

## Editorial

### If not Now, When? Reclaiming Academic Journals as a Space of Kindness\*

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It is with huge pleasure that I welcome the readers to this issue of the *Journal of Cognitive Historiography* as the new Editor-in-Chief. I am determined to transform this journal in a tiny, creative space that can contribute to radically change academic culture. The academia reflects the good and bad of our contemporary societies, therefore, the drive towards changing academic publishing is entitled to the ambition to generate broader societal impacts.

My editorship will be solidly grounded onto my professional and ethical values. I believe that kindness and compassion can foster excellence. It may sound as an insolvable conundrum to maintain standards of high-quality work while kindly embracing the fragilities and vulnerabilities of contributors to, and readers of, the journal. But it is merely an apparent contradiction. To create a safe and provocative publishing space is a concrete possibility if we agree on a shared code of conduct. Academic publishing has several unwritten rules that make it an unsafe jungle for many brilliant minds. It is too often a space to exercise power and gatekeeping in disciplines. For too many decades it has been a toy in the hands of white, upper-class, middle-aged men. But why should the *JCH* in particular aim to contribute to fighting for more equal and just academic publishing? The reason is inherent in its name. For a journal that explores ideas in between cognition and history, the psychological stories of those who make the journal feel alive should be cared about by its editor. But cognitive historians are no psychotherapists, of course. So, how can they help? My idea is to outline a set of rules to abide by when I am working for this journal. The rules are simple: 1) to encourage anti-bullying behaviour and kindness; 2) to create a survivor-centred research space; 3) to foster collaboration; 4) to promote Emotional Intelligence in peer-reviews; 5) to reject non suitable

articles with compassion. I will try to explain the rationale behind this code of conduct, which will be included in the freshly updated Guidelines for Authors and Reviewers.

Firstly, bullying and gaslighting in any form will not be tolerated and promptly addressed. There is a growing literature on how bullying in the academe heavily affects people's career and personal lives (Prevost and Hunt 2018), but the phenomenon is still understudied and unspoken of. It is difficult to recognize whether one has been a victim of bullying, mobbing, and gaslighting in the workplace over a period of several months. Moreover, often even conscious victims do not make an official report because of fear of retaliation, or because of disillusionment that nothing will significantly change. Moss and Mahmoudi (2021, 2) define academic bullying as "sustained hostile behavior from one's academic superior" that includes, but is not limited to, "abusing authorship or violating intellectual property rights, threatening to cancel funding, positions, or visas; and damaging budding scientists' reputations through bad recommendations or speaking negatively about them to others." It can create spirals of not being invited to collaborate, self-blaming, embarrassment, and abusive patterns. Academic bullying can result in isolation, mental breakdowns, termination of contracts and careers. These mechanisms do not uphold trustworthiness and transparency in collaborations, and I believe they impoverish the whole academic community. If an article is the product of a collaborative enterprise, as I hope to publish many interdisciplinary ventures, each author must receive equal credit for the work done towards the publication submitted to the *JCH*. Kindness, politeness, and civility will be appreciated as essential in any form of written or oral communication between the editors, the team at Equinox, and the contributors.

Secondly (please skip the following section if after having experienced trauma it is preferable to avoid triggers), in my own research practice, I tend to boycott the work of scholars found guilty of sexual harassment charges as well as of scholars notoriously acting as sexual predators, while they are yet protected by the silent complacency of their institutions. There are differing opinions on whether the work of such scholars, if valuable, should be cited [French feminists in the cinema world have moved a scathing attack to the so-called "cancel culture" or "culture of victimhood" ("Tribune Deneuve" 2018)]. Some may think that we should distinguish the person from the research. Unfortunately, however, we cannot distinguish the scholar from the victim. If there are some statistics about the numbers of harassment cases in academic contexts, there are hundreds of cases that have never been reported (cf. Bull and Rye 2018). Both silent and vocal victims of sexual violence and harassment suffer from PTSD in a variety of ways. If victims

of sexual violence and harassment do not start appropriate therapy, they live with, often for decades, severe anxiety, panic attacks, anger outbursts, emotional dysregulation, depression, sense of guilt and shame, low self-esteem, self-doubt, self-sabotage, entrapment in abusive relationships – to mention some of the more common symptoms of sexual and gender-based violence post-traumatic stress disorders (cf. Chivers-Wilson 2006; Anderson et al. 2022). In the academia, these symptoms generate a cascade effect on a key component of academic life and career progression: publications. Low self-esteem may discourage victims to even try to suggest their ideas on paper. Fear of external judgement is another factor that impedes victims from letting their work go through a peer-review process. Moreover, the perpetrator's damage on one victim can distress other victims, too. Intrusive memories may have been actively forgotten but traumatic memory follows unpredictable paths (cf., among others, Freyd and DePrince 2001). Therefore, reading the name of a notorious harasser on a list of bibliographical references can work as a trigger for reliving personal trauma. If a panic attack is triggered (cf. Nixon et al. 2004), victims of trauma require a certain amount of time to recover, and this means that their level of productivity decreases. Motivation to publish also diminishes: victims may have the misperception that their work could never achieve the quality level produced by their perpetrators. The power differential in an academic context puts the victim in a vulnerable position in which it becomes almost impossible to resist the abuse, and to regain control of their intellectual force and human dignity (on unequal power and consent, see Bull and Page 2021).

In brief, while victims try to survive, perpetrators thrive. It is time for a reversal: victims must be allowed to thrive; perpetrators must be held accountable for their actions and face the consequences (on the changes needed to address and prevent gender-based violence in Higher Education, cf. Humphreys and Towl 2022). The scholarly community, therefore, needs to reflect on whether it is just to increase the authority and respectability of perpetrators while their victims are struggling in their every-day lives and careers, or, most unjustly, if they end up being pushed out of the field. In the quest for ethics and tangible change in academic publishing, I would like to recall a comparable discussion in the arts sector, quoting an excerpt from an email of the queer and neurodiverse artist Rebecca Jagoe to the artist, academic, and publisher Sharon Kivland:

“Too often it feels like acts of care, while productive in their impact, are carried out more with an interest in the aesthetics of the gesture than the impact itself; self-interest and the desire to be seen to care. I have been talking with a friend recently about care in the art industry. How so often an institution's programming will have a show 'about' decolonisation in an overwhelmingly white programme.

A show about gender when their employment demographic is overwhelmingly cis, white, male. Because, perhaps, the desire is not so much to implement change, to invest in the politics, it is to be seen to care, to demonstrate publicly an interest in the politics without a follow through on the actions. A bizarre and arbitrary distinction between public and private ethics.

This brings us back to all of the difficulties that we encountered when ON VIOLENCE began, the difficulties of individuals who believe their private lives remain outside of the domain of ethics.” (Jago and Kivland 2020, 275–76)

Academic journals must meaningfully care about ethics and ethical behaviour. Victims do not seek justice or revenge. They are primarily in search of healing, that means facing a trigger and being able to sit with the pain while growing through discomfort; and they are in search of finding peace – within themselves and with those around them. It befalls on the shoulders of the scholarly community to seek justice, to protect the victims, to eradicate patterns of violent and unacceptable behaviour.

To those who have experienced psychological trauma in the academia, and who live Universities as traumatizing spaces, I would like to offer this journal as a trauma-informed and survivor-centred research environment. More generally, traumatized authors can be assured that they can write a paper worthy of publication notwithstanding, or because of, going through any kind of trauma in life. As editor of a multi-disciplinary journal, though, I cannot possibly know the record of offences, reputation and ethics of any scholar being cited or publishing here. But this journal aspires to be a safe space. I do not intend to police every article submitted to the journal, but I do intend to hold a space that respects, honours, and validates victims of trauma.

Continuing describing the space that I envision for this journal, my third area of focus concerns collaboration. The founders as well as previous editors of the *JCH* have defined cognitive historiography and contributed to its development as a field of enquiry. With the journal reaching Volume 7 this year, I would like to pursue a broader definition of what cognitive historiography is. Maintaining the limits of the journal’s scope, each issue will be open to the freedom of cross-disciplinary experiments. I am using in this editorial cross-disciplinary and inter-disciplinary as synonyms, in the belief that the division between scientific disciplines often takes the focus away from the common aims. As Carr wrote, “the historian is not really interested in the unique, but in what is general in the unique” (Carr 1964, 63). He advocated for a profounder acknowledgment of the similarities between scientists and historians:

Scientists, social scientists, and historians are all engaged in different branches of the same study: the study of man and his environment, of the effects of man

on his environment and of his environment on man. The object of study is the same: to increase man's understanding of, and mastery over, his environment. (...) Historian and physical scientist are united in the fundamental purpose of seeking to explain, and in the fundamental procedure of question and answer. The historian, like any other scientist, is an animal who incessantly asks the question 'Why?' (86).

By recognizing the unity of knowledge, researchers can cultivate more inventiveness in their approaches. Contributors who are willing to rewrite the rules of what cognitive historiography is, will be welcome. Cognitive historiography is another label for exploring cognition and culture. Since its foundation, the *JCH* has hosted work that places history in dialogue with psychology, neuroscience, philosophy, history of religions, sociology, and anthropology. The journal gives the chance to cross and reinvent disciplinary boundaries. I will keep it as a shared space for collaborative knowledge production.

I hope to publish studies on a variety of topics including, but not limited to, visual perception, attention, and focus; learning, memory, and forgetting; speech, language comprehensions, and metaphors; problem-solving, judgment, and decision-making; emotion and affective neuroscience; consciousness; gender, queerness, feminist cognition, and neurofeminism; trauma and PTSD from war, violence, or psycho-emotional trauma; space, objects, and place; non-human agency; non-Western cultural traditions.

For scientific collaboration to flourish, the largest variety of scholars should be involved. I would like to practically achieve this objective in two ways. Firstly, I will encourage doctoral students and early career researchers to submit their work to the journal. They will also be welcome to get in touch with me at any stage of the publication process to ask for support and advice. Secondly, in addition to the Equinox policy on Open Access, within the next few years I hope to promote institutional subscriptions to the journal from University and public libraries. More subscriptions can give the opportunity to scholars and practitioners without an academic affiliation, or from underprivileged backgrounds and regions, to read the *JCH* and write for it.

A fourth point I care about is to find strategies that make the blind peer-review a process that guarantees academic excellence without discouraging authors receiving negative comments on their articles. A good starting point can be thinking about how to implement Emotional Intelligence in academic publishing. Emotional Intelligence allows humans to be self-aware of their emotional lives so as to manage relationships more harmoniously (cf. Goleman 2020). Peer-review is an emotionally loaded process, albeit it is not openly labelled as such very often. A survey conducted by the Royal

Society has uncovered truths that were tacitly widely known. To the question “Is there anything that you think publishers should provide to help reviewers?” one respondent asked for “Guidance on bullying and power abuse behind the curtain of anonymity” (Royal Society Publishing 2021, 9). To the same question, another response rightly argued: “Everyone has experienced nasty reviews that personally attack, criticize and defame the authors. As with everything there should be a code of conduct. Especially early career researchers should be able to submit manuscripts and receive feedback without requiring mental health support” (Royal Society Publishing 2021, 10). By acknowledging the risk of psychological damage, a journal editor can increase to a certain extent self-awareness and can facilitate non-conflictual resolution of people dynamics during the peer-review. Moreover, the wider is the range of identities involved in the process, the easier the management of negative emotions can be. If peer-reviewers are mostly powerful professors or ‘big names’ in the field, it is more likely that power strategies will play a role – with attached the unsympathetic rules that power games entail. If we come back to Edward Carr and his description of what an historian is, we read:

“The historian, then, is an individual human being. Like other individuals, he is also a social phenomenon, both the product and the conscious or unconscious spokesman of the society to which he belongs; it is in this capacity that he approaches the facts of the historical past. We sometimes speak of the course of history as a ‘moving procession’ (...) New vistas, new angles of vision, constantly appear as the procession – and the historian with it – moves along. The historian is part of history. The point in the procession at which he finds himself determines his angle of vision over the past.” (Carr 1964, 35)

This passage is relevant here for two reasons: the biased perspective of researchers, and the pronouns used for identifying the authors of historical writing. Carr’s use of masculine pronouns was undoubtedly inevitable in his time. But still today a varied expression of genders, age, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, disability, neurodiversity, socio-economic backgrounds, and geographies, is not equally represented across the academic research system. To invite scholars who do not belong to my social network can contribute to avoiding these biases. Furthermore, when early career scholars are involved in peer-reviews, the process should allow them to learn a skill and gain more experience with academic publishing. Otherwise, they might lose time, which for them could be very precious in comparison with academics who have secured a position. By providing more details on journal-specific elements to look out for, and by enabling Emotional Intelligence and cultural diversity, I hope that reviewing and being reviewed for the *JCH*, either

in the case of article submissions or book reviews, will be an occasion for expanding knowledge and being inspired.

The fifth and final point of my ideal ethical plan as editor comprises showing compassion when articles will need to be rejected. There are countless stories of studies being rejected at least once. The publication of Popper's *The Poverty of Historicism* (1957), a fundamental treatment of historical causation and situational logic, was delayed because the manuscript was rejected by the philosophy journal to which it was initially submitted. My judgment on rejecting a piece will assess the value of a submission in that exclusive moment and in relation to this specific journal. No judgment will be made on the value of the scholar *per se* and their ability to produce outstanding work.

My editorial journey has started with bringing to publication work on religious practices and beliefs in Asia and the Middle East, which was submitted to the journal before I arrived. Bach's article on Construal Level Theory applied to the Dead Sea Scrolls features in the section *New Perspectives on Ancient Texts*, and through Social Psychology it offers a new understanding of persuasive prescripts in Qumrān literature. Forman's guest-edited issue, *History and Historiography: The Interplay between Religion and Cognitive Science in Asian and Middle-Eastern Traditions*, brilliantly demonstrates how cognitive historiography is enriched by collaborative and multi-disciplinary enterprises, and by shifting the attention from the West to the East. These authors, and the behind-the-scenes team at the *JCH*, deserve our thanks for providing us with a thought-provoking combination of theoretical, empirical, and experimental research.

## Notes

\*The content in this article may be upsetting to some readers. If you have been affected by the issues discussed here, please seek further support and advice from your local healthcare professionals. UK-based resources include: [The Survivors Trust](#); [The 1752 Group](#); [Anti-Bullying Alliance](#); [Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service](#).

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