On sponsorship, transparency, scholarly publishing, and open access

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Sponsorship in the research and library communities is pervasive today, and scholarly publishers are some of the most generous providers of it. This generosity comes at a time when scholarly communication is in sore need of root-and-branch reform. However, since publishers' interests are no longer aligned with the needs of the research community, and they have a vested interest in the legacy system, the research community might be best to avoid publisher sponsorship. Yet researchers and librarians seek it out on a daily basis.

While the benefits of this sponsorship to the research community at large are debatable, publishers gain a great deal of soft power from dispensing money in this way. And they use this soft power to help them contain, control and shape the changes scholarly communication is undergoing, often in ways that meet their needs more than the needs of science and of scientists. This sponsorship also often takes place without adequate transparency. Sponsorship and lobbying (which often amount to the same thing), for instance, have assisted legacy publishers to co-opt open access. This has seen the triumph of the pay-to-publish model, which has been introduced in a way that has enabled publishers to adapt OA to their needs, and to ringfence and port their excessive profits to the new OA environment. Those researchers who do not have the wherewithal to pay article-process charges (APCs), however, are finding themselves increasingly disenfranchised.

Sponsorship has also to be seen in a larger context. With paywalls now viewed askance, and pay-to-read giving way to free-to-read, more and more content is being funded by the producers rather than the readers. This has a number of consequences. Above all, it has made it increasingly difficult to distinguish neutral information and reporting from partisan content created solely to serve the interests of the creator/sponsor. Now commonly referred to as "fake news", this is normally associated with biased and/or false information about, say, politicians, elections, and celebrity deaths etc., and its origin and purpose is often unknown.

But open access has presented science with the same kind of problem. With many authors now choosing (or having) to pay for the publication of their papers, and publishers' revenues directly related to the number of articles they publish, unscrupulous authors are now able to find an outlet for any paper regardless of its quality. It is therefore becoming increasingly difficult to distinguish legitimate science from pseudoscience. This is in part a consequence of publishers' use of sponsorship (and lobbying) to foist a flawed business model on the science community. And by continuing to dispense sponsorship, publishers are able to perpetuate and promote this model, and maintain their grip on scholarly communication.

These are the kinds of issues explored in the essay below. It includes some examples of publisher sponsorship, and the associated problems of non-transparency that often go with it. In particular, there is a detailed case study of a series of interviews conducted by Library Journal (LJ) *with leading OA advocates that was sponsored by Dove Medical Press. Amongst those interviewed was the* de facto *leader of the OA movement Peter Suber. Suber gave three*

separate interviews to LJ, *but not once was he informed when invited that the interviews were sponsored, or that they would be flanked with ads for Dove – even though he made it clear after the first interview that he was not happy to be associated with the publisher in this way.*

Anyone wanting to go direct to the LJ *case study – which can be read as a self-contained piece of text – can click [here](#).*

Relentless tide of free content
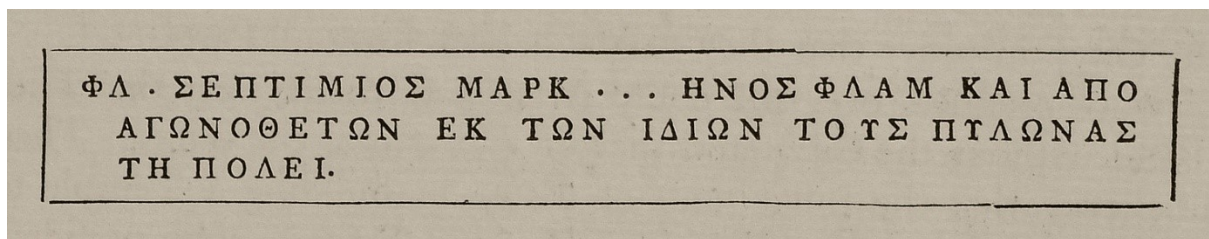
Both [sponsorship](#) and [online advertising](#) have seen healthy growth in recent years, and have been merging in the form of [sponsored content](#) and "[native advertising](#)". This is directly related to the relentless tide of free content now flowing across the internet, and the widespread view that paywalls and subscriptions are not acceptable in an online world. The implications of this are considerable.

For instance, in order to survive traditional print publications are having to find new ways to fund themselves online, both trade and professional publications like *Library Journal* (*[LJ](#)*), and [mainstream media too](#). And while more and more open content might seem like an unmitigated good, the shift from pay-to-read to free-to-read raises new issues and poses new dangers, not least those arising from the increased difficulty readers face in distinguishing objective reporting and independent discussion from paid-for content created primarily to promote products, companies, causes, and careers; or content created simply to generate revenue from "clicks".

Moreover, although this is often discussed primarily in terms of [fake news](#) – about elections, politicians, celebrity deaths, and even "[fake rice](#)" – there is a [threat](#) to [science](#) here too, and so real implications for the research and library communities. For instance, the emergence of "[fake medical news](#)" and the mass of pseudoscience (and plain junk) now being distributed in so-called "[predatory journals](#)"[1] is corrupting the research corpus, and eroding the public's trust in science.

Predatory (or questionable) journals, it is important to note, are essentially a product of demands that paywalls around scholarly research be dismantled, and the consequent rise of pay-to-publish gold OA[2]. For librarians, there is in this an irony: While they see themselves as the go-to source for quality-controlled content, and are treating the fake news phenomenon

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[1] Some prefer to use the term "questionable journals".

[2] We should note that many reject the assumption that only open access journals can be predatory, pointing out that legacy journals can also be predatory, both because their pricing is so high, but also because they too sometimes publish junk science. There are certainly merits to this claim, but I don't want to get into that conversation here.

as a personal [call to arms](#), it has been their relentless calls for OA that has helped create the quality problems now confronting the research community. I shall argue below that librarians and OA advocates are complicit in other ways too.

The issues here are many, varied, tangled, and thus complex; and – for so long as the world insists on having free access to more and more information – not readily solvable. It is my belief, however, that the relentless growth of sponsorship (in its many forms) helped to trigger, and has facilitated and exacerbated, the information quality problem the world now faces, not least sponsorship in the scholarly communication space. For the purposes of this discussion, therefore, I want to focus on three questions: what are the implications when objective reporting, and independent debate and discussion face increasing competition from paid-for content, and promotional and partisan messaging? What role has the research community played in enabling the growth of sponsorship and paid-for content? Does sponsorship create similar problems to fake news, and are they in fact both part and parcel of a larger problem? And I want to discuss these questions by looking specifically at the growth of sponsorship by scholarly publishers, and the way in which this helps them to shape and control the debate about scholarly communication and open access – and which has as a by-product aided the rise of predatory publishing.

Sponsorship is invariably focused on promoting a company and/or its products, but in a more elusive way than traditional advertising. It is, of course, far from new, but as the research environment is increasingly marketised, as government funding becomes harder to obtain, and as the scholarly publishing industry continues to consolidate, the weight of money that publishers can now bring to the sponsorship table is such that they are able to set the agenda in ways not previously possible. And like much sponsorship, this tends to take place without adequate transparency.

Importantly, as [SocArXiv](#) founder [Philip Cohen](#) has [pointed out](#), researchers and librarians are often implicated in this process. "It's not just [about the] executives and managers of the multinational conglomerates that sit atop the system, it's also the conferences and receptions and awards (and tote bags) they dole out, for which the vast majority of faculty [and librarians] continuously scrap."

Pervasive

By way of background, it is worth noting that today sponsorship by scholarly publishers touches all parts of a researcher's life. They sponsor receptions, conferences, events, lectures, training, awards, medals, travel, prizes, and [even](#) [research](#) and [research institutions](#).[3] In short, sponsorship is now pervasive, and permeates the [research](#) and [library](#) environments through and through. Indeed, many now view it as an essential ingredient for oiling the wheels of academia. So deeply has the term penetrated the research community's psyche that when Elsevier first introduced its pay-to-publish open-access option it referred to it (tellingly) as "[sponsored articles](#)".

Importantly, the deluge of publisher sponsorship comes at a time when a consensus has emerged that scholarly communication is in urgent need of re-imagination. This in turn has given rise to a [new awareness](#) that in today's online world publishers' interests are no longer

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[3] See [here](#) for details of Elsevier's prizes and awards in the physics area alone. And it is not just Elsevier – see [here](#) and [here](#) for instance.

aligned with the needs of the research community. Yet because of their financial muscle, their willingness to flex it, and the research community's habituation to sponsorship, publishers are able to influence and shape discussions, decisions, and outcomes. And given publishers' vested interest in the status quo, these outcomes tend to lead to clumsy and expensive tweaking of the legacy system, rather than the introduction of new models, methods and approaches able to radically improve efficiency and reduce costs (as the network now permits). In short, it leads to outcomes that tend to benefit publishers more than the research community. The way in which legacy publishers have been able to co-opt open access to their own benefit demonstrates this all too well.

It does not help that the research and library communities' addiction to sponsorship means that they rarely think through the consequences of constantly turning to publishers for money. OA advocates' apparently insatiable appetite for what they refer to as "publishers' swag" is simply the most baroque example of this.

And while one might assume that this is only an issue *vis-à-vis* legacy publishers, OA publishers are also implicated. After all, they are now as dependent on the continued existence of the traditional journal, and the traditional paper, as are legacy publishers. One consequence of this is that OA publishers have become hostages to the article processing charge (APC) – a business model based on the assumption that (for scientists at least) the primary method for communicating research (even in the online world) remains "version of record" articles bundled into legacy journals. OA publishers have become dependent on APCs even as more and more in the research community are concluding that pay-to-publish OA is a flawed business model. Even former PLOS employees are coming to this conclusion. In fact, PLOS is a particularly unfortunate victim of the APC trap: Today, legacy publishers are starting to eat its lunch, yet it cannot abandon the APC in favour of a more appropriate and effective model as doing so would mean giving up its primary source of revenue.

Either way, it is clear that OA publishers are just as happy as legacy publishers to use the sponsorship toolkit to promote themselves and their pay-to-publish business model (e.g. here and here). Yet while clinging to legacy forms, processes and practices may suit publishers, it is not in the best interests of science.

The sponsorship epidemic threatens the research process throughout the production chain. In 2009, for instance, it was revealed during a court trial that Elsevier had for five years been publishing fake journals. As *The Scientist* reported at the time, "Scientific publishing giant Elsevier put out a total of six publications between 2000 and 2005 that were sponsored by unnamed pharmaceutical companies and looked like peer reviewed medical journals, but did not disclose sponsorship."

And this year came news that the alcohol industry will be contributing $67.7 million to an NIH clinical trial to explore whether alcohol is good for you. As Marion Nestle, a professor of nutrition and food studies at New York University, pointed out to the *NYT:* "[I]ndustry-sponsored research almost invariably favors the interests of the industry sponsor, even when investigators believe they are immune from such influence."

Doubtless we could argue about the nature and the extent of the problems posed by sponsorship, but I personally now try to avoid having any dealings with it (unless one counts the very occasional PayPal donation I receive for my blog) not least because, like "product placement", sponsorship often operates in stealth mode.

What surprises me is the lack of debate within the research and library communities about the risks and issues associated with it. True, sponsorship has been discussed in the context of funding open access journals. In 2005, for instance, SPARC published some guidance on the sponsoring of open access journals, and proposed a series of tests regarding *editorial control*, *perception* and *commercialism*, (See the 50-page guide here). The daily traffic in sponsorship, however, mostly goes unremarked (and unreflected upon). Yet while it is clear that this offers very real benefits for sponsors (if it didn't, they wouldn't open their wallets), the value to the research community, I shall argue, is often nugatory, and it is retrograde.

One can only conclude that researchers and librarians are so keen to hold their conferences and events, and promote their ideas and causes (e.g. open access) that they turn a blind eye to the fact that asking publishers for money is to engage in a two-way deal in which he who pays the piper invariably calls the tune (even when the sponsorship arrangement is theoretically "hands off"). The only real focus of those taking sponsorship money is to get publishers to pay for things, with little or no thought given to the benefits that accrue to publishers as a result.

It is worth bearing in mind that sponsorship does not have to mean turning to scholarly publishers (and other commercial organisations). The Public Knowledge Project, for instance, seems able to manage with help almost exclusively from universities i.e. from within the community itself.

Case study

But let us explore the kind of issues that publisher sponsorship can give rise to by looking at a recent example in the library and scholarly communication space – one that involves paid-for content and interviews about open access, along with sponsored events.

In February 2016, I received an email from librarian/journalist Gary Price inviting me to do a video interview about open access. The interview, he said, would be sponsored by the open-access publisher Dove Medical Press and published by *Library Journal*. Since I did not want to seem to be endorsing Dove I declined, and subsequently outlined my reasons for doing so in a blog post (here).

I won't rehash the details of that post, but I will note that one of the reasons I did not want to be seen to be endorsing Dove (which I felt I would be doing were I to give the interview) was that I don't believe it is a sufficiently transparent company, both with regard to its ownership and its business practices (for some background see here and here). Moreover, since I assume that most of Dove's profits come from the public purse (i.e. most research and its subsequent communication is funded by the taxpayer), it seems to me that the need for transparency is particularly important in scholarly publishing.

I was also aware that over the years a number of concerns have been expressed about Dove – e.g. over its spamming activities. The publisher was also (possibly unwarrantedly, I do not know) at one point on Beall's list of predatory publishers, and in 2013 it had its membership of the Open Access Scholarly Publishers Association (OASPA) terminated for two years due to "lack of sufficient rigour in editorial processes". Dove was also associated with the tragic case of Amy Bishop, and recently one of its journals (*Pharmacogenomics and Personalized Medicine*) published a paper whose authorship includes five employees of the controversial

genetic testing company [Proove Biosciences](#) (including its CEO and Founder), a company that *Pain News Network* (*PNN*) has [linked to a fraud investigation](#) in the US (also [here](#)),[4] and about which *STAT News* has published a number of allegations. (These allegations have been denied by Proove Biosciences [here](#). I have also seen no specific claim that Dove did not have the Proove paper adequately reviewed before publication[5]).[6]

Given Dove's somewhat eventful past, however, I was curious as to what due diligence processes *LJ* goes through before agreeing a sponsorship deal with a third-party company.

When I put this and other questions to Price in 2016 he replied that he was just a contractor and so could not comment. However, he said, he would pass my enquiry on to *LJ*. Separately I emailed the journal's managing editor, and I subsequently tweeted *LJ* [inviting](#) it to respond to my questions and subsequent blog post. *LJ* did not respond to any of these overtures.

Why should we care about this? After all, the online world is awash with ads and sponsored content, and most now view them as no more than a minor irritant at most. However, I think it is useful to stop and reflect on how these kinds of arrangements work in practice. I shall argue below that in agreeing to the deal with Dove, *LJ* not only provided the publisher with visibility and credibility but, in effect, endorsed it. I anticipate cries of disagreement, and claims that I am overstating the situation, but please at least hear me out before reaching that conclusion.

To begin with, the arrangement with Dove turned out to be somewhat more than *LJ* simply selling the publisher a few advertising spots, or of Dove sponsoring an interview or two. Rather it was a partnership – the endeavour was [described](#) by Dove as having been developed in "collaboration with *Library Journal*" – that saw the creation of a joint *LJ*/Dove-branded [minisite](#). This was then populated with a sizeable portfolio of [video interviews](#),[7] [written interviews](#) and Dove-sponsored [articles](#), and [webcasts](#) – all under the rubric [Open Access in Action](#). Those invited included librarians and OA advocates.

But I will go further, and argue that in its collaboration with Dove, *LJ* ended up not only endorsing the publisher, but assisting it to create the impression that it was setting (or at least facilitating the setting of) an agenda for the future development and deployment of open access. I say this because Dove was able to exploit *LJ's* (highly regarded) brand in order to recruit leading and well-respected OA advocates to take part.[8] And in choosing whom to invite and what to discuss, *LJ*/Dove were in a position to mould and shape the discussion.

For their part, by agreeing to do the interviews the contributors enabled Dove to leverage their and their institutions' brands as well. So, for instance, the site went live with a video

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[4] One of the authors has also published a paper with the controversial OA publisher OMICS [here](#). OMICS is currently [under investigation by the FTC](#).

[5] This seems to be the Dove paper [here](#).

[6] On July 14, 2017, however, *PNN* wrote, "In April, a second Proove study was published in *Pharmacogenomics and Personalized Medicine*, an online journal published by Dove Medical Press, another so-called predatory publisher that charges high fees to researchers to get their studies into medical journals". We should note that the use of the term predatory here may mean that *PNN* views all pay-to-publish journals to be predatory. One is bound to point out, however, that if publishers used open peer review, rather than [single-blind review](#), the review process would be transparent to all, and so they could avoid the risk of being declared to be "predatory".

[7] Now apparently mainly archived on YouTube.

[8] We should ask: would these people have agreed to do the interviews if they had been told they were to be published on Dove's own [website](#)?

interview that had been undertaken with Peter Suber. Suber is the *de facto* leader of the OA movement, author of the seminal book on open access, Director of the Harvard Office for Scholarly Communication, Director of the Harvard Open Access Project, and a Senior Researcher at the Berkman Klein Center for Internet & Society. And the way the interview was presented, I would argue, created the impression that Suber had himself endorsed the project. Either way, Suber was quite a catch.

In reality, Suber had not only not endorsed the project but he had no desire to be associated with Dove. So why did he agree to do the interview? Because, when he was invited he was not told about the Dove sponsorship. Nor was he informed that it would be flanked with adverts for Dove (more on how Dove was promoted on the minisite here).

Jam

When I published my reasons for declining to do a Dove-sponsored interview, Suber posted a comment on my blog. He said, "I share Richard's two-sided attitude toward Dove Press. On the one hand, I have doubts about [Dove], based primarily on Richard's own 2008 investigation. On the other hand, I haven't done my own investigation of Dove, and didn't know how Dove might have changed since 2008. Hence (quoting Richard's new piece), 'while some have accused Dove Press of being a "predatory" publisher, I am making no such claim here. Nor could I, since I don't have sufficient information to make a judgement either way.'"

That indeed is what I did say in 2016. And today I still don't have enough information about Dove to make a call either way. This goes to my point about a lack of transparency, which was what mainly informed my decision not to do a Dove-sponsored interview.

Suber went on to say that he nevertheless did not believe his interview amounted to an endorsement of the publisher. "I wouldn't have done the interview if I thought it amounted to an endorsement of Dove Press. But I don't think it amounted to an endorsement, and I don't think any careful reader would assume that an interviewee endorses a company just because the company's ad appears on the same page as the interview."

When I replied that I thought he was understating the situation, Suber posted a further comment: "My invitation letter didn't mention Dove. But I see your point that there's more going on here. I wouldn't want a jam company to put my photo on its jam jars without my knowledge and consent, even if I liked the jam. The same goes for framing my photo on a web page with its jamming message. Even less do I want to advertise for Dove, or be perceived to advertise for Dove. I say 'even less' because this lies in my area of professional work, where I want to be professionally picky. And as I've said, I don't like this jam."

He added, "Like you, I want to worry about false framing, and conscripting interviewees to appear to give endorsements they didn't mean to give. But I also want to worry about the future of interviews if interviewees fear 'inferred endorsements' in case they can't investigate a periodical's ads in advance."

These are all fair points, but I think it is important to state that this was not just a question of ads as traditionally understood. Rather, I would argue that Suber's interview would be better described as an example of what marketing people now call "native advertising". Here is how this is described in a paper published last year in the journal *American Behavioral Scientist*.

Native advertising, the authors say, is [the practice](#) whereby a "marketer borrows from the credibility of a content publisher by presenting paid content with a format and location that matches the publisher's original content."

This, they add, "not only gives users content that matches the topic of the publishers' original content but also does so by copying the format of nonpaid content."

As I say, I anticipate some will complain that I am overstating the situation. But while we can certainly disagree about the extent to which the *LJ*/Dove minisite gave the impression that the interviewees were endorsing Dove, I think we would have to agree that *LJ*/Dove were very successful in persuading key OA advocates to contribute to the site. And while we can disagree over the extent to which this will have benefited Dove, I would argue that Suber's agreement to do the first interview was likely instrumental in encouraging other OA advocates to take part, and so was key to its success.[9]

I think it also safe to assume that Dove will have gained new business from the minisite, not least because readers were invited to leave their name and contact details, presumably to populate a leads database. In addition, *LJ* inserted direct links to Dove's journals.

Scope and extent

As the interviews, articles and webcasts built up on the *LJ*/Dove minisite I became intrigued – and not a little impressed – at the scope and extent of Dove's ambitions. While the initial video interviews were undertaken by Gary Price – a regular *LJ* contributor and long-time writer on library matters – the subsequent written interviews and articles appeared to have been outsourced to someone called [John Parsons](#). While [Price](#) is listed on the *LJ* website, however, I could find no information about Parsons.

So, in March, I obtained Parsons' details from one of the people he had interviewed and took a look at his [website](#). There Parsons describes himself as a ghostwriter, publishing strategist, business writer, and marketing consultant.

When I emailed Parsons, he told me that the articles he had written for the minisite were all entirely sponsored content, with Dove paying *Library Journal*, which in turn paid him. Sponsored work like this, he explained, is something he does regularly. When I asked how many more interviews we could expect, Parsons said that there was one more interview currently planned, which would go live soon.

To my surprise, when the [next interview](#) appeared on the site (on March 29th) it was again with Suber. In light of his [comments](#) on my blog I had not anticipated Suber would be doing any more Dove-sponsored interviews. When I emailed him to enquire, however, he replied: "Parsons did not tell me that the interview was sponsored by Dove. I didn't learn about the Dove sponsorship until the interviewed appeared online."

He added, "If you're asking whether I'm comfortable with the Dove sponsorship of the Parsons interview, the answer is no."

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[9] The invitation I received indicated that Suber had already done a Dove-sponsored interview.

As I see it, the *LJ*/Dove collaboration invites four further (and connected) questions. First, when publishers post sponsored content how clearly should they signal that it has been paid for by a sponsor? Second, if named third-parties are asked to contribute to sponsored content is there a danger that readers will (incorrectly) infer they are endorsing the sponsor? Third, how important is it that experts and professionals invited to contribute to sponsored content are told that that it is sponsored when first approached? Fourth, in today's increasingly ad-dominated content world do members of the research community need to take greater care when agreeing to give interviews?

Backstory

On the first of these questions, I assume we would all agree that sponsored content should be flagged as such. And I suspect we would agree that the *LJ*/Dove minisite was entirely transparent about this. On the other hand, I would argue that the banners and ads surrounding the interviews were so prominent and intrusive that readers would be very likely to infer that the interviewees were endorsing Dove (which goes to our second question).

We could note in passing that other sponsored pieces authored for *LJ* by Parsons (e.g. here and here) have a single banner at the top of the piece saying "Sponsored Content" and a single (non-clickable) logo of the sponsoring company at the bottom.[10] What I find noteworthy is the contrast between these other pieces and the much higher profile given to Dove by *LJ* on the minisite.

To explore our third question, it might help to rehearse the backstory to the second Dove-sponsored interview *LJ* did with Suber.

On January 27, 2017, someone called Rebecca Jozwiak contacted Suber and invited him to do an interview on open access. This, she said, would be sponsored by Dove. Suber replied, "Before I can agree, I'd like to see Dove Press respond in public to the concerns raised by Richard Poynder in this February 2016 blog post."

When Dove indicated that it was not prepared to do that, Suber says, he told Jozwiak that he was therefore not prepared to do the interview.

A month later, on March 18, 2017, Suber received an email from Parsons inviting him to do an interview for *LJ*. As we now know, this was destined for the Dove-sponsored minisite but, unlike Jozwiak, Parsons did not tell Suber this. Had he been told that it was to be sponsored by Dove, Suber says, he would have attached the same conditions as he had done when approached by Jozwiak.

We are bound to wonder what if any relationship there was between these two interview requests, all the more so since this web site indicates that Jozwiak is Editorial & Research Director at new media analyst company The Bloor Group. And The Bloor Group appears to have been working with *LJ* on the Dove sponsorship. In a Dove-sponsored *LJ* webcast held in February, for instance, Jozwiak is listed as moderator.

In light of this we might want to ask whether Jozwiak told anyone at *LJ* that Suber had put conditions on doing any further Dove-sponsored interviews. When I emailed Jozwiak she

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[10] While they do not have a by-line, we know Parsons authored these pieces because he lists them on his website here.

replied, "I'm really not qualified to answer any questions you might have. My role at *LJ* is mostly that of webcast program manager (as a contractor, no less), and I have no authority to speak on behalf of the company or its brand."

In a second email, Jozwiak added. "I'm on the webcast production end only. I am not involved in business or content development, nor do I conduct interviews or publish material."

Presumably, therefore, Jozwiak's interview request to Suber was made on behalf of someone else, but we don't know who that was, or what exactly the relationship was/is between *LJ* and The Bloor Group. We also don't know whether Jozwiak told *LJ* about the conditions Suber had put on doing a Dove-sponsored interview.

"I have no reason to think that anyone at *LJ* knew that I'd asked for a public response from Dove or even that I'd turned down the interview", Suber told me.

At this point, I concluded that the only people who could clarify the situation were *LJ* and Dove.

However, I knew there was no point in contacting Dove because in 2010, when writing about the Amy Bishop case, I asked the company's Publisher [Tim Hill](#) about the ownership of Dove. This led to my receiving an email from him saying "Henceforth I will not be providing you with any comment or information on any subject". And when, in 2016, I contacted the person registered at UK Companies House as the Managing Director and Company Secretary of Dove, I [failed to get a response](#).

Unfortunately, I was also unable to get much in the way of answers to my questions from *LJ* (of which more later).

The backstory does not end quite here. After I contacted Suber in March he looked through his emails, and the *LJ* website, and discovered that an interview he had done with Parsons for *LJ* in August 2016 (on [journal flipping](#)) had also been placed on the Dove-sponsored minisite. Again, Parsons had failed to tell him this when inviting him. "He didn't mention Dove in that correspondence either, although the published result was sponsored by Dove", says Suber.

Greater care needed?

Which brings us to the last of the four questions I posed with regard to the *LJ*/Dove collaboration: in an online environment rapidly filling up with paid-for content do researchers and other professionals need to be more careful when agreeing to do interviews? For all three of the Dove-sponsored interviews he did for *LJ*, Suber was not told (and so was not aware) that his contribution was destined for a sponsored minisite. If he had asked the right questions, however, he could presumably have elicited that information.

We should note here that when [commenting](#) on my blog, Suber said that he would have agreed to do the first invitation even if he had known about the sponsorship, "because I trust Gary Price and *LJ*."

I assume, therefore that Suber agreed to do the two later interviews for the same reason: he *trusted LJ*, and so saw no need to ask for details. I would think that that trust will have been eroded a little by now, but it is worth stressing the point: Suber agreed to do the interviews because he *trusted LJ*. This would seem to confirm my assertion that by renting Dove a section of its website *LJ* had (in effect) endorsed the publisher.

What about the other *LJ*/Dove interviewees? Were they told about the Dove sponsorship before agreeing to take part? I *was* told (which is why I turned down the invitation), but what about the others? To try and find out, I contacted a number of them. The only one who replied was Stephen Pinfield, Professor of Information Services Management at The University of Sheffield.

Pinfield responded: "As far as I was concerned, I was doing an interview for the *Library Journal* by a freelance writer. I also did a recorded interview for the *Library Journal* at more or less the same time as part of a series of interviews with people involved in OA, including Peter Suber and Heather Joseph."[11]

From this I infer that, as with Suber, Pinfield's agreement to do the interview was at least partly based on his *trust* in *LJ*. And I assume from the way he worded his reply his agreement would likely also have been influenced by the fact that both Suber and Joseph had already done interviews for the minisite. As such, Pinfield perhaps presumed (if only subliminally) that they had endorsed the project.

When I pressed Pinfield on whether he had been told that the proposed interview would be sponsored by Dove he went back and reviewed his emails and replied, "I corresponded with both Gary Price from the *Library Journal* and John Parsons at the time. Dove was mentioned in the emails. The video and article interviews were rather intertwined in the communications."

Whether that means that *both* Price and Parsons told Pinfield their respective interviews would be sponsored I do not know. Either way, Pinfield's video interview with Price was published in August and can be seen here; the interview with Parsons was published in September, and can be read here.

Might it be that Suber was the only interviewee not told that his contribution would go on a sponsored site? If so, why? Unfortunately, I can only speculate as I was unable to clarify this with *LJ*, and when I went back to Parsons with that question he did not reply.

Indeed, I struggled to get answers to all the questions I had about the *LJ*/Dove project. Despite emailing four different people at *LJ* (in addition to contacting Price, Parsons and Jozwiak) – initially in 2016, again this year – my efforts to establish the whys and wherefores were repeatedly frustrated. The only *LJ* employee to even reply to me was Group Publisher David Greenough. However, of the nine specific questions I emailed him he half-answered just two.

Of Parsons' role in the project, Greenough said only, "John presents himself well, is an experienced journalist, and always approaches interview candidates with full disclosure on his role."

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[11] Joseph is Executive Director of the open-access advocacy organisation SPARC.

On the question of sponsorship, Greenough said that the issues I raised, "are familiar ones, and the discussion on the importance of editorial integrity has been central to both print and digital media for years. For the record, the mandate in our own publishing practices is to safeguard content quality by keeping our editorial coverage and sponsored content independent of one another, and ensuring transparency to our readers. Those are the rules of engagement – and we abide by them."

My questions to Greenough on the specifics of the process, and why Suber was not told about the sponsorship, went unanswered.

Guidelines

Greenough is correct to point out that discussions about sponsored content have been ongoing for some years. But what are the rules of engagement he refers to and how effective do they appear to be?

In the US (where *LJ* is based) the rules are overseen by the [US Federal Trade Commission](#), and in response to the way advertising is morphing online the FTC has been reviewing its guidelines. In December 2015, for instance, it updated its [Enforcement Policy Statement on Deceptively Formatted Advertisements](#), which specifically addresses the topic of "advertising and promotional messages integrated into and presented as non-commercial content". And earlier this year it issued [new guidelines](#) on native advertising.

On the latter, the FTC states that the key question is this: "as native advertising evolves, are consumers able to differentiate advertising from other content?" It [adds](#): "From the FTC's perspective, the watchword is transparency. An advertisement or promotional message shouldn't suggest or imply to consumers that it's anything other than an ad."

This is important because when an ad or marketing message is embedded /embodied in content that replicates the format of regular journalism it can be hard for consumers to differentiate neutral content from ads and promotional messages. They may, for instance, mistake an ad for independent reporting, or assume a sponsored interview is an endorsement. These are the increasingly difficult waters the FTC is having to navigate today.

It might be, however, that the FTC is still overly focused on the concept of a product ad. In the case of sponsorship deals like the *LJ*/Dove minisite, for instance, the goal seems primarily to be that of promoting the sponsor's corporate brand and business model, rather than to advertise its products (although as noted, *LJ* did provide links to Dove's journals).

The distinction here is one between product advertising and what is nowadays called [corporate advertising](#), where the latter "seeks to benefit the image of the corporation as a whole rather than its products or services alone."

It does not help that marketing people are themselves not always clear or precise when making distinctions between the various types of advertising that are emerging online, conflating and/or confusing [a range of different things](#) – e.g. branded content, brand journalism, native advertising, sponsored content etc.

Another point to make is that the FTC's brief is focused on "protecting America's consumers". As such, one of its tasks is to ensure that consumers are not confused between regular content and sponsored content. This might seem to imply that it is less interested in protecting the interests of those who contribute to sponsored content, and thus of anyone who might have been confused or misled about the role they were playing in doing so.

When I contacted the FTC, I was told that there is currently no written guidance directly addressing the issue of transparency for interviewees. According to the FTC, however, "If the published interview communicates to a substantial proportion of reasonable consumers that the person interviewed endorses the sponsor's product, then that would have to be true in order to comply with Section 5 of the FTC Act."

[Section 5 of the FTC Act](), we could note, states that "Unfair methods of competition in or affecting commerce, and unfair or deceptive acts or practices in or affecting commerce, are hereby declared unlawful."

As the FTC implies, therefore, if consumers infer that an interviewee is endorsing a sponsoring company (when that is not the case) they will have been deceived, which goes to the point Suber makes about "inferred endorsements".

I said earlier that we cannot fault the way in which Dove's sponsorship of the *LJ*/Dove minisite was flagged. I added, however, that the (to my mind) intrusive size and number of Dove banners and links, and the way the collaboration operated, might lead readers to assume a) that the interviewees were endorsing Dove and b) that *LJ* was itself endorsing the publisher.

The problem, of course, is this: how can one establish such things? On the first question, the FTC, takes the view that it is "a fact-specific empirical question." But we might wonder how such a "fact" could be established without surveying readers.

Be that as it may, the FTC points out that "If a sponsored story was misleading, the company sponsoring the story could be liable for its misleading nature." And if an interviewee feels they may unwittingly/unwillingly have been made to endorse a company or product they can object. "If the person thinks that the publication is representing that the person endorses some product, he or she can contact the publisher and request corrective action, i.e., call and complain."

Presumably, therefore, if anyone who took part in the Dove-sponsored interview series feels that readers/viewers might have inferred that they were endorsing Dove (whereas they had not intended to do so) they can ask *LJ* to add a note to the interview making that clear. Whether anyone did complain I do not know. Certainly, Suber might seem justified in complaining that on three separate occasions he had not been told he was being invited to take part in a sponsored interview.

All in all, however, it would appear that the onus will have to be on interviewees, who need to make sure they are clear about what they are agreeing to, and what other interests might be involved, before doing an interview. As such, the answer to our fourth question is surely that researchers *do* need to take greater care. And perhaps OA advocates need to take especial care – because they are constantly looking for ways to promote their cause, and so might be

more vulnerable. Essentially, they might be advised to consider establishing the nature and purpose of any interview before agreeing to take part.

That said, it is self-evident (to me at least) that anyone publishing sponsored content has a duty to be completely transparent when inviting people to contribute. Surely, they should also be responsive to journalists and/or members of the public who ask for the details of any sponsorship deal?

Transparency

Let's broaden the discussion out again. The FTC argues that when sponsored content and native advertising are utilised the watchword should be *transparency*. I want to suggest that *transparency* should also be the watchword in all matters concerning scholarly communication – not least because it is the public that generally funds research and its subsequent communication. This should doubtless include financial transparency, but also transparency of process, and transparency when discussions and debates about scholarly communication take place, especially when financial or other interests are involved.

It has to be said that scholarly publishers are not generally very good at transparency – as we have seen with their attempts to keep journal subscription and APC pricing secret, and as we have seen with the reluctance of some to be transparent about their ownership, and about their governance and business processes and practices.[12]

As noted, however, here I am mostly interested in how sponsorship effects discussions about scholarly communication (including open access), and the transparency issues that can arise as a result. In the case of the *LJ*/Dove minisite, although Dove's sponsorship was made abundantly clear on the site, the process itself was not transparent, both in the way that Suber was recruited as a contributor, and the non-responsiveness of *LJ* to my questions about the collaboration.[13]

There are other examples of non-transparency I could point to. In 2013, for instance, I discovered that the blog Open Science is owned and managed by the legacy publisher De Gruyter. Yet, at the time there was no indication on the site that this was so – a point I drew attention to in this blog post.

In the wake of my post De Gruyter added its logo to the bottom of the home page, and there is now also an "about" page stating that the blog is "affiliated" with De Gruyter. Since the domain name records show that De Gruyter is the owner of the blog, and since it is managed by someone with a De Gruyter email address and a De Gruyter web page, the term "affiliated" might seem an odd choice of word here.[14]

To me this suggests that De Gruyter is still not as transparent as it could and should be. Moreover, the company has taken to publishing posts written by De Gruyter employees without acknowledging as much – describing them, for instance, as "guest posts". This seems particularly unfortunate when these posts could be seen to discredit and/or criticise De

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12 E.g. Dove; e.g. PLOS; e.g. F1000 and other Vitek Tracz companies, p. 7.

13 Suber, by contrast, was entirely responsive, and answered all my questions quickly and conscientiously.

14 The manager of the OpenScience blog also runs a blog for the De Gruyter journal *Open Cultural Studies*, where he is listed as Senior Associate Editor of the journal and blogger at Open Science.

Gruyter's competitors. On April 20th, for instance, a post by a De Gruyter Open product manager was published on the topic of APC costs. This included the controversial (and refutable) assertion that the most expensive APC-charging publisher is PLOS (See the CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 image below), an assertion that PLOS was quick to challenge (as were others).
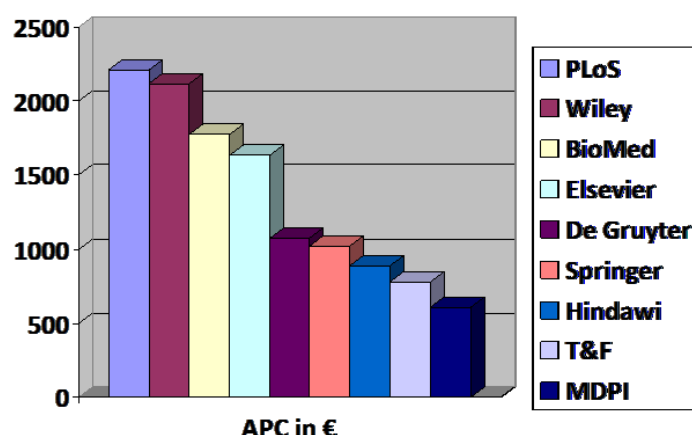
The "about" page of the Open Science blog states that its objective is to "stimulate the discussion on the potential of open access publishing, existing open source solutions of which the academic community can avail itself, and the possibilities of using digital tools for the sharing of academic research to the public."

However, I would suggest that a more accurate description of the blog might be that it is a De Gruyter-sponsored platform for discussing open access in ways that seek to shape the development of OA and, more specifically, to portray De Gruyter as a key OA player. Either way, the blog does not seem to be averse to presenting pure OA publishers in a negative light. And it is particularly regrettable when this is done without disclosing the fact that an author of a post is a De Gruyter employee. So, in the post cited above it is (incorrectly) asserted that the leading non-profit pure-gold OA publisher is the most expensive, and without acknowledging that the post's author has an obvious conflict of interest. The post also includes deceptive third-person statements that (incorrectly) imply authorial objectivity and distance – e.g. this statement: "Germany-based De Gruyter, which also has a sizable Open Access portfolio, has a remarkably uniform pricing structure.").

It is also worrying that when I posted a comment on the blog drawing attention to the author's conflict of interest the comment was promptly deleted, on the spurious grounds that it was off-topic. When I took to Twitter to complain about this act of censorship my comment was re-established in an edited and curtailed form.

Below is my original comment:

Richard Poynder
April 26, 2017 at 4:56 pm

Does Beata Socha not think she should have disclosed the fact that she is a De Gruyter Product Manager on the original post? And why was her post described as a "guest article", as if she were independent of De Gruyter rather than an employee?

This lack of adequate disclosure goes back as far as 2013: http://poynder.blogspot.co.uk/2013/10/lets-be-open-about-open-access.html.

At least the About Page now shows that the blog belongs to De Gruyter, but anyone following a link to the post would not have known that without clicking the About link. The deceptive title of the blog does not help.

Reply ↓

Leave a Reply

Enter your comment here...

True, when De Gruyter later added a comment from the post's author responding to PLOS' rebuttal it was acknowledged that she was an employee – in so far as the comment had her name attached below it. But this only happened after the post was challenged. Should it really be necessary to drag publishers into the light in this way?

Contradictory

Let me be clear, I am not claiming that any company, or any individual, referred to in this text is doing, or has done, anything illicit, or dishonest. What I *am* saying is that I believe the growing use of sponsorship in the library and research communities is unhealthy. It provides publishers with soft power that enables them to shape discussions about the future of scholarly communication and open access; and given that their interests are no longer aligned with the needs of the research community it inevitably means the seek to hold back necessary changes and to try to move scholarly communication in a direction that suits them, even where this may mean sacrificing the needs of science itself. And I am arguing that this is often done without adequate transparency.

Let me be clear on this too: I believe it is desirable that we have a marketplace for ideas, and that everyone should be free to contribute to and seek to influence the debate. But I worry that publishers have an unfair advantage. This advantage flows from the fact that they are able to deploy the large profits they capture from the taxpayer (via the high rates of return they make from selling publishing services to the research community) to exert undue influence over how discussions take place, and to amplify their voice while drowning out other voices. And since sponsorship arrangements are not always transparent, and no one appears to spend time reflecting on the process, this is happening by default, and without sufficient scrutiny. Indeed, many today seem to assume that commercial sponsorship is unremarkable, and par for the course.[15] I do not.

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[15] When the *WSJ* reported recently that Google was paying professors $5,000 to $400,000 for research supporting business practices that face regulatory scrutiny, and apparently without disclosing it, *TNW* wrote: "when it's common industry practice for companies to fund research it would be strange for Google to be the only one to abstain." The list of

It is also striking to me that OA advocates and librarians are often complicit. This is ironic, not least because in doing so they are, in effect, helping publishers to consolidate the oligopolistic power that these same librarians and OA advocates frequently complain about.

This means that librarians and OA advocates sometimes adopt oddly contradictory positions. So, for instance, one minute they will be tirading against legacy publishers, and bemoaning the high profits that these companies extract from taxpayer-funded research; the next minute they will be begging these same organisations to sponsor their events, their conferences, their research etc.

See, for instance, the list of for-profit publishers that sponsor the Research to Reader Conference, or those that sponsor the World Conference on Research Integrity, or those that sponsor the Special Libraries Association Annual Conference.

This contradiction is most apparent when publishers sponsor conferences and/or discussions about the future of scholarly communication. Here consider the Open Scholarship Initiative (OSI). OSI describes itself as a collaborative effort "to improve the scholarly publishing system", and consists of annual conferences and a discussion list.

Membership of OSI is made up primarily of legacy publishers and US librarians, and many (if not all) of the latter would describe themselves as OA advocates. Moreover, as the funding provided for OSI by UNESCO has been falling, so the contributions of legacy publishers have been increasing. Commenting on this on the GOAL mailing list, Executive Director of Research Libraries UK (RLUK) David Prosser pointed out that in 2017, 37% of the total sponsorship money for OSI came from five legacy publishers "An increase in both percentage and absolute total over 2016." He added, "Cynics will be concerned that he who pays the piper calls the tune."

As noted, this would be less of an issue if the interests of publishers were fully aligned with the needs of the research community, but they are not, and they are less and less aligned each year that passes. Leaving aside the fact that the number of researchers (the people who actually *do* research and *write* the papers at issue) involved with OSI is miniscule, it means that the initiative must struggle to arrive at a meaningful consensus, or satisfactory conclusions about the future of scholarly communication. In fact, the discussion frequently gets bogged down in bad-tempered, unproductive conversations (see here for instance). But since they hold the purse strings it is publishers who will likely determine the outcomes (as Prosser fears).

Sponsored conversations can also lead to censorship. When in 2016, for instance, someone criticised a publisher on the OSI mailing list the moderator promptly deleted his comments, inaccurately portraying them as a "personal dispute". In fact, as an advisor to the criticised publisher later pointed out, the criticism was justified and appropriate.

The price paid

These then are the kinds of issues that librarians and OA advocates face when they ask publishers to fund their activities and/or when they enter into conversations with them about the future of scholarly communication. Why then do they continue to do so? Because attending conferences and events is part of the process of building a career, and publishers have lots of money. It can also help participants obtain personal sponsorship. When I asked one of the members of the OSI discussion list why he was involved he pointed out that the moderator was "getting sponsors." This could be good for him, he added, because he was currently talking to one of those sponsors in connection with the funding of his own research. Thus, we circle back to money. But while librarians and OA advocates can benefit personally from publisher sponsorship, there must be some doubt as to whether the research community at large (and science itself) can benefit.[16] I for one am a sceptic.

Publishers continue to fund events and initiatives for similar reasons: that is, sponsorship – either directly or indirectly – benefits them. It helps them, for instance, to control the conversation about scholarly communication, and to nurture publisher-friendly outcomes. This is so even if taking part brings down on their heads opprobrium and criticism, and sparks toxic conversations. Publishers know that critics are always the most vocal, and that on any discussion list, and at any conference, there will be many silent lurkers who are flattered and grateful for publishers' "generosity", and who will therefore be encouraged to publish in their journals, to promote them within their institutions, and to support their claims that they are essential service providers who offer value for money.[17]

They also realise that in an OA world it is important to engage with the people who now increasingly pay them (or at least place orders) for their services: authors. Sponsoring projects like OSI – along with similar initiatives, and conferences – has grown in importance for publishers. Now more than ever it is necessary that they win the hearts and minds not just of politicians and institutions, but of authors as well.[18]

For all that, publishers know that it is also important to work behind the scenes, which is doubtless partly why they tend to be shy of transparency. A good example of this is the way the 2012 Finch Report played out. With OA advocates persisting in their calls for open access, the UK government felt compelled to commission a "stakeholders" report into how to make open access a reality. By the time the Finch Committee was formed, however, publishers were significantly overrepresented – doubtless as a result of covert publisher lobbying along the lines uncovered by Prosser in 2005. (Helped perhaps by preparing reports for the Government on national research activity – a further example of sponsorship?[19])

The Finch Report was a very big win for publishers. When it was released it was immediately apparent that the focus was as much on preserving publishers' revenues as it was on

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[16] In an email conversation about this text with me Suber asked me to stress that he received no money for any of the interviews he did for the *LJ*/Dove collaboration; nor has he been paid for any interview he has ever given. I think we can safely assume that none of the other Dove-sponsored interviewees were paid either. That was not the point of the exercise.

[17] Leaving aside the perverse and pernicious issue of impact factors.

[18] It is, of course, problematic here that, try as the moderator might, OSI has attracted so very few authors/researchers, a source of occasional breast beating on the list.

[19] Indeed, the point at which sponsorship and lobbying overlap is an interesting question, but one perhaps without a ready answer.

achieving an effective and financially-sustainable open access publishing environment (two objectives, we could note, that many OA advocates maintain are mutually incompatible). Specifically, the primary recommendation of the Finch Committee was that "a clear policy direction should be set towards support for publication in open access or hybrid journals, funded by APCs, as the main vehicle for the publication of research".

In short, the Finch Report marked the triumph of pay-to-publish gold OA. This was exactly the kind of OA that publishers wanted, and it stymied OA advocates' expectation that open access would reduce costs and increase efficiency. It has enabled legacy publishers to embed themselves in the new environment in a way that has seen the money they extract from the research community increase rather than fall. And, as noted, it has embedded outdated forms of scholarly communication (but which continue to benefit publishers) into the new environment.

To return to the third of the three questions I posed at the start of this text: Does sponsorship create similar problems to fake news, and are they in fact both part and parcel of a larger problem? I think the answer to this is yes. Like sponsorship, the purpose of fake news is to promote the interests of whoever created or paid for the content. For instance, exaggerated claims from dubious publisher-sponsored surveys suggesting that "a six-month embargo would cause research libraries to cancel 65% of their Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences journals and 44% of their Scientific, Technical and Medical journal subscriptions" are similar in kind and purpose to, say, UK politicians during the Brexit campaign promulgating spurious calculations ostensibly showing that leaving Europe would provide a £350m-a-week spending bonanza for the NHS (described by *The Independent* precisely as fake news). The objective is not to inform the public but to promote a company, a person, or a cause.

Likewise, sponsoring content and discussion lists (or a blog) that present themselves as objective and neutral information sources – where in reality the aim is to promote a company, an industry, or a cause – has much in common with fake news. It also gives commercial and other interests disproportionate control over discussions and outcomes, often without their vested interest being made transparent. Alternatively, we could think of sponsorship as a kind of "gateway drug". It boosts the desire to direct and control customers and/or the public, but the dose has to be increased over time as the craving grows. Thus, advertising and simple sponsorship arrangements morph into native advertising and sprawling minisites of paid-for content. The end point, one must assume, is a world awash with fake news. Indeed, one might want to suggest that many of the vainglorious and exaggerated press releases and self-definitions publishers promulgate today already verge on fake news – this is a world in which every publisher is a "world leader", or a "global player", or the "largest" whatever. In 1946 George Orwell said, "Political language … is designed to make lies sound truthful and murder respectable, and to give an appearance of solidity to pure wind." In today's neoliberal world (where money and markets are the be-all and end-all) we also see the same solidity being created out of pure wind. Three years later Orwell created the word "newspeak". Today we use the term fake news. Welcome to the post-truth world.

It is also worth noting that the rising number of questionable journals now spraying fake science around the world, polluting the research corpus, and casting doubt on legitimate science is fake news *par excellence*. This is a direct consequence of publishers' successful co-optation of open access, and the emergence of pay-to-play publishing. And sponsorship and lobbying played a large part in this.

Pay-to-publish gold OA has opened the floodgates to the mass of online platforms now available that allow researchers to "publish" their papers (for a fee) in faux journals. The companies that run these platforms charge extravagant APCs on the promise that papers will be peer reviewed but, in reality, no review takes place, or the review is so cursory that, to all intents and purposes, it might as well not take place. Scarily, many researchers looking to bulk up their CVs now use these journals in full knowledge of their bogus status.

These online platforms also attract fringe groups like climate deniers, anti-vaxxers, and peddlers of complementary and alternative medicine (CAM). By paying to publish, advocates for these controversial ideas are able to give their articles a patina of respectability and legitimacy. As one critic put it, predatory publishing blurs the lines "between science and pseudoscience, essentially flooding the world with low quality and bogus studies and promoting the borderline academics who produce them."

In short, money, and those who wield it, are increasingly able to determine the future of politics, policies, practices, industries and, in an OA world, even science itself. This is one with the phenomenon known in the US as "special interests", which undermines democratic processes and subverts evidence-based decision making.

Disinformation and partisan reporting has always existed, but the rise of the internet and the demand for friction-free access to information *sans* paywalls is seeing more and more prejudiced and biased information drowning out and side-lining mainstream media and traditional information flows.

Let me stress again: I make no claim that anyone mentioned in this text is doing, or has done, anything illicit or dishonest, or that any specific company is predatory.[20] I guess I am making five (separate but related) points. 1) Widespread publisher sponsorship in the library and research communities is undesirable, not least because it gives publishers soft power and undue influence to enable them to promote their interests ahead of the needs of science, and this often takes place without adequate transparency. 2) The calls for research papers to be made freely available have ended up having a deleterious effect on the quality of published science. 3) Publishers' creation and promotion of a pay-to-play model in order to meet the demands for OA (and the sponsorship they have dispensed in the process of doing this) has given rise to questionable practices and questionable publishers, even if the vast majority of those publishers who now promote, sponsor and offer OA do so with the best of intentions. 4) Since pay-to-publish and sponsored content both involve the creators (rather than the readers) paying for the content, the research and library communities now face similar risks and problems as the world at large faces from fake news. 5) OA advocates and librarians have been complicit in the creation of these problems, as have trade publications like *Library Journal*.

Defenders of transparency?

Let's finish by revisiting the *LJ*/Dove collaboration: *Library Journal* self-describes itself as "the most trusted and respected publication for the library community." For their part, librarians pride themselves on being defenders of transparency[21] and leaders of the open-

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[20] In fact, given the secrecy that surrounds publishers' internal processes, and most peer review, I defy anyone to demonstrate that they can routinely and reliably tell when a journal or a publisher is behaving in a predatory way – *pace* Cabell's claims.

[21] See three of their manifestos that state as much: here, here and here.

access movement. They are also staunch critics of fake news and "alternative facts", and are now positioning themselves as solution providers in this area.

It is therefore unfortunate that their most trusted and respected publication invited the *de facto* leader of the open-access movement to do three separate interviews without informing him once that the result would be sponsored by a company whose "jam" he does not like. It is also unfortunate that *LJ* proved less than forthcoming when asked questions about the *LJ*/Dove collaboration by an independent journalist.

It is further unfortunate that librarians continue to seek out and enjoy sponsorship from publishers without apparently giving a great deal of thought to the implications of doing so. The *LJ*/Dove collaboration suggests that they are also happy to take part in sponsored interviews without noticing, or perhaps caring, that they have been sponsored, or who the sponsor is.

Meanwhile, Dove appears to have moved on to new sponsorship pastures. In March, it announced that it will be sponsoring The Nanomedicine Academy of Minority Serving Institutions at Northeastern University. One of the co-founders of the Academy, Thomas J Webster, is editor-in-chief of Dove's *International Journal of Nanomedicine*. Webster also publishes with Dove, and appears to have co-authored 92 papers with it over the past six years, most if not all of which appear to have been published in his own journal.

The other co-founder of the Academy is Srinivas Sridhar. Sridhar serves on the editorial board of the *International Journal of Nanomedicine*, and he too publishes in it.