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EDITORIAL

Avoiding scholarly offences in academic publishing

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The increasing evidence of deception, falsification of data, results or findings, plagiarism, or slippery analysis in scholarly publications is one of the many challenges in modern academic publishing. At the same time, there is not only increasing competition between publishers but also immense pressure on scholars and research groups to produce more, better (as measured by a variety of criteria), and more widely cited, research. And then there are those old-fashioned souls seeking to uphold ideals of scholarly rigour and accessibility. But theirs may be a losing battle as a recent *Guardian* article highlighted vividly, in showing how scholarly crimes have burgeoned, including the growth of paper mills (https://www.theguardian.com/science/2024/feb/03/the-situation-has-become-appalling-fake-scientific-papers-push-research-credibility-to-crisis-point?CMP=share_btn_fb).

A 'paper mill' is an organisation that produces counterfeit manuscripts which, at first glance, resemble genuinely researched scholarly articles – and here, of course, Artficial Intelligence (AI) is a valuable source. Some researchers have argued paper mills have proliferated in recent years, but the evidence, beyond a few very famous cases, is a trifle mixed. There is certainly a confirmation that fake articles from paper mills are being submitted to scholarly journals as if they are the output of academic research. As the *Guardian* recently noted, citing Oxford academic Dorothy Bishop,

> .... in many fields it is becoming difficult to build up a cumulative approach to a subject, because we lack a solid foundation of trustworthy findings. And it's getting worse and worse. (*Guardian* February 3 2024)

Other examples of growing scholarly crime include falsification of results, duplication of articles, and seemingly purposive incorrect citations or sources of evidence. All of this has become easier to do with the ever-increasing use of the internet but so too have capabilities to identify and highlight these kinds of academic offences.

The establishment of organisations such as Retraction Watch (https://retractionwatch.com/) since 2010 has come about precisely because of this diffusion of evident unethical behaviours and sometimes downright deceptiveness – fabrication, plagiarism, or distortion of evidence or analysis. What Retraction Watch does is to record all retractions by scholarly journals, noting the reasons for retraction, the sub-discipline, and the geographical location of the authors whose work has been retracted – or found to have been problematic. Retraction Watch records the public misdemeanours as systematic and widespread bogus authorship, poor journal review practices, plagiarism, falsified results, or mismatch between article title and article evidence.

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Research on the impact of COVID-19, for example, was particularly fruitful for identifying serious issues. Retraction Watch has identified over 400 articles related to COVID-19 that have been removed (retracted) after publication by journal editors. Now of itself, in this era where careers live or die through some defined ever-increasing quantum of publications in the 'right' journals, and where the pressure to publish, to be widely cited, and to gain lots of research funding, is immense, it is not surprising that mistakes are made or boundaries stretched. What organisations like Retraction Watch have found, though, is that in many cases, the 'mistakes' are systematic and the duplications are surprisingly frequent. This is a nightmare for the authors who are found out but equally a daunting fear of the journal editor who let such offences through, who missed the falsified table or the mismatched graph. To have allowed this to happen to a journal which has built up trust and respect in the community of scholars who are its readers, could be a devastating blow.

So far, the evidence suggests that the vast majority of scholarly indiscretions have taken place in the physical and natural sciences, fields where pressures for commercialisation and profit are great. Indeed, in the initial draft of this editorial, I asserted that, for us in economics, policy, labour studies, sociology of work, industrial relations, and the like, there was some hope. However, even in the first few days of February 2024, Retraction Watch highlighted an immensely embarrassing falsification of data in an economic paper in a very high-impact journal; the authors found they had a database with a lot of empty spaces in it, so they simply filled in those empty spaces as they saw fit, well beyond the usual manipulations. Similar stories are emerging regularly.

So, what does this say about the future of scholarship? How can journals demonstrate to their readers that they are genuinely ensuring the scholarship and integrity of their journals?

This is where another emergent organisation is worth recognising. Hidden away in the this journal's home page is a reference to our membership of the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) (https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/the-economic-and-labour-relations-review/information/journal-policies). COPE was started over 25 years ago when academic publishing became ever-more evidently commercial and profit-oriented. COPE seeks to assist journals, researchers, universities, and publishers alike, with guidance and structures for ensuring the integrity of scholarly literature, seeking:

> to bring the two worlds of universities/research institutes and journals/publishers together, to help us solve the publication ethics problems we share, and promote integrity in research publishing better, fostering a culture of responsibility for the integrity . . . (https://publicationethics.org/membership/universities-research-institutes)

COPE produces very thorough guidelines on how to support and advise peer reviewers and how to ensure honesty and integrity throughout the research, submission, and publication process. Not only that, these are dynamic and wide-reaching guidelines with case examples and a broad use of members' experiences – both exemplary and horrifying (https://publicationethics.org/core-practices). In other words, COPE can be seen as a hub for journals/publishers, research organisations, editors and authors dealing with, new and difficult challenges.

Like many others, I had always thought of COPE as a 'good thing' but probably rather 'dyed-in-the-wool' with one-size-fits-all approaches and other clichéd advice. However, just as we received our fourth (halleluia!) Call For Papers (CFPs) for a Themed Collection (TC) in as many months (see below for a section on our CFPs for TCs!), someone raised with me that Themed Collections might leave an academic journal open to questions of peer review problems, competing interests, and self-promotion. Now, we at *The Economic and Labour Relations Review* (*ELRR*) are rather sure this is not the case for us. It is some years since we produced a 'Special Issue' but rather have tended to go with only a part of any

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issue with a Guest Edited TC (with full oversight from the Editor-in-Chief [EIC], the journal's Editorial Group, the Ediiral Board members who act as Associate Editors, and who choose peer reviewers).

Indeed, look at our wonderful TCs in 2023 (two symposia in honour of Geoff Harcourt (in the March and June issues), Labour Conflict, Forms of Organisation (in September), and Class Platforms in the City: Spaces and Alliances for the Renewal of Social Movements in the Platform Economy (December)); they all produced collections of top-notch international articles. The TCs comprise about a half to a third of the articles in those issues and include an introductory article by the Guest Editor(s) of that TC; the remaining articles in the journal covered the scholarly melting pot of ideas encompassed within the scope of ELRR (https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/the-economic-and-labour-relations-review).

However, once someone raises an unexpected query, such as my colleague questioning the rigour and integrity of TCs, one's tendency is to worry and doubt until we are sure we have done the right thing. In this case, I was saved from too much worry by reference to a COPE discussion paper, Best Practices for Guest Edited Collections (https://publicationethics.org/resources/discussion-documents/guest-edited-collections).

This is where COPE is invaluable to harried editorial teams. The 10-page document describes and discusses all the risks of malpractice or sloppy scholarship in Guest Edited TCs, and then offers structures and procedures to avoid them. It emphasises the need for clarity of expectations for Guest Editors and the centrality of EIC editorial oversight. When we compared what we have done in our TCs, it became evident that ELRR does indeed effect appropriate processes and structures for ensuring the integrity of our TCs – although to be honest, we need more formal documentation – something already started.

It is evident that the publication of good scholarly research is being battered on several fronts, but so far, we at *ELRR* have avoided some of the challenges and offences noted above, not only in separate original articles but also those in TCs. Arguably, we have achieved this through the journal's long-term unwavering commitment to rigorous peer review, as set down by the *ELRR* founding editors, John Nevile and David Plowman, and their colleagues. Despite increasing pressures on academics, the different editorial groups within the journal have also depended on good links between authors, the journal's Associate Editors, and the (unknown) peer reviewers. It is a demanding process, sometimes, having to contact 10 or 15 scholars, just to find 2 reviewers willing to 'blind-review' an article, not knowing if the author they are reviewing is a grand old woman of the discipline or a late-stage PhD from a rural university in a distant country. So – yet again – we find ourselves deeply grateful to the peer reviewers; they may appear slightly defensive against the perils of hollowed out universities, paper mills, profit motives, and over-ambitious dishonest scholars, but, so far, our Associate Editors and peer reviewers have ensured good, indeed great, scholarship for the journal. Maintaining that rigour and surety will be at the forefront of our efforts – not something new but increasingly important and challenging.

Calls for papers

I noted above that as of the first week in February, we have four CFPs. It is perhaps a record to have four CFPs out at the same time, but they are projected over the next 18 months, and they certainly cover a very broad range of topics (and in this respect, thank you to the wonderful Cambridge University Press (CUP) marketing staff for giving a [right-hand] sidebar just for CFPs on the journal's home page; https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/the-economic-and-labour-relations-review).

The first to be published will be under the guest editorship of Michael Quinlan and Mike Belzer exploring the **Economics of Occupational Health and Safety (OHS)** to be published in September 2024. It will seek to cover all economic aspects of OHS taken from a wide

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perspective, including comparative analysis, the political economy of OHS regulation or death/disaster and all the complexities of modern supply chains, contracting and precarious/informal sector work, or the association between pay and safety, including particular industries or sectors, economic factors driving OHS, and economic welfare consequences of OHS externalities.

In December 2024, and perhaps beyond, the TC will be under the guest editorship of Raja Junankar. **Working future: The Australian Government's Agenda on jobs and opportunities – foundations and prospects** took its impetus from the Australian Government comprehensive White Paper on jobs and opportunities issued in September 2023. The extensive White Paper contained a labour market reform agenda, with the foundation assumption that the government was 'working to create an economy where everyone who wants a job is able to find one without having to search too long. These should be decent jobs that are secure and fairly paid' (p. vii).

The Guest Editors for March 2025 TC on **Indigeneity, Labour Relations, and Work** are Sharlene Leroy-Dyer, Mark Jones, and Diane Ruwhiu. These Guest Editors note in the CFP that there has been a lack of Indigenous voices in academic literature on labour and workplace relations so that TC will seek to amplify Indigenous voices, knowledge, and perspectives, on any aspect of labour relations and work. Topics for publication could include settler colonialism and Indigenous labour studies, business and employment, as well as the protection of the working rights of Indigenous peoples, colonial power and labour relations, and discrimination and exclusion.

The most recent CFP, and also included in this issue, explores **Gender and Work: Emerging Issues** and comes from Yuvisthi Naidoo, ELRR Emerita Editor Anne Junor and Assistant Editor Tanya Carney. The purpose of this call for papers is to assemble a stocktake, assessing progress towards gender equality in work, paid and unpaid, formal and informal. To this end, they seek articles with a theoretical, policy, or empirical focus to analyse a specific issue of gender and work, or offer a case study or evaluation of a gender and work initiative, drawing out its implications for policy and practice, or offer new evidence on any aspect of gender and work.

So, what is in the March 2024 issue?

This issue has fewer articles than usual, but what a wonderful array of methodologies, theories, and explorations! The first article begins by noting the long hours, lower pay, and major challenges to safe working conditions for long-distance truck drivers in the USA. **Belzer** and **Ju** in **Follow the Money: Trucker Pay Incentives, Working Time, and Safety** explore the complex relationship between regulatory violations, pay incentives, and crashes. They seek to determine the effects of economic forces on carrier safety, using a very significant data source from 13,904 intrastate trucking companies in the USA, as well as median hourly truck driver wages from data published by the Bureau of Labor Statistics. They find, *inter alia*, that higher pay is a significant factor in improving safety.

Another invaluable OHS study, this time based on qualitative research, comes from **Makri**, **Walters**, **Wadsworth**, **Devereux**, and **Burg** in their fascinating short paper **Occupational health and safety in aquaculture: organisation of work and employment in small seaweed farms in North West Europe**. Looking at wider contextual factors, including enterprise size, economic, and business relations and forms of employment arrangements, they explore the impact of OSH risks in the emerging seaweed industry in North West Europe. Noting the predominance of micro and small enterprises which have limited capacity to address risks and problems, the authors point to the need for both better orchestration of public and private regulatory influences, and further research to determine if strategies that are seen as successful in other sectors could be transferred to the growing European seaweed industry.

Khandan, **Malek**, **Sadati**, and **Haddad Moghadam** have sought to base analysis of the pressures for and costs of retirement in Iran, given the complexities of that country's

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economy. In **Pension Policies and Early Retirement: New Evidence from a Counterfactual Analysis in Iran**, the authors draw on a dataset of Iran's Social Security Organization (ISSO), including 267,000 newly retired over two time periods, and then use counterfactual evaluation to identify potential costs and alternative pressures. The findings show that ISSO's retirement rules and other legislation determining the age of exit and benefit eligibilities clearly increase the retirement probability, with significant policy implications.

The article by **Pérez-Montiel**, **Manera**, **Navinés**, and **Franconetti**, titled **Pension Policies and Early Retirement: New Evidence from a Counterfactual Analysis in Iran**, explores the dynamics of the profit rate of non-financial firms in the USA between 1945 and 2020, noting particularly the sharp break from the 1970s which heralded the liberalisation and globalisation of markets. This left the US productive sector at the mercy of an unstoppable growth of imports. The authors show how increasing foreign competition forced firms to invest and increase their productive capacity, even when they continued to lose domestic and foreign markets, with concomitant impacts on the productive capacity utilisation, capital productivity, and rate of profit.

Also taking a broad perspective, **Woźniak-Jęchorek**, **Woźniak-Jasińska**, **Lewoniewski**, and **Kirov** employ cutting-edge big data-type tools and machine-based automatic text processing to delve into the topics, arguments, and postulates related to Industry 4.0 strategies by trade unions and employers' organisations, in order to understand what will shape social dialogue in France and Germany. In the article **Industry 4.0: a bibliometric analysis of social partners' public messages in France and Germany**, the authors note that dialogues of both France and Germany centre around workers' rights, working conditions, and skills training.

In another broad-ranging and unusual approach, **Tche** seeks to use Keynes' Finance Circuit and some subsequent post-Keynesian findings, to model complete causality tests, drawing on data from the World Development Indicators database covering 32 African countries, for the period from 1990 to 2021. In **Keynes' Finance Circuit Model on Banks in Africa**, the author shows how policymakers could design policies that will stimulate economic growth within a post-Keynesian endogenous money supply framework in developing countries in Africa.

In their article entitled **Individual social capital and expectations of career advancement**, **Rungo**, **Sánchez-Santos**, and **Pena-López** explore the links between class/social capital and expectations of career advancement, in order to identify determinants of labour market outcomes, noting that expectations are a function of class habitus. Drawing on a valuable survey, the authors show that the ability to mobilise network resources is positively linked with both measures of career advancement. However, access to the upper class is only positively associated with expecting a pay rise.

Colom Andrés and **Molés Machí** draw mainly on a bivariate probit model to evaluate the determinants for young workers in Spain in terms of labour market participation and access to independence living away from the family home, in their article **Gender Gap in Residential Independence and Employment of Young People**. They showed that while young women have a higher rate of residential independence than men, other traditional labour market factors limit young women's participation and involvement in work.

Paweenawat and **Liao** note that Thailand offers an interesting developing country case study investigating the return on skills and polarisation, using the Labour Force Survey (LFS) from 1985 to 2020, in their article **Brain over Brawn: Job Polarisation, Structural Change, and Skill Prices**. They quantify the contribution of changes in the skill requirement and highlight the increase in the return on the 'brain' and the decrease in the penalty on 'brawn', which helps explain the wage distribution changes across different time periods.

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We have a highly provocative *Contested Terrains* article from economist **John Quiggin**, who traces changing Australian government approaches to economic growth and full employment, using federal government White Papers and other indications of policy priorities, starting from the 1940s postwar idealism for full employment achieved under the policies set out by the Curtin and Chifley governments. As Quiggin concludes in his *Contested Terrains* article, **Full Employment and Working Future**, '.... if the policy framework that has prevailed since the 1990s is left unchanged, this opportunity [for achieving employment goals and decent work] will pass us by. Sooner or later, contractionary monetary policy will produce a return to high unemployment, with a corresponding upward adjustment to the NAIRU.' Some definite debate potential here – for some!

The last article in this issue is by Emerita Editor, **Anne Junor**, who offers an inspiring and heartfelt obituary of union organiser, feminist, and activist, Fran Hayes. For those seeking a model of integrity commitment and activism, Junor's eulogy in **Frances Hayes, 8 November 1953–11 December 2023**, is exemplary.

Good wishes to all for integrity, rigour, and collegiality in your policy or scholarly endeavours in 2024.

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