

## **Editorial: double-blind peer review and the advantages of sharing data**

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We have made two policy changes at the *International Journal of Primatology* recently. First, we instituted double-blind peer review, following consultation with the primatology community. Second, we now encourage authors to share their data.

### **Double-blind peer review**

The purpose of peer review is to improve the quality of the manuscript under review, and of the material that is eventually published. Conscientious peer review is a time-consuming task but is essential to assure the quality of scientific publications. My experience as Editor-in-Chief suggests that the great majority of reviews are highly constructive and result in a final article that is of higher quality than the original submission.

The *International Journal of Primatology* observes the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) Code of Conduct and Best Practice Guidelines (<http://publicationethics.org>). We strive to ensure that peer review is fair, unbiased and timely. Editorial decisions to accept or reject a manuscript for publication are based on the advice received from reviewers and the editor's own reading of the manuscript. We provide detailed guidelines for reviewers. We have no targets for rejection and work with authors to make a manuscript acceptable, sometimes via multiple rounds of revision and feedback.

Previously, the *International Journal of Primatology* operated a review process in which the identities of the authors were known to the reviewers, but the identity of the reviewers were not known to the authors, unless they choose to sign their review. This is known as single-blind review, and is intended to allow reviewers to provide critical and constructive comments, in the absence of personal consequences, either positive or negative. However, single-blind review may allow biases based on characteristics of the author rather than on the contents of the manuscript to influence the review process. These aspects may include relationship to the reviewer, gender, seniority, nationality, reputation and affiliation, and implicit bias may result from the reviewer's background, cultural environment and personal experiences. One possible way to address these potential biases is to replace single-blind review with a system in which the reviewers do not know the identities of the authors, in

addition to the authors not knowing the identities of the reviewers. This is termed double-blind peer review.

The question of whether double-blind peer review effectively addresses issues of bias was heavily debated in the literature several years ago. Results suggesting that double-blind review led to a significant increase in the number of papers published in which the first author was female (Budden et al. 2008) were criticised on the basis of the statistical approach employed (Engqvist & Frommen 2008, Hammerschmidt et al. 2008; Webb et al. 2008; Whittaker 2008). Bias is, however, evident in other assessments made in science (Moss-Racusin et al. 2012). A recent survey on the International Journal of Primatology website found that most respondents would prefer double-blind review, and my conversations with Primatologists suggest that double-blind review is perceived as fairer and more objective. We have, therefore, now implemented double-blind peer review. In so doing, we will be in a position to measure the effect of a change in review policy on author diversity, including gender, nationality, institution and seniority.

In moving to double-blind peer review, we acknowledge that the methods section, in particular, may help to identify authors. Nevertheless, guesses can be wrong, and most manuscripts submitted to the International Journal of Primatology are multi-authored, meaning that the reviewer cannot identify the full team, or the position of the authors in the list. Employing double-blind review also serves to remind reviewers of the need to provide an impartial review. Double-blind review may make it more difficult for reviewers to identify conflicts of interest, but this seems unlikely, as reviewers have access to the abstract when invited to review. Double-blind review may also deter reviewers from providing helpful advice to less experienced authors, and we will monitor this.

Several years ago, the Editorial Board also discussed the practice of signing reviews. A member of the Editorial Board pointed out that this can be (ab)used to cultivate relationships with influential researchers. However, it can also be useful if reviewers openly offer to help authors with an issue. We have retained our current practice of allowing reviewers to waive their anonymity if they wish.

Finally, a commonly proposed alternative to any sort of blind review is open review, in which reviews are published alongside the article. This has the benefit of acknowledging the important role of reviewers and encouraging in-depth reviewing. However, open review does not address the possible influence of the personal consequences of a flattering, or a critical, review on the review process. For the moment, then, we work with the traditional closed system, but encourage authors to acknowledge the anonymous reviewers in their articles.

## **Data-sharing**

We now encourage authors to make the data supporting their results available, as Electronic Supplementary Material or via an appropriate repository. Data-sharing promotes transparency, allows others to reproduce analyses and encourages scrutiny of research findings. It promotes further use of data and leads to new collaborations. It also ensures the

long-term persistence and preservation of datasets. It provides excellent resources for education and training. Finally, data-sharing is a requirement of many funding agencies (e.g. the UK research councils).

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