

## *Research Publishing in the Humanities ....*



Just as the thespian is only as good as his/her last movie, the University based academic/researcher is only as good as his/her last PU count. But unlike the celebrity actor, who at least has the ephemeral fan cohort and in most instances, the sizable bank balance; most academics/researchers have neither that same glamorous star struck following (plagiarizing postgraduate students don't count!), nor the enchanting bank balance. Research (publication) is of course incentivized, which is wonderful. But like the disarming kid in the OREO advert, who declines explaining the 'true' meaning behind the mechanics of the 'biscuit-eating-process' to her dad, and summarizes with an all encompassing "*It's complicated!*" so is the process of incentivization.

Incentivization is defined (by that wondrous and chosen concubine of many of our students; *Wikipedia*) as the practice of 'building incentives into an arrangement or system in order to motivate the actors within it, for the delivery of a desired outcome', with that desired outcome being the DOHET approved publication. I am being facetious of course, as it is conceded that monetary incentives are essential in sharing much of our research within the various transnational networks of academic communities we belong to, and the conferences we choose to attend. The money awarded from publications is also vital in articulating the viable structure and shape of our future research activities.

One is also not contesting that research is indeed important work. Research within the Humanities is for me, about creating and contributing to fluid bodies of intellectual capital. This intellectual capital however, is meant to be semiotically and inherently '*creative*' in the sense of being potentially innovative and resourceful. Such a resource allows one to conceptualize this capital in wider knowledge economies and knowledge ecologies and draw thereon within applied and collaborative public contexts that make real time connections with the substantive world. Such 'real world connections' demand points of arrest and fixture (of our work) that is necessarily made possible through our publications. The ('*doing*' of the) research is thus rendered potentially accessible to wide circuits of readers and researchers and, in a more directly applied and advocacy context, through activists, *via its textual signification*- in other words through our (accessed) publications. There is however, the somewhat more invidious effect of incentivization on the manner in which we are sometimes compelled to publish our research. A recent paper<sup>1</sup> goes as far as arguing that material and credentialing incentives can be regarded as a kind of soft 'violence' in the exercise of disciplinary power, detailing

---

<sup>1</sup> Hasrati, Mostafa. 2013. Material and Credentialing Incentives as Symbolic Violence, *Journal of Business & Technical Communication*, 27(2): pp. 154-179.

how publishing has become (overly and heavily) instrumental in order to receive research funding and promotion.

However, most of us work on the twin *fait accomplis* that that *doing research* is critical, and that publishing that research is both evidence of having done research, as well as more critically, having done '*good research*' that has been peer-reviewed<sup>2</sup>, and which is able to contribute some social value. That said; when publishing and the number of publications become the dominant index of 'the good researcher', we suffer the possibility of ghettoizing that which is good and potentially beneficial about doing research.

Many of us simply shrug off with the cursor set to 'delete', the numerous low level predatory journals that flood our 'inboxes' with an infinite number of 'invitations to publish in overly attractive sounding journals that claim to publish in all(!) the different disciplines conceivable (and a few that are yet to be conceived!). We are able to ignore these without breaking too much of a sweat as these journals are not accredited. These journals solicit via email, much the same way that the invasive tele-salesperson solicits via the telephone. However, many of us, under pressure from material (monetary) and credentialing (promotion) incentives give in to predatory practices, if not predatory journals. Although not all 'pay-to-publish' journals in the Humanities are predatory; many hide, in invisible text, the 'true' cost (to author) of publication. Many such journals are not up-front about their (unhealthy) publishing cultures and additionally ask for non-refundable publication charges upon submission (rather than acceptance). The recent 'sting' article in *Science*<sup>3</sup> beautifully details the submission of multiple copies of a flawed (un-publishable) spoof science paper that gets far more 'acceptance' than rejection replies, and brings our frowned gaze to the publishing sharks and poor reviewing practices (in this instance in rapid pay-to-publish Open Access journals).

As the key to both achieving (legitimate intellectual) visibility and garnering (debatable) quantifiable 'impact factors and citations, is easily accessible distribution of work, many of us are understandably keen on getting published. This, however, is exacerbated by the 'material and credentialing' power assigned to getting published in ascribed/accredited journals. However, much in the same way that the so called 'strong-armed' tactics of parochial gatekeeping journals previously silenced and marginalised alternate constructions of knowledge and actors that threatened hegemonic knowledge economies, so too, do journal publishing cultures that will 'accept anything', equally threaten and adulterate knowledge construction. Again, this is not to say that *all* pay-to-publish, or *all* Open Access journals are imbricated within this publishing game. However, the straight-forward numbers game does a kind of violence that compels many of us to perhaps ignore *where* we publish.

We enjoy (as we should) our hard earned success in journals with a sustained tradition of what is widely perceived as good quality scholarship. Yet in incentivized 'bean counting' exercises, *both* the good quality journal, as well as its 'ugly sister' (journal) *both* get the same full point. Again, while many of us are committed to working across intellectual disciplinary landscapes and boundaries, many of us are

---

<sup>2</sup> The politics of the peer-review process is another can of worms that one holds off on opening until another piece perhaps.

<sup>3</sup> See the delicious article by Bohannon, John 2013. "Who's Afraid of Peer-Review", *Science*, 342 (6154): pp. 60-65

otherwise guilty of publishing in shoddily policed (DOHET recognized) journals that accept papers that have little to no intellectual rhyme or reason with the actual work in our papers. Then we attempt to fob off with the increasingly popular recourse; that publishing in such a random selection of journals, is illustrative of “doing inter-disciplinary and trans-disciplinary work”. Of course such inter and transdisciplinarity is not merely about publishing in different disciplined (sic) journals.

Thus publishing and incentives around being published, is, as pointed out, “*complicated*”. It is not however, simply that academics and researchers wish to be facile or *deceitful* to themselves, or to their colleagues. I don't think that as researchers we are inherently dis-honest, just as the child is not inherently dishonest. But the child quickly learns to ‘play’ by the rules, and fathom out what ‘good’ behaviours are ostensibly rewarded. So too do particular aspects of insentivization, spawn what we as anthropologist refer to in the discipline, as a little bit of ‘quick and dirty ethnography’, when ethnography by its very nature is meant to index hard work, patience and earnest and extensive commitment in time devoted to that which is being researched. Instead we are being inadvertently schooled to *give in* to the rapid and indiscriminate research turn-around game.