



Editorial

## Author and Reviewers' Needless Conflict

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Few authors have lately expressed concern that their manuscripts have been severely criticized by reviewers. Indeed, any unprofessional remarks unrelated to the study should be curtailed and avoided. While the responsibility of regulating these unwarranted communications rest with the editors, it is imperative to understand the review process for the benefit of the author and reviewers and a need for a greater understanding of each other's roles.

Most publications mainly follow two reviewing formats, double- and single-blind peer review. The *Indian Journal of Plastic Surgery* adopts a double-blind review system that essentially maintains the anonymity of authors and reviewers throughout the review process. It enables a fair and impartial review process unaffected by the author's stature, institution, geographical location, gender, etc. The manuscript is therefore assessed solely on its merit, regardless of the reputation of the authors.

On the contrary, the author's details are not concealed in a single-blind review format, relying heavily on the reviewer's integrity and goodwill to remain unbiased. Reviewers are expected to recuse themselves if there is a conflict of interest with the authors. However, it does not protect authors against reviewer bias in practice, as the author's credentials may consciously or unconsciously influence the reviewer's assessment. Reputed authors are likely to get the benefit of the doubt more readily from reviewers than a new researcher attempting to publish his work. Despite these inherent drawbacks, the single-blind format, including several high-impact publications, is widely used. Nonetheless, I believe that double-blind reviews may not be perfect, but at least it levels the playing field somewhat.

It is not uncommon for a reviewer, even in a double-blind review format, to make an educated guess about the authors. Particularly in a small research community, the author's work might be well known and presented on the podium, including their language style. More often than not, authors leave trails of their identity knowingly or unknowingly in the main manuscript. This includes self-referencing their previ-

ous study, mentioning the institution name or location, naming individuals in the acknowledgments, mentioning the ethical committee of an institution or a university, funding source, and so on. While the editorial screening excludes all files pertaining to the author's details, paying attention to every detail to filter cues about their identity is virtually impossible. I emphasize the authors' responsibility to provide clean manuscripts devoid of all sources of their identity.

In both formats, however, a good peer review is expected to be based on the objective evaluation of the manuscript and provide constructive criticism to help the authors. Assessing the manuscript section by section, identifying any significant flaws, and communicating with authors with clear language with due respect to their work are the essence of a good review. Any personal remarks or unsubstantiated opinions are undesirable and considered rude and unprofessional. Such reviews not only affect the authors' productivity but also significantly delay the publication process.<sup>1</sup> Contrarily, undeserving compliments by a generous reviewer could render authors complacent and less serious in the remake of the manuscript. In both situations, editors perform the balancing act.

While reviewers may be aware of who the authors are, it is not necessary to assume that reviewers' comments are deliberate and personal to the authors. Having known the integrity and fairness of individual reviewers, I believe a thorough review is intended to help authors formulate suggestions for improving the manuscript. Authors should honestly re-evaluate their manuscript, be introspective and address constructive criticism in a positive manner rather than dismissing it as harsh remarks.

Despite its limitations, the peer review system remains an integral part of scientific evaluation, which interrogates academic work submitted to the journal. Reviewers, our own colleagues, are the backbone of this scientific process to ensure that the quality of published material remains high. We must value the time and expertise they offer without any

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commercial gain or credit. A good reviewer, perhaps, is a much more valued contributor to the manuscript than several coauthors of the article.

The decision to salvage, revise, and accept is based on the collective inputs of reviewers and the editorial assessment of the overall merit and utility of the article. Articles that are likely to be published are sent for revisions and are rarely subsequently rejected despite minor conflicts. However, manuscripts that do not conform to the journal's guidelines are not approved until satisfactory revisions are made and compliance is achieved.

Finally, a well-researched and well-written succinct article is a treat for us, and authors should aim for such perfection that the article is acceptable with minor changes

avoiding unnecessary delays. The corresponding author is expected to address all criticism with a point-wise scientific rebuttal without a statement of personal ego. This will avoid needless conflicts between the author and the reviewers, which should be scaled down if found, and strictly deny any room for such situations.

#### Conflict of Interest

None declared.

#### Reference

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