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Received: 5 Aug 2022
Accepted: 24 Aug 2022
Published: 3 Oct 2022

Competing interests

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

Anonymity in anonymized peer review is incompatible with preprints

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Citation

Teixeira da Silva JA. Anonymity in anonymized peer review is incompatible with preprints. *Eur Sci Ed.* 2022;48:e91290.

<https://doi.org/10.3897/ese.2022.e91290>

It can now be argued that preprints, following an initial phase of some academic resistance and hesitation, have become established as a recognized model of academic publishing preceding traditional peer review. In preprints, authors' identities are known; that is, there is no anonymization. The anonymized peer review process employed by journals, typically known as single- or double-blind peer review, is now known as single- or double-anonymized peer review.¹ In traditional peer review, the identity of authors is known to the reviewers, whereas the identities of peer reviewers are unknown to the authors. In anonymized peer review, the identity of authors is unknown to the reviewers, and *vice versa*.

An increasing number of peer-reviewed journals are accepting preprints prior to peer review, although some limitations still hamper their smooth or effective integration.^{2,3} I recently suggested that in order to increase the use of preprints and their integration with peer-reviewed journals, and given that both are widely cited documents, the preprints and peer-reviewed papers should be treated as 'equal', that is, with equal stringent scrutiny.⁴

Scrutiny should also involve assessing the compatibility between existing publishers' preprint policies and those of peer-reviewed journals to which preprints are submitted. When I recently posted a preprint on the preprint server *SocArXiv*,⁵ the Open Science Framework platform on which it is hosted requested and published my identity as author, as is typical for the largest and most popular preprint servers such as *bioRxiv*, *medRxiv*, preprint.org, ResearchGate and Research Square. However, in subsequent online submissions to peer-reviewed journals, the text had to be submitted without any authors' names within the text for the purpose of anonymized peer review. Curiously, in one of the journal's instructions

for authors (*Higher Education Policy*, Palgrave MacMillan) indicate that neither those texts must be blinded nor do they have any specific mention of preprints, allowing or disallowing them, so authors need to check by themselves whether a preprinted version is allowed, as verified on Sherpa Romeo.

This indicates that there is a stark contrast and incompatibility between the open author-identified policy of this preprint server (i.e., authors' names and particulars (e.g., email, address, and affiliation) identified) and the requirement by this indexed journal (i.e., that submitted papers be anonymized, i.e., with authors' identities concealed). This incompatibility was neither described nor detected in a previous comprehensive analysis of preprint servers.³

Any editor or peer reviewer who completes their function responsibly and diligently will usually, in the first step of the process, screen the paper for duplication, either using similarity-detection software or manually using scientific databases or even Google. In the case of preprints or studies presented as conference abstracts, peer reviewers might identify the actual text and thus also the identity of the author(s). Even more visibility occurs when such preprints or conference abstracts are archived on websites like ResearchGate. In such cases, mandatory requirements to anonymize the paper or mask the author's identity are meaningless.

Journals and publishers that allow preprints as part of the publishing workflow would do well to address this flaw by revising their policies related to mandatory anonymization/masking of authors' identities. One solution is to convert anonymized peer review to open peer review, where the identities of authors, handling editors, and peer reviewers are known to all parties and the public.

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