

# Nurse Author & Editor

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## Predatory Publishing Practices

More Trends in Predatory Publishing Practices

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Most publishers, and many authors, have rapidly learned about the unethical practices of predatory open access publishers. Shady publishing practices undermine the credibility of the literature by publishing just about anything, without vetting content accuracy through the expertise of editors and peer reviewers in a discipline. They often have no archival policy in place to ensure digital preservation, or permanency of access to content. Of serious concern is the practice of email phishing to solicit potential authors. Junior scholars seeking publication for career advancement, and even prolific authors, may fall prey to sophisticated invitations to publish.

Jeffrey Beall, an academic librarian whose focus of study is predatory publishing, has developed a framework to analyze scholarly open access publishers and standalone journals. Beall (2014) provides multiple criteria to help editors, authors, and consumers evaluate the authenticity of scholarly content, available on his blog Scholarly Open Access.

Many disciplines are addressing the challenges that predatory publishing practices bring with expansion of the open access movement. In nursing, the International Academy of Nursing Editors (INANE) collaborative group published a position paper to educate editors about common practices associated with this phenomenon (Author, 2014). This paper identified several important red flags that may signal a predatory publisher or journal, such as no evidence of the editor's standing in the discipline; no contact information for the editor; a promise of rapid review and publication; a mysterious review process; inclusion on Beall's list of predatory publishers and journals; similarity or ambiguity of journal names; and manuscript solicitation using overly complimentary emails.

Beall's blog has posted recent information about other developments of concern as predatory practices grow more sophisticated. This article will discuss additional red flags for several related trends from unethical publishers, including journal hijacking, predatory professional conferences, and predatory social media promotions.

## **MORE CONCERNING TRENDS**

### Journal Hijacking

Journal hijacking is one type of predatory publishing. Some predatory

publishers create new journals. A hijacked journal is new and very intentionally similar to an existing, highly reputable journal that a reader or author would not question. We often think of predatory publishing in the context of fully online, open access journals. However, Jalalian and Mahboobi (2014) report at least two hijacked print only journals that do not have electronic platforms and do not use the open access model.

Hijacking publishers build on the solid reputation of long-standing journals with very sophisticated websites. Jalalian and Mahboobi (2014) explain that only minimal website design competency is required given the open source resources available. What is required are skills to copy content from reputable journal websites; hide identities on the Internet, using such techniques as actual but invalid addresses and phone numbers or virtual VoIP-based numbers; and a familiarity with potential authors' behaviors, such as a pressing need to publish articles in a journal with an impact factor. Some features that hijackers target are:

- Reputable but not overly famous journals that are often a single journal housed by a single publisher.
- Journals with a preferably low impact factor compiled by Thomson Reuters' Journal Citation Reports.
- Journals based in non-English speaking countries that may be difficult for potential authors to contact by phone for verification.
- Print only journals that do not have a website.

The above criteria make it harder for authors to establish the authenticity of the journal. Authors may question the feasibility of a several week

turnaround time in a reputable, high impact factor journal, but novices seeking publication in a short time will more likely be satisfied as long as the impact factor is present (Jalalian & Mahboobi, 2014).

Long-term consequences of unethical publishing practices include gradual shifts in author thinking related to creating a scholarly publishable product. One seasoned author questioned the need for extensive revisions, citing multiple previous manuscripts published without any revision in respected American journals. Unfortunately, these were most likely predatory journals. Jalalian and Mahboobi (2014) assert that this is one of many similar incidents causing previously enthusiastic authors to reject the longer, more rigorous process to publication associated with reputable journals.

There is also a tendency for authors to limit potential publication venues to those that they absolutely know are reputable in an effort to avoid increasing threats of unethical practices. This impacts the progress of younger, but potentially high quality, journals that are still developing reputations and may not be fully indexed or have achieved sufficient metric data. Indeed, a common feature of email calls for papers and website information is to note that the indexing process is in progress. This tendency makes scholarly growth very difficult from the perspective of both authors and publishers.

### Predatory Professional Conferences

Nurses often use conferences to disseminate information for career advancement. Conference presentations are a good way to refine dissemination prior to formal publication. However, even conferences have become the subject of predatory practices, sponsored by predatory

publishers seeking contacts to solicit. Increasingly common fake conferences fall under the category of predatory meetings (Jalalian & Mahboobi, 2014; Scholarly Open Access, 2013).

At the recent annual INANE editor's meeting, one Editor-in-Chief shared her experiences with a conference sponsored by the predatory publisher, OMICS (Beall & Yurcha, 2014). She described several practices similar to Beall's (2014) red flags for unethical practices in journal publications. For example, Beall (2014) notes that predatory journals may have names that sound deceptively similar to legitimate journals and this may also be true for conferences. Scholarly Open Access (2013) alerts us to other similarities between predatory journal publications and predatory meetings. Predatory publishers often have a fleet of journals with nebulous titles applicable to many disciplines. Meetings sponsored by such publishers may be targeted to multiple disciplines that have little or no relationship to each other. Beall's investigation also revealed that conference promotions included leading scientists, but upon speaking with the scholars, they had never agreed to participate. There were also no refunds offered for cancellation of the meeting by the organizers. Advertisements for these conferences are similar to solicitations for manuscripts, promising international presenter status, a complimentary presentation slot, and free gifts.

### Predatory Social Media Promotions

Hot off the press from the Scholarly Open Access blog (Beall, 2015) is a recent example of a publisher creating fake identities for the business social networking site LinkedIn. LinkedIn was launched in 2003 to allow networking opportunities similar to a Facebook platform, but in a

professional context. The site touts a network of over 300 million users, encouraging potential users to build a free professional online identity to connect with colleagues, discover professional opportunities, and get profession-related updates (LinkedIn Corporation, 2015).

The recent example described an invitation to connect on LinkedIn (Scholarly Open Access, 2015). I receive these invitations on a regular basis. People may be more discriminating about “friend” requests on Facebook, accepting requests only from recognizable names. Conversely, the practice on a professional network such as LinkedIn is to accept connection invitations more freely on the premise that one is building professional contacts and requests are generated by those in your discipline who may or may not know you. You have the opportunity on LinkedIn to openly share as much of your business profile as you desire, and the expectation is that people you do not know will seek a connection. Knowing this, the fake connection request has a photo of a young pretty girl with a name and position at a company. However, Beall clicked the “contact us” page, which did not lead to a location, but rather to the open access publisher ECronicon. More searching on his part revealed that the picture source was a larger image on a law school admissions website, cropped for the fake LinkedIn invitation. Finally, his evaluation of this publisher was consistent with alerts to low-quality and non-transparency reflected in his published criteria (Beall, 2014).

Fake social media promotions by unscrupulous publishers have been offered for at least several years. Witwer (2013) described multiple scamming attempts to his LinkedIn account by the publishing company OMICS, housed in India, inviting him to join discipline specific groups. Upon investigation,

Witwer uncovered groups with just one or two members. He investigated the OMICS representatives who initiated the contacts and found several red flags in their profiles, such as common, likely untraceable names (e.g., Michael Smith); a large range of years of education; college degrees that did not exist at the institutions listed on the profile; hobbies listed in alphabetical order, suggesting they were copied from lists; and numerous grammatical errors.

## MY EXPERIENCES

Since I first became aware of Beall's information about unethical publishing practices in 2012, I have tried to save calls for papers that I receive to a dedicated folder in my email, with the goal of further investigation. I managed to do that 14 times, and offer my unscientific analysis, plus a few thoughts. I believe even this extremely small sample illustrates progression in the sophistication level of the predators.

### Calls for Papers

Thirteen solicitations were calls for papers. Of those, four were on Beall's list of predatory standalone journals. The rest were not, but there were names that were extremely close, often differing by only one word. For example, one title used the term "social science" and the other the term "social studies." This makes me wonder, did the publisher, knowing that the journal was listed on Beall's list, intentionally change one small detail in the journal title?

Although most were not on Beall's list, each contained at least two, if not more, red flags listed in published criteria (Beall, 2014; Jalalian, &

Mahboobi, 2014). For example, these emails were replete with grammatical and style errors. Twelve calls used the term “international” in journal name and narrative, but only two identified a country of origin, Canada and the United Kingdom. Those that addressed the indexing process sometimes indicated that they were indexed but most often stated they are in the indexing process. In one case, they were “under” the indexing process. Signatures were often a generic “Editor-In-Chief” or “[Publisher] Editor.” Finally, only one of these calls was specific to nursing. In the typical predatory fashion, most had multiple academic areas listed encompassing just about anything. Interestingly, the few that did offer specific disciplines had little or nothing to do with nursing. I was encouraged to publish my nursing expertise in journals related to arts and commerce; and poultries, fisheries, and wildlife sciences.

### Call for Proposals

I recently received a call for proposals to present at an international academic research conference to be held in the United States. Disciplines invited were education, behavioral science, and business. Nursing was not listed. Although nurses do create presentations related to these three areas, I question how many like-minded participants who are nurses might be reasonably expected to attend a non-nursing specific conference? I was warned that this highly anticipated conference has limited space and was likely to fill fast. I was also told I could expect to receive the above-mentioned international presenter status, plus publication in online proceedings, networking opportunities with others from “nearly all states, dozens of universities, and several countries.” A professional development certificate was promised, sounding like continuing education hours, but not

in so many words. I could also expect to receive credit for a keynote presentation.

The website of the organizer lists 45 topic areas, none specific to nursing and only a few of which would likely appeal to nurses. This company offers several journals that do not appear on Beall's list, nor is the company listed as a predatory publisher, likely because these journals are not open access. When I investigated the website, which looked very legitimate and may be, I still found several of Beall's (2014) red flags. For example, I was unable to access the names of an editor or editorial board members for any of the three journals listed. I did not purchase a journal, so they may be listed in the journal itself, but I had no way to know. I did find an advisory board and editorial board as well as an editor in chief on the website. However, with three journals that are not related disciplines, it would seem that these should be designated by discipline specific journal. They advertised that all journals are indexed with Cabell's Directory. They also list several other popular directories, but a careful reader finds that these will be recommended for inclusion and are not indexed as yet. The copyright for their website is 2012, so they have not achieved inclusion in approximately three years. I don't know if this is a legitimate website describing an organizer for academic conferences and publisher of academic journals or not, but there are enough red flags for me to disregard their email solicitation.

## CONCLUSION

Jalalian and Mahboobi (2014) offer short term and long-term solutions in response to unethical publishing practices. In the short term, they suggest

education to increase awareness about scams and provide authors basic skills to evaluate dissemination venues. In short, ignore email solicitations. Do not even open those that indicate your work is already accepted. Double and triple check website claims. Verify claimed indexers with the indexing service. Compare website content with free web design resources and similarly named journals. The long-term strategy they advocate is rigorous evaluation of methods we now use to assess scholarly work.

In the meantime, every nurse is a consumer of the nursing literature. Whether readers, authors, or both, we must quickly become savvy detectives to uncover unethical publishing practices! It is evident that we now need to also carefully scrutinize not just publication opportunities, but all solicitations and occasions for scholarly dissemination.

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