

who like guessing games should have plenty to do already trying to unmask the referees of their own papers!

Potential Disadvantage 5: *There is some increased editorial burden in changing the cover sheet of the submitted paper to remove the authors' names.*

As indicated in the Reid Committee Report, this is only a slight burden that can be transferred to the contributors of articles, when anonymous refereeing becomes a journal's policy. I would just want to emphasize that the editorial board of *The Canadian Journal of Statistics* experienced no difficulty whatsoever in completing this transfer, and that many psychology and social sciences journals have successfully operated under double-blind refereeing policies for much longer periods of time, not to mention *Psychometrika*.

In summary, my reading of the situation is that none of the above constitutes a real argument against double-blind refereeing. While I appreciate the cautiousness of the IMS Council, and its desire to collect its own data and proceed to a trial run before full-scale implementation of this policy in its journals, I would contend that abundant literature and the experience of many scientific publications, including statistics journals, provide ample evidence already that anonymous refereeing bears no strong disadvantages and many potential benefits. One should thus be careful not to invest too much energy on experimentation. While the preceding reports both make good suggestions about the design of such an experiment, I am afraid that too much time and effort may be required to reach a definite conclusion. It is important to realize

that for all the extra work such a study will impose on editorial boards of IMS journals, it is not likely to prove that the current system is *better* than double-blind reviewing. It could only fail to detect bias or show that it is not statistically significant. Meanwhile, the *potential* for bias will always remain.

As I have tried to argue, double-blind refereeing is a simple, low-cost procedure that neither increases editorial workload nor reduces referee collaboration in any significant way. Although it may not be totally effective in eliminating all possibilities of bias (no procedure could be!), it would *at the very least* alleviate perception of unfairness within the statistical community. This in itself would be a source of professional satisfaction and stimulation. But beyond public relations, the introduction of anonymous reviewing is likely to put editorial responsibility where it belongs and to send referees back to their prime duty: the conscientious, objective assessment of the scientific merit of research manuscripts. If double-blind refereeing could accomplish this, would we not all be grateful for it?

DISCLAIMER

Although I was a member of the Board of Directors of the Statistical Society of Canada and an Associate Editor for *The Canadian Journal of Statistics* at the time when its double-blind refereeing policy was adopted, the opinions expressed herein are mine alone. They should not be construed to represent in whole or in part either the official views of the Society or those of its journal's present or past editorial board.

Comment

Willem R. van Zwet

Apparently many people hold strong views on the issue of double-blind refereeing, and to me the main virtues of the report of Nancy Reid's committee are its measured tone and balanced views. Being one of the group of people who "have had experience of the editorial process", I am not convinced that double-blind refereeing will make much difference one way or the

Willem R. van Zwet is Professor of Mathematics, University of Leiden and University of North Carolina. Present address: Department of Mathematics, University of Leiden, P.O. Box 9512, 2300 RA Leiden, The Netherlands.

other. An often heard argument that is also noted by the committee is that even if there would be no bias, it is important to eliminate the perception that there is. Of course there is something to be said for this, but on the other hand, our society today is rich in such perceptions, and one cannot eliminate all of them in a lifetime. As an onlooker from another continent, I cannot help noticing a certain similarity to the political correctness ideology that appears to be so powerful in the U.S. right now.

The Reid committee has not taken this path and wisely proposes to carry out an experiment first. This may indeed produce some interesting facts, but it will also make the Editor's life even more miserable than