

# A Novel Malignancy in the Academic Corpus

*Epidemiology, pathogenesis, and prognosis of parasitic publication entities,  
diagnosed from a single specimen that solicited its own diagnosis.*

# The malignancy presented itself for examination.

A journal serving clinical oncology solicited a manuscript from a researcher whose published work concerns AI safety, corporate harm, and disability rights. The closest his scholarship comes to oncology is the metaphor in this title. Rather than discard the email, he recognized a specimen. This paper is the biopsy, and the manuscript the journal requested.

SPECIMEN · SOLICITATION, 9 APRIL 2026

"Dear **Dr.** Travis Gilly,  
given your *esteemed work and expertise in the field*, we  
are pleased to invite your submission by May 10, 2026."

A title he does not hold. A field left unnamed. A deadline built for  
urgency. From the *Journal of Clinical Oncology & Advanced Therapy*.

# Parasitic Publication Syndrome.

A condition marked by the proliferation of entities that copy the surface morphology of a legitimate scholarly organ while lacking any functioning peer review, editorial integrity, or diagnostic value. The mimicry is itself the tell: a real journal does not need to convince researchers it is real. The effort invested in looking legitimate is inversely proportional to the effort invested in being so.

# Epidemiology

*Incidence, transmission, and who carries the heaviest exposure.*



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Estimates put active predatory journals above fifteen thousand. The pathogen does not discriminate by discipline, career stage, or geography; it discriminates only by the presence of a retrievable email address.

1,200+

SOLICITATIONS PER RESEARCHER-YEAR

## Twenty-three in a single week.

A seven-day audit of one inbox turned up at least 23 predatory solicitations, spanning oncology, space science, tourism management, and electrical and computer engineering, a field in which the author has no training whatsoever. One reversed his name; another removed the space in it. The record producing this volume is modest and narrowly non-medical, which means the burden on prolific medical researchers can only be inferred as staggering.

# Five transmission vectors.

|   |                              |                                                                                                                                         |
|---|------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 | Mass email solicitation      | Harvested metadata from repositories, preprint servers, and faculty directories. The only targeting heuristic is a retrievable address. |
| 2 | Nominal parasitism           | A name built to resemble a respected journal. Batesian mimicry, reversed: the harmful organism copies the trustworthy one.              |
| 3 | Indexing fraud               | Claimed inclusion in databases they never appear in, or invented indexing services with impressive names.                               |
| 4 | Fabricated editorial boards  | Real researchers' names listed without their knowledge or consent.                                                                      |
| 5 | Conference-journal pipelines | Predatory conferences feeding predatory journals, a closed loop of self-reinforcing illegitimacy.                                       |

## The burden falls hardest on researchers with disabilities.

Predatory solicitations are engineered, by design or convergent evolution, to exploit the exact cognitive functions that are atypical in ADHD and autism. The flattery, the artificial urgency, the offer of fast publication: this is a social-engineering attack on the executive-function stack. Literal interpretation of social communication makes the mimicry more effective, not less. And the sheer volume becomes an attentional tax, charged repeatedly to the people least able to absorb it.

*The current system outsources a complex diagnostic task to the population for whom that task is most costly. This is not an accommodation problem. This is a harm.*

# Pathogenesis

*The lifecycle, the diagnostic markers, and the histology of the specimen.*



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The course runs in four stages, from initial contact to metastasis. A seven-item instrument flags it early; a score of four or more is presumptive.

# The four-stage course.

STAGE I

Initial contact

Correspondence arrives carrying a characteristic cluster of diagnostic markers.

STAGE II

Mimicry

A website, claimed review, listed boards, and an ISSN approximate a real organ.

STAGE III

Extraction

An article-processing charge is collected for editorial service never rendered.

STAGE IV

Metastasis

Content enters citation networks and systematic reviews. The prognosis worsens.

## Seven diagnostic markers.

- |                                      |                                       |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| 1 Incorrect or inflated honorifics   | 2 Vague praise tied to no publication |
| 3 Absence of topical specificity     | 4 Artificially compressed deadline    |
| 5 Inconsistent grammar or formatting | 6 Generic salutation formulae         |
| 7 A name resembling a real journal   |                                       |

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The index case exhibited all seven. A score of **four or more** is presumptive evidence of Parasitic Publication Syndrome.

# The specimen under the microscope.

## Cellular atypia

A doctoral title conferred on a recipient who holds none, generated without any verification step.

## Vascular invasion

"Expertise in the field" with no referent, distributed across the infrastructure built for targeted correspondence.

## Loss of tissue specificity

A clinical-oncology journal soliciting work on AI safety, corporate harm, and disability law.

## Resistance to apoptosis

Fourteen years after the practice was named and blacklisted, the entities persist. Normal cells, under such signals, undergo programmed death. These do not.

# What PPS is not.

The diagnosis rests on intent and function, not on imperfect execution. Three conditions are easily confused with it.

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## Legitimate open access

Transparent charges, real review, willing and relevant editors. Cost is proportional to service.

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## Vanity publishing

A consensual transaction. The author pays knowing the venue lacks prestige. PPS instead targets those who do not recognize it.

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## Weak but legitimate

Uneven quality, slow review, but genuine good-faith editorial function. Weak is not the same as predatory.

# Prognosis

*Why the host cannot clear the infection, and what it costs when it spreads.*



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For the patient, the prognosis is poor. For the parasite, it is excellent: low-cost, high-volume, jurisdictionally elusive, and largely unregulated.

## Why the host cannot clear the infection.

### **i** Immunosuppression

Publish-or-perish pressure suppresses the response from within the host environment.

### **iii** Information asymmetry

Mimicry is built to exploit the time and expertise a researcher lacks to investigate.

### **ii** No central authority

No institution can shut a journal down. It rebrands, relocates, and resumes.

### **iv** Beyond jurisdiction

The pathogen crosses borders; the immune system does not.

# Four harms, escalating in reach.

|              |                                                                                                                                                           |
|--------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Financial    | Charges from tens to thousands of dollars, with nothing rendered in return. Most damaging where research budgets are smallest.                            |
| Reputational | Work in a predatory venue reads as poor judgment to committees and reviewers, and the stigma persists even when the researcher was genuinely deceived.    |
| Epistemic    | Predatory content enters systematic reviews and clinical guidelines. Renner and colleagues found it in reviews in four of the top five oncology journals. |
| Systemic     | A thriving parasitic industry gives ammunition to anyone who would dismiss academic research wholesale. The informational commons is degraded.            |

# A four-grade classification.

|     |                      |                                                                                                                                           |
|-----|----------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| I   | Benign nuisance      | Obvious errors, easily identified and discarded. No realistic risk of extraction.                                                         |
| II  | Low-grade INDEX CASE | Plausible name, vague flattery, no topical targeting. May deceive inexperienced researchers.                                              |
| III | High-grade           | Deliberate mimicry of a specific journal, fabricated metrics, listed boards. Deceives experienced researchers outside the mimicked field. |
| IV  | Metastatic           | Content has entered citation networks, reviews, or guidelines. Remediation requires active retraction and decontamination.                |

# This paper concerns a malignancy. The malignancy is them.

A journal that publishes a paper identifying it as predatory has, by the act of publication, validated the analysis. A journal that declines will have demonstrated the one quality its solicitation suggested it lacked: editorial judgment. Rather than view the invitation as an insult, the author chose to view it as an invitation. Either outcome advances the literature.

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