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# When Reviews Attack: Ethics, Free Speech, and the Peer Review Process

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## Abstract

The peer review process, whether formally applied in publication and grant review, or informally, such as exchange of ideas in scientific and professional newsgroups, has sparked controversy. Writers in this area agree that scholarly reviews that are inappropriate in tone are not uncommon. Indeed, commentators have suggested rules and guidelines that can be used to improve the review process and to make reviewers more accountable. In this paper, we examine the relevance and impact of ethical codes on the conduct of peer review. It is our contention that the peer review process can be improved, not by a new set of rules but through closer attention to the ethical principles to which we, as psychologists, already subscribe.

There seems to be agreement among most psychologists that peer review and commentary are necessary for the effective advancement of science, and are therefore essential in our field. These activities are wide ranging and include manuscript and grant proposal reviews, as well as open peer commentary/debate that takes place both in less formal discussion groups (including Internet forums) as in various journals. A large number of psychologists have had considerable experience at both the giving and receiving ends of peer review. The following examples that we recently became aware of prompted us to discuss the tone of peer reviews, ad hominem attacks (i.e., attacking to the individual rather than disputing or debating an idea), and the ethical issues involved in the review process. Several months ago, a young investigator applied for (and obtained) a major research grant from a national agency. This investigator had applied under the agency's "new investigator program." A more senior researcher was listed as co-investigator in the application. While four of the reviews of the grant proposal were positive and recommended that the project be funded,

one reviewer expressed the opinion that the project should not be funded because the ideas outlined in the proposal were not the "new" investigator's but belonged to the more senior researcher, who was really the "mastermind" behind the work. The accusation completely ignored the fact that the researchers had signed a declaration about the veracity of the proposal and the ideas therein. More importantly, the reviewer described no evidence that led him or her to make this accusation. Many persons who develop their own scientific ideas could have found such a view personally offensive on a number of levels.

In following up on this experience, we discussed this situation with a number of our colleagues. Somewhat to our dismay, we discovered that inappropriate or ad hominem remarks are not uncommon. One colleague had received a comment that the revision to a paper should be started by burning the entire manuscript. Another was described by a reviewer as being "arrogant" because he expressed a view that is inconsistent with the beliefs of most of his colleagues. Moreover, a review of the literature suggested that this issue is not a new one. Based largely on their personal experiences as writers, reviewers, and editors, other psychologists have described problematic reviews as "mean-spirited," "an avenue for professional nastiness," "cursory," and "overly caustic" (e.g., Fine, 1996; Levenson, 1996; Rabinovitch, 1996).

Since we are of the opinion that collegiality and civility are important elements of professionalism, we were very surprised when this issue was debated on the Internet forum of the Society for the Study of Clinical Psychology (SSCPnet). The SSCPnet is a section of the Society of Clinical Psychology (Division 12 of the American Psychological Association [APA]). Any member of Division 12 of APA can join this group and interact with other members via an e-mail — based discussion of various topics suggested by group members. With topics ranging from statistical methodology to questions about patient referrals, SSCPnet is meant to be a forum for the scholarly exchange of ideas related to scientific clinical psychology. Depending on the topic, debate can become heated, and the Internet format results in minute-by-minute exchanges between multiple participants. In early 1999, after receiving numerous complaints noting that debate sometimes degenerated to fractious name calling (e.g., colleagues were described as "bozos"), the SSCP board attempted to "legislate" civility by suggesting

that attacks on the speaker (as opposed to the argument) would not be tolerated and that the tone of communications must be collegial. Much to our surprise, the board's position raised a considerable amount of tension and discontent, and several persons suggested that the board's policy set new, and dangerous, limits on free speech. If such ideas are indeed representative of those of a large portion of psychologists, one might speculate that some of our colleagues may consider *ad hominem* comments made by peers as being appropriate or necessary to advance science. Others, who would still oppose the SSCP board's guidelines, might say that the reviewer situation is different from the open SSCPnet debate because reviewers (unlike the members of SSCPnet) are usually anonymous to those whose work they examine. It must be noted that the SSCP board's guidelines have since been retracted as a result of the vocal discontent that they created among participants who posted responses. Unfortunately, a formal survey of the full membership has not yet been carried out on the matter.

These examples typify the difficulties that psychologists may experience with peer review and commentary. In the example involving the young investigator, a clear *ad hominem* attack was made without evidence. The example concerning SSCPnet is perhaps most interesting, and is certainly the most novel. Because of the relative recency of Internet forums for intellectual interchanges, a number of precedents may be set that will determine the future course of peer commentary. In this paper, we will argue that, in fact, standards for peer review already exist, and that important professional guidelines are often ignored in examinations of the peer review process. It is our contention that professional codes of ethics for psychologists pertain to peer review, and that these existing codes can be used by psychologists to decide what is or is not appropriate behaviour in their reviewing practices and academic debates. We will begin by examining the literature on dissatisfaction with the tone of peer review, and describe some of the pre-existing suggestions that have been made to improve the peer review process.

As noted earlier, the tone of reviews has been the basis for a steady stream of commentary from numerous authors. Epstein (1995) cited general perceptions of colleagues that peer reviews were often flawed in both their logic and tone (e.g. "self-serving, arrogant," p. 883). Numerous commentators agreed with Epstein's general point (Fine, 1996; Levenson, 1996; Rabinovitch, 1996). The agreement among writers suggests that dissatisfaction with tone of reviews is a more common phenomenon than may be acknowledged by the field at large. One of the reasons for this lack of acknowledgement may be the nature of the remarks and their context. Authors

receiving such feedback are most often likely to share it only in private communications. Perhaps more importantly, if the author who has been attacked believes the comment to be embarrassing, or indeed warranted, he or she is unlikely to share this feedback with others. At the same time, this feedback is likely to undermine the person's confidence. In a worst-case scenario, the ultimate outcome of inappropriate feedback is that a psychologist is effectively silenced and withdraws from the forum of intellectual exchange. Clearly then, tone of reviews is an important matter for the field, and one that we should take pains to take up if we wish to encourage participation in the dissemination of intellectual knowledge.

Based on his own observations of tone of reviews, and their impact on psychologists, Epstein (1995) made a number of suggestions for improving the peer review process. He suggested that reviewers and editors be given explicit, uniform guidelines for their reviews. His suggestions for these guidelines can be grouped into pragmatic suggestions (e.g., all parties adhere to time constraints, reviewers are asked to discern correctable vs. uncorrectable limitations) and suggestions regarding the tone of comments. For the latter, he suggested constructive vs. destructive comments, balancing positive and negative comments, and awareness and control of reviewer biases. Epstein's position sparked a debate in a subsequent issue of *American Psychologist*, with several commentaries (Bedeian, 1996; Brysbaert, 1996; Fine, 1996; Levenson, 1996; Rabinovich, 1996). The one commonality among all of the contributors, independent of any pragmatic or structural changes in the peer review process, was the notion that reviews are often inappropriate, either because they are biased, superficial (and therefore incompetent), or contain personal attacks.<sup>1</sup> Other writers have offered varying critiques on the peer review process. Houlihan and his colleagues examined the potential for dual role conflicts when editors or associate editors submit a paper to their own journals (Houlihan, Hofschulte, Sachau, & Patten, 1992). Based on survey findings that editors in particular believed such submissions to be ethically problematic, the authors of the paper suggested that blind review be mandatory when submitting to one's own journal, and that guest editors be used to handle such papers (Houlihan et al., 1992). Finke (1990) noted that, because of rising submission rates and demand for high-quality reviews, the number of reviews per paper be limited, and that review-

1 It must also be noted that authors often write to editors condemning one or more of the reviewers. Such comments are usually not seen by the reviewers and are not often discussed in the literature. Nonetheless, the professional standards and ethical principles that apply to the tone of the reviewers' comments also apply to authors' comments.

ers be compensated.

Overall then, one of the key sources of dissatisfaction with the peer review process stems not from its structure or normative functioning but from the tone and style of some reviews. Despite a number of proposals, there is no universal consensus among commentators on whether, or how, administrative practices of the review process could be improved. However, there is consensus that part of the driving force for examining, and attempting to improve, the process are biased, superficial, and ad hominem reviews. The elimination of such reviews would be in the interest of everyone, including authors, editors, reviewers, and the field as a whole. Some proposals for modifying peer review, such as identifying reviewers or implementing an appeals process, are clearly designed to reduce the frequency or impact of inappropriate reviews. Unfortunately, such changes may be cumbersome, or have other drawbacks (e.g., identifying reviewers could lead to more biases and less objectivity). Certainly, none of the proposals for improving the peer review process have been implemented on a broad basis. We advocate instead that questions of the appropriateness of reviews can best be addressed at their source, the writer and his or her adherence to ethical codes of the profession. Indeed, we believe that the ethical codes to which we, as psychologists, are expected to adhere can offer considerable guidance on what is, and what is not, appropriate. In drawing together these ethical codes, we have two goals: a) to examine those principles and standards that pertain *directly* to peer review practices; and 2) to examine other principles and standards that have implications for the review process.

At least one other author has pointed out ethical standards that apply to peer review. Specifically, Stark (1998) identified at least 15 of the standards of Canadian Psychological Association's (CPA) code of ethics (CPA, 1991) that are relevant to peer review. Although the codes of ethics of both CPA (CPA, 1991) and the APA (APA, 1992) can be used to inform the debate, we were surprised with the lack of specific references to these codes when such matters are discussed in the literature. Each code, for instance, has a principle that concerns itself with respect for people's rights and dignity (which speaks against ad hominem attacks). While the APA code does not present principles in terms of relative importance to one another, the CPA code does, and *Respect for the Dignity of Persons* is considered to be the most important principle.

We will now consider the ways in which the CPA and APA codes of ethics can inform the review process, not only when it comes to manuscripts and grant applications, but also in academic debate. The *Canadian Code of Ethics for Psychologists* (CPA, 1991) consists of four principles that are hierarchically organized in order of impor-

tance (I to IV). These are: *Respect for the Dignity of Persons*, *Responsible Caring*, *Integrity in Relationships* and *Responsibility to Society*. This hierarchic organization is especially important in situations in which ethical principles are in conflict with one another. The code recognizes that, under relatively rare circumstances (such as in order to save someone's life), *Responsible Caring* can be given more weight than *Respect for the Dignity of Persons*. Nonetheless, the hierarchy applies to most situations and its validity has received some empirical and theoretical support (Hadjistavropoulos & Malloy, 1999; Malloy & Hadjistavropoulos, 1998; Seitz & O'Neil, 1996; Sinclair, Poizner, Gilmour-Barrett & Randall, 1987). The *Code of Ethics* of the American Psychological Association consists of six principles that are not organized in order of importance (*Competence*, *Integrity*, *Professional and Scientific Responsibility*, *Respect for People's Rights and Dignity*, *Concern for Others' Welfare*, and *Social and Scientific Responsibility*).

All ethical principles of the CPA and APA codes of ethics apply to the peer review process. The discussion below considers the four CPA principles in relation to peer review and to the six principles presented in the APA code.

#### ETHICAL PRINCIPLES AND CPA STANDARDS

Each of the four principles of the CPA (1991) *Code of Ethics* consists of a general values statement followed by specific ethical standards. Relevant standards are summarized in Table 1. Although all principles of the code are related to peer review, the first principle, *Respect for the Dignity of Persons*, is most directly relevant to the tone of peer reviews.

*Respect for the Dignity of Persons.* The values statement of this principle specifies explicitly a range of individuals who have contact with psychologists, including "research participants; clients seeking help with personal, family, organizational, industrial or community issues; students; supervisees; employees; colleagues; employers; third party payers; and, the general public" (CPA, 1991, p. 9). Moreover, the values statement holds at its base that in all of these contacts, "each person should be treated primarily as a person or an end in him/herself, not as an object or a means to an end." The values statement also makes clear that innate worth cannot be enhanced or reduced by any demographic factors, "and/or any other preference or personal characteristic, condition, or status" (CPA, 1991, p. 9). Similar issues are covered in the APA (1992) principle of *Respect for People's Rights and Dignity*. According to this principle, "Psychologists accord appropriate respect to the fundamental rights, dignity and worth of all people." This implies that ad hominem attacks are inconsistent with the code as they would hinder the protection of dignity. Nonetheless, the CPA

TABLE 1  
Ethical Standards Relevant to Peer Review

<i>CPA Code of Ethics</i>	<i>APA Code of Ethics</i>
Respect for the Dignity of Persons General Respect (I.1, I.2, I.3, I.4) Fair Treatment/Due Process (I.24, I.25) Extended Responsibility (I.41)	1.03 Professional and Scientific Relationship 1.04 Boundaries of Competence 1.05 Maintaining Expertise
Responsible Caring General Caring (III.1, II.2, II.3, II.5) Competence/Self-Knowledge (II.6, II.9, II.10, II.11, II.12) Offset/Correct Harm (II.34, II.35, II.36, II.37)	1.06 Basis for Scientific and Professional Judgements 1.09 Respecting Others
Integrity in Relationships Accuracy/Honesty (III.2, III.4, III.8, III.9) Objectivity/Lack of Bias (III.10, III.11) Reliance on the Discipline (III.34, III.35, III.36)	1.10 Nondiscrimination 1.12 Other Harassment 1.13 Personal Problems and Conflicts
Responsibility to Society Development of Knowledge (IV.1, IV.2) Beneficial Activities (IV.3, IV.4)	1.14 Avoiding Harm 1.16 Misuse of Psychologists' Work 6.06 Planning Research 6.26 Professional Reviewers 8.01 Familiarity With Ethics Code

code emphasizes the need to protect others' rights and dignity somewhat more strongly than does the APA code.

The ethical standards that accompany this CPA principle's value statement even more clearly demarcate behavioural guidelines to assist psychologists in their interactions and communications with others. The most relevant points for peer review are the first four standards (CPA 1991, p. 10), which state that psychologists would demonstrate appropriate respect for the knowledge, insight, experience, and areas of expertise of others. Also, these standards do not allow for demeaning descriptions of others and prescribe use of language that conveys respect for others in both written and verbal communication. There is also a proscription against any form of harassment. Two other standards encourage fair treatment of others and respect for natural justice in procedures that include editorial work and peer review. The values statement, together with these specific standards, would clearly not support ad hominem remarks or derisive commentaries. The code also clearly implies that, within their professional roles, psychologists endorse limits to free speech when it could be seen to impact negatively on other people or society at large.

*Responsible Caring.* The fundamental values behind this principle are based on the expectation that a discipline's activities benefit members of society or at least do no harm. The principle also stresses the importance of

active concern for the welfare of others. Moreover, it states that, in order to carry out their role, psychologists understand the need for competence and self-knowledge and that they pursue only those activities in which they are competent. An additional point covered in this principle is recognition of how one's own attitudes, experiences, and biases can influence one's behaviour. Clearly, *Responsible Caring* implies that reviews should be attempted only in areas in which the psychologist is competent, or at the very least, a reviewer should acknowledge the limits of his or her competence. The APA (1992) principles of *Concern for Others' Welfare*, *Competence*, *Integrity* and *Professional and Scientific Responsibility* cover some of the relevant issues discussed in CPA's code. *Concern for Others' Welfare*, for example, includes statements that speak to the importance of constructive critique rather than ad hominem attack or focusing solely on the negative aspects of any piece of work: "Psychologists seek to contribute to the welfare of those with whom they interact professionally." Strictly and exclusively criticizing a piece of work could be ethically problematic (this assumes that the vast majority of works submitted for peer review have at least some merit).

*Responsible Caring* is associated with several standards that are relevant to peer review. These include *general caring*, *competence and self-knowledge*, and *offsetting or correcting harm*. The specific recommendations include avoidance of harm and promotion of other's welfare,

including that of colleagues. Specific standards also describe carrying out only activities in which one is competent and up to date with the relevant literature. Standards related to self-knowledge point out that psychologists should be aware of their own biases when evaluating the work of others, and that they take steps to reduce these biases when necessary.

*Integrity in Relationships.* The values behind this principle are based on the belief that integrity is vital to the development of scientific knowledge and the development of public confidence in psychology. *Integrity in Relationships* also points out that, though "science is value-free, scientists are not," and goes on to suggest that personal values can affect the types of questions that psychologists are interested in asking, how they attempt to answer those questions, and what interpretation they bring to those answers. Similar issues are covered in APA (1992) principles of *Integrity* and *Professional and Scientific Responsibility*. The former principle stresses that psychologists must be honest, fair and respectful of others. The latter indicates that psychologists must be concerned with the ethical compliance of their colleagues' scientific contact. From a reviewer's standpoint this implies that considering the degree to which a study is ethical is important (e.g., was it necessary to use deception in a social psychology experiment?). From an editor's standpoint, there is an obligation that the editor should be concerned with the degree to which reviewers are acting ethically (e.g., with respect for the authors' dignity) and in good faith.

The importance of accuracy and honesty, straightforwardness and openness, minimization of bias, avoidance of conflict of interest, and maximization of objectivity are stressed in CPA's relevant standards. Nonetheless, within the context of the whole CPA code, accuracy and honesty should be tempered by the need for respect for others (Principle I) and for responsible caring (Principle II). Specific ethical standards that apply to peer review include accuracy, honesty, and objectivity in both written and spoken communication. Psychologists are directed to acknowledge their own limitations, and to be straightforward in presenting these. Another set of standards under this principle acknowledges the need to distinguish between facts, opinions, theories, and hypotheses in written communications. Finally, standards encourage familiarity with, and use of, the ethical code in the profession.

*Responsibility to Society.* This principle recognizes that psychology functions within the context of human society. Scientific freedom must be balanced with scientific responsibility. The importance of engaging in activity that is beneficial for society as a whole is stressed.

This principle also argues for active participation in the dissemination of knowledge that could be beneficial to the public. It recommends steps to avoid misinformation that could be harmful. Ensuring the dissemination of worthwhile work and discouraging misleading or incorrect statements is part of the expectations under this principle. Similar issues are covered in the APA (1992) principles of *Social and Scientific Responsibility*. Both the CPA and APA codes imply that a reviewer has an obligation to aid the author to improve his or her work, for the betterment of the author and the larger audience.

CPA standards relevant to peer review encourage the development of knowledge and the engagement in activities beneficial to the field. The former standard is explicit in stating that psychologists should contribute to the discipline itself by encouraging the pursuit and sharing of expert knowledge. The latter directs psychologists to be involved in continuing education of self and colleagues, and to assist those who enter the discipline of psychology in teaching needed competencies. The various standards also stress the importance of pro bono work (which usually applies to peer review).

#### APA STANDARDS

The APA (1992) *Code of Ethics* also includes several standards that are relevant to peer review. Since standards in the APA code are not considered within the context of specific ethical principles, we will summarize them in this section.

An examination of the relevant standards of the APA code (listed in Table 1) shows that many general standards (e.g., 1.03 *Professional and Scientific Responsibility*, 1.04 *Boundaries of Competence*, 1.05 *Maintaining Expertise*, 1.06 *Basis for Scientific and Professional Judgments*) are relevant to the review process in that they emphasize the importance of staying current, only undertaking work within one's area of competence and the like. Some other general standards are more directly applicable to the tone of peer review (1.09 *Respecting Others*, 1.10 *Nondiscrimination*, 1.12 *Other Harassment*, 1.13 *Personal Problems and Conflicts*, 1.14 *Avoiding Harm*). These emphasize respect for the rights of others and avoidance of bias and harm. Harm could, for instance, occur when a new investigator feels discouraged as a result of ad hominem attacks of his or her work. APA Standard 1.16 (*Misuse of Psychologists' Work*) stresses the importance of taking appropriate steps to correct misinterpretation of psychologists' work. APA Standard 6.26 (*Professional Reviewers*) is directly applicable, as it indicates that psychologists respect the proprietary rights and confidentiality of the material that they review. There are many standards in the APA ethics code that apply less directly to peer review but are, nonetheless, of great importance. Standards 6.06 (*Planning Research*) to 6.25 (*Sharing Data*) concern

themselves with the ethical integrity of the research that is being conducted, with 6.06 being most specific about the psychologist's role in pointing out ethical problems in research. More generally, these standards make clear that, part of the reviewers' responsibility, is to pinpoint appropriately any ethical concerns that some studies could raise. Finally, Standard 8.01 (*Familiarity with the Ethics Code*) is relevant to all of a psychologist's activities, including peer review. Specifically, it states that lack of familiarity with the ethical code cannot be a defense against acting unethically.

#### A BRIEF COMMENT ABOUT THE TRI-COUNCIL POLICY STATEMENT

The Tri-Council Policy document (Tri-Council Working Group on Ethics, 1997) is also relevant to this discussion. This document was designed to guide the manner in which Canadian university Research Ethics Boards review research proposals with respect to ethical acceptability. The Tri-Council Policy Statement is, therefore, a key document for psychologists who are affiliated with universities. Many of the aforementioned issues (e.g., incompetent reviews, ad hominem attacks) could potentially occur within the context of reviews for ethical acceptability. The Tri-Council document contains few statements that pertain to the ethical conduct of the persons who conduct reviews for ethical acceptability (e.g., Research Ethics Board members who may have a conflict of interest involving any given research protocol are expected to exclude themselves from discussions and adjudications of that protocol). The document does not include elaborate guidelines about appropriate Research Ethics Board reviewer conduct. Nonetheless, such guidelines could easily be incorporated in the document by extending the discussion of ethical principles covering the protection of the dignity and welfare of research participants.

#### Conclusions

The peer review process, whether formally applied in publication and grant review, or informally, such as exchanges of ideas in a professional forum, has not been without controversy. Debate on the issue of the adequacy of peer review (including reviewer competence) and what rules should or should not govern the process has been a recurrent theme, both in formal and informal professional discussion. Critics of the current practices have made various suggestions for improving this process, typically by "policing" the review process. Others have attempted to establish specific rules of conduct for various peer review activities. Typically, those who suggest a reform or amendment of the peer review process tend to favour an increased role for individuals or groups to act as authorities to mediate, influence, and

potentially discipline or ignore those who are seen to contravene specific standards. Those who oppose such views tend to point out the pragmatic problems associated with such changes, and philosophically oppose any infringement on free speech as a form of censorship. Another argument against any change in the peer review process is that any adverse reactions in the recipient of a review are simply a failure to develop the emotional resilience that is required to be a professional. In other words, a negative reaction to a review is, necessarily, a "narcissistic injury" (e.g., Levenson, 1996, p. 1191).<sup>2</sup>

We argued instead that there is a way for psychologists to improve the peer review process and that these changes involve not a new set of rules but simply increased attention to the ethical principles to which we as a profession subscribe. Both the CPA and APA codes directly outline principles for interactions between colleagues and are quite explicit about what is inappropriate. Both codes would not support the use of ad hominem attacks, or any other personal criticism. In addition, both codes place the onus of insuring respect for dignity of others on the communicator of a message, not the recipient. Given these straightforward codes of conduct, and their implications for peer review, why have ethical codes not figured prominently in discussions of the peer review process? One answer may be that psychologists, particularly academic psychologists, who are likely to be most involved in peer review, think of ethical codes as applicable mainly to clinical practice on the one hand and research methodology on the other. This may have led previous writers to not fully consider the impact of these codes on other professional activities in which a psychologist engages, including peer review.

One very significant advantage of focusing on the ethics code in improving the peer review process is that these codes are already supported by, and adhered to by the profession. Those who have argued that restrictions on communication are a limitation of free speech may be surprised to discover that, as psychologists, they have already agreed to such limitations simply by being a member of the profession.

In what way can the above discussion inform the examples that are described in the beginning of our paper as well as the recent debate of the SSCPnet? The codes are extremely clear that ad hominem attacks and disrespectful comments to one's colleagues are unacceptable.

<sup>2</sup> It is important to note that, particularly when a manuscript is rejected, evaluative statements that might seem neutral under most circumstances can appear negatively toned to an author. However, we believe that the most critical issue is whether the evaluation refers to the work at hand (e.g., the writing, the statistical presentation, conceptual reasoning) vs. a situation that involves an ad hominem attack that is neither logical nor based on the work. The latter is inappropriate under any circumstance.

able. The SSCP board did not engage in censorship (stating that such comments will not be tolerated) any more than our laws (e.g., against slander) and codes of ethics do. Ethical theory (e.g., Kant, 1977/1788) stresses the importance of doing what is morally right. Many democratic groups of society including psychologists have agreed on standards, ethical principles and codes with the aim to protect others and help achieve what is morally right. Being respectful of others implies that one should not make inferences and recommendations that are damaging, unsubstantiated, and based on guesswork.

Respect for others' dignity and the expectation that we maximize benefit and minimize harm is what organizations such as APA and CPA have chosen to do. It is interesting that the notion of applying ethical codes to improve the tone of peer reviews is not mentioned in the literature nor in debates about civility of academic exchange. We suggest two possible explanations for this. First, it may be that there is dissatisfaction when it comes to applying some of the CPA and APA ethical principles to certain situations. This may mean that a re-evaluation of the codes and their applicability is needed. A second, and perhaps more likely, possibility is that when we need these ethical codes, we do not think enough about using them. This may be true despite the fact that these codes can guide our judgement and behaviour in our roles as reviewers. If this is the case, we must increase our attention to the ethical principles that we have developed and apply them to the peer review process.

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## Résumé

L'évaluation par les pairs, qu'elle se fasse dans le contexte officiel d'une publication et de l'examen d'une subvention, ou dans une situation détendue, comme lors d'un échange de vues dans des groupes de discussion scientifiques ou professionnels, a suscité la controverse. Les rédacteurs de ce domaine s'entendent sur le fait que les évaluations savantes d'un ton déplacé ne sont pas rares. En effet, des commentateurs ont suggéré des règles et des lignes directrices pouvant être utilisées pour améliorer le processus d'évaluation et imputer une plus grande part de responsabilité aux examinateurs. Dans cet article, nous examinons la pertinence des codes déontologiques et leurs répercussions sur la réalisation des évaluations par les pairs. Nous émettons l'hypothèse que l'évaluation par les pairs peut être améliorée, non par l'imposition d'un nouvel ensemble de règles, mais plutôt en portant une

plus grande attention à l'éthique professionnelle à laquelle, à titre de psychologues, nous souscrivons déjà.

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