



# Predatory Publishing and You

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**Key words:** *predatory publishing*

... like all predators they are looking for feeding grounds.

Robert D. Hare (*BrainyQuote, n.d.*)

Once upon a time there was an academic librarian at the University of Colorado who led a quiet librarian life until the day he noticed predators in the midst of scholarly publishing. Jeffrey Beall discovered, studied, revealed, and blogged about what he would eventually name Predatory Publishing. His Web site, *Scholarly Open Access* (<http://scholarlyoa.com>), is an increasingly important source of information for authors and readers from all professional walks of life, including nurses (Pearson, 2015), but more about that later.

## Setting the Stage

Innovation in publishing has expanded dramatically in the electronic age. In fact, publishing is rapidly moving past print and increasingly toward exclusively online venues. But, while blogging and online posts can rapidly disseminate information, they were never meant to replace scholarly publishing, which must be held to the highest ethical and scientific standards. The questions that publishers of scholarly work have had to ask are: (a) How can we deliver cutting-edge research, accurate survey data, and valid interpretations of these data in the most expedient manner to the people who need it? and (b) How can we do so in a way that makes a profit so we can stay in business and keep publishing? (Timmer, 2009).

Publishers have developed business models to answer those questions (Pierson, 2014). The business model we are most aware of is the subscription model,

where the reader pays a fee for printed or online material that nonsubscribers may be able to access, but only after a period of time. We're also familiar with advertiser-sponsored information distribution. In this model, sponsors cover publication costs through a process of purchasing ads that are included with the publication. Readers who see the articles also see the ads, which the sponsors hope will influence the readers' purchases or prescription practices. Open Access is a newer business model, although Suber (2013) says it is really a kind of access and not a business model. Open Access was born out of a push to make new information quickly and freely available to a broad spectrum of readers, where it can inform innovation, prevent error, and move science and technology forward (Suber, 2013). With Open Access, the author (usually with support from a funder because it is not cheap) pays a fee for article distribution without the barriers of subscription and advertiser support. The *Journal of the Association of Nurses in AIDS Care* (JANAC) uses a combination of all three of these business models.

## Sounds Good – What is the Problem?

The advent of Open Access led to a frenzy of activity in the publishing world. It was a new model that fed into scholarly publishing's reason to exist (provide accurate new information in a timely

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manner) as well as the basic business goal (make money). Unfortunately, some publishers seem to only be interested in making money. While many ethical publishers use the Open Access model appropriately, some dishonest publishers have developed Open Access journals to the detriment of authors, the public, and ethical publishers around the globe.

And this is where we get back to Jeffrey Beall. Beall (2012) found that some Open Access journals did not follow ethical standards and acted more like grifters and swindlers than honest business people. Predatory publishers can be identified by a laundry list of telltale signs:

- The promise of impossibly rapid review and online publication timelines. (Committee on Publication Ethics, 2014)
- A fabricated editorial board, an editor whose expertise is not in the journal's area of concern, or an absence of reviewers. Unfortunately, predatory journals have been known to add names to board, reviewer, and editorial positions without the individual's permission. (Committee on Publication Ethics, 2014)
- Legitimate-sounding titles that mimic the names of established and respected journals. (Committee on Publication Ethics, 2014)
- E-mails that doggedly solicit papers. You've probably seen these e-mails. They are usually flattering; they make appealing offers; and they often ask for papers on topics that you know nothing about. (Flanagan, 2015)
- A focus on making concessions to the author, not on careful attention to scholarship, legitimacy, ethical publishing, or scientific validity. (Pearson, 2015)
- Online-only publishing. Although not a clear indication of a problem because many excellent journals publish online only (see above), predatory publishers do not invest in paper publishing. Online is the only way to make the profits they seek.

This may not sound too bad yet, so here is the zinger. What do authors who choose to publish with predatory publishers get? Well, they get to pay for the publication and they get a paper, quickly published, in a disreputable journal that is likely to disappear at some future point. They sign away their work and can never ethically republish it. And, because academia has become

highly aware of predatory publishing, these authors cannot even pad their resumes with the publications. In addition, science suffers because (a) good work may be lost because it is not archived properly, or – more likely – (b) flawed work is published and influences public opinion, future scientific work, and the literary record. The only one who wins is the publisher who gets the money.

## What to Do?

The author is responsible for finding the best journal for her/his work. Jeffrey Beall has a Web site (<http://scholarlyoa.com>) where he keeps an updated list of known predatory publishers. If in doubt about a journal you are considering, check out Beall's journals list. If you are lucky enough to be looking for a nursing journal, you can also visit the *Directory of Nursing Journals* (<http://nursingeditors.com/journals-directory/>), a list of journals vetted by nurse editors for ethical standards, transparency, and lack of predatory practices.

Unfortunately, fraud and misconduct are easy in this electronic age. Anywhere a clever scheme can be developed, someone will figure it out and start the exploitation. As with everything, it is up to you to protect your assets. Be suspicious, do your homework, and submit only to journals that will treat your work with proper respect.

## Disclosures

The author reports no real or perceived vested interests that relate to this article that could be construed as a conflict of interest.

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