



Reviewer anonymity: a hindrance to self-correction in science?

By Sabine Louët

To encourage reproducibility and replicability, let's make anonymity a thing of the past

Pre-publication registration, post-publication peer-review, greater data openness; all these factors form a long list of potential solutions heralded as capable of improving study reproducibility and replicability in science. Though not everyone agrees, the world of scholarly publishing is in full debate mode. For example, intense [discussions](#) took place at the recent Royal Society meeting in the UK on the [future of scientific scholarly publishing](#). A second meeting scheduled in [May](#) on the same theme will tackle reproducibility as one of its key focus points.

We have reached unprecedented levels of collaboration and competition in research. Encouraging scientists to reproduce results is part of a healthy, self-correcting science. Some argue researchers would only be encouraged to further reproduce and replicate results if they have an incentive to do so. But with the current evaluation system, such incentives are almost inexistent. One of solution is to bring the publication process out into the open and no longer rely on anonymity of reviewers. This, in turn, will provide the transparency required to introduce new mechanisms for allocating credit to those who perform reproducibility and replication studies.

The truth is relying on anonymity, when peer-reviewing manuscripts, is no longer a guarantee of neutrality during the process. Indeed, it sometimes hides some possible conflicts of interest—despite requirement for disclosure—among those competing for the same limited funding resources. So why hide the identity of those who do the peer-review? For fear of retribution, should the review not be favourable?

Since science is collaborative in essence, the risk associated with the disclosure of the reviewers' identify should be lower than the rewards. Although there will always be rivalries among scientists, transparency will bring help incentivise self-correction in the scientific process. By making reviewers' identity and comments more public,

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reviewers will have to ensure that their comments withstand scrutiny. And these changes go hand-in-hand with the need for giving credit to those who take part in an open post-publication process.

It is not a matter of whether, but rather of when, this evolution will take place. EuroScientist would therefore like to encourage its readers to share their suggestions on how this can be done!

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