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Book Review

Review of *Predatory Publishing and Global Scholarly Communications*

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ABSTRACT

Review of *Predatory Publishing and Global Scholarly Communications*, by Monica Berger, Association of College and Research Libraries, 2024. 350 pp. ISBN: 9780838989555

KEYWORDS

predatory publishing, scholarly communications, journals

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Introduction

Scholarly communications is an easily misunderstood area of librarianship because of the complexities and nuances of assessing journals and other publications for their trustworthiness and the legal aspects of assessing copyright, among other tasks. Monica Berger's *Predatory Publishing and Global Scholarly Communications*, a compulsively readable text, does the lion's share of heavy lifting to make the scholarly communications ecosystem easily digestible. Broken down into four parts, this text addresses the background of "predatory publishing," including its history, its characteristics, the geopolitics of scholarly publishing, and responses and solutions to address the "predatory publishing" problem.

"Predatory publishing" is a loaded term because individual cultures can view some practices and norms from other cultures as "predatory." Berger states, "The expression *predatory publishing* itself is considered problematic, if not offensive, and the binary nature of its conceptualization is inherently flawed" (p. 3). Berger later relates that the Ottawa Summit's definition of predatory publishing is as follows: "predatory journals and publishers are entities that prioritize self-interest at the expense of scholarship and are characterized by false or misleading information, deviation from best editorial/publication practices, lack of transparency, and/or use of aggressive and indiscriminate solicitation practices" (p. 7).

Berger's intended audience is "academic librarians at non-research-intensive educational institutions." I would respectfully state that this monograph has applications across the academic libraries landscape; from smaller, non-research institutions to larger, more research-intensive institutions. This text is especially relevant and beneficial to those of us who are not strictly in the scholarly communications realm of librarianship, because Berger's text is well researched and written, making it easily understandable.

Content Organization

Part One: Background

In this section, Berger thoroughly discusses the background of scholarly publication, "predatory publishing," and neoliberalism. Berger relates that "neoliberalism imposes business values on nonbusiness sectors, playing an outsized role in fostering the unhealthy environment in the scholarly communications ecosystem that underpins predatory publishing. Specifically, neoliberalism engenders the monopoly power of commercial publishers and practices that surveil and monetize users; the exclusion of less well-resourced scholars; and the practice of excessive evaluation by proxies—or substitutes—which in turn stimulates excessive publishing outputs and diminishes scientific predictability" (p. 45). With the background information on the fraught vocabulary of predatory publishing and the underpinning of business values in library land and scholarly publishing, those less well-versed in scholarly communications will better understand the monetization of research, which has led to the current research landscape.

Paired with neoliberalism and the tenure track imperative to "publish or perish," the scholarly ecosystem is ripe for nefarious actors (publishers, editors, editorial board members, and others) to game the system, publishing articles that are not worth the metaphorical paper on which they are written.

Part Two: Characteristics and Research

The chapters in this section outline the detailed characteristics of predatory publishing, honing in on publishers and authors paired with editors, evaluators, spam, indexing, citations, and bibliometrics. This section features a case study covering OMICS, explicitly focusing on predatory journals and conferences. Berger outlines detailed characteristics of predatory journals, such as spam, rapid publication turnaround, journal naming, and scope (predatory journals can and are frequently named something close to legitimate titles). This section has an excellent chart that provides an overview of the characteristics of predatory journals. This chart is handy for librarians who are seeking venues to publish their own research, as well as for scholarly communications librarians to create presentations for faculty members around.

This section also provides an illuminating outline of researchers and authors who could seek out publication in predatory journals. Librarians must remember the author's humanity behind their publication(s) in predatory journals. Berger discusses cohorts of vulnerable authors, including health-care professionals and medical authors. Therefore, this would be a beneficial title for health sciences librarians to review and share with their faculty.

Berger thoroughly discusses editors, evaluators, spam, indexing, citation, and bibliometrics in Chapter Six. This chapter provides information on editor personas and the lovely spam messages researchers frequently receive about predatory journals and conferences. Later in this chapter, Berger discusses the citation of predatory journals and bibliometrics. A key takeaway from this chapter is to do your due diligence in finding outlets for publication and opportunities to present your research at conferences.

Part Three: The Geopolitics of Scholarly Publishing

In this section, Berger deeply dives into the Global South, the Bohannon Sting, and predatory publishing. Berger asks readers to expand their knowledge of the Global South, stating, "The concept of neocolonialism helps explain conditions in the South. It is based on the idea that after decolonization (independence), aspects of colonialism persist because of the continuing domination of the North" (p. 152). Berger thoroughly discusses the expectations for scholarship within the academy of the Global South, specifically going into detail about how Global Southern authors do not have the benefits Global North authors have (i.e., funding for article processing charges, well-funded research ecosystems, access to peer review, and many others).

Berger then discusses the scholarly publishing ecosystem in India, Sub-Saharan Africa, and China in great detail. Berger stated, "To conclude, neoliberalism has a distinctive but not dissimilar impact on individual countries and regions, resulting in haves and have-nots. Indian academics experience scarcity when resources are earmarked for the best universities, leaving others to work under challenging conditions. In Africa, despite progress, South Africa dominates in resources and infrastructure, while many other countries struggle for research support. China, where research is well funded, has created a successful yet excessively high-pressure and controlled environment with limited opportunities for non-elite scholars" (p. 194). This information is helpful for librarians to know because it can impact cultural competence and sensitivity when assisting researchers with foreign backgrounds.

Part Four: Responses and Solutions

This section provides potential responses and solutions for the predatory publishing crisis. There is a robust discussion of Cabells Predatory Reports and whitelisting and other tools for selecting journals. The mechanics of Open Peer Review and Open Science are also discussed later in this chapter. Later in this section, pedagogical solutions are offered for the predatory publishing crisis, specifically regarding information literacy, publication quality, and teaching scholars from undergraduates to faculty members. These solutions are especially valuable to all librarians, whether they are public-facing or instruction librarians. Berger's conclusion resonated when she states:

Educating users about predatory publishing is, in itself, extremely valuable. However, the macro-level goal is to empower stakeholders to think critically about how their work fits into the scholarly communications ecosystem. Learning about publication quality in particular helps authors reflect on the work relative to local institutional expectations and in a wider context.

Pedagogical solutions to predatory publishing represent a unique place where librarians and others can have important exchanges about open access and scholarly assessment. Through relationship building, our colleagues can begin to apprehend the need for transformation and, in turn, ally with librarians and others seeking a better, more humane scholarly communications system (p. 302).

Berger's framework should serve as both a call to action and a path forward for all librarians in the scholarly communications ecosystem.

Conclusion

Berger's text would be an excellent addition to a library's collection. This incredibly thoroughly researched text would assist in understanding a nebulous area of library science, scholarly communications, and, specifically, "predatory publishing." Each chapter contains pages of references, indicating how seriously Berger took this topic. There is an Appendix with

additional resources, including guidance on withdrawing, various faculty workshops, predatory journal consultations, and handouts (all linked and accessible). There is a listing of common abbreviations, which would have been more helpful toward the beginning of the book. There is also an exhaustive index.

This text was easily readable and enjoyable to read, illuminating an area of librarianship that is complex and not easily understood. I have already recommended this text for purchase at my library, and I encourage anyone to do the same.