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Intersections

Predator!

Here we go again. Or, rather, even after the shutdown of the notorious "they're predators because I say they are, and OA sucks" lists and the retirement of the man behind them, there seem to be more articles about "predatory" journals and their creator than ever.

I won't pretend that this is comprehensive coverage of stuff over the last year related to open access and so-called predatory journals. I've become much ~~lazier~~ more selective about tagging items; I don't usually tag material behind paywalls (even "you get X free each month" paywalls); I only tag English-language material; I certainly don't *see* everything or close to it; I stopped tagging in mid-August 2018; and I've decided to stay out of the kitchen. I started with 130-odd tagged items; that boiled down to 90 as I was subdividing them into groups; there are 68 as this final editing pass begins. It's still too many.

The Predometer

I'm using a P-grade (PG) for this roundup, indicating the extent to which an article includes misleading but common "predatory" assumptions. The P grade starts at A and goes down a grade for each of the following:

- Buying into the "400,000 predatory articles in 2014" nonsense without caveats. It's simply wrong. If you want the details, read *Gray OA 2012-2016: Open Access Journals Beyond DOAJ* (*Cites & Insights* 17.1), specifically Chapter 4; you might also want to read the followup in *C&I* 17.9, covering 2014-2017 (with 2017 projected based on half-year counts). More reasonable figures are either just under 30,000 or just under 114,000.
- Buying into 8,000-or-more active predatory journals in 2014. That's also wrong; more reasonable figures are either 936 or 2,692 journals. (Same sources as above.)

- Assuming that if Beall called it predatory, *it must be predatory*—with no caveats.
- Assuming that gold OA *means* APCs.
- Assuming that all predatory journals are OA (or, worse, that all OA journals are predatory).
- Suggesting that, while *some* OA journals may not be predatory, most are—the "Oh, yes, there are *some* good OA journals" line.

I'll note PG-B through PG-F for articles based on the Predometer Grade, which could also be called the "Predatory Hype Grade." As usual for grades, there is no E—and while a PG of D or F doesn't make an article worthless, it does suggest that it suffers badly from predatory hype.

How Would I Define Predatory?

Tempted as I am, fact is *I've already talked about this* (see the brief *Cites & Insights* 17.8) and doubt that going over the same ground will change anybody's mind about anything.

Clearly predatory: hiding APCs; refusing to withdraw articles where APC hasn't been paid and author requests withdrawal; lying about peer review or editorial board; charging "color page charges" if there's no print edition (that one obviously implicates some non-OA journals); charging submission fees and repeatedly asking for re-submission. Less clear: charging high APCs *or subscription prices* without clarity as to why the costs are that high. But I'm not going to attempt an exhaustive list or to discuss why some so-called criteria really aren't. One section of this roundup has to do with defining predatory journals; I'll add comments as required.

General Predation

Items on aspects of "predatory" publishing with no common theme.

Predatory Publishing Isn't The Problem, It's a Symptom of Information Inequality

So says Phill Jones in this July 29, 2015 piece at Digital Science's *Perspectives*—one of the earliest pieces in this mostly-recent roundup. It's a good piece, focusing on one of the issues that tend to get swept into "predatory" discussions. The start and finish:

> One major topic of conversation among publishers and librarians these days is the rise of predatory publishers. In the past, I've been concerned that the discussion has been divisive and used as somewhat of a political football between the Open Access (OA) and traditional publishing communities. Just lately though, I've been relieved to see the debate begin to

> evolve into a more rational discussion about how scholarly communication and the issues surrounding maintaining its integrity are evolving. It seems to me that predatory publishing is not a singular problem but part of a larger issue of information inequality in the digital age.
>
> …
>
> If we're going to move forward and have a reasonable discussion about predation, I think we need to do two things.
>
> 1. Librarians in the West, stop linking to Beall's list as a way of dealing with predatory publishers. It's divisive and the information on there is actually fairly redundant. Your patrons already know how to pick journals to publish in, or their supervisors do.
> 2. Everybody in the industry needs to start thinking about predatory publishing as part of the larger global problem of information inequality and acknowledge who is actually being victimized.
>
> By focusing our discussion on the predators themselves, we're missing the bigger picture. If we're going to fix this, we need to look at the conditions that have allowed these companies to thrive in particular markets and then look to try to solve or mitigate those larger issues.

What's in the middle is worth reading and has aged very well. I don't have much to add.

Are Predatory Conferences the Dark Side of the Open Access Movement? **No.** That's simple. Conferences have nothing to do with open access to the scholarly literature. But, of course, that's not the alarum Phaedra E. Cress intends to sound in this February 2, 2017 article at *Aesthetic Surgery Journal*. (The journal's toll access but the article is free.)

> By now, you've probably heard all about predatory publishing and journals—those aggressive entities that feign a US-based address, a high Impact Factor, and countless other accolades they've never actually achieved. They send emails, begging authors to join their editorial boards or write an article. The prevalence of predatory publishers has increased by more than 5000% since 2011 from 18 publishers to 923. The first clue that they're disingenuous may be the use of awkward grammar and syntax, lots of exclamation points or colored fonts, and copious typos, which can quickly tip you off to a predator lying in wait.
>
> *Caveat emptor!* We've peeled back a new layer under the umbrella of predatory entities, and it's called "predatory conferences." These new aberrations of predators organize conferences that appear to be scholarly but are strictly exploitive money-making schemes that cost authors and funding sources time and money. Unfortunately, no medical or scientific specialty is safe—this phenomenon crosses multidisciplinary boundaries.

There's more, and it certainly *seems* to treat "predatory" as inherent to OA:

> Beginning in 2008, the predatory publishing landscape was bubbling and brewing as Open Access was taking root. It has now matured and new iterations are revealing themselves. It's easy to believe this is just the tip of the Open Access iceberg that has plagued publishers since its onset. The creation of what some call a "catch-all" journal—PLOS ONE—publishes peer-reviewed content from any discipline in medicine or science. Many of today's predatory publishers have attempted to replicate this model but by doing so have set off alarms in the minds of scholars.

I'm tempted to just say "What?"—and a footnoted opinion piece has the same "if it's OA, it's probably skeezy" feel to it. There's a list of "confirmed predatory conferences and organizations"—and as far as I can tell these are "confirmed" to be predatory because somebody says so.

There is a table of criteria for determining predatory conferences, and portions of it may be useful. The piece as a whole seems mostly to be an attack on OA. PG-D.

A month of spamvitations

If I had a humor section, I'd include this fine piece by Stephen Heard, published May 16, 2017 at *Scientist Sees Squirrel* (a *great* blog name).

> *Esteemed contributor. Revered speaker. Renowned researcher.* You get these e-mails too: invitations to publish papers in fake* journals, to join fake editorial boards, to speak at fake conferences. I'd certainly known I got a lot of them; but that was unquantified, because I usually just grin at their clumsy phrasing and then delete them without further thought. "What", I thought, "would happen if I kept track of them all for a month? Would I learn anything? Could I milk a blog post out of it?"
>
> So I did, and I could. (You're welcome). From April 7 to May 6, 2017, I received 50 spamvitations**.

Note that * and ** lead to very good footnotes. Here's part of the first (the second basically says that sometimes it was hard to be sure an invitation was spam):

> I'll assume you'll know what I mean by "fake journals": journals that publish anything, upon author payment, with sham peer review. They're often called "predatory" journals, but for somewhat complicated reasons I think "fake" is more accurate. When someone publishes in a fake journal, they're not always being exploited; they may instead be using the journal as an accomplice in taking advantage of a naïve tenure or promotion process (for example). That doesn't seem like *the journal* being predatory – but it's definitely fake.

He lists the journals that either invited an article or asked him to join the editorial board, and also the conference invitations: 16, 17 and 17 respectively. Then he offers some semi-random thoughts, stated well and engagingly enough that you should read the article. Briefly, he thinks it's harder

to understand a scholar submitting to a fake conference than to a fake journal; it's clear that he could have a "really impressive fake CV" if he just accepted those invitations; most spamvitations (but not all) are poorly written or targeted; and…

> [I]t used to be you could recognize a fake journal by the ludicrous turnaround time it promised – submission to acceptance in 21 days! 15 days! 10 minutes! But real journals have begun to compete on speed, and some are promising equally ludicrous turnarounds (well, maybe not 10 minutes). I think this is a Bad Thing, and I wish they'd stop. Journals and authors seem locked into a positive feedback of offering and expecting more and more rapid peer review and handling, and this seems more likely to weaken the peer-review system than it is to accelerate the march of science.

The link there is to an earlier Heard piece that attempts to establish the minimum plausible time for peer review (he arrives at seven weeks)—and that one's interesting but not directly related to the current topic. Still: he's saying that fast turnaround is *not* any more a sure sign of predatory (or OA) publishing.

He quotes two of the most amusing invitations he received, including this one:

> (Our journal has been) "…*running with the continuous rigid support from Authors, Reviewers & Readers*".

I'll leave his response for you to read. A good piece.

Spears: Universities wrestle with how to stop fake science publishers

As it happens, the "Spears:" in this June 4, 2017 *Ottawa Citizen* article appears to be the reporter: Tom Spears. And, to be honest, I find it a little mystifying. The start:

> It's time for universities to crack down on fake science publishers and the academics who use them, legal experts say.
>
> The "how" part is trickier.
>
> The problem came to light again this week after an Indian company operating in Canada accepted for the second time a garbled, meaningless article it already printed once and retracted. The Citizen submitted it to test whether OMICS International actually reads material that it supposedly reviews.
>
> OMICS has bought up a string of Canadian science journals, and will operate 22 conferences in Toronto and Vancouver this summer. But it accepts research on flying pigs.

The link is to an earlier article, in which the newspaper submitted two fake papers to an OMICS conference; both were accepted. Here's where I find it mystifying:

> David Sweanor, who teaches at the Centre for Health Law, Policy and Ethics at the University of Ottawa, hopes there will soon be software to detect articles published in fake journals, just as programs today can detect plagiarism.
>
> "If the presence of such journals/conferences on a CV were treated akin to plagiarism, and it was known that (like plagiarism) they were easily detected, much of the viability of this business would likely disappear," he said in an email.
>
> "Just the possibility of such things would in the meantime be a huge deterrent to the use of these services. After all, we have seen the way past plagiarism or degree mill diplomas have come back to haunt people now that such things are easy to detect and this issue is taken seriously."

Really? There can certainly be software to identify articles appearing in journals labeled as fake—that seems easy—and maybe that's all that's meant. Otherwise—how would you algorithmically show that an *article* is fake?

The article asks a critical question that sets it apart from too much "OMG Predatory Fake Awful" coverage:

> But who, exactly, is a predator?
>
> The thousands of academic journals range across a continuum with some in the middle that are trying to do an honest job, says Tim Caulfield of the University of Alberta.

There's more here and it's interesting. There's a mention of Beall but no presumption that what he says is gospel.

Around the Web: A quick list of readings on "predatory" open access journals

No commentary, just a link to John Dupuis' good brief list of articles about "predatory" publishing—this one dated June 13, 2017.

Predatory journals are not the problem. We are.

So says Andre Costopoulos in this June 7, 2017 post at *ArcheoThoughts*, and it's such a good (and brief) discussion that I'd be tempted to quote the whole thing if I could find a CC BY license statement (which I can't).

Similarly to Stephen Heard, Costopoulos collected a month's worth of invitations to submit papers: 24 in all.

> I decided to read the invitations and look into the journals behind them in some detail. My intention was to write a light-hearted blog post on those zany fake journals. I realized very quickly that this is a serious matter.
>
> Of course, I did encounter a bit of zaniness along the way. There was that one journal for which the editor's bio is an advertisement for home air purifiers. There was another one whose editor in chief last published in the 1960s. He is most likely not aware of his recent illustrious appointment.

> He is very likely, in fact, not aware of anything at all anymore. There was a journal that had a 226 word article on the benefits of capsaicin. I was very interested because I am a notorious fan of spicy food. Visitors to my office react variously to the presence of a bottle of hot sauce on my desk. Sadly, that article is representative of the other contents of the journal.

But…when he looked more closely at the journals involved, he found that a significant number had "at least some reasonably interesting papers that were obviously written in good faith and are the result of hard work by some good people." This doesn't surprise me at all: it's implausible that 100,000 or so articles each year are submitted in bad faith or by really bad scientists.

> I was expecting the proportion of ridiculously bad papers to be much higher than it actually is. The papers that I would consider viable would have greatly benefited from peer review and most were in dire need of a professional editor, but they are solid at their core. There is the heart-breaking case study of suicide by a novel method spreading via social media. It deserves to be read. There is the paper on recent gene flow in some isolated valleys that is not spectacular but certainly informative enough to be of interest to specialists of the region. There is the review of literature on the Neolithic transition, obviously drawn from a dissertation, which, recast to focus on a particular issue and then properly refereed, should be in a legitimate journal.

I could (and do) take issue with the seeming assumption that these journals weren't "legitimate," but I think the point stands in any case:

> I detect a very worrisome trend in these viable articles in predatory journals. Their authors are overwhelmingly from the developing world and the BRICs, and/or they are junior. We senior western academics manufacture and amplify this trend by feeding the legitimate journals and publishers and using in turn their publications as easy (I would say lazy) metrics for restricting access to our club.
>
> There is more good work out there by good people than there are slots in good journals, and certainly than there are academic positions. We privilege members of our club and their designated heirs (our students) for access to those slots. There are other barriers, such as language barriers which require authors to have their articles professionally edited before they are accepted by legitimate journals. That's expensive and usually not possible. There is the fact that the amount of labour and therefore resources required to produce a complete article these days is going up exponentially. It is now very difficult to publish a simple, good, interesting result. The few available slots in reputable journals are taken up by large, well-funded teams that do far more work for a single paper than can be done by a junior, peripheral academic.

There's a bit more, worth reading, with this striking conclusion: "Saying that predatory journals are the problem is like saying that the monster in Frankenstein is the problem."

Blaming OA Publishers for predatory journals is like blaming pharmaceuticals for the supplement industry

A slightly related piece by Lenny Teytelman on September 13, 2017 at *protocols.io*—and it comes from somebody who "hate[s] scammers with a passion."

> But you know what irritates me **even more** than the scammers? It's Jeffrey Beall, his black list of predatory publishers, and the argument blaming the open access movement for the predatory journal scourge (please see today's Why Beall's List Died for more background). Jeffrey Beall is a notorious anti-open access crusader, but I have heard many people say that open access publishing gives rise to predatory journals and damages the quality of published biomedical research.
>
> Of course, the subscription publishing model avoids the potential for scams inherent in the author-pays structure. However, subscription publishing itself is an inefficient and terrible model causing way more harm to science and society than all the scam journals combined. Yet, even leaving the Open Access versus Subscription argument aside, it is simply ludicrous to blame the countless high quality ethical open access publishers for the predatory journals.

There's a bit more (it's a short piece), ending with this:

> I'm not trivializing or dismissing the problem by any means, but to argue in favor of subscriptions because scammers exist is like trying to get rid of Tylenol at your local pharmacy just because there are Echinacea bottles in the next aisle.

Examining publishing practices: moving beyond the idea of predatory open access

That's Kevin L. Smith, writing in UKSG's *Insights* 30(3) (published November 8, 2017—DOI: http://doi.org/10.1629/uksg.388), and Smith is almost always worth listening to. The abstract:

> The word 'predatory' has become an obstacle to a serious discussion of publishing practices. Its use has been both overinclusive, encompassing practices that, while undesirable, are not malicious, and underinclusive, missing many exploitative practices outside the open access sphere. The article examines different business models for scholarly publishing and considers the potential for abuse with each model. After looking at the problems of both blacklists and so-called 'whitelists', the author suggests that the best path forward would be to create tools to capture the real experience of individual authors as they navigate the publishing process with different publishers.

Those first two sentences alone are enough to make me cheer. The article—and it is an article-length opinion piece—is so much worth reading on its own that I'm hesitant to excerpt it. Smith states explicitly that APCs represent a *subcategory* of Gold OA; recognizes that APCs can *lower* the economic barriers to publishing and access (but can also raise barriers); and more.

The section "Focusing on practices, not labels" makes the case that many exploitative practices happen in subscription as well as OA journals. Discussing blacklists and whitelists, he makes a useful point that I need to remember: the very terms help to perpetuate systemic privilege (I should start calling *DOAJ* a list of *responsible* OA journals, and will try to do so).

I *must* quote one paragraph—which says better something that I've said in the past (that all journals are pppredatory):

> Another way to phrase this problem is to ask if there would really be any journals at all on the list of responsible journals. Anderson suggests that big deals that are filled with sub-par journals in order to inflate statistics, and therefore, price, is an undesirable practice. He also considers excessive prices a problem. Would these criteria prevent inclusion of any journal from Elsevier or Taylor & Francis on a list of acceptable journals? If the criteria are broad enough, it might be difficult to populate any list, since the current system seems to be broken in so many different ways. These lists, in the end, are always selective and represent a limited perspective.

He suggests a "Yelp" for scholarly publication, where authors report on their own experiences with publishers (but I'd suggest that it should be with individual journals). His conclusion:

> Ideally, we need to work to transition scholarly communication to a system that does not invite abuse and exploitation. Such a system would need to eliminate a commercial profit motive, regardless of whether that profit is generated from authors or subscribers. Some form of non-commercial open access, such as described by Eve, de Vries and Rooryck, should be our ultimate goal. In the meantime, however, we should look to authors to provide the perspective needed to evaluate specific publications. It is their experience that is fundamental to any system of scholarly communications. While no transition can be successful if it adds a significant amount of labor for faculty authors, the task of providing short reviews that recount their positive and negative experiences is something with which all faculty, in common with the rest of the consumer world, are increasingly familiar. By crowdsourcing the task of evaluation and tying it to actual experience, we can move beyond the problems that have been created by blacklisting and which are still inherent in whitelisting.

Go read the article.

Predatory open-access publishing

I wouldn't normally link to a Wikipedia article like this one (last checked on August 2, 2018)—and even here, I'm pointing to it largely because the long, long Talk page helps explain why I will never again attempt to contribute to Wikipedia: Essentially, Our Rules Are Our Rules Except When We Break Them.

That is: Blogs aren't reliable sources. Unless they're Beall's blog and lists. What makes them special? Apparently, that the *New York Times* mentioned him. Thus, he's The Expert and his word is good enough for *Wikipedia*. (There's also, embedded in the Talk page, some discussion of the need for peer-reviewed evidence, but that then cites Beall's diatribes as being peer-reviewed because they appear in journals that publish peer-reviewed articles.)

I would name specific editors, but other than Randykitty, that just gets to be too tedious. The article isn't entirely bad, but the Talk section is a bit too revealing: Once you're part of the Editorial Cabal's In Crowd, the usual rules don't apply.

Heck, they even go so far as to mention in the second paragraph of an entry for MDPI that MDPI *used to be* on Beall's list.

I can't assign a definite predometer grade here. Then again, this article offers almost no useful information on predatory journals.

A partial solution to the problem of predatory journals, and a new index of journal quality

I'm not quite sure what to say about this piece, by Alex Holcombe on January 21, 2018 at his eponymous blog.

Consider this paragraph:

> Unfortunately, there is no one-stop shop that scholars, administrators, journalists, or policymakers can consult for an indication of how legitimate a journal is. Predatory journals are common, charging researchers hundreds to publish an article with little to no vetting by reviewers and shoddy publishing service. Their victims may predominantly come from countries trying to jump into international publishing in English for the first time, some of whom receive monetary rewards from their universities for doing so. There are proprietary journal databases like journal citation reports of Thomson Reuters, but they cost money and can take years to index new journals. Jeffrey Beall used to maintain an (arguably biased) free list of predatory journals, but for various reasons including legal ones (see 1, 2) blacklists are probably a bad idea.

I wonder about the second sentence: does it overstate the prevalence of "predatory" journals? On the other hand, I like the last sentence. Holcombe's solution?

> Non-predatory, respected journals nearly universally have an editorial board of scholars who have published a significant amount of research in

> other respected journals. The whitelist would need to establish whether those scholars exist and have published in (other) reputable journals.
>
> Journals have rapidly taken up the ORCiD system of unique researcher identities, asking authors who submit papers to enter their ORCid number. They should also do this for their editorial board members – journals should add ORCiD numbers to their editorial board list.
>
> An organization (such as SHERPA, that maintains the SHERPA/ROMEO list of journals and their open access policies) could then pull the editors' publication lists from ORCiD and create a score, with a threshold for the score indicating that a goodly proportion of the editors have published in other reputable journals. To get this started, existing whitelists of legitimate journals would be used to make sure the journals the editorial board members published in were legitimate.

There's a bit of circularity here, but I also wonder whether there's not a whole spectrum between "respected" and "predatory." The next paragraph bothers me even more, as it seems to push for *more* emphasis on "prestigious" journals:

> The score could also be used as a new indicator of the esteem of journals – if the journal has only highly-cited researchers on its editorial board, it is probably a prestigious journal (science badly needs new indicators of quality, however flawed, to reduce reliance on citation metrics like impact factor). Journals could thus be ranked by the scholarly impact of its editorial board members. This would allow new journals to immediately have prestige without having to wait the years necessary to establish a strong citation record.

So: I dunno—and, of course, I'm not a scientist. Worth reading and thinking about. I'm giving it PG-B, and that may be unfair.

Identifying Predatory or Pseudo-Journals

This piece by Christine Latine and Margaret A. Winker appeared February 18, 2017 on the WAME (World Association of Medical Editors) website.

Unfortunately, the piece states the 420,000/8,000 scare numbers without caveats—and spends a *lot* of time praising Beall's list, albeit with some caveats and a curiously ambiguous closing sentence: "Thus, WAME cautions against the use of prior appearance on Beall's list as the **solitary** method for determining whether a journal is predatory or legitimate." [Emphasis added.] The caveats given prior to that waffle should be enough to be more forthright: Therefore, Beall's list should be ignored.

There's more text, much of it good, and a series of tables. I believe the article would be stronger if Table 1 was simply omitted; with one exception, Table 4 ("Warning Sign…") is pretty good. The exception:

- The publication fees are atypical for the scholarly publishing industry (much higher or much lower fees can both signal problems

> [with recognition that journals in low or middle income countries may have legitimately low fees]).

Is that either necessary or useful?

PG-C (or C-).

The Institutionalized Racism of Scholarly Publishing

This post/article, by Ryan Regier on June 9, 2018 at *A Way of Happening*, is important and well worth your time. Go read it, if you haven't already, and think about it.

Regier recounts the effect on Academic Journals, a growing African gold OA publisher, of being added to Beall's list:

> The impact was immediate. From the About Us section of their website:
>
> > Several editors resigned from the various editorial board. The number of manuscript submission declined, including several withdrawals. This decline was steep and fast, and impacted on our ability to support our team. At the end of the year, under this very difficult condition, Academic journals was forced to downsize the number of employees. Almost half of all members of the team was affected by the downsizing. Over a hundred and twenty employees lost their jobs.
>
> Academic Journals submitted a formal appeal to Beall. He admitted it may have been a bit harsh to add them to his list, but refused to remove them. Academic Journals had no choice but to struggle on. Quoting their website again:
>
> > Academic Journals doubts the sincerity of the Jeffrey Beall's list. We perceive that the list is deliberately biased towards open access journals. In addition, we consider Jeffrey Beall's methods questionable and lacking in rigor in a matter as important as the evaluation of academic publishing. We welcome a fair, transparent and rigorous evaluation of all our activities.
>
> How crazy is it that you can build a substantial publishing infrastructure on your home continent and then see it decimated by a single man across the ocean who decides to add you to his blacklist?

He also notes MDPI's addition—but MDPI managed to get removed, although Beall continued to denigrate them. Then there's the new Cabell blacklist…and he wonders whether that, too, will fail to distinguish new, struggling, currently low-quality journals (mostly in the global south) from legitimately "predatory" ones.

> This is a big issue. As I've argued before, there are a lot of low quality journals out there who are new to the field and trying to improve and establish themselves. Scholarly publishing is rigorous and hard. It's

> easy to make mistakes at the beginning. Especially when it's a new publisher and attempting to start a journal without pre-existing publishing infrastructure and polices.
>
> Listing a new journal as being low quality or predatory puts the journal in a bit of a poverty trap. As use of a journal drops because of it's blacklisting, so will it's quality. They'll become more desperate to survive, which can lead to them engaging in more practices that are considered predatory, e.g. mass email spamming to find authors or skipping peer review to publish quicker.
>
> . . .
>
> There's a larger problem here though. It has become quite clear to me in recent months that Beall's List and Cabell's List do what blacklists often do, they over-represent minority populations and encourage widespread discrimination against these populations.
>
> We know systematic racism exists and it impacts what we read and the value we give it. We know having privilege buys second chances and quick dismissal of mistakes/missteps. We know the opposite is true of those without Privilege, that they don't get second chances and their mistakes are over-emphasized. We also know that one of the sly things about Privilege is that it hides itself. That we don't notice we are being harder on those without Privilege, even though they make similar mistakes.
>
> This is exactly what is happening to non-Western and/or non-English journals. It's what happened to Academic Journals. We've been conditioned to see them as low-quality or predatory and be quick to jump on any flaws, while ignoring the flaws of journals we consider prestigious and Western.

There's a *lot* more here—and although I could quote the whole thing (yes, it's CC-BY), I'd rather have you read it. Consider the language issue: is it *really* legitimate to assert that *all* science is or should be in English?

There's a very good list of ways to "fix this"—and I will quote the list in full:

> 1. Reconsider how we talk about predatory publishers and stop recommending blacklists. A lot of the instruction I've seen about predatory publishers lately is based off a "Trust your gut" and "If it feels wrong, don't trust it" approach.
>
> We need to stop this. We aren't objective beings and systematic racism has a lot of influence here. We need a "Look at this journal critically and be aware of your own bias" approach. Evaluate the journal critically based on the content and not it's spelling or if the interface feels "familiar".
>
> 2. Use other databases for research beyond just Scopus and Web of Science. We know they have flaws. Use DOAJ, Google Scholar, or other search indexes that capture the output from international publishers

and researchers as well. Here's a great list of some of these sources from Andy Nobes.

3. Make an effort to search non-English sources. For example, Amano et al recommend including speakers of a wide range of languages when doing systematic reviews.

4. Push publishers/vendors to include more of these journals in their databases (EBSCO is good at this). Do whatever we can to help these journals get better indexed and discovered. For example, a small thing a libraries can do, that makes a big difference, is to activate all of DOAJ in their knowledgebase.

5. Talk more about issues of privilege and discrimination in the scholarly publishing process. Especially in information literacy sessions. Bring these topics directly into these sessions when we talk about how authority is constructed and contextual.

6. Talk to these journals and researchers. Find out how we can help. What we need to work on. Bring them to the table. Give them more say in these decisions. Stop us from making the same mistakes again.

This is seriously good and important stuff. PG-A.

Falling prey to a predatory OA publisher: Individual failure or community problem?

Richard Poynder posted this on July 20, 2018 at *Open and Shut*?—and, as is not uncommon with Poynder, it's complicated. You can guess that he argues against "individual failure"—that he doesn't believe it's up to scholars to *know where they're submitting articles*.

I find that difficult to accept. While he doesn't say that in so many words, he does say this:

> What surprises me is that while no one can agree on what predatory publishing is, or how prevalent or damaging it is, there nevertheless appears to be a consensus that if anyone falls victim to one of these publishers they have only themselves to blame. In other words, it is viewed as an individual failure.
>
> By contrast, I view predatory publishing as a community problem. And, as such, I believe the community has a responsibility to come up with a solution for those researchers who become victims. After all, as I pointed out three years ago, predatory publishing could not exist without the co-operation of the research community – e.g. by universities and funders encouraging researchers to engage in pay-to-publish gold OA, and by (often senior) researchers agreeing to join the editorial boards of journals they know little or nothing about, in which they are unlikely ever to publish themselves, and for which they will probably

> never do any reviewing or editorial work. (Yes, I know, some researchers say they are listed on EBs without having opted-in, but many clearly do volunteer, if only because it adds another line to their CVs)
>
> To my mind, the community's apparent lack of concern for the victims of predatory publishing represents a moral failure on its part. Certainly, that was the conclusion I reached recently when – during the same week – I was contacted by two different researchers from two different continents (neither, by the way, were from the global South, which is commonly said to be where most victims of predatory publishing are based).
>
> In both cases, the researchers (and their co-authors) had **inadvertently submitted** papers to predatory publishers. As a result, both had quickly discovered that if you mistakenly submit a paper to a predatory publisher it can be difficult to extricate yourself from what is inevitably a distressing situation. [Emphasis added.]

"Inadvertently submitted." "Mistakenly submit." Huh?

I'm not a junior scientist desperate to get my CV up to snuff. I *have* published in peer-reviewed journals and have submitted articles that underwent peer review (these two are not the same thing, as too many people fail to realize: many peer-reviewed journals publish stuff that doesn't undergo peer review).

What I have *not* done, *ever*, is to submit an article to an outlet without being fairly comfortable with that outlet—e.g., reading a few issues, checking other aspects of the journal. Somehow "inadvertently submitted" strikes me as appropriate for a tweet, but not for a scholarly article.

Poynder waxes rhetorical about the blame of the community:

> That is one reason why I believe a community solution is essential, but it is certainly not the most compelling one. The more important reason is that since it is the wider research community that has created the monster that predatory publishing has become the community has a responsibility to help the victims.
>
> Aside from the fact that many members of this community are willing to sit on the editorial boards of predatory journals, the community supports and promotes the pay-to-publish business model that created the conditions for predatory publishing. And when the problem became apparent the community either denied there was a problem or simply sat on its hands and allowed the problem to grow.

Basically, Poynder's saying that *allowing* or supporting APC-based gold OA "feeds the monster"—since he apparently believes that only gold OA journals *can* be predatory (the Beall definition). The first sentence of the second paragraph—or, rather, the first clause—makes an assertion that could use demonstrating: that *many* scholars *actually* sit on editorial boards of journals that are *actually* predatory, not simply unfortunate enough to attract Beall's silver hammer.

But never mind.

I won't attempt to define Poynder's proposed solution for authors who can't be bothered to look at journals before they submit to them—oh, sorry, *it's not the author's fault*—because I don't understand it. Any more than I understand the concept that authors should be free to submit wherever they please, then change their minds if they become unhappy with the results—and it's The Community's failure to be this accommodating.

Poynder's close:

> Let us hope that COPE will indeed take this forward and finally begin to offer hope to those isolated and lonely individuals who discover they have been conned.
>
> These people are the collateral damage of the pay-to-publish business model devised and promulgated by influential publishers like PLOS and BMC and subsequently endorsed and promoted by the research community. It's time for the community to hold out a helping hand to the victims of predatory publishing. If it cannot do this I do not think it can justifiably call itself a community any longer.

I respectfully disagree. If you can't be bothered to look before you leap, put your paper in an institutional archive and be done with it.

Predatory? What's Predatory?

This section includes items that seemed to focus (at least in part) on the definition and recognition of "predatory journal," although that's also true of a couple of pieces already discussed.

How to talk about "Predatory" Publishing: Reclaiming the Narrative

Ryan Regier posted this on April 19, 2017 at *A Way of Happening*. He begins with an anecdote—an awful article showing up at the top of a Summon search result, the outcry, and this:

> This Vendor quickly responded that they were shocked how this *Predatory Journal* managed to get through their indexing process and that they would remove it from their database completely.

After noting some of the things in the anecdote that should be analyzed, Regier gets to this:

> I just want to focus on one particular bit for this blog post. Namely, that the Vendor immediately responded to this problem by calling the journal *predatory*.
>
> You see, I don't think this journal is predatory. Yes, this article and others published by this journal are mostly offensive, incorrect, and non-scientific. However, this is because this is a *bad* publisher, *not* a predatory one.

> I think it is pretty clear that the term "predatory publishing" has unfortunately become a misused catch-all for any Open Access Journal that isn't up to par. Similar to Trump's uses of "fake news", the accusation of "predatory publishing" is now being used for any Open Access Journal whose practices you disagree with.

Regier does note cases of true predation (outright lying), then distinguishes between true predation and simple weakness, as most startup journals may suffer. I'm leaving out a lot—partly because Regier points to my own work—but it leads to this:

> I know of librarians who have recently 'on faith' deactivated all of the journals on Beall's List from their search tools. Just last year during my MLIS program a LIS professor stated in class that Beall's list was the gold standard.
>
> Let's be clear here: If you are a librarian who recognizes the unfairness of the scholarly publishing industry and wants change, you can't *also* be telling your patrons to rely on (an archived version) of Beall's List. These are positions are in direct conflict. Beall's list is pro-status quo and he wants the authors to continue publishing via current processes with the large scholarly publishers.
>
> Beall's list just doesn't allow new open access publishers to get off their feet. It doesn't allow them breathing room to make mistakes. This is the problem in general with Blacklists. Once you are on a Blacklist once, that's how you are remembered. It's easy to get on a Blacklist and incredibly hard to get off. Whitelists are different, they are are hard to get onto and very easy to get taken off. Blacklists are technically infeasible, practically unreliable and unethical. Period.

Later, he offers four bullet points he tries to bring up when he's asked about predatory publishing. Briefly: Beall's list is "far from perfect" (an understatement); use whitelists/review tools, not blacklists; subscription publishers can have predatory practices; and don't give up on OA.

Well done, worth reading.

Fake Climate Change denial papers in Fake scientific journals

Maybe this piece, by "Dave" on June 13, 2017 at *Skeptical Science*, belongs in another section, as "Dave"'s definition of fake or predatory is *really* simple: Beall Says So.

The lead and first few paragraphs:

> Academic publishing can for some be a rather daunting arena. There are literally thousands of journals. Together they compose a reputation spectrum that at one end consists of the highly reputable high-impact journals such as **Nature** and **Science**, all the way through to the predatory journals that claim to be peer-reviewed, but in exchange for a fee will publish quite literally anything.

Beall's List

If you are not immersed and active within a specific field that how can you shift the wheat from the chaff?

One quick check is to lookup Beall's list. University of Colorado Denver librarian and researcher Jeffrey Beall, who coined the term "predatory publishing", first published his list of predatory publishers in 2010 and ever since has been maintaining it and keeping it up to date.

"Dave" then quotes a few of Beall's supposed criteria (including one that, as far as I can tell, would apply to *many* subscription journals—that is, publishing "essays by laypeople, polemical editorials" as well as peer-reviewed articles), and goes through a climate-denialist article in an OMICS journal to show that it's junk (it is), then comments on OMICS and the journal in question. All of which may be fine, but:

> In the more traditional model, the publishers of science journals earn income via subscriptions, hence they are motivated to ensure quality. If the work published was crap, then nobody would subscribe and so their income would be impacted.
>
> Sadly in recent times they have proven themselves to be rather greedy by charging absurd fees, and so there has been a move towards open access journals. There are some very good open access journals that do a fine job and do adhere to a rigorous peer-review process. Unfortunately, it also opened up a market that is driven by two forces …
>
> - A market where open access journals simply charge a fee for publication creates an incentive for some open access journals to only be motivated by fee collection and not care about quality at all. Publishing anything will not be a problem for them.
> - The need by many within the academic arena to be published creates a ready market for them to tap into. The marginal stuff that should never be published, because it is basically crap, now finds an outlet.

The first paragraph may have been true before the Big Deal era; I'm not sure it stands these days. The second reads as a fine example of damning with faint praise: there are *some* very good open access journals…

So: the definition of "predatory" is "Beall says so." Sad. PG-C.

'Predatory' Open Access Journals as Parody: Exposing the Limitations of 'Legitimate' Academic Publishing

Kirsten Bell published this article in *triple-c* some time on or before July 14, 2017, and it's powerful. The abstract:

> The concept of the 'predatory' publisher has today become a standard way of characterising a new breed of open access journals that seem to be more concerned with making a profit than disseminating academic knowledge. This essay presents an alternative view of such publishers,

> arguing that if we treat them as parody instead of predator, a far more nuanced reading emerges. Viewed in this light, such journals destabilise the prevailing discourse on what constitutes a 'legitimate' journal, and, indeed, the nature of scholarly knowledge production itself. Instead of condemning them outright, their growth should therefore encourage us to ask difficult but necessary questions about the commercial context of knowledge production, prevailing conceptions of quality and value, and the ways in which they privilege scholarship from the 'centre' and exclude that from the 'periphery'.

I find it essentially impossible to excerpt from Bell's article without doing it real injustice. I can only point you to it and quote the conclusion:

> Although the concept of 'predatory' open access journals has been widely taken up, it serves to limit our understanding of what is a far more interesting and complex phenomenon. In particular, I have suggested that it is more useful to think of these publishers as *parody* (and *mimicry* in Bhaba's sense) rather than *predator*. Without wishing to deny the questionable ethics of some of these publishers, they nevertheless expose the problems with contemporary knowledge production in academia, in terms of its commercial context, our methods for ascertaining quality and value, and the ways it systematically privileges scholarship from the 'centre' and marginalises and excludes that from the 'periphery'. Viewed in this light, such journals reveal not the dark side of the open access movement, but the dark side of academic knowledge production itself and the underlying truth of "the democratic, egalitarian ethos of scientists [...] as the visible face of a hierarchical system echoing the structure of feudal nobility"

Predatory Journals: How to Spot and Avoid Them

This article by Mary Beth Genter and Rosonald R. Bell appeared August 24, 2017 at the Society of Toxicology's "Newswise."

It's short and almost astonishing. "An in-depth analysis and discussion of predatory publishers began in earnest in 2012, when Jeffrey Beall, a librarian at the University of Colorado, Denver, published an article in *Nature* titled "Predatory Publishers Are Corrupting Open Access" (Beall 2012)." In-depth analysis? Really?

A bit later, Beall's *absolutely incorrect* definition of gold OA is repeated without comment: "In what Mr. Beall calls 'gold (author pays) open access'…" Not only does the piece accept the bloated Shen/Björk numbers without caveat, *it turns 420,000 into "nearly a half-million."* So if you bill me $1,000, I can pay you $810 and say "close enough"?

Accepting that Beall's list is gone, here are the authors' tips to "help identify potential predatory publishers":

- Journal/publisher websites that are unprofessional in appearance with many typos and grammatical errors;

- Poorly-written email invitation letters to publish in a given journal;
- Absence of journal indexing in MEDLINE;
- Absence of a journal impact factor in Thomson Reuters Journal Citation reports;
- Absence of information about publishing costs in a given journal; and
- Promises of unrealistically fast time for peer review and publication. We've seen promises of peer review and publication in one week in solicitations that continually fill our Inboxes.

So much for *any journal less than three years old:* if it doesn't have an IF, it's predatory! (I guess they're only writing for toxicologists, so maybe the "not in MEDLINE" tip isn't quite so bad.)

Awful. PG-F.

'Colonialism' Article Flap Highlights Push for Transparency in Publishing This article by Colleen Flaherty on September 26, 2017 at *Inside Higher Ed* isn't *directly* about "predatory" publishing at all—but I think it's worth considering in the light of how *defective* publishing should be defined.

It's about an "article" (as it's frequently called in the comments) that was published as an opinion piece after peer reviewers rejected it as an article. That's interesting in and of itself. That the journal—*Third World Quarterly*, which is *not* an OA journal (and is published by Taylor & Francis), although it has a "hybrid" option—would refuse to withdraw the essay even after the author requests it is even more interesting.

The Flaherty piece suggests that it's because the controversial essay ("The Case for Colonialism") is clickbait—it's getting a lot of attention. One of 15 editorial board members who resigned over the matter wasn't buying the publisher's With All Deliberate Slowness approach to deciding what to do:

> That answer didn't particularly interest Vijay Prashad, George and Martha Kellner Chair in South Asian History and professor of international studies at Trinity College in Connecticut, who resigned from the journal's editorial board last week over the matter.
>
> "The fact that the journal ran the piece in the first place is the problem," he said. "And just because I'm saying the journal shouldn't have published the essay doesn't mean that I'm operating on behalf of the state to curtail free speech. But the journal has certain values, and this is coloring outside the lines."
>
> Prashad added, "I'm willing to have a debate about real issues, but the question is who sets the terms of the debate? This essay was just juvenile. It set the debate at such a low level, I feel embarrassed to have to

> respond to it. It's like saying, 'Let's debate whether women are inferior to men.' It's not the place you want to start that conversation."

...

> Critics immediately objected to Gilley's premise, since it goes against decades of scholarship on the ills of colonialism. They also highlighted what they called methodological flaws and a near-complete failure to grapple with atrocities committed in the name of colonialism.
>
> More than 10,000 names--many belonging to academics--soon appeared on a petition to retract the article. Perhaps most significantly, some 15 members of the journal's editorial board, including Prashad, resigned in protest, saying that three peer reviewers had rejected Gilley's piece: first as an article, then as an opinion essay. The editorial board members' objections shifted the debate in that they weren't just about content, but about a publication process in which editorial norms may have been bypassed.

There's a lot more here. I guess I'm suggesting that opaque peer review processes that appear to allow an editor to override supposed reviewers might *possibly* be considered sketchy, if not "predatory." And, as should be clear from the example, it's not an issue that's exclusive to OA journals.

Actually, if John K. Wilson's comment here is the rule, it's fair to suggest that peer review is frequently window dressing:

> John K. Wilson, an independent scholar of academic freedom and co-editor of the American Association of University Professors' "Academe" blog, said that, in general, "Editors make the choices, not reviewers. So it's not a question of veto power, it's editorial judgment." At the same time, he said, "peer review exists for a good reason. If an editor is going to reject the judgment of all the reviewers, that editor ought to have a very good reason and inform the editorial board about it."

To Catch A Predatory Publisher

This post, by Bill Sullivan on October 4, 2017 at the *SciComm* blog, really belongs in the (missing) humor segment, but Sullivan is delineating one easy way to spot (some varieties of) sketchy publishers from the mass/customized invitation emails they send out (yes, I get them—and Gmail consistently flags them as spam, perhaps an advantage of not having a Proper Scholarly Email Address).

> I often wonder if other scientists wake up every morning to delete a deluge of spam messages from no-name journals and questionable conferences. Sometimes one of these emails will escape my extermination efforts and I end up reading it by accident. The invitations from so-called "predatory" publishers are so transparently fake and poorly written that a part of me finds their annoying overtures oddly amusing.

> I realize that predatory publishing and phishing emails are not laughing matters. There has been an explosion of predatory publishers trying to con scientists out of their money. For a fee, these journals or books are just frothing at the mouth to ~~publish your work~~ collect your cash. Some may even invite you to serve on their "prestigious" editorial board, but this is just to lend an air of authenticity to their sham operation.

Most of the post is just samples from some of the invitations. As Sullivan notes, you'd have to be awfully naïve or desperate to take any of these seriously. But there are two little problems: Sullivan implies that *all* "legitimate science publishers" "charge you large sums of money for you to do all the work"—and the closing paragraph suggests using Beall's list without any caveats. That's unfortunate, and the piece gets PG-C.

Flipping journals or filling pockets? Publisher manipulation of OA policies

This essay, by André Sartori and Danny Kingsley on October 26, 2017 at *Unlocking Research*, is—to my mind—a pretty good description of a practice I'd consider *truly* predatory: making sure that publishing practices get the highest possible revenue from UK OA policies.

Excerpts:

> As was predicted early 2013, by the Chairman of the House of Commons Business, Innovation and Skills Committee: "Current UK open access policy risks incentivising publishers to introduce or increase embargo periods". By September 2013, there was clear evidence this was happening.
>
> Now, in the final year of the RCUK transition period, the situation is far, far worse.
>
> …
>
> What several publishers have done …is to adapt their policies to maximise the ability of their journals to capture the additional funds being injected into open access, by either imposing non-compliant embargo periods or charging more for mandated licences…
>
> Several funders (e.g. European Research Council, National Institute for Health Research, RCUK and Charities Open Access Fund partners including the Wellcome Trust) stipulate that open access to funded scientific research must be provided no later than 6 months after publication (with some funders allowing up to 12 months for humanities), either by self-archiving or by purchasing immediate open access.
>
> Hence, any hybrid journal imposing an embargo period exceeding the maximum allowed by these funders will require authors of funded research to purchase immediate open access in order to comply with the funder's policy. And, sure enough, this was exactly the response of several publishing Goliaths to the introduction of funders' open access policies.

Examples follow. They're pretty convincing and involve all five of the "big 5" publishers. Then there are higher prices for fully compliant OA licenses: charging as much as $1,000 to $2,000 *more* to have a CC-BY license rather than a CC BY-NC license. Since the Gates Foundation and several others *require* CC BY (and will pay the fee), hey, why not charge extra?

There are also targeted embargoes, and that's complicated enough that you need to read the article.

Remember: this predatory behavior is about "hybrid" OA and gold OA as practiced by the big commercial publishers, with some big APCs to match. I'm a bit unhappy with the essay's close, which says "Green over gold, people"—since the problem is with some big-publisher subset of gold OA, and since those publishers are also trying to *prevent* green OA. But still, an article worth reading. PG-A-, as that last phrase comes a little too close to suggesting that gold OA *means* APCs.

Everything You Ever Wanted to Know About Predatory Publishing but Were Afraid to Ask

Monica Berger wrote this paper for the 2017 ACRL Conference and deposited it in CUNY's institutional repository, CUNY Academic Works, in March 2017. It's generally excellent, even though I have to give it PG-C (because both the "420,000 predatory articles" and "8,000 active predatory journals" results of bad sampling and projection are repeated as legitimate—but then, I'm guessing Berger, who *is* familiar with some of my work, completed this before I demonstrated how bad those figures actually are).

Too long to excerpt in detail, and it's very good reading, but for the purposes of this section I'll provide her "detailed characteristics of predatory journals" with a couple of outdented comments:

> 1. *Spam emails sent to .edu addresses to attract potential authors for journals and conferences*: Written with fawning language, these solicitations use bogus personalization but have no connection to the recipient's discipline and specialty.
>
> 2. *Promises of fast peer review and fast publication*: Peer review is poorly explained and the peer review itself may be faked or low quality.
>
> 3. *Lack of focus in subject matter or subject matter extremely broad*: many predatory journals lack a feasible scope.

I've always found this one amusing: consider *Nature* and *Science*.

> 4. *Lack of transparency about author fees*: Journal business model is based exclusively on APCs. The journal will not waive fees. Fees may be disclosed after acceptance or terms of fees change after acceptance.
>
> 5. *Contradictions and inconsistencies*: Journal scope may not match the content. The journal's name may not match its location. Note that many publishers claim bogus addresses in the United States, Canada and United Kingdom.

6. *Editors are not editors*: Academics are listed as editors without that individual's knowledge or involvement. Journal proprietors are editors. Look for duplicate editorial boards, cases where no editor is identified as well as a lack of academic-affiliated email and/or academic affiliation for editor(s).

7. *Newness and quantity*: Most predatory journals and their publishers are new businesses. They launch many journals at once. A high quantity of articles per issue and frequent issues signals lack of peer review and an over-eagerness to earn revenue.

8. *Copycat names with and without copycat websites*: Some predatory journals have names that sound familiar. Others are hijacked journals that take the exact or very close name, look, web domain, and ISSN of an established journal. Well-known examples include *Wulfenia Journal*, *Jokull Journal*, and *Sylwan*. Dadkhah has written at length on the topic: for a quick overview, see Bohannon's short article in Science. Hijacked journals may be the worst form of predatory publishing. They are especially deeptive and exist purely to defraud scholars, sometimes accepting author fees without publication.

9. *Author-editor nightmares*: There are no opportunities for an author to revise. Horrible editing errors are introduced. Sometimes an article will be published without author consent. The editor will refuse to retract an article or to retract an article without payment.

10. *Location information that is contradictory or missing*: Bad information about the physical location of publisher can be a telling signal. Many predatory publishers falsely claim a base in the United States or England or a business address that is residential. Use Google Earth to investigate.

I still don't understand why an electronic journal's address can't be a residential address: heck, HP and Apple both started in residences.

11. *Standards and identifiers missing, stolen or faked*: Check for standard journal identifiers (ISSN) and linking standards (DOIs). ISSNs, however, can be stolen or fabricated. The presence of an ORCID ID (an author identifier) for a journal signals a bogus journal.

12. *False and fake bibliometrics*: Imaginatively named journal metrics are common as well as false claims of inclusion in legitimate bibliometric services. Fake 'impact factors' are supplied by companies that support predatory publishing.

13. *False and inappropriate claims of indexing and inclusion in databases*: Journals falsely claim inclusion in DOAJ as well as Ulrich's, Serials Solutions, and Cabell's. Look for claims of indexing in Sherpa RoMEO or other services that are not indexes as well as bogus indexing services.

14. *Amateurish website*: Poorly designed, difficult to navigate websites with dead links or many "coming soon" texts can signal a predatory publisher. Excessive and aggressive advertisements are also signs. More recently probable predatory publishers have more sophisticated websites.

15. *Nota bene*: Many legitimate journals, because they are small and poorly funded, may lack the hallmarks of their shinier, well-supported counterparts. Legitimate journals may lack ISSNs, indexing, impact factor, and other qualities of larger, monied journals. Less than stellar English is also not a meaningful indicator.

There's quite a bit more here that's good, whether I agree with it all or not.

Format Aside: Applying Beall's Criteria to Assess the Predatory Nature of Both OA and Non-OA Library and Information Science Journals

This article by Joseph D. Olivarez, Stephen Bales, Laura Sare, and Wyoma vanDuinkerken appeared in the January 2018 *College & Research Libraries*—which, like most ALA divisional peer-reviewed journals, is a gold OA journal with no APCs. The abstract:

> Jeffrey Beall's blog listing of potential predatory journals and publishers, as well as his Criteria for Determining Predatory Open-Access (OA) Publishers are often looked at as tools to help researchers avoid publishing in predatory journals. While these Criteria has brought a greater awareness of OA predatory journals, these tools alone should not be used as the only source in determining the quality of a scholarly journal. Employing a three-person independent judgment making panel, this study demonstrates the subjective nature of Beall's Criteria by applying his Criteria to both OA and non-OA Library and Information Science journals (LIS), to demonstrate that traditional peer-reviewed journals could be considered predatory. Many of these LIS journals are considered as top-tier publications in the field and used when evaluating researcher's publication history for promotion and tenure.

I won't excerpt extensively, as it's a 16-page article with a lot of detail. Briefly, the researchers applied Beall's "criteria" to the universe of LIS journals in *Journal Citations Reports*, winding up with 81 evaluations. Of the 81 journals, mostly *not* OA, 45—more than half—failed at least one criterion and 18 failed more than one. Some of the oldest journals had some of the most criteria failures.

The conclusion:

> This study demonstrates the subjective nature of the Criteria by which Beall constructs his lists. Furthermore, it highlights the finding that well-regarded academic journals, whether OA or not, can be considered as possible predatory journals, even when LIS professionals apply the Criteria. The researchers recommend placing emphasis upon training evaluators to apply the Criteria itself, as opposed to relying on a list of journals derived

from the Criteria's application developed under one person's opinion. The problem with relying on any list is that when an information specialist presents a list to a reader, the reader might view this list uncritically, assuming it to be 100 percent correct. The reader may rely solely on the list, even with the author's "warnings," and not consider the information content presented within the journal itself. However, as this study has demonstrated, even librarians disagree about the interpretation and application of the Criteria, and this study's three analysts did not even consider the quality of the content found within the pages of the journals. After all, scholarly communication is ultimately driven by the information within the journal. The researchers put forth that only experts in a specific field of study can truly identify fraudulent information in their field of expertise, whether or not that journal finds itself on any predatory journal list.

However, if a list of potential predatory publishers and journals is given, an evaluation process needs to be developed that is transparent to the reader so that the reader will know and understand why certain criteria did not pass muster and, therefore, why the journal failed the evaluation. Beall's lists are deficient in this area, as he provides only names and links to journal publisher websites that have failed. Identifying the reasons a journal failed would shine light on the Criteria and would help the reader to reconsider if the journal is truly predatory, possibly causing them to further consider the information within the journal.

This study shows the subjective nature of Beall's Criteria, as well as the subjective nature of the lists created from the application of the Criteria. Such criteria provide a starting point for a discussion on predatory aspects of academic publishing. Nevertheless, as librarians, our duty is to refrain from offering up these lists as the final word on predatory journals. Rather, it is our responsibility to (1) use such lists and criteria as tools for teaching faculty to be proactive about evaluating what journals to publish in and (2) to ensure that newer journals, which are often OA, are not disqualified unfairly from consideration as part of quality scholarly output. This latter point is especially important if promotion and tenure committees use Beall's Criteria without considering the subjective nature of their application, or without also including supplemental evaluative measures of journal quality. The authors of this paper concur with Berger and Cirasella that librarians "are key stakeholders in scholarly and professional conversations reimagining various aspects of scholarly communication," and the present study emphasizes this role in the area of predatory publishing.

Quibbles about "predatory" aside, a good article.

India's misfire on predatory publishing hits open access

This T.V. Padma article published December 5, 2017 at *nature index*, tells an odd and unfortunate tale, as noted in the tease:

> In trying to thwart predators, the government is penalizing researchers who publish in genuine open-access journals.

The lede:

> The Indian government's attempts to stamp out predatory publishing are misguided, say researchers.
>
> The decision to exclude from reviews for promotion any articles published in journals that charge a processing fee — standard practice for 'gold' open access — has outraged the scientific community. Although the initial circular only refers to a scientific institute funded by the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD), scientists are concerned that it could eventually be extended to other institutes too.

There's a seriously wrong phrase in the second paragraph, given that most gold OA journals do *not* charge processing fees. Also interesting: this simplistic "if there's a charge, it's predatory" decision also means:

> Journals that have a policy of levying processing, page, colour reproduction or open-access charges would automatically come under this category.

Whoops. As Subhash Lakhotia says,

> "This notification would nullify publications in most of the well-established 'non-predatory' journals in almost all disciplines, since charges of one or the other kind have become common practice for a large proportion of them."

In my opinion, any *non-print* journal that levies color reproduction charges is pretty damn sketchy, but that's not the point here. Worth noting is a comment from Sridhar Gutam:

> Many researchers and academics in India equate all journals that charge an article processing fee, commonly known as an APC, as a predatory or questionable journal, he says.

Interesting brief piece. PG-B.

How Can you Spot a Predatory Journal?

This report by Julianna LeMieux on December 12, 2017 at acsh.org is based on "Potential predatory and legitimate biomedical journals: can you tell the difference? A cross-sectional comparison" (*BMC Medicine*, published March 9, 2017).

That study selected roughly 100 biomedical journals from each of three groups: Beall's list, OA journals at PubMed Central (and a few direct inclusions), and subscription-based journals at Abridged Index Medicus. Researchers looked at a fair number of items. Some of them are interesting: for example, "journal name similar to another journal" was true for 22% of subscription journals and the processing charge was difficult to find for a *higher* percentage of subscription journals than "predatory" OA journals.

I won't comment at length on the cited study, including its "if the APC is low, it's probably predatory" attitude and the seeming precondition that being on Beall's lists *means* a journal is predatory. A suggestion as to money wasted on predatory APCs would require a cool million articles per year in predatory journals to make sense, a number that makes even the bloated "420,000" figure seem modest by comparison.

LeMieux's reportage pulls out four bullet points:

- There was a high prevalence of predatory journals from low or low-to middle-income countries (LMICs) (75.%) compared to open access journals (19.56%). None of the subscription-based journals listed LMIC addresses.
- Readers were the main target of language used on subscription-based journal web pages (58%) but less so in open access (14.14%) and predatory (3.23%) journals, where authors (predatory journals) or both authors and readers (open access journals) were the primary target.
- Predatory journals charge a considerably smaller publication fee (median $100 USD) than open access journals ($1865 USD) and subscription-based hybrid journals ($3000 USD)
- More predatory journals indicated interest in publishing non-biomedical topics (e.g., agriculture, geography, astronomy, nuclear physics) alongside biomedical topics in the stated scope of the journal and seemed to publish on a larger number of topics than non-predatory journals

That first bullet point is interesting on several counts, and mostly comes down to the known problem of global south science being paid attention to—and I think of the fourth bullet as the "*Nature* and *Science* clause," made more interesting by the inclusion of *PLOS One* in the "good OA" group. Finally, here's the list of characteristics that "can be used to identify predatory journals":

1. The scope of interest includes non-biomedical subjects alongside biomedical topics
2. The website contains spelling and grammar errors
3. Images are distorted/fuzzy, intended to look like something they are not, or which are unauthorized
4. The homepage language targets authors
5. The Index Copernicus Value is promoted on the website
6. Description of the manuscript handling process is lacking
7. Manuscripts are requested to be submitted via email
8. Rapid publication is promised

9. There is no retraction policy
10. Information on whether and how journal content will be digitally preserved is absent
11. The Article processing/publication charge is very low (e.g., < $150 USD)
12. Journals claiming to be open access either retain copyright of published research or fail to mention copyright
13. The contact email address is non-professional and non-journal affiliated (e.g., @gmail.com or @yahoo.com)

No further comment on 1 and 11; I must admit that, when I was looking at OA journals from big publishers, #6 would seem to apply to rather a lot of them (and need I mention #12?).

PG-B or C.

How to spot predatory journals

This article by Prasad Ravindranath on December 19, 2017 at *Science Chronicle* has many criteria in common with the previous piece, with different commentary and added criteria. Ravindranath is another big Beall fan and quotes the 420,000 articles/8,000 journals nonsense without caveat (but from a secondary source), earning a PG-F at best.

He also quotes a researcher's experience, which to me says more about the state of scholarly publishing than it does about "predatory" journals:

> I sincerely hope this list will help people like Aravindhan Vivekanandhan, Assistant Professor at Chennai's Dr. A.L.M. PG Institute of Basic Medical Sciences, to stay clear of predatory journals. "About five years back I did a small study and the results [were] interesting and wanted to publish it in a good journal. Unfortunately, since the results were limited the paper got rejected again and again. At that time I received an invitation from a journal to submit a paper. Since the journal's name was very relevant to the manuscript in hand I checked for the impact factor. The journal's website indicated it as 2.5* with a star at the top which I didn't care (my bad). Then I checked the PubMed and found a few articles in PubMed. Again, I assumed it to be recently PubMed indexed (my bad). It was a paid journal and I also applied for a waiver, which the editor declined.
>
> "Within two weeks the paper was accepted and I happily informed my collaborator. Then came the thunderbolt from my collaborator. He pointed out that it is a predatory journal and the published impact factor (which was displayed in the journal's home page) was actually calculated by the journal itself (hence the star at the top). I immediately sent a mail to the editor stating that I am withdrawing the paper. But as usual there was no response. When I was modifying the paper to submit to another journal came the second thunderbolt from my collaborator. He wrote to me saying

> that the **article was already published in that journal** with a link to the article. So I lost the opportunity of even trying with the second journal," says Vivekanandhan. "But the worst was yet to come. Just two weeks after publication, the journal sent me an invoice for publication fee which I didn't bother to respond. Till last year, every six months, I was receiving a reminder mail from the journal to pay the publication fee."

It's an OMICS journal, and I'm *not* attempting to say anything good about OMICS—but a key here is "I did a small study and the results [were] interesting and wanted to publish it in a good journal. Unfortunately, since the results were limited the paper got rejected again and again." Small science is hard to get published; that doesn't make it bad science.

The criteria are discussed and illustrated at great length—and, I must admit, some of the comments about unprofessional webpages (scrolling, etc.) remind me a *lot* of many Elsevier and other big-name OA sites I visited.

This article raises the bar for "if it's cheap it must be bad":

> The publication charges are very often not clearly mentioned and if mentioned is often way lower than what genuine journals charges. While the article processing charges levied by genuine journals is above $800, predatory journals charge less than $200. Keeping the **publication charge low** is one way to attract more researchers from submitting their manuscripts to the journal.

So if an OA journal is "genuine" it charges *at least $800* APC. So much for SciELO… There's more here, including a very clear #13: "Stay clear of journals from OMICS group." I won't argue with that.

One oddity: #16: "Instructions to authors are plagiarized." Really? Each journal should rewrite the boilerplate that's needed for author instructions? I've seen essentially identical instructions in thousands of OA journals (and would expect to see them in subscription journals), because most of this stuff is pretty much standard.

A beginner's guide to avoiding 'predatory' journals (using your critical thinking skills)

I'm closing this section with this piece by Andy Nobes, appearing July 24, 2018 at *AuthorAID*, skipping seven other pieces that were repetitive, so deeply Scholarly that I couldn't make sense of them, or for other reasons defeated my critical instincts.

Nobes' piece is pretty good. Take this paragraph:

> Some researchers may be told to use journal 'blacklists', but you should exercise caution. We do not recommend using the 'Beall's List' blacklist to identify 'predatory' journals as it is not considered a reliable, unbiased, or transparent source of information, and has not been updated by Beall since January 2017.

"Don't use it" is in my opinion the best approach to the blacklists. Summaries of Nobes' key signs (copied from the article):

1. Don't trust email invites and 'Call for Papers' (unless you recognise the sender)
2. Be sceptical of 'international' or 'global' journals, and those with a wide scope
3. Double-check claims of prestigious indexing and impact factors
4. Read the 'Aims and scope' or 'About' page – check the journal understands your field
5. Check who is publishing the journal – are they a credible scholarly organisation?
6. Check your reference lists – familiarise yourself with good journals in your field

#5 won't always work, but in general this is a good list. The close:

> Ultimately, it's your decision where to publish your research, so take some time to make sure it's being reliably published and shared as widely as possible amongst your target audience. But be careful not to be swayed by flattering emails, impressive-sounding journal names, fancy impact factors, or too-good-to-be-true offers without doing your research first!

Indeed.

Blacklists

Beall's, Cabell's, and the whole question of whether blacklists work or make sense. You presumably already know my opinion: Beall's was an extraordinarily bad example of a blacklist (really two blacklists), but I don't believe in the concept of blacklists in any case.

Why we don't need journal blacklists

Jon Tennant posted this on May 11, 2017 at *Green Tea and Velociraptors*.

It's an interesting "total brain dump" triggered by a journalist's question, and certainly worth reading on its own. Two central paragraphs:

> In reality, 'predatory publishers' are a bit of an overblown issue too. For details, see the section 'Deceptive publishing practices' here. A much more valuable thing would be to provide a regulatory service to publishers such as Elsevier, Wiley, and Taylor and Francis, who operate based on behaviours remarkably similar to extortion and racketeering, yet legal, to hold a monopoly over an unregulated publishing market (see here and here). "Predatory publishing" is really just a distraction from these much larger issues in my views. What's the real threat? A handful of bad pseudo-publishers that sucker in a negligible fraction of

> the research community with very little real, negative consequences ultimately, or the corporate empire that sucks $billions out of public universities each year to sustain it's bloated 35%+ profit margins by leveraging the free labour of academics and breaking the backs of our financially-drained libraries. The name of the game here is distraction.
>
> What I would like to see finances being directed towards are more training services to teach those at most risk for falling for predatory publishers more about the ethics surrounding scholarly publishing (e.g., those from lesser economically developed countries, students). More awareness of these issues means that we lose the need for a blacklist of any sort. What we want is an informed scholarly community who are able to make decisions on where to publish themselves – I mean, that's what we should be doing as researchers anyway, making evidence-informed evaluations. If we can't do that, and need blacklists to help, then we probably don't deserve to call ourselves researchers.

No comment required.

Pay-to-view blacklist of predatory journals set to launch
Basically a news item by Andrew Silver on May 31, 2017 at *Nature*'s news site, although the lede might suggest a pro-blacklist slant:

> The blacklist is dead; long live the blacklist. Five months after a widely read blog listing possible 'predatory' scholarly journals and publishers was shut down, another index of untrustworthy titles is appearing — although this version will be available only to paying subscribers.

It's fair to say that the paragraph on Beall's list does not mention *any* criticisms of the list (but does mention legal threats). It provides details on Cabell's list (but no sense of pricing).

> Some researchers say there's little value in a blacklist. Cameron Neylon, who studies research communications at Curtin University in Perth, Australia, says such lists require a lot of work and will always miss some journals. He thinks that researchers should rely on whitelists of trustworthy journals, and that their training should cover how to judge journal quality.
>
> But Natalia Zinovyeva, an economist at Aalto University in Helsinki who is studying the editorial processes of some of the journals that Beall once tracked, thinks Cabell's list will be "extremely valuable" to funding or hiring committees without a wide level of expertise, who could use it as a tool to help evaluate researcher CVs.
>
> And Beall, who was once an informal consultant for Cabell's, says he thinks blacklists are still useful as a timesaving tool for authors who are deciding where to publish. Cabell's will probably find managing its appeals process one of its most difficult tasks, he says.

Mostly news, although with a pro-Beall and somewhat pro-blacklist slant.

Cabell's: 'Our journal Blacklist differs from Jeffrey Beall's'
This interview by R. Prasad (with Kathleen Berryman of Cabell's) appeared June 17, 2017 at *The Hindu* (and R. Prasad appears to be the Prasad Ravindranath mentioned earlier). It's informative enough, and I think a couple of interchanges speak to the journalist's slant as much as anything:

> **Many journals have made their home page and journals look very authentic. How difficult will it be to assess them?**
>
> Again, our team of research specialists is trained to seek out hard-to-find information. One way we do this is by contacting the editors, reviewers and/or authors who are listed on the journal's website. We ask not only if they agreed to be included on the editorial board, but also what their duties are as an editorial board member.
>
> We do not rely on how a website "looks" to determine whether or not the journal should be blacklisted. We do not include journals on our Blacklist unless we have evidence of their deceptive publication practices.
>
> **Will the Blacklist be freely available to institutions in countries like India, where most predatory journals are published?**
>
> We originally planned to make our Blacklist available for free, but after analysing the time and resources it took to create it — and the resources it will take to maintain it – we realised that it would not be sustainable. We're making every effort to keep the subscription fee for the blacklist as low as possible, and we're exploring other options to support it in the future.
>
> **Jeffrey Beall was forced to shut down his blog. Do you think you are well prepared to handle litigation threats and appeals?**
>
> A lot of the debate surrounding Beall's list was around the execution, not its usefulness. We don't deny that there might have been some issues of transparency and objectivity with Beall's list, and that is exactly what we aim to improve upon.
>
> Each entry on our Blacklist, in reality, is a detailed report of our investigative process. The report includes not only identifying information, but also the specific violations that the process revealed.

Consider particularly the second and third boldfaced questions—or, rather, the assertions that most "predatory" journals are published in India and that Beall was *forced* to shut down his list. The first is at best questionable (although one could certainly define "predatory" to make it true); the second is based only on Beall's word.

Apart from transparency, consider one *critical* difference for this blacklist:

> We are also reviewing journals, rather than publishers, regardless of the type of access. This means that there will be subscription access journals on our list as well as open access journals.

U.S. company launches a new blacklist of deceptive academic journals
Another article that's primarily news, and one of the better (and longer) ones I've seen, this from Alex Gillis on July 7, 2017 at *University Affairs/Affaires Universitaires*.

Kathleen Berryman certainly doesn't downplay the supposed seriousness of what Cabell's calls deceptive journals:

> "Deceptive journals are a very huge threat to science," Ms. Berryman said. "They do a lot of damage to researchers and readers, because of fake data and the nonsense that the journals publish. People run with this data and info, and act like it's true."

Fortunately, big-name subscription journals *never* publish things like evidence of arsenic-based life or fraudulent studies showing that vaccines cause autism: no, harmful stuff like that only happens in…oh, wait…

A side note: in the course of commenting on this, I clicked on the link to Cabell's "about" page for the blacklist. After two headings, "The rise of predatory publishers" (well, so much for "deceptive") and "Fighting back against a growing trend that threatens to undermine scholarly communication," we have two quotations, one from Shen and Björk, one from Beall:

> "Predatory journals have rapidly increased their publication volumes from 53,000 in 2010 to an estimated 420,000 articles in 2014, published by around 8,000 active journals."

> "By far, predatory publishers damage science more than anything else. They do not faithfully manage peer review, allowing questionable science to be published as if it had passed a strong peer review."

So the list's website gets PG-D at best (oh, and lists Beall as still being at the University of Colorado).

Getting back to the news piece, it's fair to note that both quotes from academics are supportive.

Some of the criteria are listed. As one comment notes, Cabell's itself could be considered deceptive based on one of the criteria, but never mind. It is interesting that Cabell's has retained the idea that articles by "laypeople" are inherently questionable.

On Blacklists and Whitelists
This article, by Tracy Vence on July 17, 2017 at *The Scientist*, offers some back-and-forth about blacklists and whitelists. I'm including it mostly for this paragraph, which I regard as telling:

> The University of California, Irvine's Mark Langdorf wasn't intimidated by the challenge, however. Teaming up with Bhakti Hansoti, an assistant professor of emergency medicine at Johns Hopkins, and Irvine librarian Linda Murphy, he generated a blacklist and a whitelist in the field of emergency medicine, both of which were published last September in *Western Journal of Emergency Medicine*. Several months later, the team

> did a second search to update the lists, adding titles to both and moving one journal, *Clinical and Experimental Emergency Medicine,* from the black to the white. "[It] was brand-new and yet legitimate—it just had not yet been indexed anyplace," Langdorf tells *The Scientist,* adding that he and his colleagues have no plans to update the lists again.

It's probably fortunate that blacklists don't seem to doom journals.

The undercover academic keeping tabs on 'predatory' publishing

Let's close this section with a piece that suggests *one* way to deal with transparency and possible publisher pressure: hide, and don't offer *any* reasoning (thus upping Beall's ante, since he offered reasons for some 12% of his listings). The piece is by Dalmeet Singh Chawla on March 16, 2018 at *Nature*'s news site.

> When librarian Jeffrey Beall shut down his controversial blog listing potentially 'predatory' scholarly publishers and journals last year, archived copies swiftly appeared elsewhere online. More than a year later, at least one of these copycat blacklists is still growing — maintained by an anonymous website manager who says that they spend hours each weekend working on the list.
>
> Growing interest in the site suggests that there is still an academic appetite for a public blacklist of predatory journals, says the site manager, who identified themseves as a senior research assistant in the hard sciences at a European institution. The site's keeper corresponded with *Nature* by e-mail and declined to provide any further details of their identity, citing fear of harassment.

Noting first that these two paragraphs are copied-and-pasted, not retyped, I would also note that Chawla chooses *not* to link to the new site, which does indeed have new additions, generally with no comments given (and, oh look, MDPI is back on the list, as is Frontiers).

This article says Cabell's blacklist is already up to 8,000 journals (which, unless they're including "journals" with no articles, is astonishing), but it seems mostly about an anonymous effort to blacklist publishers without offering reasons. After all, aren't the best blacklists like the *Index Librorum Prohibitorium* or McCarthy's list?

Are They All Bad?

This section includes a few items suggesting that "predatory" journals might have some benefits or questioning the harm—or at least it started that way, although it's ended up differently.

The Rewards of Predatory Publications at a Small Business School

This article by Derek Pyne appeared in *Journal of Scholarly Publishing* 48:3, April 2017. The abstract:

> This study is the first to compare the rewards of publishing in predatory journals with the rewards of publishing in traditional journals. It finds that the majority of faculty with research responsibilities at a small Canadian business school have publications in predatory journals. In terms of financial compensation, these publications produce greater rewards than many non-predatory journal publications. Publications in predatory journals are also positively correlated with receiving internal research awards. By improving the understanding of the incentives to publish in predatory journals, this research aims to contribute to a better-informed debate on policies dealing with predatory journals.

Unfortunately, while I found the abstract so intriguing that I tagged the article, *I can't discuss or recommend it* because the university-published journal is not OA, and did not make the article OA. Otherwise, I'd love to see how Pyne defines "predatory"—is it as simple as "Beall says so" or was actual investigation involved?

However, Pyne chose to close access to this, so that's not possible. (Yes, Pyne *chose* to close access: I don't know whether this University of Toronto Press journal has "hybrid" options—and, despite what the press says, I could find nothing on the journal's website to tell me—but there are many available OA journals, such as the no-fee *Journal of Electronic Publishing* from the University of Michigan.)

Too bad.

Who is Actually Harmed by Predatory Publishers?

Martin Paul Eve and Ernesto Priego ask that question in this August 13, 2017 article at *triple c: communication, capitalism & critique*. (The journal is OA, but not CC-BY.) The abstract:

> "Predatory publishing" refers to conditions under which gold open-access academic publishers claim to conduct peer review and charge for their publishing services but do not, in fact, actually perform such reviews. Most prominently exposed in recent years by Jeffrey Beall, the phenomenon garners much media attention. In this article, we acknowledge that such practices are deceptive but then examine, across a variety of stakeholder groups, what the *harm* is from such actions to each group of actors. We find that established publishers have a strong motivation to hype claims of predation as damaging to the scholarly and scientific endeavour while noting that, in fact, systems of peer review are themselves already acknowledged as deeply flawed.

That final sentence certainly resonates with me, and note that the next major section of this roundup has the tag "op-hype."

The authors deal with Beall fairly, in part judging him by his own words:

> From his writing, we can infer that Beall's motivation was a political dislike of certain aspects of open access. In a 2013 article, he wrote: "While the open-access (OA) movement purports to be about making scholarly content open-access, its true motives are much different. The OA movement is an anti-corporatist movement that wants to deny the freedom of the press to companies it disagrees with". Such a stance separated Beall even from the usually-conservative Scholarly Kitchen website and also prompted a number of counter-studies (Esposito 2013; Berger and Cirasella 2015).

And there's this about the broader question:

> Indeed, we contend in this article that if the label of 'predation' is predicated upon a non-provision of peer review, then the soundness of peer review itself must be questioned. Examining the literature upon the general efficacy of pre-publication peer review does not lead us to believe that such practices are good pre-determiners of academic quality. Nonetheless, peer review remains valued by the academy, despite its inefficacy, since it performs a labour-saving function that is tightly coupled to academic reputations.

Before getting to the main issue here, the authors comment on value added even by journals without real peer review:

> Conversely, such publishers do also provide a service to the authors who choose to publish with them. Often, these services are not commensurate with the level of service provided by traditional academic publishers, even when it is deceptively claimed that this is the case. For instance, it is unclear what the digital preservation practices of these entities may be. However, in the basic sense of publishing as 'making public', such journals do offer a venue in which one may 'publish'. This involves running an infrastructure for digital publication and being able/willing to perform some basic labour functions. In this sense, even predatory publishing requires labour that must, under the current paradigm, be remunerated. However, it has also been shown that these publication venues are extremely low cost and "can be assumed to have modest annual incomes" (Xia 2015).
>
> In light of the above, it is not uncontroversial to claim that there is harm to authors who are 'duped' into publishing with such predatory actors. Certainly, those paying for a service that they believe includes peer review are being conned. The main demographic for authors in such venues are "for the most part, young and inexperienced researchers from developing countries" (Xia et al. 2015). On the other hand, there have been claims that the entire economic system of much academic publishing - even under non-open access models - is one that hoodwinks academics into writing works that nobody can afford to read (*The Guardian* 2015; Reilly 2015).

Based on my own work, Xia seems to be right: most Beall-listed journals do not generate very much income.

I love the discussion of false positives and false negatives in proper peer review—e.g., in one experiment, when *accepted* articles were disguised as new submissions and resubmitted to the same journals, 90% were rejected. But read this in the original. (The piece also implies what I've always assumed: peer review doesn't determine *what* gets published, only *where* it gets published.)

Much of the article is devoted to discussing the harm from sketchy journals to seven stakeholder groups: academic authors; academic hiring, promotion, and tenure committees; general publics; funders; learned societies; librarians; and traditional academic publishers. And here the discussions are too dense (that is, too rich in content) for me to do suitably brief summarizing or excerpting. Here's just the first of seven thoughtful, worthwhile discussions:

> **2.1. Academic Authors**
>
> Academic authors choose to publish in specific venues for a variety of reasons. Some of these are to do with dissemination (e.g. is the venue accessible to those outside the academy?) Others have to do with prestige and reputation, often linked to discourses on quality (Starbuck 2014). As above, if a venue claims to conduct peer review but does not, there is an intrinsic harm of fraud at work that will not be mitigated by other arguments. This is both a financial and reputational harm to the author, who will not have been provided with a service that has been advertised. That said, academics who publish in an open-access venue that achieves the former set of conditions (i.e. disseminates their work so that anybody can read it) but that does not fulfil the latter (i.e. there are fraudulent peer review practices) can see benefit or harm in different ways.
>
> Through having their work available openly (and most predatory publishers are open access, even if most open access journals are not predatory), there are a range of advantages that are discussed in the aforementioned literatures on the histories of open access. This open dissemination can often be achieved through these predatory platforms at a cost level that is much lower than traditional academic publication channels. At the same time, if authors seek reputational credit for their work - one of the core drivers of academic productivity - they are likely to be harmed by publishing in predatory venues. In other words: the degree of harm depends upon the author's motivations in publishing. This likelihood of harm to an author is in large part due to the continued problematic use of tenuous measures for evaluation by hiring panels, and it greatly depends upon the quality of the work as to whether or not the harm here is justified.
>
> If the author publishes sub-standard work, then it does not deserve institutional reward. Thus, publishing in a predatory venue is of no *undeserved* harm to that academic (though there are difficulties in defining what has merit, as above). It is also presumably the case, ac-

cording to the logic of those who believe that peer review works, despite the evidence to the contrary, that this material would not have found a home elsewhere anyway.

If the author or authors publish brilliant work that just so happens to appear in a predatory venue, then certainly they have been duped out of the institutional systems of reward that assume that this work should have appeared in a top journal. It is also the case that this work remains excellent, despite the venue, and that the actual reputational harm done here is perpetrated by those who brand the journal as predatory. If this does not occur and the work is assessed on its own merits, the problem does not arise. However, what does it say of our abilities to independently judge work and our systems of accreditation (which are actually systems to regulate the efficiency of scarce evaluative labour time) that we are unable to countenance good work appearing in bad places? It is, in the present authors' view, a damning indictment of those systems.

When it is said, then, that predatory publishers prey on early-career researchers or those from outside the global North who seek reward in the Anglo-US systems, what is actually being assumed is that our systems of accreditation possess inadequate discriminatory power to spot brilliance that occurs outside the parameters we have defined for containers. Such a view appears deeply condescending and also carries an imperial legacy upon its shoulders. For it says, just as did Beall when he called SciELO a "publication favela" (Scientific Electronic Library Online 2015): publish in the venues that we respect or we will not countenance the work's merit.

There's a *lot* there—and in the other six. The conclusion:

The debate about predatory publishers is not going to disappear. We maintain that it is deceptive and wrong to claim to provide a service when such service is not provided, and predatory publishers should never be defended on those grounds.

There are many entities, though, with vested interests who stand to benefit from the existence of organisations that make traditional peer-review and toll-access publishing seem the only viable future path for truth. However, the actual site of questioning that we need to focus on is the space of research evaluation. All the evidence indicates that we are not brilliant at evaluating work without some kind of frame and that peer review is deeply flawed. Yet at the same time we say that the main problem with predatory publishing is that it does not resort to peer review. It is likely that some readers will maintain a faith in peer review despite the above work - and that is fine. It is probable that peer review will catch some errors. But when we have become so dependent upon proxies for evaluation as a gatekeeping tool that we are willing, in the name of saving labour time, to exclude the possibility of good work appearing outside of

> known venues, there is something very wrong with our system of verification. Indeed, we would say that it is a *necessary* harm that predatory publishing inflicts upon our cultures of evaluation; forcing us to look at our own reflection and to dislike what we see. What we believe is needed is robust debate in the spirit of enhancing work, rather than supposedly robust but fallible standards used as a means of exclusion. This could be achieved through various types of post-publication review approaches.
>
> To close with an anecdote: when one of the present authors was speaking about open access recently, a question came from the back of the audience. "How can we tell students which journals to read when some are predatory or just not part of our library catalogue? How will they know what is good?" It was impossible but to respond: it is our job to make people able to read critically, to find ways of evaluating truth wherever it is found or published (Priego 2016); not because it appeared in a glamorous academic journal.

Again, well worth reading.

Predatory publishers ensnare even Ivy League scientists — sometimes at taxpayers' expense

By Eric Boodman on September 6, 2017 at *STAT News*. It begins with an anecdote—a researcher submits an article, gets almost immediate acceptance and an invoice, and, well, you know.

> This kind of "predatory" publishing has generally been considered a trap for scholars in the developing world — so much so that in one famous counter-trap, a science reporter "created hundreds of very similar but fake papers from fake African scientists" to test how well journals vetted submissions. But it turns out predatory publishers aren't just tricking researchers in Lagos and Hyderabad; they're also ensnaring scientists at Harvard and the Mayo Clinic.

This is mostly commentary on a study with 32 authors from the "Center for Journalology" at the Ottawa Hospital Research Institute, a study that appears to accept "Beall = predatory" as a valid equation and uncritically quotes the 8,000//420,000 figures. The study would get a PG-D, and maybe deserves worse given its "guilty, period" attitude, as in this:

> It is nearly impossible for prospective authors to differentiate predatory journals by metrics. For example, the *Journal of Surgery* from Avens Publishing Group — the title most favoured by US authors in our sample — does not have easily identifiable metrics that distinguish it from non-predatory journals. We contacted the editor-in-chief of the journal, who replied that he hadn't heard of predatory journals but that the journal sends manuscripts to peer reviewers and has rejected manuscripts on the basis of their merit. (Note that at least two other questionable journals carry the same title.)

> Our experience with these journals is that they provide both poor vetting and poor access. Their websites and archiving systems are unstable. Although some articles appear in PubMed (often after a delay), the titles are not indexed by Medline and are difficult to find.

The article itself flatly and *incorrectly* states

> With legitimate open-access journals, researchers pay a fee to cover the costs of publishing so that readers everywhere are able to peruse the article for free.

and of course treats Beall warmly, with the closest to a caveat being:

> (Beall's list is a controversial document — as Cobey points out, "curated by just himself, a single individual, and his criteria … weren't necessarily completely transparent." But it remains the most authoritative listing of these publishers that scientists generally have.)

"Weren't necessarily completely transparent" is a charming way of saying "only provided any evidence in 12% of cases"—and even that understatement is pretty much wiped out by the final sentence.

I must admit that I was bemused that the "Center for Journalology" is at a medical school rather than, say, a journalism department—but a little Google searches suggests that the term is mostly used by medical folks.

An alternate headline might be "Even Ivy League scientists publish in journals that one former librarian who detests OA has denounced as predatory," but that's a much longer and more boring headline.

PG-C.

'Predatory' journals: the situation is urgent, so why don't we fight back? Another commentary on the "journalology" study, this time from two of the authors, Larissa Shamseer and David Moher, on September 6, 2017 at *Times Higher Education*. The tease is itself a bit questionable:

> The solutions to the predatory publishing problem are known, we just need to implement them, say Larissa Shamseer and David Moher

So "the solutions" to this study (which, as far as I can tell, assumes that "Beall = predatory" and pretty clearly involves many papers with quite legitimate science in journals that might or might not be sketchy) must be in the commentary, right?

The closest I can find is these two paragraphs under "What is the solution?":

> One thing that institutions can do is to start rewarding their faculty and research staff for depositing data and preprints of their studies in repositories, so that these actions count towards hiring, promotion and tenure decisions in the same way that legitimate journal publications do. This may remove some of the burden on researchers to publish (anywhere) or perish.

> Legitimate open access publishers can address this issue in their own way, as can funders. Many authors are priced out of traditional open access journal publishing. While some publishers offer APC waivers for open access, authors from upper-middle or high-income countries (who we now know constitute a large part of the problem) are typically ineligible because they do not live in a qualifying country. This leaves the door open to anyone willing to fill this gap for a lower fee.

The first "solution" is interesting: it seems to say that *non-peer-reviewed* research (as most preprints are) should be considered equal to published research. Maybe that extension of Green OA does make sense.

The second is a handwave: it doesn't offer a solution at all.

Nigeria's predator problem

This piece, by Jackie Opara on October 19, 2017 at **Research* (or "Researchresearch" in the URL or maybe *Research professional), is to some extent another focused commentary on the "journalology" study, this time looking at the fact that Nigerian authors were the third most prevalent (after India and the United States).

I find these paragraphs especially interesting:

> A previous study estimated that up to 10 per cent of all articles produced in Nigeria end up in profit-seeking predatory journals, which offer to publish academic work cheaply, without credible peer-review or editing. Published manuscripts are often riddled with errors and often shunned by the international science community—meaning they are a dead-end for academics wanting to build up an internationally respected body of work.
>
> The publications deny illegitimacy. One publisher of a group of publications that appear on the Beall's list told Research Africa he believed the list was a ploy to push African publications out of business. He said his publication house "has become a shadow of itself" and that the list was "scaring his clients off". As a result, he said, he is unable to pay salaries and run his organisation.

Read that second paragraph again. Is it the case that Beall has managed to undermine low-cost OA publishing in Nigeria?

There's more here, and I think it's worth reading, with the caveat that (as usual) Beall's Word doesn't—or at least shouldn't—make a journal either worthless or predatory.

Gaming the system with scammery

The Library Loon posted this on January 2, 2018 at *Gavia Libraria*. The Loon links to some other reports—including this interview with the author of the paywalled article I note but (because it's paywalled) don't discuss at the start of this section. It's fair to say that the interview doesn't help, as it appears that Pyne's basis for "predatory" is "on Beall's lists."

How widespread in the scholarly world is the practice of systematically paying scam journals to pad one's CV? The Loon has *no earthly idea*. None whatever. She knows it to be a known phenomenon in certain geographic areas, especially where thoughtless government mandates create excess incentive for quantity over quality. She does believe that plenty of existing tenure and promotion processes worldwide are vulnerable to such system-gaming, yet she has no notion how to bracket "plenty" either. She also knows that hardly any institution anywhere has procedures in place to detect this variety of system-gaming, much less policy setting out punishments for it.

This could go a few ways:

- The practice is not particularly widespread; a few more hit-pieces appear, a few offenders are caught and (one hopes) dealt with, and life goes on as before.
- The practice is widespread (and easy-to-detect) enough to spur significant damaging attacks on higher education from outside higher education, forcing institutions to respond somehow.
- The practice is widespread enough, detectable enough, and sufficiently considered poor form, for institutions to enact policy and procedures to detect and stop it.

Again, the Loon has no strong or even weak sense which way this die will fall. (If anyone else does, the comments are open.) The Loon's worry is that in any situation spurring institutional action, the actions taken will seriously damage openness in the larger academy.

Why? Because decisions required by institution-wide policy invariably reduce to *heuristics*—quick-and-dirty, easy-to-make judgment calls—and publishing heuristics are rarely to never open-friendly. Put another way, it's far faster and easier for an institution to say "no open-access journals, no journals under a decade old" than to put in the cogitation needed to go even as far as "if it's on the DOAJ list, it will do." If you think many institutions won't institute such a heuristic (keeping in mind also that the percentage of open-access advocates among faculty and administrators amounts to a rounding error) you have far more faith in them than the Loon.

The Loon discusses what it sees as the futility of trying to get rid of both blacklists and whitelists, and adds:

If the Loon worked for a big-pig publisher (yes, yes, of course she never would; permit her a contrafactual hypothetical), she would encourage her employer to create a handy-dandy "reputable journal" list, possibly through yet another of the quickie pseudo-trade-organizations the big pigs whomp up when they are trying to snooker faculty away from open access. Alternate means to the same end could include getting chummy

> with known list-purveyors, such as Cabell's and Academic Analytics (or whoever has succeeded them in the resell-universities-their-own-scholars'-metadata market). The goal, of course, is admitting as few open-access journals as possible to any such list. Such open-access journals as must be added for the look of the thing should be owned by the big pigs; independent open-access journals need not apply. (How this will yet again reinforce developed-world hegemony over scholarly publishing will be left as an exercise for the reader.)

There's more, and it's worth reading. While I continue to believe that blacklists are so inherently bad as to be best avoided, I believe that white-lists are a different story. I certainly agree with this:

> Best that lists should happen transparently, against public criteria, in a venue where open-access advocates have a snowball's shot in Hades of keeping open-access journals on the table. (Did the open-access movement learn nothing from Beall? *Do not let your enemy control a visible, high-mindshare product or service in your space.*)

Oh-oh Canada: Baffling fake university mangles our culture

This article by Tom Spears appeared February 7, 2018 in the *Ottawa Citizen*, and since Ottawa seems to be a center of predatory hype, perhaps it's not surprising that Spears simply refers to "known predatory journals that will print anything for a fee" with little explanation.

It's mostly a fun article: one "scholar" seems to have created an entire university as his employer—California South University, in Irvine (or Garden Grove). But the "university" seems to be based on Canadiana. (The website URL should be a giveaway: rather than the expected **.edu**, it's one of those rare sites that uses **.us** as a TLD. The website takes forever to load, but is quite impressive once it does, including the heading "About Us" with its tagline "Know us more," a novel way to put it.)

I won't go through more of this, and it's largely irrelevant in any case. You can explore the website if you have patience; you'll discover that "The university ranks among the top five universities in the United States" but is also 45th in the U.S. There's even a scandal:

> The university has been the subject of several recent scandals. In 2011, the school's dean of medicine resigned after plagiarizing much of his graduation address. In 2012, the University's Psychiatry department chair was placed on leave before officially beginning his duties after allegations emerged of an inappropriate sexual relationship with a patient.

This remarkable institution has 39,000 students at five campuses, 15,000 employees, and accounts for five percent of California's GDP—and, in keeping with its Canadian heritage, it's a "public provincial university" and in the "provincial capital" of Garden Grove.

There is, to be sure, no connection to the University of California, Irvine, which *is* a highly respected state (not provincial) campus but has a mere 32,754 students and is only among the top *ten* U.S. *public* universities (or top five if you believe *Money*). And, of course, UC Irvine is a newcomer: it's only been around since 1965, whereas the Premier of the California Province succeeded in getting California South University going in 1920!

[Note: I'm a Cal alum—UC Berkeley, that is—and I do not in any way look down on Irvine, another of several world-class UC campuses.]

As I say, the newspaper article is amusing, and suggests that "predatory" journals can be *real* career-builders: how many professors get to create their own university, a university nearing its centennial?

Just How Bad Is It?

Items that seem to either overstate the problem of "predatory" journals or, in some cases, comment on the hype.

Is Canadian research falling prey to predatory journals?
This article by Karen Palmer, Timothy Caulfield and Maureen Taylor appeared January 19, 2017 at *healthydebate*. It starts with an example of a bogus journal (since shut down) with a website patterned after a legitimate journal, although the names were distinct.

> The main difference was that the second journal is what's known as a predatory journal, set up to collect fees from researchers desperate to publish. It would forgo the usual scientific review process reputable journals stand behind.
>
> The sham was convincing: researchers were fooled by spam sent from the second journal inviting submissions, McGowan says, only to realize later they'd played into the hands of a fake.
>
> The site has since shut down, taking the research with it.
>
> When a researcher submits a study to a legitimate academic journal, it normally undergoes peer review, a process that can take up to six months or longer and involves careful reading by independent experts in the field. These reviewers may request further study or clarifications or may suggest rejecting the article altogether.

The first sentence in the last paragraph is interesting, as "normally" is quite a bit short of "always"—in other words, some studies (apparently) make it into "legitimate" academic journals *without* peer review.

And, sure enough, here comes the link to OA and the surety that *only* OA journals can be "predatory." And the hype:

> Over the past decade, this has ballooned into a massive trade that some feel has fundamentally warped the academic publishing and peer review process. It has become increasingly difficult to tell real from fake.

Massive! Fundamentally warped!

What we have here is more from David Moher's Centre for Journalogy at the Ottawa Hospital Research Institute. Since I've already commented on the oddity of a medical school being home to journalism studies, let's let that go. Oh, here are the 420,000/8,000 claims, of course without caveats. And "Open access open to corruption" as a headline (subscription journals are, of course, pure as the driven snow), and quotes from Beall with high praise and absolutely no sense that Beall's less than perfect. A key quote:

> "I think the predatory publishers are bringing down the entire industry," Beall says. "All of scholarly publishing is being poisoned by this. There are calls to eliminate journals altogether. Things have become so corrupted by predatory publishers that the whole institution is being damaged by it."

There's more, and it's a pure hypefest. The website has "debate" in it but there's not an iota of balance in this article. PG-F.

Predatory Journals

This post by Lucy Bray on June 12, 2017 at the University of Nottingham's *Library Blog* is intended, I think, as an explainer—but there are problems. For one, it's another case where predatory (sometimes in scare quotes, sometimes not) is asserted to be a subset of OA. There's also a discussion of Beall's lists with no caveats as to their quality. The close:

> Ultimately, a combination of conducting ourselves in an online world and the current Open Access model means that predatory journals aren't going to go away. A complete overhaul of the system and better education for authors from their institutions about publication routes may help, but ultimately- where there are authors willing to pay, predatory journals will continue in business.

That first sentence makes it clear: no OA, no problem. Sad. PG-C.

Open Access Predatory Journals

This piece, by Steven Novella on June 16, 2017 at *Neurologica Blog*, is almost a classic: it may be part of the work toward the canonization of Saint Beall. It starts out linking to the "chilling tail" of why Beall took down the lists—but that's a dead link, so never mind. But then…

> A predatory journal is generally one in which authors pay a fee in order to publish a paper. This in itself does not make a journal predatory, but it sets the stage. This is part of the open-access movement, which is also not synonymous with predatory but is vulnerable to predatory practices.
>
> Traditional journals earn their money from subscriptions and advertising. In order to maximize revenue, they want to maximize their reputation and impact factor. This gives them an incentive to publish high

> quality articles, although also surprising and new studies, which may not be replicable, but that is a separate issue.
>
> Open access journals make the papers they publish freely available to the public. Because they don't, therefore, have subscriptions, they make their money by charging researchers a publication fee. Again, there is nothing inherently wrong with this model and the idea of open access is a good one. But, with this model publishers have an incentive to publish a lot of papers and no financial incentive to reject poor quality submissions or to engage in rigorous peer review.

"Not synonymous with predatory" is about as favorable as it gets. The second paragraph suggests that subscription journals *don't* have author-side charges (many do) and they have no incentive to publish as much as possible (but, of course, price rises are justified based on increased page counts…) The third paragraph equates OA with APCs (usually false) and has the necessary "oh, it's a good *idea*" sop.

Then there's more on St. Beall and his martyrdom in the face of evil publishers. There is—of course, given the overall tenor—no suggestion whatsoever that Beall's lists might have been controversial. Instead:

> Beall was pressured to take down his list and his websites. This is a tragedy for academia and medicine.
>
> The institution of science is built on quality control, peer-review, and self-criticism. Beall was providing an invaluable service by pointing out practices among some journals that violated the spirit and the process of quality control in science. Predatory journal contribute to a blurring of the lines between science and pseudoscience, essentially flooding the world with low quality and bogus studies and promoting the borderline academics who produce them.
>
> He specifically points out, and I agree, that the pseudoscientific world of complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) benefits greatly from this blurring of lines.

Consider that final paragraph. It's not as though respectable subscription publishers like Elsevier would publish journals on homeopathy or Ayurvedic medicine…oh, wait.

Then, of course, attack University of Colorado for not standing firmly behind Beall and repeat the suggestion that complementary and alternative medicine is only the purview of predatory journals.

PG-F.

Credit to Zen Faulkes, who added a fairly lengthy comment pointing out some of the problems with the article.

Beware! Academics are getting reeled in by scam journals
This article, by Alex Gillis on January 12, 2017 at *University Affairs/Affaires Universitaires*, combines a Beallfest with some interesting Canadian anecdotes and some legitimately troubling situations with OMICS and its purchases in Canada.

There's a lot of hype about the "skyrocketing" problem, apparently skyrocketing because Beall kept adding so many more publishers and journals. As for Beall's own tendency toward hype:

> "OMICS International is on a mission to take over all of scholarly publishing," Mr. Beall wrote, saying the company is on a buying spree around the world. "It is purchasing journals and publishers and incorporating them into its evil empire. Its strategy is to saturate scholarly publishing with its low-quality and poorly managed journals, aiming to squeeze out and acquire legitimate publishers."

I've heard of a publisher that seems to be buying up all aspects of scholarly communications—a publisher that has more than three times as many journals as the dread OMICS and has had its share of scandals. But, since that publisher is mostly subscription-based, it's honorable (and has been praised by Beall for having consistently fine journals).

At the end, there's a set of suggested actions that begins with checking Beall's list or another *anonymous* "misconduct" database—and includes these fairly astonishing pieces of advice:

> 5. Avoid using journal "whitelists" because such lists and indexes weren't created for the purpose of conferring legitimacy. For instance, the Directory of Open Access Journals and the Thomson Reuters Master Journal List (which provides a list of journals appearing in at least one of 24 indexes) are legitimate operations, but their lists contain many predatory journals. Ditto for Scopus, Science Citation Index and other academic lists, citation databases and indexes.
>
> 6. Don't be fooled by a journal's association with legitimate businesses, codes and committees. The scholarly publishing industry is doing a poor job of policing itself and legitimate companies, such as firms that sell software and agencies that distribute ISSN numbers, offer services and licenses to almost anyone, including predatory publishers. For example, although the Committee on Publication Ethics, or COPE, contains more than 10,000 members worldwide and provides advice on how to handle cases of research and publication misconduct, many of its members are from predatory journals.

Once you understand that Jeffrey Beall knew more about every journal and its legitimacy than *everybody else put together*, you've got it.

PG-C. With exceptions (hi, Marc!), the comments are even worse.

Opinion: Why I Published in a Predatory Journal
This piece, by John H. McCool on April 6, 2017 at *The Scientist*, is a puzzlement. I'm avoiding the issue of whether submitting bogus papers is ethical or not—but what this piece seems to suggest is that even a low-cost journal should *thoroughly* investigate *every aspect* of a paper. Is that true, realistic, or typically done?

The story is amusing, in its own way. McCool got a silly invitation to submit an article to a urology journal (he's a science writer)—and so he wrote a case report, *deliberately crafted to be as realistic as possible*, but using a disease name and author/coauthor names derived from *Seinfeld*.

> Basically, I wrote the manuscript in a style as close to a real case report as I could, except that it was 100 percent fake.

The case report was published after revisions.

> Why did the journal publish a report so easily identifiable as fake? I'll leave that to the publication to explain.
>
> Why, you might ask, did I take this stunt as far as I did? For nearly a year, I have been on a personal mini-crusade against fake scientific journals, and I have written several articles on the topic. In 2016, I was invited to submit a paper to the *Journal of Nanomedicine Research*, which is also published by MedCrave. I posted an article on LinkedIn about this, but it was not widely read, nor effective at exposing the journal as dubious. So when the urology journal came calling, I thought a more-extreme trolling operation might be more effective. I wrote the fictitious case report over a weekend.
>
> My short-term goal is to expose MedCrave as a publisher that will print fiction, for a price. My long-term goal—an ambitious one, I know—is to stop the production of predatory journals altogether.

I'd link to the PDF of the article, but that link—although it's on *The Scientist*'s site—now yields a 404.

I'll agree that the supposed editor of the journal didn't do due diligence to verify the institution and email address (but if the email address was phony, how did the interchanges take place?). I'm less convinced that a typical reviewer should (a) be intimately familiar with *Seinfeld* character names and assume there aren't real people with the same names; (b) read one or all of the papers in the reference list; (c) be aware of every disease name in a field. You can make a case for the third, to be sure—but, especially in a case report, I'm less certain.

Now, admittedly, in this case, the journal's home page gives me some pause, specifically the statement:

> Urology & Nephrology Open Access Journal (UNOAJ) is an internationally peer-reviewed open access journal with a strong motto to promote information regarding the improvements and advances in the fields of

> urology, nephrology and research. This journal covers the arena of kidneys, adrenal glands, ureters, urinary bladder, urethra, genitourinary disorders, urinary tract infections, urinary tract system and several other research areas. The innate theme of the journal is to spread the advanced research technologies in urology and nephrology. All manuscripts published in this journal are subjected to rigorous peer review. UNOAJ delightfully welcomes research papers, review articles, case reports, short communications, mini-reviews, opinions, letter to editors etc.

Strong motto? Delightfully welcomes?

Predatory Journals Hit By 'Star Wars' Sting

A first-hand report by "Neuroskeptic" (on July 22, 2017 at Discover's *Neuroskeptic* blog) on yet another sting, using ethically questionable methods to expose "predatory" journals:

> A number of so-called scientific journals have accepted a Star Wars-themed spoof paper. The manuscript is an absurd mess of factual errors, plagiarism and movie quotes. I know because I wrote it.
>
> Inspired by previous publishing "stings", I wanted to test whether 'predatory' journals would publish an obviously absurd paper. So I created a spoof manuscript about "midi-chlorians" – the fictional entities which live inside cells and give Jedi their powers in Star Wars. I filled it with other references to the galaxy far, far away, and submitted it to nine journals under the names of Dr Lucas McGeorge and Dr Annette Kin.

The conclusion? There are four journals that published a supposedly obvious spoof—and later deleted it.

But then…

> To generate the main text of the paper, I copied the Wikipedia page on 'mitochondrion' (which, unlike midichlorians, exist) and then did a simple find/replace to turn *mitochondr** into *midichlor**. I then Rogeted the text, i.e. I reworded it (badly), because the main focus of the sting was on whether journals would publish a ridiculous paper, not whether they used a plagiarism detector (although Rogeting is still plagiarism in my book.)

So the obviousness of the spoof is to some extent dependent on a reviewer's detailed knowledge of terminology—and consider this: the title begins "Mitochondria": and in the abstract it explicitly calls midichloria a synonym for mitochondria: "mitochondria (also referred to as midichloria)."

Note that three "predatory" journals rejected it, including one from OMICS, that in one case reviewers recommended reverting "midichloria" back to "mitochondria," and in one case reviewers seemed to be in on the joke.

> So does this sting prove that scientific publishing is hopelessly broken? No, not really. It's just a reminder that at some "peer reviewed" journals, there really is no meaningful peer review at all. Which we already knew, not least from previous stings, but it bears repeating.
>
> This matters because scientific publishers are companies selling a product, and the product is peer review. True, they also publish papers (electronically in the case of these journals), but if you just wanted to publish something electronically, you could do that yourself for free. Preprint archives, blogs, your own website – it's easy to get something on the internet. Peer review is what supposedly justifies the price of publishing.
>
> All of the nine publishers I stung are known to send spam to academics, urging them to submit papers to their journals. I've personally been spammed by almost all of them. All I did, as Lucas McGeorge, was test the quality of the products being advertised.

I'm guessing that all "predatory" journals tested were OA journals; that there were no similar attempts to get the paper into fourth-rate subscription journals. I could be wrong. (In the comments, Neuroskeptic simply *asserts* that "Reputable journals wouldn't have accepted this paper," therefore no need to actually test that, right? And further calls Hindawi—its journal turned down the paper—"borderline predatory.")

Reading through the odd mix of comments, it turns out that midichloria *is* real—a bacteria called in full "midichloria midochondrii"—and that it was named for, well, you guessed it. Which makes the spoof even subtler. There also seem to be a lot of climate change deniers in the comments.

Including Neuroskeptic's responses in comments, I'm inclined to give this piece PG-C.

Predatory "scientific journals" tricked into publishing Star Wars-themed hoax

This relatively brief piece by Cory Doctorow on July 24, 2017 at *BoingBoing* is mostly a quick third-party commentary on the sting and a few selections from the paper, but it's worth noting for this paragraph:

> The pay-to-play journals are a kind of parasite that masquerades as open access journals, publishing anything and calling it "peer reviewed." But it would be a mistake to lay this as the feet of the open access movement: even "traditional" journals have been revealed as fakes, funded by the pharmaceutical industry and others.

One could take issue with the overly-broad "pay-to-play journals" but it's good to have the reminder in the last sentence.

Predatory Journals: They will destroy open access trustworthiness. This piece, by Ken Mitton in early August 2017 at *The Science Rant,* appears to be a lament that Jeffrey Beall "has been forced to shut down his blog," but I find these paragraphs most revealing:

> Science journals, in paper or online, need to be trustworthy. They need to be edited and reviewed by real scholars in those fields, and not just anyone with a PhD who wants to pump up their resume. Actual scholars who do research for a living and who may also teach at the University and College level.
>
> Manuscripts actually need to be reviewed. Peer review.
>
> Online journals full of post-docs and research assistants as their editors, who have never gained charge of their own labs or research programs, or professorships / lectureships, and who also have little if any publishing of their own in their field in bona fide journals, are not really scholarly journals. They are just what they are. Pay money, get your manuscript online to look like its a real scholarly open access journal. That is not however a publication that warrants being included in a list of peer reviewed publications used to establish one's reputation or to obtain scholarly employment with.

So not only is unaffiliated or citizen science to be avoided at all costs, so is science done by postdocs who don't yet have their own labs. The more I read the article, the more it sounds as though all *real* science (and all editing and peer reviewing) should be done by professors.

Hard to say much about that…especially since I'm part of that scum with no legitimate role in scholarship.

More predatory journals get indexed in PubMed
Another R. Prasad piece, thus time August 26, 2017 at *The Hindu*—and referencing a *Lancet* item basically saying the same thing. As far as I can tell, what's *really* being said is that more journals listed in Beall's lists are showing up on PubMed—or that more journals in PubMed are showing up on Beall's lists.

I say that because neither the Prasad piece nor the *Lancet* item offers any evidence that there was any actual investigation into journals' "predatory" nature. And, of course, Beall is only too happy to smear PubMed and urge that it not be used as a whitelist.

PG-B at best.

The surge of predatory open-access in neurosciences and neurology. Oh, wait: this article by Manca A, Martinez G, Cugusi L, Dragone D, Dvir Z, and Deriu F may be the basis for Prasad's and Lancet's pieces; it appears in the June 2017 *Neuroscience.*

Here's the abstract, which *does* add one useful piece of information: none of the "predatory" journals was in *DOAJ*.

> Predatory open access is a controversial publishing business model that exploits the open-access system by charging publication fees in the absence of transparent editorial services. The credibility of academic publishing is now seriously threatened by predatory journals, whose articles are accorded real citations and thus contaminate the genuine scientific records of legitimate journals. This is of particular concern for public health since clinical practice relies on the findings generated by scholarly articles. Aim of this study was to compile a list of predatory journals targeting the neurosciences and neurology disciplines and to analyze the magnitude and geographical distribution of the phenomenon in these fields. Eighty-seven predatory journals operate in neurosciences and 101 in neurology, for a total of 2404 and 3134 articles issued, respectively. Publication fees range 521-637 USD, much less than those charged by genuine open-access journals. The country of origin of 26.0-37.0% of the publishers was impossible to determine due to poor websites or provision of vague or non-credible locations. Of the rest 35.3-42.0% reported their headquarters in the USA, 19.0-39.2% in India, 3.0-9.8% in other countries. Although calling themselves "open-access", none of the journals retrieved was listed in the Directory of Open Access Journals. However, 14.9-24.7% of them were found to be indexed in PubMed and PubMed Central, which raises concerns on the criteria for inclusion of journals and publishers imposed by these popular databases. Scholars in the neurosciences are advised to use all the available tools to recognize predatory practices and avoid the downsides of predatory journals.

I can't tell you much more because the article is behind an Elsevier paywall, as of course all articles about predatory publishing should be.

The Ugly State of the Literature These Days

Derek Lowe posted this on September 15, 2017 at the "In the Pipeline" blog at *Science Translational Medicine*. It is to some extent another commentary on the "journalology" study.

It's clear that Lowe's understanding of the OA field is—well—limited. So, for example, "there's no shortage of quasi-open-access titles out there, the ones that (like reputable OA journals) do charge you for publication and make the resulting paper freely available (if the web site stays up)." That certainly *suggests* that all gold OA journals have APCs—and if the suggestion isn't clear enough, Lowe's responses to comments make it *absolutely* clear.

This bit (related to a different article) is interesting:

> But the problem, as the article shows, is that a number of biopharma companies have published papers in Omics journals, participated in its sponsored conferences (there are over a thousand every year!), and thus lined the pockets of this guy. This isn't good. The implication is

> that the people doing the publishing are either clueless or trying to place papers somewhere where they know that they'll get published no matter what, and neither of those burnishes anyone's reputation. The closer such papers get to marketing, the worse this looks.

Quite separately from whether every journal in the "journalology" report is, in fact, predatory, Lowe noting that biopharma companies are big contributors to OMICS conferences and journals is worth noting.

The close suggests Lowe's attitude toward OA in general:

> Mind you, the rest of the scientific publishing world is not such a quiet place these days, either. I wanted to note this study, which suggests that the number of pirated papers on the Sci-Hub site is now so large as to pose a potentially irreversible threat to the big publishing houses and their business model. They'd better adapt quickly – I don't like the looks of the people who are coming up from the bottom looking to take their place.

In this case, the comments are more interesting than the article. The article gets PG-C, partly by inference.

[Skipping some other rehashes of the "journalology" stuff including one that seemed to believe Beall's lists were still active in September 2017.]

GUIDE: How to spot predatory academic journals in the wild

Perhaps this piece, by Sarah Wild on October 17, 2017 at *Africa Check*, should be in the earlier section on defining predation—but it links to the "journalology" piece and also seems to check off most hypefactor items: All gold OA involves APCs, if it's on the lists it must be predatory, the 420,000-article claim. That's a PG-D right off the bat. The new part is a study showing that South African scholars published articles in Beall-listed journals.

The final section, "What gives a predatory journal away?," includes some reasonable points and a couple I'd consider less so. Ignoring the explanations, they are: Is the journal respected by others in academia? Who is the editor? Who is on the editorial board? Where is the journal based? What is the turn-around time? How many articles do they publish? When in doubt, ask a librarian.

You can probably guess the ones I have trouble with: "Where is the journal based?" and "How many articles do they publish?" Let me quote the full explanation for the latter one:

> If a journal is pumping out hundreds – or thousands – of articles a year, how are they managing to give academics quality editing or peer-review?

So much for *Science*, *Nature*, *PLOS One*…and so many other top journals, both subscription and OA. I'd say a better reason to question a "journal" is that it's published fewer than, say, ten articles a year or 20 articles in its lifetime.

What's really amusing here is that one of the sources for the tips is *PLOS One*.

Predatory Journals Are Also Shameless

I had planned to cite and comment on this *Nautil.us* article—but I won't, and I won't provide a link, because part way into the article a call (apparently for an ad) managed to freeze Firefox and slow down my computer so badly that I was forced to do a hard restart (that is, forcing the computer to shut down)—and then a full scan, after finding that two key Windows Defender settings had apparently been turned off.

So: predatory article or at least predatory website, in a very different sense. Don't go there.

A quality-control test for predatory journals

I just have to note this "correspondence" by Steven N. Goodman, appearing January 10, 2018 on the *Nature* site. Goodman has a solution for the "confusion" caused by the "surge in predatory journals": attempt to massively pollute the literature!

> The scientific community could submit replicate test articles several times a year to a wide array of open-access journals, suspect and non-suspect. These manuscripts would use the organization and language of legitimate science but would be readily identifiable as nonsense to someone in the field. The process should be undertaken by an independent group, perhaps under the auspices and oversight of the Directory of Open Access Journals or the US National Library of Medicine.
>
> The results could then be made public to form the basis of a 'journal integrity index'. This would avoid labelling journals as predatory and reduce the risk of legal retribution.

Note first that it's only *open access journals* that need to be tested: apparently subscription journals are automatically ethical. Note also that there's no exclusion for the majority of OA journals that don't charge APCs: they should be tested!

Anyone care to estimate the cost (in time and dollars) of carrying out such a scheme? Anyone want to bet that subscription journals would all pass this test?

OK, so maybe I really did need a "humor" section in this roundup—but I can't find anything to indicate that it's intended to be a joke.

Some science journals that claim to peer review papers do not do so

This unsigned article appeared June 23, 2018 in *The Economist*, and I'd expect better of it. There's Beall's list (cited without caveats) and the rapidly-growing Cabells' (now up to 8,700!) blacklist, and *of course* the "more than 400,000" figure—again, all without any suggestion that calling a journal predatory doesn't make it so.

Oh, and *of course* all OA journals charge APCs—except that this item seems to suggest that many scholarly journals are flipping to OA:

> Behind all this is a change in the way a lot of journals make their money. Over the past decade, many have stopped selling subscriptions. Instead, they charge authors a publication fee and permit people to read the result for nothing. This "open access" business model has the advantage of increasing the dissemination of knowledge, but it also risks corrupting the knowledge thus disseminated.

The close?

> One far-fetched solution is a return to journal subscriptions. These have for so long been excoriated as rent-seeking profit-inflators restricting the flow of information that a change of course would now be unthinkable. But those who pushed for their elimination might be wise to pause for thought. As the old proverb has it, be careful what you wish for. You might get it.

PG-F.

400,000 Scientists All Over the World Have Been Published in Fake Journals

This piece by Kari Sonde appeared July 20, 2018 at *Mother Jones*, and it's about a big German or multinational "investigation" into 175,000 articles "published by five of the world's most prominent pseudo-scientific publishing platforms." Since I don't read German, I won't deal with the reports themselves, but it seems that *journalists* did the "examining," so it's fair to assume that it's another "Beall = predatory" case. Here's a core paragraph:

> Predatory publishers target individual scientists by email, charge high fees in exchange for publication, and forego international peer-review standards to publish quickly and frequently. Some of these pseudo-scientific journals also publish work from employees of pharmaceutical companies. Some members of the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists reported that "In addition to failing to perform peer or editorial committee reviews of articles, the companies charge to publish articles, accept papers by employees of pharmaceutical and other companies as well as by climate-change skeptics promoting questionable theories."

This *seems* to suggest that APCs are suspicious in and of themselves—and that there is no legitimate research done in pharmaceutical companies. Interesting. The final paragraph is interesting:

> Stefan Hell, who won the Nobel Prize for Chemistry in 2014, told ICIJ that the pseudo-science cultivated through predatory publishing is an issue that demands action, echoing the sentiments of other Nobel prize-winners and research groups. "If there is a system behind it," Hall said, "and there are people who aren't just duped by it but who take advantage of it, then it has to be shut down."

Who would "shut down" this "system"?

Predatory publishers: the journals that churn out fake science
This article by Alex Hern and Pamela Duncan appeared August 10, 2018 at *The Guardian*—and while it seems to be about the same investigation noted above, the tease calls it "A *Guardian* investigation, in collaboration with German broadcaster Norddeuscher Rundfunk"—just as a cluster of Indian articles (*not* dealt with later for computer stability reasons) seemed to call it an Indian investigation.

While the lede has the same hyper tone as other reports, there's a bit more subtlety later in the article. The lede and first few paragraphs:

> A vast ecosystem of predatory publishers is churning out "fake science" for profit, an investigation by the Guardian in collaboration with German publishers NDR, WDR and Süddeutsche Zeitung Magazin has found.
>
> More than 175,000 scientific articles have been produced by five of the largest "predatory open-access publishers", including India-based Omics publishing group and the Turkish World Academy of Science, Engineering and Technology, or Waset.
>
> But the vast majority of those articles skip almost all of the traditional checks and balances of scientific publishing, from peer review to an editorial board. Instead, most journals run by those companies will publish anything submitted to them – provided the required fee is paid.
>
> To demonstrate the lack of peer review, Svea Eckert, a researcher who worked with NDR on the investigation, successfully submitted an article created by the joke site SCIgen, which automatically generates gibberish computer science papers. The paper was accepted for discussion at a Waset conference, which Eckert attended and filmed for NDR.

Once again, we have deliberate polluting of the scholarly literature to prove a point, but never mind. Note that the third paragraph refers to *the vast majority* of the papers—a lessening of the usual hype.

A bit later we have this subtlety from a researcher who was a victim:

> "I wouldn't suggest all papers are nonsense, just that the practice is deceptive and opens the door for people to push fake papers though. The deception is that these outlets give the impression of being authentic academic journals when they are not. A question is then raised about why scholars submit."

And this:

> Some scholars argue that the open nature of these publishers is valid in its own right. Prof Milton Wainwright, a biologist from the University of Sheffield, has published a number of articles in the Journal of Astrobiology and Outreach, an open-access publication run by Omics with minimal peer review.
>
> "Most of our work is published in peer-reviewed journals," Wainwright told the Guardian. "However, we believe that the peer-review system is

> actively denying academics access to our work on panspermia (ie that life originates from space) … I use 'lightly refereed' journals to circumvent the gatekeeping role of peer review in order to provide a document which can be used by future scientists to assess our work.

And this:

> Not every journal published by a predatory publisher is itself predatory, however. Some have active editorial boards, and provide real peer review. One academic, who asked to remain anonymous, provided the Guardian with copies of the extensive notes of a reviewer for the Omics journal Anthropology.
>
> "Many of the traditional journals I've written for provide much less feedback," the academic said. "I publish in this journal because they respond quickly, provide very good proofs and format the references well, and their publication fees are reasonable."
>
> "I'm aware of the controversies surrounding Omics. This may exist in some of their journals, but I do believe Anthropology is a reputable peer-reviewed journal."

There's more to the article, and on balance it's one of the best pieces I've seen. Worth reading.

Storm in a teacup: predatory journals are irrelevant

We end this section with a less hype-prone view, from Arndt Leininger on August 6, 2018 at *Elephant in the Lab*. Leininger works at a German university, and notes the Big German Investigation—but doesn't react the same way. The lede:

> "Predatory publishing" describes the practice of pseudo scientific publishers that promise scientists the rapid publication of their studies. They purport to carry out a peer review but actually do not do such a thing and basically publish anything if the publication fee has been paid. Thus, unreviewed but not necessarily low quality work ends up in worthless online journals, which for a layperson are not necessarily distinguishable from reputed journals. The phenomenon is well known to researchers. A quick search on Google Scholar returns hundreds of articles on predatory publishing since 2017 alone. Curiously, a team of investigative journalists of public broadcasters WDR and NDR as well as the broadsheet newspaper Süddeutsche Zeitung (SZ) has tried to scandalize what in essence amounts to not more than academic SPAM mail. What is easily missed in the lurid tone of reporting is that scientists who have published in a predatory journals are mostly victims themselves and that only a very small number of scientists are affected.

Consider this, about the #fakescience hashtag that's sprung up:

> The journalists behind the #FakeScience story would certainly refuse to be referred to as #FakeNews in the face of a few unintentional factual mistakes in journalistic coverage. But now they provide a similar buzzword that climate skeptics, opponents of vaccination and other conspiracy theorists will latch onto to dismiss scientific evidence contradicting their world views. This is dangerous because the reporting on predatory publishing under that heading is by and large too superficial to be able to correct the distorting image that the hashtag paints…
>
> The term #FakeScience implies that all studies published by pirated publishers are fake. Most of it, however, may well be serious research but inadequate, irrelevant, or both. Some published papers may even be really good, but a young, inexperienced junior scientist has fallen prey to a pirate publisher. Not surprisingly, most of the scientists mentioned in the media are or claim to be the victims of pirated publishers, often having unsuspectingly spend tax money on scientifically worthless journals or conferences. Unfortunately, the #FakeScience-journalism creates the impression that 'false' results have been willfully placed in predatory journals and that the problem is widespread.

As for the "widespread," the author notes that the number of German scientists supposedly affected is about 1.5% of scientists in German universities and university hospitals alone, excluding other sectors.

There's more; read it in the original. I might not agree with everything, but I do appreciate the term "scandalization."

[Note: I had a cluster from India, all from one newspaper—but those ad-heavy articles, with text bouncing up and down as I tried to read it, seem to have similar computer-freezing tendencies to another article, so I've given up on the cluster. It was interesting to be informed that Beall *managed* the Auraria library until March 2018; I'm sure his supervisor was surprised by that.]

How Can We Miss You When You Won't Go Away?

A tip of the hat to Dan Hicks for the title of this section; do give a listen to his rendition, along with the Hot Licks. The "you" should be fairly obvious: after shutting down the lists and the blog, he just keeps on slamming OA in general and his version of "predatory" journals.

I can't hear you, you're not prestigious enough: Thoughts on Open Access and respected, white men.

We'll start a ways back, with a December 20, 2013 post by Kendra K. Levine that I didn't discover until years later. As Levine notes, the post isn't so much about OA as about people talking about OA.

> Like anything that starts to become popular, it's sort of annoying to see who is recognized as the leaders of the group. For a group of people, the

> voice of OA was Jeffrey Beall, well known for Beall's List of predatory OA publishers. (Yes, it always had his name in it – important marketing tool.)
>
> I've never understood Beall's appeal other than he wasn't too radical, he was a respectable, older, white, male librarian (therefore perceived authority), and he is great at self promotion. He's a hype machine, and while I didn't really agree with him and his tactics, I didn't feel any point in calling him out because nobody would listen to me and he got people talking about OA.

Levine then notes that by late 2013 some "respectable" folks—yes, also white men, as am I—were starting to call Beall out.

> I'm thankful for Eisen's blog post so that I can point to something next time people try to get me excited about Beall's list, and tell them, "This is why I don't care what he has to say or support him." It's concise and people will pay attention. It's just frustrating that for many people, it took people like Eisen and Tennant calling Beall out to do something about it. This isn't anything against them (I personally think they're both pretty awesome), but it's against the collective whole. Start paying attention to people beyond the big names. Stop dismissing people who reference blogs (gasp!) or people you're not familiar with. Especially if you're a librarian/info pro, you know how to find this stuff. I understand it's hard staying up to date on everything, but only looking towards the establishment does stifle conversation. Thankfully we have people like Eisen and Tennant who pay attention to the fringe conversations.

This goes way beyond Beall, and Levine is, of course, right on the money.

The Ethical and Academic Implications of the Jeffrey Beall (www.scholarlyoa.com) Blog Shutdown

This letter by Jaime A. Teixeira da Silva was accepted for *Sci Eng Ethics* (sorry: don't know the expansion) on March 20, 2017; if you can't get to the link, my apologies. Here's most of the abstract:

> A profoundly divisive and controversial site, the Beall blog represented an existential threat to those journals and publishers that were listed there. On the other hand, the Beall blog was a ray of hope to critics of bad publishing practices that a culture of public shaming was perhaps the only way to rout out those journals—and their editors—and publishers who did not respect basic publishing ethical principles and intrinsic academic values. While members of the former group vilified Beall and his blog, members of the latter camp tried to elevate it to the level of policy. Split by extreme polar forces, for reasons still unknown to the public, Beall deliberately shut down his blog, causing some academic chaos among global scholars, including to the open access movement.

There's a bit more to the full letter; no additional comment.

'Academic Terrorist'

Carl Straumsheim wrote this on June 2, 2017 at *Inside Higher Education*. The tease:

> Months after deleting controversial lists of "predatory" journals and publishers, the librarian behind them still faces anonymous harassment online.

The article is about an anonymous website devoted to criticizing Beall and using a domain strikingly similar to Beall's own. I'm not providing a link because, in my opinion, the site (which I've seen before) is scurrilous.

Note that it went up years before Beall shut down his lists and blog, and that the blog portion wasn't updated after February 2016 (while the home page was updated after the shutdown).

I'd love to recommend the site as a joke, but it's not funny: it's sad, vicious and quite possibly slanderous.

Critic of 'predatory' publishing returns with scathing message

Tom Spears reported this on June 26, 2017 at the *Ottawa Citizen*—and, to be sure, there is not a word suggesting that Beall and his lists might be less than perfect. Nope, it's a series of quotes from a Beall piece published in *Biochemia Medica*—a Croatian journal that would appear to be as closely-related to scholarly publishing issues as, say, *Guns & Rifles* is to studies of classical music.

Oh, by the way, *Biochemia Medica* is an OA journal, as are others that have published Beall's anti-OA rants. The link in the newspaper article doesn't work; this link works as of this writing.

Spears' article is essentially entirely quotes from Beall's article. Those quotes are fairly astonishing on their own, for example:

> "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 (CAM) to parade as if it were authentic science, and by enabling the publication of activist science."

But in some ways Beall's "history" is even more amazing. (Beall consistently *asserts* that all gold OA is "author-pays," it's become a verbal tick, as in "gold (author-pays).") Consider:

> The subscription prices increased in North America for several reasons. First, as the baby-boomer generation reached the age where many were finishing their PhDs and entering tenure track, journals began to publish more articles to accommodate the increase in the amount of research the boomers were carrying out. In some cases, bi-annual journals became quarterlies, and quarterlies became monthlies – all to accommodate the increase in the number of research articles being submitted for publication. Naturally, publishing more costs more, and this was especially true

> in the print environment of the early 1990s. A contemporary discussion of some of the causes of serial price increases is provided by Farrell (1).
>
> There were two other factors that contributed to price increases in subscriptions in North American academic libraries. One was the weak American and Canadian dollars in the late 1990s, and the practice of many larger academic libraries to collect journals from Europe, where currencies were strong at the time. The other was the creation of new fields of study, a phenomenon that paralleled the arrival of the baby boomers into higher education faculty positions. New fields such as nanomaterials and genomics were born, and they spawned many new journals.
>
> Unfortunately, few understood all these reasons for journal price increases. Most took the politically-correct, intellectual shortcut of blaming journal price increases directly – and only – on the publishers, ignoring the true causes.
>
> **Open access advocates**
>
> This misplaced blame, coupled with the advent of the World Wide Web in the mid-1990s, led to the open-access movement, which quickly and cleverly turned into a full-fledged social movement.

Extremely high profit margins? Nah, that can't be part of the problem. As for green OA, here's the Real History According to Beall:

> Several prominent "open access statements" were drafted by elite, self-selected committees of hero-wannabes, people whose careers were safely built on the foundation of articles published in subscription journals. Open-access repositories were formed, costing academic libraries huge sums of money in expensive software licensing costs, professional and support staff positions to manage them, and other, additional costs, yet faculty largely ignored their library-managed repositories, despite the fact that they could enjoy the dual-advantage of publishing in a respected, subscription journal and also have their work made open-access in the repository – or at least a post-print counterpart of it. Or was green open access really the great advantage its backer claimed it was?
>
> To deal with researchers' near-complete lack of interest in contributing to open-access repositories, open-access zealots imposed mandates on their fellow researchers, mandates that were celebrated by OA advocates, often with emotional announcements posted to the movement's email lists, announcements dripping with military metaphors heralding the latest victory.

I must admit that I do remember seeing a number of faculty senates vote, sometimes unanimously, for OA mandates (usually with opt-outs); I'm less aware of all those mandates imposed from above by some all-powerful cadre of open access zealots. But then, I don't believe in chemtrails either.

Reading the rest of the piece, one would hardly guess that, for example, Elsevier has a stable of publications on complementary and alternative medicine: no, that's all those predators at work. You will, of course, learn that whitelists are worthless and contain "predators."

At last, Jeffrey Beall reveals the reasons for shutting down his blog on predatory journals

This blog post, by Prasad Ravindranath on June 13, 2017 at *Science Chronicle*, is based on the same Beall article/editorial, but looking at an entirely different aspect of it—the martyrdom of Saint Beall.

> Unlike what most people had guessed, it was not a lawsuit from any of the predatory journal publishers that forced Jeffrey Beall, Librarian at the University of Colorado Denver and publisher of the famous Scholarly Open Access blog, to shut down the blog one fine day in January 2017, five years after he started it in January 2012. According to an Opinion piece published by him in the journal *Biochemia Medica*, the official journal of the Croatian Society of Medical Biochemistry and Laboratory Medicine, it was the "intense pressure" from his University and the "fear" of losing his job that forced him to shut down the blog.
>
> "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," he writes in the journal.

There's more, and it's all of a type. As expected, there is no suggestion that there might possibly be anything wrong with Beall's findings—or effort to see whether the university agrees with his claim (it doesn't).

What makes an anti-librarian?

This post, by Galen Charlton on June 15, 2017 at *Meta Interchange*, is a little more light-hearted, but with a serious message. Charlton ordered a bunch of conference ribbons for the 2017 ALA Annual Conference with the label "Anti-Librarian."

> Am I hoping that the librarians made of anti-matter will wear these ribbons to identify themselves, thereby avoiding unpleasant explosions and gamma ray bursts? Not really. Besides, there's an obvious problem with this strategy, were anti-matter librarians a real constituency at conferences.
>
> No, in a roundabout way, I'm mocking this behavior by Jeffrey Beall:

What follows is a screen shot of a Beall tweet attacking a tweet by Rachel Walden (and, in writing this, I just discovered that I've been honored by a block from Jeffrey Beall, so I can't cut-and-paste from the tweet itself).

Walden's tweet:

> I promise you all as a med library director that rapidly incr. pries from legit journals are a much bigger prob, than "predatory publishers."

Beall's response:

> This is fake news from an anti-librarian. Budget cuts affect library journal licensing much more than price hikes. #OA #FakeNews

I find Beall's use of "fake news" enormously telling—and am impressed that he knows more about Walden's library budget than she does. Charlton's take (and while I'm technically violating the blog's BY-SA license, since *Cites & Insights* doesn't have the "SA" clause, this is also quotation in the context of commentary):

> Seriously, dude?
>
> I suggest reading Rachel Walden's tweets for more background, but suffice it to say that even if you were to discount Walden's experience as a medical library director (which I do not), Beall's response to her is extreme. (And for even more background, John Dupuis has an excellent compilation of links on recent discussions about Open Access and "predatory" journals.)
>
> But I'd like to unpack Beall's choice of the expression "anti-librarian"? What exactly makes for an anti-librarian?
>
> We already have plenty of names for folks who oppose libraries and librarians. Book-burners. Censors. Austeritarians. The closed-minded. The tax-cutters-above-all-else. The drowners of governments in bathtubs. The fearful. We could have a whole taxonomy, in fact, were the catalogers to find a few spare moments.
>
> "Anti-librarian" as an epithet doesn't fit most of these folks. Instead, as applied to a *librarian*, it has some nasty connotations: a traitor. Somebody who wears the mantle of the profession but opposes its very existence. Alternatively: a faker. A purveyor of fake news. One who is unfit to participate in the professional discourse.
>
> There may be some librarians who deserve to have that title — but it would take a lot more than being mistaken, or even woefully misguided to earn that.
>
> So let me also protest Beall's response to Walden explicitly:
>
> It is not OK.
>
> It is not cool.
>
> It is not acceptable.

My commentary: I regard "fake news" as fake commentary, since the chief user of that term regards most of America's best journalistic outlets as "fake." Using the term says much more about Beall than it does about the

situation—and "anti-librarian" is, well, I think Charlton nails it pretty well in the last five brief paragraphs.

Prof says 'social justice warrior' librarians endanger science

I'll link to Toni Airaksinen's August 17, 2017 report at *Campus Reform*, a right-wing site, only because *Times Higher Education* (where the material originated) paywalled me when I went there.

The bullet points preceding the report itself give the tone of Beall's discourse:

- A University of Colorado professor recently blasted "social justice warrior" librarians for "betraying" academia to promote an "anti-corporatist" agenda.
- Professor Jeffrey Beall contends that many SJW librarians are pushing "open access publishing" because they want to "kill off" traditional academic journals, despite the fact that the model is frequently used to publish "junk science."

This "reporter" seems to think Beall was a professor who *also* happened to be a Scholarly Communications Librarian, but that's not important. Oh, and now it's not some mysterious agency mandating OA:

> Indeed, in an effort to advance open access publishing, many college librarians have passed "open access mandates," which require that professors publish all new research in open journals. According to Beall, Duke University, Cornell University, and Harvard University have all passed some form of an open access mandate in the past few years.

Who knew university librarians were so powerful—presumably, using hypnotic spells to cause university *faculty* to vote to adopt such mandates.

Another gem:

> Meanwhile, activists are similarly taking advantage of the "easy article acceptance" enabled by open access publishing to "publish activist science," Beall added, citing "research" that shows "vaccines cause autism" as a particularly prominent example.

That's shocking: I never knew that *The Lancet*, which published the paper in question, was a predatory OA journal, not a very well-established, highly respected Elsevier-published subscription journal!

I wish *THE* wasn't intermittently paywalling: the full interview may have even more pieces of hidden wisdom.

Of course, I've seen others attacking predatory journals and citing the harm caused by the defective articles in them—except that, when you track down the articles that actually cause harm, they tend to be in high-impact, well-reported-on, subscription journals.

Open access, power, and privilege

This article by Shea Swauger appeared in *College & Research Libraries News* 78:11 (2017). It's in response to Beall's *Biochemia Medica* piece—and this sentence is crucial:

> In the interest of full disclosure, I am Jeffrey Beall's direct supervisor at the University of Colorado-Denver's Auraria Library and have been since I began working there in July 2015.

Swauger comments on four aspects of Beall's opinion piece. I'm tempted to quote the whole thing, and certainly encourage you to read it in the original, but I'll excerpt.

Dangerous nostalgia

> At several points, Beall describes a history of scholarly publishing where authority and credibility were known and stable, and from which we have significantly regressed:
>
> > At that time, most journals were generally respected and of good quality, and peer review was taken seriously and managed well. The once-proud scholarly publishing industry is in a state of rapid decline. There is a general sense among scholars that scholarly publishing is collapsing, falling apart, or whatever metaphor one might select that compares the industry to something that was once mighty and respected that later declined rapidly and unexpectedly into an embarrassing heap of debris.
>
> These statements portray a publishing system that I believe never existed. The history of scholarly publishing is less a meritocracy of ideas and more a reflection of who held privilege in society. Access to at least one, and often multiple, intersections of privilege were almost a requisite for being considered to join in the scholarly conversation. Who and what got published was largely determined by established power structures that favored maleness, whiteness, cis-gendered heterosexuality, wealth, the upper class, and Western ethnocentrism. Note that these are still the dominant structures that control our social and scholarly discourse.
>
> More importantly, nostalgia for a time when these power structures were even more entrenched than they are now is dangerous and, if taken seriously, threatens the participation of people typically marginalized in our scholarly record. Beall's implicit call for a return to this previous imagined reality is by far his most concerning position.

OK, so that *was* the whole discussion—and I think it's worth saying.

Predatory publishing is an information literacy problem

That's the second aspect—and I've previously quoted Beall's hyperbolic assertion that predatory publishers pose "the biggest threat to science since the Inquisition." Part of Swauger's commentary:

> Predatory publishing is at once a larger and a smaller problem than Beall claims,… The problem is larger in that his definition of predatory publishing articulates only one kind of unethical practice (the systematic abuse of the Gold OA model), when other practices like exclusionary pricing models, closed-access vanity publishing, the selling of public domain content, and others like them are not addressed. The problem is smaller in that the broader discussion about how predatory publishing is an unprecedented or unique challenge to research or science is misplaced….

What follows is hard to excerpt; I'll just provide the close:

> Just because something was published in a predatory journal doesn't mean that it's false or poor research. Just because something was published in a prestigious closed-access journal doesn't mean that it's true or excellent. Authority isn't about the containers that information comes in, and the solution was never a list of bad containers. The best thing librarianship can do to support science and research is to engage in the inherently messy, dynamic, and important work of systematic information literacy instruction in higher education and research.

Political correctness

In case Beall's love for his profession was ever in doubt, the quote that heads this discussion should help clarify things:

> Beall writes, "Librarianship slavishly follows political correctness and trendiness, so it's no surprise that the profession fell in line with the open-access social movement and attacked those seeking to tell the truth about it."

What's especially lovely about Swauger's response is that, just as I'm delighted to be called a social justice warrior, he *embraces* "political correctness":

> While I don't interpret Beall as sharing this definition, I define political correctness as the act of changing the terms of public discourse by challenging narratives and structures that benefit the powerful or the majority at the expense of the powerless or the minority. Oftentimes, critiques of political correctness manifest when words or ideas that were once acceptable by a dominant group of people aren't acceptable any longer, and when those words or ideas are expressed, the person who expresses them experiences some form of social pressure to stop. This is an uncomfortable experience for that person, and one response to that discomfort (which I believe Beall to be employing above) is to classify that social pressure as overly sensitive, intolerant, or even discriminatory.
>
> Based on the above definition, political correctness is something that I aspire to and is something that I believe librarians have a role in: changing the terms of public discourse and challenging dominate structures of power that disenfranchise the marginalized. In my opinion, this is also the single greatest merit of open access: it can shift the publishing

system to expand its definition of whose voice matters and who can participate in the scholarly record.

Academic freedom

Beall says he was pressured to shut down his blog.

> At no time did I pressure Beall to discontinue his work, or threaten his employment because of his work. In fact, I did everything I could to support his ability to research and publish, and would continue to support him should he decide to publish his blog and website again. The University of Colorado-Denver, the institution for which we both work, released the following statement regarding Beall's website and is worth noting:
>
> > CU Denver disagrees with Jeffrey Beall's assertion that he was pressured by the university to take down his website, scholaryoa.com, earlier this year. We are not aware of anyone at or affiliated with the university who asked Professor Beall to take down his website and blog. Additionally, CU Denver has defended and supported Professor Beall's academic freedom to pursue predatory publishing as part of his scholarship, but also respects the personal decision he made in January to take down the site. His tenured faculty position here at CU Denver was never in jeopardy because of his work researching open access journals or predatory publishers.

There's more, as Swauger calls some of Beall's (carefully footnoted) comments "disrespectful and unprofessional," but he decries both that and those of us who get too snarky about Beall.

Well done. My recollection is that this firm denial never got the coverage and traction that Beall's cries of being pressured did, but that's par for the course.

Why Beall's blacklist of predatory journals died

This lengthy news piece by Paul Basken first appeared September 22, 2017—and I'm linking to *University World News* rather than the original (credited) *Chronicle of Higher Education* for the simplest possible reason: *University World News* will let me read it.

The coverage is *highly* favorable to Beall, right from the get-go:

> Nine months after a dogged academic librarian quietly closed his carefully tended list shaming more than a thousand scientific journals as unscrupulous, the Beall's List Murder Mystery remains unsolved.
>
> Why, after toiling so hard for five years – and creating a resource cherished by scientists wary of exploitative publishers – did the University of Colorado at Denver's Jeffrey Beall abruptly give it all up? Who, or what, forced his hand?

Then there are lots of Possible Culprits and complaints from Beall that his office isn't adequate, but remarkably little indication that the lists might

have been flawed, say, by not providing reasons for inclusion of journals or publishers. (Toward the end of the piece, Beall offers a classic handwave in the best McCarthyite tradition: "he said he had kept specific reasons in particular cases confidential because the details often came from researchers who feared retaliation if their complaints became publicly known." Since he didn't even offer *general* reasons in 87% of cases, that excuse just doesn't fly.

It's a long report, and pieces aren't bad, but it's noteworthy that the only link to a source questioning Beall's work is the grotesque anti-Beall site that I will once again not link to: legitimate criticisms are basically ignored, but Beall gets another chance to show his mettle:

> Having raised his hand at a time the research community seemed to need him, he now puzzles over many aspects of his treatment. Universities might want innovators, he said, but perhaps more importantly they like happy news. "They prefer things like 'Students go to Haiti and dig a well to help poor people' – they love stuff like that," he said. "But they don't like 'Faculty member calls out predatory publishers'."

That the University of Colorado did, in fact, go to some lengths to support him over the years is apparently fake news?

Predatory journals exploit structural weaknesses in scholarly publishing
This "invited comment" by Jeffrey Beall was published online June 1, 2018, in the "life sciences—medicine" section of volume 1 of *4open*, another OA journal. It was accepted 13 days after it was submitted.

Let's see: startup journal: check. Stated subject coverage has nothing to do with the article: check. Accepted within two weeks: check. Predatory? Maybe not…the publisher has a number of fairly expensive OA journals (typically $1,830 APCs in 2017) and a fleet of conference-report journals, the latter representing about 95% of the article total.

Two months later, let's see what else is in this "open access multidisciplinary journal dedicated to publishing high-quality content adhering to excellence in all disciplines of science and research, including materials and engineering": an editorial, a brief article that appears to be an opinion piece, and one Czech article, "Various damage mechanisms in carbon and silicon materials under femtosecond X-ray irradiation."

Anyway, what we have here is another broadside against OA publishing in general and his "predatory" villains in particular. I'm not sure why a fledgling would-be OA megajournal would start out by inviting an attack on OA, but what do I know? A couple of paragraphs should give an indication of Beall's tone:

> The open-access movement has been stuck on promoting open-access as an ideological good rather than objectively evaluating whether it is the best solution to existing problems in scholarly publishing. I think the movement has averted its eyes to the problems and perils of predatory journals, preferring instead to promote open-access and kill off

> subscription journals, despite the fact that thousands of subscription journals perform effective and highly selective peer review, add great value to published articles through copyediting, invest in publisher platforms that promote the articles, and carry on relationships with libraries that ensure articles are indexed in library discovery systems…
>
> Academic librarians have poisoned scholarly communication, using their often state-funded positions to ennoble themselves (and advance their careers) as combatants fighting the good fight against subscription journals (who can argue against free access?), eagerly accepting pay raises each year as they work to collectivize one industry and another, further diminishing the tax base.

Whew.

And Beall gets the final word, strange as it is—because I found one of the two remaining items apparently more interested in attacking *all* pre-publication peer review, and the other (another Beall quotefest, this time from India) was in a publication I've already seen freeze my browser.

Closing Thoughts?

There's already too much here, another in the Crawford tradition of overdoing it—valuable when it means discovering facts not previously in evidence (e.g., the Gold Open Access Journals series, my "gray OA" studies), but possibly leading more to confusion than enlightenment in other cases.

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Masthead

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