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Crossing disciplinary boundaries: An ethnographic exploration of academic publishing invitations

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ABSTRACT

Background: This autoethnographic study examines email invitations for health researchers to publish in journals outside their expertise, exploring implications for interdisciplinary research and knowledge production.

Methods: Over three months, email invitations to publish outside the author's field were documented and analysed thematically and through reflexive journaling.

Results: Five main themes in publication invitations were identified: emphasising novelty, promising rapid publication, appealing to research impact, flattering language, and persistent messaging. Reflexive analysis revealed complex factors shaping responses, including publication pressures, desires for prestige, and tensions between disciplinary norms and interdisciplinary collaboration. While invitations may present opportunities for novel collaborations, they often reflect predatory publishing practices.

Conclusions: Navigating this landscape requires careful discernment, commitment to academic integrity, and reflexivity about one's positionality. The study underscores the need for researchers to critically interrogate the motivations behind such invitations. Further research could explore decision-making processes across disciplines and implications for academic publishing integrity and equity.

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Introduction

The landscape of academic publishing is a complex and ever-evolving terrain, shaped by a myriad of factors ranging from disciplinary norms and institutional pressures to the rapidly changing nature of knowledge production itself. In this context, the arrival of an unexpected invitation to contribute to a journal outside one's primary area of expertise can be a surprising yet intriguing occurrence. As a public health researcher focused on qualitative methods and community-based research, I have become increasingly

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fascinated by the unexpected deluge of unsolicited invitations to publish in journals outside my primary area of expertise. These invitations periodically appear in my inbox, often seemingly misaligned with my core research interests, encompassing issues such as homelessness, community health promotion, breastfeeding, access to healthcare, and mental health. However, upon closer inspection, I have come to recognize that these invitations warrant a critical examination to determine their legitimacy and potential value for interdisciplinary research. Do they present a unique opportunity to explore new intellectual territories, engage in interdisciplinary dialogue, and potentially uncover novel insights that can inform and enrich my work?

As health professionals and researchers increasingly engage in interdisciplinary collaborations to address complex health challenges, understanding the dynamics and potential pitfalls of such collaborations is crucial. These collaborations often begin with invitations that serve as catalysts for reflecting on the value and challenges of crossing disciplinary boundaries in the pursuit of knowledge and solutions to pressing health issues. However, it is essential to approach these invitations with a discerning eye, as not all opportunities are created equally. Ojala, Reynolds, and Johnson (2020) highlight how predatory journals are affecting scholarly publishing, making it increasingly challenging to distinguish between legitimate and predatory publication opportunities. This challenge is part of a broader trend in academia, where the increasing marketization of higher education has profoundly transformed academic careers. As Oliveira, Nada, and Magalhães (2024) note, academics have shifted from “privileged intellectuals in ivory towers to high-skilled workers trapped in the wheel of precarity” (Oliveira, Nada, and Magalhães 2024, 23). This shift has significant implications for how academics engage with publishing invitations and career development opportunities, including interdisciplinary collaborations.

The notion of interdisciplinarity has gained significant traction in recent years, with researchers, funding bodies, and policymakers alike recognizing the value of crossing disciplinary boundaries to address complex societal challenges (Fortuin et al. 2023). Interdisciplinary collaboration has the potential to foster innovation, creativity, and the generation of new knowledge that may not be possible within the confines of a single discipline (Moirano, Sanchez, and Stepanek 2020). However, interdisciplinary work itself is not without its challenges, as it requires navigating differences in epistemological assumptions, methodological approaches, and disciplinary languages (Turner et al. 2015). The complexities of this landscape may partially contribute to the phenomenon of unexpected publication invitations. In this context, it becomes crucial to distinguish between genuine opportunities for interdisciplinary research and predatory publishers seeking to exploit researchers’ desire to publish and expand their impact. Callaghan and Nicholson (2020)

note that the difficulty in identifying predatory journals, with small or new open-access publishers with limited resources may be mistakenly labeled predatory. This challenging context may partly explain why some authors publish in predatory journals, with recent research by Kurt (2018) finding that factors such as social identity threat, unawareness of journal quality, high pressure to publish, and lack of research proficiency all play a role (Kurt 2018).

While previous studies have examined various aspects of predatory publishing practices, there is a need for a deeper exploration of how invitations to publish outside one's area impact researchers' experiences and perceptions of academic publishing. Existing research has primarily focused on specific aspects of predatory publishing: Shrestha (2021) and Bocanegra-Valle (2023) highlighted the deceptive tactics and linguistic strategies used in predatory e-mails, while Lund and Wang (2020) quantified characteristics of predatory spam in library and information science, and Sureda-Negre, Calvo-Sastre, and Comas-Forgas (2022) examined the prevalence of academic spam in educational sciences. However, these studies do not explore the implications for interdisciplinary research, power dynamics or positionality issues embedded in these invitations.

The pressure to establish oneself within the academic community can be overwhelming for researchers. The well-known adage of “publish or perish” looms large in academia, with researchers facing immense pressure to produce numerous high-quality publications, demonstrate impact, and secure funding as key metrics for success (Craig, Cosh, and Luck 2021; Mertkan, Onurkan Aliusta, and Bayrakli 2020). This high-stakes environment creates a complex cycle in academia where the pressure to publish contributes to an overwhelming volume of articles (Frederick 2020). This “publish or perish” culture, combined with increasing time pressures and information overload, leaves researchers with less time for other important academic activities, including thorough peer review. Frederick (2020) notes that this situation can make predatory journals' promises of rapid publication more appealing to time-pressured academics. The pressures on early career academics to publish are particularly intense. Aprile, Ellem, and Lole (2021) found that early career academics in regional universities face significant challenges in balancing institutional demands for research productivity with their personal values and commitment to teaching and community engagement. This tension between institutional priorities and personal academic identities may influence how early career researchers respond to publishing invitations, especially those outside their primary field of expertise, potentially making them more vulnerable to predatory publishing practices or pushing them to publish outside their primary field of expertise.

When I first began receiving offers to publish in journals outside my primary field of health promotion, my initial reaction was skepticism. The

idea of my research on the social determinants of health contributing to discussions in fields disparate as quantum physics or ancient history seemed preposterous, a misguided attempt to shoehorn my work into an ill-fitting disciplinary mold. However, upon further reflection, I began to question whether my initial dismissal of these invitations was justified or whether it stemmed from a narrow understanding of the potential for interdisciplinary collaboration. As I grappled with these questions, I was forced to confront my own assumptions about the nature of expertise and the value of different forms of knowledge production. While it may be tempting to view unsolicited publication invitations as a manifestation of the increasing pressure on journals to boost their impact factors and expand their reach by attracting contributions from a broader range of disciplines, it is essential to consider the possibility that some of the invitations represent genuine attempts to foster cross-disciplinary dialogue and knowledge exchange.

However, engaging in interdisciplinary work is not without its challenges. Collaborating across disciplinary boundaries requires a willingness to step outside one's comfort zone, grapple with unfamiliar concepts and methods, and navigate the complexities of collaborating with colleagues who may have very different ways of understanding and approaching the world (Mattessich and Johnson 2018). This demands a level of openness, flexibility and willingness to learn that can be difficult to cultivate within the constraints of traditional academic structures and reward systems. The landscape of academic publishing itself can be fraught with obstacles and pitfalls, particularly for those seeking to publish outside their primary discipline. The hierarchies and gatekeeping mechanisms that structure the production and dissemination of knowledge reinforce disciplinary silos and limit opportunities for cross-disciplinary exchange (Frickel, Albert, and Prainsack 2016). These mechanisms include discipline-specific journals, peer review processes that favor established methodologies within a field, and academic reward systems that prioritize publications in high-ranking, discipline-specific journals. Such structures may discourage researchers from venturing outside their primary fields, as publications in unfamiliar disciplines may be perceived as less valuable for career advancement. The specialized language and methodological expectations may create barriers to cross-disciplinary understanding and acceptance, further entrenching these silos. Aprile, Ellem, and Lole (2021) highlight that for early career researchers, participation in research teams can be seen as a strategic move to "get a leg up" in meeting performance expectations. However, this collaboration can sometimes come at the cost of sacrificing autonomy or extensive disciplinary knowledge. This suggests that early career researchers may approach interdisciplinary publishing invitations with mixed feelings, seeing them as both opportunities and potential compromises.

Against this backdrop, unsolicited requests to publish take on a particular significance. On the one hand, these invitations can be seen as a manifestation of the increasing pressure on journals to boost their impact factors and expand their reach by attracting contributions from a broader range of disciplines. From this perspective, the invitations I received might be interpreted as an approach that may leverage my growing interest in interdisciplinary work, regardless of the actual fit or relevance of my work to the journal's scope. On the other hand, these invitations might also be viewed as a genuine attempt to foster cross-disciplinary dialogue and knowledge exchange, break down the barriers that impede innovative research, and limit the impact of academic scholarship. By reaching out to researchers from diverse fields and inviting them to contribute their perspectives, these journals may seek to create a more inclusive and dynamic platform for advancing knowledge. Alternatively, these invitations may have an unspoken expectation that researchers will bend their work to fit the journal's disciplinary mold, regardless of how far it may stray from their actual expertise.

This study employs an autoethnographic approach to critically examine the phenomenon of receiving requests to contribute to journals in unfamiliar disciplines, situated within the broader context of interdisciplinary research. By reflexively examining my personal experiences and responses, I aim to shed light on the complex factors that shape researchers' engagement with these opportunities. Through this personal account, I aim to explore the complex factors that shaped my engagement with these opportunities. This personal account serves as a starting point for considering the potential benefits and challenges of crossing disciplinary boundaries in the pursuit of knowledge and solutions to pressing social and health issues while acknowledging that these experiences may not be universally applicable to all researchers.

Through a reflexive analysis of my own experiences and responses to these invitations, I aim to explore the factors that shaped my engagement with these opportunities. This reflection is situated within a broader context of research on academic publishing motivations. For example, recent research by Mills and Inouye (2021) has highlighted the nuanced factors influencing academics' publishing choices, finding that institutional pressures and incentives play a significant role in shaping publication decisions.

This study aims to fill this gap by examining how one researcher navigates and reflects on invitations to publish outside their primary areas of expertise. By doing so, it aims to contribute a nuanced understanding of the complex interplay between predatory publishing practices, interdisciplinary opportunities, and the broader academic publishing system. In addition, this study will reflect on the underlying power dynamics at play in these unexpected

publication invitations. Academic publishing is not a neutral space; it is shaped by complex hierarchies, institutional pressures, and systemic inequities. By considering these power dynamics, we can better understand how they influence researchers' decisions, shape interdisciplinary collaboration, and reproduce or challenge existing academic hierarchies.

This study addresses the following key research questions:

- (1) How do invitations to publish in journals outside one's primary area of expertise shape academic experiences and perceptions of academic publishing?
- (2) What are the opportunities and challenges of engaging with these invitations in the context of interdisciplinary research?
- (3) How can researchers navigate and reflect on the power dynamics and positionality issues embedded within these invitations and the academic publishing system?

By exploring these questions, this study aims to contribute to ongoing discussions about the changing nature of academic publishing, the potential for interdisciplinary collaboration, and the ethical considerations surrounding publication practices.

Method

This study employs a dual-method approach to address the research questions by providing insights into how the researcher navigates academic publishing, engages with interdisciplinary opportunities, and manages power dynamics. Through autoethnographic methods, I examine my personal experiences and responses to these invitations, reflecting on how they shape my understanding of academic publishing practices. Secondly, a thematic analysis of the e-mails provides a systematic examination of their content. This combined approach allows for an in-depth exploration of one researcher's encounter and a broader analysis of the nature and patterns of these invitations.

An autoethnographic approach allows for the critical examination of personal experiences in relation to broader cultural, social, and political contexts (Boylorn and Orbe 2020). This approach aligns with recent calls for more reflexive and critical examinations of academic experiences in the context of marketized higher education (Oliveira, Nada, and Magalhães 2024). I am a female mid career public health academic from Aotearoa New Zealand. I have been in a balanced permanent position since 2016, with responsibilities spanning research, teaching and academic citizenship. My primary interests lie in community-based health promotion, and I also publish in public health education. I am based in an interdisciplinary unit,

which exposes me to a variety of disciplinary perspectives daily. As part of my role, I supervise postgraduate students across a range of health-related disciplines, further broadening my academic purview. My academic journey has included serving on editorial boards and as a peer reviewer for several journals in my field and navigating the complexities of publishing in high-impact journals. I have some experience with publishing outside my primary field of health promotion through participation in cross-faculty research projects and supervision. This positionality informs my interpretation of publication invitations and shapes my reflections on their implications for academic practice.

Over a three-month period, I systematically documented all unsolicited e-mail invitations to publish in journals outside my primary field of public health. My research field was defined as public health with a focus on health promotion and qualitative methods. This encompasses work on community-based health promotion, access to healthcare, mental health and addiction, breastfeeding, homelessness, and public health education. E-mail invitations from journals in public health, health promotion, education, or closely related social science disciplines were excluded. For each invitation, I saved the full e-mail into a dedicated folder, which quickly became a veritable trove of academic spam. Only invitations to publish full research articles in peer-reviewed journals were included, as this focus allowed for consistent cross-disciplinary analysis and examination of a key metric in academic evaluation. Requests for book chapters, conference presentations, or editorial roles were excluded from the analysis as they lacked the prestige and allure of a peer-reviewed journal article. Data analysis was conducted in two stages: 1. Thematic analysis of the e-mail invitations, and 2. Reflexive journalling of my own thoughts and experiences as I entered this unfamiliar academic landscape of interdisciplinary collaboration.

For the thematic analysis, I systematically analyzed the invitation e-mails to identify relevant themes and patterns. Following Braun and Clarke's approach (Cooper et al. 2012), I first familiarized myself with the complete e-mail data set, carefully reading and re-reading each e-mail. During this initial phase, I noted recurrent language, tones, and content that potentially reflected broader practices and ideologies within academic publishing. Second, I conducted open coding, generating initial codes that described key features, ideas and patterns of meaning that emerged repeatedly across the dataset. This process was primarily inductive. In the third phase, I collated codes into potential themes. The subsequent phases involved reviewing and defining themes into an overarching thematic structure that captured key themes across the e-mails. Throughout the process, I paid attention to both semantic and latent content, considering not only the surface meanings of the data but also the underlying ideas, assumptions and conceptualizations.

Reflexive journaling is a key component of autoethnographic research, as it enables the researcher to critically examine their own assumptions, biases, and emotional responses to the phenomenon under study (Cunningham and Carmichael 2018). I maintained a written reflexive journal, recording immediate reactions after reading each e-mail invitation. These entries included detailed descriptions of feelings and associated thoughts, capturing my responses to each e-mail. Weekly, I engaged in more in-depth reflection on received invitations, exploring evoked thoughts and feelings and broader questions about academic publishing, interdisciplinarity, and my researcher identity. The analysis involved a two-stage coding process: initial descriptive coding to summarize the primary emotions or thoughts in each e-mail. This was followed by focused coding to synthesize and conceptually group the initial descriptive codes into broader categories. Throughout this process, I engaged in close reading of journal entries, attending to emerging details and meanings while remaining attentive to how my own subjectivity and positionality shaped my interpretations. This process allowed me to maintain a critical and reflexive stance, interrogate my own complicity in the system, and explore alternative modes of knowledge production. The coding process was iterative, involving constant comparison between data, codes and emerging themes to ensure a robust and grounded analysis.

To further contextualize my autoethnographic account, I conducted a literature review related to academic publishing practices, interdisciplinarity, and the politics of knowledge production. This review provided valuable insights into the broader debates and tensions that shape the landscape of academic publishing and helped me situate my own experiences within a broader critical discourse. However, given the inherently subjective nature of autoethnographic research, I make no claims to generalizability or objective truth. Instead, I aim to offer a provocative and reflexive account of one researcher's journey through these murky waters.

Results

Over the three-month study period, I received 154 invitations to publish in journals spanning a wide range of disciplines, from quantum physics to marine biology to ancient history and literary criticism. The high volume of invitations received over the three-month period was notable. While this could be interpreted in various ways, it primarily demonstrates the prevalence of such solicitations in the current academic publishing landscape. The diversity of disciplines represented in these invitations suggests a wide-reaching approach to solicitation rather than targeted interdisciplinary outreach or perhaps the efficiency of their bots. While some of these invitations were clearly misaligned with my expertise in public health and health

promotion that I had to wonder if they had been sent to me by mistake, others presented intriguing opportunities to expand my research horizons and make groundbreaking contributions to fields I had never heard of before. On further reflection, it became apparent that these journals could be sending invitations indiscriminately and not always the result of deliberate targeting on the part of the journal.

Thematic analysis of e-mails

The thematic analysis of the invitation e-mails revealed several recurring patterns and persuasive strategies that may potentially mislead researchers unfamiliar with predatory publishing practices. Five main themes emerged:

Language emphasizing novelty and innovation

Many of the invitations employed language that emphasized the “groundbreaking” or “innovative” nature of my research, even when the connection to the journal’s focus was tenuous at best. Similarly, the framing of these invitations positioned the invitations as exciting, using rhetoric like “pushing boundaries” and “innovative” that appealed to my identity as a progressive scholar. This language evoked notions of traversing academic frontiers and disrupting conventional disciplinary norms through provocative, cutting-edge work.

Promises of rapid publication and minimal effort. The majority of the invitations emphasized the speed and ease of the publication process, promising “guaranteed publication” and “waived publication costs.” Some e-mails offered pre-written templates for manuscripts, an attempt to reduce the effort required from the researcher. While potentially exploiting the “publish or perish” pressures in academia, 72% of the invitations explicitly promoted a “rapid peer-review process” of under four weeks as an advantage. Such promises of expedited review times and lack of fees possibly targeted researchers’ urgency around productivity metrics.

Appeals to elevate research impact and status. A core persuasive strategy was positioning the journals as premier venues to “elevate research impact.” For example, 66% of the invitations mentioned “elevating research impact” as a key benefit, often using phrasing like “premier international journal” or “cutting-edge research” to convey prestige and status. The e-mails often referred to opportunities to “elevate my research impact,” perhaps a testament to the openness and progressiveness of the journal’s editors, eager to push the boundaries of their respective fields by welcoming insights from a health promotion scholar. Alternatively, the frequent use of terms like

“prestigious” and “high impact” invoked notions of academic stratification and the commodification of scholarship – such rhetoric positions publication as a means to accrue symbolic capital versus disseminating knowledge. The e-mails suggested that publication in these journals would confer scholarly credibility and success.

Flattering salutations and honorifics. All the invitations employed highly complementary and flattering language, often to an excessive degree. The invitations used honorific titles that may have reinforced academic hierarchies, such as addressing me as an “esteemed professor.” They frequently referred to me as a “leading expert,” “visionary researcher,” or “pioneer.” These honorific greetings, while potentially aiming to flatter, also subtly reinforced academic hierarchies and conferred academic prestige and status.

Persistent language. The persistence and frequency of the invitations were persuasive strategies. Over half of the e-mails used language that created a sense of urgency or pressure, such as a warning that “time was running out” to take advantage of a “special offer” or suggesting that failure to publish in the journal would cause my work to be “left behind.” This language may have been intended to exploit my fear of missing out on important opportunities or falling behind in academia.

Reflexive journaling analysis

Initial reactions and emotions

Through the reflexive journaling process, I was also able to thoughtfully explore and make sense of the range of emotional and intellectual musings that arose from receiving the e-mails. At times, the audacity of receiving invitations to contribute to special issues in journals of experimental physics and cellular toxicity was both overwhelming and perplexing, as captured in this journal entry:

An invitation to publish on quantum optics? Can't quite fathom how my temporary housing research could intersect with such complex phenomena. Felt thrilling, what novel ideas could emerge? Unlikely. But wait, could the principles of quantum entanglement hold the key to understanding the complex web of factors that trap individuals in cycles of homelessness?

I also marveled at the mental gymnastics it would require to connect my research on school food programmes to the intricacies of photonic integrated circuits:

A well-designed photonic circuit directs light along precise pathways; a school lunch programme guides young minds towards brighter futures ... metaphor feels strained, but I feel a flood of creative thinking not contained by rational thought.

Other invitations prompted my serious reflection on the nature of expertise, the value of interdisciplinary perspectives, and the potential risks and rewards of venturing into unfamiliar academic territories, as evident in this journal reflection:

Part of me worries about spreading myself too thin across disciplines. Another part is excited about the prospect of bringing together fields. If my community-based approaches could shed light on radio imaging, why should I resist those opportunities? Cognitive dissonance feels both exhilarating and exhausting.

Amidst the flurry of invitations, one e-mail stood out in particular due to its unusual characteristics that challenged legitimate academic correspondence. The invitation arrived on April 1st from a journal I had never heard of, with the sender name “Baby1.” The journal claimed to be seeking contributions on geographical formations based on my article about unmet needs in health-care. This convergence of peculiar factors – the unprofessional sender name, the implausible thematic link, and the date’s cultural connotations – made me question whether it might be an elaborate academic prank, a test of my ability to distinguish between genuine interdisciplinary outreach and questionable solicitation.

Reflections of interdisciplinary potential

Another surprising invitation came from a well-respected journal in the field of security studies. At first glance, the connection between my research on breastfeeding and national security seemed tenuous at best. However, upon further reflection, I began considering how public health and security are intimately intertwined. As the saying goes, “the first line of defense is a good offense,” and in public health, breastfeeding is one of the most effective ways to protect infant health. Could there be lessons from the world of security studies that could inform our efforts to protect and promote breastfeeding as a public health strategy? The invitation certainly gave me food for thought.

One particularly memorable invitation came from a journal in the field of musculoskeletal science. The e-mail began with effusive praise for my “ground-breaking research on the stigma faced by young breastfeeding mothers.” It suggested that my insights would be “invaluable” for their upcoming special issue on electrophysical modalities. While my initial reaction was disbelief at the audacity of the claim, I began to reflect on the potential connections between seemingly disparate fields as I considered the invitations more deeply:

Could there be lessons from collaborating with the endeavours of particle physics that could inform our approaches to tackling complex public health challenges? Might there be value in bringing a social determinants of health lens to discussions of dark matter and aerospace engineering? Would I have to fight to convince

biomedical collaborators that lived experience is right up there with the all-powerful p-value?

My reflexive journalling process frequently touched on the complexity of interdisciplinary work. These reflections considered how disparate fields might contribute to multifaceted public health challenges. Despite their often dubious nature, the invitations prompted consideration of interdisciplinary approaches to complex issues.

Reflecting on academic identity and expertise

Upon reexamining my analysis and choice of language used to interpret these invitations, I realized how inadvertently my writing could reinforce the very academic hierarchies and power imbalances I aimed to critique. Despite my efforts to maintain an authentic, relatable narrative voice, traditional academic writing conventions and assumptions occasionally surfaced. I found myself writing: “Perhaps my research on access to healthcare could add to supplementary perspectives to esteemed physicists working on unified field theory.” I had to pause after that sentence. Why was I automatically positioning my own scholarship as subordinate, mere “supplementary perspectives” to the realm of physics? By uncritically using language that elevated one discipline over another, I played right into the very power dynamics of academic hierarchies.

Through these diverse invitations and the intellectual journey they prompted, it became apparent that the convergence of seemingly unrelated fields could offer rich opportunities for interdisciplinary discourse and innovation. Through the reflexive journaling process, I was able to revisit and examine my reactions of surprise and skepticism elicited by the e-mails. It facilitated a deeper contemplation of the broader academic landscape and how we address complex public health challenges.

Discussion

The literature on interdisciplinarity and academic publishing illustrates a growing recognition of the need for more integrative, interdisciplinary approaches to tackling social, environmental and health challenges (Ding, Pulford, and Bates 2020). However, the analysis of the invitation e-mails in this study revealed several recurring patterns that raise questions about the authenticity of these interdisciplinary collaboration opportunities. The themes identified – including the emphasis on rapid publication, promises of minimal effort, and flattering language – align with characteristics often associated with predatory publishing practices. These findings suggest that many of these invitations may be primarily motivated by factors other than

fostering meaningful scholarly exchange. The responses to interdisciplinary publishing invitations observed in this study could be understood through multiple theoretical lenses, including Blustein et al. (2024) framework of precarity that identifies resistance, adaptation, and resignation as interrelated responses to precarious circumstances. For instance, hesitations about publishing outside one's area of expertise may reflect adaptation strategies, while considering these invitations as opportunities for broadening one's academic reach could be a form of resistance to traditional disciplinary boundaries.

The thematic analysis, coupled with the reflexive journaling, indicates that the invitations lack the depth and specificity one would expect from genuine attempts to develop interdisciplinary scholarship. For instance, the frequent misalignment between the inviting journal's focus and my own research experience suggests a lack of careful consideration in selecting potential contributors. This observation, combined with the persistent and often generic nature of the invitations, raises concern about the authenticity of these outreach efforts. Instead, they are more likely to be generated by predatory publishers who engage in deceptive and unethical practices to exploit researchers' desire to publish and disseminate their work. However, challenges were also evident, including the risk of engaging with predatory publishers and the difficulty of evaluating the legitimacy of invitations outside one's area of expertise. My findings align with Mills and Inouye (2021) systematic review, which emphasizes the role of institutional contexts and incentives in shaping publishing decisions. However, my results provide additional insight into how e-mail solicitations specifically appeal to these motivations. While some invitations may appear to align more closely with a researcher's interests than others, this alignment is likely coincidental rather than the result of careful consideration or a genuine interest in interdisciplinary collaboration on the part of the journals.

Addressing the research question on navigating power dynamics and positionality, the reflexive journaling process revealed the importance of questioning one's own assumptions and biases when considering these invitations. For example, the realization that I was unconsciously positioning my own scholarship as subordinate to other disciplines highlights the need for researchers to critically examine their own positionality and the power dynamics at play in academic publishing. Through the lens of epistemic injustice, as discussed by Albornoz, Okune, and Chan (2020), my hesitations about publishing outside my expertise may reflect concerns about how knowledge might be valued or devalued in unfamiliar disciplinary contexts. The findings can also be understood through the ideological level of marketization's impact on academic careers (Oliveira, Nada, and Magalhães 2024). Oliveira, Nada, and Magalhães (2024) argue that there is a 'widespread acceptance among academics that playing according to the neoliberal "rules of the

game” is “the one and only” way in which it is possible to build an academic career” (p. 27). This perspective helps explain why academics might consider publishing invitations outside their expertise despite potential risks or ethical concerns.

This is not to suggest that interdisciplinary collaboration is inherently problematic or undesirable. Crossing disciplinary boundaries can foster innovation, creativity, and the generation of new knowledge that may not be possible within the confines of a single discipline. However, engaging in interdisciplinary research requires working through significant challenges, including differences in epistemological assumptions, methodological approaches, and communication styles (Turner et al. 2015). These challenges are further compounded by the current academic publishing landscape, which often prioritizes narrow specialization and quantitative metrics over interdisciplinary breadth and research quality (Hyland and Jiang 2019). Ojala, Reynolds, and Johnson (2020) emphasize the need for various academic stakeholders to address the challenges predatory publishing poses.

As I continued to reflect on the invitations I received and the broader landscape of academic publishing, I increasingly grappled with questions of power, privilege, and positionality. I was pushed to consider more deeply how academic publishing itself is embedded within broader systems of power and inequity. The experiences of Indigenous colleagues being asked to collaborate on research funding applications outside of their expertise provide a striking parallel to the unsolicited e-mail invitations explored in this study. In both cases, researchers risk being exploited or tokenized for their identities or expertise rather than being engaged as genuine partners in the research process. This is particularly concerning in the case of early-career Indigenous researchers, who face additional pressures and systemic barriers in the academy. As Smith (2013) argues, the dominant model of knowledge production in academia has historically been shaped by colonial, patriarchal, and Eurocentric ideologies that have served to marginalize and exclude the voices and knowledge systems of Indigenous peoples, women, and other marginalized groups. The pressure for Indigenous researchers to participate in projects that may not align with or serve their own research interests or priorities can be seen as an extension of these oppressive dynamics, serving to reinforce rather than challenge the dominant power structures.

As I grappled with the questions raised by these unexpected invitations, I also reflected on the limitations of traditional, quantitative approaches to research that often dominate fields such as physics and biology. While these methods have undoubtedly yielded important insights and advancements, they can also obscure the complex social, cultural and political factors that shape health and wellbeing (Marmot and Wilkinson 2016). In contrast, qualitative approaches, such as those employed in my own research, seek to center the lived experiences and perspectives of individuals and

communities, recognizing the value of subjective knowledge and the power of storytelling to understand and address health inequities (Greenhalgh 2016).

This is not to suggest that quantitative and qualitative approaches are inherently incompatible or that one is superior to the other. Rather, it highlights the importance of embracing diverse forms of knowledge production and the potential for interdisciplinary collaboration to challenge and enrich our understanding of complex health and social challenges. By bringing together insights as seemingly disparate as health promotion and particle physics, we may uncover new ways of thinking about the determinants of health and the role of research in promoting social change. However, such collaborations must be approached with caution and discernment, carefully distinguishing between genuine opportunities for interdisciplinary exchange and predatory publishing practices that exploit the language for interdisciplinarity for financial gain.

The invitations I received to publish in unexpected fields might also be seen as a symptom of the ongoing struggles over the legitimacy and authority of different forms of knowledge within the academy. While these invitations appear to challenge the traditional hierarchies of expertise and create more inclusive spaces, it is crucial to recognize that they are not immune to reproducing the very power dynamics that they may claim to challenge. Even well-intentioned attempts at interdisciplinary collaboration can reinforce existing inequities, particularly when they fail to attend to the power differentials and historical legacies that shape the relationships between researchers and the communities they seek to engage.

For those of us in health who are committed to equity and social justice, these complexities require a deep commitment to reflexivity, humility, and accountability. It demands that we interrogate our own assumptions and biases and actively seek out opportunities that center the knowledge and expertise of those historically marginalized within the academy. It also requires a willingness to challenge the norms and practices of academic publishing itself and advocate for more inclusive and equitable models that recognize the value of diverse forms of expertise and lived experience (Turner et al. 2015). This might involve pushing back against the metrics and incentives that prioritize narrow specialization and disciplinary silos and working to create more collaborative and community-engaged approaches to research.

At the same time, we must remain open to the possibilities that may arise from stepping outside our disciplinary comfort zones and engaging with new academic communities. Some of the most significant scientific breakthroughs and societal innovations have emerged from the intersections of diverse fields and perspectives. By bringing our expertise in qualitative methods, community engagement, and social determinants of health to conversations in fields such as engineering, accounting, or computer programming, we may uncover

new insights and approaches that can enrich our work and contribute to advancing knowledge more broadly.

The findings of this research suggest that invitations to publish in unexpected fields can serve as a catalyst for critical reflection on the norms, practices, and values that broadly shape academic publishing and research. As researchers committed to addressing complex health and social issues, we must approach these invitations with a critical and discerning eye, carefully evaluating the journal's credibility, the alignment with our own research interests and expertise, and the potential impact on our own scholarly reputation and the communities we serve. This requires a willingness to look beyond the flattery, sense of urgency and promise of rapid publication and to ask difficult questions about the integrity and rigor of the journals we choose to engage with. The enthusiastic, urgent tones in many e-mails evoked an underlying pressure to embrace interdisciplinarity at all costs, potentially overshadowing important considerations about epistemological differences or power imbalances between disciplines. Navigating the landscape of academic publishing and interdisciplinary collaboration requires a delicate balance between openness and discernment, a willingness to venture into new intellectual territories, and a commitment to the values and principles guiding our work.

The reflection on interdisciplinary potential presented in this study was conducted in the context of a focused autoethnography. This study's approach offers valuable insights into academic publishing opportunities. Researchers should maintain a critical awareness of unsolicited invitations. The findings can inform researchers' general approach to evaluating such invitations, helping them quickly identify potential red flags without needing in-depth reflection on each invitation received. The responses to interdisciplinary publishing invitations observed in this study may be influenced by broader issues affecting academics. Mula et al. (2022) highlight how neoliberal policies in higher education are shaping academic identities, often increasing pressure to publish. While this study does not focus on these broader identity issues, they may influence how researchers evaluate invitations outside their field. The very notion of interdisciplinarity itself is often contested and poorly defined, with varying definitions and understandings across academia. These conceptual debates are further complicated by the political and economic realities of academic publishing, potentially hindering collaborative efforts.

This study has several limitations that should be considered. First, the retrospective nature of the journaling process may have introduced memory biases, potentially affecting the accuracy and completeness of the recorded reflections. While efforts were made to mitigate these biases through prompt and regular journaling, some nuances of immediate reactions may have been lost or altered over time. Second, the lack of

triangulation for personal reflections limits the validation of interpretations. The autoethnographic approach relied solely on the researcher's experiences without external perspectives, which aligns with the subjective nature of the method but may limit generalizability. Third, this study is limited to the experiences and reflections of a single researcher. The findings should be interpreted as one perspective contributing to broader discussions about academic publishing practices. They may not capture the full range of reactions that academics from different fields or career stages might have when receiving similar invitations. The findings are inherently shaped by the author's positionality and disciplinary lens. While this study provides valuable insights into e-mail solicitations and my responses, it does not capture the full range of predatory publishing tactics. Teixeira da Silva et al. (2022) identified various strategies predatory publishers employ, such as mimicking legitimate journals' websites. Future research could examine how these different approaches interact to influence decision-making across various disciplines and regions.

While this study has uncovered some of the complexities and contradictions of unexpected publication invitations, it has also raised several questions that warrant further investigation. For instance, to what extent do these invitations reflect genuine attempts to foster interdisciplinary dialogue and knowledge exchange, as opposed to more predatory efforts to boost journal impact factors or capitalize on trending topics? How do researchers from different disciplinary backgrounds and institutional contexts manage the power dynamics and cultural differences that can arise in these collaborations? Future research could explore these questions through a range of methodological approaches. In-depth interviews with scholars who have received and responded to these invitations could provide valuable insights into their decision-making processes and the challenges and opportunities they encountered. Comparative studies of successful and unsuccessful interdisciplinary collaborations could help identify the factors that facilitate or hinder effective community and integration across disciplinary boundaries. While this study used thematic analysis to identify broad patterns, future research could employ discourse analysis to examine the linguistic structures and rhetorical devices in the e-mails. This approach could examine how language choices reflect and construct academic power dynamics and uncover subtle underlying assumptions and agendas.

As the study's findings suggest, unexpected publication invitations can serve as a catalyst for scholars to question and challenge traditional hierarchies of expertise and narrow definitions of academic excellence. They can also reinforce existing inequities and exclusions. It is important to acknowledge that the issues raised in the study are fundamentally political and ethical, implicating the broader struggles over the ownership, legitimacy, and accountability of the academy.

Conclusion

This autoethnographic study offers a nuanced and reflective exploration of the phenomenon of invitations to publish in unexpected academic fields. By critically examining my experiences and responses to these invitations, I have sought to shed light on the complex factors shaping our engagement with interdisciplinary opportunities and the potential implications for our research practices and identities as scholars. The study's results, which identified five key themes in these invitations – emphasis on novelty, promises of rapid publication, appeals to research impact, flattering language, and persistent messaging – highlight the tension between potential opportunities for interdisciplinary collaboration and the risks associated with predatory publishing practices. Through this process, I have come to recognize the importance of approaching these invitations with a spirit of curiosity and discernment and carefully evaluating their legitimacy and potential value while remaining committed to academic integrity and social justice principles.

To navigate this landscape effectively, we must be willing to interrogate our assumptions and biases, ask difficult questions about the credibility and integrity of the journals we engage with, and consider the potential impact of our choices on our scholarly reputations and the communities we serve. This process of critical reflection aligns with the concept of epistemic injustice discussed earlier, as it requires us to examine how power dynamics in academic publishing may devalue or misappropriate expertise across disciplines. At the same time, we must remain open to the possibilities that may arise from stepping outside our disciplinary comfort zones and engaging with new academic communities. Engaging in interdisciplinary collaboration can be challenging but ultimately rewarding. It requires a willingness to grapple with differences, confront our limitations, and engage in ongoing learning and adaptation. It also demands a deep commitment to reflexivity, humility, and accountability, particularly when working with communities that have been historically marginalized or exploited by academic research.

As public health researchers committed to equity and social justice, we must approach interdisciplinary collaborations with reflexivity, humility, and accountability, particularly when working with marginalized communities, to ensure we center their knowledge, expertise and priorities. This approach is crucial in addressing epistemic injustice and ensuring our research practices do not perpetuate power imbalances in knowledge production. By approaching unexpected invitations with a spirit of openness, critical reflection, and a commitment to social justice, we can identify meaningful opportunities to contribute to advancing knowledge and

promoting health equity. In doing so, we may just uncover new ways of thinking about the complex social, cultural, and structural factors that shape health and wellbeing and work toward more holistic, collaborative, and impactful approaches to research and practice. However, we must remain vigilant against the allure of prestige and the pressure to conform to disciplinary norms that may undermine our core purpose. This journey requires courage, humility, and a willingness to embrace the unexpected. It may have immense potential for transforming how we understand and address the most pressing challenges of our time.

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