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Reviewing is caring! Revaluing a critical, but invisibilized, underappreciated, and exploited academic practice

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Abstract

Reviewing is critical to advancing scholarly knowledge by assuring research standards and contouring what counts as novel. Yet, our system of reviewing submissions to journals is in crisis. With growing submission numbers, editors struggle to match these with qualified review capacities, unwillingly adding extra, often uneven, workloads on some reviewers, without equally distributing pressures or finding the "ideal" expert match. We propose to redress this issue in terms of care. Inspired by feminist care theory, we discuss how the current review system invisibilizes, underappreciates, and exploits the care invested in it. Furthermore, we suggest reconsidering the very organizing of the review system along the lines of care to reinvigorate the nurturing, knowledge-enhancing practices of reviewing. Specifically, we recommend (1) increasing the visibility of reviewing across journals, (2) recognizing reviewing as an inherent part of paid scholarly work, and (3) introducing cross-journal review limits. Together, we argue that such moves enable a more visibly appreciative and less easily exploitative organizing of reviewing as a scholarly practice of care that we and all science indeed rely on.

Keywords

Review system, peer review, feminist care theory, ethico-politics, open science

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> Reviewing is done without financial reward or institutional credit, and so time for it suffers as universities demand more teaching, more administration, more outreach, and more publishing. These competing pressures mean that academics are often forced to squeeze the task into ever shrinking time windows or decline requests and so force editors to turn to untried individuals. Either way, the quality of reviews can suffer and encourage bad tempered or caustic comments. (Hyland and Jiang, 2020: 11)

Introduction

Reviewing is a critical practice of academic life and is used for many purposes, including decisions about funding, titles, promotions, rewards, and—perhaps most importantly—publications (Hansen, 2022). As such, reviewing is central to sustaining academic quality, with one of its noblest purposes being to contribute to scientific knowledge production by assuring research standards, nurturing novel and impactful insights, and contouring future research avenues (Bedeian, 2004). In the age of "publish or perish" (Ashcraft, 2017; Butler and Spoelstra, 2012), this is especially the case for reviewing submissions to journals, as journal articles have become the primary currency in many fields, not least organization studies (e.g. see Hartmann, 2025; Rasheed and Priem, 2020, for critical discussions).

Yet, despite this noble purpose, our system of reviewing submissions to journals is in crisis. With ongoing pressures to publish in the neoliberal academy, many journal editors experience growing submission numbers all while—as stressed in the quote above—struggling to match these numbers with qualified review capacities and puzzled by the unequally distributed delivery of review "services" within scholarly communities (Edwards and Roy, 2017; Hyland and Jiang, 2020). Among others, this unequal distribution may relate to skewed engagement in reviewing by hierarchical positions and career stage (e.g. early-career scholars feeling pressured for strategic reasons such as a powerful editor or a CV getting ready for promotion review), gender (e.g. women and non-binary scholars who may have to over-perform to keep a place in academia), and place (e.g. scholars from under-privileged regions or indigenous knowledge fields who must legitimize themselves to increase visibility vis-á-vis journal editors). Beyond the individualized challenges of editorial workflows and pressures on reviewers, as well as the prolonged submission processing time of authors hoping to publish (to not perish) by contributing to their fields and scholarly careers as demanded by the 'Rule of Excellence' (Ashcraft, 2017), this is fundamentally problematic for scholarly communities and knowledge production in at least two ways. First, the quality of reviews and knowledge gain suffers when the most qualified expert reviewers decline review invitations; and second, reviewers that consistently accept invitations tend to be overburdened with review requests, hence reinforcing unevenly distributed work pressures (Hyland and Jiang, 2020; Lindebaum and Jordan, 2023).

As in other challenging areas of reviewing such as the evaluation of grant applications (e.g. Bendiscioli and Garfinkel, 2021; Severin et al., 2020), several studies critically debate these matters in order to improve the system of reviewing submissions to journals. These target our professional and ethical responsibility (Treviño, 2008) and collegiality (Brewis, 2018; Fleming and Harley, 2024), positioning reviewing as a moral quid-pro-quo commitment (Lindebaum and Jordan, 2023), "gift exchange" (Kaltenbrunner et al., 2022), or self-interested activity (McMullen and Newbert, 2023); calling for peer-review training (Raelin, 2008) and guidance (Lepak, 2009) to challenge the power-infused politics of gatekeeping by specific scholars and fields (Bell et al., 2020; Ozkazanc-Pan, 2012; Plotnikof, 2023); and suggesting to broaden and deepen the reviewer pool in order to collectively deal with otherwise individualized work pressures (Aczel et al., 2021). Others propose alternatives such as open peer review (Dobusch and Heimstädt, 2019; Willmott, 2022a), and introduce various incentive schemes (e.g. Zaharie and Osoian, 2016; Zaharie and

Seeber, 2018). Relatedly, some scholars specifically critique the politics of the neoliberal model underpinning much commercial publishing more generally (Harvie et al., 2012, 2013). This model embraces and incentivizes increasing submission numbers in order to eventually "sell" more published work. In doing so, publishers reinforce the "publish or perish" doctrine and instrumentalize research practices, causing overproduction and overwork, whilst profiting from oftentimes publicly funded or free academic labor delivered, among others, by reviewers.

All of these studies testify to the crisis in which the system of reviewing for journals and, with it, the underlying practices that constitute it find themselves, offering critical insights, and idea generation for improving this system. In expanding this debate, however, we propose to redress these issues, namely through the lens of care, arguing for its value in helping us explore these issues and potential solutions by resting on its feminist ethico-politics (Bozalek et al., 2021; Fotaki et al., 2019; Tronto, 1993). In doing so, we are not trying to equate the political and societal devaluation, invisibilization, and hardships of care work more generally as, for example, child, social, and elderly care (Harrington Meyer, 2000; Plotnikof, 2016; Plum, 2012) with the partly more privileged work life of academia. We fully acknowledge the different historical conditions and political structures that tend to celebrate knowledge work and underappreciate care work, hence exacerbating gendered, racialized, and class-stratified inequalities between these work areas. Yet, while often enjoying better economic and cultural valuation, academia is far from privileged when considering its uneven work conditions across the globe, and the surging precarity in terms of short-term contracts, rising performance demands, scholarships without or below minimum wage, and abusive teaching obligations, also reproducing unequal opportunities and gendered, classed, and racialized discrimination in this line of work (Bleijenbergh, 2024; Brewis, 2018; Dar et al., 2021; Moletsane et al., 2015; Özkazanç-Pan and Pullen, 2020).

With this essay, then, we hope to move the critical debates about reviewing by addressing its challenges in terms of *invisible, underappreciated, and devalued practices of care* in academia. Arguing for a care lens inspired by feminist care theory (Tronto, 1993, 2021) allows us to approach these issues and potential solutions with inspiration from and respect for practices of care in academia as well as of care work in the broader societal context—fueled with contempt for the lack of societal recognition and valuation of care workers of all kinds. In view of this sensitivity, we find that, in many ways, reviewing should be viewed as a relational practice of care that attends and responds to research(ers') needs. More specifically, reviewing can be considered a practice of *caring for, about*, and *with* (Tronto, 1993) research(er) development: "caring for" by engaging with and responding to research under review; "caring about" by assuring and evaluating the scientific standards and holding authors accountable to specific norms of good (or bad) research, thus nurturing knowledge development; and "caring with" by helping other scholars identify their potential results and next steps. Hence, when mobilizing care as a lens in this way, reviewing becomes a practice of caring for, about, and with research(ers) in that it shapes both researcher subjectivity and research insights (e.g. Brewis, 2018; Fotaki, 2023; Plotnikof and Utoft, 2022), thus being normative to and educating of good scientific practice. Therefore, through this lens, reviewing is a relational practice of care through which we engage in, learn from, and shape thoughtful debates, critical insights, and research novelty.

Yet, when we approach reviewing as a practice of care, we also notice that this practice involves some (but surely not all) of the same organizing challenges and political struggles that characterize the broader societal "crisis of care" (Bailyn et al., 2025; Duffy et al., 2023) The care lens that we mobilize here forefronts reviewing as a practice of care that is, regrettably like much care work, often organized in invisible, underappreciated, and un(der)paid ways, thus carrying many similar problems. Hence, this care lens draws ethico-political attention to some pressing pathologies of the review system, namely, unequal work conditions, power asymmetries and dynamics, and varying

financial models for research and higher education around the world. To be clear, the related oddities of parasitic for-profit academic publishing (Buranyi, 2017) and the "audit cultures" of the neoliberal university (Ashcraft, 2017; Fleming and Harley, 2024) that surely contextualize and affect the review system are backgrounded with this focus on care (although care is also governed by similar neoliberal discourses of audit and marketization; see Plotnikof, 2016). Yet, as we argue, the lens of care more specifically serves as a springboard for ideas on how to reorganize the review system in more engaging, nurturing, and knowledge-enhancing ways. In that sense, we find inspiration in feminist care theory to develop an affirmative critique (Raffnsøe et al., 2022) that may help us move beyond critical questions about the crisis of the review system, and envisage tangible ideas for how to "crawl from the wreckage" (Fleming et al., 2022) of that system and care-fully reorganize it in more ethico-political ways.

Thus, any efforts to improve our current review system, we claim, need to acknowledge that reviewing is a practice of care and, hence, must incorporate a more appreciative organizing of this practice, inspired by feminist care theory. This leads us to consider three care-based organizing matters that enable us to see how "reviewing is caring" with an ethico-political respect, allowing us to (re)value reviewing both collectively and individually as a practice of care that we all depend on so critically.

Reviewing as a practice of care: Challenges and potentials

Our account of care engendered in the practice of reviewing is especially inspired by the work of feminist care scholar Tronto (1993), along with later developments in feminist new materialism (see Bozalek et al., 2021). Tronto (1993) discerns four elements of care as constitutive features of a "good society": (1) attentiveness to others' needs, (2) taking responsibility for caring about those needs, (3) having competence to perform care in relation to those needs, and (4) responsiveness between care-taker and care-receiver. Thereby, she stresses care as a fundamentally relational practice and, with it, a care lens underpinned by ethico-politics in its caring for "the good." Such a care perspective considers "everything we do to maintain, continue, and repair the world so that we may live in it as well as possible" (Fisher and Tronto, 1990: 40), thereby combining concerns for—as in feminist new materialism—the ethical, political, and epistemological in its care perspective (Tronto, 2021).

In following this, we argue that reviewing is a practice of caring for research(ers') needs to help develop insights, caring about this research and its potential novelties, and caring with and in response to the specific research(ers) in nurturing their scholarly fields. Specifically, inspired by Tronto's (1993, 2021) feminist care theory, we recognize how reviewing is a relational practice of care in (1) attending to research(ers') needs regarding academic knowledge (and professional) development, and (2) taking responsibility for these needs by responding positively to reviewing requests and taking the necessary time to do so, despite pressures to speed up processes. Further, (3) by engaging competently with those needs through, among others, field-specific knowledge and methodological skills, and (4) responsiveness in the form of a critical and respectful dialog, or "generative conversation" (Geraldi et al., 2025), between authors, editors, and reviewers—including insisting on care-full, time-consuming, even slow, or hesitant developments (Tronto, 2021). These features of reviewing cannot be separated, but are interwoven in the complex, relational practice of care (Held, 2006), in attending and responding to research(ers') needs across the involved actors, knowledge fields, times, and spaces. Together, they all contribute to maintaining, continuing, and repairing a good academic society (Fisher and Tronto, 1990; Tronto, 1993) by valuing the nurturance of research knowledge through caring relationships between humans (and non-humans of, e.g. data materiality) as key to individual and collective knowledge generation.

In fact, just as much as the care invested by authors in the development of their studies and manuscripts (Ortiz Casillas, 2020), the quality of our reviews and, by extension, research developments and outputs depend vastly on our care for, about, and with the arguments, concepts, and methods articulated in manuscripts. Undoubtedly, there are multiple caring situations in academia, such as supervision, collegial debate and support, as well as conference presentations; but it is the review process—especially for submissions to journals in our field—that is critical, if not indispensable for theory and empirical analyses to become "*informed* knowledge claims" (Cornelissen et al., 2021: 3, emphasis added; Dobusch et al., 2020). This is because caring for, about, and with those submissions ideally contributes to nurturing and disseminating novel understandings and explanations, securing research standards and norms, shaping researcher subjectivity in relation to those norms and standards, and contouring future research avenues for the good academic society (Bedeian, 2004; Tronto, 2021). Hence, our research subjectivity as well as organization studies as a whole are at stake with the review system. Both individually and collectively, it would be risky to review manuscripts carelessly, that is, without attempts to care for, about, and with research(er) development, or even entirely withdraw from reviewing.

However, in highlighting the criticality of the importance of reviewing as a practice of care, we do not mean to romanticize this practice by, for example, arguing that it is or should always be associated with "happy" or "warm" emotions. Far from naïvely overlooking how peer review communication may well be sharp, even cold at times or is riddled with normativity (see Brewis, 2018; Hyland and Jiang, 2020; Krlev and Spicer, 2023), we rather argue that this normativity is an inherent part of reviewing as a practice of care. As such, reviewing circulates affects that are more than "warm" or "cold" alone (Bailyn et al., 2025; Becker and Peticca-Harris, 2024; Miele and Gherardi, 2025; Plotnikof and Utoft, 2022), making the practice of reviewing all the more critical to nurture with care.

In fact, this is why an ethico-political engagement is fundamental to this academic practice. This engagement reminds us that reviewing as a practice of care is not one-directional, linear or static, but emerges relationally in written encounters across involved actors. Hence, precisely because reviewing is a relational practice of caring for, about, and with research(ers), it is enmeshed with power dynamics. Indeed, this care lens is not blind to power dynamics. Rather, it renders them accessible to critique and responsible for learning and changing (Held, 2006; Plotnikof and Utoft, 2022), as Tronto (2021) has recently argued (p. 158):

> [L]earning always requires that the parties are willing to listen. Those in positions of relative power are not the ones who listen more carefully; they always have the power to tune out. Any ethical approach to learning must always recognise the unequal power inherent within it. And the impatience of instructors or of scholars is often simply a manifestation of their power, as they use the matter around them to carry out their ways of educating. [. . .] So what finally comes out, after we name and unload all of our impatience with our imperfect institutions, is a capacity, born of hope, to try to bring change in modest yet profound ways.

So, care scholars have highlighted that practices of care—whether related to knowledge creation, ethics, or social work—are complex, ambiguous, tension-ridden, and power-laden (e.g. Bozalek et al., 2021; Tronto, 1993, 2021). Consequently, through this care lens reviewing surely isn't a neutral practice, innocently producing "objective" research outcomes merely reflecting the "truth" (e.g. Brewis, 2018; Krlev and Spicer, 2023). Rather, reviewing embodies relational power dynamics between, for example, authors, editors, reviewers, texts, theories, different types of data, research debates, journal rankings, etc. in and through which participants demarcate, negotiate, and develop the possible field of action in the specific manuscript—underpinned by associated scientific norms, ideals of excellence, and knowledge politics (Ashcraft, 2017; Ozkazanc-Pan, 2012;

Plotnikof, 2023). Also, reviewing risks betraying its noble purpose of assuring knowledge development by becoming a self-righteous act of gatekeeping, misusing the reviewer role by normatively directing the manuscript in ways that reproduce one's own interests or importance regarding a research area instead of caring for, about, and with the research(er) potential on its own terms. Of course, the political functioning of this cannot be overlooked, as it can reproduce powerful voices and references, colonize knowledge fields and forms, and shape researcher subjects and agency in unequal ways (Bell et al., 2020; Bozalek et al., 2021; Jammulamadaka et al., 2021).

These power dynamics, thus, call for an ethico-political (self-)critique (Tronto, 1993, 2021) as an inherent part of the idea we have put forward, namely, that reviewing is caring. Such inherent (self-)critique demands us to question how, as well as for what and whom, our review practices are caring, and how that care for the "good academic society" is organized. Such a critique helps us continuously consider the power dynamics in play when caring for, about, and with specific research(ers) in normative ways in the review process. It makes us take responsibility for the micro-politics and ethical considerations of the normativity that our reviewing embodies (afforded by language) as caring reviewers during the learning path. (Self-)critique assures that we pose critical questions respectfully with care for, about, and with the research(er) at hand, while critically considering the (self-)interests of those questions. Moreover, this care lens extends its ethico-political (self-)critique to questions about the overall review system that individualizes reviewer norms and workload pressures and accelerates review and resubmission speeds, rather than taking full organizational responsibility for the work conditions—with modest (but not naïve) hopes for change (as Tronto stressed above).

Given the power dynamics are inherently part of reviewing as a practice of care, we do need to critically assess how this practice is organized. This is because the organizing or reviewing may well underscore how this practice of care comes to make use of the powers invested in it—including taking time to and insisting on thinking–doing with the research at hand, resisting being instrumentalized by a review system focusing on, for example, careerism and commercial publishing, and bringing change into it in modest, yet profound ways (Tronto, 2021: 158).

Specifically, the ethico-political care lens that we advocate foregrounds that, in its very organizing, reviewing is part of a broader societal "crisis of care" (Bailyn et al., 2025; Duffy et al., 2023) in that it is challenged and devalued in academia in at least three respects: reviewing is often invisible, underappreciated, and un(der)paid. With much respect and gratitude to those who care about caring personally and professionally, and with acknowledgment of the at least partial difference between caring for vulnerable people and caring for research(ers), we follow Tronto's (1993: 18) and other feminist scholars' (e.g. Antoni and Beer, 2019; Becker and Peticca-Harris, 2024; Fotaki and Pullen, 2024; Plotnikof and Utoft, 2022) invitation to critically think about how politics of care play out in organizing our academic lives to redress potential changes on more ethico-political terms.

First, reviewing is *invisible* because it is a "faceless" process that we perform in the shadows—especially when it is double-blinded as often is the case in organization studies. That is, reviewing remains largely unseen by authors, colleagues, and university administrators—when we do it, but also afterward due to the blinding (Carland et al., 1992). Most scholarly data infrastructures do not allow displaying one's efforts invested in reviewing both at and across outlets. While research information management systems such as PURE, academic profiles on research search engines such as Google Scholar, and entries in social media for academics such as ResearchGate list research achievements of all sorts (but primarily scholarly publications), they do not enable scholars to render their reviewing transparent. In addition to these formalistic reporting aspects, we rarely discuss reviewing as part of doctoral education; and many of us do not even talk about our review activities with colleagues in day-to-day work—or when did your colleague proudly share

the last time that they "reviewed this or that (un)interesting submission to *Organization* yesterday"? This opacity, Willmott (2022b) argued, is cemented as a way for reviewers to "escap[e] vendettas" (p. 1745) in the name of "objective" assessments because organization studies is a fragmented field in which each specialist area might be populated by only a few experts, thus enabling the identification of authors, and reviewers based on just a few cues.

As such, reviewing mostly remains in the shadows of organization scholarship, despite our complete dependence on it. Yet, this "faceless" nature constrains or even undermines the caring sides of reviewing. As Lévinas (1969: 150) highlighted about face-to-face encounters, "The Other precisely reveals himself [sic!] in his alterity [. . .] as the primordial phenomenon of gentleness," eliciting needs and demands through the revelation of the face that one cannot fully attend and respond to without this revelation (see Rhodes, 2023, for an overview of literature that builds on Lévinas' work). Translated into the context of reviewing, performing this practice in a caring way is difficult, if not impossible if it remains invisible and "faceless."

Second, reviewing is greatly *underappreciated*. Leaving face-lip appreciation such as reviewer lists and awards aside, reviewing does not experience any recognition for the most part. For instance, promotion schemes tend to foreground other aspects of one's track record, and community services such as reviewing are typically not included (Babcock et al., 2022). It is a "voluntary" service mentioned at the fringes of one's CV—a mentioning that is valued especially by scholars who are systemically disadvantaged in terms of career stage, gender, and place to display their participation in the academic community, but often without any specification of the effort invested in reviewing because it doesn't "count" anyway (see Fleming and Harley, 2024). Understandably then, scholars may marginalize reviewing as a side activity by prioritizing the manifold other activities that do count: one's own research, teaching, grant applications, committee work, etc. Such marginalization may partly even stretch to extremes, namely, when scholars' contracts do not include paid working hours devoted to reviewing and other essential community-caring activities.

Under such marginalized conditions, reviewing is conducted in one's "free time"—as an *un(der) paid* activity, possibly with detrimental consequences for review quality and personal well-being related to work pressures. Given the outstanding importance of reviewing for scholarship writ large, this is absurd—even more so when considering that commercial publishers reap substantial profits at margins that outrival Apple, Google, and Amazon without adding much value to published outputs (Buranyi, 2017), but based on the "voluntary," un(der)paid service provided by reviewers, editors, and authors (Beverungen et al., 2012; Forgues and Liarte, 2013). In a way, this constellation parallels social reproduction theorists' findings about the critical role of unpaid household work in reproducing exploitative capitalist systems (e.g. Federici, 2014, 2019; Glenn, 1992): the reproduction of capital depends on the systematic exploitation of submissive workers, especially those who are already systemically disadvantaged.

Third, those who do contribute to the review system are at risk of *overwork and exploitation*. Isn't it fair to assume that, in the face of an ever-growing number of submissions, editors tend to re-invite those reviewers who have agreed to do so before, trying to avoid overly lengthy submission-processing times (Hyland and Jiang, 2020)? As some of us being editors ourselves, we know this dilemma well. This, then, creates a virtual pile of reviews-to-do on the desks of those who actively contribute to the review system, whereas the desks of an apparently large portion of non-contributors (Lindebaum and Jordan, 2023) remain empty. Hence, the burden often falls unequally (Babcock et al., 2022).

If there is one exception to our claim that reviewing is greatly invisible and underappreciated, it is the existence of editorial review boards to which scholars are invited, among others, due to their above-, and-beyond efforts invested in reviewing for the journal. However, the reputation effect of joining an editorial board greatly depends on the reputation of the journal. Being an editorial board

member of a low-prestige or niche journal might even be considered a waste of time and resources, for example, by tenure-board members who evaluate the "productivity" of early-career scholars. In turn, from publishers' perspective, editorial boards appear to be an effective means of motivating scholars to "do more" ("If you review more manuscripts for us, you will eventually make it into our editorial review board!"), or to "keep it up" ("As you are part of our editorial board now, we expect you to review X manuscripts per year for us!") without actually granting substantial influence on a journal's aims and scope. Ever-expanding sizes of editorial *review* boards (as they are, e.g. tellingly called at *Sage*) are another indicator for the schism between (at least comparably influential) boards of senior and associate editors on the one hand and mere listings of review workers on the other. And if such boards are not a motivator, they reflect power asymmetries in that adding one's membership in the editorial review board of a prestigious journal as a line to the CV requires scholars to provide a not-so "voluntary" service. Risks of overwork and exploitation may well become even higher if the financial model of that higher education system does not include reviewing within the scope of paid day-to-day scholarly work.

Organizing the review system more care-fully: Three recommendations

Can we expect to deliver and receive high-quality reviews when the review system (1) invisibilizes, (2) underappreciates, and (3) exploits the care invested in it? We believe not. We argue that, through the lens of care, critically challenging the politics of reviewing and cultivating reviewing as a practice of care with due respect to its fundamental importance is pivotal to the future of organization scholars(hip). Specifically, building on the three pathologies of reviewing that a care lens renders salient, we propose three care-based matters for (re)organizing the review system.

First, reviewing must leave the shadows where it is performed by *increasing its visibility across journals*. Especially privileged scholars might not see value in rendering their reviewing efforts visible, as it makes no personal difference to them. This, however, is a choice that less powerful reviewers who are unequally burdened with the pathologies of our review system don't have. One may even consider silence about one's review activities a lack of solidarity with less privileged colleagues by contributing to the invisibility of reviewing. We, therefore, argue that the visibility of reviewing is a crucial pillar for cultivating care in our review system.

One way to increase the visibility of reviewing is to introduce non-proprietary and decentralized review data standards. This would mean that journals offer data on reviewing, perhaps including review full-texts of published articles in standardized, machine-readable ways that—if reviewers give their consent when they accept a review invitation—allow both individual reviewers and research institutions to access and showcase them. Such standards could interlink various journal platforms, rendering our review activities transparent, both individually and collectively. They could provide the foundation for more visible reviewing approaches such as publishing written exchanges between authors, reviewers, and editors open access (see Dobusch and Heimstädt, 2019; Nature, 2020; Willmott, 2022a), potentially abating systemic problems of reference politics, gatekeeping, and power abuse (Brewis, 2018; Plotnikof, 2023). In line with renewed efforts of establishing scholar-led publishing infrastructures (Adema and Moore, 2018) such as the Open Library of the Humanities or preprint servers (e.g. SocArXiv), we advocate for non-proprietary and not-for-profit data-clearing services, where the bulk of costs for maintaining decentralized review data standards could be financed through contributions by academic societies and public research-funding institutions. This could follow the example of payments for far-reaching open-access licenses that the DEAL Consortium (2024) has negotiated for German universities and libraries (Dobusch and Heimstädt, 2024). Similarly, universities and libraries could cover a "fair share" of the costs

for maintaining decentralized review data standards, for example, relative to the number of reviews that their members "produce" through their submissions.

We are aware that rendering our reviewing more visible comes with greater measurability. To some degree, increasing the visibility of reviewing adds to the proliferation of academic metrification, potentially providing yet another form of control and "governance by numbers" (Sellar, 2015; Staunæs and Brøgger, 2020). We have no interest in pushing further metrification as a form of power in academia, for the care perspective rightly challenges individualism and managerialism (see Askins and Blazek, 2017; Plotnikof and Utoft, 2022). However, we do question why, amongst the many metrics we are governed by and which we cannot easily revoke (Fleming and Harley, 2024), it is reviewing that should not be celebrated by metrics that count. A reviewing-centric metric, we think, is actually helpful and critical to the good academic society, whereas many others aren't. Hence, we ponder whether adding reviewing metrics to the mix could contribute to raising a long overdue discussion on what parts of academic life can and should be "measured," and what metrics are actually worthless or even counterproductive for accomplishing the good academic society and only pay into a soulless managerialism or careerism of neoliberal academia (see Hartmann, 2025; van Houtum and van Uden, 2022). Hence, we wonder whether introducing reviewing metrics contributes to what others have called for (see Clark et al., 2024), namely, distributing and, hence, alleviating the dominance of a few measures in favor of a broader, more fluid set of metrics. Alternatively, is leaving reviewing in the shadows really the better option?

Grappling with these questions also invites us to discuss how the visibility of reviewing is organized. Besides further metrics, a complementary, more qualitative approach to increasing the visibility of reviewing could be to organize formal and informal educational practices of learning and normalizing to evaluate and critique quality in caring ways as an essential part of academic life. Specifically, we need to develop ways of nurturing review capacities that care for, about, and with research(er) developments as a standard practice in organization studies, hence actively participating in creating the good academic society that we all depend on. For example, doctoral programs in our field could include at least one course on reviewing. Reviewing could also be a routine part of professional development workshops at conferences; nurtured through off-conference webinars and workshops of organized research communities as, for example, pushed by the Strategizing Activities and Practices Interest Group at the Academy of Management (e.g. Leybold et al., 2024); and written into supervision tasks. Such formal training does justice to the fact that conducting reviews in careful ways is each and everyone's responsibility; it is not meant to individualize burdens of improving our review system per se. We believe that, in addition to normalizing reviewing as a practice of care, the visibility of care that is or should be invested in reviewing may also enable a more explicit (self-)critical discussion amongst senior faculty, editors, and journal publishers about the (un)caring ethics and politics of reviewing and the risks of gatekeeping and misuses to reproduce one's own privileges and interests in uncaring ways (see Tronto, 1993).

Will increasing the quantitative and qualitative visibility of reviewing through the proposed measures be enough? As social reproduction theorists revealed the pathologies of reproducing exploitative capitalist systems on the backs of unpaid household work, they contributed to fomenting solidarity by giving rise to the influential Wages for Housework movement that demanded a wage for reproductive labor (Toupin, 2018). Likewise, one may consider recent mass resignations of journals' editors and editorial boards (Retraction Watch, 2024) in response to exploitative and abusive publishing conditions a sign of hope that the visibility of reviewing mobilizes support for transforming the pathologies of the review system. Yet, as the mass resignation at *Gender, Work & Organization* (Jack, 2024) illustrates, many of the abandoned journals are revamped with new editors and editorial boards—leading to continued controversies about the academy's relationship with for-profit publishers and, thus, further division, rather than much-needed unity of critical

scholarship. This shows that the visibility of reviewing and its pathologies alone may not suffice to reorganize the review system and cultivate care. We rather view the visibility of reviewing as a necessary ground condition for further measures to be taken.

Specifically, second, based on the visibility of reviewing as part of our (paid) day-to-day academic life, *reviewing needs to be formally recognized* in relation to its pivotal role. Instead of treating reviewing as a gift exchange (Kaltenbrunner et al., 2022), an ethical quid-pro-quo commitment (Lindebaum and Jordan, 2023), or a self-interested activity (McMullen and Newbert, 2023), it is an essential service to the community without which academic knowledge cannot be acclaimed. Therefore, once reviewing is rendered visible, it can be included in formalized, paid work tasks as well as promotion schemes and, thus, turned from an individual "voluntary service" into a systemic part of paid scholarly work that everyone feels responsible for. This might also counter the need for "no clubs" as a contemporary form of resistance to unequally-distributed non-promotional tasks (Babcock et al., 2022). As such, reviewing would be acknowledged as part of the glue that makes the scholarly community stick together, and we need to challenge unequal work conditions and rather see such care as a necessary, knowledgeable part of life in a good academic society.

Recognition as a way of fostering care is known to elicit tensions—most of which are not covered by Tronto's perspective on care (Islam, 2013), and which could potentially become counterproductive. Therefore, recognition requires thoughtful treatment. For example, formal recognition might generate crowding-out effects. We know that extrinsic incentives might crowd out intrinsic motivation (e.g. Weibel et al., 2014), such that even more scholars might refuse to engage in reviewing or provide reviews of dubious quality. If so, how can we more formally acknowledge the relevance of and resources invested in reviewing, while reinforcing its key character as a service to the community? How can we recognize and value reviewing as a practice of care without relying on quid-pro-quo reciprocity?

One key step in this regard might be to anchor reviewing as a practice of care within research cultures by fostering day-to-day collegiality (Fleming and Harley, 2024; Plotnikof and Utoft, 2022), making sure that daily practices of caring for, about, and with each other's work are prioritized institutionally and, hence, help challenge the individualizing, competitive incentives currently dominating. Another central approach to these challenges could be to explicitly address and strengthen the focus on an ethico-political care in the academic publishing system overall (Fleming et al., 2022; Fotaki et al., 2019). Thus, beyond the individual level, we see the need to limit for-profit publishers' unjustified expropriation of reviewing by making outcomes of the review process and potentially even the reviews themselves available with open access. Publishers who do not pay for reviewing should not restrict access to reviewed research outputs. If the public or providers of a "volunteer" service pay for both the authoring and reviewing of scientific works, they deserve open and unrestricted access to the outcome of this process. Only in this way, we can make sure that the research outcomes, which are shaped by reviewing, inspire the communities to which the review service is delivered—instead of allowing publishers to expropriate and exploit these outcomes on the backs of those who deliver the service.

Despite calls to abandon for-profit publishers (Harvie et al., 2012, 2013) or at least to pluralize our ways of publishing in order to be less vulnerable to the adversities of for-profit publishing (Beverungen et al., 2012), the case of *Gender, Work & Organization* shows that overcoming for-profit publishers' power position and making them step away from their commercial interests in the name of knowledge development is easier said than done. Yet, courageous examples—like aforementioned mass walkouts, or non-for-profit, critical publishing such as *ephemera*, as well as alike resistances in other fields, for example, the movement from *Lingua* to *Glossa* in linguistics—show that cutting the cords to abusive for-profit publishers is possible (e.g. Retraction Watch, 2023a, 2023b; Rooryck, 2016). We consider these examples signs of hope for movements toward

open-access publishing and open peer review, ones that may reduce publishers' unreasonable profit margins but contribute to cultivating the caring features of reviewing in academic life.

Finally, *reviewing must become a well-respected, scholarly practice of care*. Instead of imposing reviewing demands on a sub-group of scholars, as is the case now, we propose to introduce cross-journal review relationality by setting a limit to the number of reviews put on single scholars, in the effort of redistributing the workload more justly amongst those who produce that workload through their submissions. For example, at a seminar, an associate editor offered the following heuristic for the number of papers to be reviewed per person:

> As a rule of thumb, I think to myself that every time I submit a paper, at least two reviewers are involved in volunteer labor. So, I should always review double the amount of papers that I myself have under review, to serve the scholarly community equally. (July 2022)

This heuristic supports thinking about reviewing as a relational practice of care; and it also heeds the care-full "slow movement" of collectively refusing to constantly produce more and more research outputs (Berg and Seeber, 2016; Tronto, 2021) by allowing us to self-critically reflect on existing (partly formalized, partly implicit) norms regarding the quantity of scholarly output amidst problems of overproduction and careerism in the neoliberal academy: Which number of review assignments—including the reviewing of submissions to journals, conference papers, and grant proposal reviews, among others—is sustainable not only for the review system overall (Lindebaum and Jordan, 2023), but also for us personally in being caring and even "happy" academics (see also Plotnikof and Utoft, 2022; Smith and Ulus, 2020)? How many manuscripts can each of us submit at maximum in order to hit or stay below the number of manuscripts to be reviewed in return? Hence, a cross-journal review limit would offset the challenge that being an active, reliable reviewer tends to generate further review assignments, one that might otherwise be worsened through an increased visibility of one's reviewing activities.

However, such a heuristic is not enough for cultivating care in the practice of reviewing, as it puts the burden on individuals to weigh up the number of reviews that they can handle, and to decline review requests. This may not transform the status quo at all, given that less powerful and systemically disadvantaged colleagues tend to say "yes" more often, even if they are aware that doing so is not healthy for themselves. Therefore, we argue that establishing and adhering to a cross-journal review limit needs to be organized in order to reconsider reviewing as a relational matter of care, removing the issue as an individual matter and lifting the individual burden on those already overburdened with doing most of the reviewing to decline additional review requests.

Here, cross-journal review data exchange that renders scholars' reviewing transparent can be supportive, if not indispensable. Such an exchange could be realized by directly embedding review data in the journals' submission platforms, enabling editors to see the review-related workload of colleagues not only at one's home journal, but across journals (and, perhaps, the number of submitted papers under review at that time so as to discern the number of review assignments that an author could or should handle in return). But of course, considering the historical growth of the publishing system, one can hardly expect support from for-profit publishers—as owners or operators of the submission platforms—for an initiative that does not directly increase their profits. If this is so, an alternative could be to extend non-proprietary review data standards by a cross-journal platform that uses these data, one whose maintenance could equally be financed through a consortium-based coordination of fair cost-sharing among universities and libraries. Hence, in the end, implementing a cross-journal review limit may not primarily be a financial issue that for-profit publishers would have to buy into, but a social one of coordinating review assignments more justly that editors and reviewers need to agree on. This is especially so when research institutions

and libraries—like German ones—would organize themselves, for example, in consortia such as DEAL, to stop throwing excessive amounts of money at abusive publishers,[1] and, instead, redirect only a fraction of it to the financing of such a platform.

In fact, editors—not only reviewers—should be interested in establishing and adhering to a cross-journal limit, foremost, in order to avoid the further growth of a "no club" (Babcock et al., 2022) that would aggravate their challenges to find reviewers. Furthermore, when calibrated wisely, a cross-journal review limit should allow more time being devoted to a review, thus on average raising review quality, fostering research(er) development, improving output quality, and, by implication, increasing a journal's reputation. A side effect of the broadening of the pool of reviewers could also be to reduce the gate-keeping power of few "top reviewers" who have a substantial influence on the direction of entire scholarly fields (see Willmott, 2022b). Hence, collectively agreeing to adhere to a cross-journal review limit can, in itself, be considered an act of care from which research(er) development greatly benefits—even if this means "doing less" not only in quantitative, but also in qualitative terms (i.e. not reviewing manuscripts submitted to predatory journals, to journals owned by abusive publishers, etc.).[2] Adhering to such limits may, then, even contribute to greater awareness of the current unequal distribution of reviewing and raise debates among editors about further institutional safeguards for avoiding exploitative conditions.

Reviewing as a practice of care for a good academic society?

When thinking about improving the review system, we found inspiration from feminist care scholar Tronto's (1993: 2) critical question posed more than 30 years ago, asking us what it would mean "to take seriously, as part of our definition of a good society, the values of caring—attentiveness, responsibility, nurturance, compassion, meeting others' needs—traditionally associated with women, and traditionally excluded from public consideration?" Please read it again, and take it in. What would that mean generally, and more specifically in relation to creating a good academic society?

Much is at stake—not least in the looming year of 2025—when engaging with Tronto's question concerning the fundamental role of care, ethico-politics, solidarity, and the need for relational approaches to organizing such work, including in academic practices, to support greater equality, inclusion, and social justice (see Pullen and Rhodes, 2025). Respectfully, we have discussed this question in the context of academia and organization studies, and more tangibly with regard to the reviewing of submissions to journals and the problematic politics of caring exposed with this question. In our view, the lens of care makes evident how reviewing is caring, including the normative power dynamics necessitating an ethico-political (self-)critique of the caring reviewer participating in the review system. As such, it also enables an affirmative critique that help us reformulate problems and potential solutions to the crisis of the review system. While we may not agree on the critique and movements toward a more caring review future, we should all nonetheless be mindful of identifying and willing to discuss it more explicitly—not as individualized matters, but as organizational issues we all rely on as quality assurance. In stimulating this, we suggested a care lens resting on feminist ethico-politics to point to three critical matters of reorganizing the review system to visibilize, appreciate, and redistribute reviewing more equally as contributions to a good academic society.

As highlighted, while the care lens draws attention to these three critical matters, it relates to but somewhat backgrounds other pathologies of our review system that are equally worth being challenged and transformed, such as the rarely questioned focus on journal publications as our field's currency (e.g. Clark et al., 2024; Rasheed and Priem, 2020), and the unchained power of publishers (e.g. Beverungen et al., 2012; Buranyi, 2017; Harvie et al., 2012, 2013). Overall, the established

publishing system seems teflonic in that ideas aimed at revolutionizing the entire system can be dismissed all too easily. Therefore, we have focused on cultivating care within the practice of reviewing as an essential part of both our academic lives and the established publishing system so as to render this practice more nurturing and knowledge-enhancing. However, our discussion of ways forward does provide further backing to initiatives that aim at open-access publications, open peer review, and perhaps even the abandoning of for-profit publishers, among others. Scholar-led publishing initiatives and consortia such as DEAL in the area of open-access publishing do show that coordinating collective action amongst research institutions and libraries is possible. This, we believe, opens opportunities to transform the review system in more careful ways to participate in and contribute to a broader movement away from the status quo of publishing in our field. Furthermore, given that reviewing submissions to journals participates in assuring the quality that the "audit cultures" of the neoliberal business school hold so high (Fleming and Harley, 2024), making it a wreckage from which many of us are care-fully reviewing (Fleming et al., 2022), we hope that the acknowledgment and nurturing of the caring sides of reviewing for journals could perhaps shape the broader landscape of reviewing in academia for the better, in improving the conditions for care.

By care-fully reorganizing reviewing in the three discussed ways, we hope that our scholarly community can organize and thus also conduct reviews in just, ethico-political ways to improve the review quality and even out the workload and benefits both collectively and individually—in the name of careful reviewing that we all depend on so critically.

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Notes

1. Specifically, in 2018, Elsevier stopped providing access to their publications to members of many German research institutions and libraries, which had lapsed their subscriptions due to excessive financial demands for both regular and open-access publishing (Pells, 2018). These institutions' persistent collective refusal to accept Elsevier's offer eventually culminated in the DEAL Consortium's open-access agreement with Elsevier in 2023 (Dobusch and Heimstädt, 2024).
2. One of the reviewers could not have expressed this any more clearly: "I consider never reviewing for Elsevier as an act of care."

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