

Editorial

Blind No More

On July 1, 2009, the *Journal* will end its practice of double-blind peer review. Instead, authors' identities will be revealed to reviewers, although reviewers will remain anonymous.

Then-editor Dr. Iris Litt instituted double-blind review at *JAH* nearly 20 years ago, and it has remained a proud tradition at the *Journal* since then. Double-blind review is a rarity among scientific journals, but *JAH* has persisted because of the perceived objectivity and fairness of the process. Indeed, in a recent survey of 3,000 reviewers and editors, 56% of respondents preferred double-blind review over other forms of peer review, and 71% viewed it as the most effective form of peer review [1].

But the evidence does not support these perceptions. At the close of the last century, a flurry of research into the efficacy of double-blind review failed to show a clear advantage in the quality of the reviews [2]. Even those studies showing a positive effect to blinding authors' and reviewers' identities were hampered by methodological issues that limited the interpretation of the results.

Which brings us to our reasoning for ending double-blind review at *JAH*. Masking authors' identities is complicated and time-consuming. It requires that authors submit multiple documents to the editorial office, and that the editors carefully screen (and often correct) these documents for any inadvertent unmasking.

Furthermore, reviewers frequently make assumptions and guesses about authors' identities, particularly in a relatively small field such as adolescent health. Ten years ago, *JAMA* published a study of masking success, showing that reviewers were able to correctly guess the identity of a masked author 40% of the time [3]. Of even greater concern are the incorrect guesses and mistaken assumptions.

Finally, we believe that we can make better use of our reviewers' time and expertise by fully informing them of a manuscript's origin and backing. Reviewers who are aware

of authors' identity will be better able to uncover instances of plagiarism, repeat publication, and conflict of interest.

The editors did consider fully open review. Revealing reviewers' identities to authors holds the promise of greater accountability, and thus, objectivity. Our concern is that many reviewers would be unwilling to review if they were denied anonymity [4]. Currently, a little over half of our review invitations are declined, for various reasons. An increase in that rate of decline would have an unwelcome effect on the speed and efficiency of *JAH*'s review process.

As we evaluate and consider the effect of this latest change to our review process, we may revisit the possibility of open review in the future, as well as other review innovations, such as postpublication review. Ultimately, the *Journal*'s editors are committed to publishing high-quality science that moves the field of adolescent health forward. We will implement the peer review process that best enables us to do just that. We welcome your comments and feedback.

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