



Predatory Publishers: what's new?

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Who am I?

- **Jan Seal-Roberts** - Publishing Director, Adis (Springer Healthcare)
- Part of Springer Nature, publishing 35 journals under the Adis banner - both conventional and open access (OA)
- We believe that all scientifically sound data should be published, but carefully adhere to rigorous peer-review protocols, aiming to be as transparent as possible in all our publishing practices

Disclaimer: this presentation represents my own thoughts!

A quick reminder:

'Predatory' Publishers? Who/what are they?



Those who unprofessionally exploit the author-pays model of OA publishing for their own profit*

**Jeffrey Beall (Academic Librarian at University of Colorado in Denver)*

These are the 'bad guys' of publishing....

.

How common is predatory publishing?

- **It's big business!**

Revenue from reputable OA journals in 2015: approx. \$244 m*

Revenue earned by predatory publishers in 2015: approx. \$74 m (i.e. 30%!)*

Estimated 8000 predatory journals that together publish > 400,000 articles per year*

Easy to start up – and the threat continues to grow...

But what's the big problem here.....?

These companies aim to attract article-processing charges and other revenues under false pretences

Business model is usually unsustainable – they take the money and run.

*Shen, C. & Björk, B.-C. BMC Med. 13, 230 (2015). <https://bmcmecicine.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12916-015-0469-2>

Authors are duped, thinking they are submitting to a reputable journal

- They are often flattered at outset, but generally misled by false claims
- Very little peer review is offered, if any
- Some companies simply pocket the APCs and do not publish
- Others will publish – but there are often hidden charges
- Author is now hooked in – and possibly tainted by association
- Usually there are no checks for plagiarism – so everyone is vulnerable
- Often no digital preservation (what happens if the journal closes?) nor the means of retraction (without a fee)



Reviewers are misled

- Initially flattered but soon frustrated – wasted time
- Damaged reputation by association
- Predatory publishers are tenacious!

KOLs are often misrepresented

- Often recruited via wide-scale spamming
- Initially egos are flattered – but even if they refuse, their names often included anyway
- Ed boards may look good, but names are often included without invitation (or acceptance)
- Hard for individual names to be removed without threat of/recourse to legal action

And reputable publishers often feel tarred by the same brush...

- “You’re an OA publisher - you charge APCs.
- Doesn’t that make you a predatory publisher?” (Answer: no!)

Integrity of scientific scholarship is slowly being undermined

- Lack of robust peer review
- What can you trust?
- Ethical issue of wasted time, resources, animals – and patients
- Lack of digital preservation

Nature Comment 6 Sept 17: David Moher, Larissa Shamseer, Kelly Cobey *et al.* **Stop this waste of people, animals and money**

- Characterised 2000 biomedical articles from > 200 journals thought to be predatory
- < 10% of studies claiming to be RCTs described how pts were allocated
- <25% noted whether pts and outcome assessors were blinded
- Only 3 authors had previously tried to submit elsewhere

Authors' conclusion:

“Little of this work will advance science.

It is too dodgily reported (and possibly badly conducted) and too hard to find.”

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So how do we recognise a predatory publisher?

It can be very hard!

- Invitations effusive – and often broad (“write on anything you like!”)
- ‘False front’ editorial offices (e.g. W. Coast US)
- Journal names are familiar sounding – and yet...
- Editorial board often missing (or odd-looking)
- No proper contact names / tel nos given (or the same name recurs many times)
- Email addresses are non-professional (e.g. Google or Hotmail)
- Website has poor grammar and typos
- Implausible claims made, e.g. re journal impact factors
- Publishing costs and timelines are almost impossibly cheap / fast
- No policies given re retraction or digital preservation

So what are reputable publishers doing to address this?

- **Self-defence:** on a case-by-case basis – but it's not easy
- **Education:** to inform and warn about the risks

But as soon as one company disappears, another often reappears – possibly the same people masquerading under a different name.

And there are a few companies that operate in a greyish 'twilight' zone...

Who is/was Jeffrey Beall?

- Librarian at University of Colorado in Denver
- Ran Scholarly Open Access and a blog from 2012 to Jan 2017 to identify publishers and OA journals he considered predatory
- ‘Beall’s list’ – essentially a one-stop shop ‘blacklist of baddies’:

Dubious companies

Publishers	
Year	Number of publishers
2011	18
2012	23
2013	225
2014	477
2015	693
2016	923

Dodgy standalone journals

Standalone journals	
Year	Number of journals
2013	126
2014	303
2015	507
2016	882

What happened to Jeffrey Beall?

- Beall's blog and lists were suddenly taken down in January 2017
- Beall's Opinion Piece in *Biochemia Medica* (2017) provides some background, saying that during the 5 yrs of his blog and platform:
 - the requests to remove journals and publishers from his blacklists increased in number – and became more intense
 - some people and companies resorted to more wide-scale, and often aggressive, strategies - more latterly via his own university officials (who presumably weren't pleased).
- Eventually it seems that Beall simply felt that he had to back off:

*In January 2017, facing intense pressure from my employer, the University of Colorado Denver, and fearing for my job, I shut down the blog and removed all its content from the blog platform**

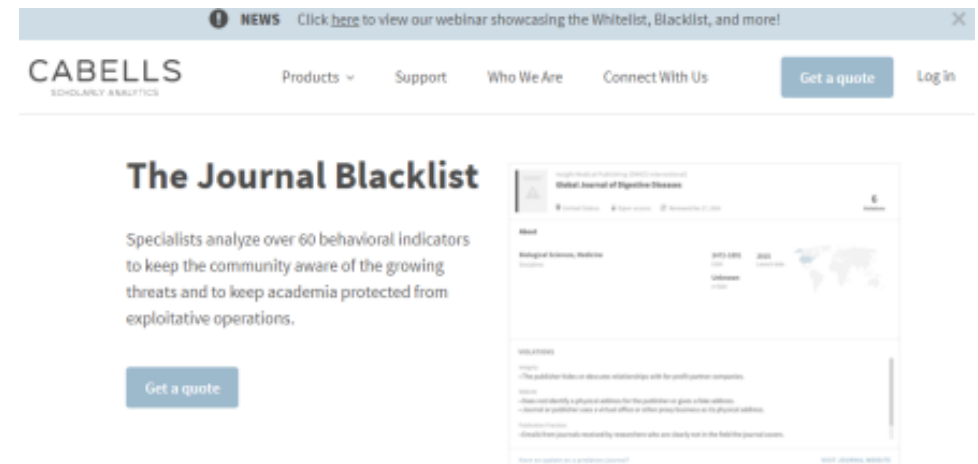
***Jeffrey Beall.** What I learned from predatory publishers. *Biochemia Medica* 2017;27(2):273-9.
<https://doi.org/10.11613/BM.2017.029>

So what do we do now? There are a few other options:

- **Beall's list continues – for now...**
- The final iteration of Beall's list (dated 15 Jan 17) is currently (unofficially) still available:
<http://beallslist.weebly.com/contact.html>
- This is being 'preserved' by someone preferring to remain anonymous
- Stated plan is to “keep the list updated as much as possible....(but) expect the list's applicability to diminish over time.”

Cabell's Blacklist

- A fairly new blacklist that is more 'robust, consistent and careful'
- Criteria for inclusion given
- Ratings are given at the journal level
- Greater transparency than Beall's list - but this is a commercial product requiring a paid subscription
- But this could be a useful resource for institutions requiring a robust resource



The screenshot shows the Cabells Scholarly Analytics website. At the top, there is a navigation bar with the Cabells logo and links for Products, Support, Who We Are, and Connect With Us. A 'Get a quote' button and a 'Login' link are also present. Below the navigation bar, the main heading is 'The Journal Blacklist'. The text below the heading states: 'Specialists analyze over 60 behavioral indicators to keep the community aware of the growing threats and to keep academia protected from exploitative operations.' A 'Get a quote' button is located below this text. To the right, there is a preview of a journal entry for 'World Journal of Digestive Diseases'. The preview shows the journal title, a 'Get a quote' button, and a world map. Below the preview, there is a list of criteria for inclusion in the blacklist, such as 'The publisher holds or shares relationships with for-profit companies', 'The publisher is a for-profit or other non-academic organization', 'The publisher is a for-profit or other non-academic organization', and 'The publisher is a for-profit or other non-academic organization'.

Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ)

DOAJ - <https://doaj.org>

- An independent online ‘whitelist’ directory of ‘quality open access peer-reviewed journals’
- Lists > 10,000 open access journals **that adhere to high standards and peer review.**
- Funding is via donations - so is totally free to access
- Aims “to be the one-stop shop for users of open access journals”.



The screenshot shows the DOAJ website homepage. At the top, the logo reads "DOAJ DIRECTORY OF OPEN ACCESS JOURNALS". A navigation bar includes links for Home, Search, Browse Subjects, Apply, News, About, For Publishers, and API, along with a Login button. A search bar is prominently displayed with a search icon and a dropdown menu for "journals" and "articles", and a link to "Advanced Search". On the right, a statistics box shows: 10,151 Journals, 7,352 searchable at Article level, 121 Countries, and 2,626,070 Articles. Below this is a "SUPPORT DOAJ" button. The main content area features a "Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ)" section with a brief description: "DOAJ is a community-curated online directory that indexes and provides access to high quality, open access, peer-reviewed journals. DOAJ is independent. All funding is via donations, 50% of which comes from sponsors and 50% from members and publisher members. All DOAJ services are free of charge including being indexed in DOAJ. All data is freely available." To the right of this section are links for "FAQs", "Interacting with DOAJ", "Open Access Information", "Best Practice", "Download metadata", and "New Journals Feed". Below the description is a "Latest News" section with a headline: "Parts of DOAJ metadata in my catalog&discovery serviceA-Z List have changed, are out-of-date or are missing completely. Why?" and a sub-headline: "It's time to update your index and/or ask your discovery service provider to do so! We have received several messages via our Feedback account from library catalogue administrators, their readers, and researchers asking why all of a sudden so many of the articles indexed from DOAJ are now missing? Within library catalogues, users are perhaps [...] Read More...". The news item is dated "Published Mon, 29 Sep 2017 at 09:06". At the bottom of the page, there is a "SUPPORT DOAJ" button and a social media sharing section with icons for Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and YouTube. A final "SUPPORT DOAJ" button is located at the bottom right.

Whitelists vs blacklists

- Is it better to have a blacklist (which everyone avoids being on) – or a white list of ‘acceptable publications’?
- Blacklists can attract controversy
- Whitelists are more positive in reputation – but can provide false credibility to ‘grey zone’ journals that currently lack sufficient evidence to justify removal



“I think predatory publishers pose the biggest threat to science since the Inquisition. They threaten research by failing to demarcate authentic science from methodologically unsound science, by allowing for counterfeit science, such as complementary and alternative medicine, to parade as if it were authentic science, and by enabling the publication of activist science.” *

***Jeffrey Beall. What I learned from predatory publishers. *Biochemia Medica* 2017;27(2):273-9. <https://doi.org/10.11613/BM.2017.029>**

So how does an author avoid being scammed by a predatory publisher?

Think. Check. Submit. - a cross-industry initiative led by representatives from ALPSP, DOAJ, INASP, ISSN, LIBER, OASPA, STM, UKSG, and individual publishers



Are you submitting your research to a trusted journal?
Is it the right journal for your work?



Use our [check list](#) to assess the journal



Only if you can answer 'yes' to the questions on our [check list](#)

<http://thinkchecksubmit.org/check/>

Think. Check. Submit.

Refer to this list for your chosen journal to check if it is trusted.

- Do you or your colleagues know the journal?
 - Have you read any articles in the journal before?
 - Is it easy to discover the latest papers in the journal?
- Can you easily identify and contact the publisher?
 - Is the publisher name clearly displayed on the journal website?
 - Can you contact the publisher by telephone, email, and post?
- Is the journal clear about the type of peer review it uses?
- Are articles indexed in services that you use?
- Is it clear what fees will be charged?
 - Does the journal site explain what these fees are for and when they will be charged?

<http://thinkchecksubmit.org/check/>



And there's more...

- Do you recognise the editorial board?
 - Have you heard of the editorial board members?
 - Do the editorial board mention the journal on their own websites?
- Is the publisher a member of a recognized industry initiative?
 - Do they belong to the [Committee on Publication Ethics \(COPE\)](#) ?
 - If the journal is open access, is it listed in the [Directory of Open Access Journals \(DOAJ\)](#) ?
 - If the journal is open access, does the publisher belong to the [Open Access Scholarly Publishers' Association \(OASPA\)](#) ?
 - Is the journal hosted on one of INASP's [Journals Online](#) platforms (for journals published in Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Central America and Mongolia) or on [African Journals Online](#) (AJOL, for African journals)?
 - Is the publisher a member of another trade association?

<http://thinkchecksubmit.org/check/>



If you can answer 'yes' to most or all of the questions on the list....

- Complete the check list and submit your article only if you are happy you can answer 'yes' to most or all of the questions.
- You need to be confident your chosen journal will have a suitable profile among your peers to enhance your reputation and your chance of gaining citations.
- Publishing in the right journal for your research will raise your professional profile, and help you progress in your career.
- Your paper should be indexed or archived and be easily discoverable.
- You should expect a professional publishing experience where your work is reviewed and edited.
- Only then should you submit your article.



<http://thinkchecksubmit.org/check/>

So why would anyone still choose to submit to a predatory journal?

- Ignorant of their existence?
- Naïve to the risks?
- Just wanting a cheap and easy option....?

Also, use of the term 'predator' in this context has been questioned:

- are these journals devious or inept?
- and is it possible that some authors are deliberately seeking low-bar options ...?

Nature Comment 6 Sept 17: David Moher, Larissa Shamseer, Kelly Cobey *et al.* **Stop this waste of people, animals and money**

- “Predatory journals have shoddy reporting - **and include papers from wealthy nations**”
- >50% of corresponding authors were from high- or middle-income countries
- Of the 17% reporting a funding source: the NIH was the most frequently named funder
- US-based authors were second only to India
- Only 3 of the responding authors said they had previously submitted the article elsewhere

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Some recommendations:

- Publishers, research institutions and funders should **issue clear warnings** against illegitimate publishers and make clear recommendations
- Funders and research institutions should **prohibit the use of funds to support publications in predatory journal publications** and ensure researchers are trained in selecting appropriate journals when submitting work.
- When seeking promotion or funding, **researchers should include a declaration that their CV is free of predatory publications.**
- **Ethics committees should ensure that researchers work with institutional resources**, such as librarians, to ensure they do not submit to any journals without reviewing evidence-based criteria for avoiding these titles.
- **“If not, predatory journals will continue to erode the integrity of scientific scholarship.”**

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And finally, a warning about Predatory Conferences...

These are becoming increasingly common – and have been linked to companies known to be predatory publishers

- Conferences appear to be scholarly, but are designed just to exploit and make money
- Academics are asked to attend and present – and pay!
- Conferences usually have a very similar name to an existing meeting – perhaps differing only with the inclusion of a colon or a dash
- These often set out to combine broad topics from a range of disciplines, increasing a meeting's apparent relevance to a large number of people
- Many are hosted in Asian countries (e.g. Taiwan, Malaysia, Japan, Thailand, Hong Kong) – can sound enticing
- However, meetings are found to be third rate and a complete waste of time (e.g. headline speakers do not turn up, and there are often relatively few attendees)
- Hotels apparently booked and paid for prior to departure have no record of bookings
- And once booked, there is no opportunity for cancellation or refund...

Please spread the word!

Some take-home messages....

- Make sure your staff and clients continue to be informed and made aware of the existence of predatory publishers in the OA journal arena.
- Be aware of the dangers of lost data and damaged reputations, as well as the risk of being associated with dodgy bed-fellows who may be choosing these journals for non-ethical reasons.
- Predatory journals are getting harder to spot – but if the website looks dodgy, it probably is!
- Do not be beguiled by seeing editorial board names that you recognise. Blurred headshots presented in an inconsistent style are likely indicators that these names may have been hijacked.
- If you aren't sure, check out DOAJ. Make sure your clients are aware of the Think.Check.Submit checklist. <http://thinkchecksubmit.org/check/>
- And finally: warn your clients to look out for predatory conferences. These are on the increase, and are very likely to be (at best) disappointing – and may even be complete scams.

Thank you!



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