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Doing the right thing to get diamonds? Professional challenges and moral dilemmas

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Andringa et al. (2024) offer us very persuasive, clearly articulated arguments about how to address what is, surely, one of the most pressing issues for anyone who cares about sharing knowledge or about justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion (JEDI). The source of the challenge that faces us lies long ago in our publishing culture, and as such, it runs very deep. Navigating these waters is going to take courage and collaborative effort so that individuals are not vulnerable. Andringa et al. (2024) make a powerful rallying call for us to unify.

The authors shine a sobering light on the topic, though some of the issues and recommendations remain far from straightforward. Here, I provide personal and professional reactions, which reinforce many of the authors' points but also problematise them with a view to informing concrete steps towards diamond open access.

Like Andringa et al. (2024), I believe that individuals are accountable for making informed choices in their approaches to this issue, and so I situate myself as an individual: I have been a leader and practitioner of open scholarship in relation to: materials and data infrastructure for the field (Marsden, 2020); instruments and data with students and early career researchers (Bell et al., 2022; Dudley et al., in press; Finlayson et al., 2023; O'Reilly & Marsden, 2023); teaching resources (<https://resources.ldpedagogy.org/>, Marsden & Hawkes, 2023); and accessible summaries of research (Alferink & Marsden, 2023). On the other hand, *diamond* open access publication has certainly been less of a forte, with only one such publication to my name (Bovolenta & Marsden, 2021), another forthcoming, and this one. Perhaps 'worse' – and at the same time one of the endeavours I found most stimulating and of which I am most proud – is that I was at the helm of a

hybrid journal (*Language Learning*, Wiley), as associate editor (2015–2019) then journal editor (2019–2022). I am a senior professor at a university in the north-west of the globe at an institution deemed to be relatively well-funded.

In sum, I am among those that Andringa et al. (2024) call to account. I can't be alone in wanting to reconcile myself with my past and move forward. Although I did *not* “forget about [open access] in my enthusiasm to develop other open science practices” (p. 2) – indeed, now almost everything I author is open access either via ‘big deals’ with hybrid journals or pre/postprints (both routes appropriately critiqued by Andringa et al. 2024) –, I now take this opportunity to explore some of the tensions that make *diamond* open access one of the more complex challenges of open scholarship. As Marsden & Morgan-Short (2023a) conclude, “open access to findings that are free to be published and to be read is what is most urgently needed to achieve better equity in the global knowledge economy; however, open access publication, as things stand, involves a more complex set of professional and personal choices for authors, reviewers, and editors [relative to our choices to make materials and data etc. open].” (p. 373). For further discussion, see Marsden & Morgan-Short (2023a, appendix; and 2023b).

1 On the dilemmas of flipping a journal to a diamond model

I am persuaded by the observation that hybrid models can be harmful and by the call to flip journals to diamond models. Only journals that are not owned by the publisher can flip with the journal's name intact. There are a handful of such journals in the field (for example, *The Modern Language Journal* belongs to NFMLTA; *Language Learning* to the Language Learning Research Club at the University of Michigan; *Foreign Language Annals* to ACTFL). If I had been physically and mentally able – after three years with a new manuscript submitted almost daily – to extend my term as journal editor, I would have argued to move to a diamond model when the next Wiley contract expired. I will continue to encourage the board of directors to consider this option carefully. But this requires some very hard choices, lying in tension with activities that need money: offering research grants for students and early career researchers (a very rare funding source); appropriately compensating the editorial team; and paying for high quality copyeditors. The answers are not easy. And journals that are not owned by a publisher are not the only ones that could act: The many journals that *are* owned by their publishers also face a choice. They could take their editorial teams and reputations to re-establish themselves under a different journal name with a diamond model.

1.1 Ways forward?

- We could canvas the field: where relevant, how should we prioritise between diamond open access *versus* grants, awards, and well-supported editorial teams?
- We can push and support our professional associations to take on the now small (as explained by Andringa et al., 2024) financial burden of hosting journals that are accessible to all. For example, an AAAL committee, such as JEDI, might lead the way, and existing journals wanting to flip could be prime candidates to move under the wing of professional associations.
- One of the trump cards held by large publishers is their marketing networks, which perpetuate their hegemony over citation indices and make established journals fearful of flipping. There are perhaps two steps we could take: (1) It is *we* who cite each other's work, so, as Andringa et al. (2024) suggest, "Authors can include the accessibility of sources as one of the criteria in choosing what references to include in their own work", thus providing a carrot to established journals to flip so as to maintain their visibility; (2) We can prepare ourselves: with today's digital infrastructures and communications, it would be a relatively small undertaking to gather the contact emails for university libraries throughout the world – indeed, artificial intelligence may oblige. Those who host the flipped journals (e.g., institutions or professional associations) can prepare for the change by asking libraries to connect to the diamond version of the journal. Libraries are becoming adept at accommodating such moves.
- So that *all* articles in a journal can be published open access, we can push the paymasters of the 'big deals' and the publishers to ensure that waivers for Article Processing Charges (APC) are available for researchers who cannot pay them. This model has already been systematically introduced by many [Cambridge University Press journals](#), allowing them to give the following reassurance: "Prospective authors should submit with full confidence, knowing that no author will face a financial barrier to publication in this journal." This inclusive Gold model, which essentially re-distributes the funds provided by big deals, could drive other publishers to follow suit, as they are likely to want to compete with the increased citations and visibility that such a move should bring.

2 On the dilemmas of publishing in diamond journals

The vast majority of senior academics' work is co-authored with early career researchers who need to progress in their careers, which largely involves publishing in 'high-quality' venues. To improve the perceived quality of diamond journals, senior academics publishing in them can enhance the visibility and citations of the journal. But publishing in those venues, as they stand, is not usually in the best *short-term* interests for our early career co-authors, yet publishing in them *is* in the best long-term interests of

the *future profession*. The “Catch-22” is clear. To illustrate, when my early career colleagues are job searching, they want – with some good reason – articles in ‘Q1’ journals (with impact factors in the top quartile). As a result, we sometimes agree to submit to hybrid journals, some of which embargo post-prints for 12 or 24 months – two of the very characteristics that can impede progress towards field-wide diamond publishing.

A second illustration of the challenges is as follows: A PhD student and I decided to submit an article to a special issue which was an excellent fit for our work, to be published by a Sage journal (Pan & Marsden, 2024). Once accepted, we learned that the publishers’ deal to pay the APCs is only applicable if the first or corresponding author’s *primary* affiliation is an institution included in the deal. The student’s home institution in China – upon which the student relies for career progression and project funding – demanded to be the primary affiliation. As Chinese institutions are not covered by the publishers’ deal and the publisher would not make an exception to their policy, the article must sit behind a paywall.

A final challenge that I frequently encounter is when I am invited to write about open scholarship in venues that are paywalled – the irony is obvious. What to do? On the one hand, the community (a) needs to read about these issues, (b) is still effectively reached by commercial outlets, and (c) arguably, readers of commercially published material constitute the very audience that needs to be reached. On the other hand, publishing in these venues perpetuates the problem. Luckily, my WEIRD (Western, Educated, from Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic; Henrich et al., 2010) institution can pay APCs for books and chapters to be made open access. But, as argued by Andringa et al. 2024, this model exacerbates the commercial publishers’ hegemony.

In these situations, one approach is to go ‘green’ – make pre and post prints available, as Al-Hoorie & Marsden (in press) recently had to, and see publications flagged * in the References. To facilitate this approach, groups of universities in England (e.g., ‘the N8’) stipulate that all employees retain the rights to their publications, allowing them to make all pre- and post-prints available systematically on cross-institutional, fully open repositories (e.g., White Rose Research Online). However, the green route also has problems. First, publishers can sometimes impose embargoes on postprints (though to my knowledge publishers have not historically challenged such Right Retention policies). Second, and more critically, pre- and post-prints further exacerbate impediments to establishing diamond journals, partly because they increase citations to the existing commercial journals whose model thrives upon those very citations.

2.1 Ways forward?

- Senior academics could ensure specifically *diamond* open access publications are rewarded in career progression metrics and explore *efficient* ways (other than journal metrics) of determining quality, perhaps drawing more on referees from the field

and/or facilitating sufficient time in our professional infrastructures to allow evaluators to actually read publications for themselves.

- We need institutional and governmental leaders to (continue to) work to improve *global* understanding of more equitable publication models and agree *unilateral* routes forwards.
- Senior academics could submit to diamond journals when junior colleagues' careers are not vulnerable. But, crucially, established academics probably need to reach a consensus to focus their collective expertise – as authors, reviewers, and editors – on *a small number of diamond journals*, so as to retain quality and concentrate efforts on journals that are not predatory.
- We could all begin to accept that our work will receive less proof-reading and have lower quality aesthetics. As a case in point, I noticed several typos in the lead article. But the errors are less important to me than the fact that hearing those authors' voices was not reliant on their ability to pay. Authors will need time and support to take more responsibility for publication quality. For Bovolenta and Marsden (2021), the first author took about three or four hours to format it according to the guidelines for a new diamond journal (*Language Development Research*), so that free software could type-set it. I hope that this is a time-cost that our research infrastructures can afford.

I conclude with a note of caution. Open access – and open scholarship more broadly – cannot, *per se*, address much more powerful causes of inequity (Marsden & Morgan-Short, 2023b). And the very nature of Intellectual Property is likely to engender competition between academics, institutions, journals, and nations. As a result, some research entities will always be better funded than others, and so the playing field will probably never level. But I am with Andringa et al. (2024): Diamond publication models mean that a key aspect of our own behaviours is not an unnecessary perpetrator of a vicious circle of inequity.

Author contributions

Emma Marsden: Conceptualization; writing – original draft; writing – review and editing.

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Supporting information

None.

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