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Articles and Statements

Leonid Schneider calls Springer Nature's Science and Engineering Ethics Predatory, Without Proof

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Highlights

- Leonid Schneider is one of the most active and vocal science watchdogs.
- Springer Nature's *Science and Engineering Ethics (SEE)* is a leading indexed ethics journal.
- Schneider called *SEE* "predatory" on social media on several occasions, without proof.
- Several ethics-related bodies, including COPE and *SEE* itself, never responded.
- The intersection between science ethics, activism, and social media, is highlighted.

Abstract

In the world of academic publishing, to refer to a journal or publisher (or any other scholarly entity) as "predatory" carries with it a very serious and negative connotation, and can damage its reputation if that claim is made in public. If such a claim is supported by clear evidence, then it becomes a valid critical opinion because it is substantiated. Even if others share different opinions, the original claim cannot be false if clearly substantiated by evidence. However, if such a claim is made without solid support, then such a claim can be defamatory. Academics are weary of the nature of such claims from the Jeffrey Beall era. Between May and December of 2017, Leonid Schneider, currently one of science's most vocal watchdogs, Tweeted on several occasions that Springer Nature's *Science and Engineering Ethics (SEE)* was "predatory", in one Tweet even stating that "They are deeply unethical crooks at Science & Eng Ethics!" These are not light claims to be made in public. Moreover, Twitter is not simply a private communication medium, it is a powerful disseminative social media tool that is used by academics, and others, to give maximum exposure to a message. In this case, Tweets were likely made to cause reputational damage. Academia has entered a new phase in its evolution where polite communication about the issues to save the image of the for-profit publishing model is being tested by select individuals or groups, who sacrifice political correctness in the name of truth. If Schneider were to provide clear proof of his claims that *SEE* is predatory, then this would rock the world of ethics publishing, because *SEE*

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represents one of the most established academic ethics journals globally, ranked third based on its Clarivate Analytics journal impact factor. On September 16, 2017, the author contacted Schneider to request a full and thorough list of properties that led him to make these accusations in public. In that email, the *SEE* co-editors-in-chief, Raymond Spier and Stephanie Bird, Springer Nature, COPE and other related individuals were copied, with a formal request to offer feedback. Almost two years after that email, not a single entity has ever responded. Spier deceased at the end of April 2018, leaving a vacuum in this challenge by Schneider on *SEE*. This paper offers some perspectives about this case, and the wider implications of making accusations in public, especially using Twitter, which is now clamping down on social media aggression, of a potentially defamatory nature, without proof or substantiation.

Keywords: Defamatory, Ethics, Fact Versus Opinion, Lack of Proof, Public Perception, Science Journalism, Science Watchdog, Social Media, Twitter.

Evidence of Leonid Schneider's Tweets critical of *Science and Engineering Ethics*

On May 31, 2017, Leonid Schneider, currently one of the most vocal science watchdogs (Teixeira da Silva, 2016), and who runs a blog "For Better Science", Tweeted during the 5th World Conference on Research Integrity[†] that Springer Nature's *Science and Engineering Ethics* (*SEE*) were "deeply unethical crooks" (Fig. 1A)^{*}. To place that comment within context, that Tweet was in response to a Tweeted statement (Fig. 1B)[§] made on the same day by Matt Hodgkinson, Hindawi Corporation's Head of Research Integrity^{**}, regarding Raymond E. Spier, one of two *SEE* editors-in-chief^{††}. On June 14, 2017, Schneider Tweeted that *SEE* was "predatory" (Fig. 1C)^{**}, and following a challenge by Christian Munthe (Fig. 1D)^{§§}, who claims to be a bioethics researcher and blogger on his Twitter account^{***}, Schneider further claimed that *SEE* publishes "fraud and garbage", at a cost (Fig. 1E)^{†††}. Schneider appeared to defend his position by citing Matt Hodgkinson, while insulting *SEE* once more, noting that it publishes "diatribes"^{****} (Fig. 1F)^{§§§}. Finally, to cement his view that *SEE* is predatory, Schneider, in response to a Tweet by pseudonymous *Neuroskeptic* (read concerns about this entity in Teixeira da Silva, 2017a) about a paper published at *SEE* by the author of this paper (Al-Khatib, Teixeira da Silva, 2019), claimed that *SEE* is "notoriously predatory" (Fig. 1G)^{****}, suggesting that this status (as predatory) is both widespread, known^{††††} and acceptable among a wide swathe of academics. Readers are advised to read the full thread of Tweets related to

* <https://forbetterscience.com/>

† <http://wcri2017.org/>

* <https://twitter.com/schneiderleonid/status/869852726523547648> ("They are deeply unethical crooks at Science & Eng Ethics! #WCRI2017")

§ <https://twitter.com/mattjodgkinson/status/869851870570872832> ("Ray Spier: "too good to be true" research deserves publishing even if wrong to stimulate field. He edits an ethics journal! o_o #WCRI2017")

** <https://about.hindawi.com/team/matt-hodgkinson/>

†† <http://www.springer.com/philosophy/ethics+and+moral+philosophy/journal/11948/PSE?detailsPage=editorialBoard>

** <https://twitter.com/schneiderleonid/status/874972147759943680> ("A predatory journal "Science & Eng Ethics" @SpringerLink publishes an article about saving research from predators")

§§ <https://twitter.com/christianmunthe/status/874992896272990208> ("@schneiderleonid: That ray Spier makes an ethical argument you disagree with doesn't imply the journal he is EiC for is predatory.")

*** <https://twitter.com/christianmunthe>

††† <https://twitter.com/schneiderleonid/status/874996737148059648> ("The EiC announced to publish fraud and garbage so his journal can fill its pages. Which are then sold as subscription. Isn't it predatory?")

*** <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/diatribe> ("archaic: a prolonged discourse"; "a bitter and abusive speech or piece of writing"; "ironic or satirical criticism")

§§§ <https://twitter.com/schneiderleonid/status/874997917962174464> ("Well, @mattjodgkinson was there, not I. I just know what horrible diatribes this journal publishes")

**** <https://twitter.com/schneiderleonid/status/908637763385352192> ("Published in a notorious predatory journal @SpringerLink")

†††† <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/notorious> ("generally known and talked of"; "widely and unfavorably known")

each of the Tweets summarized in this paper, to obtain full and more comprehensive coverage of the discussions on Twitter, and to obtain a wider perspective than that offered by the author.

Given these repeated serious public claims, or allegations, and given the “respectable” standing of SEE in journal ranking, on September 16, 2017, the author challenged Schneider by email, requesting that concrete scholarly evidence be provided to support the claims made in his Tweets. That email was copied, among other proponents related to this case, to the two SEE co-EICs, Raymond Spier and Stephanie Bird, the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) co-Chair, Chris Graf (because Springer Nature is a COPE member, as is SEE; note that Graf works for Wiley, as the Director of Research Integrity and Publishing Ethics), and Matt Hodgkinson, as well as other interested parties such as Retraction Watch, another science watchdog. To date, no response has been received by any of the parties contacted, despite a reminder and request for evidence, feedback and commentary on October 1, 2017. In particular, no evidence has yet been provided by Schneider to support his claims, and the SEE leadership has not offered any response and has instead opted to remain silent.

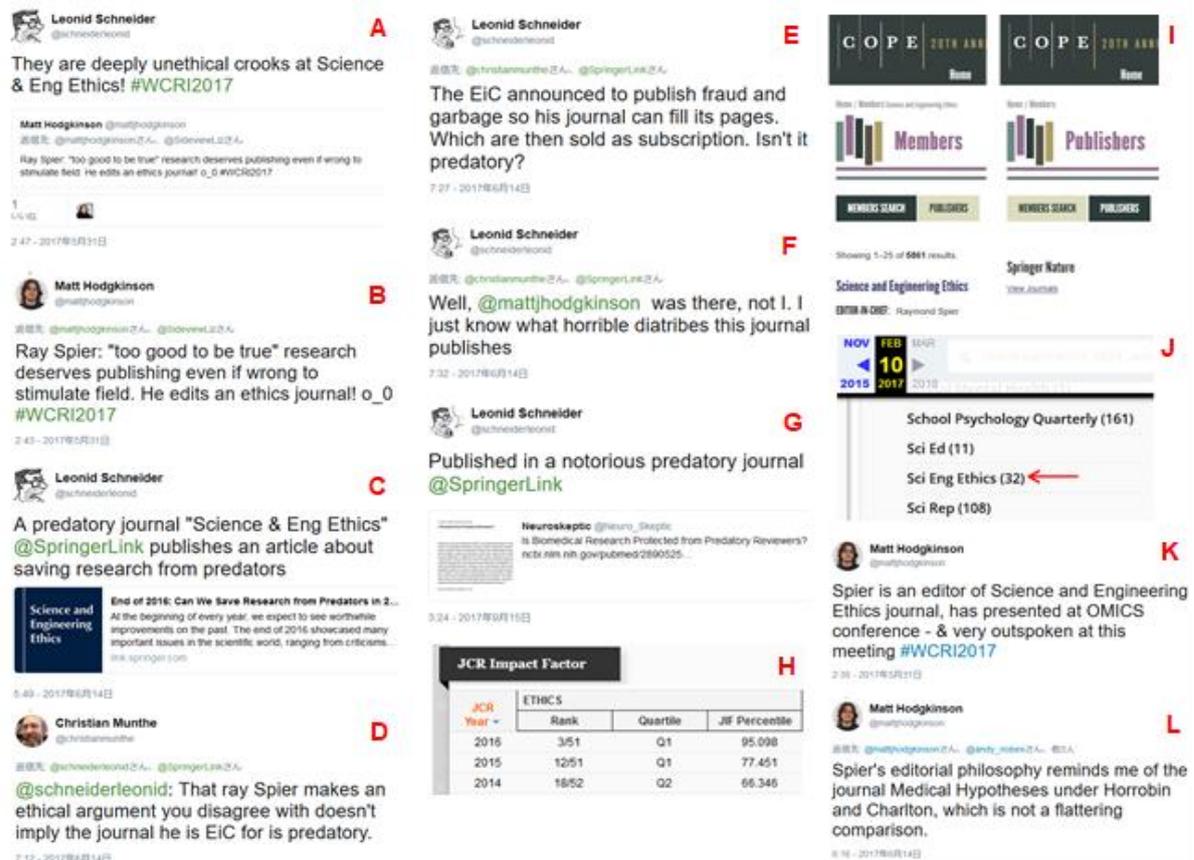


Fig. 1. Evidence of Tweets sent by science watchdog Leonid Schneider

These Tweets were used as the means to accuse Springer Nature’s Science and Engineering Ethics (SEE) of being “predatory”, as well as level other accusations at this journal and/or its leadership (A, C, E-G), despite the rapid rise in rank of this journal among “ethics” listed journals from 18/52 in 2014 to 3/51 in 2016 according to Clarivate Analytics’ Journal Citation Reports Impact Factor (H). Christian Munthe questions Schneider’s claims (D). Both SEE and Springer Nature are COPE (Committee on Publication Ethics) members (I). Matt Hodgkinson, Hindawi Corporation’s Head of Research Integrity, takes some jabs at one of the SEE’s editors-in-chief, Raymond E. Spier (B, K, L). Tweet dates: (A, B, K, L) May 31, 2017; (B-F) June 14, 2017; (G) September 15, 2017. Non-Tweet screenshot dates: (H, I) October 2, 2017; (J) October 3, 2017.

Sources:

- (A) <https://twitter.com/schneiderleonid/status/869852726523547648>;
 (B) <https://twitter.com/mattjhodgkinson/status/869851870570872832>;
 (C) <https://twitter.com/schneiderleonid/status/874972147759943680>;
 (D) <https://twitter.com/christianmunthe/status/874992896272990208>;
 (E) <https://twitter.com/schneiderleonid/status/874996737148059648>;
 (F) <https://twitter.com/schneiderleonid/status/874997917962174464>;
 (G) <https://twitter.com/schneiderleonid/status/908637763385352192>;
 (H) <https://jcr.incites.thomsonreuters.com/JCRJournalProfileAction.action> (behind paywall);
 (I) <https://publicationethics.org/members/journals/Science%2520and%2520Engineering%2520Ethics> (left); <https://publicationethics.org/members/publishers?name=Springer> (right);
 (J) <https://web.archive.org/web/20170210135854/https://www.pubpeer.com/journals/>;
 (K) <https://twitter.com/mattjhodgkinson/status/869849911151525888>;
 (L) <https://twitter.com/mattjhodgkinson/status/874978865600442368>.

On December 12, 2017, Schneider reaffirmed that he believed that *SEE* was predatory*, and solidified those claims again on December 17, 2017†. Schneider also suggested on November 4, 2017, that the world’s largest open-access mega-journal, *Scientific Reports*‡, also published by Springer Nature, was predatory§. A circular-style email sent by Bird on June 15, 2018, indicating that Spier had passed away on April 28, 2018, was meant to assuage those contacted - presumably authors – that the functionality of the journal was intact. After almost two years, it can be safely assumed that no evidence exists, no evidence will ever be provided, and that the parties contacted (Schneider, COPE, science watchdogs, Hindawi’s Matt Hodgkinson, Wiley’s Graf, and others) will ever respond. This paper examines some of the issues related to this case study, as part of a wider learning curve associated with the complexities of publishing that academics must face, as well as a deeper examination of how the currently vocal science watchdogs are operating to improve, as they see themselves, the state of science and science publishing.

Ethical and moral concerns in this case

The main possible ethical and/or moral concerns raised in this case can be assigned to three entities:

1. Leonid Schneider has provided zero evidence to support his accusations;
2. Raymond Spier, Stephanie Bird, Springer Nature, and COPE remained silent;
3. Matt Hodgkinson and/or Hindawi offered no feedback or clarification.

1. Leonid Schneider provided zero evidence to support his accusations

Schneider is the central topic of discussion as he is the individual who leveled serious accusations about the academic standing of a highly ranked – at least according to Clarivate Analytics’ JCR journal impact factor (JIF) – ethics journal. The primary accusations that were stated publicly, all via Twitter, were that this journal is not only predatory, but that it is notoriously predatory, that the leadership, specifically Spier, the Co-EIC, publishes “fraud and garbage” that is then sold for profit, via subscriptions, by Springer Nature, and that *SEE* publishes “horrible diatribes”. These are not minor issues. They are serious accusations.

In recent years, academics have become aware of the “predatory” open access (OA) movement thanks, in part, to an awareness campaign launched by Jeffrey Beall on his blog at the beginning of this decade. However, global academia has also, since the sudden and inexplicable closure of that blog in January of 2017 – still without a crystal clear explanation to the public by

* <https://twitter.com/schneiderleonid/status/940103981535080448> (“Predatory journal @SpringerNature retracts anti-vax paper. Because even too hot even for them?”)

† <https://twitter.com/schneiderleonid/status/942321208477016064> (“1. This is predatory journal. 2. Stop educating your audience how backwards Asians are compared to USA.”)

‡ <https://scholarlykitchen.sspnet.org/2017/04/06/scientific-reports-overtakes-plos-one-as-largest-megajournal/>

§ <https://twitter.com/schneiderleonid/status/926879254545096704> (“Is @SciReports your predatory journal, @SpringerNature?”)

Beall or his academic institution, the University of Colorado, Denver (Teixeira da Silva, 2017c) – become wary of the “predatory” label for a journal or publisher, OA or not. This is because the way in which the term “predatory” has been used in an applied manner varies widely, in some cases without any clear definition, and has started to lead to a discriminatory and potentially libelous* use among academics to discriminate against other academics. As one example, in Teixeira da Silva (2017c), see criticisms of Beall, Beall’s flawed and biased lists and of those who have (ab)used the Beall lists such as Derek Pyne (Pyne, 2017) at the School of Business and Economics, Thompson Rivers University, Canada, who labelled his colleagues’ papers that were published in OA journals on Beall’s lists as “predatory papers”, relying on the Beall blacklists to level that accusation. This is problematic given the flaws and weaknesses of such blacklists (Teixeira da Silva, Tsigaris, 2018). Had global academia, and Beall himself, heeded to the advice of this paper’s author back in 2013, and applied a quantitative score – even if now currently outdated and imperfect – to quantify the level of academic “predation” (Teixeira da Silva, 2017d), then most likely Beall’s blog as well as his lists would have seen continuity, because they would have been substantiated by clear evidence of characteristics that made them predatory, and thus led them to be validly termed as a predatory OA journal or publisher. Beall would have gained wider respect and his lists might then have been used for official purposes because the criteria he used to list his “predatory” OA journals or publishers would have been adequately quantified. However, since this did not happen, it is widely believed (this still remains highly speculative) that legal action against Beall and/or his lists and/or his institute – as was alleged on October 10, 2017, against the Swiss-based publisher Frontiers Media† – may have spurred the closure of his blog, Beall, his lists, and the attitudes that accompanied both should now be considered academically extinct.

Schneider does not appear to have learned any lessons from Beall’s case, most likely because he appears to be an avid Beall supporter, and also a staunch critic of Frontiers, which was considered by Beall to be a “predatory” OA publisher‡, even though it is a paying COPE member§. Consequently, Schneider has, absent any concrete evidence of his claims, used the term “predatory” loosely, and perhaps erroneously, to label *SEE*. It is possible that Schneider has valid reasons or clear evidence to slap this “predatory” label on this Springer Nature and COPE member journal, but absent this evidence, his characterization that was made in public with the apparent intent to smear the image of this journal and its leadership, primarily Raymond Spier, remains false and possibly defamatory. Despite a formal request (and subsequent reminder after 2 weeks on October 1, 2017) to Schneider to provide that evidence to support his claims that *SEE* is “predatory”, as well as evidence that it publishes “fraud and garbage”, no such evidence has yet been provided. Absent this evidence, i.e., *SEE* appears to be anything but notoriously predatory, as Schneider claims, one can simply conclude that no such evidence exists and that these claims are false and thus potentially defamatory** statements to shame the journal, its EICs, and/or the publisher. As for business advertising, where false claims are treated as a criminal or illegal act (e.g. in Australia††), so too should such claims made on social media be treated in the same manner. If so, then what would be the motivational factors behind such false claims (McKay, Kinsbourne, 2010)? It is the opinion of this author that such an attitude, which represents an immature, reckless and irresponsible journalistic practice, could merit a legal threat** by the publisher, Springer Nature, at minimum to request Schneider to delete those Tweets and to offer a formal apology in public for false claims, or to provide the evidence to support those claims. This is because the use of social

* <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/libel> (“a written or oral defamatory statement or representation that conveys an unjustly unfavorable impression; a statement or representation published without just cause and tending to expose another to public contempt”)

† <http://www.universityworldnews.com/article.php?story=20170920150122306>

‡ <https://forbetterscience.com/2017/09/18/frontiers-vanquishers-of-beall-publishers-of-bunk/>

§ <https://publicationethics.org/members/publishers?name=Frontiers>

** <https://www.hg.org/defamation.html>

†† <https://www.accc.gov.au/business/advertising-promoting-your-business/false-or-misleading-statements>

** Schneider has been sued in Germany by Philipp Jungebluth and the Heike and Thorsten Walles couple for libel: <https://forbetterscience.com/2017/04/06/judge-in-jungebluth-trial-announces-to-uphold-his-injunction-dismisses-all-evidence/>; <https://forbetterscience.com/2017/03/23/will-words-or-actual-evidence-count-in-the-walles-case/>

media by Schneider and others claiming to be science journalists to spread false or unsubstantiated information is fortifying the notion that science and science publishing are clearly in a new age of “false” or fake (Teixeira da Silva, 2017e), and that the Schneider message is not in fact “For Better Science”, as his blog title claims, but in fact constitutes a clear case of social tabloid or smear journalism (Popović, Popović, 2014).

This use of social media may be reflecting a new trend in academic publishing, as one branch of the post-publication peer review movement (Teixeira da Silva 2015a; Teixeira da Silva et al., 2017), namely the rise in power of individuals who may be invested in the destruction of science, or of science and the science publishing status quo, or a new science anarchist movement. This could involve the use of social media platforms such as Twitter to spread a false and/or unsubstantiated message, as was leveled against *SEE* and/or Springer Nature and thus also indirectly against COPE, since *SEE* and Springer Nature are COPE members (Fig. 1I). Schneider has developed a special antipathy towards COPE* (disclaimer: the author is also critical of select aspects of COPE, such as inconsistent use of COPE guidelines among COPE members; e.g., Teixeira da Silva, 2017f; or even challenging its moral compass; Teixeira da Silva, 2019). Although much can be said and criticized about Schneider and his blog, a deeper analysis of this science watchdog will be left for separate analyses, as there is much to analyze and discuss, but a final message is left for the reader: is it not ironic that Schneider criticized John Dawson, the EIC of Elsevier’s *Journal of Inorganic Chemistry*, for not dignifying his email with a response, stating “I contacted with this information the journal’s chief editor and chemistry professor at University of South Carolina, John Dawson as well as his four associate editors, but they did not dignify my email with a reply”? Incidentally, the author of this paper sent an email to John Dawson on October 8, 2017, and received a response on the very same day.

2. Raymond Spier, Stephanie Bird, Springer Nature, and COPE remain silent

When the publishing status quo offers silence in response to public criticisms, then this is a bad sign of poor academic engagement and may reflect opacity. Faced with opacity, opacity tools offer protection to both positive and negative freedoms and serve as a shield against false inferences (Gutwirth, 2007). It might also indicate, however, that the parties who are being labelled as “predatory” and as peddling “fraud and garbage” consider these claims to be trivial or false, enough to ignore them. However, by remaining silent, the three core publishing-related entities in this case (*SEE*, represented by its co-EICs Spier and Bird; the publisher, Springer Nature; COPE, which offers a paid-for ethics shield and brand label to both journal and publisher) have set a potentially unwanted precedent, namely that false or unsubstantiated claims can be made in public, such as on Twitter, about them, without any rebuke or repercussions. Silence also offers the unsubstantiated possibility that the claims made are true. This silent attitude may also be an approach to avoid conflict with the base of academics, which, together with their research institutes, is the primary source of its business revenues and profits, i.e., is this a standard procedure of business etiquette? The media has been implicated in inducing a spiral of silence by an impositional position regarding a specific issue (Kim et al., 2004), in this case, the constant claim by Schneider that *SEE* is “predatory”. Another possible counter-argument is that engagement with Schneider in public might invite other critics to join the fray, resulting potentially in a never-ending cycle of attack and defense of *SEE*, Springer Nature and/or COPE, inducing thus a Streisand Effect[§].

Without in any way trying to appear sympathetic or supportive of Schneider’s claims that *SEE* is “predatory” or that it publishes “fraud and garbage”, the following facts can be gleaned about the perception of this journal and/or publisher by two other prominent science watchdogs:

1) Springer Nature was the second most profiled publisher, after Elsevier, by Retraction Watch, another science watchdog, with 337 entries (vs. 604 for Elsevier), in October 2017;

* <https://forbetterscience.com/2017/03/29/cope-the-publishers-trojan-horse-calls-to-abolish-retractions/>;
<https://forbetterscience.com/2015/10/31/join-the-committee-ignore-publication-ethics/> (as two clear examples within the search for COPE on the Schneider blog: <https://forbetterscience.com/?s=COPE>)

† <https://forbetterscience.com/2017/09/29/the-rise-and-fall-of-an-antivax-paper-by-smut-clyde/>

* http://www.sideroad.com/Business_Etiquette/workplace-etiquette.html

§ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Streisand_effect

2) *SEE* had nine registered entries at Retraction Watch*, one of which relates to the author of this paper, who called on the resignation of one of the *SEE* EICs, Stephanie Bird, following failed peer review that took in excess of 20 months to complete, independent of the reason provided†. *SEE* appears to have taken steps towards correcting this issue, and currently appears to provide timely feedback and editorial decisions, at least in the experience of the author, which is a positive development that can serve as an example for other journals or editors in the same predicament (Teixeira da Silva, Dobránszki, 2017).

3) *SEE* had, in February of 2017, 32 entries listed at PubPeer (Fig. 1J; PubPeer no longer keeps free journal-by-journal records after it implemented a new platform, PubPeer version 2, and now charges to access such information), another science watchdog that has financial backing by a US philanthropic organization, The Laura and John Arnold Foundation. There are serious issues with opacity at PubPeer (Teixeira da Silva, 2018b).

Can the public expect a response or rebuttal from *SEE* and Springer Nature to the unsubstantiated claims made by Schneider? And should COPE, the “ethics” lobbying organization that provides the ethical cape for this journal and publisher, but which has a proven track record of sitting on the fence and/or showing silence and/or apathy towards ethical situations that involve its paying members (Teixeira da Silva, 2017f), continue to offer no advice regarding the use of social media such as Twitter to make unsubstantiated claims against its members?

3. Matt Hodgkinson offers no feedback or clarification

Matt Hodgkinson is one of the more publicly conscientious publishing-related ethicists who has risen to rapid prominence in recent years, appearing frequently at ethics-and publishing-related meetings and symposia. In his position as Hindawi Corporation’s Head of Research Integrity, Hodgkinson is both in a privileged and a precarious position. Privileged because he acts as judge and jury over ethical decisions in all Hindawi journals, which run a highly profitable OA journal fleet‡, and precarious because what he says and does in public has consequences on the field of ethics, and would also affect Hindawi’s reputation. Personal opinions about ethical topics or about other ethicists are thus not encouraged, not as a way to silence his opinions, but as a sign that a true ethicist remains tone-neutral, and thus transparent (Menéndez-Viso, 2009). It is therefore surprising to learn the tone of the opinions that Hodgkinson held, and expressed in public via Twitter, of *SEE*’s Raymond Spier. One Tweet was a subtle jab (Fig. 1K) while the other was a direct insult (Fig. 1L). It is unclear if this reflects personal or professional animosity that may have existed between Hodgkinson and Spier, or if it reflects an inter-publisher animosity, between Springer Nature and Hindawi Corporation, two competing publishers for the OA publishing market. Given these relationships and standing of these “ethicists” in the world of biomedical publishing, real – but undeclared – conflicts of interest now exist.

Conclusion

The publishing process is complex and challenging, and it appears to be getting more so with each passing day. This conclusion can only be gleaned after extensive experience, in some cases negative ones, over decades of close engagement. The experience of the author of this paper has shown that many parties are responsible for error: authors, journals and their editors and EICs, and publishers (Teixeira da Silva, Shaughnessy, 2017). In addition, the current publishing culture is struggling to deal with multiple pressures, including now a new pressure, namely open and public criticism, including on blogs and social media such as Twitter. Open debate and criticism are healthy because it can engender positive change and reform, and hopefully lead to an improvement in publishing. Bias is ever-present because individuals are always subject to leaning most towards their own opinions and interpretations, but claims should always be substantiated, as best as possible, by factual evidence.

In this paper, the focus was placed on Leonid Schneider, who is currently one of the most vocal and outspoken science watchdogs, but who has leveled serious accusations about the academic and scholarly nature of a Springer Nature ethics journal, *Science and Engineering Ethics*.

* <http://retractionwatch.com/category/by-journal/sci-eng-ethics/>

† <http://retractionwatch.com/2014/07/21/publishing-gadfly-demands-journal-editors-resignation-then-has-fairly-incomprehensible-paper-rejected/>

‡ <https://archive.fo/W3frg>

If those claims are true, and if Schneider can substantiate them with concrete cases and evidence, then the consequences and repercussions for the journal and publisher will, and should, be serious. However, absent any evidence, the consequences and repercussions for Schneider will, and should, be serious. Zollo et al. (2015) consider “the diffusion of unsubstantiated rumors on online social media [...] one of the main threats for [...] society”. There must also be consequences for Matt Hodgkinson, Hindawi Corporation’s Head of Research Integrity. Silence, i.e., the lack of communication on the part of all parties, in this case, is against a fundamental principle of conflict resolution (Zucker, 2012), and is one reason why science and science publishing are perceived to be in an evolving crisis.

The critique of publishers and of the status quo publishing establishment is not easy and can have serious consequences. As a real example, the author of this paper has been made *persona non grata* by an Elsevier journal, *Scientia Horticulturae*, and also banned from all Taylor & Francis / Informa journals from submitting to these journals, in response to criticisms of their editorial processes and/or publishing models. This indicates that criticism and critique are not in fact welcomed, or are rarely welcomed, and are subjected to punishment if it may cause reputational damage or bruise the for-profit business model by shedding a negative light on poor scholarly conduct by leading publishers, to avoid being referred to as “predatory”. Stifling the opinions, including criticisms, made by the academic base, is anti-democratic, and is not a healthy way to resolve conflicts (Toegel, Barsoux, 2016). Such tyrannical actions can, instead, have a chilling effect on freedom of speech, and can serve as ways to temper the criticisms by the academic base, which feeds the profits of the current publishing status quo, either as subscriptions, or as OA article processing charges (Al-Khatib, Teixeira da Silva, 2017). Consequently, it is currently extremely difficult to publish papers that are critical of journals or publishers because there is a constant fear of personal and/or professional reprisals from powerful entities. Despite this, the author can point to ways, exemplified by four cases, in which a publisher could be critiqued, via publications, when evidence is available (see details in each case: Teixeira da Silva, Dobránszki, 2013; Teixeira da Silva, 2015b; Teixeira da Silva, Al-Khatib, 2017; Teixeira da Silva, 2017g). Naturally, other possibilities include blogs and social media platforms such as Twitter.

The publishing industry is also evolving rapidly, and the failed IPO by Springer Nature* might not only indicate market weakness, but also a lack of market confidence in the publisher, even as a result of reputational damage, such as that inflicted by Schneider. Also, Schneider should be more self-conscious about the evolving landscape of hate speech, online harassment and potentially libelous and unsubstantiated claims using his blog and Twitter. For example, Germany imposed a social media hate speech law in Q3-Q4 of 2017†, while Twitter has also taken concrete steps, since 2016, but cemented in October of 2017‡, and again in May of 2018§, to curb hate speech and possible slanderous communication as exemplified by Schneider. The issue of public shaming, the border between public criticism and slander, and the use of such techniques by the science watchdogs, is unfortunately not a highly pertinent topic of academic discussion (Teixeira da Silva, 2018c), but should be. Moreover, Spier, in passing away, has left many questions unanswered and several conflicts unresolved. Even after deceased, academics have responsibilities (Teixeira da Silva, Dobránszki, 2015), and in this case, these must be borne by Bird, SEE, Springer Nature and COPE.

Prior to this submission, this paper was submitted to SEE on October 16, 2017, and was rejected by SEE on October 19, with the following reason: “It is the policy of SEE not to engage in personal conflicts. I would like to thank you very much for forwarding your manuscript to us for consideration and wish you every success in finding an alternative place of publication.” In other words, SEE encouraged the publication of this case study, but not in SEE.

* <https://scholarlykitchen.sspnet.org/2018/05/15/springer-nature-ipo-withdrawn/>

† <https://techcrunch.com/2017/04/05/german-cabinet-backs-e50m-hate-speech-fines-for-social-media-firms/>; <https://techcrunch.com/2017/10/02/germanys-social-media-hate-speech-law-is-now-in-effect/>

‡ <https://techcrunch.com/2017/10/13/twitter-ceo-promises-to-crack-down-on-hate-violence-and-harassment-with-more-aggressive-rules/>

§ <https://slate.com/technology/2018/05/twitter-will-start-hiding-tweets-that-detract-from-the-conversation.html>; <https://twitter.com/jack/status/969234280655147008>

Schneider apparently does not only consider Springer Nature and/or *SEE* as predatory and has extended his use of predatory to characterize Elsevier* and Karger Publishers†, each within different contexts, while referring to the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences USA* as a parody journal‡.

Conflicts of interest

The author has written about Leonid Schneider, a science watchdog and journalist, in Teixeira da Silva (2016), and has used his blog as a platform to offer post-publication peer review, commentary, and critique. After criticizing Schneider and commentators on his blog of clear violations to written comment policy, the author was banned from commenting on the Schneider blog in early 2017. The author was critical of the editorial handling by the Springer Nature journal that is the subject of this paper, *Science and Engineering Ethics*, for peer review that took over 20 months to complete, leading to a rejection and case profiling by another science watchdog, Retraction Watch§. The author has published over a dozen papers in *Science and Engineering Ethics* over the past few years. Other than these, the author declares no other related conflicts of interest, financial or otherwise.

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* <https://twitter.com/schneiderleonid/status/944115508152061953> (“From tea-drinking China, by predatory publisher @ElsevierConnect : “Drinking Tea Improves the Performance of Divergent Creativity””) December 22, 2017; <https://twitter.com/schneiderleonid/status/946478641550159872> (“Publishing nonsense papers in predatory journals is poppycock. Fake @liu_universitet professor Tiwari published predatory papers in Biosensors & Bioelectronics @ElsevierConnect, helped by EiC @APFTurner”) December 28, 2017

† <https://twitter.com/schneiderleonid/status/1004336901006995457> (“How can anyone take those predatory tospots seriously?”) June 6, 2018

‡ <https://twitter.com/schneiderleonid/status/945223473248591872> (“Ah, that's why @JCventer avoided peer review and published his bullshit face prediction paper in that parody journal @PNASNews”) December 25, 2017

§ <http://retractionwatch.com/2014/07/21/publishing-gadfly-demands-journal-editors-resignation-then-has-fairly-incomprehensible-paper-rejected/>

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