

Too Good to be True? Being Alert to Predatory Publishers, Journals, and Conferences
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Would you ever think that an emailed invitation to submit a manuscript might lead to an entity with ties to funding terrorism? It happened to one of our ITAA colleagues. We all think of our work as being good when we ship it off to a journal, but, truthfully, we expect, at a minimum, some edits, comments, and questions, and we anticipate that a review will not be overly fast. Our colleague was surprised at how quickly the manuscript was accepted with few if any changes. Knowing that some journals have page charges, she was not surprised to be asked to pay them. Where the payment was to be sent, however, seemed unusual, and that clue led to the ultimate discovery that this was a predatory journal.

What have come to be called predatory publishers and journals are a real problem for scholars and librarians. All open-access publishers may not be predatory, but all predatory publishers are open-access. The term predatory can be applied to independent journals or to publishers having multiple journals (Beall, 2015).¹ Jeffrey Beall, an academic librarian at the University of Colorado Denver, is the best known writer and watchdog on the topic, having followed it since 2008 (Straumsheim, 2017). In a 2016 article, Beall described the development of “gold open-access publishing”, which incorporates author fees to support a journal, and the expansion in the numbers of for-profit versions of gold open-access publishing. Beall (2016) pointed to the profit motive as a driving force in this growth. Straumsheim (2017) reported predatory conferences that, like the publishers or journals, spam scholars seeking to profit from registration fees. Because quality reviews reduce the number of accepted manuscripts or presentations, predatory entities provide little or no review (Beall, 2016; Straumsheim, 2017). Thus, readers cannot have assurance of the value of the research, which can even include publication of “junk science” (Beall, 2016, p. 2).

Beall identified 52 criteria that can be used as clues to whether or not a journal or publisher is predatory (Straumsheim, 2017). For example, e-mail solicitors of manuscripts may indicate that the journal is based in a major city such as New York or London, but the reality may be that it comes from somewhere much more unexpected. There may be deceptive references to journal impact factors. Publishers of multiple journals may have odd subject matter combinations. Websites may be difficult to navigate, and e-mail addresses may suggest private individuals rather than bearing an organization’s name (Beall, 2015, 2016). According to Straumsheim (2017), Cabell’s International, an organization consulted by librarians and scholars, has been working with Beall and is supposed to be revealing a blacklist of predatory journals in the near future. Prior to the disappearance of Beall’s website, it provided updated lists of them.

Perhaps some good news is that Beall (2016) reported that predatory businesses particularly targeted researchers in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union more than in the West. Other targeting factors, however, included scholars in institutions that use only publication numbers in promotion and tenure decisions, as well as researchers who have research funding. Unfortunately some databases, including Google Scholar, include predatory publishers in an effort to be as thorough an index as possible (Beall, 2016).

The bottom line is that when you are considering submitting a manuscript or citing an unknown open-access journal, stop first and do some research. Look to see if Cabell's has published a blacklist. Consult an academic librarian at your institution. Beall (2015) even suggested contacting authors in the journal concerning their experiences. We have to be skeptical about e-mailed invitations to present work, too. Although Beall (2016) and Straumsheim (2017) said researchers were "spammed", that may not literally mean that the email is labeled spam. It seems that you must be alert to the reality that some things can simply be too good to be true.

¹Note that at the time of finalizing this Newsletter piece, this citation source (<https://scholarlyoa.com/publishers/>) could no longer be accessed as it was when the piece was drafted in late December, 2016. Straumsheim (2017), referenced below, documents the disappearance of the website.

References

Beall, J. (2016). Essential information about predatory publishers and journals. *International Higher Education* (Summer), 2-3. Retrieved from <http://ejournals.bc.edu/ojs/index.php/ihe/article/view/9358/8368>

Straumsheim, C. (2017, January 18). No more 'Beall's List.' *Inside Higher Education*. Retrieved from <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2017/01/18/librarians-list-predatory-journals-reportedly-removed-due-threats-and-politics>