Predatory open access publishing is an exploitative open-access academic publishing business model that involves charging publication fees to authors without providing the editorial and publishing services associated with legitimate journals (open access or not). The idea that they are "predatory" is based on the view that academics are tricked into publishing with them, though some authors may be aware that the journal is poor quality or even fraudulent.[a] New scholars from developing countries are said to be especially at risk of being misled by predatory practices.[2][3]

"Beall’s List", a report that was regularly updated by Jeffrey Beall of the University of Colorado until January 2017, set forth criteria for categorizing publications as predatory.[4] The list was taken offline by the author in January 2017.[5][b] A demand by Frontiers Media to open a misconduct case against Beall was reported as the reason Beall closed the list. An investigation by the university was closed with no findings.[6][7]

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History

In March 2008, Gunther Eysenbach, publisher of an early open access journal, drew attention to what he
called "black sheep among open access publishers and journals" and highlighted in his blog publishers and journals which resorted to excessive spam to attract authors and editors, criticizing in particular Bentham, Dove Medical Press, and Libertas Academica. In July 2008, Richard Poynder's interview series brought attention to the practices of new publishers who were "better able to exploit the opportunities of the new environment."[9] Doubts about honesty and scams in a subset of open-access journals continued to be raised in 2009.[10][11] Concerns for spamming practices from the "black sheep among open access journals and publishers" ushered the leading open access publishers to create the Open Access Scholarly Publishers Association in 2008.[12] In another early precedent, in 2009 the Improbable Research blog had found that Scientific Research Publishing's journals duplicated papers already published elsewhere;[13] the case was subsequently reported in Nature.[14] In 2010, Cornell University graduate student Phil Davis (editor of the Scholarly Kitchen blog) submitted a manuscript consisting of computer-generated nonsense (using SCIgen) which was accepted for a fee (but withdrawn by the author).[15] Predatory publishers have been reported to hold submissions hostage, refusing to allow them to be withdrawn and thereby preventing submission in another journal.[16][17]

On 25 August 2016, the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) filed a lawsuit against the OMICS Group, iMedPub, Conference Series, and the individual Srinubabu Gedela, an Indian national who is president of the companies.[18] In the lawsuit, the defendants are accused of "deceiving academics and researchers about the nature of its publications and hiding publication fees ranging from hundreds to thousands of dollars". The FTC was also responding to pressure to take action against predatory publishers.[20] Attorneys for the OMICS Group published a response on their website, claiming "your FTC allegations are baseless. Further we understand that FTC working towards favoring some subscription based journals publishers who are earring [sic] Billions of dollars rom [sic] scientists literature," suggesting that corporations in the scientific publishing business were behind the allegations.[18]

Bohannon's experiment
In 2013, John Bohannon, a staff writer for the journal Science and for popular science publications, targeted the open access system by submitting to a number of such journals a deeply flawed paper on the purported effect of a lichen constituent, and published the results in a paper called, "Who's Afraid of Peer Review?". About 60% of those journals, including the Journal of Natural Pharmaceuticals, accepted the faked medical paper, and 40%, including the most established one, PLOS ONE, rejected it.[21]

'Dr Fraud' experiment
In 2015, four researchers created a fictitious sub-par scientist named Anna O. Szust (oszust is Polish for "fraud" [person]), and applied on her behalf for an editor position to 360 scholarly journals. Szust's qualifications were dismal for the role of an editor; she had never published a single article and had no editorial experience. The books and book chapters listed on her CV were made-up, as were the publishing houses that published the books.

One-third of the journals to which Szust applied were sampled from Beall's List of 'predatory' journals. Forty of these predatory journals accepted Szust as editor without any background vetting and often within days or even hours. By comparison, she received minimal to no positive response from the "control" journals which "must meet certain standards of quality, including ethical publishing practices."[22] Among
journals sampled from the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ), 8 of 120 accepted Szust. The DOAJ has since removed some (but not all) of the affected journals in a recent purge. None of the 120 sampled journals listed in Journal Citation Reports (JCR) offered Szust the position.

The results of the experiment were published in Nature in March 2017,[23] and widely presented in the press.[24][25][26]

SCIgen experiments
SCIgen, a computer program that randomly generates academic computer science papers using context-free grammar, has generated papers that have been accepted by a number of predatory journals as well as predatory conferences.

Characteristics
Complaints that are associated with predatory open-access publishing include

- Accepting articles quickly with little or no peer review or quality control,[27] including hoax and nonsensical papers.[15][28][29]
- Notifying academics of article fees only after papers are accepted.[27]
- Aggressively campaigning for academics to submit articles or serve on editorial boards.[30]
- Listing academics as members of editorial boards without their permission,[4][31] and not allowing academics to resign from editorial boards.[4][32]
- Appointing fake academics to editorial boards.[33]
- Mimicking the name or web site style of more established journals.[32]
- Making misleading claims about the publishing operation, such as a false location.[4]
- Using ISSN improperly.
- Citing fake or non-existent impact factors.

Growth and structure
Predatory journals have rapidly increased their publication volumes from 53,000 in 2010 to an estimated 420,000 articles in 2014, published by around 8,000 active journals.[36][37] Early on, publishers with more than 100 journals dominated the market, but since 2012 publishers in the 10–99 journal size category have captured the largest market share. The regional distribution of both the publisher's country and authorship is highly skewed, with three quarters of authors hailing from Asia or Africa.[36] Authors paid an average fee of 178 USD per article for articles typically published within 2 to 3 months of submission.[36]

Response

Beall's list
University of Colorado Denver librarian and researcher Jeffrey Beall, who coined the term "predatory publishing", first published his list of predatory publishers in 2010.[30] Beall's list of potential, possible, or
probable predatory scholarly open-access publishers attempted to identify scholarly open access publishers with questionable practices.[38] In 2013, Nature reported that Beall's list and web site were "widely read by librarians, researchers, and open-access advocates, many of whom applaud his efforts to reveal shady publishing practices."[30] Others have raised doubts that "Whether it's fair to classify all these journals and publishers as 'predatory' is an open question—several shades of gray may be distinguishable."[39]

Beall's analyses have been called sweeping generalizations with no supporting evidence,[40] and he has also been criticized for being biased against open-access journals from less economically developed countries.[41] One librarian wrote that Beall's list "attempts a binary division of this complex gold rush: the good and the bad. Yet many of the criteria used are either impossible to quantify... or can be found to apply as often to established OA journals as to the new entrants in this area... Some of the criteria seem to make First World assumptions that aren't valid worldwide."[42] Beall differed with these opinions and wrote a letter of rebuttal in mid-2015.[43]

Following the Who's Afraid of Peer Review? investigation, the DOAJ has tightened up its inclusion criteria, with the purpose of serving as a whitelist, very much like Beall's has been a blacklist.[44] The investigation found that "the results show that Beall is good at spotting publishers with poor quality control."[45] However, the managing director of DOAJ, Lars Bjørnshauge, estimates that questionable publishing probably accounts for fewer than 1% of all author-pays, open-access papers, a proportion far lower than Beall's estimate of 5-10%. Instead of relying on blacklists, Bjørnshauge argues that open-access associations such as the DOAJ and the Open Access Scholarly Publishers Association should adopt more responsibility for policing publishers: they should lay out a set of criteria that publishers and journals must comply with to win a place on a 'white list' indicating that they are trustworthy.[46]

Beall has been threatened with a lawsuit by a Canadian publisher that appears on the list. He reports that he has been the subject of online harassment for his work on the subject. His list has been criticized[47] for relying heavily on analysis of publishers' web sites, not engaging directly with publishers, and including newly founded but legitimate journals. Beall has responded to these complaints by posting the criteria he uses to generate the list, as well as instituting an anonymous three-person review body to which publishers can appeal to be removed from the list.[30] For example, a 2010 re-evaluation resulted in some journals being removed from Beall's list.[48]

In 2013, the OMICS publishing group threatened to sue Beall for $1 billion for his "ridiculous, baseless, [and] impertinent" inclusion of them on his list, which "smacks of literal unprofessionalism and arrogance".[49] An unedited sentence from the letter read: "Let us at the outset warn you that this is a very perilous journey for you and you will be completely exposing yourself to serious legal implications including criminal cases lunched against you in INDIA and USA."[50] Beall responded that the letter was "poorly written and personally threatening" and expressed his opinion that the letter "is an attempt to detract from the enormity of OMICS's editorial practices".[51] OMICS' lawyers stated that damages were being pursued under section 66A of India's Information Technology Act, 2000, which makes it illegal to
use a computer to publish "any information that is grossly offensive or has menacing character" or to publish false information.[52] The letter stated that three years in prison was a possible penalty, although a U.S. lawyer said that the threats seemed to be a "publicity stunt" that was meant to "intimidate".[49] Section 66A has been criticised in an India Today editorial for its potential for misuse in "stifling political dissent, crushing speech and ... enabling bullying".[52] Beall could have been sued for defamation, and would not have been able to fall back on truth as a final defense; under section 66A, the truth of any information is irrelevant if it is grossly offensive.[52]

In an unrelated case in 2015, Section 66A was struck down by the Supreme Court of India, which found that it had no proximate connection to public order, "arbitrarily, excessively and disproportionately invades the right of free speech," and that the description of offences is "open-ended, undefined and vague."[53] As such, it is not possible for the OMICS Group to proceed against Beall under section 66A, but it could mount a defamation case. Finally, in August 2016, OMICS was sued for "deceptive business practices related to journal publishing and scientific conferences" by the Federal Trade Commission (a US government agency), who won an initial court ruling in November 2017.[54]

Beall's list was used as an authoritative source by South Africa's Department of Higher Education and Training in maintaining its list of accredited journals: articles published in those journals will determine funding levels for their authors; however, journals identified as predatory will be removed from this list.[55] ProQuest is reviewing all journals on Beall's list, and has started removing them from the International Bibliography of the Social Sciences.[55]

In January 2017, Beall shut down his blog and removed all its content, citing pressure from his employer.[56] Beall's supervisor wrote a response stating that he did not pressure Beall to discontinue his work, or threaten his employment; and had tried hard to support Beall's academic freedom.[57]

**Cabells' lists**

At the May 2017 meeting of the Society for Scholarly Publishing, Cabell's International, a company that offers scholarly publishing analytics and other scholarly services, announced that it intended to launch a blacklist of predatory journals (not publishers) in June, and said that access would be by subscription only.[58] The company had started work on its blacklist criteria in early 2016.[59] In July 2017, both a black list and a white list were offered for subscription on their website.[60][61]

**Other lists**

Since Beall's list closed, other list groups have started,[62] including CSIR-Structural Engineering Research Centre and an anonymous group at Stop Predatory Journals.[62][63]

**Other efforts**

More transparent peer review, such as open peer review and post-publication peer review, has been advocated to combat predatory journals.[64] Others have argued instead that the discussion on predatory journals should not be turned "into a debate over the shortcomings of peer review—it is nothing of the sort. It is about fraud, deception, and irresponsibility..."[65]
In an effort to "set apart legitimate journals and publishers from non-legitimate ones", principles of transparency and best practice have been identified and issued collectively by the Committee on Publication Ethics, the DOAJ, the Open Access Scholarly Publishers Association, and the World Association of Medical Editors.[66] Various journal review websites (crowd-sourced or expert-run) have been started, some focusing on the quality of the peer review process and extending to non-OA publications.[67][68] A group of libraries and publishers launched an awareness campaign.[69][70]

A number of measures have been suggested to further combat predatory journals. Others have called on research institutions to improve the publication literacy notably among junior researchers in developing countries.[71] Some organisations have also developed criteria in which predatory publishers could be spotted through providing tips that include avoiding fast publishers.[72]

As Beall has ascribed predatory publishing to a consequence of gold open access (particularly its author-pays variant),[73] one researcher has argued for platinum open access, where the absence of article processing charges removes the publisher’s conflict of interest in accepting article submissions.[74] More objective discriminating metrics[75] have been proposed, such as a "predatory score"[76] and positive and negative journal quality indicators.[77] Others have encouraged authors to consult subject-area expert-reviewed journal listings, such as the Directory of Nursing Journals, vetted by the International Academy of Nursing Editors and its collaborators.[78] It has been argued that the incentives for fraud need to be removed.[79]

Bioethicist Arthur Caplan has warned that predatory publishing, fabricated data, and academic plagiarism erodes public confidence in the medical profession, devalues legitimate science, and undermines public support for evidence-based policy.[80]

In 2015, Rick Anderson, associate dean in the J. Willard Marriott Library, University of Utah, challenged the term itself: "what do we mean when we say 'predatory,' and is that term even still useful?... This question has become relevant because of that common refrain heard among Beall's critics: that he only examines one kind of predation—the kind that naturally crops up in the context of author-pays OA." Anderson suggests that the term "predatory" be retired in the context of scholarly publishing. "It's a nice, attention-grabbing word, but I'm not sure it's helpfully descriptive... it generates more heat than light."[81] A 2017 article in The New York Times suggests that a significant number of academics are "eager" to publish their work in these journals, making the relationship more a "new and ugly symbiosis" than a case of scholars being exploited by "predators".[82]

Similarly, a study published in January 2018 found that "Scholars in the developing world felt that reputable Western journals might be prejudiced against them and sometimes felt more comfortable publishing in journals from the developing world. Other scholars were unaware of the reputation of the journals in which they published and would not have selected them had they known. However, some scholars said they would still have published in the same journals if their institution recognised them. The pressure to 'publish or perish' was another factor influencing many scholars' decisions to publish in these fast-turnaround journals. In some cases, researchers did not have adequate guidance and felt they lacked the knowledge of research to submit to a more reputable journal."[83]
Inclusions when list was discontinued

- Allied Academies[^4]
- Bentham Open[^4]
- Frontiers Media[^4]
- OMICS Publishing Group[^4]
- Pulsus Group[^4]
- Scientific Research Publishing (SCRIP)[^4]
- World Academy of Science, Engineering and Technology (WASET)[^4]
- MedCrave Group[^5][^4]
- Intech Open Science[^6]

Past inclusions

- Dove Medical Press
- Hindawi Publishing Corporation (only some of its journals)[^7]
- Libertas Academica
- MDPI

See also

- Author mill
- Diploma mill
- Fraudulent conferences
- Hijacked journal
- Mega journal
- Open access journal
- Peer review failures
- Pseudo-scholarship
- Vanity press

Notes

a. Gina Kolata (*The New York Times*, 30 October 2017): "These publications often are called predatory journals, on the assumption that well-meaning academics are duped into working with them — tricked by flattering emails from the journals inviting them to submit a paper or fooled by a name that sounded like a journal they knew.

"But it’s increasingly clear that many academics know exactly what they’re getting into, which explains why these journals have proliferated despite wide criticism. The relationship is less predator and prey, some experts say, than a new and ugly symbiosis."[^1]

b. The list had 1155 entries as of 31 December 2016.

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**External links**

- Think.Check.Submit. (http://thinkchecksubmit.org)
- Copy of Beall's list (as it was on January 2017) (http://beallslist.weebly.com)
- List at predatory journals (https://predatoryjourneys.com/journals/)
- List of predatory publishers (https://predatoryjourneys.com/publishers/)


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