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Predatory Publishers : Blacklists, Whitelists and Nice Neighbourhoods

By Eileen Crawley | October 21, 2020 | [Journal market](#), [Open Access](#), [Predatory Publishing](#) | [0 comments](#)

October 19-25 2020 is Open Access Week – a chance to learn about the benefits of Open Access and inspire wider participation to help Open Access become the new norm in scholarship and research.

Most people believe Open Access to be a positive movement, but a vocal minority have criticised it for allowing predatory publishers to flourish. Legitimate Open Access publishers generally charge fees to authors, but still stick to ethical publishing practices. The predatory publishing market is defined as “an exploitive academic publishing business model that involves charging publication fees to authors without checking articles for quality and legitimacy and without providing the other editorial and publishing services that legitimate academic journals provide.”

(https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Predatory_publishing)

So if you are a researcher working from home and you find you have [more time to write and submit](#) any pending manuscripts to publishers, be aware that predatory publishers will see it as an opportunity for them too. It's all the more important to watch out for those overly complimentary emails enticing you to send them your esteemed research where it will be immediately published in world leading journals.

There are many trusted [websites](#) that point out the pitfalls of predatory publishers and guide you to making an informed choice about where to submit your manuscript. [Think. Check. Submit](#) is the go-to resource and it's welcome news that they have recently extended their guidelines to cover [mono-](#)



By Think. Check. Submit. –
<https://thinkchecksubmit.org>, CC BY 4.0

graph publishing too. Predatory conferences are also a thing, so the related Think. Check. Attend website will help. At the least the current situation has reduced the chances of wasted airfares to waste-of-time conferences, but no doubt they will spring up again once travel restrictions have been lifted.

It's clear that new developments in scholarly publishing such as pre-prints, author charges, rapid publication, post-publication peer review and new players in the market can make it harder for inexperienced authors to navigate their way to successful publication. Remember, *deception* is the key. Journals that charge Article Processing Charges to authors but do not carry out rigorous peer review before publication is a warning sign for a predatory publisher, but some legitimate new publishing platforms do this too. The difference is that they are upfront about it and will explain what the charges are for and the service you can expect.

Blacklists, whitelists, and why lists have limited value

Think. Check. Submit and other sites guide authors to make informed decisions about publishing but do not name specific publishers to avoid. In contrast other sites have attempted to make blacklists and name who they consider guilty parties. Some people may remember Beall's list, which was officially closed in 2017 although it is still maintained online in a less formal way. There have been efforts to establish other lists, in particular Cabells Blacklist – a commercial product available only on subscription.

While it may be satisfying to be able to check whether your chosen journal is on the right side of the blacklist/whitelist divide, there are good reasons to treat these lists with skepticism.

Lists rely too much on the judgement of one person, and their motives and criteria are often hidden. They are never complete nor up-to-date and are hard to maintain. Any listing that claims to be comprehensive will have concentrated on verifiable criteria like the quality of the website, whereas other areas like the quality of articles or level of peer review may not have been assessed in any detail. The risk is that low resource platforms, which may be developing emerging models of open access publishing are being put in the same category as genuinely deceptive publishers and their progress is being stifled.

Publishers exist on a spectrum – they can move from being predatory to being considered legitimate and also move the other way. A reputable journal may be hijacked by a disreputable publisher which will trade on its past good reputation, inclusion in reputable sites such as Directory of Open Access



Image by Pete Linforth
 from Pixabay

Journals and impact factor. In other words, whether an article is considered reputable or not may depend on when it was published in the journal's life.

Favelas vs Nice Neighbourhoods

Perhaps the most damaging criticism of Beall's list and its supporters is that they can be guilty of an attitude to publishers from the Global South that is condescending and does not take into account the realities of scholarly publishing outside the well resourced North. Beall did not do himself any

favours by comparing the long-standing and well-respected South American Open Access platforms SciELO and Redalyc as '**publication favela**', and Global North publications as 'nice neighbourhoods'. This controversial post attracted many negative comments including a **rebuttal** on the SciELO site, and **further comment** on the SciELO site which continued:



Image by [Tumisu](#) from [Pixabay](#)

"Mr Beall also appears to have a deep mistrust of academic publishing in the developing world. He regularly puts new publishers from these countries on his list until they can "prove" their credentials creating added difficulties for publishers in these countries. A case in point is MedKnow, a publisher of reputable journals in the Middle East and Asia, including the journal of a regional office of the World Health Organization. This publisher was added to his watch list, presumably because it was based in India. The publisher was then acquired by Walters-Kluwer and the journals suddenly becoming safe in Beall's worldview as the publisher disappeared from the watch list."

Hooman Momen, *Jeffrey Beall and Blacklists*: https://blog.scielo.org/en/2015/08/04/jeffrey-beall-and-blacklists/#.XqBszdNKj_Q

It is certainly the case that **researchers from the Global South are shut out** of the 'nice neighbourhoods' of Global North journals by virtue of lacking research funding and resources to attend conferences where informal networking is important, and where you can get to know editors of major journals. Nevertheless their work has to be disseminated, and academics from the Global South are often under pressure to publish in some form of 'international' journal – it needs to be quick and it needs not to be rejected. For lack of any alternative, no frills publishers may satisfy this need. To see everyone who publishes in these journals as a poor innocent victim misunderstands the inequity of the scholarly publishing system. These underlying problems should be addressed but in the meantime it's a much more complex system than just predators and victims.

open access

predatory publishers

