

Is Kropotkin's Mutual Aid the Antidote to the Predatory Journal Problem?

Andrew R. du Rocher

Sheffield Hallam University, Sheffield, UK,
andy.r.du.rocher@gmail.com, a.du-rocher@shu.ac.uk

Abstract: Academic capitalism has encouraged the development of pay-to-publish journals, and may have also encouraged the proliferation of poor-quality profit motivated predatory journals. Predatory journals undermine the confidence that people have in scientific research, and have created an ethical crisis. Alternatives to capitalist ideologies can reveal how an anti-capitalist intervention to the predatory journal problem might be developed. A response to the predatory journal problem might be developed using a collaborative behaviour referred to as mutual aid. Mutual aid is an organisational component of the anarchist communism proposed by Russian dissident, geographer, zoologist, and anarchist Pyotr Alexeyevich Kropotkin. Networks of non-commercial not-for-profit online open access publishing houses and journals could be developed by faculty in higher education institutions using a mutual aid strategy. It is entirely possible that a gradual and sustained increase in (anti-capitalist) online open access journals would result in a gradual and sustained decrease in (capitalist) predatory journals.

Keywords: capitalism, predatory journals, academic publishing, platform socialism, anarchist communism, mutual aid, intervention, open access, Kropotkin

1. Introduction

Higher education institutions and their academics are involved in the production of, and use of, research articles that appear in academic journals (Niles et al. 2020). Publishers of research journals have proliferated. There has been an increase in what are generally considered honest quality scholarly publishers, but there has also been an increase in dishonest poor-quality journals. These dishonest poor-quality profit-motivated journals have been labelled “predatory journals”. Often predatory journals charge article processing fees that are higher than what is required for the purpose of publication, without offering quality peer review or editorial services in return. This indicates that these organisations function like businesses that are not particularly motivated by academic scholarship (Kurt 2018). Reasons for academics publishing in these journals include fear of academic job loss and the pressure to publish, career competition in the higher education environment, and a lack of awareness that the journals are dishonest or of poor quality (Demir 2018, Kurt 2018).

The activities of predatory publishing organisations corrupt the ideas behind legitimate open access publishing (Ferris and Winker 2017). Many predatory journals offer open access publication in return for financial payment, therefore the link with open access can cause a bias against quality open access journals (Krawczyk and Kulczycki 2021). Poor quality articles from predatory journals can also be naively captured in the systematic review process, which could be detrimental to research impact (Rice, Skidmore and Cobey 2021). Predatory journals undermine the confidence that the readership and the public have in research (Ferris and Winker 2017). It is thus no surprise that the predatory journal problem has been described as an ethical crisis (Cress and Sarwer 2019).

It has been suggested that interventions to this problem could be based on the creation of quality monitoring and/or journal ranking systems (Dadkhah and Bianciardi 2016; Wallace 2019), and/or the organisation of international editing collaborations (Callaghan and Nicholson 2020). It has also been suggested that more academic publishing could be conducted by learned societies and/or university presses (Teixeira da Silva et al. 2022).

The question this paper asks is: Is Kropotkin's mutual aid the antidote to the predatory journal problem? The article presents how an intervention to the predatory journal problem might evolve that is based upon non-commercial open access scholar-led publishing, and how such an intervention might be organised by academics in higher education institutions. Specifically, section 2 discusses how traditional academic publishing is located within a system of market capitalism. Section 3 analyses some socialist alternatives to capitalist ideologies. Section 4 introduces the anarchist-communist thought of Russian dissident, geographer, zoologist, and anarchist Pyotr Alexeyevich Kropotkin (1842-1921). Section 5 discusses who might organise a response to the predatory journal problem. Section 6 suggests what an anti-capitalist intervention to the predatory journal problem might look like. Section 7 provides some important monetary considerations. The overall focus of this paper is to consider how an intervention to the predatory journal problem might be developed using a collaborative behaviour referred to as mutual aid. Mutual aid is a component of the anarchist communism proposed by Kropotkin (1902, 1906).

2. Academic Publishing and Capitalism

Society can be considered as the totality of social systems that are external to the individual. The social horizon is the social background that lies behind the everyday perception of each individual person. From this perspective, segments of this social horizon can implicitly influence, mould, and shape a person's behaviour. Thus, a capitalist society can implicitly influence perception and a person's behaviour (Gunderson 2021). Capitalism pushes social process and institutions to create an organised system of the production of goods as a profitable commodity. Thus, capitalism manifests a society in its own image (Marx and Engels 1969/1848). It is a capitalist imperative to organise the rapid production of these profitable commodities in a large volume (Stoner 2020).

Although academic publishing started off as a profession, it became a business within a system of market capitalism, and finally an industry organised using capitalist logic (Luescher and van Schalkwyk 2018). It has been suggested that there is a tendency for academic capitalism to develop within economies that are already dominated by capitalist markets (Jessop 2018). Jessop (2018) suggests that academic capitalism tends to develop in five analytically separable stages that also have the potential to overlap. Stage 1 is the commercialisation stage where research and education are produced as commodities and are offered for sale:

“This stage involves various forms of simple commodity production that are not yet subject to the competitive pressures of profit-oriented, market-mediated capitalist production to reduce the socially necessary labor time for production and the turnover time of capital” (Jessop 2018, 105).

Stage 2 is the capitalisation stage where the capitalist market economy develops in academia, which reinforces the commercialisation process. In this stage Jessop (2018) suggests that one can observe:

“free trade in knowledge, the rationalization of its production based on tight control on costs and their recovery, and universities and research institutes using their own accumulated capital and/or loans to boost revenues” (Jessop 2018, 105).

Stage 3 is described by Jessop (2018) as a further step towards capitalisation that is based on a more radical modification of the process of production. In this stage the means of production is separated from the contribution of intellectual material:

“It involves the quasi-commodification of mental labor as an input, including the separation of intellectual labor from the means of intellectual production. This contributes to hierarchization and precarization of intellectual labor, loss of professional status, and attempts to limit the freedom of teaching and research in the interests of cost reduction and profit maximization” (Jessop 2018, 105).

Stage 3 also includes

“the appropriation of traditional knowledge, privatization of the intellectual commons, commodification of teaching materials, scholarship, scientific research, and scientific publications, and, more recently, digitization of lectures enabling their virtually costless reproduction and circulation – while charging consumers for access” (Jessop 2018, 105).

Stage 4 is the financialisation stage in which Jessop (2018) describes two components:

“First, mobile capital enters these fields considered as sites of profitable substantive investment; and, second, market forces equalize profits across specific universities, colleges, and research enterprises and between these and other fields of potentially profitable investment” (Jessop 2018, 106).

Stage 5 is described by Jessop (2018) as a system that is dominated by financial interests. In this stage,

“a finance-dominated system subordinates education and research to the profitability requirements of capital as property” (Jessop 2018, 106).

Throughout the stages of academic capitalism described by Jessop (2018), the products that are produced for sale include learning and teaching materials, actual tuition itself, and research. It is the production of research that is of relevance to the present discussion. It is easy to see how the observation of the development of academic capitalism would attract mainstream journal publishers to the market. Critically, this may have also encouraged the proliferation of predatory journals. The stages of academic capitalism described by Jessop (2018) offer a clear entrance into the market for profit motivated organisations. In short, within academia there is a system already in place whereby there is a separation of intellectual input from the means of intellectual production, where intellectual content is a commodity offered for sale, and where capitalism is the accepted norm.

It has been suggested that academic research is now driven by the need for academics to continually publish, as opposed to academic research driving the need

to publish (Hyland 2023). Capitalist open access research communication organisations simply see the content of academic production as goods to be commercially produced, distributed, and consumed (Knoche 2020).

Considering that academic publishing has become an industry organised by capitalist logic (Luescher and van Schalkwyk 2018), it seems likely that this has encouraged the proliferation of predatory journals and their host publishing organisations. It therefore makes intuitive sense to consider some political ideologies that are opposed to capitalism that can inspire an intervention to the predatory journal problem.

3. An Alternative to Capitalist Ideologies

Capitalism appeared at some point in the era spanning the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries when human behaviour shifted from using markets sporadically, to producing goods for them as an all-consuming behaviour (Sunkara 2020). Capitalism involves people indirectly and anonymously exchanging products which is achieved by using money. In this situation, members of society do not mutually contribute to each other's social activities, they just loot each other to the best of their abilities. By contrast, a Marxist inspired socialist perspective suggests that the recognition of the needs of societal members should out way individual members personal egotism. This can be achieved if products are not exchanged via a market using money (Honneth 2018).

Throughout the middle of the twentieth century, socialism and capitalism were contesting for the opportunity to define the future (Sunkara 2020). Historically, socialist ideas have revolved around the idea that society should control economic activity. Socialist economic models were based on cooperation, community, and association, and were predicated on the ideas that individual self-fulfilment is dependent upon the self-fulfilment of others (Honneth 2018). However, socialism in the twentieth century can be considered a false start, as confidence in socialism was gradually destroyed during the 1980s. Marxist perspectives were confined to classrooms in universities. Marx was considered a philosopher as opposed to a revolutionary, and capitalism was considered to have won as the final form of humanities socio-cultural evolution (Sunkara 2020).

Capitalism is resilient but is susceptible to crisis. The inequalities created by capitalism are provocative enough to bring about forms of resistance. However, many people lack any reason to think that politics can make their life any better. Moreover, collective activity in or outside the workplace carries a greater risk to those involved than an acceptance of the status quo (Sunkara 2020). This still leaves open the following question:

“But what about the end goal of socialism – extending democracy radically into our communities and workplaces, ending the exploitation of humans by other humans?” (Sunkara 2020, 237).

The current quandary for socialism is to understand how to direct discontent at the inequalities created by capitalism and mould the discontent into a viable confrontation to the capitalist system. Training new socialist organisers is important as new generations of writers, speakers, and thinkers are needed, as any form of socialism is unachievable without them (Sunkara 2020). Socialism has been described as a form of historical experimentalism (Honneth 2018). 19th century socialists spent most of their time writing about possible recipes for a different future. By contrast, contemporary socialists need to convince people that the future can be different,

without knowing what that future may look like. Today socialism has been revived, but it still needs to construct a coherent narrative of opposition to economic elites and to challenge capitalism (Sunkara 2020). If socialism is to survive it needs to be reactivated in a more contemporary format. Social freedom may be achieved via experimenting with different methods of creating economic value beyond that which is defined by capitalism, and these new methods should involve cooperative mechanisms (Honneth 2018). In this context, Honneth says:

“The guideline for any experimentation with different economic combinations must lie in strengthening ‘the social’ in the economic sphere as much as possible, enabling all those involved to satisfy their needs through complementary activity without compulsion or restricted influence” (Honneth 2018, 67).

The current organisation of the market must be dissected into its differential components so that they can be examined for suitability for cooperative manifestations of economic organisation. Thought experiments resulting from this can inform the creation of a revised form of socialism and the expansion of economic social freedom. Historical experimentalism suggests that the more preliminary methods that are tested under real-world economic situations the more influence they will have in the context of future political and practical activities (Honneth 2018). These socialist experiments could include experimental ways of combating the predatory journal problem, with the experiments being conducted by researchers and academics.

In a true socialist society, the means of production should be in common ownership of the producers (Marx 1844). The advent of digital technologies has facilitated the creation of a new form of commodity, and related means of production, that has been exploited by capitalist markets. A form of digital capitalism has developed whereby digital communication, and knowledge is seen as a commodity, and where the means of communication (the means of production) are seen as private property (Boucas 2020, Fuchs 2020a). This has, however, encouraged the manifestation of a form of digital socialism (Fuchs 2020a). The difference between capitalist and socialist ideas on communication technologies can be summed in the following way:

[In digital capitalism,] knowledge and communication are privately controlled and owned by the few as private property, whereas in a socialist society knowledge and communication technologies are gifts and common goods that are collectively produced and owned” (Fuchs 2020a, 20).

A socialist critique of digital capitalism needs to address the digital alienation caused by the lack of common control of digital resources and commodities, and the lack of common control of the creation of digital ideologies on the internet (Fuchs 2020a). To summarise, in digital capitalism (or communicative capitalism) computer hardware and software, as well as apps and data are the means of production. When these are owned by capitalist monopolies economic power is centralised. Digital socialism aims to break up such monopolies. Digital socialism asks that technology is used to benefit everybody and calls for the creation of forms of non-commercial collective and public digital communication services (Fuchs 2020a). Critically, the current system of digital capitalism does not allow members of society to increase their engagement with socially beneficial work, or to increase autonomous peer production, therefore these are the goals that digital socialism needs to address (Boucas 2020). It might be possible gain some inspiration “from literary communist utopias for the creation and

organisation of communicative and digital socialist society and a utopian Internet” (Fuchs 2020b, 146). In summary, one way of combating digital capitalism / platform capitalism would be for the digital means of production to be owned by members of society, which would result in a form of digital socialism (Fuchs 2021).

Many schisms occur within the broader socialist ideology, but one ideology of relevance here is termed socialist anarchism or social anarchism. Social anarchism involves solidarity and voluntary collaboration, and should not be confused with individualistic types of anarchism (Kinna 2019). The media and the state often distort perceptions of anarchism and associate it with chaos. However, social anarchism can be considered a rationalised constructive reaction to hierarchy and domination (Ferretti 2016). A key component of social anarchism (but not individualistic or capitalist anarchism, and therefore not anarchism in general) is its opposition to capitalism, opposition to authoritarianism, and its focus on the decentralisation of organisational decision making. These anarchists seek to replace the capitalist strategies of exploitation and profit-seeking, with mutual aid strategies (Williams 2018).

The social anarchist strategy of prefiguration involves blending anarchist ideologies into practical endeavours which can result in the organisation of alternatives to mainstream social institutions, such as counter-institutions which function as cooperatives (Cornell 2016). Prefigurative political behaviour is the future-orientated creation of alternative political situations and/or the reflection of political goals in current activities. Thus, prefiguration involves the creation of alternative practices in the anticipation of a changed situation in the future (Yates 2021). Such political strategies aim to establish radical new practices that challenge the status quo (Törnberg 2021).

Some people might be described as implicit anarchists and may identify with general anarchistic labels such as anti-authoritarianism or libertarian socialism. By contrast, other people may form anarchist collective groups and explicitly identify with specific ideological perspectives such as anarcho-communism or anarcho-syndicalism (Williams 2018). Discussion now turns to the anarchist communism advocated by Pyotr Alexeyevich Kropotkin.

4. Pyotr Alexeyevich Kropotkin’s Thought

4.1. *The Conquest of Bread*

The Conquest of Bread (Kropotkin 1906) was first published in French as *La conquête du pain* in 1892. In the *Conquest of Bread*, Kropotkin (1906) describes so-called “civilised societies” as a minority of monopolists taking advantage of their alleged rights that have been historically obtained to take two-thirds of the products produced by society and squander them. This minority prevents the remainder of society from producing the products that are required by all, as they are obligated to produce the products that provide the largest profit for the monopolist minority. According to Kropotkin, “in this is the substance of all socialism” (Kropotkin 1906, 5). Kropotkin considered that the result of this system is that enterprise and the resulting production increases the profit of the speculator but does not consider the requirements of the community.

Kropotkin (1906) notes that the privileges of the minority of monopolists and speculators are upheld by a system of law enforcement, which manifests a system fraught with lies and corruption. He continues by discussing how huge amounts of labour are wasted in producing and funding an unnecessary lavish and depraved lifestyle for the rich and fashionable, which is funded by consumers who are pushed

into purchasing what they do not require. Therefore, in such a system, huge amounts of labour are routinely wasted in producing wares that are profitable but injurious. Moreover, this squandering activity occurs at the detriment of the production of useful products that would benefit the other two-thirds of society. Similarly, in contemporary society, academic capitalism appears to have encouraged the creation of predatory journals who can publish substandard research publications. When predatory journals publish substandard research, it can be naively used as the basis of future genuine attempts at research. The future research that is based upon the substandard research will then have been conducted and possibly published, at the detriment of the production of useful research (based on quality prior research) that could benefit the rest of society.

Kropotkin (1906) says that a key problem of the capitalist system is that production produces surplus-value in the first place. Thus, the issue with capitalism is not solely that any surplus-value goes to the capitalists who own the means of production. Similarly, in contemporary society, academic capitalism appears to encourage the creation of predatory journals that publish large amounts of (potentially surplus) research in order to maximise profits. Kropotkin says that society needs to aim to produce as many goods as are required to ensure the well-being of all its members, whilst also minimising the waste of energy of its members. Kropotkin summarised this issue in the following manner:

“Might it not be that production, having lost sight of the *needs* of man, has strayed in an absolute wrong direction, and that its organization is at fault? And as we can prove that such is the case, let us see how to reorganize production so as to really satisfy all needs” (Kropotkin 1906, 79).

In contemporary society, the re-organisation of production in order to satisfy societal needs could be interpreted as the re-organisation of academic publishing to increase the availability of open access journals that do not charge any fees to contributing authors or the journal readership. The anarchist communism described by Kropotkin can be seen as a description of a post-scarcity society that would be highly productive and thus improve the means of production. Therefore, in contemporary society the anarchist communism described by Kropotkin can be reinterpreted to incorporate the proposed utilisation of digital technologies as a means of increasing production (Fuchs 2020b). The utilisation of digital technologies can be used to increase the availability of open access journals that do not charge any fees to authors or readers, as well as increasing useful production in general.

In *The Conquest of Bread*, Kropotkin (1906) says that the privilege and riches of the minority must be redistributed as common property to serve the collective interests of all in society. Kropotkin argues that all members of society have a right to live, and that society ought to share with all its members whatever is required for existence. Kropotkin says that the wage system will perish when the capitalist system of commercial production perishes. He writes that novel organisations should be created in a multitude of forms that are all based upon the communist principle of “to every man according to his needs” (Kropotkin 1906, 15). He argues that communistic behaviour intermittently appears in societies already. He discusses examples concerning the railways, such as the implementation of season tickets allowing unlimited travel, and zone systems whereby travel costs the same across long and short distances within the same zone. Kropotkin continues by explaining that a huge network of European railways evolved that consist of a multitude of different

companies, with multitudes of shareholders. These companies and their shareholders all interact and collaborate via reason and free agreement that is not enforced by government. Accordingly, Kropotkin asks “why, in the midst of our societies, consisting of groups of free workers, should we need a government?” (Kropotkin 1906, 57). Kropotkin’s observations clearly suggest that collaborative and collective behaviour between groups of people throughout a large part of the globe is possible. This is what is required if a solution to the predatory journal problem is to be found. In *The Conquest of Bread*, Kropotkin (1906) envisages a society where all members have become producers, all members have an education, and thus all members have the time and the opportunity to develop the ability to create science or art. A key point made by Kropotkin (1906) is: “*Society must itself, take possession of all means of production*” (Kropotkin 1906, 42).

Kropotkin (1906) also aimed to eliminate the division between manual labour and mental labour. This division between manual labour and mental labour is clearly present in stage 3 of the development of academic capitalism as described above. To reiterate, in this stage, the means of production of intellectual material is separated from the contribution of intellectual material (Jessop 2018). Kropotkin’s (1906) ideas on eliminating the division between manual labour and mental labour have also contributed to ideas on a new digital socialism. For example, a future based on digital socialism would allow a single person to produce digital media, use freely available information obtained via the Internet, participate in social activities (including online activities) and work on producing content that will be distributed online using creative commons licences, all on the same day (Fuchs 2020b). The idea of digital socialism is clearly applicable to organising a new publishing paradigm as an intervention to the predatory journal problem.

4.2. Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution

In *Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution*, Kropotkin (1902) focuses on the idea of collaboration. Kropotkin was inspired by his observations of the mutual aid-based co-operation in the animal kingdom. Concerning the observed advantage of mutual aid amongst animals he wrote:

“Don’t compete! – competition is always injurious to the species, and you have plenty of resources to avoid it! That is the *tendency* of nature, not always realized in full, but always present. That is the *watchword* which comes to us from the bush, the forest, the river the ocean. ‘Therefore combine – practise mutual aid! That is the surest means for giving to each and to all the greatest safety. The best guarantee of existence and progress, bodily, intellectual and moral’” (Kropotkin 1902, 71).

Kropotkin (1902) was also inspired by the mutual aid-based co-operation in early human societies, cities, groups of poverty-stricken people, and labour movements. He was interested in the human history of mutual-aid institutions and considered how they still survive in society:

“It seems, therefore, hopeless to, look for mutual aid institutions and practises in modern society. What could remain of them? And yet, as soon as we try to ascertain how the millions of human beings live, and begin to study their everyday relations, we are struck with the immense part which the mutual-aid and mutual-

support principles play even now-a-days in human life. Although the destruction of mutual-aid institutions has been going on in practise and theory, for full three or four hundred years, hundreds of millions of men continue to live under such institutions; they piously maintain them and endeavour to reconstitute them where they have ceased to exist” (Kropotkin 1902, 193-194).

Kropotkin (1902) was inspired by the way human societies have always manifested practices and institutions that manage conflict and oblige the needs of their membership. Kropotkin argues that these practices and institutions did not arise from any centralised authority but were manifested by the customs and instincts of the people within society. Kropotkin’s suggestion that mutual aid is based upon customs and instincts within society suggests that the customs and instincts of sections of society should manifest a solution to the predatory journal problem. Kropotkin was particularly interested in how the labouring classes utilise mutual aid type strategies to aid survival:

“For anyone who has any idea of the life of the labouring classes it is evident that without mutual aid being practised among them on a large scale they never could pull through all their difficulties” (Kropotkin 1902, 240).

In his work on mutual aid, Kropotkin (1902) discusses the idea that voluntary co-operation and mutual aid have more practical utility than egoistic behaviour. His ideas are still consistent with current biological theorising, as co-operation is observable wherever there is biological organisation. For example, co-operation is observable when studying genes and how they function within the genome, cells and how they form multi-cell organisms, and when studying humans and how they form societies (West et al., 2007). Kropotkin (1902) disagrees with the Darwinian concept of the “survival of the fittest” (Darwin 1859), that has often been used for justifying the existence of slavery, exploitation, and warfare. However, it is notable that Darwin (1859) accepted that the “struggle for existence” can also include one individual being dependent upon another (Pantel et al. 2023).

Kropotkin (1902) does not entirely reject the involvement of competition and individual selection for survival, but rather sees the importance of mutual aid and collaboration. Kropotkin considers collaboration to be significant factor in the struggle for existence. Kropotkin argues that competition between individuals in the same species is detrimental to any advantageous effect of cohabitation. For Kropotkin, mutual aid is a driving force of evolutionary change. His work is still considered relevant in the field of ecology and mutualism (Pantel et al. 2023). Indeed, as Pantel et al. discuss:

“From an evolutionary perspective, cooperation is a stable strategy when its benefits outweigh the benefits of cheating (where individuals in the group do not participate and still receive benefits)” (Pantel et al. 2023, 87).

The work of Kropotkin (1902) and Pantel et al. (2023) suggests that the advancement of human knowledge should be based on collaboration and co-operation. Evolutionary biology also suggests that co-operation evolves where the relationship is beneficial to all involved (although over time the mutual benefits may change). However, the system of co-operation needs to be resilient to the evolutionary effect of “cheaters” that benefit in some way without having co-operated. In the context of the current debate, when

authors naively submit research to predatory journals, the predatory journals profit from the work of others without contributing very much. The magnitude of the predatory journal problem suggests that academic publishing has not yet become resilient to cheaters.

Species exist in an ecosystem that includes distinct components that manifest as different types of interactions that include predatory, parasitical, and competitive behaviour as well as co-operative, mutualist, and commensal behaviour (Pantel et al. 2023).

“No species can only participate in one of these interactions – all organisms consume, and organisms do share finite resources. However, organisms also produce resources for other species as byproducts, at no cost to themselves, and others exchange materials to cooperatively improve their fitness” (Pantel et al. 2023, 89).

The behaviour of predatory journals can be considered parasitic as they value profits over quality. However, researchers live in the same ecosystem and should be able to formulate a mutual aid-based solution to predatory journal problem. The works of Kropotkin suggest that mutual aid and sociality should be the components of a newly evolved social moral. Kropotkin envisages a future where people appreciate the repercussions of their behaviour and realise that they need to limit their own needs in order to not harm the rest of society. Kropotkin’s ideas can therefore be considered a foundation for ethical behaviour (Padovan 1999) which might inform a response to the predatory journal problem. After all, the predatory journal problem has been described as an ethical crisis (Cress and Sarwer 2019). Kropotkin did not have any naive belief, or optimistic belief, that that human progress was inevitable, and he did not assume that evolutionary change was identical to progress. Kropotkin proposes that mutual aid is the key factor in the advancement of evolution, but he does not rule out the possibility that other factors such as the need for struggle, could lead to a reversal of evolutionary progress. Moreover, Kropotkin also discusses in a late nineteenth century newspaper article that the environment could alter the balance of mutual aid type behaviours and individualist behaviour (Kinna 1995). Nevertheless, re-examining the evolutionary ideas of Kropotkin, and building upon his ideas of mutual aid and co-operation, might elucidate some of the possibilities for social change that are needed to combat social crises (Pantel et al. 2023).

Mutual aid has become a fundamental element of left-wing political movements (Kenworthy et al. 2023). Mutual aid projects evolve when existing public services are not sufficient, are non-inclusive, or exacerbate state abuse (Spade 2020). Such behaviours are central to the survival of minority groups related to race, disability, sexuality, as well as groups of people affected by plague, pandemics, natural disasters, and illnesses such as HIV/AIDS (Kenworthy et al. 2023).

In summary, the literature on mutual aid suggests that subcomponents of anarchist communist ideology can be used to inform and guide small scale organised responses to societal problems. The line of thinking developed by Kropotkin in his work on mutual aid (Kropotkin 1902) can be interpreted as a theory of organisation that was way ahead of its time (de Geus 2014). Mutual aid projects often evolve to provide relief to people living through crises (Spade 2020), and the predatory journal problem has been described as an ethical crisis (Cress and Sarwer 2019). Thus, it is possible that mutual aid projects could evolve as an organised response to the ethical crisis of the predatory journal problem. There is already a requirement of mutual aid-based behaviours in the

academic publishing process. For example, peer review is not usually financially rewarded (Tötösy de Zepetnek and Jia 2014), and participation in unpaid peer review is a form of mutual aid (Springer et al. 2017). As Kropotkin states:

“it is especially in the domain of ethics that the dominating importance of the mutual-aid principle appears in full. That mutual aid is the real foundation of our ethical conceptions seems evident enough” (Kropotkin 1902, 249).

5. Who Can Organise a Response to the Predatory Journal Problem?

One way of tackling the predatory journal problem would be for more academic publishing to be organised by groups of academics, learned societies, or university presses (Teixeira da Silva et al. 2022). The suggestion by Teixeira da Silva et al. (2022) is based on the successful academic led publishing that is already common in countries such as Finland (Late et al. 2019; Pölönen et al. 2021) and South Korea (Hong and Youn 2020). There has also been a gradual increase in the development of new university presses (Lockett and Speicher 2016). It may be possible to liberate open access publishing from being predominantly controlled by industrialised capitalist publishers, by supporting a fully digitalised online open access publishing model that has an anti-capitalist ethos (Knoche 2020).

One publishing model that is appropriate here is the Diamond Open Access (DOA) model. The DOA model involves the online publication of material that is distributed without any monetary fees being charged to readers or authors (or libraries). The DOA model is run by non-commercial not-for-profit organisations, or networks of associations, and does not allow any for-profit or commercial re-use of published material. Although content published using the DOA model is typically in online digital format, DOA does allow publishers to charge printing costs (with no profit margin) if print copies are to be offered. The DOA model uses Creative Commons licenses which allows others to re-share (with the same terms) and to reuse content for non-commercial purposes. These creative commons licenses can either allow others to modify and expand on work or disallow such practices. The authors are always given credit under such licensing agreements. Some versions of creative commons licenses allow commercial reuse of material, but these versions can be excluded by the DOA model as they violate the not-for-profit ethos (Fuchs and Sandoval 2013). Despite the existence of DOA models, at present there does not appear to be enough not-for-profit and/or academic led online publishing houses and journals to function as a strong antidote to the predatory journal problem. Thus, there is still a need for the development of a more widespread non-commercial academic led open access publishing paradigm.

The workload of academics employed by higher education institutions involves teaching, research, publishing, and contributions to administration within university departments. However, some academics may also involve themselves in some form of academic activism, with the intent to facilitate some sort of social change (Kenny 2021). Higher education institutions can approve of the involvement staff in academic activism if the activity is not organised in opposition to the institution itself. If academic activism is aimed at facilitating a positive social change, then this activity can be presented by institutions as evidence of the relevance of universities and their staff (Kenny 2021).

It has already been discussed how faculty in higher education institutions can be involved in not-for-profit collaborative scholar-library-university led open access publishing (Adema and Moore 2018). This collaborative form of organisation can

involve both horizontal and vertical processes. Vertical collaborations involve the interaction between university libraries, higher education institutions themselves, external funding bodies, and other organisations. By contrast, horizontal collaborations can involve consortia or collectives that are manifested via unions formed by networks of small independent presses and/or publishing communities that publish books or journals. This type of organisation can facilitate the provision of mutual aid and thus the sharing of practical support. Collectives involved in these networks can be non-hierarchical, and all members can be involved in decision making. Therefore, these organisations can be described as having a horizontal or flat organisational structure (Adema and Moore 2018).

The focus of the present discussion is to consider how an intervention to the predatory journal problem could be organised. The perspective on scholar-library-university led collaborative academic publishing discussed by Adema and Moore (2018) implicitly resonates with some of the thoughts on collaboration and mutual aid proposed by Kropotkin (1902, 1906). However, discussion now turns to how the anarchist communism proposed by Kropotkin (1902, 1906) can explicitly inform a mutual aid-based intervention to the predatory journal problem.

6. Anti-Capitalism and Open Access

Capitalism generates discontent which generates forms of resistance. Motivations for discontent with, and therefore resistance to capitalism can be related to class interests but can also be related to moral values. Thus, in the twenty-first century, anti-capitalism cannot be explained just in terms of Marxist social class struggle. Anti-capitalism can also be explained in terms of a struggle to defend one's moral values. Thus, in the twenty-first century, it is imperative to create anti-capitalist organisations based on moral values and not just social class interests (Wright 2021). Erik Olin Wright (2021) discusses five strategic components of historic anti-capitalist activity:

“smashing capitalism, dismantling capitalism, taming capitalism, resisting capitalism and escaping capitalism. Even though in practice these strategies intermingle, each of them constitutes a distinct way of responding to the harms of capitalism” (Wright 2021, 38).

Wright (2021) differentiates between two strategic dimensions of anti-capitalist activity. The first of these strategic dimensions includes the strategies of taming capitalism and resisting capitalism and forms a dimension that should result in neutralizing some of the harm caused by organised capitalism. The second dimension includes the strategies of smashing capitalism, dismantling capitalism, and escaping capitalism, and forms a dimension that should result in transcending the organisational structure of capitalism. A contemporary strategy for resisting capitalism appears to be evolving in parts of southern Europe and Latin America. This strategy of “eroding capitalism” merges bottom-up society-based strategies of resisting capitalism and escaping capitalism, with top-down state-based strategies of taming capitalism and dismantling capitalism. The strategy of eroding capitalism is predicated upon the thought that no economy is ever purely capitalist, as economic systems that are dominated by capitalism include pockets of alternative economic activity. This alternative economic activity includes activity where goods and services are produced and distributed using cooperative, collaborative, peer-to-peer, and/or not-for-profit behaviour. Thus, a capitalist economy can be seen as an ecosystem that includes a multitude of economic activities that are dominated by capitalism. The strategy of eroding capitalism therefore

involves expanding these non-capitalist economic activities into the gaps, niches, and cracks within the capitalist dominated economic ecosystem (Wright 2021).

Anti-capitalism can be considered an organisational form that changes depending upon circumstances. Political collectives can adopt a range of organisational forms that apply to anti-capitalism without explicitly using the label “anti-capitalism” to confirm their eagerness to adopt such organisational forms (Malherbe 2024). There are examples in society where cooperatives are run by workers who make decisions concerning finances and production. Consumer cooperatives exist where people purchase goods in bulk to cut cost, and then redistribute the goods amongst their members. Moreover, trading schemes exist where members receive credits that are earned and spent by providing and receiving services to and from other members (Gordon 2012). The existence of these behaviours in society suggests that faculty in higher education institutions should be capable of adopting similar strategies in any newly evolving publishing paradigm that emerges as a response to the predatory journal problem. Moreover, further inspiration and ideas can be acquired from the many internet platform cooperatives that already exist, as they can take different organisational forms (as listed and discussed in Scholz 2016). Of particular interest are those platform co-operatives that can be described as a producer-owned platform. Producer is a term which is used by Trebor Scholz to refer to a blend of user and producer owned platform. Platforms such as this are a response to the activities of monopolies such as Google or Facebook who attract users by offering a “free service” whilst profiting from their data and content. Producer platforms offer users opportunities for co-ownership of the site through which they are distributing their product (Scholz 2016). Such a system could be adapted to suit a not-for-profit mutual aid inspired academic publishing paradigm. Platform co-operatives rely on essential interaction with other co-operatives:

“Platform co-ops are not islands, entire of themselves. Every co-op is part of an eco system” (Scholz 2016, 21).

Platform co-operatives use a means of production that is in collective ownership. Therefore, they should be able to create a common collection of resources that members can draw from, and contribute to, according to their requirements and capabilities (Padimitropoulos and Malamidis 2024). Access to collections of shared resources would also aid the development of new journals in a newly developing mutual aid inspired not-for-profit online open access academic publishing paradigm. Indeed, platform co-operativism envisages a future where digital technology serves the social good. In such a future, users of a people’s Internet have decision making and ownership rights, as well as the space to debate, communicate and create content (Sandoval 2020).

In his book *Envisioning Real Utopias*, Wright (2010) describes how real utopias concerning social empowerment and the economy can be organised and experimented with. Economic activity that is organised by the voluntary collaborative and/or collective behaviour of members of society can be described as a social economy (Wright 2010). Wright (2010) discusses Wikipedia as an example of a social economic behaviour, an example of anti-capitalist internet activity, and thus a real utopia. Nobody receives payment for entries in Wikipedia. Maintenance of its software is completed by volunteers. There is no charge for access to content in Wikipedia, and there are no advertisements. The key criticisms of Wikipedia concern the accuracy of the entries, the issue of neutrality within arguments and debates, and the problem of

intentional distortion of information (Wright 2010). In the context of the creation of new online open access journals, these problems should be resolved by mutual aid-based peer review. The question that needs considering here concerns whether it is possible to create a real utopia that reflects a not-for-profit online open access academic publishing paradigm.

One way of combating capitalism is to develop a co-operative market economy. Mutualist co-operatives can collaborate with each other via coordinated joint activity. However, co-operatives can be less efficient than capitalist businesses and can remain a small part of societies economy (Wright 2010). Nevertheless, the ideas discussed by Wright (2010) clearly resonate with those of Kropotkin. Wright draws attention to the following fact:

“The oldest vision for an emancipatory alternative to capitalism is the worker-owned firm. Capitalism began by dispossessing workers of their means of production and then employing them as wage-laborers in capitalist firms. The most straightforward undoing of that dispossession is its reversal through worker-owned firms” (Wright 2010, 165).

There are also some further principles of anarchist communism that are applicable here. Kropotkin (1906) implies here that all useful property and intellectual property should be collectively owned as individual products are the work of everyone:

“Science and industry, knowledge and application, discovery and practical realization leading to new discoveries, cunning of brain and hand, toil of mind and muscle -- all work together. Each discovery, each advance, each increase in the sum of human riches, owes its being to the physical and mental travail of the past and present. By what right then can any one whatsoever appropriate the least morsel of this immense whole and say – This is mine, not yours?” (Kropotkin 1906, 7).

Kropotkin (1906) clearly considers that the development of such property relies on the physical and intellectual labour of people who predated any individual's contribution (Kropotkin 1906). This is also clear when he says:

“Thousands of writers, of poets, of scholars, have laboured to increase knowledge, to dissipate error, and to create that atmosphere of scientific thought, without which the marvels of our century could never have appeared” (Kropotkin 1906, 6).

Similarly, newly produced academic work builds upon what is known beforehand. Thus, existing theories aid the development of new theories and are often the basis for new research. Moreover, one unitary journal article is not simply an individual piece of creativity, it is part of an ongoing communication process that is continued and contributed to by several people over many years (Fuchs and Sandoval 2013). This emphasises why all knowledge produced by research should be made freely available to everyone.

Kropotkin (1906) also argued that a need for a product should be felt prior to producing it as illustrated by his rhetorical question: “Is it not the study of needs that should govern production?” (Kropotkin 1906, 78). This is particularly relevant to the development of an intervention to the predatory journal problem. For example, only

research articles that are of good quality and beneficial to others need to be published. This can more easily be achieved via the organisation of a non-capitalist not-for-profit publishing paradigm, than by continuing with the current, and dominant, capitalist industrialised publishing paradigm.

If there is enough interest in an anti-capitalist mutual aid-based solution to the predatory journal problem, networks of new not-for-profit online publishing houses and open access journals could be developed by faculty in higher education institutions. Kropotkin's thoughts on mutual aid (Kropotkin 1902) and anarchist communism in general (Kropotkin 1906) can clearly inspire the development of such a small-scale publishing paradigm. When any new online publishing house or journal is developed, the means of production would be the sum of all resources that are used to produce the journals, which could be collaboratively owned (or at least collectively cared for, until being passed to the next generation of caretakers). The shared ownership of any means of production would mean that decisions concerning finances, production, and the method of interaction with other mutual aid networks, could be made collaboratively. A contemporary social anarchist economic perspective suggests that experimentation with different varieties of economic organisation can be tried, whilst maintaining the emphasis on production that is not solely motivated by profit (Wigger 2014). Such experiments would be congruent with the experimental socialism advocated by Honneth (2018), and aid the development of new not-for-profit online publishing houses and journals. Moreover, within contemporary models of social anarchism differing methods of production might co-exist, as might horizontally organised networks that are involved in the exchange of services and products (Wigger 2014). This is particularly relevant to the possible development of new not-for-profit online publishing houses and journals. Different publishing houses organised by different co-operatives, and located in different communities, or countries, might produce journals in a different way. However, they can still form horizontally organised networks that share services and products via mutual aid. The utility of horizontally organised mutual aid networks for the sharing of practical support relating to collaborative open access academic publishing has already been noted (Adema and Moore 2018).

As discussed above, social anarchists can work alongside non-anarchists to organise social movements that tackle societal problems and facilitate social change (Cornell 2016). Thus, any new online publishing houses adopting an anarchist(ic) approach may be able to collaborate with university presses and libraries located within higher education institutions. Such online publishing houses will be able to resist being acquired or taken over by university presses if they want to (Loacker 2021).

Furthermore, Adema and Moore (2018) discuss the formation of a radical open access collective, and the creation of the associated website. This is indicative of the increasing interest in collective and collaborative not-for-profit academic publishing. This type of activity is compatible with the prefiguration strategies used by social anarchists. As discussed above, these strategies involve blending social anarchist ideologies into practical activities which are intended to result in the future creation of alternative organisations, counter-institutions, and co-operatives (Cornell 2016).

In time, mutual aid networks could be developed nationally and internationally which could facilitate higher education faculty to develop new online publishing houses and journals. International collaborations might reduce international problems. For example, a problem exists whereby authors located in developing countries can feel that well known western journals are prejudiced against them, which can push them towards publishing in predatory journals (Kurt 2018). However, socialist experimental

interventions in one context should improve the likelihood of success of socialist experimental interventions in other contexts. If these interventions are successful, they can be tested worldwide. Thus, one can envisage the existence of a future collaborative network of successful socialist experimental interventions (Honneth 2018).

7. Monetary Considerations

Alternative political and economic activity can exist as pockets of organised low-profile resistance within the wider capitalist economy. Pockets of social and/or economic activity that are located outside of any capitalist processes and capitalist relations have been described as activity that is operating within an exilic space. In these exilic spaces novel practices and organisational structures can exist in autonomy from capitalist accrument and exist independently of social control (O’Hearn and Grubačić 2016). Thus, the staff of new online publishing houses and journals could interact within their organisation, or between similar organisations, using the economic practices of their choice. However, the organisational structures within these exilic spaces would need be able to interact with external organisational structures distributed across the wider capitalist economy.

An intervention to the predatory journal problem might be based on the organisation of new non-commercial online open access journals, that do not charge author fees. Despite the anticipated involvement of collaboration, mutual aid, and the social anarchist economies described above, there would still need to be the involvement of some money. Typically, journals incur costs of employing editorial, technical and design staff, but there are further costs of running electronic journals. These costs can include server and online infrastructure maintenance, as well as the employment of a troubleshooting team. However, electronic publishing can be organised for a lower financial cost than print publishing (Tötösy de Zepetnek and Jia 2014). Some of these maintenance costs might be able to be reduced if horizontally organised publishing networks are created that are involved in the exchange of the required services and products. For example, an online journal will require an article submission system and website to be maintained (Chiarelli et al. 2023). This could be achieved via mutual aid networks collaborating during setting up and running online publishing houses. Kropotkin (1902) also discusses the utility of mutual aid in creating human knowledge:

“the practise of mutual-aid and its successive developments have created the very conditions of society life in which man was enabled to develop his arts, knowledge, and intelligence; and that the periods when institutions based on the mutual-aid tendency took their greatest development were also the periods of the greatest progress in arts, industry, and science” (Kropotkin 1902, 247-248).

Kropotkin’s ideas on mutual aid are clearly still relevant to the proposed development of online open access journals. There are, however, some monetary costs that may be less easily reduced by mutual aid strategies. The creation of, and maintenance of, an online open access journal will require funds to pay for web hosting, provision of a domain name, and article DOI registration. There are also other costs to consider such as membership fees for organisations that offer services relating to databases and metrics, as well as plagiarism detection software and support relating to publication ethics (Chiarelli et al. 2023). A means of funding the services that cannot be supplied via mutual aid networks and the social anarchist economies described above would need to be found.

Existing Internet platform co-operatives also have similar problems, and they also rely on sources of funding, designers and workers, solicitors, software programmers and software engineers. Internet platform co-operatives require a different type of funding option than mainstream enterprises, as conventional sources of funding are often unavailable to them. Co-operatives can receive funding from development funds and crowdfunding. However, disruptive regulatory bodies are often keen to stop the advancement of experiments into platform co-operativism. Platform co-operatives are reliant upon open-source software licences. Therefore, it has been proposed that more software needs to be made accessible for them to use. For example, software programmers could help this situation by developing and distributing core protocols which can be modified to suit different open-source applications with different end uses (Scholz 2016). Moreover, forms of Internet-based peer-to-peer collaborative production already exist within the wider capitalist economy and interact efficiently with capitalist organisations if required. Linux (an open-source operating system for computers) is used by capitalist organisations, and some of these organisations donate paid software engineer time to aid production of the software. This process occurs even though Linux has an open-source license that prevents any patenting of the software (Wright 2021). This type of help with software access would also help those developing new not-for-profit online open access journals and/or their host online not-for-profit online publishing houses, as a response to the predatory journal problem.

Publishers that are non-commercial, radical, and not part of mainstream publishing must survive financially within the capitalist market economy. Sometimes their requirement for economic survival can appear somewhat incongruent with their original political ambition. Collective publishing organisations can find that the cost of time and resources is high in comparison to their commercial counterparts. Thus, collective publishing organisations need to consider the amount of collective behaviour and participation that can realistically be provided at any one time, whilst existing in the capitalist market economy. Resolving goal conflict that arises between political ambition and economic requirements can be a dissonant experience (Comedia 1984).

A study on DOA journals (Bosman et al. 2021) has reported that the cost of running these journals varies substantially. A financial stability analysis indicated that 43% of the journals claimed that they break even, whereas 25% of them claimed that they made a financial loss. Moreover, 31% of them claimed that they do not know their financial status, and 1% make a profit. Of these journals 60% use volunteers, and 86% (of the 60% who use volunteers) have a medium to high reliance upon voluntary workers. Financial support and funding for these journals comes from a range of sources including (but not limited to) research organisations and universities, national funding agencies, publishers, learned societies, libraries, foundations/trusts, NGO/charities, and museums. Of these journals, 91% (1186) said that they did not charge monetary fees for any of the services they provide. Of those journals who did charge some monetary fees, printing fees (52), layout fees (43) or copy-editing fees (39) were the most common types of monetary fee. Respondents were asked how research funders could financially support DOA journals. 869 responses were received. Many respondents asked for support from institutions, funders, and funding platforms. Many asked for support for editorial staff, proof-reading staff, copy-editing staff, as well as for translation, and plagiarism detection software. Moreover, long term funding was asked for by 16% of the journals, and short- or medium-term funding was asked for by 8% of the journals. More staff resources were requested by 10% of the journals (Bosman et al. 2021). Bosman et al. also noted that:

“Some respondents underlined that it is an ethical responsibility for funders to support or even favour non-profit journals by providing them with some basic level of support” (Bosman et al. 2021, 120).

It should be noted here that in this study lots of types of journals reported to be under the banner of DOA. These have organisational practices ranging through small voluntary run journals, learned society journals, institutional journals, commercial and non-commercial publisher journals, and large professional journals (Bosman et al. 2021).

Personal time input into the day-to-day functioning of new online publishing houses and journals could be collective and collaborative, which would create an organisation based on shared responsibility. However, there is the question of where the bulk of the editorial staff time will come from, as academics working in higher education already have high workloads. This prompts the question as to whether higher education institutions would be willing to donate a percentage of staff time to use as editorial time. Research universities are involved in the generation of knowledge and are expected to operate in a sustainable and socially responsible way (Nejati et al. 2011). Their contribution would aid combating the predatory journal problem and would demonstrate a level of corporate social responsibility on their part. Alternatively, it might be possible that editors could donate a proportion of the editorial time from their own time, and the rest of their editorial time could be donated by their host higher education institution in the form of work planned university allocated time.

This idea comes with a substantial caveat. If universities donate staff time to use as editorial time, then it would ideally need to be made mandatory in some way, as a voluntary donation could easily be withdrawn. This would be very similar to a form of public funding. Thus, a more practical alternative would be for a specific funding body to be created that offers funding for a 5 to 10-year period to cover those costs of running a DOA journal, that cannot be covered by practices involving collaboration, mutual aid, and the social anarchist economies described above.

A means of nurturing the DOA model needs to be incorporated into large scale policy making decisions. Taxes are often used for state funding of universities and to facilitate the payment student fees. Universities and libraries spend some of this money on subscriptions to journals. Moreover, some funding institutions and/or research councils offer publishing subsidies that can also end up being paid to for-profit publishers. Thus, there is evidence that public funds end up either directly, or indirectly, funding for-profit publishers (Fuchs and Sandoval 2013). This practice needs to be stopped as it facilitates the capitalist exploitation of authors and readers. Indeed, Kropotkin (1906) envisaged a future where:

“Literature and journalism will cease to be a means of money-making and living at the cost of others” (Kropotkin 1906, 48).

Publishers of predatory journals also see research literature as a means of making money, and thus thrive at the expense of others. The present discussion has focused on using components of the anarchist communism proposed by Kropotkin (1902, 1906) as a small-scale social paradigm that can inform the development of a mutual aid-based intervention to the predatory journal problem. In summary, although much of the work required can be based upon the anarchist(ic) activity of mutual aid based collaborative networks, monetary funding will always be required for work relating to

the purchase and maintenance of electronic and online resources. Such funding could also help pay for additional editorial time.

At present, anarchist(ic) run academic journals must exist as pockets of resistance within a selection of broader capitalist type economies, although they would still exist within any possible future democratic socialist economy (such as that favoured by Sunkara 2020). Not all social anarchist collectives are likely to agree with relying on public funding. However, DOA publishing could be supported if public funding were available to subsidise editorial, proof-reading and technical staff (Fuchs and Sandoval 2013). Moreover, public funding for DOA publishing by autonomous journals might be more readily available in a possible future democratic socialist economy (such as that favoured by Sunkara 2020) than in any of the current capitalist type economies.

8. Conclusion

Academic publishing has become a capitalist endeavour (Luescher and van Schalkwyk 2018). It seems likely that this capitalist endeavour has encouraged the development of pay-to-publish journals, which has in turn proliferated the manifestation of predatory journals. Thus, the present paper has discussed some anti-capitalist political ideologies, including economic practices relating to social anarchism that may inform a possible intervention to the predatory journal problem. In particular, the present paper has discussed the anarchist communism advocated by Pyotr Alexeyevich Kropotkin with a particular emphasis on an organisational behaviour referred to as mutual aid (Kropotkin 1902, 1906). In contemporary society mutual aid strategies are employed by left-wing political movements, and minority groups fighting for survival (Kenworthy et al. 2023). Mutual aid projects are often manifested as responses to crises (Spade 2020). The present paper has discussed how non-commercial not-for-profit online open access publishing houses and journals could evolve that are organised by faculty in higher education institutions using a mutual aid strategy. This process could be facilitated by the availability of funding for editorial, proof-reading and technical staff. It is entirely possible that a gradual and sustained increase in (anti-capitalist) online open access journals would result in a gradual and sustained decrease in (capitalist) predatory journals.

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About the Author

Andrew R. du Rocher is a senior lecturer in psychology in the Institute of Social Sciences at Sheffield Hallam University. His teaching is usually focused on statistics, research methods, individual differences, mental health and cognitive processes. His PhD focused on anxiety and the cognitive control of visual affect. He has published research on various topics including individual differences, mental health, cognition and emotion, pedagogy, and dreaming. He is interested in how anti-capitalist political ideologies can inform an intervention to improve the current global academic publishing paradigm.