

# Book Review

Michael Fernandez, editor

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***Predatory Publishing and Global Scholarly Communications***. By Monica Berger. Chicago: Association of College and Research Libraries, 2024. 350p. \$115.00 softcover (ISBN 978-0-8389-8955-5); \$80.00 e-book (ISBN 978-0-8389-8956-2).

Predatory publishing has proven to be a complex, mutable phenomenon in scholarly communication, with numerous debates and controversies surrounding its definition and measurement (operationalization). A cursory search of the LISTA (Library, Information Science & Technology Abstracts) database results in more than 400 academic treatments of predatory publishing since 2010 (with Beall's coining of the term "predatory publishing"), with more than ninety appearing just since 2023.<sup>1</sup> Monica Berger's *Predatory Publishing and Global Scholarly Communications* presents an expertly and thoroughly researched critical appraisal of predatory publishing that places the practice into the context of larger scholarly communication debates, such as open access; tenure, promotion and reappointment norms; and the geopolitics of research dissemination (e.g., "Northern" domination of scholarly protocols and distribution mechanisms). The primer is particularly notable for its deep wrestling with the debates and assumptions of the field, while remaining relatively agnostic as to the best approach or the "correct" definition of predatory publishing. Although Berger applies this overall agnosticism to the phenomenon—as Kevin Smith notes in the work's foreword—and states that it is best to "use a comprehensive and pedagogical approach" (15), it is evident that she understands and supports a more nuanced, empirically based conversation around predatory publishing as a by-product of larger contemporary scholarly communication trends. It is indeed a very worthwhile and comprehensive addition to the literature and builds upon previous monograph-length work on predatory publishing.<sup>2</sup> Despite the work being very well-organized and including extremely helpful summaries at the conclusion of most chapters, it does suffer from some repetition that I feel could have been edited without losing value or message. With that said, the notes that accompany each chapter are quite exhaustive and comprehensive!

A helpful analogy for Berger's work lies in approaching the predatory phenomenon as a pathology. Although I do not think that this was Berger's intention, the breakdown of the text lends it to this implicit sort of analysis. In other words, Berger attempts to review the origins and nature and symptoms of this "ailment" and how to best "diagnose" its presence in the first few chapters (1–6), and then subsequently considers treatments, which run the gamut from pedagogical training to journal lists and criteria, such as Think. Check. Submit. (chapters 10–12). In between these sets of chapters, Berger takes on geopolitical epidemiology of predatory publishing within the context of the "Global South" and the overall norms of academic publishing. These "Northern" or "Western" publication and scholarly communication norms is a running theme and lens through which Berger views the phenomenon.

For Berger, there is a philosophical-practitioner ("scientist") tension in defining predatory publishing (3–4), which has some of its roots in the adoption of neoliberal practices in scholarly communication (45–49). Berger also notes frequently that the language we use around "predatory publishing" can itself be problematic. In addition, as her review of the critique of Beall's initial investigations and lists makes

clear, there continues to be some conflation of open access with predatory publishing, along with the common narrative that this is a “Global South” problem rather than an international issue. Although there have been many attempts to define predatory publisher via a set of characteristics (see table 4.1, pages 83–86, for a thorough review of the principal elements), there is still some significant discussion regarding whether these considerations are more/less necessary or sufficient in classifying a journal as predatory. Table 4.1 is particularly useful for the exceptions that it accentuates, for example, some small journals that are not in the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ) or new journals that are not yet indexed in the major bibliometric services. As Berger notes—in alignment with the pathology approach above—“the onus of judgment ultimately falls to authors who must evaluate through reading, close analysis of the journal and publisher, and feedback from expert colleagues” (76). Transparency is key in any system or methodology that classifies journals, along with noting how these criteria are revised over time (again, see the discussion of the DOAJ’s revisions). I find that this critique of rubrics, along with questioning the use of blacklists (which may have some negative racial connotation), to be one of the strongest elements of the work. Most interestingly, one characteristic that has dramatically changed is the “pay to publish” model that was once associated with predatory journals, particularly as article processing charges become a dominant feature of open access publishing for most commercial publishers.

In the latter chapters of the book, Berger tackles a number of methods for treating the “puzzle” of predatory publishing, while acknowledging that none of these approaches are foolproof and that they often must be employed together. The approaches discussed include open peer review, which Berger notes has “tremendous potential to reduce predatory publishing as well as to benefit the quality of all scholarly publishing and science” (247), and scholarly communication information literacy and pedagogy, which has its ultimate goal “to empower stakeholders to think critically about how their work fits into the scholarly communications ecosystem” (302). Berger also critically reviews collaborative tools such as Think.Check.Submit., COPE (Committee on Publication Ethics) best practices, and various governmental journal and nonprofit industry whitelists (DOAJ, Cabell’s). Finally, Berger notes that it might be more worthwhile to have conversations with researchers about publication quality, rather than using the “predatory” language (269), and recognize that multiple factors go into researcher choices for publication venues.

Finally, I think one of the most interesting, although not completely novel, discussions in Berger’s work pertains to the structural incentives for authors to publish in questionable journals, such as the need to publish (especially in “international” journals), the focus on bibliometrics, and the frequent pursuit of quantity over quality scholarship. There are many misconceptions as well regarding motivations for publishing in predatory journals. By extension, we should treat such research behavior on a spectrum, rather than on a binary. The section on “predatory journal myths” (275) makes the argument (among several) that predatory publishing is not a singular challenge for one set of publishers in one geographic region or for one group of researchers over another. This statement is echoed in other recent publications, especially from Latin America, that call for a more nuanced understanding of predatory

journals and research integrity as a global problem.<sup>3</sup>—Chris Palazzolo ([cpalazz@emory.edu](mailto:cpalazz@emory.edu)), Emory University, Atlanta, Georgia

## References and Notes

1. Search conducted on January 3, 2025, using the query: (“predatory publish\*”) or (“predatory journal\*”).
2. Jingfeng Xia, *Predatory Publishing* (Routledge, 2022).
3. Cicero Cena, Daniel E. Gonçalves, and Giuseppe A. Câmara, “Should I Buy the Current Narrative about Predatory Journals? Facts and Insights from the Brazilian Scenario,” *Publications* 12 no. 7 (2024), <https://doi.org/10.3390/publications1200007>.