

Open Science Talk No. 51 (2023) Breaking up with Elsevier: a computer-generated transcript¹

00:06 Per Pippin Aspaas

Open Science Talk, the podcast about Open Science. My name is Per Pippin Aspaas and today my guest online is Janine Bijsterbosch from the Washington University in St. Louis, where she is an assistant professor of radiology. Janine, you have some experience in the field of Open Science, so would you mind bringing that up to our listeners?

00:36 Janine Bijsterbosch

Yes, of course. Thank you so much for having me today. I'm excited to be here and to be talking to you today. Yes, Open Science is closely aligned with my values as an academic. I am currently the outgoing chair of the Open Science Special Interest Group or OS SIG, as part of the Organization for Human Brain Mapping, or OHBM, which is one of the biggest organizations in my field, scientific organizations in my field.

01:07 PPA

Yeah, and the reason why we invited you here is that you're part of the editorial group of something which is now just starting. It's actually a journal that hasn't been put online yet, but you are already accepting manuscripts, and it's called *Imaging Neuroscience*. It has one editor-in-chief, eleven senior editors, 30 handling editors, one of which is you, and then a number of editorial board members as well. So it's a big enterprise. And this didn't start from scratch, did it? What is the background of *Imaging Neuroscience*?

01:52 JB

That's right. We were all an editorial board at a former journal that actually does still exist, which is called *NeuroImage*. And unfortunately – I mean we all heavily invested, many of us, for years and years in *NeuroImage* and we all valued *NeuroImage* as an outlet for some of our own best work and and some of the best work in the field. But unfortunately we ended up making the decision to resign en masse, as the entire editorial group, and start our own new journal, which is called *Imaging Neuroscience*.

02:30 PPA

Yeah, this *NeuroImage* used to publish about a thousand peer-reviewed articles per year, with a journal impact factor of more than 7, I think it's 7.4 in the latest year, published by Elsevier. And in April of 2023 Elsevier put out a statement saying that "It is with regret that we must inform that inform you that effective the 17th of April 2023 the current editors of *NeuroImage* will no longer be responsible for handling new submissions to the journal. We are very disappointed." And so they go on, and then: "In line with our policy of setting our article publishing charges competitively below the market average relative to quality the fee that has been set for fully open access *NeuroImage* is below that of the nearest comparable journal in its field." So this is what Elsevier claims, that they

¹ This is a computer-generated transcript of the podcast episode Open Science Talk No. 51 (2023): <https://doi.org/10.7557/19.7158>. The automated transcript has been proofread by Huw Robert Grange and is included here for the sake of Universal Design and improved discoverability by full-text search engines.

actually have competitive article processing charges, that is the fee that authors need to pay in order to publish in gold open access with them. But this fee is actually \$3,450. Any comments?

03:56 JB

Yes, our stance as an editorial board was that this fee was unethical and unsustainable. The estimate of the cost for actually publishing an individual article is around about \$1,000. And so there is a fairly substantial amount of profit that is made for each article that gets published. So we have been in discussions with Elsevier for at least a year before making this move, trying to get them to reduce this publishing fee to something that was a little bit more in line with the cost, and in our mind a little bit more ethical and sustainable. There are – the whole field I think is changing and is becoming more aware of these publishing fees and the amount of it that goes into profits. And these fees get paid in most cases from grants, and so this is public money. It's taxpayers' money that gets used for paying these publishing costs and publishing fees. And so having such a large amount of it go to the profit of a company like Elsevier was just something that we found was not in line with our values as researchers, and probably not sustainable, given that there's more and more pushback in the field towards this for-profit model of publishing.

05:37 PPA

Yeah, because *Imaging Neuroscience* – that is your new journal – is supposed to be non-profit, or it is non-profit, and it's published still by MIT Press, which is one of the large presses of the US. Do you know anything about MIT Press and their motivation to host such a non-profit journal?

06:05 JB

So what I know about them is that they're a university press hosted by MIT. So all of their – it's not just our journal that will be not-for-profit, their whole publishing model is not-for-profit. So all of the other journals that they host as well – even though it is also, as you say, a relatively large publishing house, it just has a different cost model, that is, all of it is not-for-profit. And that was just more closely aligned with what we wanted for our new journal, to have the author cost be well-aligned with the cost of actually running the journal. And we had heard from colleagues in our fields who run other journals at MIT that they had a good experience, that they had a lot of input in setting the fees and making other decisions for the journal, and that it was a positive collaborative work relationship with MIT. So we heard a lot of positive views from colleagues, and that made us explore with them and end up going with them.

07:17 PPA

Yeah, I mentioned \$3,450 for an APC with the former journal, that you worked for formerly that is, at Elsevier, whereas *Imaging Neuroscience* with MIT Press will cost \$1,600. And you will also have these so-called waivers, that is for people from low-income countries, they can actually ask to publish there for free. So this is all non-profit, but what's in it for you? I mean, to invest so much of your precious research hours, reading other people's work, trying to edit their papers, do you get some sort of compensation for that, or is it all volunteer work?

08:06 JB

We get – as editors, we get a small amount of compensation. At *Imaging Neuroscience* we won't get anything to start, because we want to get the journal up and running, so we won't get anything until a certain threshold is met, in terms of the number of papers that we publish meeting the cost of running the journal. At that point, I believe the agreement is that all of the editors, regardless of the seniority of editing, of editorship, will get \$2,000 per year, I think, is what we were going to do. And so that is a minor, you know, reward for doing the work that doesn't really line up very well with the number of hours that we put into doing the work. The reviewers actually that do the reviews of the

manuscripts don't get any reward. To me, it isn't really about the \$2,000. To me, it is just the service that you do as part of being an academic and being in the field. I expect, you know, when I publish a manuscript, I expect people to review it. I expect people to handle it and to edit it, and I do that in return for other people's work. To me it is just part of the the service to the community as part of being an academic. So no, none of our motivation is for the money that we get for it. We all want to create a journal that is a home for our research that people value, that people look to for high quality research, and that we can place our own high quality research. So I think we care much more about the journal as a valued kind of home for the work that we're all doing. And that's what we're trying to build. And that's what we loved building at *NeuroImage*. We were sad to go from *NeuroImage*. We were sad – we were hopeful that we could have conversations with Elsevier that would have led them to reduce their author processing fees, which – I think we asked them to reduce it to \$2,000, which was still a relatively large amount of profit. And it is actually larger, higher than what we have now at *Imaging Neuroscience*, or what we will have at *Imaging Neuroscience*. So no, we're not in it for the money. We just want to create a well-valued outlet for the research of ourselves and others.

10:50 PPA

Great, how about the connection between journals and journal articles, and other kinds of scientific material that is also supposed to be online for free for everybody to access, like open data? I know you've worked a little bit with that before. Do you see some potential there for *Imaging Neuroscience*? How will you handle this part of the Open Science umbrella, so to speak?

11:19 JB

Yes, I mean as an Open Science advocate myself, I certainly feel like we should all be sharing our data and sharing our code and sharing our research products other than just the written papers. So I absolutely agree with that. Data can be – so I think the field is more and more moving towards “open everything”. The discussions that we've had at *NeuroImage* and that we're now continuing on to have at *Imaging Neuroscience* in our editorial board have been to move towards – so at the moment we're just encouraging – we're requiring statements about sharing, but we're not yet requiring that people share either their code or their data. I think in terms of the data sharing it's moving into that direction, but there are some caveats still in terms of some forms that the participants sign don't have the right wording to be completely publicly shared with everyone. And so there is a little bit of a kind of – there is other work that needs to be done before you can share data. And so requiring data sharing fully at this point – I think it will move into that direction – I'm hoping that that's something that we can do in the future, but I think we're not quite there yet in terms of fully demanding that. However, we did in the last meetings agree towards code sharing, and certainly code sharing for papers that are relatively methodological in nature, if their contribution is the methodology, then that code that goes along with that should be shared and needs to be shared. And so I think I'm hoping that we'll be able to set stronger requirements for code sharing to start with, and then data sharing will sort of slowly happen after that. So this is certainly the direction that we're moving into.

13:29 PPA

Yeah, other things to say about directions you're moving into. I mean, you're trying to sort of take the field with you to *Imaging Neuroscience* as the best journal in that particular field. But will you be handling, I mean, about a thousand articles per year? Do you have some sort of figure that you're aiming at? Or will you just wait and see how many submissions you get? Do you have a goal there in terms of the growth of the journal?

14:06 JB

We are certainly hoping that *Imaging Neuroscience* will end up the equivalent or the new *NeuroImage*. And so far, I mean, we've seen very positive responses to our – you know, the tweet that announced our resignation was seen 2,000,000 times and retweeted many, many times, and liked many, many times. And we've had an outpouring of sort of support, and a large number of reviewers and colleagues signing up for the editorial board and signing up for reviewing for the new journal. Well, we've already had a large number of submissions within the first month. Not quite to the level that we had at *NeuroImage*, but that will take a little bit of time. One of the things about setting up a new journal is that it takes a few years to get an impact factor at all. You have to have had a certain number of submissions, and those submissions have had to be published and then those publications have had to be cited in order for the system to be able to – for you to be able to apply for getting an impact factor. So that will take a few years. And for some people that is prohibitive. You know, for some people who are earlier on in their – and we understand that, you know – people who are earlier on in their career and have to make certain decisions that impact their own CV and their own chances of getting jobs, you know, they might have to – even though they are in agreement with our decision and want to support our journal, they might not be in a position to make that choice necessarily. And we understand that. We're hoping, and what we're seeing so far is that the community is very supportive and is coming along with us. But I think, and I'm personally hopeful and I would almost dare to say confident, that we will be able to reach a similar level that we had in *NeuroImage*, but it will take a little bit of time and patience, for sure.

16:11 PPA

It's common to talk about the world of scholarship, the academia globally, as two different cultures. I mean the humanities and social sciences on the one side, and the so-called STEM disciplines that you represent on the other. But within the humanities and social sciences, there has been a growth of so-called Diamond Open Access journals, not so much in the STEM disciplines yet. Diamond Open Access then implies that there is no fee for the reader and no fee for the author either. It's just some sort of general funding that backs the entire journal. Would that be possible for *Imaging Neuroscience*? And if it was possible to get that kind of funding, would it be desirable for you as an editorial team?

17:06 JB

Yes, this is – so the journals I'm aware of in our realm broadly that are Diamond Open Access are relatively small. And perhaps not always of the highest impact factor or the highest quality. There are some consortia that are community-led – so we are affiliated with the the Registered Report initiative, and so that means that they have – they do their own reviewing and we are one of the journals that can be an outlet for a registered report that gets reviewed there. But people have the option to just publish there and not publish at any journal, and that's for free if you publish there. So I think there are some options in our field towards that. So there are true costs associated with running a journal, even if you don't do fancy typesetting, you know, just having a submission platform where authors can submit to and where we can assign reviewers and, you know, where the paper can get handled. Many of those are commercial products that have costs associated with them. And, you know, so there are a variety of different costs, and there is also, if we want to make it completely free for the lower and middle income countries, then some of that cost has to be absorbed somewhere else. So that's why that explains where our fee is at the moment. We're hoping to reduce it further once the journal is up and running. And we've looked at the budget and we believe that in some years' time we might be able to reduce it further. Having a fully Diamond Open Access model is not something that's feasible for us at the moment. And I don't think it will ever be feasible for the format that we have at *Imaging Neuroscience*. But there are movements in the field that are more kind of community-led consortia that are more aligned with that idea of Diamond Open Access. And

I'm excited to see where the field will be in ten years' time, in 20 years' time, we'll have to see how that plays out. But at the moment we're just trying to keep it as low as possible, while still having the infrastructure that we need for supporting the publishing.

19:41 PPA

Yeah, certainly excited to see where you will be in a couple years from now. And I wish you luck with this adventure that you have joined to have a non-profit journal in your field. Anything else you would like to add towards the very end of this podcast episode?

20:05 JB

Maybe one thing I'll add is that the journal publishing framework is its own field, but it isn't separate from the other decision-making structures within academia, so I think, for example, there is a role for funders. If funders would put more pressure on publishing fees set by journals, whether they're for profit or not-for-profit, then I think funders could have a lot of power in terms of changing that dynamic and changing the amount of money that goes into publishers. And then, of course, there's also incentive structures. You know, I talked about – and with that, I mean what people need on their CV in order to get positions and in order to get promotions – I talked about that a little bit when I answered your question about how many papers are we expecting and how much time will it take to get up to the same level that we were at *NeuroImage*. And so I think in terms of having the broader conversation that I think your podcast is amazing at hosting and having those conversations, I think beyond the publishing structure we should also look at encouraging changes to the funding mechanism and the incentive mechanism, to try and improve all of of these forces within the field towards a more productive and more sustainable system.

21:45 PPA

Janine Bijsterbosch, thank you very much for coming to the podcast.

21:50 JB

Thanks for having me.

21:53 PPA

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