2024 Internationales Jahrbuch der Erwachsenenbildung International Yearbook of Adult Education

Michael Schemmann (Hg.)

Coordination of Action in Adult Education Organizations

wbv

E-Journal Einzelbeitrag
von: Tim Roor

Review: The Predator Effect: Understanding the Past, Present and Future of Deceptive Academic Journals

wbv

Review: The Predator Effect: Understanding the Past, Present and Future of Deceptive Academic Journals

Tim Roor
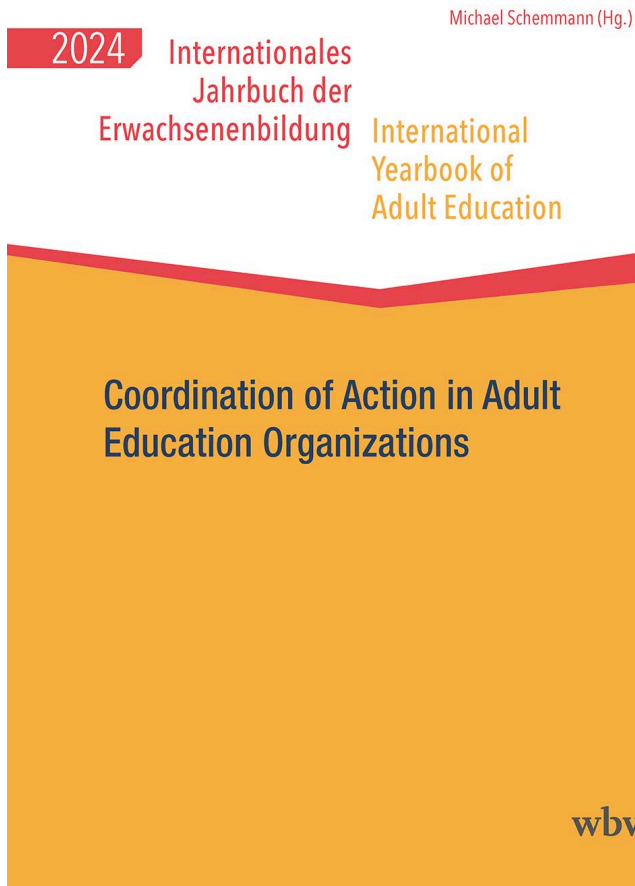
Simon Linacre (2022). The Predator Effect: Understanding the Past, Present and Future of Deceptive Academic Journals. Charleston: ATG LLC (Media). 69 pp.

Predatory journals, or predatory publishing, as an unintended effect of a combination of the open access movement in academia and changing governance structures in higher education organizations, pose a major risk to scholarly integrity and communication. In his 2022 monograph "The Predator Effect – Understanding the Past, Present and Future of Deceptive Academic Journals", Simon Linacre, formerly of Cabell's Scholarly Analytics and now working at Digital Science, explores what predatory journals are, how they came to be, how they have become an undesirable part of contemporary academic publishing, and how scholars can protect themselves from them.

The book is divided into 9 chapters which can be subdivided into three parts which are also reflected in the subtitle of the book. Chapters 2–5 look at the history of predatory publishing from its beginnings to the present day. First, Linacre develops a working definition of the publishing phenomenon, which reads as follows:

> "Predatory journals are deceptive and often fake, giving the appearance of legitimate peer-reviewed journals and impact academic stakeholders by exploiting the Open Access model while using misleading tactics to solicit article submissions" (p. 11).

Chapters 3 and 4 trace the history of the emergence of predatory journals with a particular focus on the facilitating factors, such as the rise of digital publishing (p. 13), the commercialization of the academic publishing market after World War II and finally the successive success of the open access movement (p. 19), which aimed to facilitate public access to research results and whose funding model via author fees provided the economic breeding ground for predatory journals. Finally, Chapter 5 is devoted to Jeffrey Beall, a key figure in the recent history of predatory journals. Beall's contributions, such as the coining of the term "predatory journal" and the creation of Beall's List (p. 25), the first blacklist of predatory journals and publishers, are discussed.

Chapters 6 and 7 focus on the post-Beall period and thus the present of predatory practice. Chapter 6 draws on a number of quantitative studies on the status quo and the global spread of the publication phenomenon. Chapter 7 focuses on authors who publish in predatory journals and, with the use of qualitative studies on the publication phenomenon, examines the reasons why authors choose to publish in such journals. Linacre comes to the conclusion that a combination of unethical, i. e. consciously act-

ing authors, and inexperienced or ignorant authors can be found in the article reviews
of predatory journals (p. 42).

Finally, chapters 8 and 9 focus on the future handling of predatory journals and
concentrate in particular on changes to structures and the establishment of organiza-
tional and individual prevention strategies. Linacre highlights the development of AI to
check reference lists for citations from predatory journals as a promising development
(p. 55).

Overall, Linacre presents a compact, open access published, reader-friendly and
historically precise overview that can be a guide to action, especially for novices in aca-
demic publishing. However, despite citing a large number of empirical studies on the
topic of predatory journals, it also has scientific gaps and ultimately misses a great op-
portunity to question fundamental assumptions in the debate.

First of all, it is critical to note that the author does not make explicit the major role
of commercially oriented core publishers of science in the emergence of predatory jour-
nals in the context of his explanations on the history of predatory journals. While the
monopolistic pricing power of Elsevier and Co. was the main driver of the journal crisis
of the 1990s, from which the non-profit-oriented Open Access (OA) movement eventu-
ally emerged, they also contributed to the "author-pays model" becoming established as
a common business model in OA, contrary to the basic anti-commercial orientation of
the OA movement. Although many OA publishers and journals only use article pro-
cessing charges (APCs) to cover their costs, this financing method offered commercial
academic publishers the opportunity to enter the OA market. The previously classic
commercial providers have tapped into the OA 'business field' in such a way that Elsev-
ier, one of these publishers, currently publishes the most OA journals and subscription
prices for libraries have even risen to such an extent that the nationwide supply of sci-
entific knowledge can no longer generally be guaranteed (Morrison 2017, p. 53; Beck-
Sickinger et al. 2019, p. 245).

The work also lacks a critical examination of the "Predatory Reports" blacklist pub-
lished by Cabells, which is prominently highlighted in several places in the book as an
alternative to the Beall's List, which was closed in 2017. For example, the literature
points out the lack of transparency and objectivity of the inclusion criteria or criticizes
the payment barrier for the list (Dony et al. 2020).

Finally, the most comprehensive point of criticism is closely linked to the author's
uncritical attitude towards the many studies cited that investigate the phenomenon of
predatory publishing. The majority of studies use blacklists such as Beall's List as a data
basis for investigating predatory journals without cross-checking the results due to the
subjectivity and lack of transparency of the inclusion criteria. This can lead to distor-
tions, particularly to the detriment of publishers from countries in the Global South, as
it reproduces the bundling of misconduct and poor or lower quality (Eriksson & Hel-
gesson 2018). Without investigative journalistic methods, it is not possible to clarify
beyond doubt whether journals are pursuing honest intentions or acting illegitimately
by simply looking at publications from the outside. Thus, there is a great risk that
authors who are forced to publish in non-mainstream journals (Chavarro et al. 2017) for
reasons of "Northern" disciplinary gatekeeping (Mills & Inouye 2020, p. 102), for exam-

ple, will be falsely discredited. For a comprehensive critical examination of the concept of predatory publishing, such a fundamentally critical perspective would have been expected.

References

Beck-Sickinger, A., Schwappach-Pignataro, B., Herrmann, J. & Buchner, J. (2019). *Open Access* und die Zukunft wissenschaftlicher Veröffentlichungen. *Biospektrum 25*(3), 245. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12268-019-1040-z.

Chavarro, D., Tang, P., & Ràfols, I. (2017). Why researchers publish in non-mainstream journals: Training, knowledge bridging, and gap filling. *Research Policy 46*(9), 1666–1680. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.respol.2017.08.002.

Dony, C., Raskinet, M., Renaville, F., Simon, S., & Thirion, P. (2020). How reliable and useful is Cabell's Blacklist? A data-driven analysis. *LIBER Quarterly: The Journal of the Association of European Research Libraries 30*(1), 1–38. https://doi.org/10.18352/lq.10339.

Eriksson, S. & Helgesson, G. (2018). Time to stop talking about 'predatory journals'. *Learned Publishing 31*(2), 181–183. https://doi.org/10.1002/leap.1135.

Mills, D. & Inouye, K. (2021). Problematizing 'predatory publishing': A systematic review of factors shaping publishing motives, decisions, and experiences. *Learned Publishing 34*(2), 89–104. https://doi.org/10.1002/leap.1325.

Morrison, H. (2017). From the field: Elsevier as an open access publisher. *The Charleston Advisor 18*(3), 53–59. https://doi.org/10.5260/chara.18.3.53.

Author

Tim Roor (born Vetter), M. A., is a research associate at the Chair of Adult Education/ Continuing Education at the University of Cologne. In the context of his dissertation, he deals with questions of openness, transparency and representation of the international publication system of adult education research. His research interests include bibliometrics of adult education research, adult educational organization research, and workplace learning.

Contact
University of Cologne
Faculty of Human Sciences
Department of Educational and Social Science
Professorship for Adult and Continuing Education
Innere Kanalstraße 15, 50823 Cologne
Germany
t.vetter@uni-koeln.de
ORCID-ID: 0000-0003-1139-8328