As a scholarly communications librarian, I specialize in the system through which research and other scholarly writings are created, evaluated for quality, disseminated to the scholarly community, and preserved for future use.
Predatory publishing has in many ways become the fake news of academic publishing. It makes a great headline and not only raises our heart rate, but doubts about our ability to trust in established systems and the information they produce.
Like fake news, predatory publishers are sometimes hard to spot, requiring us to drill down for more information and, ultimately, check our gut.
It’s understandable that something like Beall’s List can feel stable and authoritative. However, even this blacklist identifies the publishers as potential, possible, or probable predatory publishers – underlining the difficulty of definitively identifying deceptive practices.

It’s important to note that over the years, many publishers once blacklisted by Beall were later removed from the list. The publishers hadn’t intended to be deceptive, they were new to the online publishing space or, perhaps, merely took an approach that was different from western standards.

Many established, well-respected journals don’t pass Beall’s criteria.
Article abstract: “Jeffrey Beall’s blog listing of potential predatory journals and publishers, as well as his Criteria for Determining Predatory Open-Access (OA) Publishers are often looked at as tools to help researchers avoid publishing in predatory journals. While these Criteria has brought a greater awareness of OA predatory journals, these tools alone should not be used as the only source in determining the quality of a scholarly journal. Employing a three-person independent judgment making panel, this study demonstrates the subjective nature of Beall’s Criteria by applying his Criteria to both OA and non-OA Library and Information Science journals (LIS), to demonstrate that traditional peer-reviewed journals could be considered predatory. Many of these LIS journals are considered as top-tier publications in the field and used when evaluating researcher’s publication history for promotion and tenure.”
What is a predatory journal?

The single trait shared by predatory publishers is that they deceive authors for financial gain.
In 2016, the Federal Trade Commission filed against OMICS for deceiving and defrauding authors, not for publishing low-quality journals. Misrepresenting their impact factor, indexing, and peer review processes, the publisher convinced academics to submit articles representing work that took months or years to complete, and then held that article hostage over undisclosed publication fees that went into the thousands of dollars. Because the article was held captive by the publisher, those authors couldn’t then resubmit to another publisher.

Researchers from all backgrounds and institutions publish in predatory journals, but studies have shown that these publishers primarily work with inexperienced researchers and researchers from developing countries.
Why publish in a predatory journal?

There are anecdotes of researchers who already have tenure and want to get their work published more quickly. More often, the researcher doesn’t know the journal is predatory and won’t provide their work with the benefit of peer-review.
There’s a lot of anecdotal evidence, but a new study came out last week.

Authors often publish in these journals because they:
(1) are afraid of being viewed as inferior to others because they belong to a particular group
(2) were unaware that that were publishing in a predatory journal (perhaps they received one or more emails inviting them to publish and were flattered by it)
(3) are responding to the pressures to publish – or perish – while also juggling a demanding teaching load
(4) feel their knowledge of research methodologies is too limited to enable them to publish in higher-quality journals


- Social identity threat
- Unawareness
- High pressure
- Lack of research proficiency

Study available at doi:10.1002/leap.1150
Knowing why faculty publish in predatory journals, how do we address it?

A part of any response is to first identify and communicate the issue, and this is already happening through the libraries and other offices across CUNY.
The Libraries do not advocate black listing or white listing specific publishers or journals. Instead, we recognize this as an information literacy issue, and there are a number of resources available to help faculty evaluate publisher practices.

The publishing industry provides an online tool called Think.Check.Submit (recommended by the NIH), and many of the campus libraries offer online resources and hands-on workshops.

**Ethical Publishing Practices**

- www.thinkchecksubmit.org
- LibGuides from CUNY Libraries
- Workshops offered by CUNY Libraries
As an example -- In one of the workshops I offer, we do a think-pair-share exercise in which faculty are asked to use this checklist to evaluate the publisher, the journal, its content, and its editorial process. We really have to dig into the website publisher’s website and crosscheck the information with outside resources. It’s an intensive process, and it’s helpful to go through it together.
Each of these are valuable resources, but they often come *after* the work has been published and don’t necessarily get at some of the underlying issues that lead faculty to publish in these journals in the first place.

Therefore, I advocate for a more comprehensive approach, one in which the Libraries partner with campus colleagues to support the scholarship produced by CUNY faculty.
CUNY’s librarians are deeply committed to maintaining the integrity of the scholarly record, and a subset of us have long offered a range of workshops to support faculty scholarship. When it comes to these workshops, campus partners are vital to ensuring that faculty attend. Unlike the headliner “Beware of Predatory Publishers!” a library workshop on copyright or authors’ rights isn’t a sold-out show.

Let’s work together to get these resources out to faculty.
A workshop on finding and evaluating publishers includes a component about predatory publishing, but emphasizes how to select the best journal venue for a work based on its scope, audience, reputation, and impact.

Instead of responding to solicitations from a predatory journal, faculty are asked to engage with the information ecosystem in which they operate.

Identifying Journals

- Which journals do you read?
- Which journals do they cite?
- Find similar articles to what you’d like to write, which publications are they citing?
So that when a faculty member is ready to start writing, they already know the journal they want to publish in and can write with its guidelines in mind. This increases the likelihood that the article will be accepted and published, and decreases the likelihood that it will be submitted to a lower quality – or predatory - journal.
THANK YOU!

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