BIAS IN PEER REVIEW


Research on bias in peer review examines scholarly communication and funding processes to assess the epistemic and social legitimacy of the mechanisms by which knowledge communities vet and self-regulate their work. Despite vocal concerns, a closer look at the empirical and methodological limitations of research on bias raises questions about the existence and extent of many hypothesized forms of bias. In addition, the notion of bias is predicated on an implicit ideal that, once articulated, raises questions about the normative implications of research on bias in peer review. This review provides a brief description of the function, history, and scope of peer review; articulates and critiques the conception of bias unifying research on bias in peer review; characterizes and examines the empirical, methodological, and normative claims of bias in peer review research; and assesses possible alternatives to the status quo. We close by identifying ways to expand conceptions and studies of bias to contend with the complexity of social interactions among actors involved directly and indirectly in peer review.

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