HUMAN AFFAIRS *25*, 327–341, 2015 DOI: 10.1515/humaff-2015-0027

FROM BURGERS TO TENURE: PRESERVING QUALITY AMID THE CHOICES AND DILEMMAS FACING AUTHORS OF SCIENTIFIC ARTICLES[1]

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Abstract: Writing an article isn't a straightforward process. It involves difficult decisions, dilemmas and even politics, and these have a substantial effect on article quality and impact. This is even more true now than used to be the case due to the massification of science and pressure to publish. The author explores six common dilemmas and offers guidance on how to deal with them: a) why we should (not) write at all; b) which language to choose—English, the national language or another suitable language; c) how to credit resources in times of resource abundance; d) how to deal with authorship disputes; e) whether to write clearly and concisely or to represent the "messy reality" as closely as possible; and f) which journal to choose.

Key words: scientific writing; dilemmas; ethics; article; quality.

Publications as burgers

In 2003, David Farley published a cartoon of a young scholar sitting at his boss' desk. There are two doors next to it and his boss tells him: "Behind one door is tenure—behind the other is flipping burgers at McDonald's." A friend of mine worked at McDonald's and she told me that surviving there meant making huge numbers of burgers and other things per day. I was very surprised to discover when I entered academia that the tenure doors aren't so different from those of McDonald's. Surviving as a scholar and getting tenure nowadays means we also have to produce huge amounts of "science", usually in the form of articles. Writing an article is, however, not as straightforward a process as making burgers, even though some university managers like to think so. Writing an article in the "burger science period" is a process filled with hard decisions, dilemma solving, strategic thinking and politics. And much more so than used to be the case in the past (on the reasons why see Billig, 2013; or Liessmann, 2008).

[1] This work was financially supported by the FPVČ fund received in 2014 from the Faculty of Arts, Palacký University. Grant number: 452100651 – Failure when writing a paper in the social sciences. The author is indebted to all the people who were open to him about their publication dilemmas. Special thanks to Magda Petrjánošová, Catriona Menzies and Douglas Bernstein for their comments.

My aim is to explore the most common dilemmas and to offer guidelines for the authors of scientific papers working in the humanities and social sciences especially. The dilemmas have been gathered from several sources: my own publishing experiences; experiences of conference participants from my publishing workshops; from workshops with scholars and postgraduate students at Palacký University in Olomouc, the Czech Republic; from informal interviews and emails with experienced scholars from various countries; and from the literature.

This article deals with the four dilemmas that were most prevalent—journal choice; crediting sources; authorship issues; choice of publication language, and two topics that were mentioned less often but I personally think them too important not to be included—the way we represent the "messy" reality and whether it would be better to stop writing. I have also left out some dilemmas and choices including issues relating to the peer review process (see Sternberg & Sternberg, 2010); topic choice (more exciting or popular topics tend to be cited more often but other topics deserve attention too; see Smolin, 2007 for an inspiring discussion on the troubles this causes in physics); whether to use software for citations and organizing PDF files like EndNote, Qiqqa and Zotero; or whether our manuscript would better suit being published in another kind of publication, like a book or as conference proceedings.

Why we should (not) write

> *"One of the most salient features of our culture is that there is so much bullshit. Everyone knows this. Each of us contributes his share."*
>
> (Harry Frankfurt, 2005, p. 1)

Yes, poor writing is pervasive and slowly decimates the lives of academics and other professionals who still read.[2] It has become extremely difficult and time consuming to distinguish the rubbish from the valuable when so much "scientific stuff" is being published. That's a fact and therefore we should all think about whether we should write (or read this article) in the first place.

I don't want to go into the detail on why there is so much poor writing in the social sciences and humanities. The two main culprits are obvious: a) the massification of scientific publishing over recent decades and b) that most of us learn to write from those who don't know how to write and therefore we imitate the same errors again and again (see Billig, 2013 for a great discussion on these topics).

Let's be honest now. Most of us write because we have to, since writing is part of our job description. And I expect that most of us would stop writing "scientific stuff" if we changed jobs. That does not imply that we cannot still enjoy scientific writing and produce quality work.[3] That's just the foundation which I assume is true for the majority of people

[2] From anecdotal experience many scholars who publish their work read less nowadays because they have to write more and they generally trust the quality of writing less.

[3] I enjoyed writing this article a lot even though I probably wouldn't have written it if I hadn't had external motivation too (I promised to write some articles in a grant application). To some extent

in academia. Consequently, I expect that most of us can't stop writing if we don't want to lose our jobs and it's also often a major source of income. Stopping writing even if we write rubbish is therefore not an option for most people.[4] Hence, there are only two options left. The first is to continue writing poorly and the second is to try to improve our writing. The rest of this section will be about the second option because there isn't much to say about the first, apart from feeling pity for all the people involved. These authors should at least have the decency to clearly state in the abstract what their article is about and what the readers can get out of it, so the readers can stop reading it earlier and not lose valuable time.

The crucial issue in writing something that isn't rubbish is to find out what it means to write something valuable. When I interviewed scholars who write a lot, there wasn't much agreement. Some preferred to publish every little "brick" (e.g. every tiny empirical finding) while others waited for more material to write something substantial. Some thought that the work needs to have a practical impact while others thought that even basic research has meaning. Some even considered how original the article should be. I, for example, don't think this article offers many original thoughts (in the sense that nobody before me has come up with similar arguments) but I still hope it can be valuable because it summarizes the issues in one article and because I openly discuss issues that are tacitly known but not publicly acknowledged in the typical author guidelines.

The range of ideas on why we should (not) publish brought me to the simple conclusion that every article should have value for somebody or something at least. If we can't find any value apart from being promoted then that's a problem. There are, however, limits because some of the best people in the field are perfectionists, have low self-confidence or sometimes don't even or can't even see the merit of the piece at the time of publication. Consider for example the famous and important discussion note written by Einstein which started like this: "Some time ago, R. W. Mandl paid me a visit and asked me to publish the results of a little calculation, which I had made at his request. This note complies with his wish." (Einstein, 1936, p. 506).

The other problem is deciding how much to write and whether to opt for fewer higher quality publications or more lower quality ones. Eriksen (2001, p. 162) offers a hypothetical solution to this dilemma:

> If article A is twice as long as article B, it should also be twice as complex. Prolific writers on a monthly salary should be offered incentives to reduce their productivity, in so far as it implies improved quality. For example, established professors who write a lot might be encouraged to keep quiet for five years, provided they then came up with a piece that made a difference. (An

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external motivation is important for me and I have heard this from many other scholars as well. External motivation can help us overcome the tough beginnings and endings and also helps with deadlines.

[4] I often recommend people leave academia if they take no pleasure in writing (or even sometimes teaching) and their writing is poor. However, many still stay because they don't know what else to do, because it's hard to leave the job after many years in academia (it's part of their identity) or because leaving the "comfort zone" is too challenging and produces a lot of insecurity. I have also wanted to escape academia on several occasions (and maybe one day I will) but I realized that I can do things that I like and I think they make a difference. So I stayed but at the same time I also started doing other activities outside academia to balance my life more.

acquaintance of mine once suggested that all writers should have a maximum quota of 500 pages. If they exceeded that limit, they would have to withdraw some of their earlier work.)

This solution would be great but I guess it won't be applied and it would also hurt authors who write a lot but well. Actually, that is fairly often the case. More experienced authors, according to the research, write better and therefore the dilemma between quantity and quality is more or less non-existent in their case (see this blog article by Silvia, 2012). Silvia offers three reasons for the correlation between quality and quantity: a) our ideas improve during writing and therefore the more we write the better ideas we have (see also Richardson, 2003); b) those who write a lot tend to work at better institutions and that environment accelerates the quality of their writing; c) the more we write the more attention and citations we get from our peers (we start establishing ourselves as a good brand). Note: In the humanities and social sciences the writing style and argumentation is even more important than in the natural sciences.

On the other hand excessive institutional pressure to publish can certainly decrease the quality of writing because people tend to polish articles less, write redundant publications, divide one study into several smaller studies (salami slicing) and commit other academic misconduct or even fraud (see Roig, 2006 for an overview about ethical writing). One of the solutions to the quantity/quality dilemma is to write smaller pieces (e.g. short empirical studies), thereby freeing up time for bigger more substantial works. When writing, it also helps to collaborate with somebody whose writing is much better than our own and to write regularly (our article will be finished sooner, giving us more time to polish; see Silvia, 2007 for other recommendations).[5]

English or perish?

Scholars from English speaking countries are often unaware of how privileged a position they hold now that English is seen as the "academic lingua franca" in many disciplines (Lillis & Curry, 2010). This presents non-Anglophones with the dilemma of which language to publish in. Publishing in the national language is important for many reasons: we need to develop our discipline in our own language; we have a smaller impact on local issues if our writing is in a foreign language; some topics are closely related to the national (or other) language and are of little relevance in English (e.g. some issues in linguistics or history); or we want to have an impact on a particular community of scholars (e.g. one scholar told me he sometimes publishes in Hungarian even though he is Czech). Burgess, Gea-Valor, Moreno, and Rey-Rocha (2014) also highlight different publication practices in various countries and disciplines. Writing in English is therefore not only "writing" but also a method of inquiry that has an impact on our results and on the way we present them (Richardson, 2003; Antes, 2007). The problem with journals in national languages is that they are often

[5] How to polish an article: a) read it aloud; b) ask colleagues from inside and outside your field for comments; c) lay your article aside for some time and come back to it with fresh eyes; d) make structural changes first (taken from APA, 2010 and Sternberg & Sternberg, 2010). It also helps to print the article—we will find different errors when we switch to reading it in print from reading it on screen.

(with the exception of widespread languages like Spanish or French) perceived as being of lower standard. This is because these so called "national", "peripheral" or "small" journals often have a lower international impact and the quality of the peer review process has also been questioned[6] (Salanger-Mayer, 2014). Because of this, scholars in many countries are pressured into publishing in English to earn tenure and promotion even when this is not the most suitable language for their work. This trend is reinforced by the fact that in many countries science is governed by "automatic" systems that record and evaluate the scientific findings and therefore easy to use criteria like impact factor or publication language are often used as measures of publication quality (Lillis & Curry, 2010). Next follows some advice:

- *Publish bilingually*. If we can, the most elegant solution is to publish bilingually—then we can have an impact on both the international and national level. For example articles in open access journals can be translated and redistributed without permission and some journals also offer the option of having translations in the supplementary documents or allow authors to distribute article translations freely (like this journal—see my profile at ResearchGate for a Czech translation).
- *Publish for scholars in English and for practitioners or lay people in the national language*. This is a solution I most often hear from scholars across the world. Scholars that belong to the international scientific community usually understand English and therefore English is nowadays the best means of spreading our knowledge and receiving international recognition. And the hard fact is that if it's not in English it doesn't exist for the vast majority of scholars if we don't write in another major language that's "self-sufficient" with a large audience. Another issue is that we will probably be promoted more quickly if we publish scientific papers in English and for most internationally relevant topics we can find more English speaking expert reviewers who can help us improve our articles. On the other hand, when it fulfils a purpose we should continue to publish scientific papers in national languages as well (see the reasons above). Practitioners or lay people usually prefer the national language which is why the national language should be the choice for this audience. (Note: we may be aiming at international professionals and then English may be the preferred language.)
- *Beware of language bias*. As mentioned above the way we write can also be seen as a method of analysis. For example the tradition of writing in the Czech Republic or Germany is almost completely different from the tradition in France, Spain, or the United Kingdom and it cannot be said that any of the traditions is worse or better (Antes, 2007; Burges at al., 2014). Every tradition has its own focus and strengths and weaknesses (e.g. structure, depth, degree of "departure" allowed away from the main thread of the article) and we should be aware that the concise and clearly focused writing tradition found in English is only one of the ways we can perceive and study the world around us and even "international science" needs local perspectives (see e.g. Lillis & Curry, 2010).
- *Reconcile yourself to being a "local guru" and publish in the national language only*. Writing science and only sharing our results with a wider audience locally is not bad in itself. We can have a larger impact if we choose our own league and do a good job

[6] The quality of English language journals can also be questioned and surprisingly not only that of "predator" journals (see the last section in this article).

in it.[7] Writing locally may give us more time to do "real" things, to change the reality around us. On the other hand, this may cause problems for academic promotion at many institutions (Burgess et al., 2014; Salanger-Mayer, 2014).

- *Weigh up the pros and cons of publishing in English carefully*. Writing in English may be burdensome if English is not our first or second language. It can cost a lot of money to have our work translated or proofread and also the quality of the English may be questionable because we need not only find a good translator but also a person who understands our discipline (many non-Anglophone scholars have told me they have experienced being rejected because of the language even though their work was proofread by native English scholars). Writing in English may also be a bit over-rated (Burgess et al., 2014) and the impact on the scientific community may be smaller in English in comparison to the national language if for example our topic is more popular in another language or because of the sheer number of articles in English and therefore our article may be one of thousands on a similar topic.

Crediting sources in times of resource abundance and anti-plagiarism mania

> *"The only art I'll ever study is stuff that I can steal from. I do think that my plagiarism is effective."*
> (David Bowie in an interview by Crowe, 1976)

Nothing is nor can be completely original in art (see Kleon, 2012) and I am convinced that the same applies to the social sciences and the humanities even though publication manuals threaten us with plagiarism misconduct. Most ideas, arguments, theories, research designs etc. have already been invented by somebody before us. Therefore, it's almost impossible not to commit plagiarism unconsciously at least. We might for example use other people's ideas without referencing them because we think they are ours once they have "popped up in our head". This is very typical of the human memory; we forget the source even though the information may still be correct. This process is called misattribution and is one of the seven sins of memory (Schacter, 1999). Or we may invent an idea and not be aware that somebody else before us has invented the same one (and just calls it something different). Some form of unethical writing is therefore unavoidable. Because of this, many authors have told me they simply cite the authors they came across and remembered reading them with some effort so as to cite the more relevant and direct sources. West and Stenius (2008) talk about convenience citation in cases like these and see it as a deviation from the ideal citation practice.

Authors of scientific papers should certainly try to acknowledge all the sources that directly inspired them and which are not common knowledge (see e.g. APA, 2010). However, on many occasions, and especially with heavily covered topics, this would simply mean unreadable texts stuffed with references and lacking author voice (every thought would be attributed to somebody else). What can we do? Sternberg and Sternberg (2010) and Adair

[7] Robert Fulghum (2008) wrote a beautiful story titled *Meanwhile* about choosing our own league where we can add value.

and Vohra (2003) suggest citing the most relevant sources only, one or two per argument and choosing those that best support our argument.[8] Some types of articles will naturally have more citations (theoretical studies or meta-analyses) while others less (empirical studies or short articles) (APA, 2010).

Another problem is that non-native English speakers (like me) find it difficult to avoid plagiarising because our vocabulary and ability to create original sentences is limited and therefore greatly influenced by what we read. Because of this non-natives may provide inappropriate paraphrases fairly often even without knowing it (see Roig, 2006 for illustrative examples of paraphrasing or plagiarism).

I have used several thoughts here from two book chapters that were written in Czech (see Neusar & Smetáčková, 2012 and Neusar, 2012). For example I paraphrased the Sternberg and Sternberg (2010) suggestions on authorship disputes (see below) in a fairly similar way and used some of the thoughts on publication language choice too. This is a grey area. From one perspective this could be assessed as self-plagiarism (see Roig, 2006) because one and half pages from my chapter about the authorship disputes resembles the text below (even though I have used different words and sentences and the chapter was not written in English). On the other hand, I don't consider it self-plagiarism because I think Sternberg and Sternberg (2010) is the best source to cite and all the points they make are just as relevant now as three years ago, so I see no reason to change it substantially. I also see no reason to cite Neusar and Smetáčková (2012) in the subsection below because it's more relevant to cite the original source instead. The other case where I use some of my thoughts on publication language choice is similar. I haven't cited my previous work (Neusar, 2012) there because I think other resources are more relevant for English speaking scholars and also all the thoughts there were quite general and could be found in most sources relating to language choice.

As you can see, I have also cited myself several times in this article. Citing ourselves is normal and when directly relevant it helps to establish our expertise because readers can see that we have been interested in the topic for some time and therefore can probably provide better quality opinions as well. On the other hand some authors cite themselves so extensively that it's very narcissistic and highly improbable that other authors did not have anything to say about the topic and people should build upon previous knowledge in science whenever possible.

Overciting friends, colleagues or "mutual citation societies" is another unethical practice that's fairly often used (see West & Stenius, 2008). When writing an article the author has to select some authors only and skip others due to article length or readability restrictions. This provides ample room for manoeuvre to help somebody by citing them or to omit somebody we don't like even though the reference would be relevant. Many scholars around the globe have told me that they are pressurised by their institutions into citing colleagues from the same institution because that improves the institution's number of citations and also helps individuals gain tenure. To some degree this citing misconduct is normal and should not be called misconduct at all. It's normal for us to cite the work we know better more often and vice versa for these authors to cite us more often. What we cite should, however, be highly

[8] I don't mean only those that are in favour of our argument. We should also cite opposing evidence.

relevant which is not always the reality. My solution to this dilemma is that I try to cite the people I know but at the same time I always think about whether citing them provides the best possible source or at least a very good and relevant one for the audience I am writing for. Another reason for citing people we know is that once we know somebody we also know how credible these people are. Knowing that somebody does great research and writes ethically is an advantage and a good reason to cite them when the information we want to cite is also relevant.[9] One less problematic way of citing colleagues or friends is to make teams and then cite the work of others in the team. Or to be aware of what colleagues have been writing about. The more we know their work (and they know our work) the higher the chances of us and them being cited (which is an ethical way of disseminating our work). It's also advisable to send our work to relevant people in the field because they may overlook our work in the vast amount of literature that's produced nowadays. Finally, the best way to be cited more is to write well. Good quality is the fundamental characteristic of a highly cited work.

In some disciplines there is a practice of overciting the classics. For example it seems to me that in some sociological journals articles almost won't be published unless Bourdieu or Giddens are cited. Even though these authors wrote a lot it still seems suspicious to me that they are relevant to so many articles and it's probably caused by the publishing tradition in this field (a bad one).

Citing the likely referees is the last unethical practice I deal with in this section. This practice is very frequent because it improves our chances of being published (likely referees love to see their citations). Sternberg and Sternberg (2010) write that this practice is not unethical or even cynical. They interpret it in terms of the fact that the likely referees will also often be the major contributors in the field and therefore it makes sense to include them in the references if they are relevant. The issue is similar with articles from the same journal. It's advisable to cite at least some articles from the same journal because science should build upon what is published and the same is true of journals. On the other hand the practice of quite a few national and international journals of pressurizing authors into citing articles from the same journal even when they're not very relevant is certainly unethical (this was mentioned by many authors I know) and authors should be brave enough not to do it and try to publish their manuscript elsewhere.

Finally, I would like to highlight the fact that providing citations is like recommending something valuable to a friend. Once we recommend something really good it will spread and it's great when the good things spread and not the rubbish. Once we recommend something we help spread rubbish and we may also lose our reputation because people won't trust us the next time. We should therefore always try hard to use the best citations that we can.[10]

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[9] In this article I cite only two authors I know personally—M. Miovský and R. Gabrhelík. Even though it's only a citation in a footnote I think the source is highly relevant and useful and that the book as a whole (Babor, Stenius, Savva, & O'Reilly, 2008) is one of the best books on publishing guidelines even for authors (like me) who don't publish work on addiction. Note: the authors are finalizing the 3rd edition at the moment.

[10] West and Stenius (2008) also recommend citing the original source whenever possible and relevant or citing a crucial literature review instead of the original source if it's more informative.

Substantial contribution and other authorship disputes

Authorship is simple in cases when there is only one author or when one of two authors is clearly the main contributor. Often, however, it's much less clear. How big should the contribution be for the person to be included as a co-author? Who should we thank in the acknowledgements section? What order should we put the co-authors in?

Even though there are no generally agreed rules we can still do something to prevent problems with authorship. Sternberg and Sternberg (2010) suggest several recommendations:

- *Discuss issues of co-authorship before beginning the research project (or as soon as possible)*. Although we may not know the final order of the co-authors we can still openly explore the opinions of all team members and prevent many future problems. Realizing that we are not a co-author after the research project has been conducted is more painful than leaving the team before the work starts. I would also recommend the authorship issue be regularly discussed during the process of writing up the article.
- *Anyone who meaningfully contributed to the scientific ideas in the paper should be a co-author*. This is probably the most difficult principle to apply. What counts as a "meaningful" or "substantial" enough contribution for us to be considered a co-author? Here it helps to explore the various types of contributions. If we for example conduct an empirical study then major contributions could be made to study design, writing the article, interpreting the data or polishing the manuscript. All the major contributors should be included as co-authors and should approve the final version of the article.
- *Collection of data or preparation of research materials does not qualify for co-authorship*. Nonetheless when a person substantially contributes to study design, authorship should be considered.
- *It's better to over-include co-authors than under-include*. Not including somebody as co-author can cause more problems than including somebody who did less work. In unclear cases we can always ask. One of my colleagues for example declined co-authorship because he did not consider the fact that he had discussed study design with me and had read and commented on the final draft to warrant it (I made him a co-author in another boundary case to thank him).
- *The order should reflect the level of the scientific contribution*. The last place is often reserved for the person who got the grant funding, is an integral part of the team or used to be the thesis or dissertation advisor. This special role should not however mean that this person does nothing to contribute to the article. Unfortunately, this is to my knowledge quite a common experience, but it should be considered unethical. Sometimes people in senior positions even abuse less senior colleagues or students by putting their names first.
- *Involve somebody in conflict resolution before it gets too ugly*. Sometimes agreement can't be found easily and we can for example ask the departmental head or dean for help in solving the conflict. This can be especially helpful when we are dealing with somebody in more senior position who has power and there's a danger of abuse (see above). For more ideas about authorship disputes see Albert and Wager (2003).
- *It's only an article. Not all problems can be avoided* (added by A. N.). Authorship issues can be tricky and we sometimes realize too late that somebody should be removed as an

author or that the names should be in a different order. If we cannot change it, it might help to remind ourselves that "it's only an article – nothing more". A bad experience will help us to choose future co-authors more wisely. Finding a good co-author is like finding a life partner. It may take some time, we may "singe our feathers" but if we are lucky it may prove to be a very fruitful life-long collaboration.

An interesting clear concise story and/or the messy reality?

> *"... clear descriptions don't work if what they are describing is not itself very coherent. The very attempt to be clear simply increases the mess."*
>
> (John Law, 2004, p. 2)

Writing clearly and concisely is an imperative in scientific writing at least in the Anglophone world (see e.g. APA, 2010; or Turabian, 2013). Although some writing traditions also highlight other qualities (e.g. depth or authenticity in qualitative papers)[11] I agree that we should all try to be as clear and concise as possible because it increases our chance of being understood correctly (readers shouldn't need a crystal ball gazing ability to read and interpret the meaning of an article).[12] The problem with this imperative to be clear and concise is that sometimes it goes too far and researchers in the social sciences and humanities feel under pressure from journal editors (or themselves) to produce an article that has a good story and is persuasive and not very problematic since there will be a much higher chance of getting it published. Because of this I often informally hear (even from distinguished internationally recognized scholars) that many scholars simply omit some analyses because they make the interpretation less clear or don't mention some other problems with their data. To some extent, this is normal and we should use all Occam's Razor (e.g. if there are two hypotheses that both predict equally well, the less complicated should be chosen). The problem is, however, that the real world is often "messier" than our articles suggest and making the world more coherent may in fact increase the mess even more and could have a negative impact on the real world when somebody trusts our results (see Law, 2004).[13] I wrote about this problem occurring in qualitative research where we tend to create our research stories too quickly because our mind simply cannot stop creating stories (Neusar, 2014). The same is often true in quantitative research. We find a statistically significant result and quickly create a charming interpretation of our often accidental result. All this is unethical but it's a

[11] See Stenius, Makela, Miovský, and Gabrhelík (2008) for useful guidelines on how to publish a qualitative study.

[12] In my experience poor writing usually goes hand in hand with a lack of ideas and clear thinking. It may be the case that some geniuses aren't recognized because their language is too complicated but most often Zinsser (2006, pp. 147-148) is right when he says "Writing is thinking on paper. Anyone who thinks clearly can write clearly, about anything at all…. It's just a matter of putting one sentence after another."

[13] Another problem with creating better stories than the reality is that we can produce misleading representations of our research participants.

very common grey area (see Roig, 2006). The reason isn't only that we conceal the facts but also that we're pressured into being concise and brief when we simply can't present all the tiny but relevant details (we can sometimes put these details in additional article resources online). The tip of the iceberg is then the total fabrication of data in order to make the results more appealing, which happened for example in the case of a Dutch professor, Diederik Stapel, (Stroebe, Postmes, & Spears, 2012) but it has probably happened and happens more often though on a smaller scale.

Solving this dilemma isn't easy. Journal editors and readers alike prefer reading articles that don't present too many "buts" because it raises the obvious question "why should we read it if nothing is clear"? On the other hand we shouldn't give into the temptation to make our results better and to go further than our material allows in generalizing and interpreting. The best solution is to wait and conduct additional research so that we can be strong in what we write about. Another solution is to be open about the fact that our arguments are only preliminary and not very well supported but that we still want to present them because they are very interesting or should be published quickly for some other reason. Being humble is unfortunately not trendy. Not even in science where almost all research centres have the word "excellence" in their name or description.

Which journal to choose?

The choice of the right journal is usually a compromise between several competing criteria such as length of publishing process or quality of journal. Below are several common criteria that authors can use in making a decision:

- *Decide who the audience should be.* Is your message relevant to a national or international audience? Should your audience be large and from a variety of fields (like this journal) or should it be a highly selected special audience? Are you going to target academic scholars or practitioners? Most journals are typically relevant only to subgroups of people and therefore choice of journal largely influences who reads it. Audience choice and therefore also journal choice also impact on the style of writing, use of jargon etc.
- *Choose the language in which you publish.* See the English or perish section of this text.
- *Choose the journal whose scope best fits your topic and style of writing*. Some journals are highly specialized and won't accept anything apart from very specific topics. On the other hand others are more general and will accept various topics. Historically, the general journals used to have a bigger impact because they were read by more people, had a larger impact factor etc. Specialized journals have the advantage that they're usually read by the professionals in our field. Some journals (like this one) accept articles that are more essayistic while others prefer formal language.
- *Should your article be freely available on the internet or in specialized databases only?* Having the option of publishing in a journal whose articles are freely available on the internet is a great advantage because the articles can be downloaded by anybody at no cost and with no need to access articles via specialized databases from the institutions which subscribe to them (sometimes we can even provide newer versions of our article). Articles that are not available for free do not exist for many people! The trouble with

the free journals is that they often involve additional costs because many open access journals charge for publishing articles and it can be quite expensive—even several hundred euros.[14] Most institutions have access to many online databases (e.g. EBSCO, ProQuest, PsyArticles, Current Contents or ERIH), so choosing a journal that's indexed and also has full texts in these databases is essential because not many people are willing to pay for an article and some are even reluctant to ask authors for an electronic copy. A potential problem with some electronic only journals is whether our article will be available if the journal stops publishing (hard copies are always kept by libraries).

- *Acceptance rate, quality and prestige of a journal.* Some top ranked journals accept only a very small percentage of articles (10% or even less) and the publishing process can take many months up to years. As Sternberg and Sternberg (2010) summarize aiming too high can take too long while aiming too low may end up with the publication not "counting" or being weighted lower when evaluated as part of the academic promotion process. Journals with a larger impact factor usually have higher prestige as well (you can check the impact factor and other scientometrics in *Journal Citation Reports*), but in certain fields it's very prestigious and difficult to get published even in journals without an impact factor. Neither does the quality of the journal necessarily have a bearing on the difficulty of the peer review. It may happen that a journal with an impact factor of 2.0 has a more difficult peer review process than a journal with an impact factor of 10.0. If our topic is well suited to a better journal it may be worth trying that if we have enough time. Another indicator of journal quality is the *immediacy index* that shows how often articles from a journal were cited in the same year. Beginning authors should ask more experienced authors for advice because the publishing field is dynamic and changes quite quickly.[15] Lastly, some scholars have told me that they sometimes prefer lower standard journals because they offer them more freedom. Surprisingly, several reported that their best publications were published in low standard journals.
- *Length restrictions.* Most journals limit the length of an article—often to 8000 words or even less (sometimes also the number of sources cited is limited). If our topic needs more space, we should choose the journal accordingly and if that's not possible, we can think about publishing it as a chapter in a book.

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[14] Some journals allow "gold" open access (the article is available for free without restrictions); others have "green" open access (authors can self-archive their article in a repository for free; sometimes the manuscript or even the final article); delayed open access (our article is available for free after some time); or hybrid open access (gold open access is provided for those who pay an open access publishing fee).

[15] The quality of many open access journals has been questioned many times because some accept money for publishing and have no proper peer review. This puts all the quality on author because there is no quality check. On the other hand not even a proper peer review will find many problems if the author conceals them well. You can check the *Directory of Open Access Journals* here https://doaj.org/ to check the quality of the open access journals. Or you can check the Beall's List of potentially (or definitely) problematic so called "predatory" scholarly open-access publishers here: http://scholarlyoa.com/publishers/. Authors should however be aware that no white or blacklist is enough (see Berger & Cirasella, 2015). We still need our own critical thinking to decide how much to trust the resource we read. And to be fair, even prestigious publishers sometimes publish rubbish articles (see e.g. Sokal, 1996 or Bohannon, 2013).

- *Length of peer review process and publication lag.* The time between sending an article and it being published can be one or two months (in some open access journals just days), or even more than two years. We should therefore think about how long we're willing to wait. If our article will become outdated or the results should be published quickly then choosing a journal that offers a quick peer review process and accepts a relatively high percentage of articles should be our choice. Journals with more issues per year are often quicker and open access journals also tend to be quicker.
- *Get inspired by the special publications on how to publish in your field.* For example in psychology there is a great guide written by Sternberg and Sternberg (2010) and one by APA (2010), while in addiction science there's one by Babor et al. (2008).

Conclusion

"Took a little time to get where I wanted
It took a little time to get free
It took a little time to be honest
It took a little time to be me"
("Courage" by *Villagers*; written by C. O'Brien, 2015)

In the real world dilemmas are often even more difficult to solve than this article suggests because the real world is always more colourful than any paper can describe. On many occasions we have to choose between numerous ethical principles that all seem to be similarly relevant. I wish authors the courage to solve these dilemmas so publication quality does not suffer. This may sometimes mean that our careers will be slower than those of people who care less about it. But I believe that the most important thing is not to lose our good name by selling our soul to the devil—whether that's pressure from our institution or the sponsor of our research. It takes time to be free and to be honest to ourselves and other people as the song by *Villagers* proposes. However, it takes much less time to lose all this if we give up on the quality of our writing.

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