



Forum agenda
Meeting to be held on Tuesday 15 December 2020
2-3.30pm GMT
By webinar

- 1. Update on COPE activities by the Chair**
- 2. Forum discussion: Predatory publishing: where do we go from here?**
- 3. New cases**
 - 20-11 Unable to contact authors**
 - 20-12 Simultaneous submission without aiming at duplicate publication**
 - 20-13 Author requesting removal of verbatim text from published paper**
 - 20-14 Reviewer's identity revealed**
 - 20-15 Paper published without permission or acknowledgement from institution**
- 4. Updates**
 - 19-12 Appropriate scope of review for retractions**
 - 20-04 Sharing by a reviewer on social media**
 - 20-10 Authors requesting withdrawal of articles from similarity check database in order to re-publish**

CONTENTS

2. FORUM DISCUSSION: Predatory publishing: where do we go from here?	3
3. NEW CASES	4
20-11 Unable to contact authors.....	4
20-12 Simultaneous submission without aiming at duplicate publication.....	5
20-13 Author requesting removal of verbatim text from published paper.....	7
20-14 Reviewer’s identity revealed.....	8
20-15 Paper published without permission or acknowledgement from institution.....	9
4. UPDATES.....	11
19-12 Appropriate scope of review for retractions	11
20-04 Sharing by a reviewer on social media	12
20-10 Authors requesting withdrawal of articles from similarity check database in order to re-publish.....	13

2. FORUM DISCUSSION: Predatory publishing: where do we go from here?

<https://publicationethics.org/resources/discussion-documents/predatory-publishing-solutions>

Since COPE drafted a discussion paper on the topic of predatory publishing in 2019, many more scholarly papers have been published on various aspects of this issue so there's no lack of research into the practice. However, research may be necessary but it is not a sufficient response to the problems associated with predatory publishers. Consequently, and more recently, the dialogue has turned to more practice based solutions.

What are the next steps that COPE or other industry organisations might consider as a response to the continued flourishing and growth of predatory journals, conferences, and publishers?

Guest speaker

As well as considering the questions below, Dr Kelly Cobey will describe the Authenticator Project, being developed by the Centre for Journalology, Ottawa Hospital Research Institute, University of Ottawa, Canada. Dr Cobey will present the center's approach to educating the scholarly community about the nature of journal quality and transparency practices.

Questions for discussion

- Should COPE use its criteria for membership as an instrument to evaluate standards of scholarly publishing vehicles for the purpose of informing the following: authors, peer reviewers, readers, scholars invited to serve on editorial boards, and universities evaluating scholarly productivity?
- Should COPE and/or other industry organisations form a global compact of signatories to commit to the practice of research and publication integrity and further to the active marginalisation of predatory publishing within the scholarly communities of universities, editors, and publishers? The Principles of Transparency and Best Practice in Scholarly Publishing may be considered the de facto standards for membership among organisations, such as COPE, OASPA, DOAJ, and WAME, but this would be a proactive advancement of these principles, not just as membership criteria but as global standards for publication integrity.
- Should COPE and/or other industry organisations act as a third party retraction service for authors who have unknowingly published with a predatory publisher which will neither withdraw nor retract the articles at the request of the authors? This would include publishers who commit to publications which never appear.

Digital journal authenticator project

“The objective of the project is to develop a ‘Digital Journal Authenticator’ tool that can help stakeholders discern journal quality and transparency practices. We will employ a ‘user centred design strategy’, in which stakeholders such as researchers, journals, publishers, research institutions, and the public work with the research team to iteratively develop a tool that best meets their needs. The tool will provide users with a description of how a journal operates and empower them to use this information to determine whether they should interact with the journal (eg, read content, submit to the journal, or reference articles published there). The tool will be disseminated for free and will be open for others to build upon. This tool will help to safeguard against interactions with low quality journals.”

3. NEW CASES

20-11 Unable to contact authors

A manuscript was submitted to a journal and after the review and revision process, the submitted manuscript was accepted for publication. During the manuscript revision process, the corresponding author was in contact with the journal: answered all of the emails, performed revisions of the manuscript, prepared answers to the comments of the reviewers, etc.

When the manuscript was accepted for publication and the corresponding author was asked to review the final revision of the manuscript, the corresponding author stopped answering emails. The journal tried to contact the corresponding author several times. The journal also tried to contact the co-authors and the university (the department of the authors), but no response has been received. Thus the manuscript is ready for publishing, but the journal is unable to contact the authors of the manuscript.

Questions for the Forum

- What should the journal do?

20-12 Simultaneous submission without aiming at duplicate publication

An invite for a review was made by journal A. The first revision was done six months after submission, and the second revision two months later. Three weeks after submission of the second revision, the editor's decision was minor revision. At this point, the corresponding author, author X, informed the editor of journal A that the authors were reluctant to respond to the comments of the second reviewer. However, they did not formally decline to revise or withdraw their manuscript from journal A.

Then, author Y contacted the editor of journal B, a review journal which normally commissions its content, to ask if the review would fit into the scope of journal B. The editor of journal B agreed to a submission. He was aware that the review was previously submitted to journal A. Author Y indicated that he wanted to remove the article from journal A and publish it elsewhere. The editor of journal B sent the review for peer review.

Two months later, the editor of journal A contacted author X as the deadline to submit the third revision to journal A was approaching. Author X accepted an extension to submit offered by the editor of journal A. One day before the deadline, the authors contacted journal A to withdraw the paper from publication and mentioned that the review was accepted by journal B.

A month earlier, after one round of peer review in journal B, the first revision of the review was accepted by journal B.

The editor of journal A contacted the editor of journal B, stating that there was simultaneous submission. The editor of journal B contacted their publisher, and the production process of the review was stopped. However, at this stage, it was too late to stop the "in press" version from appearing online. Journal B began an investigation and contacted journal A and author Y. Author Y said he was submitting the case to the ethics committee of his institution. Journal B decided to wait on a final decision until the report was received. Journal B communicated this to journal A. Meanwhile, journal A was concerned that the review was appearing as "in press" in journal B during the investigation. Journal B then temporarily withdrew the "in press" version of the review until a conclusion to the case was reached.

Journal B concluded that this was a case of simultaneous submission without aiming at duplicate publication. Journal B received the report of the ethics committee of the institution from author Y. The report did not find against the authors because they did not submit a revision to journal A while the paper was being peer reviewed at journal B. Author Y said that the authors would like the review to be published in journal B. Journal B forwarded the report to journal A.

Journal A would like journal B to keep the review as withdrawn. Journal A is also clear that it does not want to further consider publishing the review as a matter of principle.

Questions for the Forum

- Does the Forum agree with the conclusion of journal B that there has been simultaneous submission without aiming at duplicate publication?
- Does the Forum agree with the conclusion of journal A that there has been unethical behaviour on the part of author X (on behalf of the other authors) because they did not formally withdraw the article from journal A while waiting to see if the review would be accepted by journal B?

- Does the Forum agree with the conclusion reached by the ethics committee of the author's institution?
- Given that there is no scientific problem with the review and that there has been no duplicate publication, should journal B publish the review with a note mentioning that the review was initially submitted to journal A?
- Should journal B keep the review as permanently withdrawn as there was simultaneous submission? If yes, could the Forum advise on relevant text for the note?
- Are there any other recommendations?

20-13 Author requesting removal of verbatim text from published paper

Author A contacted author B. Author B had published a paper several years ago that contained verbatim text of author A's previously published work. The verbatim work was cited but presented to the readers as paraphrased from the original. Similarity checking software showed that the paraphrased text was too close to the original text; in fact, it was quoted verbatim.

Author A is demanding that author B request the publisher to remove all of the text used from author A's published work. Removing all of author A's work from author B's published manuscript equates to 8% of the text. The text to be removed would be the 'paraphrased text' and the reference list entries to author A's work.

The concerns raised by author A to validate the removal of their text from the published work are that although the name of author A lies buried in the sections where phrases, sentences, and whole paragraphs have been lifted from their work, the actual passages lifted are not marked as quotations (by quotation marks, indentation or in any other way); the impression therefore is that the lifted passages are at best, author B own words, or at worse, author B is paraphrasing the words of author A. But neither is true. These are whole passages lifted from the work of author A. An internet search of the words contained in author A's work will wrongfully and fraudulently show up as belonging to author B.

Questions for the Forum

- How can the publisher correct the publication record in this instance?
- Should the publisher retract the paper or publish a corrigendum?

20-14 Reviewer's identity revealed

The journal operates a double blind peer review system. Because the journal is small, it does not use a platform for reviews, so reviewers are sent a Word document containing the manuscript and an evaluation form to complete, in which they can leave their comments. However, some reviewers choose to comment directly on the Word document. Most of these comments are anonymised by appearing as user1 or some other nickname. However, sometimes a reviewer will comment using their real name. Typically, the editor must edit each comment and re-do these to remove the reviewer's name and avoid revealing their identity.

However, is the reviewer implicitly deciding to reveal their identity using their real name when commenting? It takes a long time to mask the identity of the reviewer, as each comment must be deleted and redone.

Questions for the Forum

- Would it be a breach of contract to send the document with the reviewer's identity revealed to the author?

20-15 Paper published without permission or acknowledgement from institution

An author affiliated with a research institution R published two papers as a single author, one of them in an journal of publisher A.

After publication, publisher A was contacted by the research integrity officer of institution R with a letter of concern. The letter stated that the research institution has conducted a formal investigation and concluded that the author failed to acknowledge fully the likely contributions made by other staff and students in his research group, even though his work was heavily influenced by the ideas and experimental results of other members of staff in the research group. The formal investigation panel agreed unanimously that the author had behaved unprofessionally and upheld the finding that research misconduct had taken place regarding the submission and subsequent publication of the single author paper in the journal.

The research institute said that they had not been able to reach an agreement with the author about the situation, and asked the publisher to publish an erratum (or some similar note of concern) with the text: "The work was carried out while the author was at [xxx] funded by [xxx]. The experimental scheme set out in figure [xxx] was influenced by discussion with the [xxx] groups at [xxx]"

The journal contacted the author, who did not agree with publishing an erratum. The author stated that: the work was not exclusively carried out while being at [xxx], but it represented the results of a continued effort since when he was at another institute (which has been acknowledged in the paper); he was not made aware of the role of the funding agencies [xxx] during his years of employment; he states that the sketch in the figure is his original idea and is not an experimental scheme, but rather may be used to derive various experimental schemes for prototyping.

The author counter-proposed publishing an erratum as follows: "The author also acknowledges the collaborative effort in the submission of experimental proposals [xxx], based on the above theoretical framework, to build the first ever [xxx], which he initiated and led as the Principal Investigator, using the [xxx] Facility at the [xxx], in discussion with the [xxx] teams (funded by [xxx]) at [xxx]. The author further acknowledges the strong merits of this collaborative effort which warrants its continuation as already initiated by the author."

The research institute found the proposed text unacceptable as it both misrepresents and seeks to undermine the findings of the research institute's investigation. Furthermore, it claimed that the author led a collaborative project in relation to the development of an experimental prototype, which is not borne out by the facts. The research institute cannot agree to the publication of such a misleading statement. They ask the publisher instead to consider publishing a statement alongside the author's paper to confirm that it has been subject to a formal finding of research misconduct for making use of the ideas of others without permission or acknowledgement. The institute argues that such a statement is necessary for transparency, and to correct the scientific record.

Questions for the Forum

- Has the Forum seen similar situations where the author and the author's research institution disagree about proper and adequate recognition of contributors to a published work?

- Is it appropriate to publish a statement of concern that the paper has been subject to a formal finding of research misconduct for making use of the ideas of others without permission or acknowledgement?

4. UPDATES

19-12 Appropriate scope of review for retractions

An institutional review recommended retraction of certain works by a highly prolific and influential author who has since died. The institutional review focused on a relatively small portion of this author's work. The institution recommended retraction based on deeming the articles unsafe and identifying several concerns, including that the articles' conclusions were implausible.

As a publisher, we are moving forward with reviewing potential retraction of the articles identified by the institutional report. We are questioning whether we should also review the other articles written by the author in the journals' backfile, based on the following:

1. The institutional report cited serious systemic concerns with the research and findings.
2. The author was highly influential.
3. Many of the articles were published in the 1970s/1980s or earlier.
4. Other areas of the author's work/findings seem contrary to current scientific standards (and potentially harmful).

Question(s) for the COPE Forum

- When responding to an institutional report recommending retraction of certain articles, should editors review the other works of an author as part of their response (and depending on the reasons the retraction was recommended and the potential relevance to the author's other articles, issuing an editor's note or expression of concern to reference the concerns identified in the report findings for the separate retractions).
- With respect to articles in the journal's historic backfile that reference findings that have since been overturned by later works and do not meet current scientific standards (and are potentially harmful or are supportive of a practice that has since been prohibited), is it appropriate for journal editors to initiate their own review of these articles? Should these articles be retracted, or would these cases be more appropriately handled with a "statement of concern" alerting readers to the concerns with the article's findings
- Is retraction an appropriate action so long (decades) after publication?

Advice

The Forum agreed this is a difficult case and one that increasingly arises in historic papers with questionable data practices. This is a reflection of a wider problem of how far back to go if there are problems with the data. Data maintenance practices in the past may not always have been very good. It is up to editors to have a look at the papers and see if there's anything very obviously wrong that could be investigated but if it is a general suspicion that the data might not be correct but there is no way to validate this, then an expression of concern might be appropriate.

There is a presumption that the institution must have had specific reasons why the 10 papers should be retracted and not the other ones. If the data are not available and it cannot be proved that there was any manipulation or whether the findings are correct for the other papers, then retraction would be inappropriate, and a statement of concern should be considered, given that the author cannot reply. If an author has committed misconduct, does that mean their whole body of work is invalid? The Forum suggested applying retraction to

the 10 articles. For the other articles, a statement of concern for the other papers is appropriate if there is clear evidence of misconduct. Retraction for these articles is not appropriate unless the institution provides sound evidence that the data sets were manipulated or fraudulent.

For the 10 publications that the institution has suggested retracting, are there any living co-authors that could provide more information? The editor might consider contacting any co-authors for more information.

Regarding the fact that the findings of the previous articles may be unsafe, from the institutional perspective, this may not mean a danger to public health. Sometimes institutions use the term unsafe with regard to relying on the data that back the study. Perhaps unsafe means that there is little to support the actual findings and they should be disregarded or looked at it from an historical perspective. The advice was for the editor to apply common sense. There are many practices and treatments (eg, cancer treatments) that have changed dramatically over time and would be considered completely unsafe today, but we would not consider retracting those papers.

Follow-up

Two journals had published 10 articles that were identified by the deceased author's institution as "unsafe" and recommended for retraction. The editors of these two journals reviewed the institution's findings and agreed with the recommendation to retract. A retraction notice was issued by each journal for the related articles. The editors of these two journals also issued an expression of concern linked to the other articles by the author that were not identified in the institutional report. The expression of concern alerts readers to the separate institutional report and findings, informing readers that the articles linked to the expression were not part of the institutional review.

Several other journals published articles by the author that were outside the area of research by the institutional review and therefore not listed in the institutional report. The editors of each of these journals were alerted separately to the institutional report so that they could review the articles published in their journals and determine if any action was appropriate. To date, none of the editors have published an expression of concern or taken any other action.

Follow-up (December 2020)

The journal considers the case closed.

20-04 Sharing by a reviewer on social media

A journal operated double blind peer-review, so the reviewers do not know the identity of the authors, and vice versa. However, the anonymity of the authors is not guaranteed, as the reviewers may discover the identity of the authors (because of the area of research, references, writing style, etc). But rarely can the authors identify the reviewers.

The journal received a request from a reviewer to share a post on Twitter, which may disclose the reviewer's identity to the authors.

Question(s) for the COPE Forum

- Does the double-blind peer-review process apply after publication?

- What should be the position of a journal when reviewers ask to share their report or experience on social media?

Advice

The journal's course of action in this case needs to be guided by the objective. The point of double blind peer review is to reduce bias during the review process. While of course anonymity of the authors ends upon publication of the work, anonymity of the reviewers' identity in a double blind peer review process typically continues after publication because of the contract that the journal has made with its reviewers. As the right of confidentiality lies with the reviewer, if the reviewer wants to reveal the information, then it is reasonable to consider granting that request. However, many journals require permission from the author after their paper is published if the reviewer is going to disclose information, and this is considered to be a good practice to follow.

Follow-up

The journal granted the reviewer permission to post their peer review experience on Twitter, but it seems the reviewer did not do so. The journal considers the case closed.

20-10 Authors requesting withdrawal of articles from similarity check database in order to re-publish

An author's institution requires that authors publish a set amount of times per year in journals that are indexed by Scopus in order to retain their tenure. The author submits to an open access journal and their paper is published after processing charges are paid. After publication the journal is dropped from the Scopus index. The author asks for the paper to be withdrawn by the journal so that they can submit to a different journal that meets their institution's requirements.

The publisher removes the paper but it has been indexed for Crossref's Similarity Check database, meaning that if the author submits to another journal it will produce a 100% match and provide evidence of prior publication. The author is asking that Crossref removes the article from the Similarity Check database.

Crossref is seeing an increasing number of requests like this, where authors are asking for their articles to be removed from journals that they no longer perceive to be a suitable place for publication. Removing the article from the Similarity Check database will allow the author to publish elsewhere, but it could be argued that this obscures the scholarly record by "hiding" the fact that the article has been published before.

Question for the COPE Forum

- Should CrossRef remove the article from the database and give the author a "clean slate" to submit the paper elsewhere?

Advice

The Forum noted that retracting an article when the indexing of the article in a database such as Scopus or Web of Science changes is not an acceptable practice and is not in accordance with COPE's Retraction Guidelines. This practice could be considered gaming the system.

The authors should be disclosing, in their cover letter to the new journal, that the article was previously retracted. If CrossRef removes the article from the Similarity Check, they are

essentially enabling the authors to hide from scrutiny. Hence the Forum would not recommend that CrossRef remove these articles. Articles are withdrawn and retracted for a number of reasons, and from the editor's perspective, it is helpful to see the history of the article and the reasons it might have been withdrawn. Hence hiding the history of an article is problematic.

If an author is required to publish in a Scopus indexed journal, when the paper was published it was indexed and hence would have met the requirements of the submission or tenure documentation. It was only subsequently that the journal lost its indexing. Hence authors are gaming the system by asking for retraction of the article and for the history of any prior submissions of that article to be erased. Therefore, by removing the article, CrossRef would be complicit in hiding that information from the authors' employer.

If an author regrets publishing a paper in a low quality journal and subsequently gets the paper retracted, they should explain their mistake to the next journal editor and provide documentation to prove it. Effectively, the burden of proof should be on the author as they made the mistake. It is then up to the new journal to decide if they consider this legitimate and to process the article.

In summary, the Forum recommended not removing articles from the database and forcing the burden of proof onto the authors. CrossRef can legitimately and ethically decide against removing the articles based on the fact that when papers are retracted for other reasons, they remain in the database. CrossRef does not make decisions or judgements on the nature or form of the retraction. CrossRef provides the historic evidence of where that article has appeared over time.

Follow-up

CrossRef are updating their best practice guidance and have shared the case information with Turnitin, and the directors and board of Crossref. A blog about the case will be posted soon and it will appear in the member newsletter. The case is now closed.