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Intersections

Preditorials and Other Questionable Items

Preditorials? That's my name for the increasingly common (especially in medical journals) set of editorials and opinion articles that decry so-called "predatory" journals, their supposed explosive growth, and the way they're supposedly undermining scholarly publishing. That's the first section of what may be the final roundup of items related to questionable journals and the questionable commentaries about them.

Preditorials

I've tagged just a few of many recent preditorials. These things typically have several common characteristics:

- "Predatory" is used without scare quotes or typically any suggestion that maybe, just maybe, the term may be misleading.
- "Predatory" is implicitly defined based on the presence of a journal or publisher on The Lists. And, you know, The Lists are never wrong: Jeffrey Beall apparently knew more about the ethics and details of publishing than everybody else put together.
- The absurdly high Shen/Björk figures for the extent of "predatory" articles are accepted at face value.
- Gold OA is equated with APCs.
- The "one bad apple" policy reigns: one bad journal makes all the publisher's journals bad (the Beall Principle) and every article in any such journal is either worthless or dangerous.

Let's look at a few examples—and this section could be *very* long, especially if I included paywalled items.

When a Journal Is a Scam

This one's called a "Feature," by Debjani Bhattacharyya and Seth Denbo on September 17, 2018 at *Perspectives on History*, the newsmagazine of the American Historical Association. It's not one of the worst examples: it doesn't mention overall article volume or equate gold OA with fees—the latter because it barely discusses OA at all.

It's also interesting because it's in a field where the monograph is still the dominant form—and, indeed, part of it is about the pressure on young scholars to do at least one article *before* the book they really want to do.

> Guidance from advisers and mentors is vital to ensuring that scholarly effort is not wasted. In a personal communication, historian of economics Mary Morgan (London School of Economics) said she advises her students to aim to publish an article or two in thematic journals before their first book…
>
> Historian Jeremy Adelman (Princeton Univ.) advises his graduate students to publish one article in the final stages of their writing. He reasons that the sooner we are introduced to peer review of our scholarship, the stronger our projects become. Mentors and graduate advisers who always offer critical and helpful feedback for the project are also people who have seen the project take shape for five to six years. "A fresh pair of eyes on a piece or argument before defense always makes for a strong dissertation and therefore a better book," observes Adelman.

But the discussion of predatory journals still relies too heavily on Beall and the lists.

> The University of Colorado Denver librarian Jeffrey Beall coined the term "predatory journal" in 2010 to identify journals with low or no standards, published as mere profit-making ventures. While there is no hard-and-fast consensus about what makes a journal or publisher predatory, scholarly communication experts generally agree that journals with a business model that requires authors to pay to publish, that provide little or no peer review or editing, and that put out a low-quality final product fit into this category. They are often characterized by dishonest publishing practices, including phantom editorial boards or even fake names. They often prey on graduate students and junior scholars who, hungry for a publication and tempted by the promise of a speedy turnaround, might be unaware that such practices exist. The victim's scholarship—which could help them get jobs, contribute to knowledge, and engage wider publics—is lost. Ultimately, these journals steal scholarly work and charge us hefty fees for doing so.

That link is to one of the anonymously-maintained shadow sites, with The Lists, *more* publishers and journals added without reasons being given, and occasional annotation, including a general assumption that *DOAJ* listing means the journal's "probably not predatory"—and the rather remarkable

assertion that a commercial publisher taking over a group of "predatory" journals means they're no longer predatory (because reasons?). There's another paragraph that praises The Lists as a helpful tool; there is no recognition that that tool might be fatally defective.

Predatory Publishing: Shedding Light on a Deceptive Industry

This fairly lengthy piece, by Annie Stuart in the July 2018 *EyeNet Magazine* (an organ of the American Academy of Opthalmology), is more of a feature than an editorial, but doesn't lack for the signs. Take the first paragraph:

> Open access journals from publishers, such as *PLOS One*, have been around for years. To broaden access to the latest science, these journals allow readers full access to their online journals free of charge. Although articles undergo rigorous peer review, they are published relatively quickly in order to rapidly disseminate scientific advances. And, in a twist on traditional publishing, the authors pay an open access fee, rather than advertisers or subscribers funding the journal's publication.

There it is: *open access means authors pay a fee*. (I have yet to see a preditorial acknowledge that many subscription journals *also* charge author-side fees such as page charges, color plate charges, excessive-changes charges.) Then we get quotes from various folks—Rick Anderson, editors of non-OA journals, somebody from Elsevier—and the usual uncritical citing of Beall and Shen/Björk:

> From 2011 to 2017, Jeffrey Beall, a librarian at the University of Colorado in Denver, kept a list of "potential, possible, or probable" predatory journals and publishers. Some criticized him for casting his net too wide and "catching" some legitimate journals and publishers. Before shutting down in January 2017, Beall's List included 1,155 publishers and 1,294 journals.[2]
>
> Reporting in *BMC Medicine* in 2015, Shen and Björk used Beall's List to report on the growth of predatory journals. They found an increase in published articles from 53,000 in 2010 to an estimated 420,000 in 2014.[1]

I find this section interesting:

> **Perceptions of bias.** Certain perceptions may have also helped fuel the growth of predatory publishing, said Mr. Winkler. When he was newly appointed as editor-in-chief for the *American Journal of Ophthalmology,* Richard K. Parrish II, MD, commissioned a listening survey[3] of journal reviewers and editorial board members in 2016 to learn what was working well and what might need improvement. "Among other findings, 5% of respondents noted a perception of U.S. bias in acceptance of manuscripts," said Mr. Winkler.
>
> This is supported by a 2014 study by Omobawale et al.[4] that looked at Nigerian academics' publishing practices and their increasing use of

> predatory journals, he said. They found that a national trend of requiring publication in "international" journals for promotion, coupled with perceived difficulty of publishing in those journals, fueled the growth of predatory publishing.
>
> The point of this requirement is to encourage publication in journals with rigorous peer review in order to contribute to the advancement of science—and to reflect well on the author and his or her institution, said Dr. Legodi, "But with the emergence of predatory journals, the pressure to fulfill this requirement may result in just the opposite." (See "Dangers of Deceptive Publishing," below.)
>
> **Publish or perish paradigm.** Where there's a pressure to publish, especially in other countries, deceptive journals are an easy route for authors to get something published, said Dr. Holland. The majority of papers ending up in predatory journals are a particular phenotype, added Dr. McLeod. "Demographically, many come from developing countries where there is a high premium on having an inflated publication record for the obvious reasons of securing promotion and advancement."
>
> However, a recent survey of nearly 2,000 articles in more than 200 suspected predatory journals challenges this view. Contrary to Shen and Björk, who found the predatory problem was contained to a few countries—mainly in Asia and Africa[1]—Moher and colleagues found that nearly half the contributing authors came from high- and upper-middle-income countries. Of the sampled articles, 15% came from the United States—second only to India—and the U.S. National Institutes of Health funded many of these papers.[5]

As I read that, it's saying that the hot journals are biased to the Global North—and, separately, that while Shen/Björk found that most "predatory" articles were from the Global South (a finding as sound as their numbers?), others who look at this don't find such a bias.

There's quite a bit more. As usual, *no* research or writing suggesting flaws in The List or the inflated article counts is cited.

The problem of predatory journals

This piece, by Ken Budd on April 9, 2019 in *AAMC News* (Association of American Medical Colleges), isn't exactly a preditorial, but it does have some odd slants.

Here's the tease:

> The number of illegitimate journals is exploding — and they could hurt your career. Here's how to avoid falling prey.

There are no numbers to back up that scary statement, and indeed just about the only number in the piece is itself questionable:

> [A]uthors frequently learn about fees — which can range from $1,000 to $10,000 — only after their paper has been accepted.

On one hand, not making fees clear up front is an absolute sign of a questionable journal. On the other: $10,000? Really? Without at least one example, I find that questionable. (Also: most of the journals in my "Gray OA" study charged less than $1,000, and none asked more than $3,600. The average fee per published article among these non-*DOAJ* journals in the first half of 2016, excluding no-fee journals, was $333.)

Instead of numbers, we get scary statements:

> So just how big is the problem?
>
> "It's enormous," says Albertine. "Out-of-control enormous."

There's the usual uncritical commentary on Beall—but I give this writer credit for *not* saying that all gold OA involves fees. But then:

> That pay-to-publish model opens the door to journals possibly accepting marginal papers to increase their income — and makes it hard to distinguish between legitimate journals that charge and those that are predatory. Some lower-quality journals may have a legitimate academic interest but lack the significant resources necessary for peer review, notes David Sklar, MD, editor-in-chief of *Academic Medicine*. Others are only focused on profit.

Number of times I've seen the argument that author-side fees tend to encourage publication of "marginal" papers to increase revenue: Scary big. Number of times that's been counterbalanced with the *known fact* that big publishers justify their higher-than-inflation price increases for subscriptions and big deals largely on the basis of publishing more articles, thus creating *precisely* the same incentive to accept "lesser" articles to boost revenues: Outside of my own writing and those of some other OA advocates, I've never seen that.

And then there's this:

> **Eroding science**
>
> Open access could soon become more prevalent. For example, in September 2018, 11 agencies that award around $8.8 billion in annual research grants announced that they would require the scientists they fund to make their papers free to read upon publication, starting in 2020. The initiative, called Plan S, comes from funders in 11 different European countries. And the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation initiated an open-access policy in 2015 providing unrestricted access to and reuse of all peer-reviewed published research funded by the foundation.
>
> "This is causing a massive shift in the way journals work," McKinney says of the push for open access. "Now the incentive for journals is to publish more articles, and sometimes to lower their standards so that

> they can publish more and get more revenue." There's also an increasing movement toward the use of preprint servers, where drafts of articles are placed online before they're peer reviewed.
>
> Such changes concern editors like Albertine. He worries about journals that cut corners and about researchers who may be tempted to sidestep the time-honored process of peer review.

That's not a head-on attack on OA and Plan S (I have *very* mixed feelings about Plan S, but that's another discussion), but it's damn close.

It's far from the worst writeup I've seen, to be sure.

Open Access Journals in the Middle East and Iran

This opinion piece, by Farrokh Habibzadeh on April 11, 2019 in the *Journal of Korean Medical Science*, obviously isn't a standard preditorial, given that it appears in an OA journal (with an $850 fee at the time of this writing). The author edits an Iranian medical journal and is a past president of WAME, an association of medical editors.

Why is this opinion piece appearing in a Korean journal? Your guess is as good as mine. (Opinion pieces don't have fees in *JKMS*.)

It's an odd piece. There's this paragraph:

> Various types of OA have so far been proposed[2]; important types of OA include gold OA, where authors pay an article processing charge (APC) to publish their article in an OA journal; green OA, where articles are self-archived in an institutional repository or disciplinary repositories like *ArXiv*; platinum OA (also called diamond OA), where articles are published in an OA journal without paying any APCs; and hybrid OA, which is a combination of subscription and gold OA models. The OA movement was meant to provide users publicly with free search of and access to scholarly publications and use them for any lawful purposes. However, it comes with many drawbacks discussed below.

The drawbacks? As far as I can tell, that's about "predatory" publishing (of course without scare quotes)—and also an implication that university-published OA journals in Iran may be there for the wrong reasons:

> This large number of journals published by a scientific institution such as a university in a developing country, is because the *raison d'être* for scientific publishing in developing countries is quite different from that in developed nations.
>
> Publishing a scientific journal by a research institution in Iran, such as a university, is considered a prestige and brings a lot of credit for the institution in its national ranking. The journal also serves as a forum for publishing the articles of the faculty members of the institution, an important item in their career promotion.[3, 4] All, but a few, of these journals are OA. In fact, almost all biomedical journals published in the

> Middle East (and many other developing countries) have been published and distributed internationally gratis long before the era of the Internet, online publishing, and the OA movement. They have merely published for enjoying the prestige and bringing promotion credit for the institution and the faculty members.

Ah, but it's footnoted…with two citations from *the same author* (as are five of the fifteen references).

We get a pretty clear implication that small journals, especially small OA journals, are inherently troublesome:

> {I}n prestigious OA journals, the decision-making editors are blinded to the submitted manuscript APC status before making any verdicts about the manuscript. Considering the few number of staff (commonly two or three, at most) in journal editorial offices in many developing countries, institution of such an effective blinding process is very hard, if possible at all, and the temptation to receive the APCs would unconsciously incline the editor to accept the submitted manuscript for publication.

A reality check here: *very* few of the "gray OA" journals are from Iran (15 active when I studied them)—but as of January 1, 2019 there are 432 Iranian journals in *DOAJ*, 382 of them university-published (and only 72 of the 432 with fees, mostly very low fees).

Here's the start of the closing paragraph, with what appears to be the author's real motive:

> I believe under the current circumstances, to better use the limited resources exist in developing countries, the number of scientific journals should be limited[3]; the regulations encouraging the research institutions and universities to establish and publish journals for their credit should be revised; and, the national and regional auditing bodies should consider the standards set by Good Publication Practice more seriously and do not grant permission the low-quality journals to publish.

Yes, that "3" is another self-reference. As far as I can see, the argument is to kill off most university-published OA journals in developing countries. Not the author's, of course…

The Rise of Junk Science

This "cover story" by Alex Gillis in the June 2019 *The Walrus* is too long to be a preditorial, but it's also a classic. It includes the primary signs (unabashed praise for Beall without any questions raised, the assumption that any journal/publisher on The Lists is *and always will be* junk, accepting the "420,000" figure uncritically) and goes further. Although Gillis never says so explicitly, the implication is that all OA—even published by major commercial publishers—is likely to be junk.

It's partly a scare story based on Eduardo Franco's attempts to…well, here's the lede:

> In early 2017, Eduardo Franco, a professor in the Faculty of Medicine at McGill University, sent an email to his colleagues, warning them of a global "epidemic" of scams by academic journals that was corrupting research and, in effect, endangering the public. As head of the oncology department, where he oversees approximately 230 people, Franco promised to comb through every CV and annual evaluation in the department to flag any colleagues' resumés that listed journals and conferences that weren't reputable or, in some cases, even real. He didn't spell out the consequences, but the implication was clear: the faculty members would be held accountable.

Franco says it's so bad "there's never been a worse time to be a scientist," and the article then introduces OA as follows:

> Traditionally, five publishers have dominated this $25 billion industry: Wiley-Blackwell, Springer, Taylor & Francis, RELX Group (formerly Reed Elsevier), and Sage. But, before the turn of the century, a new model of online publishing, "open access," began opening doors for countless academics—and for thousands of scams in the process.
>
> The new online model created an opportunity for profits: the more papers publishers accepted, the more money they generated from authors who paid to be included—$150 to $2,000 per paper, if not more, and often with the support of government grants. Researchers also saw substantial benefits: the more studies they posted, the more positions, promotions, job security, and grant money they received from universities and agencies. Junk publishers—companies that masquerade as real publishers but accept almost every submission and skip quality editing—elbowed their way in.

Examples of these "dangerous, flawed" studies include "bogus research that vaccines cause autism." Betcha' didn't know that *The Lancet* was a Gold OA journal, did you?

It gets worse:

> These companies have become so successful, Franco says, that for the first time in history, scientists and scholars worldwide are publishing more fraudulent and flawed studies than legitimate research—maybe ten times more. Approximately 10,000 bogus journals run rackets around the world, with thousands more under investigation, according to Cabell's International, a publishing-services company. "We're publishing mainly noise now," Franco laments. "It's nearly impossible to hear real signals, to discover real findings."

The writer is uncritically (there are absolutely *no* questioning voices in this article) repeating the outlandish (in my opinion) claim that there may be *ten times* as many "fraudulent and flawed studies"—all, of course, in OA journals—as legitimate ones. (This is one of the few times I've seen the claim that essentially all articles in questionable journals are fraudulent or flawed;

it's *absolutely* the first time I've seen it asserted that as much as 91% of published articles are junk science. Either Franco is saying that most articles in most journals are junk, or he's claiming something like 20-30 million annual junk articles. And I thought Shen/Björk's numbers were absurd!)

Here's one: "In 2018, evidence from a lawsuit against Monsanto (now part of Bayer), then one of the world's largest seed companies, showed that it had been funding junk studies that discredited legitimate research about its cancer-causing herbicide, Roundup." We are, I assume, to assume that all these articles appeared in predatory journals? I suspect not…

There's a lot more here, too much to fisk. A few highlights:

> Journals published by the likes of Omics are relatively easy for Franco to spot. But there are thousands of publishers, especially newer ones, that sit in a "grey zone," as Lucy Lee, dean of the Faculty of Science at the University of the Fraser Valley, calls it. The editing processes of these mediocre journals mimic those of legitimate journals, but with flawed standards. While junk journals are outright frauds, the mediocre ones, such as those run by Hindawi (based in Egypt) and Frontiers and MDPI (both based in Switzerland), publish credible papers alongside questionable work—and sometimes allow authors to manipulate their own peer reviews.

Later, we have the unquestioned quotation of the "420,000" figure. We're told that Big Pharma regularly uses junk journals to push drugs. And:

> One of many junk studies that still disturbs Franco appeared in 2016 in *Scientific Reports*, an open-access journal from Springer, a reputable publisher, that accepts a range of high- and low-quality papers. The study suggested that the vaccine for the human papillomavirus (HPV) can cause neurological damage: scientists had injected the vaccine into twenty-four mice and found changes in two parts of the mice's brains. Franco is an expert in cancer epidemiology, including that of cancers associated with HPV, and he's familiar with the HPV vaccine, which has been proven to prevent cervical cancer in women. He spied the flaws in the paper immediately—though a casual reader might never have noticed them.

The strong suggestion: it's OA, *so it's suspicious*. Because, you know, fatally flawed studies have never ever appeared in subscription journals. I'm also charmed by the apparent equation of mediocre and fraudulent.

The author suggests Cabell's lists (apparently Cabell, a private firm, can be trusted implicitly). *DOAJ* is never mentioned.

The piece closes with more praise for Beall and his ilk and this:

> Franco's department may have made improvements for now, but around the world, junk studies are increasingly drowning out real research—not the other way around.

Sigh.

Readers beware! Predatory journals are infiltrating citation databases
This editorial, by Anna Severin and Nicola Low on July 24, 2019 in *International Journal of Public Health*, says it right up front. Namely, some journals on The Lists are also in PubMed or Scopus:

> With citation databases already contaminated, researchers, academic institutions, journals, publishers and research funders will need additional strategies to prevent the further spread of predatory publications.

The editorial touts the need for rigorous quality control and scientific method, so it's useful to see the scientific methods involved in determining that the journals found in Scopus and PubMed were in fact predatory.

Turns out that's easy: the studies assume that Beall's lists are 100% accurate. No further study required!

I'd be interested in the extent to which Infallible Great Man standards are used for other findings in scientific journals… "No need to investigate further, Dr. X says it's so!"

The open access mandate: Be careful what you wish for
This editorial, by Bruno Agustini and Michael Berk on July 21, 2019 at *Australian & New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry* (no, it's not an Elsevier Special: this one's from Sage and presumably authentic), is essentially a flat-out attack on OA in the context of Plan S. Consider:

> One of the main concerns regarding a fully open-access model is the quality of open-access journals. The Directory of Open Access Journals now lists 13,505 journals, with numbers increasing fast. While some are undoubtedly excellent, a massive majority and growing number are anything but. The precise proportions of quality and predatory categories are hard to determine, but a disturbingly large number compromise the scientific endeavour. While exemplar exceptions exist, the open-access business model is incentivised to prioritise quantity over quality.
>
> The dangers of predatory journals for the scientific world cannot be underestimated (Moher et al., 2017). Scientific integrity, quality and trustworthiness must be a *sin ne qua non* condition for editors and publishers everywhere. With the speed and reach of information spread in the online world, poor-quality research or wrong interpretations (whether by mistake or veiled interests) can create waves of dangerous misinformation with profound consequences, like in the recent case of vaccine scepticism. This initiative from some of the largest European funding agencies, and from the biggest funding agencies in the world if progressed, might embolden existing predatory publishers and create a new wave of mercenary and mediocre open-access journals, with the potential to severely damage the integrity of the scientific publishing process.

A *massive majority* of journals *in DOAJ "anything but"* excellent. And it sure seems to be implied that *DOAJ* has loads of "predatory" journals. And, once

again, we're reminded that vaccine skepticism springs from that flawed study published in that notorious predatory OA journal *The Lancet*. Oh, wait…

These writers make a clear equation between price/costs and quality: "The very best journals are very expensive to operate" (citing *NEJM*'s bloated staff—77 *non-editorial* employees—as an example).

Does this editorial explicitly say that all gold OA involves fees? Not in so many words, but there's zero recognition of other possibilities, and this gem of a prediction regarding peer review:

> Behavioural economics suggests that a pure open-access model would severely compromise peer review, the bedrock of scientific quality and integrity. The rationale is straightforward: people (as well as animals) have intrinsic 'inequity aversion'. In other words, they consistently react emotionally and forego possible rewards if they perceive unfairness in an interaction. In this case, if one publishes for free, one is more tempted to review for free. Finding willing free reviewers for costly open-access journals will probably become increasingly difficult, an ongoing issue that has paralleled the rise of the open-access movement to date and is likely to get worse as a consequence of the proposed model. There is already a declining engagement with peer review, with many journals increasingly struggling to find quality reviewers. This is in all likelihood driven (at least in part) by the behavioural consequences of the rise of the open-access movement, something that one can predict will worsen. The fracture of the *quid pro quo* agreement that one provides one's services to peer review willingly and for free in exchange for free publication and review of one's own work can have severe consequences. If in the future journals have to move to paid reviewers (a predictable consequence of having to pay for publishing), this will further shift costs to authors and add another whole level of bias into the system.

Whew. As long as you can pretend that your university isn't actually paying for subscriptions, current publishing is "free." The next paragraph says *explicitly* that OA journals have "generally lower thresholds to publishing mediocre or frankly poor research." Charming.

Predatory Open Access Journals: Risks of Association

This piece by Gary Henscheid appeared January 1, 2019 in *The Language Teacher*. It's a doozy. Consider the first two paragraphs:

> Open access journals can be broadly defined as those freely available to readers online. While they are lauded by proponents for improving access to information, not all are completely open. Many offer access to some content while restricting access to other articles, and still others provide full online access after a certain time period. JALT publications, for example, are available to non-JALT members after six months.

> Multiple studies indicate that open access research is significantly more likely to be cited than research published in non-open-access journals. There are two major open access models - those that charge authors to publish, and those funded under any of multiple other business models. Those charging authors are known as "gold open access", and this article investigates the ethics of paying to publish. The primary concern is that objectivity in the peer-review process is compromised by profit motives. University of Colorado at Denver librarian Jeffrey Beall dubbed them "predatory journals," and his account of them is discussed next.

So the writer's expanding OA to include not only "hybrid" but also "eventual access." That's not quite as bad as "Those charging authors are known as 'gold open access'" which is just plain wrong.

The next few paragraphs are wholly uncritical quotes from Beall or extrapolations from Beall, e.g.:

> Since the advent of predatory publishing, there have been tens of thousands of researchers who have earned Masters and Ph.D. degrees, been awarded other credentials and certifications, received tenure and promotion, and gotten employment – that they otherwise would not have been able to achieve – all because of the easy article acceptance that the pay-to-publish journals offer. (Beall, 2017, p. 275)

There's pretty much an assumption that all fee journals (already equated with gold OA) are questionable, and there's this:

> There may be good people who will maintain high standards while using author fees to provide a quality journal to the public for free. But for every one of them, there will be 10 more who take any paper without real standards and those who are rejected from the "good journal" will flock to the others because they need to publish quickly and don't have the time or inclination to work to improve their writing ability enough to get into the "good journal." (E. Forsythe, personal communication; June 20, 2018)

There it is again: *91% or more* of fee-based OA journals don't actually have peer review. Evidence? Who needs evidence? And consider:

> One resource for legitimizing open access journals is the Directory of Open Access Journals [https://doaj.org/], a comprehensive database that attempts to exclude predatory journals. The ICIJ will hopefully soon be releasing names of the thousands of predators that it has identified, but ThinkCheckSubmit [https://thinkchecksubmit.org/] provides helpful tips for avoiding predators as well.

That first sentence, with "legitimizing" and "attempts to exclude," feels a *lot* like damning with faint praise. But then, the author apparently believes that "predatory" journals go beyond The Lists—and is suspicious of university-published journals:

> Paying to publish is legal, but Beall and other investigators have questioned the ethics of publishers whose reviews are tainted by the influence of money, as many on Beall's lists and others are strongly suspected to be. Though Beall discontinued publishing his lists, they are still considered authoritative by many, and those and other lists like them are readily available online.
>
> JALT publications are widely recognized in Japan, and since neither they nor university journals accept payments to publish, these are probably two of the better options for authors here. Standards in university journals vary widely. Those for the elite universities may be relatively high, while other universities publish materials without any review at all. Nevertheless, subjecting one's work to peer-review is prudent and well worth the extra effort.

I didn't fisk the Beall section, but *of course* the author says Beall was pressured by his employer to abandon the lists, which his boss has denied. But, of course, his boss isn't Beall.

Controversies

A range of items dealing with controversies around questionable journals and the like.

Pointing the Finger at Colleagues

This one, by Colleen Flaherty on November 26, 2018 in *Inside Higher Ed*, is a bit tough—partly because it's impossible to discuss the article it's based on (which I tried to do a year ago) since it's closed access.

The subject is Derek Pyne, who wrote "The Rewards of Predatory Publications at a Small Business School" in 2017, looking at the publications of his colleagues at Thompson Rivers University. Here's 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.

And here's perhaps the key paragraph in Flaherty's story:

> As a result of that 2017 paper and the media attention that followed, Pyne says, he's been effectively banned from campus since May. He may visit only for a short list of reasons, such as health care. Teaching is out

> and so, too, is the library. It's unclear when, or if, Pyne will be allowed to resume his normal duties.

If, in fact, the journals in question were known to be fraudulent and if, in fact, his article is the only reason he's been banned, then *of course* it should be an issue of academic freedom.

But is that what's going on?

First, of course, we have no idea whether the journals in question are fraudulent or only happened to be on some iteration of The Lists (I have my suspicions). If the latter, then he's attacking colleagues based on questionable or nonexistent evidence—and I would argue that any paper based on the assumption that The List is authoritative is so far from being academic that the usual freedoms may not apply. But that's me.

Second, it's not *at all* clear that the article resulted in the ban.

> Pyne, who has been at Thompson Rivers since 2010, was always a squeaky wheel in the department, once getting into a shouting match with a former chair about academic programs, for example. He'd also had earlier email skirmishes with his dean and a colleague about his interest in predatory publications.

…and, later,

> Around the same time, Pyne began to criticize new graduate programs within the business school. Internally, he told colleagues that they were more like undergraduate programs in quality. He said as much externally, including in comments posted to a local news website, where he also mentioned his findings on predatory publications…

and, closing the article:

> "I can see making the mistake once," he said of publishing in a predatory publication. "But when you start getting multiple mistakes, people doing this six, seven, eight, nine times, you have to wonder if they're really qualified to do research to begin with."

So is (or was) Pyne banned for legitimate but controversial research, or for slandering his colleagues, shouting at people, and otherwise misbehaving? The university president says it's the latter, as quoted in a Vancouver *Sun* article from November 2018:

> "Much of the media attention has incorrectly stated that faculty member Dr. Derek Pyne was disciplined for his research. This is not the case," said Bovis-Cnossen.
>
> "The discipline imposed is related to matters which I am unable to comment on due to both employment and privacy law. But I do want to be clear, to set the record straight, that academic freedom is fully protected at TRU under the collective agreement with our faculty association. Action taken against Dr. Pyne was not related to his specific research, the dissemination of his research, or the exercising of his right to academic freedom."

Blowback Against a Hoax

Another Colleen Flaherty piece in *Inside Higher Ed*, this time on January 8, 2019—but it's a different professor at a different university. More specifically, it's Peter Boghossian at Portland State and the "Grievance" hoax. Since I devoted 13 pages to that hoax in the November 2018 issue, I won't go over it again—but do note that the November 2018 essay was about ethics, and my personal opinion was that the study was at best questionable. (It was aimed at discrediting whole academic fields, not just 'exposing' journals.) The first paragraphs sum it up:

> A hoax revealing that academic journals had accepted fake papers on topics from canine "rape culture" in dog parks to "fat bodybuilding" to an adaption of *Mein Kampf* met with applause and scorn in the fall. Fans of the project tended to agree with the hoaxers that critical studies scholars will validate anything aligned with their politics. Critics said that the researchers acted in bad faith, wasting editors' and reviewers' time and very publicly besmirching academe in the process: the story was covered by nearly every major news outlet.
>
> Now the controversy has flared up again, with news that one of the project's authors faces disciplinary action at his home institution. Peter Boghossian, an assistant professor of philosophy at Portland State University and the only one of three researchers on the project to hold a full-time academic position, was found by his institutional review board to have committed research misconduct. Specifically, he failed to secure its approval before proceeding with research on human subjects -- in this case, the journal editors and reviewers he was tricking with his absurd but seemingly well-researched papers. Some seven of 20 were published in gender studies and other journals. Seven were rejected. Others were pending before the spoof was uncovered.

[I would note in passing that Flaherty's article consistently refers to "Aero Magazine," but the URL and site make it clear that it's *Areo Magazine*.]

As you might expect, Boghossian's response to suggestions that the research (or "research") was inappropriate:

> Boghossian said in a statement that Portland State, "like many college campuses, is becoming an ideological community and I've demonstrated that I don't fit the mold. I truly hope the administration puts its institutional weight behind the pursuit of truth but I've been given no indication that's what they intend to do."

Here's what a group of professors had to say:

> "The 'hoaxes' are simply lies peddled to journals, masquerading as articles," wrote the group of about a dozen professors. "They are designed not to critique, educate or inspire change in flawed systems, but rather to humiliate entire fields while the authors gin up publicity for themselves without having made any scholarly contributions whatsoever.

> Chronic and pathological, unscholarly behavior inside an institution of higher education brings negative publicity to the institution as well as the honest scholars who work there. Worse yet, it jeopardizes the students' reputations, as their degrees in the process may become devalued."

There's more to the article. I'll close with Joel Christensen's comment:

> Over all, Christensen said he and Sears believe that Boghossian "wants to have it both ways." That is, publicly presenting his project as a "rigorous study that exposed flaws in the peer-review system" while also "claiming that the hoax wasn't a genuine study, and therefore IRB approval doesn't apply."
>
> "We think that he did commit academic fraud, by design, and that some professional sanctions might be warranted," Christensen continued. Boghossian and his colleagues "did misrepresent themselves, they did falsify their evidence and they did commit a serious infraction of research misconduct by deceiving these editors, wasting the time of the readers and then publicly slandering the journals and their fields. It is the right of any university to investigate fraud perpetrated by its employees."
>
> Still, Christensen said, "We doubt that this rises to the level of an offense warranting termination. And the bar for professional sanctions should be very high in the case of an academic with academic freedom."

By now, I'm satisfied that ethical concerns only apply to one side; that's clearly true in politics in general, and maybe also for academic politics.

What Value Do Journal Whitelists and Blacklists Have in Academia?
I'd like to be a lot more positive about this article, by Jaime A. Texeira da Silva and Panagiotis Tsigaris in the November 2018 *Journal of Academic Librarianship* (the article is OA), but I can't—at least partly because of something in the abstract:

> This paper aims to address the issue of predatory publishing, sensu lato. To achieve this, we offer our perspectives, starting initially with some background surrounding the birth of the concept, even though the phenomenon may have already existed long before the popularization of the term "predatory publishing". The issue of predation or "predatory" behavior in academic publishing is no longer limited to open access (OA). Many of the mainstream publishers that were exclusively subscription-based are now evolving towards a state of complete OA. Academics seeking reliable sources of journals to publish their work tend to rely on a journal's metrics such as citations and indexing, and on whether it is blacklisted or whitelisted. Jeffrey Beall raised awareness of the risks of "predatory" OA publishing, and his blacklists of "predatory" OA journals and publishers began to be used for official purposes to distinguish valid from perceived invalid publishing venues. We initially reflect on why we believe the blacklists created by Beall were

> flawed, primarily due to the weak set of criteria confusing non-predatory with true predatory journals leading to false positives and missing out on blacklisting true predatory journals due to false negatives. Historically, most critiques of "predatory publishing" have relied excessively on Beall's blacklists to base their assumptions and conclusions but there is a need to look beyond these. There are currently a number of blacklists and whitelists circulating in academia, but they all have imperfections, such as the resurrected Beall blacklists, Crawford's OA gray list based on Beall's lists, Cabell's new blacklist with about 11,000 journals, the DOAJ with about 11,700 OA journals, and UGC, with over 32,600 journals prior to its recent (May 2018) purge of 4305 journals. The reader is led into a discussion about blacklists' lack of reliability, using the scientific framework of conducting research to assess whether a journal could be predatory at the pre- and post-study levels. We close our discussion by offering arguments why we believe blacklists are academically invalid.

As you may guess, my problem is with the antepenultimate sentence, beginning "There are currently…" To wit: There is *no such thing* as "Crawford's OA gray list based on Beall's list." My investigation of the journals in The Lists is not and was never a graylist, blacklist or anything of the sort. Yes, I made the dataset available as part of good research practice, but I find it frankly offensive for it to be called a blacklist (or a whitelist for that matter). I'll also suggest that *DOAJ* is about as "perfect" as any whitelist is ever likely to be—and in the end I'm inclined to agree that blacklists are academically invalid.

Trying to get past the extent to which the labeling of a *study* of non-*DOAJ* journals as itself being a blacklist damages the article in which that mislabeling occurs, do I want to say more about this?

Not much, as it turns out. The authors claim that *DOAJ* removed journals based on The Lists and Bohannon's sting, but I know of no evidence that the former is true (although the latter may be): *DOAJ* applied stricter criteria to all journals starting in 2014. That claim troubles me, but let it go for now.

I find it interesting that, while one footnote links to one of my studies, nothing of mine was considered relevant enough to be in the set of fifty references (which includes fourteen Teixeira items, a 28% self-reference ratio), but by now I'm used to that.

Just in case there's any question: I have *never* published a blacklist of journals and never plan to. To suggest otherwise is offensive.

Revisiting the Term Predatory Open Access Publishing

This opinion piece, by Aamir Raoof Memom on March 18, 2019 in the *Journal of Korean Medical Science*, is another one I would like to admire more than I do.

I'd like to admire the article because of things like the second paragraph:

> Given the history of errors in white and black listings, and the ongoing criticism and controversy surrounding them, would it be appropriate to say that the term "predatory" is a misnomer? Recently, scholars have questioned the validity of the term and have proposed alternatives in order to avoid stigmatizing legitimate, low-quality journals or journals that have not yet been indexed.[4] Additionally, when non-serious scholars seek out predatory journals as an easy and fast route to publication in order to increase their number of publications, and consequently support them through the payment of article processing charges, the term 'predatory' appears to be out of context.[4, 10] It is more like a symbiotic relation between researchers who try to cheat the system, and greedy publishers.[4]

But as I read through the fairly long piece, I find "predatory" *without* scare quotes used repeatedly—indeed, there are fifty occurrences of the term without scare quotes and only five cases where quotation marks are used.

Then there's Table 1, a proposed set of criteria to determine whether a journal is "predatory," legitimate but low-quality, or high-quality. The first and third rows of that table appear to put *PLOS One* and all OA megajournals squarely in the "deceptive" category—since all high-quality journals supposedly have narrow scopes and publish a limited number of papers per issue. (In fact, most active OA journals that aren't in *DOAJ* publish relatively few papers—only 4% of active journals published 124 or more articles in 2017.) For that matter, small journals with small editorial boards are consigned to "low-quality legitimate" at best—and email article submission can never be part of a high-quality journal. Really?

I'll stop there.

Academics Raise Concerns About Predatory Journals on PubMed

This one's a relatively brief news piece, by Diana Kwon on May 19, 2019 in *The Scientist*. The gist: there are articles in PubMed that appear in journals on The Lists. And some academics are intent on seeing to it that anybody who does not offer proper obeisance to The Great Man is punished for the heresy.

Here's an interesting paragraph:

> Sheehan tells *The Scientist* that the NLM is aware of concerns that articles from non-reputable journals are entering PubMed through that route. "The fact that these articles have to be on PMC is a bit of a challenge," he adds. "At the same time, those are articles that result in research that was funded by the NIH, so there's some ability to recognize that there was a very selective peer review process that occurred in the funding of the research that was reported." Still, to try to curtail this problem, the NIH issued guidelines to help authors identify credible journals in which to publish their work in 2017.

Those guidelines mention Think Check Submit and an FTC publication noting OMICS, but do not (to their credit) suggest using The Lists.

There's this:

> The concerns raised about low-quality content on PMC seeping onto PubMed spurred Peace Williamson, a medical librarian at the at the University of Texas at Arlington, and her colleague to investigate the composition of articles on PubMed, as well as quality-control procedures NLM had in place. Their study, which was published in *JMLA* in January, revealed that more than 90 percent of the content on PubMed came from MEDLINE, and that 85 percent of author-deposited accepted manuscripts were published in MEDLINE journals.
>
> Based on their findings, Williamson says she personally doesn't feel that the presence of predatory publishers on PubMed is a pressing problem. Still, "it would be better to be able to [identify] how things got into PubMed," she tells *The Scientist*. "Being more apparent about that would be helpful to the user."
>
> The presence of predatory journals may be worse on some other repositories of scholarly literature. Catherine Smith, a professor of information sciences at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, tells *The Scientist* that in a preliminary analysis, which she presented at the Medical Library Association conference last year, she and her colleague found that PubMed actually had fewer articles from predatory publishers than other digital resources, such as Scopus and Google Scholar. "I thought the NLM did pretty well in this study," Smith says.

I regard the first sentence of the last paragraph as unfounded guesswork, but of course "may be" makes it all good. I do like the final paragraph:

> Ultimately, it's important for both authors and readers to be mindful of the journals they submit to or the articles that they read, Williamson says. While there is some level of quality expectation with resources such as PubMed, "even things that get published in the *New England Journal of Medicine* get retracted—so the onus is on us to practice good critical appraisal methods when we look at literature."

Indeed.

Predatory journals in the firing line

This item, by Edwin Naida and Sharon Dell on May 31, 2018 in *University World News* Africa Edition, is about a South African government attempt to eliminate academic subsidies for articles appearing in "predatory" journals. Without going through the article in detail, I did note a couple of oddities. For example:

> "The majority of these publications were published in 2014 and 2015, which pre-date the existence of the Beall's list," he said.

Well, no, that's simply not true. The lists began no later than 2012. And what makes a journal predatory? You got it:

> He said that during the course of research for ASSAf in 2016, which informed the June 2017 article titled "The extent of South African authored articles in predatory journals" by Mouton and Valentine, published in the *South African Journal of Science*, it became clear that 40 or so journals listed by Beall also appeared on the DHET-approved lists at that time, particularly the IBSS list.

Isn't it convenient that there's one infallible authority on unworthy journals? Oh yes, *of course* the journals were then removed from the DHET-approved lists, since The Great Man was never wrong and no "predatory" journal can ever improve.

Who is Actually Harmed by Predatory Publishers?

Martin Paul Eve and Ernesto Priego published this article on August 13, 2017 in *triple C*. Here's 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.

Right off the bat, the at least occasional use of scare quotes around the magic phrase is heartening, as is the conclusion. So, also, this:

> This is the origin of the article processing charge (APC) business model for gold open access (OA) (although note that APCs are not the only business model for gold open access. See Look and Pinter 2010; Eve 2015.)

The bulk of the article follows the title; it doesn't focus on whether journals actually *are* "predatory," but that's not the aim. I won't comment on the article in general. I certainly agree with the argument that judging scholars for promotion and tenure based on *where* they publish, rather than *what* they publish, is an awful practice—but I'm not an academic, so it doesn't affect me. I absolutely love this turn of phrase (which sets these authors apart from Beall, who argues that *all* "predatory" journals are OA):

> [M]ost predatory publishers are open access, even if most open access journals are not predatory.

Since they speak of "publishers" rather than "journals," I won't argue with the first clause (a case can be made that most "predatory" journals are, in fact, not OA—but that's close to the case that *all* journals are at least potentially questionable). Here's the full 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.

By the way: these authors include as references all items referred to, not discriminating against those not in Proper Journals—thus, I do have one reference. (The one that seems to get cited in preference to all my other work related to The Lists, but never mind…)

Graylists for academic publishing

I certainly don't always agree with Dr. Zen Faulkes' posts, but in this case—posted June 7, 2019 at *NeuroDojo*—I certainly applaud most of what's being said. (Note that the post has *nothing* to do with my badly-named study of "gray OA journals," which is absolutely definitely positively *not* a graylist or intended as such; I have no reason to believe that Faulkes is even aware of that study, or should be.)

I'm tempted to quote the whole post (it's relatively brief and it would be legal to do so), but I won't: it's worth reading in the original. I will quote the beginning and end:

> Lots of academics are upset by bad journals, which are often labelled "predatory." This is maybe not a great name for them, because it implies people publishing in them are unwilling victims, and we know that a lot are not.
>
> Lots of scientists want guidance about which journals are credible and which are not. And for the last few years, there's been a lot of interests in lists of journals. Blacklists spell out all the bad journals, whitelists give all the good ones.
>
> The desire for lists might seem strange if you're looking at the problem from the point of view of an author. You know what journals you read, what journals your colleagues publish in, and so on. But part of the desire for lists comes when you have to evaluate journals as part of looking at someone else's work, like when you're on a tenure and promotion committee.
>
> …
>
> Academic publishing is a complex field. We should **not** expect all journals to fall cleanly into two easily recognizable categories of "Good guys" and "Bad guys" – no matter how much we would like it to be that easy.
>
> It's always surprising to me that academics, who will nuance themselves into oblivion on their own research, so badly want "If / then" binary solutions to publishing and career advancement.
>
> If you're going to have blacklists and whitelists, you should have graylists, too. There are going to be journals that have some problematic practices but that are put out by people with no ill intent (unlike "predatory" journals which deliberately misrepresent themselves).

Or not have blacklists at all…

Some thoughts on Open Access' 'Bad Journals' Problem and the APC Model

We'll close this section with an interesting piece by Ryan Regier on March 31, 2019 at *A Way of Thinking*—interesting, but also difficult for reasons that have little to do with "predatory." The start:

> I'm always a bit surprised the way some researchers use the term 'predatory' to refer to any and all open access journals they think are of lower quality. Since trying to rebalance the conversation around these journals is kinda my shtick, I used to push back pretty hard on this, but I've been rethinking it There's been a move lately to move to using the term "questionable publishers" when broadly referring to these journals. That way you can talk about bad journals and 'journals that are actually trying to scam you' together without conflating the two like 'predatory" does.
>
> I'm not sure though. "Questionable" still puts bad journals and predatory ones in the same box. It's not really solving the problem (telling the two apart), just avoiding it. When I talk to researchers who use the term predatory freely, they usually seem to be well aware that they are using it to include both bad journals and actual predatory ones. It doesn't matter to them. Publishing in a bad journal is the same as publishing in a predatory one. Only one might actively be trying to scam you, but both result in sub-par research being published.

Here, and in the rest of the piece, I get bogged down by "bad" and "sub-par." Does "bad" mean deceptive? Does it mean improperly done? Or does it include small science, the kind of research or thinking that yields legitimate but not "major" results?

I don't know, but Regier's repeated use of good, better, best to describe not only articles but peer reviewers makes me wonder whether there is some established hierarchy that I simply don't know about—and that isn't some variation on the global south/"favela" issue.

Do the "best" papers and peer reviewers come from the "best" universities? Are non-academic scholars automatically bad? (Cabell seems to think so…) Let me quote a paragraph that leaves me confounded:

> There are a bunch of successful open access journals out there. Ones that could be considered the leading journals in their field, but the open access movement still really struggles with the bad journals problem. Fear around predatory publishing has made this even worse. I've run into a fair number of cases where researchers refuse to peer review for smaller OA journals because they are scared they are predatory or just bad journals not worth their time. What's an OA journal to do if they can't attract reviewers? They start getting desperate. Ask some less-than qualified reviewers. Results in reviewers and authors both having a bad experience. This happens a few times and journals reputation gets worse. Next thing they know they are on a blacklist.

Maybe it's *because* I'm unaffiliated that I don't instinctively know which scholars and journals are bad, better, best. In fact, Regier says this:

> I might be able to convince a researcher that open is a gamble worth taking and also of the whole 'they should not be giving their research to a large publishing company that makes huge profit margins off their free

> labour and commercializing their research', but when it comes down to it, established paywalled journals are still the better journals. They still attract the best article submissions and the best peer reviewers.

And there it is. *The better journals* are subscription journals and attract *the best* articles and *the best* peer reviewers. I read that, from a supporter (I think) of OA, and I begin to believe that OA really is doomed.

Research

Research and "research" related to questionable journals—with the note up front that any so-called research that uses The Lists as a basis (as opposed to investigating The Lists), without additional checking, is the fruit of a poisoned tree.

Predatory publications in evidence syntheses

This article by Amanda Ross-White, Christina M. Godfrey, Kimberley A. Sears and Rosemary Wilson was accepted September 1, 2019 by the *Journal of the Medical Library Association*. The abstract:

> **Objectives:** The number of predatory journals is increasing in the scholarly communication realm. These journals use questionable business practices, minimal or no peer review, or limited editorial oversight and, thus, publish articles below a minimally accepted standard of quality. These publications have the potential to alter the results of knowledge syntheses. The objective of this study was to determine the degree to which articles published by a major predatory publisher in the health and biomedical sciences are cited in systematic reviews.
>
> **Methods:** The authors downloaded citations of articles published by a known predatory publisher. Using forward reference searching in Google Scholar, we examined whether these publications were cited in systematic reviews.
>
> **Results:** The selected predatory publisher published 459 journals in the health and biomedical sciences. Sixty-two of these journal titles had published a total of 120 articles that were cited by at least 1 systematic review, with a total of 157 systematic reviews citing an article from 1 of these predatory journals.
>
> **Discussion:** Systematic review authors should be vigilant for predatory journals that can appear to be legitimate. To reduce the risk of including articles from predatory journals in knowledge syntheses, systematic reviewers should use a checklist to ensure a measure of quality control for included papers and be aware that Google Scholar and PubMed do not provide the same level of quality control as other bibliographic databases.

The bad: the article appears to accept The Lists as gospel (although it says "Predatory journals are often, but not exclusively, linked to open access

publishing models," which is decidedly *not* the case for The Lists) and uses the term "predatory" generally without scare quotes. And the statement "published 459 journals" is misleading, since 145 of those were "journals," having never actually published anything. The article's coy about *naming* the publisher, although it's clearly based on OMICS.

The good: If you have to pick a publisher, that's a plausible choice. The research seems to have been done properly (and only 120 articles showed up in systematic reviews). This statement:

> It is also important to note that not everything published in a predatory journal is fraudulent or of poor quality. Ethical researchers can also be caught in the predatory trap.

The curious: A seeming assumption that The Lists override other resources and that purchase of a journal by OMICS automatically negates its worth:

> Of the 459 journal titles from our initial list, only 1 title was indexed in MEDLINE. Another 7 were indexed in Embase, and 2 were indexed in CINAHL. Nine of the 10 journal titles indexed in bibliographic databases were journals that had previously been published by reputable scientific organizations that had been bought by the predatory publisher after the decision to index the journals [5, 6]. In addition, 39 of the journals with articles cited in a systematic review or meta-analysis had select publications in PubMed Central (PMC) in compliance with public access policies requiring authors of National Institutes of Health–funded research to deposit completed manuscripts in PMC.

In all, it could be better—but it could be a lot worse.

Predatory publishers threaten to consume public research funds and undermine national academic systems – the case of Brazil

I find this piece, by Marcelo S. Perlin, Takeyoshi Imasato and Denis Borenstein on September 6, 2018 in the *LSE Impact Blog*, more troubling than the previous one. Here's the introduction/abstract:

> An unintended consequence of the open access movement, predatory publishers have appeared in many countries, offering authors a quick and easy route to publication in exchange for a fee and usually without any apparent peer review or quality control. Using a large database of publications, Marcelo S. Perlin, Takeyoshi Imasato and Denis Borenstein analyse the extent of this problem throughout the entire Brazilian academic system. While predatory publications remain a small proportion of the overall literature, this proportion has grown exponentially in recent years, with both early-career and established scholars found to have authored papers published in predatory venues. The inclusion of predatory publications in national journal quality rankings has been a key factor in this increase.

The piece here is based on a paywalled article. It's clear that they accept The Lists as gospel: a graph shows three "levels of predatory identification," all of which involve Beall's lists. The "least severe" level is for journals that are also in *DOAJ*, and the fact that those aren't omitted entirely means that these authors consider Beall to be foolproof. (The third and most extreme level is for non-*DOAJ* journals that don't have JCR or SJR impact factors.)

Key paragraphs:

> When looking at the profiles of the researchers publishing in these venues, the results were striking. Contrary to our initial expectations, those to have published significantly in predatory venues are experienced scholars, many years into their careers, and with many previous publications. The idea that young researchers, vulnerable due to their inexperience, are the victims of predatory publishers is simply not corroborated by the data. We cannot, however, attest to whether or not the researchers were fully aware of the practices of these journals at the time of submitting their work. Most concerning about these results is that funding to pay the publishing fees of predatory journals may come from research grants awarded by governmental agencies; part of a vicious circle in which experienced researchers increase their number of publications in order to become more competitive when applying for grants, and subsequently use the funds obtained to publish more papers in predatory journals.
>
> Also interesting is the way we formally acknowledge the quality of a publication in Brazil. We use Qualis as the local assessment of the quality of journals. Similar to the ABS journal rankings, Qualis ranks journals from A1 (the highest quality) to C (lowest quality) and is used to assess the performance of researchers and to evaluate postgraduate courses. Needless to say, Qualis sets the bar and is the main driver of publications in Brazil. When cross-referencing the datasets from Qualis with our own predatory classifications, we find many predatory journals throughout all rankings of Qualis, but mostly in the lower ones. Going further, we investigated whether or not a predatory journal included in Qualis publishes more articles than a non-predatory one. A positive result could go some way to explaining how predatory publications are entering and expanding in the system. Our results show that when a predatory journal enters Qualis, it publishes a significantly higher number of articles than non-predatory journals. That is, the predatory journals classified in Qualis are being targeted by authors in a significant and worrying way.
>
> The message from our research is clear: predatory journals are not yet undermining the academic system of Brazil, but may do so in the future. As we can see in Figure 1, the proportion of the research literature made up of predatory journals is increasing at an alarming rate. We provide strong evidence to suggest Qualis is a key factor in why we see such an

> increase. If not identified and combatted, predatory publishers may consume important research funds at the expense of the scientific endeavour.

Here's how I read this: the authors are saying Jeffrey Beall knows more about journal quality (even though, as I've previously shown, he rarely gave any specific reasons for his listings) than experienced scholars or Qualis. I find that astonishing and unsupportable.

Hype or Real Threat: The Extent of Predatory Journals in Student Bibliographies

This article by H. Rainer Schira and Chris Hurst appeared in the first 2019 issue of *Partnership* (the link is to a PDF of the article).

On one hand, the article recognizes that The Lists have been criticized and been shown to be Beall's subjective judgments, and raises other questions about them.

On the other, it uses "predatory" without scare quotes—a *lot*—and relies *entirely* on Beall's lists as being authoritative.

The results: They found *five citations* that were from journals Beall didn't like, two of which were in PubMed. That's one-third of one percent of the citations (but the authors manage to find a way to make it look worse). With five articles, you'd think they could actually *look* at the articles to see whether they're sound science, but I guess Being On The Lists is all they need to know. They also seem to use "free" and "open access" in ways that confuse more than they enlighten. All in all, a nothingburger study.

[I've omitted some "studies" that either rely entirely on some version of The Lists as evidentiary basis or use some new calculus to "refine" The Lists. It just gets too tiresome.]

Did the Research Faculty at a Small Canadian Business School Publish in "Predatory" Venues? This Depends on the Publishing Blacklist

This one—by Panagiotis Tsigaris and Jaime A. Teixeira da Silva, on May 20, 2019 in *publications*, is tricky, if only because it's largely based on my own work (which is credited) and on use of a "graylist" that I didn't intend as a graylist—namely, publishers on The List where I found at least some case was being made.

The authors reexamine the Pyne paper (see "Pointing the Finger at Colleagues" earlier) based on my work—with some difficulty, since Pyne wouldn't make his data available. Here's the abstract:

> The first ever quantitative paper to claim that papers published in so-called "predatory" open access (OA) journals and publishers were financially remunerated emerged from Canada. That study, published in the Journal of Scholarly Publishing (University of Toronto Press) in 2017 by Derek Pyne at Thompson Rivers University, garnered wide public and media attention, even by renowned news outlets such as The New York Times and The

> Economist. Pyne claimed to have found that most of the human subjects of his study had published in "predatory" OA journals, or in OA journals published by "predatory" OA publishers, as classified by Jeffrey Beall. In this paper, we compare the so-called "predatory" publications referred to in Pyne's study with Walt Crawford's gray open access (grayOA) list, as well as with Cabell's blacklist, which was introduced in 2017. Using Cabell's blacklist and Crawford's grayOA list, we found that approximately 2% of the total publications (451) of the research faculty at the small business school were published in potentially questionable journals, contrary to the Pyne study, which found significantly more publications (15.3%). In addition, this research casts doubt to the claim made in Pyne's study that research faculty members who have predatory publications have 4.3 "predatory" publications on average.

You can read the article itself for more; I think conflict of interest prevents me from discussing it further.

Publishing in predatory open access journals: Authors' perspectives
This one, by Mohammad Salehi, Mohammad Soltani, Hadis Tamleh and Shohreh Teirmornezhad, published September 17, 2019 in *Learned Publishing*, is tricky to comment on for a simple reason: it's paywalled.

But in this case, perhaps the abstract tells us everything we need to know.

> The proliferation of predatory or bogus journals has been recognized as a threat to academic research, and this study was conducted to discover the experiences of authors published in these journals. Eighty authors who had published in journals identified as predatory were surveyed. We asked how the authors learnt about these journals, what they thought about the reputation of the journals, their experiences of peer review and the quality of feedback provided, and whether publication was driven by PhD or job requirements. Our results showed that a third of authors discovered the journals by web searches or responding to email invitations. Over half said the reputation and name of the journal were important in selecting a journal, although a third admitted that the journal they published in did not have a good reputation. The main reason for selecting the journals was the promise of fast publication (32.2% respondents). Only half of the respondents said that publication was driven by PhD or job requirements. Just over a third reported that peer review was good or excellent, and only 17.5% said that peer review was poor or non-existent – over 70% thought they had received good feedback from the journals. Although the research was somewhat limited, it does indicate general satisfaction with the journals in which the authors published. Fast publication coupled with good feedback and encouragement to submit can make publishing in predatory journals so tempting that few authors can resist.

Note this: "**Just over a third reported that peer review was good or excellent**, and only 17.5% said that peer review was poor or non-existent – over 70% thought they had received good feedback from the journals."

It's clear from the first part of that quotation that the authors regard Jeffrey Beall as more knowledgeable about the peer review practices of each and every journal on his lists than actual scholars who've dealt with the journals. At which point I see no need to worry about the rest of the study. I'd believe the scholars: Indeed, fast publication and good feedback and peer review seem like damn good reasons to publish with a journal.

Victims

Yes, it's an odd heading. So are the items here.

Preying on the Predatory Journals: A Case Study
This essay by Dr. Caleb Lack was posted December 29. 2018 on the Center for Inquiry blog. It's an odd one and could *seriously* use copyediting. For example:

> Although initially published primarily by scholarly organizations and scientific societies, larger publishing companies began to gain a foothold in the field after World War II and have since come to dominate the academic journal publishing landscape.

So larger publishing companies were initially published primarily by scholarly organizations and scientific societies? Or the intro to the topic at hand:

> Like in many realms of life, this chance to make money has brought with it individuals with less than altruistic goals in mind, what's become known as predatory open-access publishing. These are publishers that (typically) have a large number of online-only journals that charge authors for publishing through them.

Set aside the lack of antecedent for "this chance"; fact is, in my exhaustive study of journals identified as potentially "predatory," among journals with two or more articles between 2012 and 2016, only seven publishers had more than 100 titles each; another 14 had more than 50; another 48 had more than 20; and, stretching "a large number" to its limit, another 78 had more than ten. That's a total of 147 publishers with more than ten active journals each, but only 69 with more than 20. In contrast, there were 997 standalone journals and publishers with ten or fewer journals (672 with only one). So, no, "typically" is just plain wrong.

Anyway: Lack decided to respond to one badly-written spamvitation to submit a paper, this time for a publisher that must be newer than Beall's lists. Oddly enough, it was *not* accepted until two months after submission, at which point it was accepted and he was asked for $822. It included a ludicrous "reviewer's comment" that was useless.

He strung them along, saying he needed more feedback—and got just enough, a few days later, to believe somebody had actually read the paper. After further back-and-forth, the publisher asked for a discounted $609. At this point, he tried to kiss them off:

> Apr. 16, 11:20 am
>
> **Dear Angelina Jovovich**,
>
> Hope you are doing well also!
>
> I apologize for the delay in correspondence. I am afraid that the over $600 is still just much too pricey for me to pay to publish in your journal. As such, I suppose I will need to just withdraw my article from consideration. I regret that we have let a little thing like money come between us and halt our relationship. Unfortunately some people operate in the way that noted author Pink Floyd wrote about: "Money, it's a gas; Grab that cash with both hands and make a stash." Or as poet K. West made sure the world knew, "I ain't saying she's a gold digger; but she ain't messing with no broke *retracted*."
>
> Farewell, dear Angelina, and I hope that you get many more submissions from the Indian subcontinent on using cow urine to cure disease.
>
> With utmost and deepest regrets,
>
> **Dr. Caleb W Lack**

Yes, there was an article on that topic—and, amazingly, the journal has a fair number of volumes (two per year) and articles.

There's more back-and-forth, with the journal first asking for $150, then agreeing to waive all charges—and yes, the article was published.

What this post shows about the dangers and prevalence of "predatory" publishing? Not much, but it's a cute anecdote. Is the publisher in question, well, questionable? Almost certainly. Is its journal on complementary and alternative medicine likely to undermine scientific medical research? Probably not.

How I became easy prey to a predatory publisher

Where Lack was deliberately screwing around, Alan H. Chambers' case, recounted on May 9, 2019 at *Science*, is a slightly different animal,

> I was nursing my wounds from my latest manuscript rejection when the email arrived. I was about 2 years into my assistant professorship, with the tenure clock running at full speed, and the pressure to publish was immense. I knew that navigating rejection was part of the job, but I was also starting to wonder whether my study—a modest project designed to be feasible with the minimal lab space and skeleton crew of a new professor—would ever see the light of day. So when I received the email from a newly launched journal inviting me to publish with them, I saw a lifeline. That's when my troubles started.

I must admit that I'd *automatically* be wary of an invitation from a "newly launched journal" unless I was personally acquainted with the editor or someone on the board, but that's me. Chambers didn't check the journal on *DOAJ*; instead, because he'd heard about "predatory" journals, he checked the journal—but not the publisher—on Beall's list.

The rest of the story is told well and concisely in the original. In short, the questionable journal demanded $400 to withdraw the article, and eventually stopped demanding but, as of publication, hadn't removed the article. (One curiosity: Chambers had *rechecked* Beall's lists, and seems not to be aware that the lists were shut down in 2017.)

I would note that Chambers *only* checked The Lists; there's no evidence that he checked *DOAJ* or used the Think Check Submit steps.

The close:

> I fell into this trap because of my ignorance. I now ignore every invitation to publish my research in any journal. And I know to be wary of any offer that comes via email, whether from journals or international conferences. After all, time spent on manuscript hostage negotiations doesn't count toward tenure.

Again, purely an anecdote—and I do not *at all* doubt that there are publishers and "publishers" behaving this way. Still, it would be more useful in the "Careers" section if positive steps were suggested rather than merely negative steps.

Being a deliberate prey of a predator: Researchers' thoughts after having published in predatory journal

Finally, here's an odd research paper by Najmeh Shaghaei and six other authors, published on December 10, 2018 in *LIBER Quarterly*. The authors don't scare-quote "predatory," seem content to assume that any journal in The Lists is "predatory," and seem to believe that all gold OA involves author-side fees.

From that questionable start, the group looked at all scholarly articles by researchers from the University of Southern Denmark published in 2015-2016 (3,851 in all) and found 31 "possibly predatory publications" from 70 researchers—in other words, less than one percent.

They contacted the first author in each case and asked them to participate in half-hour interviews. Six agreed. In other words, this is a study of *six researchers* (and involved six articles).

I am impressed that the seven authors managed to construct a full-scale research article based on six interviews. I'll quote the conclusions:

> In conclusion and as an answer to our research question, we found that the reasons why researchers from the developed world publish in predatory journals are quite the same as those from researchers from developing countries: Lack of awareness, speed and ease, a chance of getting rejected work published, or getting unpublishable work published anyway. Also,

> researchers from the developed world may be fooled by allegedly high impact factors or a journal name similar to that of a quality journal.
>
> The scientific quality is low regardless of high acceptance rates in predatory journals but it could pose a problem if many researchers read and apply the results. The risk seems to be low because the scientific community in general prefers publications from well-established publishers. The risk can't be dismissed due to the fact that articles in predatory journals most likely are Open Access and all articles are easily searchable through the large databases as e.g. Google Scholar. Researchers from less established scientific communities are often found among the readers of this type of literature (Frandsen, 2017). In contrast, our respondents may face a problem if they place their articles in predatory journals. Serious academics may not read these journals and would therefore be missed as target readers.
>
> What we find very interesting is that some of the researchers selected the possibly predatory journals due to their Open Access potential. For the researchers, the size of the audience is of utmost importance, and due to the predatory journals' Open Access policy, some researchers argued that articles from such journals may be more read, used and cited than articles in mainstream high impact factor journals.
>
> On top of that, we notice that we have not found conclusive evidence that the researchers experienced the publishing process as being very different from the one familiar to them from quality journals. On the contrary, several of them claimed that they had experienced a serious review process.
>
> With the current climate in the traditional scientific publishing business, there may be reasons to reconsider the condemnation of the so-called predatory journals within certain disciplines.

The second paragraph is troubling and seems to assume facts not in evidence, especially given the penultimate paragraph. But there's some interesting anecdotal stuff here.

OMICS

Of course there are questionable publishers, even if the term "predatory" has been so damaged that it's useless. A few items about the biggest—and no, I'm neither suggesting that OMICS is *not* questionable nor willing to assert that every single journal from the publisher is worthless. It's rarely that simple.

FTC hits predatory scientific publisher with a $50 million fine

John Timmer wrote this on April 2, 2019 at *ars technica*. The tease:

> Conduct egregious enough that a judge doesn't even wait for a trial.

Timmer is a little too free with his "predatory" and I believe implies that questionable publishing is a much bigger problem than I suspect it is, but it's a good wrapup of the situation and includes a link to the court's finding. I'm not commenting directly on that, but the first ten pages provide an impressive list of demonstrated bad practices, while the remainder deals with why a summary judgment is warranted and spells out the details of that judgment—the reasoning for the monetary fine and the enjoined practices.

Most of the article is a good summary of the judgment's key points. For example:

> The practices of the companies, as documented by the FTC, are pretty egregious. While the OMICS Group claims that its publications are peer reviewed, two different journalists have submitted nonsense papers to its publications and had them accepted without revision. Scientists who have submitted articles indicate that they came back from review in a matter of days; the court recognized that peer review typically takes months. In some cases, the manuscript was simply published without warning after submission.
>
> Scientists who are listed as editors for the OMICS journals submitted letters indicating that they had never received any manuscripts to review, and others contacted by the FTC were previously unaware that they had been listed as editors. In a number of cases, the scientists asked to have their names removed from the journal website, but the requests were ignored.
>
> . . .
>
> Similar things went on with the scientific meetings organized by iMedPub, which would identify prominent scientists in relevant fields and then declare that said scientists were attending the conference. In most cases, the scientists had no idea the conference was even happening—and again, some asked unsuccessfully that their names be removed. Meanwhile, people who did sign up to attend ended up disappointed by the actual speakers at the conference.

Summary judgment effectively means that the court finds no substantial disagreement on the facts: that no substantive defense was presented.

Fining one 'predatory' publisher won't fix the problem of bad science in journals

This piece, by Adam Marcus on April 5, 2019 at *Stat*, briefly covers the judgment (and, of course, uses the p-word without scare quotes), but Marcus is more interested in broader issues:

> Predatory publishers like OMICS, which is far from alone in this space (one estimate put the number of bad actors at more than 900), thrive because the market for scientific papers is insatiable — and growing.

> Last year, researchers produced somewhere between 2 million and 3 million papers.

Heck, I've seen estimates as high as five or eight million…especially from those claiming that gold OA is no more than 15% of the market (with 711,670 articles in 2017, *not including* all the journals added to *DOAJ* this year or that aren't in *DOAJ*).

> The world clearly doesn't suffer from a dearth of pixels devoted to research. What it lacks is an effective mechanism for controlling the quality of all that information.
>
> In a sense, then, OMICS is inadvertently right about one thing: Relying on peer reviewers to vet papers prior to publication is less critical than legitimate publishers would like us to believe.

Marcus seems to question peer review in general:

> Indeed, as we and others have argued, pre-publication peer review, even when legitimate, is often bark without bite. It doesn't catch fraud, it allows plenty of junk science to enter the literature, it hasn't stanched the flood of irreproducible results, and so on.
>
> So, while punishing OMICS for its bad-faith practices is warranted, and might deter some would-be predators from similar misbehavior, don't expect the fundamental problems in science publishing to go away without an effort to address their root causes. Predatory publishers such as OMICS are symptoms of those problems, not the problems themselves. There would be no prey — knowing or otherwise — if there weren't a market.

There was, of course, a lot to the OMICS judgment besides faulty or absent peer review.

OMICS, Publisher of Fake Journals, Makes Cosmetic Changes to Evade Detection

This article, by Dinesh C Sharma on August 10, 2019 at *The Wire*, is curious, both for what it's saying and for the "editor's notes" interspersed in it. For example:

> Usually a publication that proactively seeks research papers from scientists and publishes low-quality journals without a reliable editorial board and peer-review system is dubbed 'predatory'. Predatory publishers often engage in forgery, plagiarism and incorrect indexing practices. They also falsify editorial boards and lure researchers by claiming to offer better services and assured publication.
>
> *Editor's note*: However, the 'predatory' prefix has been finding less acceptance because, in many contexts, they don't prey as much as collude with willing researchers eager to have published papers to their name.

What I find most curious is the commentary on a study comparing OMICS journals and BMC journals on various parametrs.

> When they analysed the data, they found OMICS to be 'evolving' to better evade quality checks. Of the 35 criteria listed in Beall's list, and which could be verified using information available online, 22 were common to OMICS and BMC. Of these, OMICS and BMC both checked five but OMICS also checked 13 others that BMC didn't. For example, OMICS seemed to have commenced an online submission process similar to other well-known publishers. Earlier, it used to accept manuscripts through email. In sum, OMICS dodged most of the Beall's list criteria and emerged as a reputed publisher.

I can think of at least three ways to deal with those results:

1. Since Beall clearly regarded *all* OA as bad, and since BMC fails five criteria, just add BMC to the nonsense lists.
2. Consider the possibility that OMICS is actually trying to clean up its act—that it's possible for a sketchy publisher to improve.
3. The approach the study authors chose:

> "It is increasingly becoming hard to distinguish between authentic and predatory journals using a standard list of criteria or rules," Jain told *India Science Wire*. "The standard criteria need to be updated and our work shows which are the ones that may need to change." He is set to present his findings at a scientific conference in November 2019.

That's right: if journals you've already decided are sketchy no longer meet your criteria for sketchiness, there's only one solution: *Change the criteria!*

Beall and the Lists

A center of predatory publishing

The tenor of this interview by Santosh H. Hulagabali on February 4, 2019 at *Elephant in the Lab* may be obvious from the "Author Info":

> Jeffrey Beall is best known globally for his fight against predatory open access journals and dubious publishers. His crusading efforts have brought him appreciation worldwide. At the same time, he has faced criticism and fought legal cases for being acutely vocal about potential predatory journals listed in his blog- Scholarly Open Access. Nothing has deterred his mission even after he shut down his blog last year. His splendid work and strong concern for ethical publishing has inspired many professionals globally and made them his avid fans.

With an intro like that, the rest is fairly predictable. Indeed, it's so predictable (OA bad, subscription good, *of course* libraries cancel any subscription journal that's low-quality [he's apparently never heard of big deals or believes all big-publisher subscription journals are high-quality], let's throw

in some racism for free—if there are US "predatory" journals, they're probably run by "immigrants to this country.") So I won't soil this issue with more quotes.

It must be nice to have cheerleaders.

Dolos List

The only problem with The Lists is that they're too selective, right? So here's Professeur Alexandre Georges to fix that, with the Dolos list of "predatory, parasitic, or pseudoscientific publishers and journals."

How much does he expand the lists? Well, the starting page "welcomes some of our newcomers to the list," such as Taylor & Francis, Dove Press, Wolters Kluwer and the *Directory of Open Access Journals*.

Really.

He calls *DOAJ* a "false whitelist." Well, that seems authoritative…

You need not worry about the superb quality of each and every inclusion in this long, long list: he states six criteria and then says a journal or publisher is either predatory or not. No need for individual commentary.

Nor will there be in general (although, as it turns out, there are some "statements"). To quote from the site:

> The Dolos list will never have to justify itself to anyone in any case, unless the interests of justice so require, as in the framework of, for example, a procedure initiated by the Dolos list team. Collected evidence serves only to make a decision. Justification requests will therefore never be processed, regardless of the originator of this request, so that they do not delay the team's work.

The good professor, a theoretical physicist at Projet Energium, is 22 years old, so he can presumably carry on his landmark work for decades to come. I trust it will get precisely the reception it deserves, but I'm probably being too optimistic.

Miscellany

OSI Brief: Deceptive publishing

This one—by Rick Anderson on March 19, 2019 at the OSI website—is unusual because it would appear to carry the imprimatur of Open Scholarship Initiative (the author appears only at the end) and, presumably, be more authoritative than most discussions.

Here's the intro:

> Deceptive publishing (more commonly known as "predatory publishing") is an important and troubling issue in scholarly communication. However, its parameters and seriousness are a matter of controversy, and there is not yet any consensus as to how big an issue it is, how fast it is growing, the variety of its manifestations, and what (if anything)

> can be done to combat it. The broad outlines of deceptive publishing, as described in this brief, are clearer than its exact details.

Now here's me tearing it to shreds because Rick Anderson is also a "chef" at a site I regard as being generally anti-OA:

> . . .
>
> Hmm. Fact is, at least from one reading, Anderson has done a commendable job here. I could grump a bit about one sentence, but only for omission, and the argument's too long to go into. Decidedly worth noting that deceptive publishing is *not* treated here as unique to OA, and one specific example (of a "phony" journal) is specifically from a subscription publisher.
>
> Worth reading, and quite well done.

Myth-busting: DOAJ indexes "predatory" journals

This unsigned post on May 8, 2019 at the DOAJ Blog is part of a myth-busting series. Here's the whole thing:

> Some people are afraid to use DOAJ because they believe that it lists questionable ("predatory") journals. DOAJ started to clean up its index in 2014. DOAJ was the first service to define the standards aimed at preserving the quality and trustworthiness of a database of open access journals. Today, DOAJ's standards are the unofficial gold standard for open access journals.
>
> **Raising the bar**
>
> Early in 2013, DOAJ's team decided that the problem of questionable journals—at that time proliferating from India in particular—needed to be tackled. DOAJ's inclusion criteria were not adequate enough to filter out journals of dubious character. By October 2013, the three countries with the most journals in DOAJ were the USA, Brazil and India. In December 2013, the number of journals in DOAJ passed the 10 000 mark for the first time: the number of journals from the "USA"* (1247) and India (652) had risen sharply and faster than any other country.
>
> Work on a new set of criteria for inclusion in DOAJ started in early 2013; this was developed, reviewed by the Advisory Board and eventually sent out for public consultation in June 2013. After extensive development work, the new application form built around the criteria was made live in March 2014. The new criteria, a work that had involved the whole open access community, increased the DOAJ application form from just 17 questions to today's 58.
>
> At that point, every single journal in DOAJ was made to reapply under the new criteria, to be re-indexed. This was more effective at improving the level of quality in DOAJ than we could ever anticipate.

**A typical questionable publishing trait is to pretend that a journal is registered in Global North countries, particularly the USA.*

Effective criteria

DOAJ has developed rigorous checks to ensure a very high level of quality of every journal in its index.

One of the most effective checks, which delivered considerable changes in the geographic distribution of journals in the database, is insisting that a journal is listed in the country that its business activities are carried out.

Compared to other indexes that are often cited in research on scholarly publishing and open access, it is safe to say that DOAJ is probably the cleanest and most reliable, especially in the context of questionable publishing. To back up that statement, DOAJ is carrying out its research, comparing some well-known indexes. More details on that will be published here very soon.

Joint initiatives

To highlight its approach to creating a list of quality journals, to reinforce its position on questionable publishing and to emphasise the importance of standards as an effective tool to helping to identify good journals, DOAJ co-authored the Principles of Transparency and Best Practice, first released in December 2013.

DOAJ is also a founding organisation of the innovative campaign, Think. Check. Submit.

Old stains are hard to wash away

The problem of questionable publishing is vastly exaggerated. For those who still insist that DOAJ is filled with questionable journals, we would ask you to take a closer look at the database today, review our criteria and read the research on both the problem of questionable publishing and how prolific it isn't.

If you do think that a journal in DOAJ is questionable, however, please report that journal to us so that our Questionable Publishing team can review it.

I don't feel that additional comments are required—and note with pleasure the fact that "predatory" *only* appears within scare quotes.

Cabells Blacklist Criteria v 1.1

I don't normally address Cabell since, like any other unaffiliated person, I have no access to its lists, but this March 20, 2019 post by Lucas Toutloff at *The Source* is at least interesting. It spells out changes from the original set of criteria, then gives that set, separating criteria into Severe, Moderate, and Minor categories.

I won't go through all the criteria, but do wonder about some. Among Severe criteria, I see:

> The journal publishes papers that are not academic at all, e.g. essays by laypeople or obvious pseudo-science.

So "laypeople" (however defined) simply can't do research? Good to know that! (Yes, of course, I'm a layperson: no affiliation and only a BA.)

Among Moderate criteria are these two:

> The number of articles published has increased by 75% or more in the last year.
>
> The number of articles published has increased by 50-74% in the last year.

Rapid growth is a sign of a bad journal? Really? (Even 25%-49% is included, but moderate growth is only a *minor* infraction.)

At the other extreme, this criterion—which I'd call so major as to immediately disqualify a journal—is only a *minor* infraction:

> The journal's website attempts to download a virus or malware.

So growing by 50% is more problematic than disabling or damaging a user's computer. That's some value system.

I continue to believe that blacklists are inherently unsound; these criteria do little to change that belief—especially the ones cited here.

Conclusion

I could probably find another 50 preditorials, especially if I had access to paywalled journals—and as it is, I only used two-thirds of the ones I'd tagged. I'm sure the stream will continue.

But roundups on commentaries about questionable publishing won't, at least not in *Cites & Insights*, barring a surge of interest in retaining this publication. It's only been three weeks (as I write this) since I raised the question of that continuation, so I won't yet count the complete lack of any responses as conclusive.

Masthead

Cites & Insights: Crawford at Large, Volume 19, Number 6, Whole # 224, ISSN 1534-0937, a periodical of libraries, policy, technology and media, is written and produced by Walt Crawford.

Comments should be sent to waltcrawford@gmail.com.

URL: citesandinsights.info/civ19i6.pdf