PEER REVIEW BETWEEN ANONYMITY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

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12. FACHTAGUNG ZUR LAGE DER SOZIAL- UND GEISTESWISSENSCHAFTLICHEN ZEITSCHRIFTEN

PROBLEMS WITH PEER REVIEW

Reviewer 2 Must Be Stopped!

Public group · 181.8K members

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About this group

This group is for those who believe Reviewer 2 must be stopped (see definition below).

In the name of science and all that's good and fair in life. Stop this madness!

On this Facebook group, we probably won't get our act together to take any concrete steps for stopping Reviewer 2 (e.g., by challenging/changing the peer review and publishing system). But we sure can come here to vent about Reviewer 2...

Don't forget to invite your co-authors...

You know Reviewer 2:

The one who wrote "this has already been done" to reject your paper, without any references to the literature...

The one who sat on your paper for 6 months while they frantically ran their competing experiment...

The one who goes on an on about how the method you used sucks (except s/he misread the paper and you didn't use that method at all)...

Acknowledgements

I am indebted to Joel Kahn, Chris Eipper, Raelene Wilding, Tania Lewis, Nicola Henry and Nesam McMillan for their invaluable comments on earlier drafts of this paper. I must also acknowledge that this is a much better paper as a result of having addressed the critical commentary provided by *TAJA*'s anonymous reviewers (although I remain somewhat bewildered by some of their comments).

PROBLEMS WITH PEER REVIEW

- A system of journals with prestige tiers enforced by extreme selectivity creates a review system where scientific soundness is a necessary but far from sufficient criteria for publication, meaning that fundamentally aesthetic and sociological factors ultimately determine what gets published and inform the content of our reviews (Esarey 2015, 2).

  - Esarey, Justin. 2015. "Introduction to the Special Issue: Acceptance Rates and the Aesthetics of Peer Review." *The Political Methodologist. Newsletter of the Political Methodology Section American Political Science Association* 23(1): 1–27.

    - American Ethnologist: 1100 articles submitted over four years, 167 accepted (less than 10% success rate)

      - Source: Besnier, Niko. 2019. From the editor. What I have learned in the last four years. American Ethnologist 46(4): 381-386.

- Primarily focusing on the search for mistakes, inconsistencies, poking holes in the argument

- Courtroom model of an intellectual exchange

THINKING AGAINST

Image source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Justizzentrum_Aachen-Gerichtssaal01.jpg

THINKING WITH

- Peer review:
  - mechanism of quality control of scholarly work
  - a form of a <u>dialogue</u> among scholars

  - Make an <u>interpretive effort</u> to understand what the author tried to do
  - Give <u>actionable feedback</u> to help them get the paper where they wanted to go

Introduction: "Thinking With" When Peer Reviewing

June 13, 2022   0 comments

By *Čarna Brković*

Emergent Conversation 16

This essay is part of the series PoLAR Online Emergent Conversation on Peer Review as Intellectual Accompaniment

Source: https://polarjournal.org/2022/06/13/peer-review-as-intellectual-accompaniment/

ACTIONABLE FEEDBACK?

- "Editors expect authors to respond to peer reviews by changing the manuscript. It's therefore not helpful to hear 'this is terrible' without being presented an alternative pathway.

- Phrases like 'You might consider' and 'have you thought about' push me, as a reviewer, to come up with actionable suggestions while moderating my tone substantially.

- Likewise, offering suggestions of literature to consider with descriptions of the main ideas you think need to be incorporated into the paper,

- offering suggestions of how to restructure an argument by briefly re-outlining it for the author,

- and especially finding points where the author can amplify, elaborate, or emphasize significant points are all suggestions authors can act on quickly and efficiently, using <u>the review as a punchlist of what to do</u>."

- Source: Elizabeth C. Dunn. Peer Review and The Production of Sanctimony: A Denunciation, https://polarjournal.org/2022/06/13/peer-review-and-the-production-of-sanctimony-a-denunciation/

THINKING WITH IN AREA STUDIES

- "thinking against" is predicated upon an assumption of egalitarianism within a scientific community

- "One consequence of this, [Julie] Weiss shows, is that when that circle of referencing and review is too tight, it becomes less conversation than cabal, so that 'The path that academic anthropology is currently taking is one that keeps pushing too many people to the sides.' If journal editors disproportionately invite reviewers from within their own scholarly conversation, university network, or among those already highly cited in a given journal, the conversation tends towards closure rather than openness. This is not good for a field that is committed to interrogating epistemic common sense. But it can also be deeply destructive to the individuals excluded from conversation through a snide or dismissive review."

  - Source: Madeleine Reeves, "Falling into the Gaps, Together: On Peer Review as Intellectual Accompaniment", https://polarjournal.org/2022/06/13/falling-into-the-gaps-together-on-peer-review-as-intellectual-accompaniment/
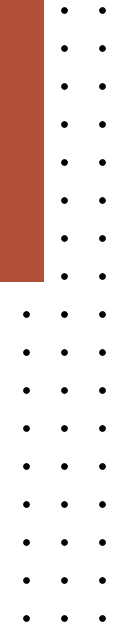
WHAT TO DO?

PRESCRIPTION VS DESCRIPTION

- How do we <u>ought to</u> do peer review? (prescription)

- How have different people been doing peer review, over time and in different corners of the world? (description)
  - Peer review as a socio-historically specific knowledge practice

- Better prescription can be formulated when we are familiar with more description

Collection

Referee Reports

BIAS

- Watson and Crick, 'double helix', Nature, 1953:
  - "We and our colleagues at the Laboratory for Molecular Biology deem this appropriate for Nature."
  - John Maddox, editor of Nature: "the Crick and Watson paper could not have been refereed: its correctness is self-evident. No referee working in the field (Linus Pauling?) could have kept his mouth shut once he saw the structure…"

- James Oldroyd, 1950 math paper, reviewed by a geophysicist Harold Jeffreys
  - "Knowing the author, I have confidence that the analysis is correct."

- physicist Shelford Bidwell reviews Frederick Edridge-Green's paper
  - "I was prepared to find that his new paper by Frederick Edridge-Green was rubbish; and it turned out to be rubbish of so rank a character that no competent person could possibly take any other view of it.'"

WHY WAS PEER REVIEW INTRODUCED?

- expansion of scholarly communities and knowledge – journal editors cannot reach decisions on their own anymore

- controling the cost of printing (number of printed pages)

- 1970s Cold War climate – attacks on science in the US
  - peer review as a way to claim accountability, while maintaining autonomy
  - see: Baldwin, Melinda. 2018. "Scientific Autonomy, Public Accountability, and the Rise of 'Peer Review' in the Cold War United States." *Isis* 109(3): 538-558.

WORLD WITHOUT PEER REVIEW

- Ethnologia Europaea: Mart Bax, seven articles on BiH published betwen 1988 and 1992 retracted

    - "In 2013, a university commission initiated by the VU Amsterdam Free University concluded that throughout his whole research career, the then-retired professor of political anthropology, Mart Bax had invented field sites, source materials, informants, and research problems.

    - At the time of publication, Bax was an internationally renowned scholar, whose notion of religious regimes, allegedly developed on the basis of fieldwork in Ireland, the Netherlands, and Bosnia-Herzegovina, had gained considerable scholarly attention. He claimed to protect his informants by using pseudonyms and inventing geographical names for the sites included in his fieldwork, so it took a long while for the scientific community to realize that informants and field sites had simply been made up.

    - The Bax affair led to an aftermath of serious self-reflection in the scholarly community .... Due to the VU Commission's conclusions, we decided to retract seven articles by this author, published in the journal between 1988-1992"

    - Marie Sandberg, From Gatekeepers to Caretakers. The Often-Overlooked Role of Editors' Care Work in Peer-Reviewed Publishing
        – https://polarjournal.org/2022/06/13/from-gatekeepers-to-caretakers-the-often-overlooked-role-of-editors-care-work-in-peer-reviewed-publishing/
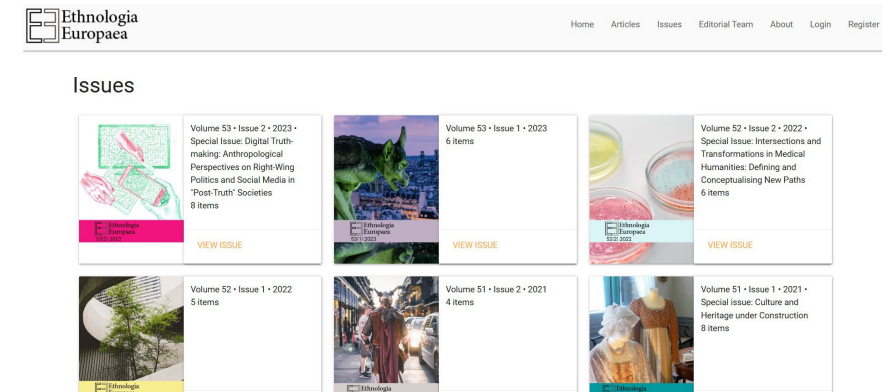
More on this case: Sandberg, Marie & Scheer, Monique. 2020. "Fabricating Data, Undermining Trust, or: Why We Omitted Work from Our Digital Archive: Editorial by the Joint Editors-in-Chief." Ethnologia Europaea 49(2): 5–7.

Margry, Peter Jan. 2020. "On Scholarly Misconduct and Fraud, and What We Can Learn from It", Ethnologia Europaea 49(2): 133–144.

EXPERIMENTS WITH PEER REVIEW

- Single- and double-blind peer review – standard

- Open peer-review: the names of authors and reviewers are disclosed right away
  - pro: more effort to treat each other with kindness and understanding; charitable interpretation
  - contra: no protection against bias, advantages of anonymity are lost

- Temporarily blind review
  - pro: more effort to treat each other with kindness and understanding; charitable interpretation
  - contra: a bit more editorial effort

EXPERIMENTS WITH PEER REVIEW

- Crowd-sourced peer review
  - "The message notified more than 80 expert reviewers that a manuscript was waiting for them, ready to be critiqued and considered for publication in the journal Synlett. A link within the email led the potential reviewers to a website called Filestage. There, they could click on any portion of the manuscript to pop up a box to compose comments.
  - Half an hour after the message hit reviewers' in-boxes, pale green circles dotted the screen where eager readers left suggestions and edits. Over the next four days, more than a dozen of the original 80 invitees anonymously debated the new chemical synthesis presented in the manuscript. They commented on the reaction's novelty, questioned the molecular mechanisms proposed by the authors, suggested control experiments, pointed out spectra of samples with subpar purity, flagged typos, and most crucially, recommended rejection or acceptance. Once the review period closed, an editor weighed the reviewers' comments and decided the manuscript's fate."
    - Source: Nguyen, M. Tien. The case for crowd peer review. C&EN. 26 November 2018: https://cen.acs.org/policy/publishing/case-crowd-peer-review/96/i47
  - pro: quick, direct, detailed response
  - contra: not clear how applicable to social sciences and humanities

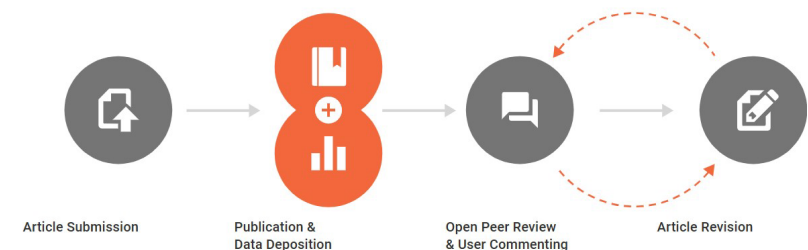# EXPERIMENTS WITH PEER REVIEW

- Post-publication peer-review

  - submission

  - editorial check

  - publication

  - peer review

  - articles that passed vs those that did not
    pass peer review are clearly marked

  - (F1000Research journal)

Rapid & Transparent Publishing

F1000Research is an Open Research publishing platform for scientists, scholars
and clinicians offering rapid publication of articles and other research outputs
without editorial bias. All articles benefit from transparent peer review and
editorial guidance on making all source data openly available. F1000Research
operates under a continuous publication schedule.

Our Publishing Processes

For Articles

| Article Submission | Publication & Data Deposition | Open Peer Review & User Commenting | Article Revision |

EXPERIMENTS WITH PEER REVIEW

- Community peer review

  – going back to the communities one studied, hosting public meetings to present the results, methods, and analysis (Liboiron 2018).

  – "In this model, community members can provide feedback, refute findings, and even refuse to allow the research to be published."

    – Liboiron, Max, Zahara, Alex, Schoot, Ignace. 2018. "Community Peer Review: A Method to Bring Consent and Self-Determination into the Sciences." Preprints 2018, 2018060104. doi: 10.20944/preprints201806.0104.v1).
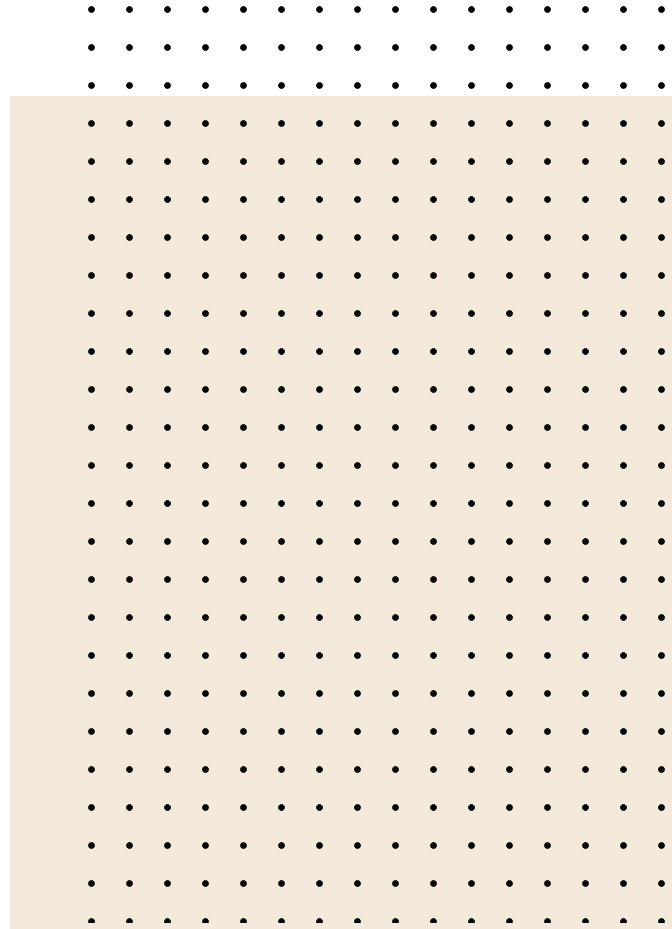
RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Develop guidelines for peer reviewers

   – Example: https://polarjournal.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/polar-reviewer-guidelines.pdf

2. Do not share with the author a peer review that is not constructive, or that is offensive. Find another reviewer

3. Share (anonymous) reviews with everyone after decision has been made

4. Consider temporarily blind peer review – share names and reviews with everyone after the decision has been made

SOURCES

- https://polarjournal.org/2022/06/13/introduction-thinking-with-when-peer-reviewing/

- https://mitcommlab.mit.edu/broad/commkit/peer-review-a-historical-perspective/

- https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-024-03287-4?fbclid=IwY2xjawGKcDJleHRuA2FlbQIxMQABHZZSLjdqrGlWv0HDT9NavcZvL1HscEWMu-uxfMFvC5K9h9kYx0-pOxzUeA_aem_kZEr9IFk00oU2noN2CWkxw

- https://makingscience.royalsociety.org/items/rr/referees-reports-on-scientific-papers-submitted-to-the-royal-society-for-publication

Thank you!

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