

Definition of Systematic Manipulation of the Publication Process

Systematic manipulation of the publication process is where an individual or a group of individuals have repeatedly used dishonest or fraudulent practices to:

- prevent or inappropriately influence the independent assessment of a piece of scholarly work by an independent peer.
- inappropriately attribute authorship of a piece of scholarly work.
- publish fabricated or plagiarised research.

Systematic manipulation is conducted with the goal of influencing the publication record and/or achieving financial gain, and involves more than one manuscript and possibly more than one journal.

Systematic manipulation of the publication process may raise concerns at different levels:

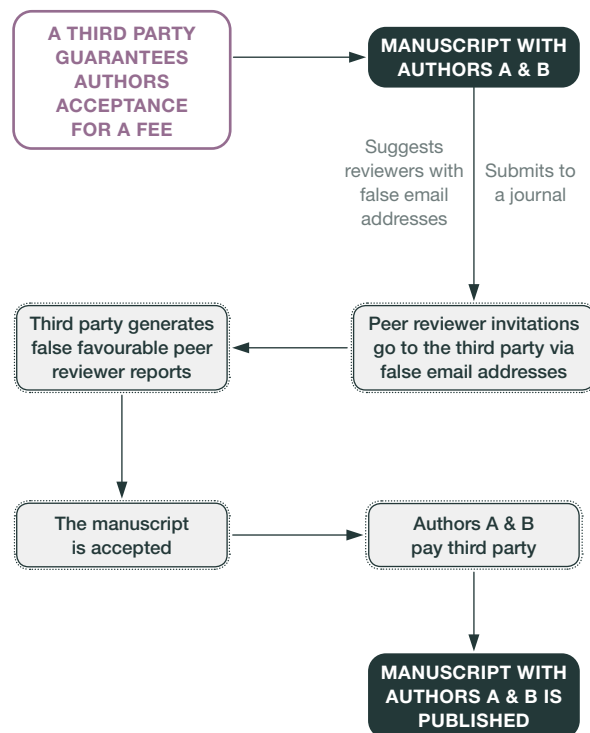
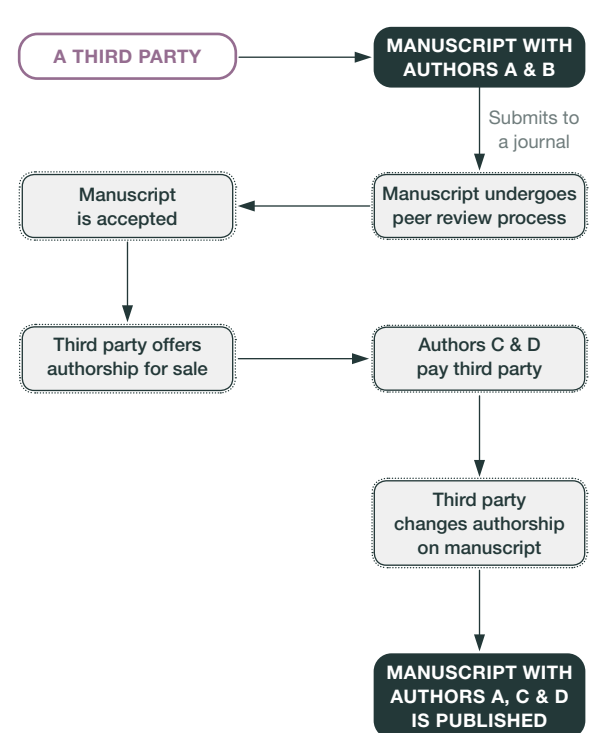
- **Peer review manipulation.** This type of manipulation can occur directly by manipulation or hacking of the submission system of the journal. It can also occur when authors are able to suggest peer reviewers and input contact email addresses for these peer reviewers on the submission system of the journal. The authors may suggest fabricated names or names of real experts, but the contact email addresses are falsified so that all correspondence with the suggested peer reviewers is directed back to the authors. The manipulators then submit positive peer review reports to ensure the manuscript is accepted for publication.

This type of manipulation may be carried out by a group of individuals who agree to act as false peer reviewers for each other's manuscripts, thereby guaranteeing favourable peer review reports and boosting the publication records of the group.

Third-party editing agencies may carry out this type of manipulation by suggesting peer reviewers on the authors' behalf, for a fee, but supplying fabricated email addresses that they input on the submission system of the journal (although not necessarily with the authors' knowledge). They then also supply the favourable reviews, thereby guaranteeing manuscript acceptance for which they can charge a fee.

[Fig 1].

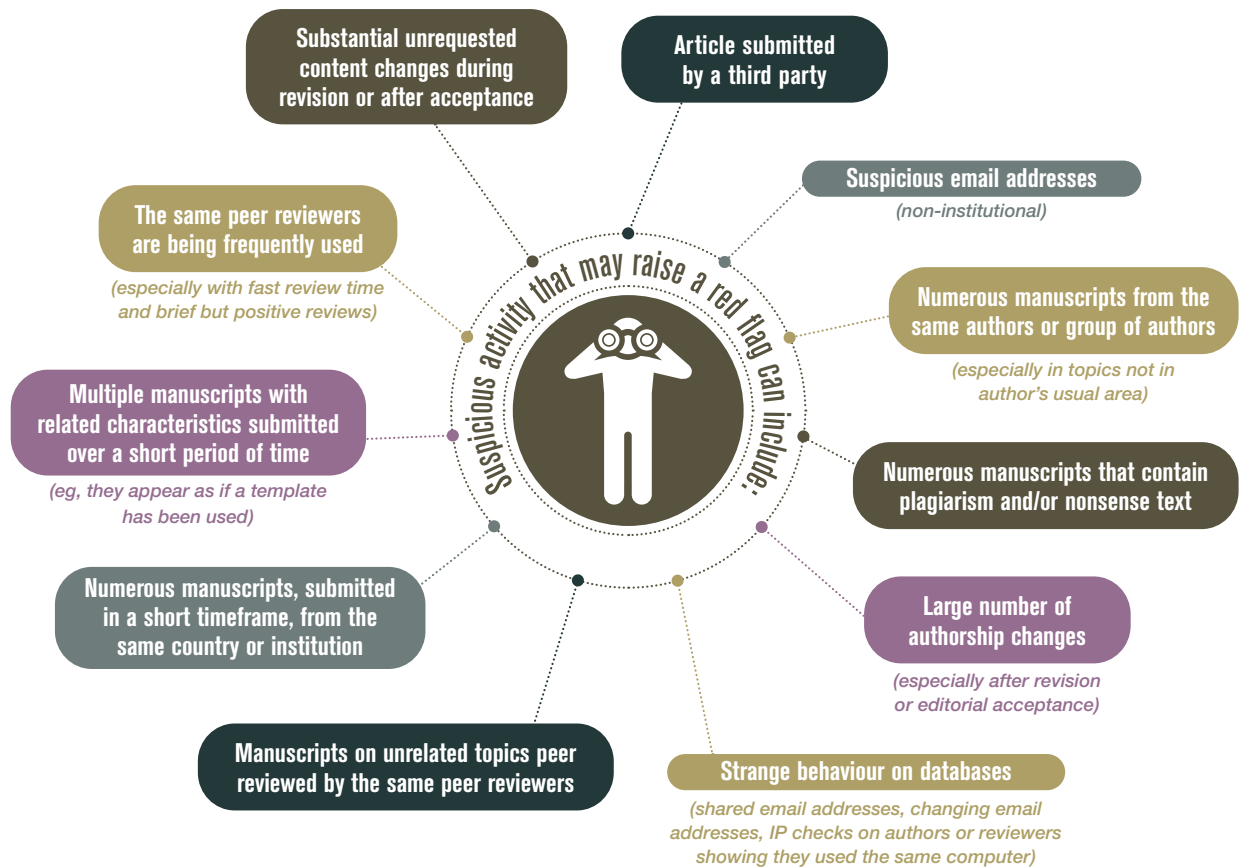
- **Authorship for sale/papermills.** Another possibility is initially inserting the name of an accomplished guest author, especially for single-blind and open review, and then replacing the name during revision or after editorial acceptance.
- **Substitution of a manuscript.** Sometimes a high-quality manuscript is initially submitted (to ensure it passes peer review) and then a similar, but poorer quality manuscript (the authors' own manuscript) is substituted after editorial acceptance.

Fig 1. An Example of Peer Review Manipulation**Fig 2. An Example of Authorship for Sale**

Note: Peer review manipulation may occur in isolation and be instigated by authors on a small scale, for example, if a group of individuals are trying to boost their own publication records. Authorship for sale is likely to be accompanied by peer review manipulation because claiming a fee from the authors is dependent on acceptance for publication.

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How to Investigate and Prevent Further Publication Manipulation

On discovering a suspicious pattern, the first considerations would be:

- To determine the cause of the problem – is it the authors, is it the reviewers?
 - Search for other submissions and publications by the same authors.
 - Check the peer reviewers of the suspicious manuscripts and published articles.
 - Check the email addresses of peer reviewers of suspicious manuscripts and articles.
 - Check whether there have been requests to change authorship or make major revisions after editorial acceptance.
- To determine whether there is a weakness in your submission process or manuscript handling system that can be addressed to prevent further manipulation.

Further investigation might include:

- Searching for computer IP addresses to determine whether all manuscripts were submitted via the same location.
- Cross-publisher pattern checking via the **COPE Publishers' Forum**.
- Seeking advice from **COPE**.
- **Using technology, such as adding flags to manuscripts or running searches on suspicious names or emails across all journals might make patterns become apparent.**
- **Providing information and training for editors to raise awareness of the types of manipulation that are occurring and what to look out for would be useful.**

COPE Publishers' Forum

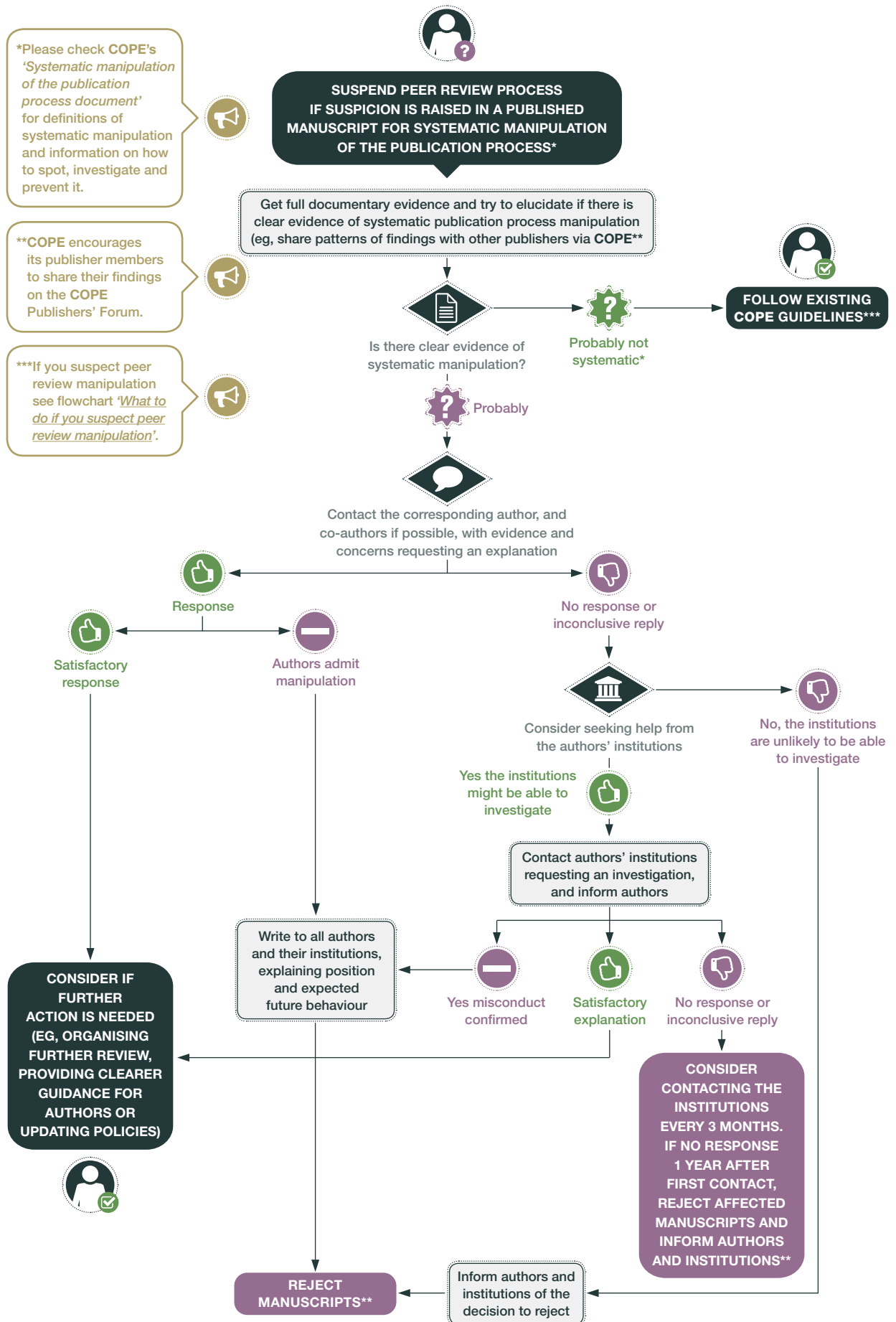
The **COPE Publishers' Forum** is already used by publisher members of **COPE** to seek advice on unusual cases. It provides a confidential means of sharing information, such as patterns of behaviour, about publication process manipulation with other publishers to allow them to look for similar patterns in their systems. Over time, these shared patterns and findings could develop into a resource that all members could use to help with their investigations into suspicious activities.



WHAT TO DO IF YOU SUSPECT SYSTEMATIC MANIPULATION OF THE PUBLICATION PROCESS

Before Publication

(a) Suspected systematic manipulation of the publication process concerning submitted manuscripts.



WHAT TO DO IF YOU SUSPECT SYSTEMATIC MANIPULATION OF THE PUBLICATION PROCESS

After Publication

(b) Suspected systematic manipulation of the publication process concerning published manuscripts.

