Editorial

Cabells is a prominent player in the field of data gathering and analysis in academic publishing, an industry that thrives on the academic predicament – to write papers to be read or papers to be counted. They are not at all the same thing. This (Northern) autumn, Cabells will be releasing a new assessment of predatory journals, journals whose predatory publishers, it is said, will publish any old nonsense in return for the author's cash.

But what, more exactly, is predatory publishing? The question was contentious when Jeffrey Beall, the first to use the term, found himself in a spot of bother when he included on his blacklist of predatory publishers some which objected to the status. To be sure, Beall had criteria to guide his selection, but they were rough and ready. For example, Beall regarded just about all open access publishers as suspicious on the *prima facie* grounds that authors could pay to be published. Beall was silenced by the academic publishing industry in 2017, by which time his blacklist contained 2,425 publishers he considered predatory. Beall's blacklist remains in secret circulation for want of anything better. Will the Cabells list be anything better?

Beall, working full time as a university librarian, lacked the resources required for sophisticated classification. Cabells has resources, and its criteria are much more detailed than Beall's, though many are evidently – and perhaps inadvisably – devised from Beall's criteria. While Beall listed predatory publishers, Cabells is focusing on journals instead. Its team has been finding about 1,000 additional predatory journals every year and its *Predatory Report* (rather than a blacklist) will include about 17,000 come the autumn. Will it still ruffle a feather or two?

Cabells has come up with dozens of criteria ('over 60 behavioral indicators') for identifying predatory journals, many of which seem to apply just as well to journals produced by the established industry. Take, for instance, 'No way to contact the journal/only has a web-form.' Surely Cabells is aware of the horrendous manuscript submission forms imposed on authors by respectable journals, though rarely by predatory ones. There are many more examples of criteria that apply equally well to the established industry:

> Authors are published several times in the same journal …

> Similarly titled articles published by same author in more than one journal

> The journal hides or obscures relationships with for-profit partner companies that could result in corporate manipulation of science.

> The journal uses language that suggests it is industry leading …

> The journal purposefully publishes controversial articles in the interest of boosting citation count.

Much of Cabells's mysterious mélange of criteria is also contradictory: one sign of a predatory journal is that no information is given about author fees; another is that the 'journal's website seems too focused on the payment of fees'. Another Cabells criterion for a predatory journal is that 'very few articles are published per year', but so is a marked increase in the number of papers published in the previous year (which the author-pays model has persuaded reputable publishers is a thoroughly good thing).

The values inherent in Cabells's criteria for distinguishing predatory journals are most evident in their wholesale condemnation of academic endeavour in the developing world. For Cabells, a poor website and deficient grammar are certain signs of a predatory journal, not of an under-resourced one. A journal in which 'the majority of authors are [sic] based in developing countries' is also likely to be predatory, especially if it has a Western business address. Presumably this would

not apply to the *BMJ* and the *Lancet*. As not disclosing a business address or having one in the developing world are also suspicious, it is not clear what location Cabells finds acceptable for a journal publishing authors from poor countries. 'Little geographic diversity of authors and the journal claims to be international' is another sign of a predator, one that surely disregards the preference of, say, many top journals in management and economics for publishing American authors.

It is hard to tell whether the authors of the latest Cabells *Predatory Report* are ignorant of academic publishing or simply arrogant – or both, perhaps. How on earth are Cabells employees to know whether 'editor/review board members do not possess academic expertise to reasonably qualify them to be publication gatekeepers in the journal's field'? But perhaps the indicator itself has an intrinsic value quite independent of whatever it is supposed to indicate. Academic publishing is awash with such things.

Cabells seems to work from the premise that established academic publishing is a respectable, gentlemanly pursuit above the stench of predatory journals, whose publishers (disreputable companies publishing second-rate authors from far-off lands) are in it just for the money. While only a predatory publisher would charge an author a publishing fee, it is absolutely proper for a respectable open access publisher to charge the author an article processing charge (often adjusted to the journal impact factor and bearing no relation at all to paper processing costs) which is many, many times greater. Overlooked is the reality that established academic publishers make outlandish profits through the ruthless exploitation of academics and that they and their journals are mired in the gaming that has made so many academic papers so intellectually sterile. Beall suspected that open access would attract unscrupulous publishers and it has – many of them long established in academic publishing.

While Beall worked entirely for what he saw as the public good, Cabells is a for-profit company with some interest in making money from its identification of predatory journals. Cabells is not transparent about which journals it decides to investigate, the weighting it gives to its criteria of predatoriness is confidential and Cabells will reveal whether it considers a journal predatory only to paying customers.

The first of this issue's papers is from Alejandro Agafonow and Marybel Perez from the ESSCA School of Management in Paris. Their subject is curiously appropriate to the Cabells analysis of academic publishing; they look at bean-counting in business schools, by which is meant the assessment of the business school product independent of any qualities the product might have. Their setting, the business school, has long been associated – not unfairly – with the mindless production of quantity. Here the subject is the linking of the academic's pay to the academic's production – a strategy the business school adopts itself while teaching other organizations that it should be avoided. It seems that French business schools, in their eagerness to be competitive with international business schools, are not averse to a little hypocrisy. So, hits in top journals and citations are totted up to reward those who comply with an institutional accounting directive, and to herd those who would stray into research that might produce knowledge back into the fold. The message, still unfamiliar in French business schools, is that academics need to reclaim their turf if they are to justify their existence.

Sonali Gupta, from the M. S. Ramaiah University of Applied Sciences in Bangalore, brings her experience of entrepreneurs to the fore. Too often they are seen as swashbuckling sorts, absolutely confident in themselves and their projects. Indeed, such qualities are often transposed to entrepreneurship itself and considered essential to entrepreneurial success. Gupta's ethnographic approach to the subject and her extensive interviewing of entrepreneurs reveals that many are actually rather hesitant, uncertain of themselves and their project rather than steeped in bravado – the meek and mild Clark Kent rather than the heroic Superman. Gupta argues that this patience may actually be fundamental to entrepreneurial success.

There follow four reviews of books about artificial intelligence and the digital world and one review essay inspired by a book on the moral and legal issues surrounding robots. My thanks to our reviewers (and Steven Umbrello, our book review editor, of course), who are paid absolutely nothing for their very considerable efforts.

Stuart Macdonald
General editor