



Image: Tracey Long

Identifying and avoiding predatory publishers: a primer for researchers

For researchers across all disciplines, research dissemination is the intellectual core of scholarly work. Publishing in a high-quality peer-reviewed journal remains a prime goal for academics, especially for early-career researchers focussed on promotion and tenure.

Selecting the most appropriate journal based on disciplinary reputation, peer-review quality and selectivity standards is an important first step for scholars when submitting a manuscript for publication.

It is more important than ever that scholars carefully evaluate and select the publications in which they wish to disseminate their work. With the explosion in the number of newly-formed scholarly journals, the selection task can be daunting. While many journals are respectable, adding important conversations and discoveries to the scholarly landscape, others are not. Of greatest concern are those that engage in predatory practices.

Common characteristics of predatory publishers:

- High manuscript acceptance rates or acceptance guarantees
- The publisher sends you an un-solicited invitation to submit an article for publication
- Minimal (or non-existent) peer review process
- Little attention paid to digital preservation
- Not necessarily indexed in electronic databases
- Journals may be short lived
- No archiving policy

The landscape of predatory publishing

So-called predatory publishers are those that lack discernible scholarship, academic rigour or credibility. They use aggressive practices to recruit authors and editors. Predatory publishers' opaque operations and editorial processes are suggestive of an intention to deceive both authors and readers (Butler, 2013).

Some print-on-demand publishers, also known as vanity presses, produce scholarly monographs. They will require authors to pay for the editing, printing, marketing and distribution of the finished product, but the authors will not benefit from the same high peer-review and editorial standards of a university press, for example.

Predatory practices even extend to conferences and associated conference proceedings. Organizers of such forums use pushy tactics for gathering submissions. Beware of meetings that lack evident scholarship or academic standards, such as an open call for submissions and a named selection panel of known experts.

A more prevalent problem than you might think

Although most open access journals hold to the same high peer-review and editorial standards as do highly-regarded subscription journals, predatory open access (OA) journal publishers have become more prevalent in recent years. University of Colorado at Denver researcher and librarian, Jeffrey Beall, defines predatory OA journals as ones whose primary goal is "to generate profits rather than promote academic scholarship" (Stratford, 2012).

Many OA journal publishers collect a fee from authors to pay for publication and website maintenance. But predatory OA journal publishers exploit this business model, taking fees from authors without providing the services, such as peer-review and copy editing, one would expect from established reputable publishers.

Is anybody tracking and documenting these so-called predatory journals?

Yes. See Beall's list: "Potential, possible, or probable predatory scholarly open-access publishers"

<http://scholarlyoa.com/publishers/>



Some warning signs of predatory publishers

(Adapted from Butler's checklist on evaluating publishers)

- If something looks fishy, proceed with caution; use common sense, as you would when shopping online.
- You have received overly-flattering, unsolicited invitations to submit work to journals or to become an editorial board member.
- The Journals have names that do not adequately reflect origin (e.g., a journal with the word "Canadian" or "Swiss" in a name that has no meaningful relationship to Canada or Switzerland).
- The journal falsely claims to have an impact factor but is in fact not listed in the ISI Web of Science or in Scopus, or it uses some made up measure (e.g. "view factor"), feigning international standing.
- The publisher falsely claims to have its content indexed in legitimate abstracting and indexing services, or claims that its content is indexed in resources that are not existing, known and reputable abstracting and indexing services.
- The publisher dedicates insufficient resources to preventing and eliminating author misconduct, to the extent that the journal reflects repeated cases of plagiarism, self-plagiarism, image manipulation, and the like.

Avoid being duped by an unscrupulous publisher

Ensure you select a reputable, accredited journal before publishing. Is the journal one that your peers read and publish in? Verify a lesser-known open access journal before submitting your work. Are its claims of prestige valid? Is it actually ranked (see next column above) in tools providing impact measures? Bottom line: "Consider the source" is just as applicable to the choice of publication venues as it is to research methods (Anggraeni, 2014).

And remember, if your goal is open access, you can also publish in a reputable subscription journal and place a copy of your accepted article manuscript in your institutional repository. CARL maintains a list of Canadian OA repositories at <http://www.carl-abrc.ca/ir.html>.



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To find reputable journals, look for those listed in one or more of the following:

- Lists produced by associations where only reputable journals are selected for listing
- The *Directory of Open Access Journals* (DOAJ) - An online directory that indexes quality open access, peer-reviewed journals <http://doaj.org>
- The *Journal Guide* - Journal lists that can be sorted by discipline <https://www.journalguide.com>
- The *Ulrich's Web Global Serials Directory* - Can be limited to peer-reviewed journals (open access or subscription-based) <http://www.ulrichsweb.com/ulrichsweb/faqs.asp>
- The *Web of Science Journal Citation Reports* - A multidisciplinary index to journals with impact factors <http://thomsonreuters.com/journal-citation-reports/>
- *Scopus* - An abstract and citation database including benchmarking and analytical tools that allow researchers and librarians better compare and evaluate journals <http://www.elsevier.com/online-tools/scopus>

Consult a librarian

When in doubt, turn to your campus library. Staff there are familiar with a broad range of scholarly publications, and can provide guidance that helps determine whether a potential publishing venue presents the best opportunity for you.

Further reading

Anggraeni, Hilda (October 28, 2014). "UNBC librarians inoculate novice academics against predatory publishers." BCCampus blog <http://bccampus.ca/2014/10/28/unbc-librarians-inoculate-novice-academics-against-predatory-publishers/>

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