



Communication Scholarship and the Quest for Open Access

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ABSTRACT

The advent of black, green, and gold open access publication models poses unique questions for scholars of communication. Plato's (1956) classic critique of writing in the legend of Theuth and Thamus warned that the printed word "rolls about all over the place, falling into the hands of those who have no concern with it" (pp. 69–70). More than 2 millennia later, scholars and administrators at all levels of the discipline face just such a phenomenon. As scholars of cyberspace debate whether "information wants to be free" (Levy, 2014), a communication perspective involves consideration of the importance of authorship and attribution amid an ever-shifting array of digital publishing options and subversions. The purpose of this study is to investigate the ongoing transformation of academic publishing by examining black, green, and gold open access models, the responses of the communication discipline, and ongoing questions surrounding the nature and extent of accessibility. As access options for research and publication continue to evolve, this study hopes to provide coordinates for administrators seeking to navigate questions concerning the *what*, *how*, and *why* of communication scholarship in a digital age.

KEYWORDS: accessibility, communication ethics, academic journals, public domain, scholarly publishing

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Introduction

The face of communication scholarship is changing at a dizzying rate. Within the last 2 decades, online journals have transformed from a technological novelty into the primary format for disseminating scholarship. Scholarly communication associations have largely turned over publication responsibilities for their journals to massive online academic publishing houses. Academic social media affords researchers new ways to quantify and analyze the impact of their articles. In the midst of these technological advances, key ethical questions concerning individual scholars as well as associations and publishers arise: Who should have access to online communication scholarship? What are implications of limiting access to online communication scholarship? And, conversely, what are implications of unlimited access to online communication scholarship? Also, how should factors such as online access impact ancillary administrative factors such as tenure and promotion or budgetary concerns?

Open access, within the world of academic publishing, is a term used to indicate that scholarly work is freely available to the public. Open access stands in contrast to more traditional modes of publication in which individuals or institutions pay an annual subscription fee to receive copies of a journal. The three primary open access models considered in this study are black, green, and gold (Björk, 2017). Black open access is the publication of academic scholarship by a third party without the permission of the copyright holder. Green open access involves copyright holders, often authors, making research available after its original publication. Gold open access refers to journals that provide free access to content at the moment of publication. Thus, the key questions that distinguish these three colors are *who* provides the access and *when*.

The debate over open access invites a communication ethics perspective that examines what is being “protected and promoted” (Fritz et al., 2023) in the activity of publication. These ethical questions arise frequently in conversations about media ecology. Technologies—both traditional formats like print scholarly journals as well as digital publication platforms—act as media that empower, control, and restrict access to information in a particular context. While cyber-discourse continues to propagate the assumption that “information wants to be free” (Levy, 2014), the principle that everyone should have universal access to scholarship is not a monolith. Questions of open access are particularly relevant for scholars and administrative gatekeepers in the communication discipline, both because of the implications and because of the theoretical issues at stake. The research and publication process is closely tied to issues of institutional legitimacy, funding, and voice. Consequently, we begin this article with the assumption that the tradition of communication scholarship matters, and that ethical communication scholarship in the coming decades of the 21st century pivots on thoughtful engagement with questions of open access.

In the journal *Qualitative Research Reports in Communication*, Ronald C. Arnett (2007) provides coordinates for qualitative communication research in the hermeneutic tradition of interpretive scholarship. A central metaphor in Arnett’s framework for interpretive research is the notion of public disclosure, which raises questions of the *what*, the *how*, and the *why* of communication scholarship. Three things distance qualitative research from the broadcasting of subjective opinions: responsiveness, public disclosure, and public evidence. These categories define scholarship in terms of its impact and interest for a public sphere beyond the horizon of an individual researcher. Arnett’s essay offers an invitation to consider the emerging question of open access scholarship in light of the public sphere in which communication inquiry is conducted.

Accordingly, we approach the topic of open access scholarship with Arnett's three framing questions as a guide. First, *what* is the historical background for the phenomenon of open access scholarship since the digital revolution? Second, *how* has the quest for open access shaped communication scholarship specifically? Finally, *why* does the metaphor of access matter to scholars of communication in an interpretive/hermeneutic tradition? These questions organize the headings of our article.

What: Black, Green, and Gold Open Access Models

The history of digital scholarly publishing is intertwined with the origins of academic journals. In 1996, Stephen P. Harter and Hak Joon Kim traced this history from a perspective of library science with a view to the prospects of electronic journals. As they noted, the very first academic journal can be identified as the *Journal des Scavans*, begun in France in 1665. The journal developed into a home for philosophical essays and research findings and is still in print today, more than 350 years later. Harter and Kim write, "For more than three centuries the journal has played a pivotal role in the creation and transmission of knowledge by serving as the primary medium of scholarly communication, and has remained essentially unchanged in form and function over its lifetime" (para. 1). However, the advent of the web revolutionized the scholarly publication process. As the internet found early acceptance among research communities, advocacy for electronic journals emerged as early as the 1970s (para. 4). As a result of an extensive study of the electronic journals available in 1996, Harter and Kim concluded that electronic scholarly publication faced significant challenges, including the accuracy and accessibility of cited information and the low rates of usage and citation of online articles.

Today, the landscape of scholarly publishing is drastically different than it was even a quarter of a century ago. Academic publishing professionals have identified two tectonic changes that the field has undergone since the mid-20th century. The first major shift involved the movement of publishing control from nonprofit organizations and institutions to for-profit corporations (Larivière et al., 2015). By 2013, five for-profit corporations owned 50% of academic journals across all disciplines. As the academic journal landscape has become increasingly dominated by for-profit corporations, the price of accessing academic content has skyrocketed, with for-profit publishers of scholarly work such as Elsevier making upward of 30% profit margins (Buranyi, 2017).

The second major shift came with the explosion of the internet (Laakso et al., 2011). Contrary to Harter and Kim's (1996) expectations, digital dissemination has become central to the continuation of the academic publishing tradition. The challenges and possibilities that the internet has brought to academic publishing, specifically the publishing of research articles, have varied and are still unfolding (Green, 2019). One of the most significant quandaries birthed by this moment is the question of who has access to scholarly articles in the digital age. The answer to this question has the potential to determine the character of the academic publishing world and the nature of scholarship for decades to come. The following sections briefly outline three alternatives to the traditional pre-internet access model—black open access, green open access, and gold open access—and provide coordinates for engaging the broader shift within academia over open access publishing.

Black Open Access: Asking Neither Forgiveness nor Permission

All forms of open access publishing remove barriers to accessing scholarly content (Conway & Landis, 2011). Black open access refers to any kind of access to academic essays unsanctioned by the copyright holders (Björk, 2017). In many cases, the copyright holders are traditional for-profit companies that own academic journals or have publishing deals with institutions that give them exclusive distribution rights. According to Björk, black open access in the age of the internet began to emerge as a response to access restrictions and skyrocketing prices in academic publishing. In the 1990s, as the internet knocked over barriers to access across almost every industry, individuals began to post articles online for which they did not possess the copyright. This trend mirrored the decentralized and free dissemination of intellectual and creative properties in other sectors. There are two primary areas in which black open access scholarship appears: unsanctioned copies of essays on academic social networks and pirated copies of essays on shadow libraries like Sci-Hub.

Academic social networks (ASNs) function within a gray area when it comes to copyright law (Björk, 2017). Many of the essays posted on ASNs are legal. These legal copies are often posted by the authors; they might be earlier drafts that a publisher does not own, or they might be copies that an author has the right to post after an embargo has passed (see the discussion of green open access below). However, ASNs also contain illegally posted essays. Many times, this happens when authors post copies of essays to which they do not own publishing rights. This could stem from an insufficient understanding of the complexities of copyright law, frustration with traditional publishers, or a desire to spread research more widely than a traditional access model would allow (Björk, 2017). Such illicit uses of ASNs to share academic content fall within the horizon of black open access.

While ASNs tend to operate within legal ambiguity, academic pirate-sharing sites explicitly embrace an illegal black open access publication model. These sites have taken cues from the music-sharing site Napster, a major pioneer in the early 2000s of crowd-sourced electronic file sharing as a way around paying for copyrighted content (Ku, 2002). Users who owned a digital copy of a particular song would share the file on Napster, where others could freely download the content without regard for restrictions or paywalls. Sci-Hub, founded in 2011 by Kazakhstani graduate student Alexandra Elbakyan, has functioned very similarly within the scholarly publishing community (Elbakyan & Bozkurt, 2021). Users can request and post content that would traditionally be hidden behind subscription fees and other paywalls. Over the years, Sci-Hub has grown to dominate the world of open access research. Currently, the pirating site boasts over 80 million articles (Amin et al., 2021).

The growth of black open access over the past 2 decades has occasioned strong responses from academic publishing houses, with one notable example being a United States lawsuit that academic publisher Elsevier won against Sci-Hub in 2015 (Schiermeier, 2017). The court ruled that copyright law is fundamental to scientific research and the public interest, but this legal defeat had little impact on Sci-Hub, which operates outside the jurisdiction of any particular country and hops between domain names as needed. In 2021, Elsevier, Wiley, and the American Chemical Society again sued Sci-Hub, this time in India. In this case, the journal *Nature* emailed Elbakyan with an inquiry, and Elbakyan published her reply on Twitter:

[A]cademic publishers threaten the progress of science: open communication is [a] fundamental property of science . . . Paywalled access prevents this . . . [T]he great threat

is also when the whole scientific knowledge became the private property of some corporation such as Elsevier, that has full control of it. That is a threat, and not Sci-Hub. (Elbakyan, 2021)

Elbakyan's comments provide evidence that black open access publishing may be a matter of individual convenience for some, but for others it arises from fundamental convictions about the nature of scientific knowledge and the rights of access to that knowledge. Access is a fundamental good at issue.

In light of the evasiveness of black open access publishing, traditional publishers have been forced to move in directions that capitulate to demands for freer access to scholarship. Representatives from the Coalition for Responsible Sharing, which boasts many prominent members of the academic publishing community, including Elsevier, claim that all of its members actively embrace open access publishing ("Who Is the Coalition for Responsible Sharing?", n.d.). Over the past 10 years, the academic publishing industry has employed strategies that have sought to enforce copyright law vigorously around the globe and simultaneously to provide alternatives to black open access piracy (Else, 2018; Inge, 2022; Schiermeier, 2017). Green and gold open access models, as discussed below, arose in attempts to respond proactively to the phenomenon of illegal sharing.

Green Open Access: Authors as Advocates

Green open access is a form of online publishing that makes essays publicly and freely available after publication, with full consent of authors and copyright holders (Björk, 2017; Björk et al., 2014; Gadd & Troll Covey, 2019). Traditionally, this has primarily involved posting published articles to institutional repositories and academic social networks with the publisher's permission. Copyright agreements often specify an embargo period, such as a year, after which authors are permitted to disseminate the article. Green open access is primarily driven by the authors of particular essays who legally upload them to databases after publication.

There are several important milestones to mention in the development of legal means of open access. The first was the 2002 Budapest Open Access Initiative, or the Budapest Declaration, which advocated the removal of barriers from scholarly research (Salager-Meyer, 2012). The Budapest Declaration brought definition to the concept of open access, along with the urgency of related issues within academic publishing (Bocanegra-Valle, 2017). The Bethesda Statement on Open Access Publishing by the Howard Hughes Medical Center (June 2003) and the Berlin Declaration on Open Access to Knowledge in the Sciences and Humanities (October 2003) quickly followed and cemented the power of open access in the debate over rights to scholarly information. Open access received early and enthusiastic support from STEM-related fields.

Support for open access from the humanities was slower to emerge, due to various factors such as more affordable journal subscription fees, less political pressure tied to government-funded research, and the economic importance of books versus articles. In the United States, humanities advocates for open access included Peter Suber, director of the Harvard University Office for Scholarly Communication, and Daniel J. Cohen, director of the Digital Public Library of America (Cohen & Scheinfeldt, 2013; Suber, 2005). Over the past decade, there has been a growing trend toward open access within the humanities (Smith, 2016). This is reflected in the increasing number of journals that include legal provisions for authors to initiate green open access after publication.

While green open access addresses some concerns regarding accessibility of research, it continues to reveal limitations in traditional publishing models. One limitation is that green open access is driven by individual authors, making them the salespeople for their own research. On a related note, it is difficult to prevent intentional or unintentional circumnavigation of the peer review process on platforms that rely on self-publishing. A third limitation is that the embargo window imposed by publishers is often prohibitively long. In disciplines in which timely research is key, the potential impact of an article is often tremendously diminished by the time an author is permitted to publicize it. In light of these limitations and others, pressure has been mounting for journals to embrace a more institutionalized model of open access.

Gold Open Access: Prepaid Entry

Gold open access is defined by challenges related to funding (Harnad, 2004). In an article in the *Journal of Librarianship*, Zhang and Watson (2017) explore different approaches to securing funding for a gold open access publication. In one approach, journals rely on institutional support from an association or university to make published content available to readers for free. Alternatively, many gold open access journals rely on author processing charges (APC). In this case, authors pay for the privilege of publishing in a journal and for the end user's accessibility. Such journals immediately make published content available to readers for free, but they do so while charging authors a fee for publishing in their journal. Zhang and Watson also mention a third category for gold journals, a hybrid of the first two. Hybrid journals typically charge a fee for readers to access content, but they include an option for authors to pay a fee instead and make their articles available to the public for free.

Authors and administrators interested in partnering with gold open access journals face steep charges. APC rates for gold open access journals can range between \$1,500 and \$2,500 (USD), and there is a growing trend toward more prestigious journals charging even higher figures, up to \$6,000 per article (Fontúrbel & Vizentin-Bugoni, 2021). There are clear indicators that open access journals with APC have higher citation rates than free open access journals (Björk & Solomon, 2012). However, the APC model replaces potential financial barriers to readers with financial barriers to authors. Paying to publish raises its own ethical questions about access to disciplinary scholarship channels.

A Way Past Black, Green, and Gold: Diamond Open Access?

A recent collaborative report by several scholarly organizations in Europe has introduced the concept of "diamond open access" (Ancion et al., 2022). Diamond open access seeks to label journals that are free both to readers and to authors, with processing charges handled by a network of research funding organizations, university libraries and presses, academic departments, scholarly associations, research institutes, and governments. Diamond open access represents the aspirations of organizations like the Open Library of Humanities, a UK-based nonprofit founded in 2015 and funded by an international group of libraries and grants from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. Organizations like the Open Library of Humanities exemplify a growing trend within humanities as well as sciences toward a free open access journal ecosystem (Smith, 2016). However, the movement for diamond open access can expect challenges related to funding as well

as opposition from traditional scholarly corporations for whom academic publishing has become such a profitable venture.

Open access publishing is here to stay. With an impact factor as much as 250% higher than traditional journals and the allure of greater visibility and easier research, open access carries a powerful appeal for authors and readers alike (Bocanegra-Valle, 2017). In communication ethics terms, black, green, and gold open access promote the good of knowledge dissemination (Fritz et al., 2023). How and to what extent this good should be pursued, however, is a matter of dispute. Do for-profit academic publishers have a legitimate role in the process of academic article publishing, which often involves unpaid labor on the part of individuals and institutions who worked toward the creation of the content? Is it ethical to share academic content if it violates copyright law? What are the long-term consequences of a society that prioritizes access to information without constraint? Green open access enables authors to engage directly with audiences and disseminate their work on a potentially larger scale, yet challenges the goods of timeliness and peer review. Gold open access prioritizes readers' ability to access information for free, but tends to privilege the academic voices with the greatest financial resources, raising concerns of equity and inclusion. Each of these responses to the questions facing academic journal publishing today attest to an ethical crossroads. In the next section of this article, we examine this crossroads in the specific context of the communication field.

How: Communication Responses to Open Access

This article began with an exploration of various forms of open access in scholarly publishing, which pointed to communication ethics goods in contention. With interests in the effects of orality and literacy, the consequences of changing media technologies, and the applications of communication ethics, the field of communication offers a unique vantage point for questions of open access. Although space does not permit us to give detailed documentation of the field's responses to digital publishing, we will explore origin stories of a few online communication journals and then point to some larger trends within the discipline.

One early exemplar of open access publishing is the *Electronic Journal of Communication* or *La Revue Électronique de Communication* (EJC/REC), which identifies itself as "the first peer reviewed electronically distributed journal in the social sciences" (Communication Institute for Online Scholarship, n.d.). The journal's first issue was published in 1990. In that inaugural issue, the journal editors, James Winter of the University of Windsor and Claude Martin of the University de Montreal, stated their goals in launching an online platform for communication research: (a) to be environmentally sensitive, (b) to expand the reach of traditional academic journals, (c) to reduce resources of money and time needed to produce the journal, and (d) to allow the possibility of deeper and more flexible directions of scholarship (Winter & Martin, 1990, para. 1). The theme of the inaugural issue was Q methodology, a reasoning paradigm that places emphasis on the abductive reasoning model of Charles Sanders Peirce (Goldman, 1990). Appropriately, the focus of this experimental journal began with an investigation into a "fuzzy" form of reasoning that involved openness to new epistemological paradigms and to the revelatory.

Since that first issue, the *Electronic Journal of Communication* has devoted issues to communication perspectives on current events such as the Persian Gulf War, African American communication experiences, the role of digital technology in education, social media, the rise of videoconferencing, and the presidency of Donald Trump (Communication Institute for Online Scholarship, n.d.). Guest editors have included such notable names as Tom Benson, William L. Benoit, George Cheney, Dennis Mumby, and Barbara Warnick. The call for papers details some of the unique features of this journal; one of them is that the journal is not an exclusive publication outlet: “Authors are free to re-publish their work in any other format or publication outlet. However, authors agree, in any other publication of the work, to credit original publication of the work in EJC/REC” (Communication Institute for Online Scholarship, n.d.). Other aspects of the call for papers reflect its origin in an earlier point in digital technology, soliciting article submissions in hand-coded HTML format and providing instructions for mailing manuscripts to the editor on floppy disks. The most recent issue of the journal was published in 2019, and it is unclear whether any future issues are planned.

Another early artifact in the gold open access publishing model is the *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, published quarterly since 1995. The first issue contained a variety of articles about the future of academic work in the “virtual university” or the “CyberCampus.” In 2004, the International Communication Association assumed responsibility for publishing *JCMC*, and today it is published through Oxford University Press. The journal has covered topics such as digital communication use and psychological well-being (Liu et al., 2019), implications of smartphone usage (Halfmann & Rieger, 2019), machine agency (Sundar, 2020), and the relationship between social media and social capital (Ellison et al., 2007). The journal has kept stride with developments in digital publishing and became fully open access in 2020 (Oxford Academic, 2020, para. 3). It notes that author processing charges are currently being waived, but it is not clear if this is a permanent arrangement. Today, the *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* has a 5-year impact factor of 6.273 and is ranked number 3 out of 92 indexed journals in communication.

Other open-access communication journals gain their funding from research institutes at particular universities. An example of this is the *International Journal of Communication*, which began publication in 2007. Funding for the journal comes from the University of Southern California’s Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism (*International Journal of Communication*, n.d.). Readers can access back issues of the *International Journal of Communication* at no charge, and authors are not charged fees for publication. Articles are published under a license that allows authors to retain control over their work while making it widely available to the public. The *International Journal of Communication* has historically focused on emerging issues confronting mediated communication such as net neutrality, policies on academic research, and whistleblower sites.

Even from a cursory look at the field, open access is quickly becoming the norm across communication studies. The National Communication Association currently publishes 11 journals both online and in print, all of which are managed by Routledge/Taylor & Francis and include open-access publication options. This trend is discernible at all levels of the discipline—regional, national, and international. The communication discipline has embraced an open-access paradigm for publication. Reflecting on the diverse paths that journals such as the *Electronic Journal of Communication*, the *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, and the *International Journal of Communication* have followed, we pause to offer a few observations about some of the common communication themes in these histories.

First, online publishing has altered the traditional narrative of institutional support for scholarship. The communication discipline has inherited a history similar to many other humanities or social sciences. In these disciplines, the impetus for starting a new journal would traditionally originate in a department within a particular university or a professional/academic organization such as the National Communication Association. The impact of the journal would grow as its readership increased, its circulation among academic libraries grew, and it was added to research databases. Such journals, even when they grew to become international in scope, were fundamentally rooted in and supported by a network of academic institutions, each of which helped to establish the legitimacy of the journal's contents. Today, any individual can begin a new academic journal on the web, with no particular institutional structure or oversight in place. Open access publishing tends to individualize the act of scholarship.

Second, the desire for open access and the free exchange of information has paradoxically resulted in a cutthroat publishing environment where journals and academic work prove extremely competitive. Online publishing changes the focus of attention to accessibility and citation metrics rather than scholarly reputation. Open access pressures individual authors to contribute articles which are eminently citable. In some ways the freedom involved in online publishing makes quality scholarship more difficult, rather than easier, to find. The visibility of a communication scholar's work depends not primarily on what sort of venue it appears in, but rather how tenaciously that individual promotes it, amid a plethora of digital voices clamoring for attention.

Third, open access poses serious challenges for the administrative processes of measuring and supporting scholarly work. Currently, there are a number of metrics available for measuring the impact of scholarship, both at the journal and the individual level. Each of these models captures a different angle of the picture regarding the impact of scholarship. For example, the Journal Impact Factor (JIF), which Clarivate Analytics administers, is calculated by dividing the number of citations in the year by the number of journal articles published over the past 2 years (Elsevier, *n.d.*; Hjortgaard Christensen et al., 1997). This is problematic for multiple reasons when the goal is measuring the impact of a scholar's work in online contexts.

To begin with, the JIF model does not consider the various factors that differ across disciplines. In addition, it is an analysis that evaluates at the level of the journal, not the individual article. This is particularly problematic in an era where individual articles, because of their availability or popularity online, may reach much further than what is accounted for in the calculation of the JIF. Using this calculation to evaluate tenure and promotion cases is like using a machete to weed a dandelion. Focusing on a more granular level of analysis, Altmetric is a company that provides tools for tracking and monitoring mentions of scholarly research on social media sites and in government policy documents (Bornmann, 2017). This allows for a more nuanced picture of an individual scholar's or article's impact.

However, measuring the significance of scholarship based on the number of readers or downloads comes with its challenges. Black open access is almost entirely opaque in measuring the number of times an article is accessed. There is no publicly accessible way of measuring the number of downloads across the numerous sites that pirate research. Green open access poses similar challenges, even if the research is being posted legally. Articles accessed through sites like Academia can be measured, and authors can see the number of downloads of their research and demographic information on where those downloads originated. However, many of these features are

only accessible to users who pay a monthly fee (Academia, 2023). Gold open access journals also raise ethical concerns. Although they may have a centralized system for measuring readership, gold open access journals erect an artificial barrier of entry that could discourage publication by authors who do not have access to institutional resources to pay for the publication (Roach & Gainer, 2013). Gold open access is also concerning because it introduces other criteria for selecting which articles appear in a journal. Payment becomes a determining factor. Diamond open access is once again intriguing because it strikes a middle road. While retaining the apparatus needed to track readership, it also makes articles freely available. Alone among these models, diamond open access seems to preserve a system for measuring the impact of research without introducing artificial barriers.

Fourth, and most fundamentally, the junction of open access with the rise of massive for-profit scholarly publishing corporations reflects a paradigm in which scholarly publication represents the production of commodified knowledge to be guarded and sold. In a traditional institution-supported publication model, questions of funding are secondary to the importance of engagement with ideas. The number of journals from the archives of major communication associations with sloppy typewritten or mimeographed articles bears witness to this emphasis on scholarship. However, digital publishing through for-profit corporations brings questions of access to the foreground, reframing publishers of journals as gatekeepers of data that needs to be guarded against virtual pirates. The focus moves from the ideas to the act of academic publishing itself.

So far, we have examined the *what* of open access scholarship through black, green, and gold models and the *how* of this scholarship's impact upon the field of communication. Both discussions point to communication ethics goods in contention: the good of accessibility, the good of intellectual property, and the good of scholarly legitimacy, among others. In the final section of this article, we will move to a discussion of the *why* of scholarly publishing, hoping to identify a reflective stance toward the future of open access scholarship.

Why: Responsiveness, Public Disclosure, and Public Evidence

Arnett's (2007) explication of hermeneutic scholarship emphasizes three goods at the heart of publication: responsiveness, public disclosure, and public evidence. Underneath these goods is the etymological root of *publication* as "making-public"—bringing ideas into a forum of debate and discussion. In 1963, communication scholars Douglas Ehninger and Wayne Brockreide authored *Decision by Debate*. The title bears witness to the scholarly dialogue at the heart of academic publishing: bringing ideas into a communal space with the hope that the wisdom of the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. In this section, we discuss the goods of responsiveness, public disclosure, and public evidence and apply them to the questions surrounding open access.

Responsiveness involves the recognition that scholarly work does not emerge from a vacuum. Whether research is quantitative, qualitative, or interpretive, it appears in the context of a specific discipline with a particular horizon and orientation in a given historical moment. A philosophy of communication perspective approaches research with interest in what questions are being asked, not what assertions are being made. Scholars respond to emerging questions that have been asked or suggested by others, without the false confidence of offering a "final" word on their topic. For this reason, Bettina Stumm's book on interpretive academic writing bears the title *Joining the Dialogue*

(2021). Stumm describes an ethical orientation toward the Other in academic writing, framed by the ability to engage with another's work and add to the conversation in a way that allows for openness and discovery.

The communication ethics good of responsiveness points to the centrality of access through the importance of timeliness and inclusivity. Communication scholars have an ethical obligation to attend to the emerging questions of the historical moment, as suggested by Lloyd Bitzer (1968) in his discussion of exigence. Timeliness is key to participation in dialogue. Depending on the topic, communication scholarship may be tightly coupled to an issue with a limited time frame, such as responses to the COVID-19 pandemic, or may engage more enduring and persistent questions such as rhetorical pedagogy. In either case, timeliness refers both to the relevance of the material being published and to the ability to move that material into print quickly (Sciullo, 2015). Closely related to timeliness is the notion of inclusivity. The scholarly conversation ought to include a diversity of voices, including those at the margins of the discipline. Attending to the good of access prompts communication scholars to notice barriers, including but not limited to financial barriers, that prevent the admission of new dialogic partners. Together, timeliness and inclusivity protect the ability of academic journals to practice responsiveness to the historical moment.

The second good of hermeneutic scholarship is public disclosure. The good of disclosure recognizes the necessity of furthering the discipline through publication forums that allow for reflection and response. Hannah Arendt (1958/1998) examined the implications of the public sphere as a place of "appearance" where democratic debate about past and future paths could transpire. Public disclosure continues to affirm the goods of timeliness and access involved in appropriate responses. In addition, it stresses the importance of scholarly organizations that exist to promote disciplinary and cross-disciplinary research. These organizations provide institutional homes for journals that advance theory and research.

Public disclosure frames the question of access beyond the proverbial "publish-or-perish" environment of higher education. The "publish-or-perish" dilemma frames the question of academic scholarship as an individual issue, one often characterized as precarious in nature. The pressure to publish carries tremendous implications for individuals seeking to maintain a career in a challenging job market. Access is essential—from scholars' ability to access existing articles to finding equitable opportunities to publish their own scholarship to ensuring access for their own potential readers. However, access also points to a communal obligation that enhances the discipline and continues to give it new blood to flourish into the future. While the pressure to publish carries tremendous implications for particular scholars seeking to maintain a career in a challenging job market, communication research also ought to engage the notion of access with a view to its implications for public disclosure and the continued health of the discipline.

Public disclosure works in tandem with the third good of hermeneutic scholarship: public evidence. A focus on evidence illumines the connection between contemporary communication scholarship and the ancient rhetorical tradition with its practice in the law courts. Evidence matters. From this perspective, all communication scholarship functions as a form of epideictic or demonstrative rhetoric in which ideas and implications are shown forth (Walker, 2000). Positions find support as they move from the realm of opinion into a forum where evidence can be presented, contested, and discussed.

Public evidence relates to debates over access that have characterized communication scholarship even before the rise of digital publishing. One of these is the long-standing conversation surrounding academic peer review policies (Bach et al., 1996; Blair et al., 1994; Chesebro, 1993; Leslie, 1990; Schwartzman, 1997; Sciallo, 2015). The anonymity and distance afforded by traditional editorial policies keep the focus on the quality of the scholarship rather than on the identity of individual researchers and reviewers. However, these policies may also suppress new perspectives and serve to reinforce a narrow and unquestioned paradigm of disciplinary orthodoxy. Consequently, the communication discipline receives repeated calls to cease privileging voices from “WEIRD” (Western, educated, industrialized, rich, and democratic) societies in its published scholarship (Bates, 2021). Peer review walks a “narrow ridge” (Buber, 1947/2002) between the competing goods of providing access and maintaining a high-quality academic tradition.

Our discussion of responsiveness, public disclosure, and public evidence contextualizes the quest for open access as a crucial issue. *Why* does the metaphor of access matter to scholars of communication in an interpretive/hermeneutic tradition? Academic journals represent a formal medium of communication that allows dialogue about ideas to transpire within a scholarly community. As the format of these journals shifts to accommodate a digital world, the dialogic demands of scholarship lead us to engage the question of open access with both enthusiasm and concern. Public disputes such as the lawsuits against Sci-Hub frame open access as a realm of contention between the essential nature of freely accessible scholarship for public benefit and the central role of publishers in vetting and disseminating such information. The phenomena of black, green, and gold open access raise questions about the role of individual authors and the inescapable realities of funding challenges. A look at communication journals today suggests an overwhelming embrace of massive publishing corporations and a move toward open access, but the lack of communication ethics discussion about this issue from a discipline that should be centrally poised to address it is disappointing. We offer these initial reflections here with the hope that they may spark additional research and reflection as scholars, administrators, departments, and communication associations engage the continuing question of open access.

Conclusion

Plato’s (1956) concerns over the implications of who controls the written word carry a renewed sense of urgency in a digital age. Open access raises ethical questions about what to protect and promote in the context of academic publishing. The network of competing open access ecosystems (black, green, and gold) foists a series of questions on academics and administrators regarding their intellectual property. With the advent of open access, not only do scholars face mounting pressure to get maximum exposure for their work, they also face broader ethical questions concerning intellectual property, copyright, and institutional legitimacy.

This research does not yield a singular answer to the quest for open access. We find recent explorations into “diamond open access” promising, and we also point to approaches to digital publication outside of North America and Europe as possibilities for learning. In Latin America, the movement toward open access is being led by public institutions rather than traditional publishers (Barbour & Nicholls, 2019). Open access repositories such as SciELO (Scientific Electronic

Library Online), Redalyc (Red de Revistas Científicas de América Latina y El Caribe, España y Portugal) and La Referencia provide open access to both readers and authors. These collaborative relationships have an opportunity to move the primary emphasis from profit to creative means of funding. At a local level, we can also point to the recently launched *Journal of Dialogic Ethics: Interfaith and Interhuman Perspectives*, which is funded through the Communication Ethics Institute at Duquesne University. These examples of creative and collaborative funding point to promising possibilities for open access that continue to maintain goods of relevance and scholarly rigor.

Even with these possible solutions, we still face a host of unanswered questions about emerging media and the dissemination of research. In particular, administrators face the challenge of evaluating and supporting faculty scholarship. Past systems of measuring and quantifying the weight of publications in the tenure and promotion process are no longer sufficient. In all of its forms, open access is challenging traditional ways of tracking the impact of scholarship. As we increasingly move outside of systems directly controlled by publishers, how do we measure the reach and significance of scholarly work? These systems matter. Their measurements make a real impact on scholarly careers and university reputations.

Open access is not just the future; it is our present. We are headed toward a reality where, in the words of Barbour and Nicholls (2019), “the endpoint of research will, in the future, no longer be a printed page, but be more akin to a living process” (p. 7). Seismic shifts as to how information is processed, archived, and disseminated have taken place over the past half century, and the academic world, particularly the communication discipline, bears a responsibility to react reflectively. Our research works from a standpoint that holds critiques of current open access models and hope for the future of academic scholarship in tension. No publishing process is perfect. However, despite the flaws, the act of bringing scholarship into public view continues to rest at the heart of the communication discipline. As members of a scholarly community seeking to steward ideas responsibly, it is imperative that we continue to preserve points for reflection and deliberation amidst the quest for open access.

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