



The COPE / DOAJ / OASPA / WAME Principles of Transparency and Best Practice in Scholarly Publishing: A Critical Analysis



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Abstract: Four publishing-related organizations, the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE), the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ), the Open Access Scholarly Publishers Association (OASPA), and the World Association of Medical Editors (WAME), the first being dedicated specifically to the creation and dissemination of ethics policies, established a set of 16 principles related to journal and publisher transparency and “best” publishing practices. The first, second, third and fourth versions were published in 2013, 2015, 2018, and 2022, respectively. Membership of these organizations implies that members can only become such if they satisfy these principles. This paper compares the four versions to appreciate how the content has changed over time, as a historical endeavor to gather how publishing ethics has progressed over time. An assessment is also made to determine whether all principles are related to transparency and best principles, and if any may be missing. We concluded that the 16 principles offer broad guidance to several important aspects related to journal and publishing ethics and management. However, the vast majority are in general excessively broad, occasionally vague, or lack sufficient examples or specifics, despite the slight improvement between versions 3 and 4. We argue further that these weaknesses may limit their practical application. Until September 2022, there was no transparency regarding the consequences for any members that might violate, or not abide by, these principles. In the light of these arguments, we are of the opinion that the 16 principles of “best” publishing practices merit additional improvements.

Keywords: Accountability; authors; editors; ethics; opacity; trust.

I. What Are the COPE / DOAJ / OASPA / WAME “Principles of Transparency and Best Practice in Scholarly Publishing”?

Four organizations, the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE)¹, the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ)², the Open Access Scholarly Publishers Association

1 <https://publicationethics.org>

2 <https://doaj.org/>

(OASPA)³, and the World Association of Medical Editors (WAME)⁴, are typically associated with “scholarly” or publishing-related activities (a self-description is provided in Table 1). Collectively, they established over a decade ago, in 2013, a first version of a set of 16 “Principles of Transparency and Best Practice in Scholarly Publishing”, hereafter the “principles”, related to transparency and best publishing practices⁵. Those principles are then employed, singly or in conjunction with other criteria or principles⁶, to select members that supposedly abide by them. Membership to these organizations is not free in the case of COPE and OASPA, and membership fees can be sizeable depending on the size of the organization or the number of journals, in the case of publishers. In return for that membership, and by claiming to abide by these stated principles, members receive an “ethical brand”, and are thus perceived by the academic community to be scholarly, and thus, to some extent, safe to publish in. Therefore, by obtaining this “ethics brand,” journals and publishers are also able to attract authorship. A Google or Google Scholar search for “Principles of Transparency and Best Practice in Scholarly Publishing” reveals hits in which journals and other websites claim to adhere to or follow these principles, or even promote them (Pearson 2017; Huh 2018; Jung & Seo 2022), sometimes blindly without any critical analysis (Nho 2023). Moreover, these principles are being promoted as *sine qua non* requirements for new startup open access (OA) journals (Ndungu 2021; Ng et al. 2023), making a discussion of this topic (i.e., the COPE / DOAJ / OASPA / WAME “Principles of Transparency and Best Practice in Scholarly Publishing”) extremely important to academics submitting to a journal that claims to follow them, or any journal or publisher that is a member of one or more of these organizations. An exploration of the theory and practice of these principles is thus merited, as well a historical appreciation of how they have progressed over time. As one example of a criticism of these principles, Mzhelsky notes in the abstract that while the principles “encourages journals to establish their own policy in ‘data sharing and reproducibility’ (...) this document neither provides detailed recommendations / templates nor explains the reproducibility crisis phenomenon” (Mzhelsky 2022). Stated differently, while the principles sound good on paper, there are limitations to their application in practice. For this reason, the objective of this paper was to critically examine these principles in greater detail to appreciate their strengths and shortcomings.

3 <https://oaspa.org/>

4 <http://www.wame.org>

5 For COPE – available online at: <https://publicationethics.org/resources/guidelines-new/principles-transparency-and-best-practice-scholarly-publishing>; for the DOAJ: <https://blog.doaj.org/2018/01/15/principles-of-transparency-and-best-practice-in-scholarly-publishing-version-3/>; for OASPA: <https://wame.org/principles-of-transparency-and-best-practice-in-scholarly-publishing>; for WAME: <https://wame.org/principles-of-transparency-and-best-practice-in-scholarly-publishing>

6 For example, for COPE, there must also be adherence to the “Core practices”: <https://publicationethics.org/core-practices>

II. How Did the 16 COPE / DOAJ / OASPA / WAME Principles Change?

In Table 2, a side-by-side comparison of the text of the first three versions of 16 principles allows for changes to be observed. Only superficial, minor or cosmetic edits can generally be observed between versions 1 in 2013 and 2 in 2015, but no essential or fundamental changes in the principles, and the number of principles stayed constant in all three initial versions. The transition to version 3 in 2018 from version 2 was a bit more enhanced, in which the order of the principles and some content was modified, while some principles were expanded with more information. Whereas version 3 does not have a separate principle for conflicts of interest (COIs), i.e., disclosures, it has a “publication ethics” principle, which presumably incorporates COIs. Version 3 includes licensing with copyright whereas the previous versions only discussed copyright, suggesting a change in focus to OA.

III. Some Issues with Versions 1, 2 and 3

COPE, the DOAJ and WAME date the first, second and third versions as 10 January 2014, 22 June 2015, and 15 January 2018, respectively. Only OASPA indicates a different publication date of the first version, as 19 December 2013⁷. It could be argued that inconsistent dates might be a violation of “principle” #1 (version 3). Only version 3, as indicated by COPE, carries a digital object identifier (DOI)⁸, whereas all other versions are registered on blogs, or informally, without any DOI. It could be argued that the lack of a DOI for versions 1 and 2 constitutes a violation of “principle” #13 (version 3). It is recommended that COPE, DOAJ, OASPA, and WAME employ a dual DOI-based system to record the changes in their “principles” (past and future), for maximum transparency (Teixeira da Silva & Nazarovets 2022), and not limit the information to HTML text, which allows for unaccountable edits.

How should authors and the public (especially the wider global academic pool) interpret the order and numbering of these principles? Should #1 be interpreted as the most important principle, and #16 as the least important? If yes, then this has massive ideological ramifications because it would suggest that, for example, that “peer review” was, in 2013, considered to be the most important aspect in the eyes of COPE, DOAJ, OASPA, and WAME, although “website” became #1 in 2018. The latter possibility is highly unlikely because it is so ludicrous. Thus, the only other plausible possibility is that the creators and authors of these principles lacked sufficient originality, apparently shuffling the order of principles to give an impression of “originality.”

⁷ The September 2022 update on the COPE website clarifies that the official date of the first version is December 2013. Available online at: <https://publicationethics.org/resources/guidelines/principles-transparency-and-best-practice-scholarly-publishing>

⁸ <https://doi.org/10.24318/cope.2019.1.12>

Curiously, US spelling in versions 1 and 2 (e.g., organizations) became British spelling in version 3 (e.g., organisations), suggesting that OASPA-created (US) versions 1 and 2 became managed by a British/UK entity (COPE) in version 3. This also suggests that OASPA may have devised the first version that was then adopted by COPE, the DOAJ and WAME. There is no historical explanation by these four organizations regarding how these principles were devised, on whose ideas and input they were based (e.g., if outside individuals or academics were sourced), nor do they provide any transparent – and thus essential – discussion about how or why many of the issues debated herein, even subtle ones, such as the change in spelling from American to British, came about.

Regarding authorship, even though these “principles” are claimed to be of COPE, DOAJ, OASPA, and WAME, evidently, these organizations are themselves not humans, so it is important to know which individuals exactly wrote these principles, i.e., who authored each of these versions? Since no names are indicated on any of the three versions, we argue that this amounts to a form of ghost authorship (Teixeira da Silva & Dobránszki 2016). We encourage COPE, DOAJ, OASPA, and WAME to clearly define, as a matter of historical principle, precisely who wrote (authored) these 16 principles, if they were written (or partly written or edited) by artificial intelligence, and/or if advice or suggestions were obtained or provided by external third parties, i.e., if third parties who contributed have failed to be acknowledged. If so, then such individuals and entities should be fully and duly acknowledged, much like in an academic paper. Similar issues of “ghost (i.e., undisclosed) authorship” pertaining to official publication-related policies were recently reported for the Springer Nature policies related to “predatory” publishing (Teixeira da Silva 2023a).

IV. Version 4 (2022) of the COPE / DOAJ / OASPA / WAME “Principles of Transparency and Best Practice in Scholarly Publishing”

The fourth version of the “Principles” emerged in September 2022⁹. The fourth version, presented in both HTML and as a PDF file, as a slide-like presentation, has the following features that differ from the first three versions:

1. It carries a CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 license;
2. There are still 16 principles. Except for some minor reshuffling and rewording, most of these principles have remained unchanged. For example, principles #15 and #16 in version 3 are identical in both order and content to those in version 4. In version 3, principles #1 and #2 (i.e., “Website” and “Name of journal”, respectively) were reshuffled so that in version 4, principal #1 is “Name of journal” and principal #2 is “Website” with nearly identical wording. It must also be indicated that some principles have been rephrased to allow for some flexibility. “Publishing schedule” is one of these principles,

⁹ Described on the following websites: <https://doaj.org/apply/transparency/>; <https://oaspa.org/principles-of-transparency-and-best-practice-in-scholarly-publishing-4/>; <https://wame.org/principles-of-transparency-and-best-practice-in-scholarly-publishing>

which is principle #11 in version 3 and principle #3 in version 4. Other principles, such as “Access” (principle #12 in version 3 and #9 in version 4), have been revised to include some examples. We also note that, in contrast to version 3, the 2022 version (i.e., version 4) of the principles includes a note indicating that version 1.0 was released in December 2013 rather than January 10, 2014. Principle #16 deletes two key sentences that were present in versions 1–3;

3. Oddly, it claims to be a 2019 publication, as indicated by the requested citation on page 12 of the PDF file: “Cite this as: COPE DOAJ OASPA WAME. Principles of Transparency and Best Practice in Scholarly Publishing – English. <https://doi.org/10.24318/cope.2019.1.12>”. Its DOI is precisely the same as that which was assigned to version 3. In other words, even though the content of versions 1–3 have subtle differences, and even though version 4 is considerably different to version 3, as noted above, they are nonetheless all collectively referred to by the same DOI. We question the legitimacy of this bibliometric management, i.e., the assignment of a single DOI to multiple versions of record.

V. Critical Assessment of the Four Versions of the 16 COPE / DOAJ / OASPA / WAME “Principles”

In Table 3, the “Principles” of version 3 were critically assessed to appreciate if they were complete and clear, and if any problems, issues, deficiencies or contradictions existed (Teixeira da Silva 2023b). Suggestions as to how each principle could be improved had not been provided in that preprint because the rationale was that this task was the responsibility of these four organizations. Based on the assessment in Table 3, we – reaffirming the notes by Teixeira da Silva (2023b) – are of the belief that the 16 worded COPE, DOAJ, OASPA, and WAME “principles” are insufficient and lack specificity, are thus too broad, and lack of a consistent amount of examples for each “principle” to render them practically useful, even though version 4 added a number of links that did not exist in version 3. Consequently, we believe that they cannot be used, with any level of accuracy, to determine whether a journal, publisher or other member organization is academic, scholarly, or otherwise legitimate. In other words, it is difficult to appreciate if members of these organizations are following, or violating, these 16 principles, or to what extent they might be respecting or violating them. There is no transparency regarding how cases of violations of these principles are handled, and no public records exist. It can thus be argued that this lack of transparency by COPE, DOAJ, OASPA, and WAME suggests that these organizations are not in conformity with their own stated “best” practices that are in place for their own members.

Given this, three additional important questions arise:

1. Should members’ violations of “principles” be retroactively applied? For example, if a journal or publisher became a member in 2023, but if there is evidence of violations

of “principles” in 2013, 2015, or 2018, how should these be considered? Conversely, should a member’s practices in 2016 be judged based on the 2013, 2015, 2018 or 2022 “principles”? Should any member’s practices prior to 2013 when the first version came to exist, be judged? According to legal theory and the *‘lex retro non agit’* principle, a law is not retroactive. When applied to the 16 principles, a member’s practices prior to 2013 cannot be evaluated because there were no principles at that time. Thus, practices performed in 2016 should be evaluated using the 2015 version of the principles, and if a publisher becomes a member in 2023, its practices should only be evaluated since the inception of its membership.

2. If a paying member is in violation of a “principle”, and there is a complaint by an author or a member of the public of that member, how are COPE, DOAJ, OASPA, and WAME able to set aside ideological and financial COIs in order to address complaints neutrally, objectively, and without bias? One public affidavit suggests that this might not be possible for COPE (e.g., Maceachern 2018)¹⁰.

3. If a DOAJ member that is not, for example, a COPE member, is in violation of one or more of the latest (version 4) principles, is the DOAJ exclusively responsible for holding it accountable, or is COPE responsible, or are the four organizations collectively responsible, given that these are the COPE / DOAJ / OASPA / WAME principles?

VI. Select Case Studies of COPE Members’ Questionable “Best” Publishing “Principles”

COPE quite adamantly claims that the 16 principles are useful for identifying fake journals¹¹. The proof of this claim was indirectly “tested” with select case studies of some prominent COPE members.

The first example is of Hindawi, an OA publisher that was purchased by Wiley in 2021, when version 3 of the “principles” were enacted. Hindawi / Wiley thus affirmed to follow those “principles,” based on which authors trusted this publisher and its journals. However, by 2023, after extreme cases of unscholarly publishing activity were detected, despite claiming implicitly or explicitly to have followed version 4 of the “principles,” thousands of papers were retracted, leading Wiley to abandon the Hindawi brand in December 2023¹². This situation creates a context of mistrust in the COPE / DOAJ / OASPA / WAME “principles.” Were authors who submitted to Hindawi (and then Wiley) journals in the 2013–2023 period, when versions 1–4 of these principles were being marketed, being fed misleading branding or marketing? Why then should academics

10 <https://www.universityaffairs.ca/opinion/in-my-opinion/failure-to-cope/> (16 February, 2018).

11 <https://publicationethics.org/news/identifying-fake-journals> (6 April, 2023).

12 For some background on this case: <https://retractionwatch.com/2023/12/06/wiley-to-stop-using-hindawi-name-amid-18-million-revenue-decline/>; <https://retractionwatch.com/2023/12/19/hindawi-reveals-process-for-retracting-more-than-8000-paper-mill-articles/>

believe that these 16 “principles” are being followed by all other COPE / DOAJ / OASPA / WAME member journals, and has the Hindawi / Wiley case instilled an inflection point in the academic community’s level of trust in these organizations’ ethics branding of their member journals and publishers? Despite claims of adherence to these 16 COPE / DOAJ / OASPA / WAME principles by Hindawi / Wiley, in retrospect, should authors have submitted to Hindawi journals in 2013–2023?

*PLOS ONE*¹³, a gold OA mega-journal, did not (until February 2024) include an author proof stage in its publishing scheme because it aims to publish articles as quickly as possible by avoiding detailed copyediting and typesetting proofs¹⁴. The article processing charge (APC) for *PLOS ONE* ranges from \$US1006–2290 per article, depending on the article type¹⁵. We wonder whether it is a good or ethical publishing practice to ask for so much money when subpar publishing services are/were provided?

Elsevier’s 44 “mirror” journals, which offer an OA counter-part to the original print versions, include the exact same aims, scope, and editorial board, but between 2019 and 2023, the APCs of 18 journals was lowered while the 2023 APCs of 22 journals are not shown (Ansorge, 2023). Is this “mirror” journal marketing strategy, which in principle could create a companion “X” journal for any existing non-OA journal, a “best” publishing practice?

Even though we (and others) view editorial independence as a bedrock and cornerstone of academic publishing, in the case of Taylor & Francis, which adheres to English libel laws, the forceful prohibition of the publication of articles that were editorially accepted, out of fear of being sued (Kahr et al. 2019) does not, in our view, seem to be a “best” publishing practice.

VII. Discussion

VII.1. Does COPE / DOAJ / OASPA / WAME membership and adherence to the 16 principles guarantee scholarly conduct and academic quality control?

Before version 4 of the principles existed, and when this paper was first drafted and preprinted (Teixeira da Silva 2023b), the first three versions of the COPE, HTML and PDF copies of the principles, as well as the DOAJ and WAME HTML copies stated no license pertaining to the use of the text of these principles, although the OASPA website indicated a creative commons (CC) BY 4.0 license¹⁶, so all text that was used in that preprint and

13 <https://publicationethics.org/members/plos-one>

14 <https://retractionwatch.com/2024/03/21/exclusive-plos-one-to-correct-1000-papers-add-author-proof-step/>

15 <https://plos.org/publish/fees/>

16 The OASPA website footer states “All site content, except where otherwise noted, is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution License”. No such statement exists for the COPE, DOAJ, or WAME websites, including for these 16 principles.

in this paper was used verbatim under the OASPA licensing note. It was argued that, according to version 3 of those principles, that the lack of a clearly stated license by COPE, the DOAJ and WAME in versions 1–3 was a violation of principle #7. However, version 4 now clearly states that information can be used as a CC BY 4.0 license, and has thus been used for the comparisons in Table 2. Based on this CC BY 4.0 licensed text, we provide a self-description of the four organizations in Table 1.

Who are the current COPE, DOAJ, OASPA, and WAME members, how many are there, and is membership free? Membership lists could be found for COPE¹⁷, DOAJ¹⁸, OASPA¹⁹, and WAME²⁰. Whereas WAME membership is free²¹, there is an annual membership fee for journals and/or publishers wishing to join COPE²² and OASPA²³. The DOAJ is currently (2024) 80% financially supported by sponsors' donations²⁴. In the case of OASPA members, annual publishing revenue²⁵ cannot be publicly verified, suggesting that those publishers for which annual revenue is not clearly indicated on their websites are in violation of principle #14 (versions 3 and 4). The same would apply to COPE members. In other words, journals and publishers are paying these organizations (at least, in the case of COPE and OASPA) a fee to become a member, to advertise compliance to the 16 “Principles of Transparency and Best Practice in Scholarly Publishing,” and to thus give would-be authors an ethics-based reason to trust these organizations, as well as this ethics branding, with their intellect and also funding (for example, investment of APCs). However, the Hindawi / Wiley, *PLOS ONE*, Elsevier and Taylor & Francis cases we mentioned briefly above may have dismantled this marketing strategy, leaving academics in a growing state of mistrust.

VII.2. What Literature Has Been Published on the COPE / DOAJ / OASPA / WAME Principles?

A 2013 editorial was discovered in which the first version of the principles was

17 <https://publicationethics.org/members> (14,164 members indicated on April 17, 2024)

18 <https://doaj.org/search/journals> (20,444 open access journals indicated on April 17, 2024)

19 <https://oaspa.org/membership/members/> (226 members calculated on April 17, 2024; including commercial and non-commercial)

20 <https://www.wame.org/journals-whose-editors-belong-to-wame> (not calculated; see WAME note regarding members and false indexing)

21 <https://www.wame.org/membership>

22 <https://publicationethics.org/cope-membership-subscription-fees>

23 <https://oaspa.org/membership/membership-dues/>. OASPA appears to have now deleted that website, relegating its information into the historical archives. Fortunately, a public archive exists at the Internet Archive: https://web.archive.org/web/2024000000000*/https://www.oaspa.org/membership/membership-dues/

24 <https://doaj.org/support/supporters/>

25 As had been indicated on the membership dues page: “Size of Professional Publishing Organisations is determined by total annual publishing revenue (Small = below €500,000; Medium = between €500,000 and €5,000,000; Large = between €5,000,000 and €100,000,000; Very Large = above €100,000,000).”

published by Awais (Awais 2013). No source is indicated, nor is it clear if COPE, DOAJ, OASPA, and WAME gave this editor special permission to republish the content, absent any citation to any source. Given this instance, we wonder, how many other “editors” and journals, possibly of member organizations, have cloned these principles? Awais (Awais 2013) claims that the DOAJ authored the initial version of the principles, although no link was provided to that source.

Choi and colleagues (Choi et al. 2019), analyzing a set of 718 journals (originally selected from Clarivate’s Science Citation Index Expanded) and assessing 33 items that were subdivided from the original 16 principles, found massive variation among journals in terms of compliance with these principles. As one example, they found that 596 out of the 718 journals did not specify the form of peer review conducted, i.e., only 27% compliance for this principle. As another example, at most, 20% of journals provided information about their profit model, i.e., revenue sources, advertising or direct marketing. In all cases, there was great variability depending on the geographic origin of the journals. Choi and colleagues (Choi et al. 2019) concluded that 10 of the 33 sub-items were not effectively practiced. Kim and Choi (Kim & Choi 2019) found that 85% of 1689 Asia-based DOAJ-indexed journals had no digital deposit policy. Choi and colleagues (Choi et al. 2020) analyzed a set of 59 journals listed in Journal Citation Reports (JCR) and published by Korean academic societies, using the 33 items devised in Choi and colleagues (Choi et al. 2019). They found wide variation in compliance and non-compliance among the 59 journals. Some examples of the more egregious cases of non-compliance were that 51 journals “did not describe the peer review process in detail on their webpage” (Choi et al. 2019, 26), only six journals specified the use of third-party repository services, while 12 journals had no data sharing or reproducibility policies. Kratochvíl and colleagues (Kratochvíl et al. 2019) found massive variation in adherence to these policies among 259 JCR-indexed journals, with *International Journal of Biological Sciences* (Ivyspring International Publisher) showing highest compliance and *Leprosy Review* (Lepra) showing least compliance.

One solution to increasing compliance to these “best” practices may be for journals to self-evaluate, but that is equivalent to, figuratively speaking, asking the fox to guard the hen-house. The editors of *Pharmactuel* claimed that their journal was 73% and 91% compliant with International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE) and COPE ethics-related principles, respectively in January 2020, and that this compliance rose to almost 100% by November 2020, but no evidence was provided, except for the “word” and stated guarantees of the *Pharmactuel* editors themselves (Hamel et al. 2021). Rather than blind trust in editors, journals and publishers in compliance with such principles, there needs to be, until full trust is regained, in pivoting the focus from blind “trust me” towards “don’t trust, and build trust” (Teixeira da Silva 2022). A preferred form is to provide proof, through the existence of exact URLs that address each principle, as was done by the ethics editor of the *Annals of Pediatric Endocrinology & Metabolism*, which is the official journal

of the *Korean Society of Pediatric Endocrinology* (Huh 2018).

VIII. Deficiencies: What the 16 Principles Fail to Discuss or Cover

The authors are of the opinion that the current 16 best practices do not address any of the following issues:

1. If papers are retracted, how are metrics such as Clarivate Journal Impact Factor or Elsevier/Scopus CiteScore corrected and/or adjusted in member journals (Madlock-Brown & Eichmann 2015; Dobránszki & Teixeira da Silva 2019)? If metrics are not adjusted, why would this be considered an acceptable publishing principle?

2. If COPE member journals (and/or their Journal Impact Factors) were suppressed from Clarivate's Journal Citation Reports due to some form of manipulation (e.g., of citations)²⁶, i.e., clearly not "best" practices, did COPE remove them from its membership list, and if not, why not?

3. COPE, DOAJ, OASPA, and WAME have not made their position clear regarding unethical sting operations (Misra & Agarwal 2021; Teixeira da Silva 2021a). Does silence suggest implicit approval?

4. COPE, DOAJ, OASPA, and WAME have not addressed how their members' English revision services, as advertised on their websites, are used by authors, but not declared in academic papers, thereby constituting an ethical infraction (Kendall et al. 2016; Teixeira da Silva 2021b). There is zero discussion and transparency related to this issue.

5. Are COPE, DOAJ, OASPA, and WAME practicing the same principles of equality and inclusivity that their members are mandating or requesting of their authors and editors? Initial evidence related to COPE suggests not (Teixeira da Silva 2021c).

6. Are editorial positions in competing journals indicated on the editorial boards of COPE, DOAJ, OASPA, and WAME members journals (Dal-Ré et al. 2019; Teixeira da Silva 2021d)? If not, why not, and why would opacity about competing editorial positions be considered a desirable publishing principle?

7. How do COPE, DOAJ, OASPA, and WAME differentiate exploitative from predatory publishing behavior, where do the boundaries lie in their view, and what would be unscholarly publishing practices (Teixeira da Silva et al. 2019a)? We put this principle to the test, noting that, based on COPE's own stated principles and standards related to "predatory" publishing, that one of its own member publishers would likely be classified as such (Moussa & Teixeira da Silva 2023).

8. How have COPE, DOAJ, OASPA, and WAME members and management proved that they themselves have followed their own stated "best" practices, and how are they avoiding COIs, favoritism, cronyism and nepotism (Teixeira da Silva et al. 2019b)? Is global academia supposed to take these organizations at their word and trust them blindly

²⁶ See multiple examples here: <https://retractionwatch.com/?s=JCR+suppression>

(Teixeira da Silva 2022)?

9. Are COPE, DOAJ, OASPA, and WAME members that claim to be abiding by these “best” principles in any way benefitting (financially or otherwise) from the publication of erroneous, fraudulent or unethical work (Teixeira da Silva & Vuong 2021)?

In response to this paper, and subsequent to it, members of the academic community should also suggest what aspects need to be addressed to compliment current “best” practices, with equally relevant ones, to supplement the currently highly deficient ones. Unlike what is claimed by COPE (Lane 2018), these “best” practices, in their currently stated format and wording, are still only superficially helpful, i.e., on paper only. Moreover, despite claims of adherence to these principles offers no guarantee that the journals or publishers claiming to follow these principles, and paying hefty membership fees to engage in this ethics marketing campaign and branding, are compliant with these principles (Kratochvíl et al. 2020), as is clearly evidenced by the Hindawi / Wiley, *PLOS ONE*, Elsevier and Taylor & Francis cases.

IX. Conclusion and Recommendations

COPE, DOAJ, OASPA, and WAME, by membership numbers and profiles alone, represent a formidable (in terms of numbers and reputation) set of academic and scholarly journals and publishers, as well as other groups and organizations associated or affiliated with the academic publishing industry. Academics from around the world rely on these organizations’ membership lists, principles and guidelines, as well as their brand names, in order to select journals which are supposedly safe to publish in, trusting that the scholarly and academic principles of these members have been fully and properly vetted, and thus, in theory, making them non-predatory, and at minimum, scholarly. In our interpretation, thus makes these organization and their member journals and publishers, the current publishing status quo. In this paper, the assessment of 16 “principles,” which are used by these four organizations to select members, suggests that while they offer a broad value system related to transparency and best publishing practices, there may be multiple “issues,” concerns or deficiencies with the organizations themselves, their structures and/or their functionality, such as COPE (Teixeira da Silva 2017; Teixeira da Silva 2019), or the DOAJ (Teixeira da Silva et al. 2018; Teixeira da Silva et al. 2021e; Frantsvåg 2019). Consequently, if members were selected based on a deficient set of criteria, or if they operate using values that cannot be accurately detected due to the lack of sensitivity of these “principles,” then what guarantee can these organizations provide that their members are academic, scholarly, and non-predatory? Academia needs to reflect on whether such “principles” are robust and can or should be trusted blindly, especially when several aspects of these organizations themselves are opaque. Authors also need to reflect

on whether “principles” and “guidelines”, as branded by these organizations, are voluntary choices of adhesion, or mandatory clauses (Teixeira da Silva 2023c). Authors seem to be willing to accept what the publishing industry provides them without questioning the validity of what is presented, and it is within their rights – because it affects their rights – to question the status quo structures that they might be supporting (Al-Khatib & Teixeira da Silva 2017). As Ford (Ford 2019) suggested, it is not merely sufficient for a journal or publisher to claim to follow these principles, especially those related to the transparency of peer review, and that merely claiming that such peer review needs to be replaced by a cultural shift to the praxis (i.e., “conscious action”) of practicing – and proving – that transparency, preferably through open peer review. More importantly, claiming the COPE branding of following such principles does not confer protection from fake and fraudulent publishing elements, and is a process that is in constant change as value systems evolve (Jacob 2019). The greater risk is that global campaigns to increase COPE membership, and confer paying members them with potentially superficial “academic integrity” awards (Zhang et al. 2021), is that such members may be rewarded with misleading branding even if they might not be 100% compliant with the COPE, DOAJ, OASPA, and WAME principles.

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Appendix

Table 1: Self-description of the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE), the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ), the Open Access Scholarly Publishers Association (OASPA), and the World Association of Medical Editors (WAME), according to the OASPA website^{1,2}.

Organization	Verbatim self-description
COPE	“COPE provides advice to editors and on all aspects of publication ethics and, in particular, how to handle cases of research and publication misconduct. It also provides a forum for its members to discuss individual cases. COPE does not investigate individual cases but encourages editors to ensure that cases are investigated by the appropriate authorities (usually a research institution or employer). All COPE members are expected to apply COPE principles of publication ethics outlined in the core practices.”
DOAJ	“The mission of the DOAJ is to curate, maintain and develop a source of reliable information about open access scholarly journals on the web; to verify that entries on the list comply with reasonable standards; to increase the visibility, dissemination, discoverability and attraction of open access journals; to enable scholars, libraries, universities, research funders and other stakeholders to benefit from the information and services provided; to facilitate the integration of open access journals into library and aggregator services; to assist, where possible, and their journals to meet reasonable digital publishing standards; and to thereby support the transition of the system of scholarly communication and publishing into a model that serves science, higher education, industry, innovation, societies and the people. Through this work, DOAJ will cooperate and collaborate with all interested parties working toward these objectives.”
OASPA	“OASPA is a trade association that was established in 2008 in order to represent the interests of Open Access (OA) globally across all disciplines. By encouraging collaboration in developing appropriate business models, tools and standards to support OA publishing, OASPA aims to help ensure a prosperous and sustainable future for the benefit of its members and the scholarly communities they serve. This mission is carried out through exchanging information, setting standards, advancing models, advocacy, education, and the promotion of innovation.”
WAME	“WAME is a global nonprofit voluntary association of editors of peer-reviewed medical journals who seek to foster cooperation and communication among editors; improve editorial standards; promote professionalism in medical editing through education, self-criticism, and self-regulation; and encourage research on the principles and practice of medical editing. WAME develops policies and recommendations of best practices for medical journal editors and has a syllabus for editors that members are encouraged to follow.”

¹ CC BY 4.0 license; text was transcribed from the OASPA website (version 3 of the principles)

² All original hyperlinks have been maintained, and only spacing has been modified to make all text continuous

Table 2: Side-by-side comparison of the text of the four versions of the 16 Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE), the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ), the Open Access Scholarly Publishers Association (OASPA), and the World Association of Medical Editors (WAME) “Principles of Transparency and Best Practice in Scholarly Publishing”^{1,2}.

Principle #	Version 1 (2013/2014) text	Version 2 (2015) text	Version 3 (2018) text	Version 4 (2022) text
Preamble (excluding any description of the organizations)	<p>“The Committee on Publication Ethics, the Directory of Open Access Journals, the Open Access Scholarly Publishers Association, and the World Association of Medical Editors are scholarly organizations that have seen an increase in the number of membership applications from both legitimate and non-legitimate publishers and journals. Our organizations have collaborated in an effort to identify principles of transparency and best practice that set apart legitimate journals and publishers from non-legitimate ones and to clarify that these principles form part of the criteria on which membership applications will be evaluated. These criteria are largely derived from those developed by the Directory of Open Access Journals. Note that additional membership criteria may also be used by each of the scholarly organizations. The organizations intend to share information in order to develop lists of legitimate journals and publishers. We do not intend to develop or publish a list of publishers or journals that failed to demonstrate they met the criteria for transparency and best practice. This is a work in progress and we welcome feedback on the general principles and the specific criteria. Background on the organizations is below.”</p>	<p>“The Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE), the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ), the Open Access Scholarly Publishers Association (OASPA), and the World Association of Medical Editors (WAME) are scholarly organizations that have seen an increase in the number, and broad range in the quality, of membership applications. Our organizations have collaborated in an effort to identify principles of transparency and best practice for scholarly publications and to clarify that these principles form part of the criteria on which membership applications will be evaluated. These criteria are largely derived from those developed by the Directory of Open Access Journals. Note that additional membership criteria may also be used by each of the scholarly organizations. The organizations will not share information about applications received. We do not intend to develop or publish a list of publishers or journals that failed to demonstrate they met the criteria for transparency and best practice.</p> <p>This is the second version of a work in progress (published June 2015); the first version was made available by OASPA in December 2013. We encourage its wide dissemination and continue to welcome feedback on the general principles and the specific criteria. Background on the organizations is below.”</p>	<p>“The Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE), the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ), the Open Access Scholarly Publishers Association (OASPA), and the World Association of Medical Editors (WAME) are scholarly organisations that have seen an increase in the number, and broad range in the quality, of membership applications. Our organisations have collaborated to identify principles of transparency and best practice for scholarly publications and to clarify that these principles form the basis of the criteria by which suitability for membership is assessed by COPE, DOAJ and OASPA, and part of the criteria on which membership applications are evaluated by WAME. Each organisation also has their own, additional criteria which are used when evaluating applications. The organisations will not share lists of or journals that failed to demonstrate that they met the criteria for transparency and best practice.</p> <p>This is the third version of a work in progress (published January 2018); the first version was made available by OASPA in December 2013 and a second version in June 2015. We encourage its wide dissemination and continue to welcome feedback on the general principles and the specific criteria. Background on the organisations is below.”</p>	<p>“The Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE), the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ), the Open Access Scholarly Publishing Association (OASPA), and the World Association of Medical Editors (WAME) are scholarly organisations that have collaborated to identify principles of transparency and best practice for scholarly publications. This is the fourth version of a work in progress (published 15 September 2022). We encourage its wide dissemination.</p> <p>The Principles of Transparency and Best Practice in Scholarly Publishing should apply to all published content, including special issues and conference proceedings. Where practices deviate from the standards outlined, editors must transparently communicate the procedures that the journal follows.ws.</p> <p>These principles also acknowledge that publishers and editors are responsible for promoting accessibility, diversity, equity, and inclusivity in all aspects of the publication. Editorial decisions should be based on scholarly merit. They should not be affected by the origins of the manuscript, including the nationality, ethnicity, political beliefs, race, or religion of the authors. Journals should ensure no policies create an exclusionary environment for anyone wanting to engage with the journal and should regularly assess their policies for inclusivity.”</p>
1	<p>“Peer review process: All of a journal’s content, apart from any editorial material that is clearly marked as such, shall be subjected to peer review. Peer review is defined as obtaining advice on individual manuscripts from reviewers expert in the field who are not part of the journal’s editorial staff. This process, as well as any policies related to the journal’s peer review procedures, shall be clearly described on the journal’s Web site.”</p>	<p>“Peer review process: Journal content must be clearly marked as whether peer reviewed or not. Peer review is defined as obtaining advice on individual manuscripts from reviewers expert in the field who are not part of the journal’s editorial staff. This process, as well as any policies related to the journal’s peer review procedures, shall be clearly described on the journal’s Web site.”</p>	<p>“Website: A journal’s website, including the text that it contains, shall demonstrate that care has been taken to ensure high ethical and professional standards. It must not contain information that might mislead readers or authors, including any attempt to mimic another journal/publisher’s site. An ‘Aims & Scope’ statement should be included on the website and the readership clearly defined. There should be a statement on what a journal will consider for publication including authorship criteria (e.g., not considering multiple submissions, redundant publications) to be included. ISSNs should be clearly displayed (separate for print and electronic).”</p>	<p>“Name of journal: The journal’s name should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be unique and not be one that is easily confused with another journal. • Not mislead potential authors and readers about the journal’s origin, scope, or association with other journals and organisations.”

2	<p>“Governing Body: Journals shall have editorial boards or other governing bodies whose members are recognized experts in the subject areas included within the journal’s scope. The full names and affiliations of the journal’s editors shall be provided on the journal’s Web site.”</p>	<p>“Governing Body: Journals shall have editorial boards or other governing bodies whose members are recognized experts in the subject areas included within the journal’s scope. The full names and affiliations of the journal’s editors shall be provided on the journal’s Web site.”</p>	<p>“Name of journal: The Journal name shall be unique and not be one that is easily confused with another journal or that might mislead potential authors and readers about the journal’s origin or association with other journals.”</p>	<p>“Website: Websites should be properly supported and maintained, with particular attention given to security aspects that help protect users from viruses and malware. As a minimum, websites should use https and not http, and all traffic should be redirected through https. Those responsible for the website should apply web standards and best ethical practices to the website’s content, presentation, and application. The website should not contain information that might mislead readers or authors. The website should not copy another journal/publisher’s site, design, or logo. If any text is copied from another website, an acknowledgement to the source website should be declared. In addition to the requirements outlined below, the following items should be clearly displayed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Aims and scope. ● The target readership of the journal. ● The types of manuscripts the journal will consider for publication (for example, that multiple or redundant publication is not allowed). ● Authorship criteria. ● ISSNs (separate for print and electronic versions).”
3	<p>“Editorial team/contact information Journals shall provide the full names and affiliations of the journal’s editors on the journal’s Web site as well as contact information for the editorial office.”</p>	<p>“Editorial team/contact information: Journals shall provide the full names and affiliations of the journal’s editors on the journal’s Web site as well as contact information for the editorial office.”</p>	<p>“Peer review process Journal content must be clearly marked as whether peer reviewed or not. Peer review is defined as obtaining advice on individual manuscripts from reviewers expert in the field who are not part of the journal’s editorial staff. This process, as well as any policies related to the journal’s peer review procedures, shall be clearly described on the journal website, including the method of peer review used. Journal websites should not guarantee manuscript acceptance or very short peer review times.”</p>	<p>“Publishing schedule: A journal’s publishing frequency should be clearly described, and the journal must keep to its publishing schedule unless there are exceptional circumstances.”</p>
4	<p>“Author fees: Any fees or charges that are required for manuscript processing and/or publishing materials in the journal shall be clearly stated in a place that is easy for potential authors to find prior to submitting their manuscripts for review or explained to authors before they begin preparing their manuscript for submission.”</p>	<p>“Author fees: Any fees or charges that are required for manuscript processing and/or publishing materials in the journal shall be clearly stated in a place that is easy for potential authors to find prior to submitting their manuscripts for review or explained to authors before they begin preparing their manuscript for submission.”</p>	<p>“Ownership and management: Information about the ownership and/or management of a journal shall be clearly indicated on the journal’s website. Publishers shall not use organizational or journal names that would mislead potential authors and editors about the nature of the journal’s owner.”</p>	<p>“Archiving: A journal’s plan for electronic backup and long term digital preservation of the journal content, in the event that the journal and/or publisher stops operating, should be clearly indicated. Examples include PMC and those listed in the Keepers Registry.”</p>
5	<p>“Copyright: Copyright and licensing information shall be clearly described on the journal’s Web site, and licensing terms shall be indicated on all published articles, both HTML and PDFs.”</p>	<p>“Copyright: Copyright and licensing information shall be clearly described on the journal’s Web site, and licensing terms shall be indicated on all published articles, both HTML and PDFs.”</p>	<p>“Governing body: Journals shall have editorial boards or other governing bodies whose members are recognized experts in the subject areas included within the journal’s scope. The full names and affiliations of the journal’s editorial board or other governing body shall be provided on the journal’s website.”</p>	<p>“Copyright: The copyright terms for published content should be clearly stated on the website and in the content. The copyright terms should be separate and distinct from the copyright of the website. The copyright holder should be named on the full text of all published articles (HTML and PDF). If the copyright terms are described in a separate form, this should be easy to find on the website and available to all.”</p>

6	<p>“Identification of and dealing with allegations of research misconduct: Publishers and editors shall take reasonable steps to identify and prevent the publication of papers where research misconduct has occurred, including plagiarism, citation manipulation, and data falsification/fabrication, among others. In no case shall a journal or its editors encourage such misconduct, or knowingly allow such misconduct to take place. In the event that a journal’s publisher or editors are made aware of any allegation of research misconduct relating to a published article in their journal – the publisher or editor shall follow COPE’s guidelines (or equivalent) in dealing with allegations.”</p>	<p>“Process for identification of and dealing with allegations of research misconduct: Publishers and editors shall take reasonable steps to identify and prevent the publication of papers where research misconduct has occurred, including plagiarism, citation manipulation, and data falsification/fabrication, among others. In no case shall a journal or its editors encourage such misconduct, or knowingly allow such misconduct to take place. In the event that a journal’s publisher or editors are made aware of any allegation of research misconduct relating to a published article in their journal – the publisher or editor shall follow COPE’s guidelines (or equivalent) in dealing with allegations.”</p>	<p>“Editorial team/contact information: Journals shall provide the full names and affiliations of the journal’s editors on the journal website as well as contact information for the editorial office, including a full address.”</p>	<p>“Licensing: Licensing information should be clearly described on the website. Licensing terms should be indicated on the full text of all published articles (HTML and PDF). Content designated as Open Access must use an open licence. Licensing policies about the posting of author manuscripts and published articles in third party repositories should be clearly stated.</p> <p>If Creative Commons licences are used, then the terms of that licence should also link to the correct licence on the Creative Commons website.”</p>
7	<p>“Ownership and management: Information about the ownership and/or management of a journal shall be clearly indicated on the journal’s Web site. Publishers shall not use organizational names that would mislead potential authors and editors about the nature of the journal’s owner.”</p>	<p>“Ownership and management: Information about the ownership and/or management of a journal shall be clearly indicated on the journal’s Web site. Publishers shall not use organizational or journal names that would mislead potential authors and editors about the nature of the journal’s owner.”</p>	<p>“Copyright and licensing: The policy for copyright shall be clearly stated in the author guidelines and the copyright holder named on all published articles. Likewise, licensing information shall be clearly described in guidelines on the website, and licensing terms shall be indicated on all published articles, both HTML and PDFs. If authors are allowed to publish under a Creative Commons license then any specific license requirements shall be noted. Any policies on posting of final accepted versions or published articles on third party repositories shall be clearly stated.”</p>	<p>“Publication ethics and related editorial policies: A journal should have policies on publication ethics (for example, COPE’s Core Practice guidance). These should be visible on its website, and should refer to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Journal’s policies on authorship and contributorship. ● How the journal will handle complaints and appeals. ● How the journal will handle allegations of research misconduct. ● Journal’s policies on conflicts of interest. ● Journal’s policies on data sharing and reproducibility. ● Journal’s policy on ethical oversight. ● Journal’s policy on intellectual property. ● Journal’s options for post-publication discussions. ● Journal’s policies on corrections and retractions. <p>Editors and publishers are responsible for ensuring the integrity of the scholarly literature in their journals and should ensure they outline their policies and procedures for handling such issues when they arise. These issues include plagiarism, citation manipulation, and data falsification/fabrication, among others. Neither the journal’s policies nor the statements of its editors should encourage such misconduct, or knowingly allow such misconduct to take place. In the event that a journal’s editors or publisher are made aware of any allegation of research misconduct relating to a submitted or published article in their journal, the editor or publisher should follow COPE’s guidance (or equivalent) in dealing with allegations.”</p>

8	<p>“Web site: A journal’s Web site, including the text that it contains, shall demonstrate that care has been taken to ensure high ethical and professional standards.”</p>	<p>“Web site: A journal’s Web site, including the text that it contains, shall demonstrate that care has been taken to ensure high ethical and professional standards. It must not contain misleading information, including any attempt to mimic another journal/publisher’s site.”</p>	<p>“Author fees: Any fees or charges that are required for manuscript processing and/or publishing materials in the journal shall be clearly stated in a place that is easy for potential authors to find prior to submitting their manuscripts for review or explained to authors before they begin preparing their manuscript for submission. If no such fees are charged that should also be clearly stated.”</p>	<p>“Peer review Peer review is defined as obtaining advice on manuscripts from reviewers/experts in the manuscript’s subject area. Those individuals should not be part of the journal’s editorial team. However, the specific elements of peer review may differ by journal and discipline, so the following should be clearly stated on the website:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Whether or not the content is peer reviewed. ● Who conducts the peer review, for example, external experts or editorial board members. ● The type of peer review process(es) used ● Any policies related to the peer review procedures, for example: ● Use of author recommended reviewers. ● Any masking of identities, and if so who is masked and to whom. ● Whether or not supplementary material is subjected to peer review. ● Whether or not reviews are posted with articles. ● Whether or not reviews are signed or anonymous. ● How a decision about a manuscript is ultimately made and who is involved. ● Any exceptions to the peer review process, such as specific article types that do not undergo peer review.
9	<p>“Name of journal: The Journal name shall be unique and not be one that is easily confused with another journal or that might mislead potential authors and readers about the journal’s origin or association with other journals.”</p>	<p>“Name of journal: The Journal name shall be unique and not be one that is easily confused with another journal or that might mislead potential authors and readers about the journal’s origin or association with other journals.”</p>	<p>“Process for identification of and dealing with allegations of research misconduct: Publishers and editors shall take reasonable steps to identify and prevent the publication of papers where research misconduct has occurred, including plagiarism, citation manipulation, and data falsification/fabrication, among others. In no case shall a journal or its editors encourage such misconduct, or knowingly allow such misconduct to take place. In the event that a journal’s publisher or editors are made aware of any allegation of research misconduct relating to a published article in their journal, the publisher or editor shall follow COPE’s guidelines (or equivalent) in dealing with allegations.”</p>	<p>If an article’s peer review is an exception to the usual policy, the article should state what review it received. Journals should not guarantee acceptance of initial manuscript submissions. Statements of peer review times should be supported by published timeframes on accepted papers. In the event of delays, authors should be informed of the reason for the delay and given the opportunity to withdraw their manuscript if they wish. The date of publication should be published with all published research. Dates of submission and acceptance are preferred as well.”</p> <p>“Access: If any of the online content is not freely accessible to everyone, the method of gaining access (for example, registration, subscription, or pay-per-view fees) should be clearly described. If offline versions (for example, print) are available, this should be clearly described along with any associated charges.”</p>

10	<p>“Conflicts of interest: A journal shall have clear policies on handling potential conflicts of interest of editors, authors, and reviewers and the policies should be clearly stated.”</p>	<p>“Conflicts of interest: A journal shall have clear policies on handling potential conflicts of interest of editors, authors, and reviewers and the policies should be clearly stated.”</p>	<p>“Publication ethics: A journal shall also have policies on publishing ethics. These should be clearly visible on its website, and should refer to: i) Journal policies on authorship and contributorship; ii) How the journal will handle complaints and appeals; iii) Journal policies on conflicts of interest / competing interests; iv) Journal policies on data sharing and reproducibility; v) Journal’s policy on ethical oversight; vi) Journal’s policy on intellectual property; and vii) Journal’s options for post-publication discussions and corrections.”</p>	<p>“Ownership and management: Information about the ownership and management of a journal should be clearly indicated on the journal’s website. Organisational names should not be used in a way that could mislead potential authors and editors about the nature of the journal’s owner. If a journal is affiliated with a society, institution, or sponsor, links to their website(s) should be provided where available.”</p>
11	<p>“Access: The way(s) in which the journal and individual articles are available to readers and whether there are associated subscription or pay per view fees shall be stated.”</p>	<p>“Access: The way(s) in which the journal and individual articles are available to readers and whether there are associated subscription or pay per view fees shall be stated.”</p>	<p>“Publishing schedule: The periodicity at which a journal publishes shall be clearly indicated.”</p>	<p>“Advisory body: Journals should have editorial boards or other advisory bodies whose members are recognised experts in the subject areas stated in the journal’s aims and scope. The full names and affiliations of the members should be provided on the journal’s website. The list should be up to date, and members must agree to serve. To avoid being associated with predatory or deceptive journals, journals should periodically review their board to ensure it is still relevant and appropriate.”</p>
12	<p>“Revenue sources: Business models or revenue sources (eg, author fees, subscriptions, advertising, reprints, institutional support, and organizational support) shall be clearly stated or otherwise evident on the journal’s Web site.”</p>	<p>“Revenue sources: Business models or revenue sources (eg, author fees, subscriptions, advertising, reprints, institutional support, and organizational support) shall be clearly stated or otherwise evident on the journal’s Web site.”</p>	<p>“Access: The way(s) in which the journal and individual articles are available to readers and whether there are associated subscription or pay per view fees shall be stated.”</p>	<p>“Editorial team/contact information: Journals should provide the full names and affiliations of their editors as well as contact information for the editorial office, including a full mailing address, on the journal’s website.”</p>
13	<p>“Advertising: Journals shall state their advertising policy if relevant, including what types of ads will be considered, who makes decisions regarding accepting ads and whether they are linked to content or reader behavior (online only) or are displayed at random.”</p>	<p>“Advertising: Journals shall state their advertising policy if relevant, including what types of ads will be considered, who makes decisions regarding accepting ads and whether they are linked to content or reader behavior (online only) or are displayed at random.”</p>	<p>“Archiving: A journal’s plan for electronic backup and preservation of access to the journal content (for example, access to main articles via CLOCKSS or PubMed Central) in the event a journal is no longer published shall be clearly indicated.”</p>	<p>“Author fees: If author fees are charged (such as article processing charges, page charges, editorial processing charges, language editing fees, colour charges, submission fees, membership fees, or other supplementary charges), then the fees should be clearly stated on the website. If there are no such fees, this should be clearly stated. Author fee information should be easy to find and presented as early in the submission process as possible. If the journal is likely to implement author charges in the future, this should be stated. If waivers are available for author fees, this information should be stated clearly. Waiver information should include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Who is eligible for a waiver. ● Which author(s) of the group must be eligible for the waiver to apply. ● When and how to apply for a waiver. <p>Author fees or waiver status should not influence editorial decision making, and this should be clearly stated.”</p>
14	<p>“Publishing schedule: The periodicity at which a journal publishes shall be clearly indicated.”</p>	<p>“Publishing schedule: The periodicity at which a journal publishes shall be clearly indicated.”</p>	<p>“Revenue sources: Business models or revenue sources (e.g., author fees, subscriptions, advertising, reprints, institutional support, and organizational support) shall be clearly stated or otherwise evident on the journal’s website. Publishing fees or waiver status should not influence editorial decision making.”</p>	<p>“Other revenue Business models or revenue sources should be clearly stated on the journal’s website.</p> <p>Examples include author fees (see section 13), subscriptions, sponsorships and subsidies, advertising (see section 15), reprints, supplements, or special issues.</p> <p>Business models or revenue sources (for example, reprint income, supplements, special issues, sponsorships) should not influence editorial decision making.”</p>

The COPE / DOAJ / OASPA / WAME Principles of Transparency

15	<p>“Archiving: A journal’s plan for electronic backup and preservation of access to the journal content (for example, access to main articles via CLOCKSS or PubMedCentral) in the event a journal is no longer published shall be clearly indicated.”</p>	<p>“Archiving: A journal’s plan for electronic backup and preservation of access to the journal content (for example, access to main articles via CLOCKSS or PubMedCentral) in the event a journal is no longer published shall be clearly indicated.”</p>	<p>“Advertising: Journals shall state their advertising policy if relevant, including what types of adverts will be considered, who makes decisions regarding accepting adverts and whether they are linked to content or reader behaviour (online only) or are displayed at random. Advertisements should not be related in any way to editorial decision making and shall be kept separate from the published content.”</p>	<p>“Advertising: Journals should state whether they accept advertising. If they do, they should state their advertising policy, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Which types of advertisements will be considered. ● Who makes decisions regarding accepting advertisements. ● Whether they are linked to content or reader behaviour or are displayed at random. <p>Advertisements should not be related in any way to editorial decision making and should be kept separate from the published content.”</p>
16	<p>“Direct marketing: Any direct marketing activities, including solicitation of manuscripts that are conducted on behalf of the journal, shall be appropriate, well targeted, and unobtrusive.”</p>	<p>“Direct marketing: Any direct marketing activities, including solicitation of manuscripts that are conducted on behalf of the journal, shall be appropriate, well targeted, and unobtrusive.”</p>	<p>“Direct marketing: Any direct marketing activities, including solicitation of manuscripts that are conducted on behalf of the journal, shall be appropriate, well targeted, and unobtrusive. Information provided about the publisher or journal is expected to be truthful and not misleading for readers or authors.”</p>	<p>“Direct marketing: Any direct marketing activities, including solicitation of manuscripts, that are conducted on behalf of the journal should be appropriate, well targeted, and unobtrusive. Information provided about the publisher or journal should be truthful and not misleading for readers or authors.”</p>
Footnotes and notes (excluding any description of the organizations)	<p>“In the event that a member organization is found to have violated these best practices, OASPA/DOAJ/COPE/WAME shall in the first instance try to work with them in order to address any concerns that have been raised. In the event that the member organization is unable or unwilling to address these concerns, their membership in the organization may be suspended or terminated. All of the member organizations have procedures for dealing with concerns raised about member journals.”</p>	<p>“In the event that a member organization is found to have violated these best practices, or other specific requirements of the organization, OASPA/DOAJ/COPE/WAME shall in the first instance try to work with them in order to address any concerns that have been raised. In the event that the member organization is unable or unwilling to address these concerns, their membership in the organization may be suspended or terminated. All of the member organizations have procedures for dealing with concerns raised about member journals.”</p>	<p>“In the event that a member organization is found to have violated these best practices, or other specific requirements of the organization, OASPA/DOAJ/COPE/WAME shall in the first instance try to work with them in order to address any concerns that have been raised. In the event that the member organization is unable or unwilling to address these concerns, their membership in the organization may be suspended or terminated. OASPA/DOAJ/COPE/WAME have procedures for dealing with concerns raised about members. This version published: 15 January 2018 Second version published: 22 June 2015 First version published: 10 January 2014”</p>	<p>“This is Version 4.0 September 2022 of the Principles of Transparency and Best Practice in Scholarly Publishing Version 3.0 January 2018 Version 2.0 June 2015 Version 1.0 December 2013”</p>

¹ Text was transcribed from COPE. Although COPE states “This is the third version of a work in progress (published 15 January 2018); the first version was posted in January 2014.”, no link is provided to the first or second version. The DOAJ only provides a link to the first version on the OASPA website. WAME provides a link to the first and second versions on the OASPA website. The absence of links to all three versions could be construed as a violation of principle #12.

² CC BY 4.0 license; text of versions 1-3 was transcribed from the OASPA website while text of version 4 was transcribed from the COPE website:

³ First version: <https://oaspa.org/principles-of-transparency-and-best-practice-in-scholarly-publishing/>; second version: <https://oaspa.org/principles-of-transparency-and-best-practice-in-scholarly-publishing-2/>; third version: <https://oaspa.org/principles-of-transparency-and-best-practice-in-scholarly-publishing-3/>; fourth version: <https://publicationethics.org/node/19881>

Table 3: Scrutiny of the third version (2018) of the 16 Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE), the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ), the Open Access Scholarly Publishers Association (OASPA), and the World Association of Medical Editors (WAME) “Principles of Transparency and Best Practice in Scholarly Publishing”^{1,2}.

Principle #	Issue, criticism, problem, deficiency
1	There is no indication to readers where such stated standards may be found. Many fields of study are interdisciplinary, so “scope” and readership are becoming increasingly irrelevant. The principle confounds/mixes redundant publication and authorship. There is no discussion about web security, submission systems, integrity of HTML, PDF and other formats.
2	This is absolutely ludicrous. There are ample journals published by COPE, DOAJ, and OASPA members with identical or very similar journal titles as those found elsewhere. The ISSN does not prohibit journals with the same or similar name provided that they have unique eISSNs/ISSNs.
3	Simply stating that peer review is conducted, or even indicating what form of peer review is used (e.g., single, double, etc.) is superficial and meaningless unless peer review can be proved. Given that there is strong demand for an experienced peer pool globally, it is not uncommon for journals to struggle to identify or secure peer reviewers. Despite this limitation, the period of peer review can be short (2 weeks to 1 month) if peer reviewers work diligently. What is of concern are journals that take an excessive amount of time to complete peer review or desk reject papers.
4	What precise information would be needed to appreciate ownership? This has not been defined. No examples are provided to exemplify what would constitute “misleading” in terms of ownership.
5	Many COPE, DOAJ, and OASPA member journals do not display full editors’ names. The following issues are not discussed: deceased editors; editors whose names and affiliations have been hijacked; the inclusion of editors without their explicit permission; links to editors’ <i>curriculum vitae</i> , ORCID or other tangible websites (institutional or other) that could offer verification that they are “real” and not fake. Who can be judged as an “expert”, why are non-experts not allowed to be editors, and are students and early career researchers considered “experts”?
6	There is heavy overlap with #5, in terms of editor-related information. In this day and age, is it not possible for an editorial office to be virtual (in the cloud)? Moreover, an editorial “office” might simply be a PO Box while staff work remotely around the globe. Company information, including editorial office information, should be fused with #4.
7	This is an acceptable principle with sufficiently clear guidelines. However, information about violations of copyright or licenses is needed. Should journals and publishers not offer guarantees that authors’ content will not be hijacked or pirated (e.g., to Sci-Hub, etc.).
8	How is outdated or erroneous information monitored? Why is price gauging and exploitation of article processing charges not discussed?
9	This suggests that all DOAJ, OASPA and WAME members are held to COPE standards. There is no explanation as to what “equivalent” ethical guidelines are.
10	There is thematic overlap with #9. These two principles should be fused.
11	Periodicity has become a redundant issue in the age of OA publishing, where journals are increasingly publishing papers real time. There may also be peaks and troughs in submissions, leading to irregularities in publishing schedule. These are not aspects related to “best practices”, merely to market supply. It is more meaningful to accurately document all of the submission, processing, peer review and editorial actions and dates related to a paper, pre- and post-publication, as a “publication history” (Teixeira da Silva & Nazarovets 2022).
12	The issue of pricing and discounts is not mentioned, but is important.
13	It is not clear why only two archival services are mentioned (suggestive of a biased choice). There is zero mention of indexing, and valid or invalid indexing, which is extremely important.

- 14 This is vague and statements cannot always be confirmed. How does the public verify the income sources, revenue and balance sheets of private for-profit organizations or society-managed journals? The last sentence seems out of place.
- 15 This is an acceptable principle with sufficiently clear guidelines.
- 16 The use of euphemisms like “solicitation” is not helpful. Specific guidelines pertaining to spam and email solicitation are needed. For example, whereas an occasional directly relevant email might not be obtrusive, but if the purpose is to solicit papers for the ultimate purpose of reaping OA APCs or intellect (to secure copyrighted information), then there is a moral and legal aspect of such an email. The volumes of “solicitations” are not discussed.
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Footnotes and notes The DOAJ maintains a list of members that have been removed due to violations, with a specification of the violation and date. Why do COPE, OASPA and WAME not have such a list? Ample evidence (see literature in Discussion) indicates that their members are non-compliant with “best practices”, and yet they remain members. It would seem that the procedures in place are either ineffective, or bias or favor members. There is zero transparency regarding these procedures.

¹ *CC BY 4.0 license*: <https://oaspa.org/principles-of-transparency-and-best-practice-in-scholarly-publishing-3/>

² *The sources of literature that served as a preamble or foundation to these principles should be described, so as not to give the impression of plagiarized ideas.*