

Predatory Publishers and Opportunities for Scholarly Societies

by Jeffrey Beall

In this paper, I show that the world of scholarly communication is resolutely shifting from a toll-access to an open-access publishing model, that there are many who are fraudulently corrupting this model for their own gain, and that the transition to open access will bring fundamental changes to scholarly societies' roles in the scholarly communication process, changes that will introduce new challenges and promising opportunities.

The Shift to Open Access Scholarly Publishing

To begin, I present three statements made and published in 2012 that make evident the inevitability of the transition to open-access (OA):

"The research communications system is in a period of transition towards open access." ^[1]

"It no longer seems to be a question whether OA is a viable alternative to the traditional subscription model for scholarly journal publishing; the question is rather when OA publishing will become the mainstream model." ^[2]

"Gold OA could account for 50 percent of the scholarly journal articles sometime between 2017 and 2021, and 90 percent of articles as soon as 2020 and more conservatively by 2025." ^[3]

It's clear that the transition is occurring faster in some fields than in others. The STEM fields (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics), along with the health sciences, have been leaders in the transition. Other fields, such as the arts, the humanities, and the social sciences (perhaps excepting economics) have been slower.

Predatory Publishers

At this time, there are really three main models for open-access publishing. The gold model (gold open access) is financially supported by a payment charged to the author(s) upon acceptance of a manuscript. These author processing charges (APCs) can range from as low as \$50 to as high as several thousand dollars, depending on the publisher. The green model (green open-access) is basically an add-on to the current system in which authors self-archive their works (usually the author's last draft in Word, not the publisher's PDF) in open-access institutional and disciplinary repositories. When one hears of open-access mandates, they usually refer to this type of open-access

publishing. Many enthusiastically support OA mandates, but few actually observe them.

Another model of scholarly open-access publishing is similar to the gold model, but there are no author fees. The publishing costs are supported benevolently, either by institutional funding or volunteer work, or a combination. Some call this platinum open access. It consists of online, open-access journals that charge no author fees for accepted papers.

One major flaw with the gold open-access model is that it creates a conflict of interest: the more papers a publisher accepts, the more revenue it generates. All across the globe, dozens of new publishers are appearing that employ the gold-open access model. Most of these are private businesses and many are corrupt. They are exploiting the gold-open access model for their own profit, gaming the system with shabby journals and bogus peer review. These are the publishers I refer to as predatory publishers.

I began studying predatory publishers in 2009. What motivated me to study them was a steady stream of spam email invitations to submit manuscripts and to serve on new editorial boards for the newly-created journals. Most scholars are painfully familiar with these solicitations. I now maintain a list of predatory publishers on my blog, entitled Scholarly Open Access, <http://scholarlyoa.com>.

The predatory publishers threaten the scholarly communication process in several ways. First, they are established and designed to deceive; they are counterfeit publishers. Accordingly, they frequently prey on those most unfamiliar with scholarly publishing -- graduate students and junior faculty. Moreover, in many developing countries, committees judge tenure and promotion chiefly on quantity rather than quality, a situation that creates an eager market for the bogus publishers. Thus, many researchers are fooled into thinking they have published in a legitimate journal when they have not, a revelation that can be damaging when they come up for tenure or promotion.

Predatory publishing also threatens science itself. Peer review is supposed to serve a gatekeeping role, separating science from pseudo-science. But when peer-review becomes corrupt, non-science can be published bearing the scientific community's ostensible seal of approval. Published scholarship is reported on by the media, used in legal cases, and applied by physicians. Bogus articles in corrupt medical journals have the potential to threaten the public health. Therefore, peer review's role is still important and relevant, yet some are corrupting it. We need to educate ourselves about this

situation and implement measures to deal with it -- which for scholarly societies may be a new opportunity.

Many in the academic community have enthusiastically and forcefully promoted open access. But these proponents have overlooked the quality aspects of scholarly publishing, resulting in the proliferation of predatory publishers. Just because a work is open-access doesn't mean it's good. The open-access movement may have actually changed the scholarly publishing industry's main weakness from high subscription costs to low article quality.

Yet another threat the predatory publishers have fostered is the increasing occurrence of author misconduct. Because the predatory publishers' customers are the authors rather than the readers, they mainly focus on attracting new manuscripts, even those unworthy of publication. When I examine articles published in predatory journals, I often see gross examples of plagiarism, including figure copying. Also occurring is self-plagiarism, as authors submit multiple versions of nearly the same paper to different journals to increase their publication counts, or they re-use entire sections from their earlier papers.

Opportunities for Scholarly Societies

The malevolence of the predatory publishers highlights the increased opportunities for the publishing arms of scholarly societies. Professional societies are not-for-profit, care greatly about their field, and truly seek to advance and make available the research their members carry out. Moreover, they are respected for conducting fair and honest peer review. These qualities will give them an edge up on for-profit publishers, especially the predatory ones.

A growing role of scholarly societies will be to teach its junior members about research and publishing ethics. Societies should have vigorous programs to prevent and detect author misconduct in scholarly publishing -- a few already do. Society publishers must also develop strong programs that prevent research stained by author misconduct from ever being published in the first place. This means systems that can detect plagiarism and image manipulation, for example, among other types of author misconduct.

The changing ways in which scholarly publication is financed will dramatically affect scholarly societies' publishing programs. For many years, library subscriptions have largely funded scholarly societies' budgets. This funding will disappear as open-access publishing predominates and libraries become separated from research collections. While gold-open access publishing has become the predominant model in

the sciences, it's still somewhat unclear exactly how the financing of scholarly communication will occur in open-access, scholarly society publications in the humanities, arts, and social sciences.

Some societies may choose to implement a non-refundable submission fee for manuscripts. Others may impose author fees, adopting the gold open-access model. Increasingly, universities and colleges are sponsoring open-access funds for their faculties' author fees.

As predatory publishers routinely abandon publishing ethics, more honest researchers will look to scholarly societies for their high quality research publications. So to succeed, societies must continue to "maintain the integrity of the academic record."^[4]

The licensing of published content will be another issue forcing learned society publishers to make difficult decisions. What level of open access do you want to assign your publications? Most in Europe prefer and demand the "CC By 3.0" license, a very broad and liberal license that allows data and text mining and even commercial reproduction of published works. In North America, many tend to view open access as "ocular," meaning that most prefer licenses that allow viewing open-access articles online but not much more.

Open access will not only change scholarly publishing, it will also change scholars. All scholars will need to develop a new skill we might call "scholarly publishing literacy." This skill includes the ability to recognize and avoid publishing scams and to differentiate counterfeit journals from authentic ones. The original goal of the open-access movement, to broaden access to scholarly information and make it affordable, will be achieved. However, the predatory publishers exploiting the model will hurt scholarly open-access publishing by encouraging author misconduct and the publication of non-science. While scholarly societies will have some difficulties adapting to new publishing funding models, they will discover many opportunities to thrive in scholarly publishing's new *status quo*.

References

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