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Life is Too Short to Be Serious All the Time: Donald Duck Presents Unconventional Motivations for Publishing in Academia

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Abstract

In this food for thought article, we introduce the ‘Donald Duck Phenomenon’ to consider ten unconventional reasons for publishing in academia. These include (i) symbolic immortality, (ii) personal satisfaction, (iii) a sense of pride, (iv) serious leisure, (v) cause credibility, (vi) altruism, (vii) collaboration with a friend or family member, (viii) collaboration with a hero, (ix) conflict or revenge, and (x) for amusement. The article was inspired by the lead author’s social media search for a co-author with the surname ‘Duck’. Through LinkedIn, the lead author, Associate Professor William E. Donald, who is based in the UK and specialises in Sustainable Careers and Human Resource Management, found a collaborator, Dr Nicholas Duck, based in Australia and specialises in Organisational Psychology. While the collaboration may appear somewhat ‘quackers’, per one of Donald Duck’s famous phrases, “Life is too short to be serious all the time, so if you can’t laugh at yourself then call me... I’ll laugh at you, for you”. We hope that this article offers some interesting insights, particularly for academics at the start of their scholarly journey, and acts as a way to stimulate conversation around unconventional reasons for publishing in academia.

Keywords/key phrases: academia, collaboration, Donald Duck, motivation, publishing

1. Setting the Scene

Anyone involved in academia will be familiar with the phrase ‘*publish or perish*’, whereby the sustainability of an academic’s career relies on their ongoing ability to publish. Consequently, some examples of conventional motivations to publish are a) requirements for a qualification or grant, b) career advancement and reputation, c) knowledge dissemination, and d) the ability to demonstrate teamwork and global impact via collaborations.

However, the main focus of our food for thought article is to consider some of the more unconventional motivations for publishing in academia, which we term the ‘Donald Duck Phenomenon’. We propose ten examples: (i) symbolic immortality, (ii) personal satisfaction, (iii) a sense of pride, (iv) serious leisure, (v) cause credibility, (vi) altruism, (vii) collaboration with a friend or family member, (viii) collaboration with a hero, (ix) conflict or revenge, and (x) for amusement.

We conclude by highlighting the intrasectionality and intersectionality dimensions to raise awareness of such occurrences among Early Career Scholars (ECRs) and our other colleagues.

2. The Donald Duck Phenomenon

We present unconventional motivations for publishing in academia, which have received minimal attention to date. Humorously, we have dubbed these motivations the ‘Donald Duck Phenomenon’. The authors invented the term while preparing this current ‘food for thought’ article. The lead author with the surname ‘Donald’ thought it would be entertaining to collaborate with a co-author with the surname ‘Duck’ to call out the popular animated Disney character, Donald Duck. After eighteen months of searching, the lead author connected with the second author via social media, and an international collaboration was formed between scholars in the UK and Australia. Somewhat serendipitously, one author specialises in Sustainable Careers and Human Resource Management, while the other specialises in Organisational Psychology. This article raises awareness of unconventional motivations for academic publishing and allows the authors to fulfil their unconventional motivation to create the amusing citation “Donald and Duck (2024)”. We now present ten examples of motivations that, taken together, inform the Donald Duck Phenomenon, a collection of ‘unconventional’ phenomena that motivate academics to publish.

2.1. Symbolic Immortality

According to the Terror Management Theory (Greenberg et al., 1986), individuals unconsciously seek cultural endorsement and symbolic artefacts (e.g., publishing a novel) to provide a sense of symbolic immortality. In other words, publishing can give us a legacy beyond our lifespan.

2.2. Personal Satisfaction

Satisfaction occurs when motivation aligns with personal values (Ryan & Deci, 2000). In line with Self-Determination Theory, alignment with personal values increases our intrinsic motivation towards goals because they are meaningful to us. For instance, academics may prefer to publish applied rather than theoretical works if they value real-world impact.

2.3. A Sense of Pride

At a personal level, individuals may feel a sense of pride in seeing their name and work published, which can function as a motivator for subsequent publications, also called *Authentic Pride* (Tracey & Robins, 2004). In contrast, individuals who feel a sense of pride without a precipitating event, called *Hubristic Pride*, expect accolades without effort. Both authors of this article believe they are primarily motivated by the former rather than the latter.

2.4. Serious Leisure

Stebbins (1992, p. 3) defines Serious Leisure as

The systematic pursuit of an amateur, hobbyist, or volunteer activity that participants find so substantial and interesting that, in the typical case, they launch themselves on a career centred on acquiring and expressing its special skills, knowledge and experience.

Serious leisure can help an individual improve self-perceived employability, enhance workplace well-being, and manage high stress levels (Donald & Nimmi, 2023; Nimmi & Donald, 2023). Serious leisure offers a strong motivator to publish through a hobby or voluntary capacity rather than for career advancement or income generation.

2.5. Cause Credibility

Publishing can help to draw attention to a cause and give it more credibility. For example, the lead author often publishes opinion and policy articles (as a side project to his main area of research), making a case for hybrid conferences (e.g., Donald, 2022; 2023; Green & Donald, 2023) because, as a housebound and disabled academic, he is excluded from valuable spaces of knowledge exchange when conferences are conducted in person only. The motivation for publishing such articles is to highlight the issue and call for change.

2.6. Altruism

A scholar might spend significant time supporting and co-authoring with early career researchers because it is gratifying to see the development of such colleagues during the process and the substantial impact that the publications can have on their career trajectory.

2.7. Collaboration with a Friend or Family Member

Another unconventional motivator for publishing in academia might be the opportunity to collaborate on a piece with a friend or family member. The collaboration process might be the primary motivator rather than the specific topic of focus or the choice of publication outlet.

2.8. Collaboration with a Hero

We all have our academic hero(s). Collaborating can offer a rewarding experience and be a strong motivator for publishing together. However, if the experience is less rewarding, as per the adage ‘*Never Meet Your Hero*’, this can represent a demotivator.

2.9. Conflict or Revenge

Motivations do not always have to be of pure intent. In line with the Dark Triad Theory (Paulhus & Williams, 2002), there can be sinister and manipulative motivators for publishing, such as ongoing one-upmanship with another academic. The outcome can be a continuing cascade of publications driven by the need to manipulate, coerce, or fulfil narcissistic needs rather than the pursuit of knowledge dissemination. Naturally, neither author condones such behaviour. Yet, it is an all too common occurrence that plays out in the shadows of academia.

2.10. For Amusement

Sometimes, the motivation to publish is driven by the opportunity to amuse the authors and/or their readers. We distinguish this from publishing with ill intention (e.g., fake news or disinformation) because the content undergoes peer review and is written with integrity.

3. Concluding Thoughts: Intra-sectionality and Intersectionality

The ten examples of unconventional motivations to publish in academia do not necessarily occur in isolation. Instead, intra-sectionality occurs when two or more unconventional motivators coincide. For example, this article draws on personal satisfaction (through concluding an 18-month search by the lead author for a co-author with the surname Duck, and amusement (the potential for a citation of “According to Donald and Duck (2024)”). Additionally, intersectionality occurs when one or more conventional motivators and one or more unconventional motivators coincide. For example, in addition to these two unconventional motivators, we incorporate a conventional motivator of knowledge dissemination.

To conclude, we invite you to consider what other unconventional motivators drive you and your colleagues to publish beyond those in this article. Most importantly, we encourage ECRs and other colleagues to find joy in their endeavours, as life is too short to be serious all the time.

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