



Playing The Game

Committee on Publication Ethics Case 12-30: Retraction of the first article in the case of duplicate publication

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Following the admonitory adage "publish or perish" scientists are eager to publish as often as they can. The more publications they have, the farther they advance professionally. In Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) case 12-30, scientist(s) are caught simultaneously submitting and publishing *the same* paper at two different journals.

The case report summarizes the issue raised by the editor at "journal A":

"it came to our attention that a published article in our journal (journal A) had also been published in another journal (journal B)."

Upon further investigation of this case it becomes clear that the author sent in the same manuscript to two different journals at the same time. Duplicate submissions can limit the time from submission to publication by increasing the chances of actually being published, yet this practice is

considered unethical, as it can lead to confusion in the literature and put undue strain on reviewers and editors. Indeed, many journals explicitly forbid concurrent submissions to multiple journals of the same manuscript. Duplicate submissions has also been seen in grant applications as well, leading to the grants being awarded multiple times for the same work ([Garner, McIver, and Waitzkin 2013](#)). What is the cause of this?

The authors suggest they are not to blame, but rather the editors at journal A, "for publishing the article



without their agreement." This claim, even if true, would not negate the fact that they had submitted the paper to two different venues at the same time. Moreover, it is exceedingly unlikely that the work was published without permission as authors typically sign over copyright to their work *before* publication.

SOUND FISHY?

COPE thought so too. In recorded discussions associated with the case, one COPE employee explicitly states, "there's been misconduct", and likens the case to "gaming the system." The discussion between the editor and COPE is in depth and quite constructive, yet ultimately little is done to resolve the case (you can listen to the discussion [here](#)). Indeed, it is 3 years open and the case is still "on-going." Which paper does it refer to? Does it matter? What should be done?

Perhaps, the real question for the scientific community is why would an author submit to two journals at the same time in the first place? Were the authors merely interested in hastening the process from submission to publication or was something else at play? In this case, the COPE employee thinks it may have to do with the impact factor of the journal. She asks, "are you the higher impact journal?" to which the editor responds, "we are, yeah." Arguably, there is a very large incentive to publish lots of papers and to do so in the "right" journals. As we see in this case, there is seemingly little disincentive to going about this unethically, because even if caught nothing is done about it. As the COPE recording states, "they've played the game and won it."

REFERENCES

Garner, H.R., L.J. McIver, and M.B. Waitzkin. 2013. "Research funding: Same work, twice the money?" *Nature* no. 493 (7434):599-601. doi: 10.1038/493599a.