

An Editor's Fear: Could Fraudulent or Problematic Articles Appear in *AJPOR*?

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One major concern of every journal editor is that an article will be published that has serious unrecognized flaws. Despite peer and editorial review, it is possible that an article could have flaws that no one in the reviewing process – peer reviewers, editors, etc. – detected. Honest researchers can make mistakes that are not obvious to the reviewers but become obvious after publication. If this happens, retractions can usually fix the mistake, although depending on the journal and the situation, sometimes corrections or amendments are made (Resnik & Dinse, 2013; Barbour et al., 2017).

A more serious concern is that a completely fraudulent article could be published. In October 2021, *Higher Education Quarterly* published a completely fabricated article (Kelderman, 2021). The article was similar to earlier fabricated articles that were published by various journals. In 1996, *Social Text*, a cultural studies journal, published an article written by Alan Sokol, a physicist, that was completely fabricated but used confusing terms and an ideological argument that he thought would be persuasive to the editor (Kelderman, 2021). From 2017-2018, three authors attempted to publish fraudulent articles in journals that were focused on “grievance studies.” While their most incoherent articles were rejected, some papers that were inherently flawed and/or contained falsified data were published (Pluckrose et al., 2021). The authors of the hoax paper published in *Higher Education Quarterly* stated they will continue to attempt to publish fraudulent articles. Could something similar happen to *AJPOR*? I certainly hope not.

When I, John, was editor of *Survey Practice*, I received an article from a physicist that had many confusing statements. Further, the researcher used data that did not

quite make sense to me. He also used common statistics such as means and regressions incorrectly. I sent the article to two survey researchers who had stronger statistical skills to see if they could understand the paper. They could not, so I rejected the paper. The author resubmitted the paper with a few changes, but it was still full of errors. I rejected it again. I recommended to the author that he get some help from a social scientist to improve the paper. At the time, I attributed the problems to a physicist who wanted to publish some social science research but was not adequately trained. Later, I wondered if it was an attempt to “Sokal” *Survey Practice*.

As researchers, we hope that political, ideological, national, and other biases do not influence the *AJPOR* review process. I believe our editorial and review procedures minimize the risk of a fraudulent research being published in *AJPOR*. Academic publishing is based very much on trust – that the researchers are not attempting to publish fraudulent research and the peer reviewers and editors are conscientious and professional in reviewing articles. We are committed to keeping your trust and will continue to employ best practices to prevent a “hoax” from getting published in *AJPOR*, while recognizing the necessity of having policies in place to address concerns regarding any article. Therefore, we will continue to follow our ethical guidelines outlined on our website (ajpor.org/for-authors), which are based on the COPE Code of Conduct and Best Practice Guidelines for Journal Editors (COPE, 2011).

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Biographical Notes

John Kennedy directed the Indiana University Center for Survey Research for 24 years. He also directed the University of Hartford Institute of Social Research for two years and was employed at the US Census Bureau for four years. He earned a PhD in sociology from the Pennsylvania State University. He has been involved in the development of a number of professional journals and was the founding editor of *Survey Practice*, an e-journal published by the American Association for Public Opinion Research. He has also been actively involved in professional research ethics including chairing Indiana University Social Behavioral IRB for 12 years and he served on two committees that revised the American Sociological Associations Code of Ethics. He teaches a graduate course in Survey Design.

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