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*Issues in Publishing, Editing, and Reviewing*

# The Peer-Review and Editorial System

## Ways to Fix Something That Might Be Broken

Seth J. Schwartz<sup>1</sup> and Byron L. Zamboanga<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Epidemiology and Public Health, University of Miami, and <sup>2</sup>Department of Psychology, Smith College

**ABSTRACT**—*The present article focuses on ways to make the peer-review and editorial process more efficient and more equitable for authors. In particular, we focus on the role of editors and action editors in the process of selecting and managing reviewers, balancing their own impressions of the manuscript with the reviewers' feedback, and rendering a fair and equitable editorial decision. We advance several recommendations to conserve reviewer time, provide authors with appropriate recourse when their papers are rejected unfairly, and expedite the processing of manuscripts that do not meet the standards of the journal to which they have been submitted.*

Many scholars and journal editors are concerned about current inefficiencies and unfairness in the peer-review system (e.g., Hojat, Gonnella, & Calleigh, 2003; Kumashiro, 2005; Raelin, 2008). Manuscripts seem to be spending longer than ever in the review process, editors are experiencing challenges finding reviewers (and obtaining reviews from individuals who have agreed to provide them), and reliable reviewers are finding themselves inundated with far more review requests than any reasonably productive scholar can handle.

Perhaps much of the breakdown of the peer-review system can be traced to the burden that is placed on reviewers and to the shortage of reliable and expert individuals who can be called on to provide critical reviews within a reasonable amount of time. In some respects, reviewing manuscripts is a thankless job; in most cases, authors do not know who is reviewing their manuscript, reviewers seldom receive the professional credit that they deserve for their service, and authors and editors alike often blame tardy or unresponsive reviewers when the editorial process takes

longer than anticipated. Nonetheless, we believe that most reviewers are genuinely interested in contributing to and advancing their fields of study and in helping authors improve the quality of their manuscripts. Nonetheless, the peer-review system remains inefficient and somewhat unfair.

So what can be done to help address some of the current problems in the peer-review system? Our answer examines the larger editorial system in which the peer-review process is embedded. Indeed, the editor (or associate editor) directs the review process by selecting reviewers, providing them with instructions and parameters for performing their reviews, and by using the reviewers' feedback in the process of rendering a decision on the manuscript (Eisenhart, 2002). As we discuss below, many of our recommendations for improving the editorial system focus on the role of editors rather than on the roles of reviewers. As a result, our recommendations may complement those that have been advanced previously and that have focused largely on the roles and responsibilities of peer reviewers (e.g., Foster, 2007; Kumashiro, 2005).

There is an old adage that identifying a problem is the first major step toward fixing it. Perhaps one of the reasons why reviewers are overburdened is because editors call on them more frequently than they probably should. Given that there is a finite amount of reviewer time available, we need a system that capitalizes effectively on—but does not waste—reviewers' time and energy. Reviewer time and energy should generally be reserved for new manuscripts, on which their attention is most urgently needed, with some exceptions that we note below.

### THE PASSIVE EDITOR

Many seasoned authors have probably encountered the “passive editor” many times during their careers. A manuscript is submitted for publication, assigned to an action editor, sent out for review, and judged to be of sufficient quality to be invited for resubmission. The manuscript is then revised and resubmitted,

Address correspondence to Seth J. Schwartz, Center for Family Studies, Department of Epidemiology and Public Health, Leonard M. Miller School of Medicine, University of Miami, 1425 N.W. 10th Avenue, Miami, FL 33136; e-mail: SJSchwartz@med.miami.edu.

and the action editor sends it out for review again. This process may be repeated any number of times, with reviewers sometimes consulted as many as four or five times before the manuscript is finally accepted for publication. In these cases, the editor simply takes a vote count among the reviewers, and acceptance is assumed to be contingent on unanimity among reviewers that the paper should be accepted.

Consulting reviewers repeatedly in this way can represent an inefficient use of time. Diener (2006) and Tsang and Frey (2007), for example, recommend that reviewers be consulted only once: during the initial evaluation of a manuscript. Once the paper is judged to be suitable for publication (generally with a set of revisions required), the remaining work can be accomplished between the author and the editor, with the caveat that the editor must be free to reject a resubmission that is not responsive to reviewer or editor concerns. In some cases, it may be helpful to consult the reviewers a second time so that they can evaluate the extent to which their suggestions have been incorporated into the manuscript, especially when the paper has undergone substantial revision and/or when the manuscript uses advanced statistical analyses. However, we contend that any further use of reviewer time is inefficient and detracts from time that could be spent reviewing and evaluating the scientific merit of a new manuscript. Indeed, reviewers are most valuable on new submissions, and their utility decreases with each successive round of review. We argue that editors who insist on consulting reviewers multiple times to make sure that every last suggestion has been followed are, in effect, abdicating their role as arbiter of the review process and are contributing to the inefficiencies of the review process. Even in cases where the editor is not expert in the content areas or methods represented by the manuscript, she or he should have a fairly good idea of the merits of the manuscript, and what needs to be done to improve it, after one round (and at most two rounds) of review.

Editors also need to assume a more active role in evaluating revisions rather than just reflexively sending the manuscript back out for review. We recommend that reviewers be consulted no more than twice on any given manuscript and that if revised manuscripts are to be sent back out for review, the editor should explicitly specify what she or he wants the reviewers to evaluate. As soon as reviewers have provided their input on the suitability of the paper for publication, the editor should weigh the review narratives against her or his own judgment of the manuscript and render a fair and objective editorial decision that is responsive to the reviews and to the goals and standards of the journal.

It is also important that editors discard reviewer comments (and perhaps entire reviews) that are unhelpful, tangential to the manuscript, or overly negating and critical. For example, for the *Journal of Personality Assessment*, action editors are required to rate each review that they receive, with the least favorable rating labeled as “an embarrassment to JPA.” The senior editor instructs action editors to discard reviews receiving this rating and not to share them with authors. Moreover, the review process

should be transparent enough that editors provide authors with information relating to the qualifications of each reviewer to provide a review on the manuscript (e.g., “Reviewer X is a statistical methodologist with expertise in the analytic methods used in your study”). Although the reviewers’ identities would not be revealed, authors would be assured that their paper is being refereed by individuals with appropriate expertise.

It is the editor’s responsibility to maintain a reasonable amount of control over the editorial process. As an editor once noted, “This isn’t a democracy, it is an editorial process . . . the reviewers don’t get to decide, they provide their best judgment and I get to take the responsibility” (Nancy Darling, personal communication, October 5, 2005). Allowing reviewers’ narratives or recommendations to dictate the editorial decision effectively removes the editor from the editorial process. Regardless of what the reviewers say, the editor is solely responsible for the decision rendered (Roth, 2002). To quote Baker (2002, p. 176), “editors [should not be] rubber stamps and [should] exercise their professional judgment in regard to the input they receive from reviewers and associate or section editors.”

Clearly, this requires more work on the part of the editor, and many editors and associate editors are asked to evaluate more manuscript submissions than they can reasonably handle. Perhaps as a result, scholars often encounter passive editors who provide no feedback in their editorial letters, but who instead simply inform the author of the editorial decision and proceed directly to the reviews. In some cases, it is not clear whether or not the editor read the manuscript before rendering the decision. Given Tsang and Frey’s (2007) finding that nearly 40% of scholars surveyed reported providing reviews on manuscripts that were outside their areas of expertise, passive editors can be detrimental to the integrity of the peer-review system because they cede control of the editorial process to reviewers who may or may not possess adequate knowledge of the subject area represented by the manuscript. In cases where editors must send out as many as 10 reviewer invitations before they can obtain two or three reviews on a manuscript, there is an increased likelihood that at least one of the individuals who accepts the invitation to review will be from outside the manuscript’s area of specialization. Such circumstances can sometimes result in reviews that start out with “I am not an expert in (area represented by the manuscript), but . . .” It is especially important for editors in these cases to exercise their authority as arbiter of the editorial process.

## THE CAPRICIOUS AND “HEAVY-HANDED” EDITOR

Another scenario involves an editorial outcome in which all of the reviews are at least reasonably supportive, but the editor has decided to overrule them and reject the manuscript. The editorial letter refers to the editor’s own concerns and seldom mentions the reviews, if they are mentioned at all. The editorial letter may also refer to the manuscript not representing a sig-

nificant enough contribution to warrant publication in the journal, despite the reviewers' opinions to the contrary.

Part of the reason for this centers on the high rejection rates maintained by many top journals. Some top-tier journals—especially those that are published only four or six times per year—receive many more manuscripts than they can feasibly publish. As a result, manuscripts without fatal flaws may nonetheless not meet the journal's criteria for acceptance even in the presence of positive reviews. For example, a perusal of the American Psychological Association's annual summary of journal operations (American Psychological Association, 2006) indicates that many of the top-ranked APA journals reject at least 70%–75% of submitted manuscripts and sometimes more. In 2005, *Health Psychology* and the *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*, for example, rejected 94% and 92% of manuscripts submitted for consideration, respectively. Each of these journals accepted fewer than 30 manuscripts in the entire calendar year and rejected more than 300 submissions. With rejection rates as high as these, it is highly likely that many scientifically sound papers that were favorably reviewed were nonetheless rejected (e.g., Sieber, 2006). For some journals, a high rejection rate is equated with prestige, such that there is pressure to maintain the rejection rate and therefore to reject as many manuscripts as possible. This encourages action editors to find reasons to reject manuscripts that do not meet some arbitrary (and often unreasonable) standard. Capriciousness is therefore not only rewarded, but also encouraged.

A possible solution to this challenge is to increase the number of issues per year (or to increase the number of pages per issue), which would allow for more quality papers to be accepted. Absent this, it is unfair to ask authors to wait several months to have their papers reviewed only to receive a rejection that could have been determined before the paper was ever sent out for review. A similar issue arises when editors send reviewers papers that are not consistent with the journal's mission and then reject them when the reviews come back. In either case, the following questions likely come to mind:

“Why would the editor bother to solicit reviews if she or he was simply going to disregard them and make a unilateral decision on the paper?”

“Why would a paper that the editor is not interested in publishing, or that does not meet the standards of the journal, be sent out for review at all?”

Perhaps it would have been more efficient to simply return the paper to the authors without review and inform them that it is not appropriate for the journal, or that the action editor decided that the paper was not sufficiently strong enough—conceptually, methodologically, or otherwise—for the journal. It is the editor's responsibility to screen manuscripts for appropriateness before assigning them to an action editor or sending them out for review

(Hojat et al., 2003). This saves valuable reviewer time and allows the authors to promptly send their manuscript elsewhere.

A slightly different, and more delicate, situation occurs after a manuscript is assigned to an action editor. One can probably assume that assignment to an action editor implies that the senior editor has decided that the paper falls within the scope of the journal and has at least a reasonable chance of meeting criteria for acceptance. At this point, the fate of the manuscript lies in the hands of the action editor. However, are the action editor's responsibilities any different from those of the senior editor or editor-in-chief? When an action editor sends a manuscript out for review without reading it carefully beforehand, this creates the risk of wasting valuable reviewer time on a paper that the action editor would have rejected under any circumstances. It is an inefficient use of reviewer time, and frustrating for authors, to have a manuscript favorably reviewed only to be rejected by an action editor who does not like it or believes that it does not meet the standards of the journal.

Just as in the initial screening by the senior editor, if an action editor believes the manuscript does not meet the standards of the journal or does not intend to accept it under any circumstances, then it should not be sent out for review. Instead, the manuscript should be returned to the senior editor and subsequently returned to the author without review or assigned to a different action editor. Although rejecting a manuscript without review because the action editor does not resonate with it is still capricious, heavy-handed, and unfair to the review process, it would save valuable reviewer time and allow the authors to submit their work elsewhere without further delay.

All of this begs an additional question: Should an action editor make an editorial decision based on whether she or he likes the paper (see Kaplan, 2005, for further discussion)? Is it necessary for the editor to agree or resonate with a manuscript in order to accept it, or should the primary criteria be scientific rigor and advancement of the field? It is our hope that someone serving as an action editor would accept manuscripts based on their scientific quality and potential contribution to the field, regardless of personal resonance or lack thereof. Moreover, as Sieber (2006) and others have argued, the emphasis on rejection rates as a measure of journal quality should be decreased considerably. Asking action editors to evaluate not only the scientific rigor of a manuscript, but also whether or not it is “good enough” for the journal (independent of the reviewers' opinions), invites heavy-handedness and caprice—especially given that most journals do not offer any recourse to authors who believe that their papers have been unfairly rejected.

In essence, if one accepts the premise that the job of peer reviewers is to judge the scientific acceptability and contribution of a manuscript and of the research it reports (Tsang & Frey, 2007), then the editor's role is to weigh the merits of the reviews and render an editorial decision that reflects the spirit of the reviews while still incorporating the editor's own scientific judgment and the standards of the journal. The challenge here is

to strike a balance between the reviewers' narratives and recommendations and the editor's own agenda (Roth, 2002). Nevertheless, we recommend that no manuscript should be rejected when all of the reviews are favorable. Overruling reviewers in this way serves to undermine the peer-review process and can create an authoritarian and unbalanced editorial approach. Again, if a paper is going to be rejected regardless of what the reviewers say, then it should not be sent out for review at all.

Moreover, it is important that reviewers and editors judge the value of a manuscript in terms of the overall contribution to the field and the absence of fatal flaws that would seriously undermine the ability of the manuscript to make the contributions that the authors are claiming. It is important that papers not be rejected simply because of a multitude of small problems that are "added up" and used to justify rejection. If the problems identified are addressable, and if the paper's contribution is significant enough (in the eyes of the reviewers and the editor) to merit publication in the journal, then the action editor should invite a revision.

## APPEAL PROCEDURES AND OVERSIGHT OF EDITORS

Given the way the editorial process is set up, authors are in a "one down" position from the outset (Roth, 2002). Reviewers have the right to make any requests they wish, and in many cases, authors must comply with these requests for the manuscript to be accepted for publication. Indeed, incorrect or questionable reviewer comments often find their way into print within the article that the authors publish, especially in the case of passive editors who cede control of the editorial process to the reviewers (Tsang & Frey, 2007). The mantra of the passive editor is reflected in the words of Levesque (2006), who states that "the influence of most editors ends once they have selected reviewers, [and] editors are pretty much at the selected reviewers' mercy" (p. 3). However, it could also be argued that one of the key tasks of an editor, especially when inviting a revision, is to sift through the comments made by the reviewers and to provide the authors with a sense of which comments are important to address and which are not. Indeed, the assumption that "the reviewers are always right" is subject to question. This is particularly the case in circumstances where the reviewer is unfamiliar with the discipline and/or the statistical analyses presented in the manuscript and makes incorrect recommendations. Unfounded recommendations can sometimes contribute to the action editor's decision to reject a manuscript, especially when the action editor adopts a passive approach or is not familiar with the content area or methodological approach represented by the manuscript.

Unfortunately, however, when manuscripts are unjustifiably rejected, authors have little choice but to send their work elsewhere. Most journals have no appeal process—formal or informal (Hojat et al., 2003)—and requests to editors for reconsideration of negative editorial decisions are often quickly dismissed (Brown, 2004; Cummings & Rivara, 2002). The *American Journal of Psychiatry*,

for example, once posted a note on the guidelines to authors that "deputy editors' decisions cannot be challenged" (this wording has since been removed from the journal's Web site). Given the potential problems and biases involved in the editorial process, we contend that an appeal process is needed—perhaps similar to the official appeal procedures adopted by the *American Psychologist* (Anderson, 2006). As part of this process, authors who believe that their manuscript was rejected without proper cause have the option to present their appeal to an independent Chief Editorial Advisor and/or to the Publications and Communications Committee. The author should be required to present a written statement of why the paper should not have been rejected, and the committee should weigh this statement against the action letter and reviews. A formal appeal process would hopefully make editors responsible for their decisions (Roth, 2002) and provide authors with recourse in situations in which their manuscript was handled by misguided reviewers and/or heavy-handed action editors (Raelin, 2008). Such measures could help prevent abuses of editorial power and help the peer-review process proceed as it was intended to.

## UNDULY LONG REVIEW LAGS

Most scholars have had the experience of submitting a manuscript to a journal and having to wait most of a year—if not more than a year—for an editorial response. It can be especially frustrating to have a manuscript rejected after such a lengthy delay. Most authors would agree that 90 days is a fairly standard amount of time between submission of the manuscript and receipt of the editorial decision. However, with the increased burden placed on reviewers, due at least in part to editors' misuse of reviewers' time and energy, as described here, it is not surprising that editorial lags have been increasing in recent years.

Some journals have instituted procedures to protect authors from waiting most of a year for an editorial decision on a manuscript, only to have it rejected. For instance, the guide for authors for the *Journal of Adolescent Health* (2007) notes "Manuscripts submitted to the *Journal of Adolescent Health* will receive a timely review and authors will be notified within six weeks of receipt of manuscript whether their work is accepted, rejected, or requires revision." As another example, the *Journal of Marriage and Family* states on its Web site that "The Editor will return reviews and make decisions within 12 weeks from the time the manuscript is sent out for review except when there are extenuating circumstances" (National Council on Family Relations, 2006). We would suggest an upper limit of 6 months on any manuscript review process and that, once 6 months have elapsed from the time of submission, the editor should make a decision with the reviews that have come in. Such a policy would have clear implications: Editors would no longer be able to wait endlessly for reviewers to return their comments and recommendations. Some editors, especially passive editors, may prefer to utilize a "majority vote" among reviewers. If two reviews have come in, and one reviewer recommends rejection and the



other recommends inviting a revision, the editor may wait for a third review to “break the tie.” This kind of editorial policy is unfair to authors and carries the assumption that editors’ and reviewers’ time is more valuable than authors’ time.

### EDITORS PUBLISHING IN THEIR OWN JOURNALS

Should editors be allowed (or even encouraged) to publish original theory and research in their own journals? There is no consensus on this; for example, the *Journal of Marriage and Family* Web site says that “The Editor will not publish in the Journal during her or his term of office” (National Council on Family Relations, 2006), whereas Diener (2006), in the opening editorial for *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, states the following:

In my view, it is unfair to editors to prevent their publishing in the journal with which they are affiliated. If the editors are automatically precluded from publishing in *Perspectives*, it is likely that the journal will be edited by individuals who are no longer active in scientific discovery. (p. 3)

There are ethical considerations worth noting with respect to editors publishing in journals over which they have control. Although it may be possible to bring in an outside action editor to evaluate the manuscript (and hopefully this is the rule rather than the exception), an important question remains: What is the likelihood that a manuscript written by the journal editor and/or an associate editor will be denied publication if publication is unwarranted? Even with reasonable safeguards (e.g., having an outside action editor), it would be quite difficult to have a fair hearing. There is no way to know whether the reviewers will be blind to the identity of the journal editor as manuscript author, whether the outside action editor will be willing to reject a paper authored by the editor of the journal, or whether the journal editor will abide by the outside action editor’s decision to reject her or his manuscript.

A similar issue arises with regard to established senior scholars who, as the old saying goes, can “publish their laundry lists.” Senior scholars may be able to publish marginal papers that would likely have been rejected if written by a younger or less prominent author. Because authors often cite their own work, and because reviewers and editors learn to recognize a seasoned author’s writing style after handling several of that author’s submissions, it is not very difficult for reviewers to discern who the author is, and reviewers may be unwilling to criticize the work of an eminent scholar. Similarly, journal editors may be hesitant to reject manuscripts written by senior colleagues with whom they have close professional interactions and/or relationships and who may also be reviewing or handling the editor’s own manuscripts. Although blind review may be possible for students and assistant professors who are not well known in their fields of study, there may not be such a thing as blind review for senior scholars who are nationally and internationally recognized for their work.

Our approach holds that it is the manuscript, not the author, that is being reviewed. The work submitted for consideration should stand apart from the individuals who wrote it, and it should be reviewed and considered for publication based solely on the quality of the paper and of the research and/or theory that it reports. Indeed, having substandard work appear in print may actually be detrimental to senior scholars who are regarded as leaders and exemplars in their fields of study. One possibility for addressing this would be to encourage authors to blind their manuscripts as much as possible, including removing author citations from the reference list and making the research location anonymous. Current American Psychological Association guidelines require only that identifying information be confined to the title page, which is generally not transmitted to reviewers. Unless requested to do so by specific journals, authors are not advised within APA style to remove author citations or to delete references to the research location.

### GATEKEEPING: COERCIVE REVIEWER AND EDITOR RECOMMENDATIONS

As Tsang and Frey (2007) note, not all reviewer and editor recommendations serve to improve the manuscript. Although many reviewer comments point out flaws in the paper and suggest ways to correct them, others reflect stylistic preferences on the reviewer’s part or even requests that will result in direct benefits to the reviewer or editor (e.g., asking the authors to cite the reviewer’s own work). Reviewers and editors may also ask authors to include caveats or recommendations that have little, if anything, to do with the substance of the manuscript under consideration. For example, during the review process for a recently published article on Hispanic ethnic identity and acculturation, one reviewer criticized the authors for not including a measure of skin tone and insisted that they advise future studies to do so. The action editor adopted a passive approach and continued to send the manuscript back out for review until all of the reviewers were completely satisfied with the paper. As a result, the authors were, more or less, forced to incorporate this recommendation, regardless of whether they agreed with it. In essence, this is an example where a reviewer was employing the article to broadcast her/his viewpoint (i.e., the importance of assessing skin tone in acculturation research).

The point here is not whether skin color should be assessed in acculturation research. Rather, we use this illustration to pose a question: Is this what the peer-review process was intended to accomplish? As part of the process of evaluating manuscripts and sifting through review narratives, editors should assume the task of separating comments and recommendations about the scientific adequacy and contribution of the manuscript from stylistic and political issues that reflect the reviewer’s own preferences and biases. Concerns in the former category should be taken seriously and conveyed to authors as important, whereas concerns in the latter category should be conveyed as

optional. The litmus test may be “Would following this recommendation improve the scientific quality and contribution of the paper, or would it primarily advance the reviewer’s own agenda?” As Tsang and Frey (2007) state quite persuasively, the job description for journal reviewers does not include forcing their own preferences and biases onto the authors. If this is allowed to happen, in Diener’s (2006) words, “the editor and reviewers in a sense become co-authors of the article” (p. 3).

Once the paper has been deemed scientifically adequate and appropriate for the journal, the authors should have the final say regarding what should and should not be included in their paper—within reason, of course. The manuscript must remain consistent with the mission of the journal and must conform to accepted standards of scientific writing. However, within these general guidelines, authors should be free to present their work in the manner with which they feel is most comfortable. Of course, for this to be possible, editors must provide authors sufficient leeway, must consult reviewers only as many times (generally not more than twice) as necessary to ensure the scientific adequacy of the paper, and must protect authors from having to incorporate reviewers’ stylistic or idiosyncratic preferences into their manuscripts.

### REVIEWER NARRATIVES VERSUS RECOMMENDATIONS

Yet another reason why editors need to carefully and critically consider reviewers’ input is that the reviewer’s official recommendation (accept, invite a revision, or reject) may differ from the spirit of the review narrative itself. We provide two examples here to illustrate this issue. In the first example, reviewers may recommend that the manuscript be rejected, but their review narratives may point to completely addressable and fixable issues. In this case, the editor should carefully consider the spirit of the review and invite a revision so that authors are able to respond to the issues raised, which subsequently can result in publication in that journal. In the second example, a passive editor simply takes a vote count among the reviewer recommendations, finds that one reviewer has recommended rejection, and proceeds to reject the manuscript, despite the fact that the reviewer raised only cosmetic concerns about the paper. In this scenario, it is unclear whether the editor even read the review narratives (or the manuscript). As we have suggested in most of our recommendations, the challenge for editors is to strike a balance between the passive “let the reviewers decide” approach and the heavy-handed, unilateral approach.

Again, being a passive editor—counting votes, rubber-stamping reviewer recommendations, and allowing the reviewers to make the decision on the paper—takes far less time and energy than reading the manuscript carefully, weighing the content of the open-ended review narratives more strongly than reviewers’ formal recommendations, and weighing the reviewers’ suggestions against one’s own impressions. As Arnett (2005)

notes, editing a journal is a thankless job, and the stipend from the publisher is “less per hour than the average adolescent earns for working in a fast food joint” (p. 3). Like Arnett, editors must choose this role (and responsibility) because they want to help to shape the theory and research coming into their field of study. Editing a journal must be intrinsically motivating, in the sense in which Ryan and Deci (2001) use the term. That is, as Raelin (2008) notes, editors must view their role as a choice that they would continue to make throughout their editorial term (rather than an obligation that they must fulfill), and they must derive intrinsic pleasure from the contributions that they make to the field. The changes that we are recommending for the editorial system will most likely create additional responsibilities for editors—thereby making it especially imperative that editors enjoy their work and find it personally meaningful.

### STATISTICAL REVIEWERS FOR PAPERS USING ADVANCED METHODS

There is one final note that we wish to make. Advanced statistical methods, such as structural equation modeling (SEM), multilevel modeling, survival analysis, and latent growth curve modeling have become increasingly common in scientific papers during the last 10–15 years (Gueorguieva & Krystal, 2004; Keiley & Martin, 2005; Weston & Gore, 2006). Although many of these techniques build on traditional correlation, regression, and analysis of variance methods (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007), there are many important aspects of these analyses—such as model fit, estimation methods, and parameterization—with which many readers and reviewers might be less familiar. As a result, a number of writers (e.g., Hojat et al., 2003; Tsang & Frey, 2007) have suggested that, although it is the author’s responsibility to ensure that the methods are described clearly, manuscripts reporting advanced statistical analyses must be reviewed by at least one statistical methodologist who is expert in the analytic methods used in the study. The *Journal of Adolescent Health* (2007) addresses this very issue in their guide for authors, “When relevant, a biostatistician consultant will also review the manuscript.” Such a policy will likely help to facilitate both fairness and efficiency in the review process.

Not only is it critical to ensure that the authors have used the correct statistical methods and used them properly, but it is also important to ensure that the editorial process is not adversely compromised by naive and erroneous reviewer comments. Manuscripts can be rejected, in part, because of several negative comments about the use of advanced statistical methods such as SEM, perhaps including comments based on incorrect assumptions about the method. In situations where the action editor is unfamiliar with the statistical analyses presented in a manuscript, accepting an uninformed reviewer’s feedback at face value and rejecting the manuscript does a disservice to the authors and undermines the integrity of the peer-review system. The more advanced the methods used in a given study, the more

likely it may be that reviewers will elect to either take the authors' word for it and make no comments on the analyses or make negative comments about analytic methods in which they might not be well versed. Indeed, methods such as SEM and multilevel modeling have become quite commonplace and easy to implement through the use of graphical software interfaces that assume only superficial knowledge of the method. To ensure the integrity of the review and editorial process, it is critical to call on statistical reviewers for manuscripts that report advanced analyses. Statistical reviewers' comments on methodological and analytic issues should be given precedence over other reviewers' comments on these issues. At the same time, however, editor should integrate the statistical reviewer's feedback with the content-based responses from the other reviewers, so that the authors can understand how to match changes in their analyses with adjustments in other parts of the manuscript.

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

In conclusion, authors, reviewers, and editors should be collaborative partners in the editorial process. The goal of the review process is to ensure that journals publish only theory and research that meets accepted scientific standards and that advances the field (Baker, 2002). With this in mind, we offer the following suggestions, many of which have been stated elsewhere, as well as earlier in this editorial. We hope that these recommendations, along with those advanced by others, will help to improve the quality, efficiency, and fairness of the editorial process.

1. Editors should play an active role in the editorial process. This means assessing a reviewer's level of competence as part of evaluating the review narrative, discarding the reviewer's official recommendation if it differs from the spirit of the review narrative, and balancing the reviewer recommendations with the editor's own impressions of the manuscript.
2. The editor should provide at least some feedback of her or his own on the manuscript, beyond simply stating the decision and referring the authors to the reviews. At the very least, the editor should indicate which reviewer comments are most important to address. Authors should have some assurance that the action editor who is deciding the fate of their manuscript has at least read the paper. This also means that journals should employ enough associate editors so that no editor is assigned more manuscripts than she or he can reasonably handle.
3. The review process should be transparent enough that authors should be informed about the qualifications of each reviewer to provide a review on the manuscript. This would provide authors with confidence that their paper is being refereed by individuals who are expert in the content or methods referenced in the manuscript.
4. Reviewers should never be consulted more than twice on any given manuscript, and the second round of review is necessary only if substantial changes have been made and the editor does not feel competent to judge the adequacy of the revision.
5. When an action editor is assigned to manage the review process for a manuscript, she or he should read the paper carefully before sending it out for review. If the action editor does not like the manuscript and is unwilling to accept it under any circumstances, or if he/she feels that the manuscript does not meet the standards of the journal, the paper should be returned to the senior editor immediately.
6. Manuscripts should be evaluated solely on their scientific adequacy and potential contribution to the field. If a manuscript conflicts with the action editor's own research agenda or philosophy of science, and if this conflict is likely to interfere with the editor's objectivity, the manuscript should be assigned to a different action editor or sent back to the authors as inappropriate for the journal.
7. No manuscript should be rejected when all of the review narratives are favorable. If a manuscript does not meet the journal's standards, it should not be sent out for review.
8. A journal's high rejection rate should not be used as justification for rejecting manuscripts that are scientifically sound and that, in the reviewers' opinions, make a significant contribution to the field. The journal's Instructions to Authors should clearly state the criteria for acceptance versus rejection, and editorial decisions should be faithful to these criteria.
9. Authors should be asked to address only those comments and suggestions that relate directly to the scientific adequacy and contribution of the manuscript. Addressing comments related to reviewers' personal preferences should be made optional.
10. The content of review narratives should be considered to be more important than the reviewer's official recommendation regarding publication.
11. All journals should institute a formal appeals process for authors whose manuscripts have been rejected. Appeals should be heard and evaluated by a committee (cf. Anderson, 2006) not affiliated with the author or with the editor. The author should be required to present a written statement of why the paper should not have been rejected, and this statement should be weighed against the action letter and reviews.
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likelihood that reviewers will recognize an eminent scholar's work and will be reluctant to criticize it.

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