ethical considerations around book publishing: COPE Forum March 2021

To support the discussion at COPE's March Forum, Jennifer Wright of Cambridge University Press and Tamara Welschot of Springer Nature summarised some key differences between books and journals, and provided some sample cases to consider.

Some key differences between books and journals

Peer review and decision making

Books	Journals
• Whole book not necessarily reviewed – proposal + select chapters • Reviewing rarely involves any blinding • Reviews more commonly edited/consolidated • Reviewing and decision making often actively takes account of author's abilities/character/status – effectively a "reference" as much as a review	• Whole article usually reviewed by three independent/external reviewers • Blinding models • Reviewers expected to actively dismiss their views of the author/avoid all bias

Corrections process

Books	Journals
• Lack of continuous publication • No industry standard method • A single book often includes distinct sections from different authors – corrections/retractions may apply only at chapter level, multiple chapters, or whole book • Books typically hosted in more formats (ePub, Kindle, pdf, HTML, Kobi, print…) and platforms	• Article generally standalone piece • Established mechanisms • All authors take responsibility for whole piece • Limited format types across reasonably standardised network of platforms • Serial publication

Content generation

Books	Journals
• Active content development in house • Decisions about authorship, writing style, content scope, images etc often taken in consultation with publisher • Publisher editor may advise at multiple stages of the process (proposal, pre-review, post-review but pre-contract, content development, proofs)	• Content generally (although not always – HSS exceptions) arrives "as is" for review with no input from publisher or editor

Purposes

Books	Journals
• Different purposes (teaching materials, handbooks, public engagement, briefing, benchmarking, review) and audiences (e.g.practitioners, general public, students) are common	• Purpose usually to convey research findings, opinions, or syntheses to other researchers

Business relationship

Books	Journals
• Publisher is an agent for the author, author receives royalties	• Publisher is a service provider for author, or author is "supplier"

Timelines

Books	Journals
• Usually longer than a year, can be decades in development	• Usually less than a year

Customer perceptions

Books	Journals
• Individual books perceived to be a "product" • Responsibility more concentrated (publisher, author)	• Journal is the "product", but less perception of publisher responsibility. • Collective responsibility for outcomes (publisher, owner, editorial board, editors, peer reviewers, authors)

Sample cases

Plagiarism

- **1a. Sample case**

  Description: Concerns were raised by a complainant that his *ideas* were plagiarized from his work. The book was already published. There is no direct text overlap.

  Question: Can an idea or ideas be plagiarized?

- **1b. Sample case**

  Description: Concerns were raised by a complainant that his (unpublished) work had been plagiarized by another group of authors. The corresponding author of the other paper did not react in the first instance. After mentioning the publisher would contact the institution, the author responded by saying the chapter was written by his students. The students are not traceable.

  Question: Should the chapter be retracted so that the complainant can publish his chapter?

- **1c. Sample case**

  Description: A complaint was received from an author that his work was plagiarized and published in English by different authors. iThenticate is only able to find similarities between English-language texts.

  Question: What should/could a publisher do in a situation like this?

Authorship

- **2a. Sample case**

  Description: In 2000 a book was published with 2 authors. In 2019 a new edition was published with broader scope and two additional authors. In 2020 a new edition is planned, however one of the original authors from 2000 is too ill to contribute. The author of the first book would like to proceed with the third book without the second author.

  Question: Should the author from the first edition still be mentioned as author?

- **2b. Sample case**

  Description: An Editor of a book made final edits to a chapter, added himself as the corresponding author and removed another author.

  Question: When is someone an author?

- **2c. Sample case**

  Description: A book is written by three authors. The authors would like to include a fourth author who is now deceased. Many of the ideas in the book are his (contributed while he was ill) but he could not work on the actual text.

  Question: When is someone an author?

- **2d. Sample case**

  Description: One of the authors wants himself removed from a chapter after a fall-out with the other author. A new (rewritten) version of the chapter has been provided.

  Question: Can the publisher proceed with publication of the book?

Human ethics/consent

- **3a. Sample case**

  Description: Images of an individual (minor) were used and published without consent from the parent. Investigation found that the book was full of images used without consent to publish.

  Question: Should books follow the same ethical rules as journal articles regarding human ethics/consent? Should the full book be retracted?

- **3b. Sample case**

  Description: The Editors spent years preparing a book with the Research Ethics Board (REB) of their university. As part of the methodology and ethical approach to this research, the authors received approval to NOT require people's written permission or signature (given power imbalance, inability to read English). Images therefore should not appear blurred in the book.

  Question: Should books follow the same ethical rules as journal articles regarding human ethics/consent?

- **3c. Sample case**

  Description: A book describes studies with human participants in many chapters.

  Question: Should ethics statements be mentioned? And if so, should they be mentioned for each chapter, should they be compiled into a list at the end of the book or is one collective statement sufficient?

- **3d. Sample case**

  Description: There are pictures of people in a book. These pictures seem to have been taken from somewhere else. Perhaps a database.

  Question: Is their consent for publication needed? Is permission from the rights holder of the pictures needed?

Permissions

- **4a. Sample case**

  Description: The publisher received a book proposal where the author states that he would like to re-use information that he has previously published in a journal article. He states that permission is not required for this as he plans to rehash the info.

  Question: Is this allowed/appropriate?

- **4b. Sample case**

  Description: A book Editor asked if he can republish an article he has published in a journal as chapter in an edited book he is preparing.

  Question: Is this allowed/appropriate?

- **4c. Sample case**

  Description: An author submitted an illustration for a book chapter that is quite similar to an illustration used in another book. A Google image search shows there are a lot of similar illustrations. It is therefore not easy to identify the respective copyright holder. In addition, the concept is not that complicated, everyone who wants to visualize it would come up with similar illustrations.

  Question: What should the publisher's advice be to the author?

Data

- **5. Sample case**

  Description: The Publisher has a book proposal under review and one of the reviewers thinks a paper in the proposed book uses her data without her permission.

  Question: What could/should the Publisher do?

Competing interests

- **6. Sample case**

  Description: A concern was raised that a group of authors failed to disclose their roles in an organization in a book chapter that is already published.

  Question: Should books follow the same ethical rules as journal articles regarding competing interests?

Defamation

- **7. Sample case**

  Description: The publisher received a letter from lawyers representing a group analyzed in a case study in a chapter who feel that statements in the chapter are defamatory against their client.

Question: What could/should the Publisher do?

Miscellaneous

- **8a. Sample case**

  Description: An author submitted the same book manuscript to two publishers at same time. One of the publishers became aware by accident when the author copied the publisher in on an email to the other publisher. This could also happen to book proposals.

  Question: Can authors send these to more than one publisher at the same time? This seems to be a grey area.

- **8b. Sample case**

  Description: A book was published where one of the chapters contained machine-generated (= fake) content.

  Alert: Books seem to be susceptible to paper-mill type attacks as well as journals.

- **8c. Sample case**

  Description: An author complained that the Editor had asked him to add citations to the Editors work and withdrew their chapter. Analysis of other chapters showed numerous citations to the Editor's work.

  Question: How to prove whether the Editor asked for these or the citations are there because the Editors work is central to the field?

General

- **9. Sample case**

  With journals there is a stable factor in the sense of an Editor-in-Chief to contact (or provide support to) in case of ethical issues. With books (exceptions are book series) there is often no one.

  Question: Who to contact in relation to decision-making?

Further reading

Current resources providing guidance on book publishing ethics issues

https://aupresses.org/news/handbook-of-best-practices-in-peer-review-published/

https://aupresses.org/permissions-faq/

https://brill.com/fileasset/downloads_static/static_publishingbooks_publicationethics.pdf

Relevant research

https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/abs/10.1086/601083