

Editorial

Introducing *RJJR* – Editorial

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Welcome

Welcome to *Reviews: The Journal of Journal Reviews*! We hope that scholars find this a valuable resource in evaluating scholarly journals for any need. We're pleased to announce the publication of three Reviews:

- [Scientific Journal of Research & Reviews](#)
- [Journal of Library Outreach and Engagement](#)
- [Building Healthy Academic Communities Journal](#)

Our goal for *RJJR* is to publish on a rolling basis, publishing one issue each calendar year (although we have opted to extend our first issue through 2024 as we did not officially launch until halfway through 2023). While these initial Reviews have focused on Open Access journals, we see *RJJR* as a resource for evaluating the full range of scholarly journals, both commercial and Open Access. It's our firm belief that the idea of predatory publishing is not a new phenomenon and not limited to OA journals.

Our Motivations and Philosophy

This project began in frustration and exasperation. The founding editors – academic librarians involved in scholarly communications, library publishing, and open access advocacy – share strong concerns about how the scholarly publishing community handles the phenomenon of “predatory publishing.” We opted to turn our critiques into action in good part because we believe the way scholars talk about predatory publishing fails to acknowledge various factors:

1. Financial exploitation is not a novel problem in scholarly publishing. From vanity presses to color charges, scholarly publishing has long offered many opportunities to separate authors from their money, not least of which is large publishers' rampant price increases and massive profit margins.
2. Research quality is an issue in all forms of scholarly publishing, not just in OA publishing. Issues like manipulated or fraudulent peer review, sloppy editorial oversight, and profit motives overriding academic rigor are just as possible from commercial publishers and subscription journals.
3. Scholars face different factors and forces when choosing where and how to publish, including incentives not always aligned with scholarly values. The perfect journal for one researcher may be the wrong choice for another.

Jeffrey Beall might have started this conversation, but others have documented the many problems with his list (Crawford, 2014; Berger & Cirasella; 2017; Olivarez et al., 2018). Although many of their critiques are specific to Beall's list, we believe this entire approach – relying on a binary list of good or bad publications – is misguided at best. Watchlists often make the flawed assumption that only OA journals that charge a publishing fee need to be flagged, and they fail to include other problematic practices. Even safelists like the Directory of Open Access Journals are

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limited in scope. Most importantly, both types of binary fail to reckon with the inherent complexity of scholarly publishing choices (Crawford, 2014; Berger & Cirasella, 2017; Olivarez et al., 2018; Koerber et al, 2020).

Many researchers are overworked and often do not take the time to evaluate a journal. Some rely on their librarian to provide such an evaluation, some rely on the aforementioned watchlists, and some simply don't evaluate a journal. Meanwhile, tools such as [Think. Check. Submit.](#) offer excellent advice but don't offer an avenue for researchers -- or librarians, who evaluate journals all the time -- to share their own observations.

We seek to offer a different model, rooted in context. *RJJR* aims to recruit, peer review, and publish concise, evidence-based, and easily consumable Reviews that allow anyone to quickly assess a journal. We believe we should not be the ones to decide whether a journal is an appropriate place to publish for someone else. Instead, we seek to enable authors to easily make that decision for themselves. Scholars are trained to think critically; we want to provide them with the means to do so and a model for what a contextual assessment might look like.

Our Goals

Transparency

Above all, we want to promote transparency in scholarly communication. Much of our rubric is based on what journals make known about their policies and practices, and we hope to model this value ourselves. The more scholarly journals practice transparency, the more the scholarly community can easily practice contextual analysis. We believe the main reason scholars feel the need to rely on watchlists is because so much of scholarly communications is hidden or opaque, making it hard if not impossible for scholars to make their own determinations. We also know the importance of reliable information and see *RJJR* as a resource for anyone who needs a credible source when evaluating a journal.

Conversation

We acknowledge that academic publishing is not static and that what was at one time accurate and current information in a Review might become outdated. Thus we see *RJJR* as a place for conversation in and about the world of scholarly communication. We invite journals to submit a Response to a Review if they have made significant changes, and we invite authors to submit updated Reviews for a journal if they believe the journal has made significant changes, for the better or worse (although we do ask that you wait at least a year from the most recent published Review of a journal).

Nuance

At the same time, we want to stress that we do not see *RJJR* as a source for any tool that desires to create a quantitative measurement of journal quality. Some have already asked us if we will provide our Reviews in a structured manner to easily allow for this. Our response: no. Journal evaluation depends on the context of the need, and such tools fail to account for the idea that an answer is sometimes yes, sometimes no, and sometimes in between.

In Conclusion

The best way to evaluate a journal is with context, nuance, and the critical thinking skills any scholar already uses in their discipline and work. With that, we welcome you to *RJJR*, whether you're a scholar, librarian, reader, or anyone else with an interest in scholarly communications.

Appendix A

Author Contributions: Ruen: *Writing – original draft*, and *Writing – review and editing*. Schultz: *Writing – original draft*, *Writing – review and editing*, and *Project administration*. See the Contributor Roles Taxonomy (CRediT) guide (<https://credit.niso.org>) for details of these terms.

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