"Critique is not a verb": is peer review stifling the dialogue in disaster scholarship?

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Abstract

Purpose – In this position piece, the authors will reflect on some of their recent experiences with the peer-review process in disaster studies and show how debate can so easily be stifled. The authors write it as a plea for healthy academic argumentative discussion and intellectual dialogue that would help all of us to refine our ideas, respect others' ideas and learn from each other.

Design/methodology/approach – The authors provide reflection on our own experiences. All the examples here are based on the anonymous (double-blinded) peer reviews that the authors have received in the past two years in response to papers submitted to disaster-related journals.

Findings – The authors show that the grounds for rejection often have nothing to do with the rigour of the research but are instead based on someone's philosophy, beliefs, values or opinions that differ from that of the authors, and which undermine the peer-review process.

Research limitations/implications – There is so much potential in amicable and productive disagreements, which means that we can talk together – and through this, we can learn. Yet, the debate in its purest academic sense is a rare beast in disaster scholarship – largely because opposing views do not get published.

Originality/value – The authors call for ideological judgement and self-interest to be put aside when peers' work is reviewed – and for intellectual critique to be used in a productive way that would enhance rather than stifle scholarship.

Keywords Academic publishing, Peer review, Disaster studies
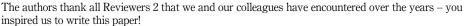
Paper type Research paper

> Reviewer 2 walks into a bar complaining immediately of this not
>
> being the joke they would have written.
>
> @AcademicsSay

Introduction

Reviewer 2 [1] is a well-known inside-joke among academics. Grumpy, aggressive, patronising, vague, unhelpful, often unprofessional, Reviewer 2 has become the embodiment of all that is wrong with the *peer* review system. The word "*peer*" is critical here, because Reviewer 2 is too

often unwilling to treat authors of a submitted paper with the respect that a peer might ostensibly expect. Perhaps Reviewer 2 has existed for as long as the peer-review system itself. However, as we have been progressing through our academic careers, we have come to realise that Reviewer 2 not only (best case scenario) leaves a bad taste in your mouth or, worse, discourages you to publish ever again, but they intentionally stifle the academic debate.

Critiques of the peer-review process are well established: reviewing is time consuming, often delays publications, inhibits unconventional ideas and can be distressing particularly to early-career authors (Bornmann, 2011); it does not guarantee "quality" (especially when it comes to various predatory open access journals (see, for instance, Bohannon's (2013) who demonstrated that their poor-quality research paper that uses buzzwords is more likely to get accepted than not by various open-access journals); overall, it lacks "predictive validity" (Bornmann, 2011, p. 204), meaning that there is little or no relation between reviewers' judgement and the subsequent "success" of the paper (measured by citations). Our aim here is not to defend or dismiss it; in fact, we see peer review is one of many ways to promote scientific rigour and progress. In this position piece, we will reflect on some of our recent experiences with the peer-review process in disaster studies [2] and show how debate can so easily be stifled. All the examples here are based on the anonymous (double-blinded) peer reviews that we have received in the past two years in response to papers submitted to disaster-related journals. Some of these papers have subsequently been accepted (in some cases, in a different journal); some are still under review (often because we had to start a new review process in another journal) – but what unites these papers is that the decision to reject a manuscript was often based on *that* one review.

The aim of this position piece is twofold: firstly, we write it not to damn the peer-review system – we do believe in it, and each does our best to be constructive peers; instead, we want to show that the grounds for rejection often have nothing to do with the rigour of the research but are instead based on someone's – perhaps more powerful and established – philosophy, beliefs, values or opinions that differ from that of the authors, and which undermine the peer-review process. Secondly, we write it as a plea for healthy academic argumentative discussion and intellectual dialogue that would help all of us to refine our ideas, respect others' ideas and learn from each other.

Interdisciplinarity in disaster scholarship: a blessing or a curse in peer review?

While we absolutely believe that interdisciplinarity is a blessing in our field, we will explore how it turns into a curse when peer reviewers are ontologically, epistemologically and methodologically rigid.

Introduced in the 18th century Europe, peer review is posited as the principal mechanism for quality control and ensuring trustworthiness in academic publishing (Benos *et al.*, 2006). Dominant processes in peer review have evolved out of distinctly Western philosophies of science. Peer review positions the active producers of science – the "experts" – as its gatekeepers (Bornmann, 2011). In recent years, however, the peer-review process has faced many challenges: the growth of scientific publishing is placing a burden on the editors and reviewers; papers today are more interdisciplinary (which should be welcomed!) and use more diverse techniques; they also have teams of authors that are multi-cultural and may not comply with Western publication standards (Alberts *et al.*, 2008). Such multiplicity and complexity are not always appreciated by all the gatekeepers of science, resulting in intellectual closed-mindedness. Atkinson (2001, p. 194) describes peer review as "a modern Janus: the forward-looking face portrays rationality and ministration but, looking the other way, there is scope for a sophistry that allows experts to obstruct competition".

Emerald Publishers' page on peer review [3] prominently features a quote by Anne-Wil Harzing: "Quality peer review is constructive, non-confrontational and prompt. It means putting yourself in the position of the author and *helping them to bring out the best* in their paper" (authors' emphasis). The page provides a detailed guide for peer reviewers encouraging them "to consider all aspects of the manuscript" (and offering guidance on how to do so); this emphasises that the feedback "should allow the authors to see where improvements can be made and understand how they can be acted upon", and notes that peer review should be based on the principles of consistency, clear confidentiality, impartiality, rigour, effectiveness and independence. These principles more or less reflect those of all major publishers. Here, we are particularly interested in the "impartial" principle – meaning "fair and objective" – that we believe applies to our Reviewer 2 and which we will discuss in the later sections.

The norms of Western science driven by Cartesian rationalism often seeks universalism of knowledge (i.e. knowledge claims should be judged impersonally, independently of their source); this is very much reflected in peer-review processes based on "traditional" research criteria of reliability, validity and generalisability (Bornmann, 2011). But, universalism should not be an aspiration of disaster scholarship, given that our (Western) understanding of disasters is hardly universal (Gaillard, 2019, 2021).

Disaster scholarship is not new [4]. Going all the way back to the 1755 Lisbon earthquake, which is considered to be "the first modern disaster", the intellectual discussions have challenged the notion of disasters as an "act of God" (Hagen, 2021). Yet, the study of disasters is not a mono-discipline [5]. Whilst the number of disaster research-related centres have grown in the past half a century (Hines *et al.* (2020), counted at least 360 centres worldwide), the vast majority of disaster scholars are not affiliated with such centres. Disaster scholarship requires interdisciplinarity – because disasters expose deep spatial, temporal, cultural, economic, political, environmental, physical, social and other interconnections and interdependencies between a myriad of systems and environments, thus drawing in researchers with widely varied types of expertise from different institutions (Peek and Guikema, 2021) and countries.

The need to strengthen multi-, inter- and trans-disciplinary and national collaborations has long been emphasised (e.g. Rodriguez *et al.*, 2004; Gaillard and Gomez, 2015; Peek *et al.*, 2020) – however, it seldom exists in a meaningful and effective way. Grounded in either natural sciences and engineering, or social sciences and humanities, very few researchers get an opportunity to do inter- and trans-disciplinary, rather than multi-disciplinary, work in a way that encourages dialogue and learning and, subsequently, a reflection on what knowledge itself consists of "on the other side". Indeed, even the infrastructure that underpins our research (universities, funding competitions, ethics committees, professional bodies, etc.) tends to be more comfortable when everyone "stays in their lane".

Sciences and engineering disaster-related scholarship remains largely grounded in technological determinism (Castaneda and Mejia, 2018), thus ultimately missing a critical focus on power relations, conforming to systems of power and operating within those systems to succeed. Grounded in positivism that defines scientific activity as objective and focusses on solving technical problems, such approach to disaster scholarship largely fails to recognise the existence of alternative epistemologies as well as ethnocentricity or masculinity of "scientific" knowledge and procedures. Similarly, social sciences and humanities often dismiss positivism without attempting to engage in a conversation; furthermore, many of the social science scholars promote universalism, without questioning the history – and the implications – of Western research approaches to scholarship (Gaillard, 2019).

Disciplinary silos – and specific expertise – are undeniably important, but a more holistic foundational education of researchers grounded in "philosophy, literature, the sciences, maths, foreign languages, politics and fine arts . . . gives you an intellectual foundation to use throughout your life" (Singer, 2009, p. 15) – and would indeed be beneficial for a more

impartial peer review that does not deny that other knowledges exist and thus silence them, but that is willing to offer their view in an open dialogue and debate, and appreciative of the fact that they may not know "it all". This is challenging because rather than being one stable community of discourse, disaster scholarship is constituted by a number of communities whose members are situated variously in the natural sciences or social sciences, engineering and humanities. This means that peer reviewers also represent diverse constituencies with vastly different disciplinary roots and "truths". Journal authors and editors are presented with the many advantages of this diversity: various perspectives, multiple research methods and approaches, fascinating learning opportunities, but they must also mitigate the potential havoc if a peer reviewer has little regard for (or, in some cases much hostility to) the author's approach [6].

It has long been evidenced that argumentative discussions and debate support critical thinking as they allow the participants to more clearly see both sides of an issue, overcome objections to a position and appreciate that problems and issues have more than one side (Sanders, 1983; Bartanen and Frank, 1991; Greenstreet, 1992). Of course, we must be careful about intellectual attacks that can lead to the loss of creative work and discourage many scholars (particularly from traditionally minoritised groups) from presenting or publishing (Tannen, 2002). But, there is so much potential in amicable and productive disagreements, which mean that we can talk together – and through this, we can learn. Yet, as we noted earlier, the debate in its purest academic sense is a rare [7] beast in disaster scholarship – largely because opposing views do not get published (thanks to Reviewer 2!).

Peer reviewers' attitudes that stifle the debate

As outlined above, an effective peer review must be performed by someone who has a clear idea as to its fundamental purpose. Many assume that the purpose of peer review is only quality control. But, the fundamental purpose of peer review is that scholarship in a field – in our case, disaster studies – should be consistently moving forward, building knowledge and contributing to an enhanced understanding of the critical concerns in a scientific domain. Peer review must, therefore, aim to facilitate intellectual developments on issues of great practical, political and societal concerns. The fulfilment of this aim requires both quality control and the encouragement of discussions that challenge dominant positions that exist. If an appropriate balance between the two is lost, then peer review will fail to fulfil its purpose.

There is a strong perception that what does not pass the peer-review process has no claim to be a valid contribution to knowledge. But how do we decide what is "valid" in disaster scholarship, a discipline that comprises myriads of researchers from all types of academic backgrounds and walks of life? Or, how does this reflect the validity of, for instance, traditional knowledges, which are known to play a significant role in peoples' capacities (Šakic Trogrlic *et al.*, 2019)? In what follows, we will not be focusing on personal bias or unpleasant reviews; instead, our aim is to emphasise the types of comments that could actually provide an excellent foundation for a rigorous academic debate but are instead used to silence those with whom the reviewer disagrees. Whilst we will be providing personal examples, these are not intended as revenge against Reviewer 2 (after all, we do not know who these people are!) but simply as a mechanism to emphasise our points. This list is of course not exhaustive – but these are the authors "favourites", encountered in the past few years.

"Back in the 1970s we reached a consensus that 'natural disaster' is a convenience term . . ."
Peer reviewers are our proxies – they are the representatives of a wider disaster scholarship community, and not its specific part (e.g. those who happened to be there in the 1970s when some of the authors of this piece were not even born yet!). We find this position to be somewhat elite

and privileged; it dismisses all thinking that comes "after the 70s" on this issue – instead of motivating peers to produce their best and most critical work, it says that everything is already set in stone. Moreover, such position re-emphasises the importance of "academic tribes" (Becher and Trowler, 2001) and claims established authority and seniority rather than a collaborative and respectful inter-generational dialogue. This has been further demonstrated by our Reviewer 2 who concludes: "I suppose each *new* generation of disaster researchers rediscovers old arguments and is fascinated by their apparent newness. This paper goes over some old ground for the nth time, but all it adds are some poorly substantiated value judgements" (authors' emphasis, as we were indeed curious how, given the double-blind peer-review process, the reviewer knew that we were, indeed, relatively "new"?).

"Conservatism, or discrimination against innovatory heretical, or dissenting opinions" is, according to Grayson (2002, p. 8), the most fundamental charge of bias in peer review. Here, knowledge is shaped in line with conventional wisdom until the discrepancies between the "accepted" and "normal" and the observed reality become impossible to ignore – and the observed reality then in turn becomes the new "normal". Perhaps one of the most prominent shifts in disaster scholarships that demonstrate this has indeed happened in the 1970s, when the hazard paradigm was challenged, shifting disaster scholarship's attention from technological solutions to the conditions that made communities unsafe and emphasised not only the exposure to hazards but, more importantly, people's capacity to recover from loss (i.e. the vulnerability paradigm) (Bankoff, 2019; Davis, 2019). But, we have not seen much shift – despite the fact that it is desperately needed (Gaillard, 2019) – since then, and when the assumptions proposed by the "fathers" of disaster scholarship are challenged – or, in this case, actually built upon and pushed forward – Reviewer 2 resorts to upholding dogma. Such incorrigibility implies that truth never need to be revised – but as Unger (2004) points out, objectivity can only be reaching through maximum corrigibility.

What is more, the reviewer may have published on this topic and maybe protective of it, or simply harbours preconceptions. All of us can only compare against familiar paradigms, but some are more open to exploring new paradigms than others. The challenge of intellectual competition or unfamiliar paradigms is often met with impatience, dismissal and self-assertion; in other words, with power play as well as with solidarity with an "inside group" that excludes everyone else. The anonymous peer-review process does not require a reviewer to maintain discipline and politeness or to hide emotions, making irrational rebuttal grounded in self-interest a luxury afforded by anonymity. Here, instead of providing an "impartial" review, our Reviewer 2 instead subjected us to arrogant and condescending pontification when surely a debate about intergenerational praxis and collaboration would have been warranted.

"How do you prove it?"
"Lies, damned lies, and statistics" could be a motto of another of our Reviewer 2s (who, unlike Mark Twain, is often in favour of quantifications and generalisations). In a recent paper, one of the authors suggested that – dialectically speaking – if there was social production of risk, it stood to reason that the social reduction of risk was also conceivable. Here, our hardy Reviewer 2 claimed that "It is important to clearly state how this study proves "social reduction of risk." It is not that the question raised here is not interesting. But, within the discipline of sociology and more particularly critical theory, the question is beside the point. The author was neither arguing for nor offering any proof in the sense that the reviewer is searching for it. Rather, what was being offered was a theoretical proposition that there was empirical evidence in support of. This is another point at which disciplinary backgrounds come into play. Scholars with a more exposure to theory may would have previously hashed through ideas of "proof" and the limits of proof-seeking ontologies. It is not that theorists take proof lightly, it is that they recognise its boundaries.

In the context of Reviewer 2's demand for proof, it is ironic that other reviewers point out that the empirical evidence provided in a paper is *too much* in line with other research. "It certainly does not contribute much to the large body of . . . literature (both academic and popular) involving survivors' own accounts, evacuation plans and practices, and reconstruction processes because the contents of your interviewees' accounts are all too familiar . . .". In the previous case "proof" was demanded for a particular phenomenon observed. In another journal on almost the exact same topic, fairly standard conceptions of "proof" are rejected for their lack of novelty. This creates a kind of interdisciplinary whiplash amongst disaster scholars. While an author might have a desire to reach a broad audience, and not confine this crucial work to any one silo, they are constantly routed into acceding to siloed conventions of what counts as robust research.

Neither of these reviewer comments was necessarily unwarranted, but both were based in the narrow conventions of their disciplines and were presented without quandary as to their absolute authority. The effect of such comments, and the cumulative effects of comments similar to them, is to stifle the possibilities present in the interdisciplinary or transdisciplinary nature of disaster research. A more productive approach might be to question how authors themselves understand the concept of proof, or whether novelty should be a demand placed on understanding disasters.

As noted earlier, disaster scholars are trained in a particular discipline – and whilst the scholarship is interdisciplinary, very few disaster scholars are. Polarisation between the world of sciences and the humanities is flawed but common, and we, thus, come to peer review with our often limited methodological preconceptions. The positivist approach dominates in disaster scholarship: even in what could (and should) be understood as "social" – e.g. "social vulnerability" – metrics are suggested and used, findings are generalised and "best" practices are translated into "universal" guiding principles. In other words, methodological expectations of "quality research" have their origin in the natural sciences that seldom recognise that conception of knowledge creation relies on the coexistence of competing ideas and the expansion of knowledge (Ochsner *et al.*, 2016).

This leads us to a conundrum about the inherent bias in peer review: in some disciplines, there is a general agreement on what constitutes a research problem and what counts as sound research methodology. But, disaster scholarship, by its nature, cannot be prescriptive – and thus there are disagreements. Here, originality, for instance, should not be a synonym for innovation and "new findings" [8], and validity should not be about quantified measurements. In fact, such quantification often has crippling effects, hiding "the fact that our fascination with quantification itself arises out of the generalized commodification of our social life" (Sewell, 2005, p. 349). Instead, both should focus on moral dimensions that bring together (new and/or) existing ideas in a way that would challenge disaster risk creation. As a collection of diverse scholars, we emerge from and engage with very different philosophical positions. Whether a scholar's personal values shape their research approach or whether they try to set up a value-free research design is often informed by disciplinary background and training.

Too often, disaster scholarship peer review also brings a methodological conservatism and rationalisations as to why a reviewer prefers their view even when the evidence may not provide adequate support for that prior view (Shatz, 2004). Armed with a claim to correctness, it is very easy to dismiss a paper with minor issues that may not even have been noticed by someone with a compatible philosophical position and methodological approach. But, to an ideologically opposed Reviewer 2, the issues become exaggerated to the level of "methodological flaws". Surely, learning about different theoretical positions and novel methodological approaches should be an integral part of academic curiosity. Debating and discussing methodological rigour and applicability could provide a much-needed driver for more and better transdisciplinary practices. Methodology follows ontological and

epistemological considerations, but Reviewer 2 rarely considers philosophical nuance – methodological claims to certainty are indicative a certain bias in Reviewer 2.

"The paper fails to clarify [. . .] what are the pros [of neoliberalism]?"
While it is not the purpose of academic papers to editorialise, it is also not their duty to prop-up both sides. A rigorous examination of social phenomenon is very different from a book report. The authors received this criticism after identifying the ill-effects of neoliberalism on disaster risk reduction. There would be no value added by then seeking out a list of the positive effects of neoliberalism. If this advice were to be heeded, it would not lead to a more robust empirical accounting; it would instead weaken academic inquiry in an empty search for balance, when the argument being made is intentionally value-laden. This is not just conjecture. In the same review, the authors, noting that around 100,000 Black New Orleanians were displaced by Hurricane Katrina, they were advised to look into if this "new action (made) the city more resilient," as if the merits of oppression must not be neglected.

If the authors believe that the creation of disaster risks is rooted in capitalism, then it is certainly incumbent on them to demonstrate how and why. What it is not their responsibility to do is then provide a conflicting argument within the same paper. That is an activity left to high school debate teams, not to serious academic inquiry. But, does an ideological disagreement warrant a rejection, given that the said paper was a conceptual piece explaining why and how neoliberal practices have become ingrained in our understanding of disasters? This is a case of opposing moral and ethical arguments (we will note that our position was supported by references, established theories as well as eloquent and novel discussion of the topic, as has been highlighted by another reviewer). There was a wonderful opportunity for debate – but, as we noted earlier, that debate has largely been shut down.

Evidence exists that peer reviewers are biased towards papers that support their personal convictions and beliefs (Atkinson, 2001). Whilst it is expected that the peer review is objective and the evaluation only considers merit, often there is an ideological bias that is hidden behind the claim to "objectivity". Epistemological bias grounded in "modern knowledge" represents "the most accomplished manifestations of abyssal thinking [which] consists of a system of visible and invisible distinctions, the invisible ones being the foundation of the visible ones" (De Sousa Santos, 2014, p. 119) – and given that the invisible equates to normative, other knowledges do not fit into the dominant knowledge.

Due to its interdisciplinary nature, disaster scholarship is home to many paradigms, so this bias is not always about the bias towards current paradigm (although often it is!). Bias has important implications in disaster scholarship, given that disasters are political, and thus, any discussion about them is a political choice (even if the researcher insists that disasters are a-political). As Levins and Lewontin (2009) note, "Science, in *all* its senses, is a social process that both causes and is caused by social organisation. To do science is to be a social actor engaged, whether one likes it or not, in a political activity" (p. 4, original emphasis). Thus, hiding behind a claim to scientific "objectivity" becomes a way to not acknowledging one's own ideological stance and to not challenge the normative (or perhaps to enhance the normative because it is beneficial for their own careers as it conforms with dominant elites). Perhaps, such calls for "objectivity" are also fuelled by what Adorno (2012) calls "the reified plaster cast of vital processes as a guarantee of correctness" (p. 86), which do not encourage us to generate research that would have any serious influence on capitalist system within which such research unfolds and thus exposes this immanent contradiction.

Concluding remarks
Our story ends well: the papers we talk about here, save one, were all accepted. In the end, we either received reviews that appreciated the theoretical perspective taken, or the editors took

the executive decision to publish the work while (we assume) recognising irreconcilable differences with Reviewer 2 (who all suggested "reject"). Furthermore, over the years, we have benefitted from many wonderful insightful peer reviews (including the ones we had for this paper!) that have undoubtedly improved our papers. But a bigger question nevertheless remains: why, instead of disagreeing publicly and engaging in an intellectual debate, are so many scholars willing to become a Reviewer 2 and "kill" a paper, simply because it does not reflect the normative positions they subscribe to?

Gayatari Spivak (1988) says: " . . . leaders read the world in terms of rationality and averages, as if it were a textbook. The world actually writes itself with the many-levelled, unfixable intricacy and openness of a work of literature". Sometimes, it feels that Reviewer 2 could be a substitute for "leader" here – expecting the manuscript to fall within their "objective", normative, universal and preferably, generalisable realm. But, disasters are a reflection of the world. We think that the overarching aim of disaster scholarship should be to contribute to disaster risk reduction – and more importantly, to provide evidence that would support resisting disaster risk creation. Disaster scholars who identify with such a position thus need to seriously consider the transboundary existential risks, political dimension and the limits of disaster governance, the struggle over power and the abilities to cope, the role and knowledges of citizens and non-state actors (Wisner, 2019); we also need to move beyond the universal concept of disasters (Gaillard, 2019), let our egos go and accept that everyone's reality counts.

Whilst peer review is perceived to be a mechanism for quality control, in reality, it can also be a mechanism for social control and shared assumptions, "a strategic site of contention and negotiation" (Berkenkotter, 1995, p. 247). It is thus in the hands of a reviewer to maintain or to raise the intellectual standards of the discipline. At no time are we more aware of ontological, epistemological and methodological differences within disaster scholarship than when we submit a manuscript to a journal: if the reviewers believe that disasters are political processes, and that not everything can be qualified and measured, and that Western epistemological paradigms are not the only "truth", then a constructive review is likely, understanding (not necessarily agreeing) with our research approach. But, if the reviewers are ideologically opposed – then we can anticipate a Reviewer 2 situation. In other words, peer review becomes a luck of the draw, instead of a meaningful intellectual dialogue and argumentative discussion.

We all have biases, and we, thus, do not expect anyone to be neutral or not to have a position. In fact, we hope for the opposite. We want to hear well-argued counterpoints to our ideas. Progress in scholarship depends on seeking out and testing new ideas that are, therefore, intrinsically likely to expand what we already know and challenge the status quo. But too often, new ideas are rejected by reviewers with little assurance of competence or impartiality – and too rarely is acceptance offered with an invitation to discuss and debate. A well-designed methodological approach always requires effective safeguards against bias – so why are not these safeguards employed for a process that essentially decides what is and is not publishable, and instead encourages unbending elitism and unfocused criticism to prevail?

Disaster scholarship faces the challenge of mastering a great deal of knowledge across a multitude of disciplines to be effective and relevant. It is a field broadly committed to addressing the rights, needs and interests of those impacted by disasters, in practice and research, at all levels, from individual to international. This requires ability to ask questions arising in circumstances of rich complexity and diversity, political intrigue and power struggle, oppression and injustice, and to find answers that are often uncertain and unwelcomed. In an absence of clear answers, dialogue is a must. It is fair to say that the global community of disaster scholars is broadly committed to building a less unequal and unjust world. Many of us disagree on how to get there, to some extent because of our ideological or disciplinary training. Thus, in pursuing this goal, we owe each other an abiding respect – otherwise, there can be no learning, and subsequently, not even a possibility of moral progress.

We think that it is time to embrace amicable and productive disagreement. What we thus call for is that ideological judgement and self-interest are put aside alongside our pride when peers' work is reviewed – and that intellectual critique is used in a productive way that would enhance rather than stifle scholarship. Recognising our own failings is hard, but discussing why we think the way that we do and challenging each other to become more reflexive is the pathway to more robust science. Only through the open and respectful expression of disagreement can ideas be refined and mistakes corrected. It is time we move away from soliloquy and engage in dialogue, because as Freire rightly pointed out, "Only dialogue, which requires critical thinking, is also capable of generating critical thinking" (1970/2005, p. 92). Let's discuss?

Notes

1. In reality, it is not necessarily the second reviewer who is mean – in fact, Peterson (2020) shows that there is no evidence that Reviewer 2 is either more negative about the manuscript or out of line with the other reviewers! But, we will use this generalised category to describe a sort of academic boogeyman.

2. We choose to focus on disaster studies as this is the area where the authors have been publishing the vast majority of their work. While we hesitate to generalise from our experiences, discussions with colleagues lead us to believe that the issues discussed in this paper are of relevance to diverse disciplines and research areas.

3. https://www.emeraldgrouppublishing.com/how-to/authoring-editing-reviewing/understand-peer-review-process.

4. Although perhaps in its current form – "disaster studies" – it is just over 50 years old (Wisner, 2019).

5. "Disaster studies" are not listed in various discipline classifications or academic fields; when classification is required, this tends to follow the researcher's primary disciplinary area, e.g. earth science, human geography, structural engineering, etc.

6. While we recognise the importance of the journal editor in managing the peer-review process (and indeed, Reviewer 2), we choose not to focus on this role in the present paper.

7. The notable exception is Radix – a list-server – that, for 20 years, have provided the most insightful and fruitful discussions and debates among established and early-career scholars from around the world.

8. In fact, searching for "new findings" may be a very bad motivator, leading people into really exploitative research.

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