



Bob Uttl <uttlbob@gmail.com>

Decision on your manuscript

Bob Uttl <uttlbob@gmail.com>

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To: Frontiers in Psychology - Peer Review <psychology.editorial.office@frontiersin.org>, mirjam.eckert@frontiersin.org, kamila.markram@frontiersin.org, frederick.fenter@frontiersin.org, "Daniel.Petrariu@frontiersin.org" <Daniel.Petrariu@frontiersin.org>, "giovanni.lippi@frontiersin.org" <giovanni.lippi@frontiersin.org>
Cc: "axcleer@ulb.ac.be" <axcleer@ulb.ac.be>, "psychology@frontiersin.org" <psychology@frontiersin.org>, "sjaswal@cus.ac.in" <sjaswal@cus.ac.in>, "e.davelaar@bbk.ac.uk" <e.davelaar@bbk.ac.uk>

Dear Elena:

Thank you for your email.

First, it is unclear why you, Head of Research Integrity, communicate about what are ultimately peer-review processes and editorial decision issues that (a) you were not part of, (b) you are not qualified to evaluate/do not have expertise in, and (c) have nothing to do with misconduct or malpractice. Your Loop Profile (<https://loop.frontiersin.org/people/428607/publications>) shows that you do not have the necessary qualifications to be Frontiers' editor in this area (<https://www.frontiersin.org/editors/join-as-editor>).

I expected Dr. Eddy Davelaar, the Specialty Chief Editor, who decided to reject our manuscript after Dr. Jaswal, his Associate Specialty Chief Editor, accepted it, to take charge of this communication. Instead, Catriola Leslie and now you were tasked to be the Frontiers' front.

RE: Several X posts. In para 2, you state that "the [published] abstract was flagged to our attention due to several posts being made online on the social media platform X." Despite my repeated requests for Frontiers to disclose the allegations of "overstated" claims, you continue to hold these posts on X secret and you also continue to hold secret as to who "flagged" those posts to your attention. **One more time: Please disclose the relevant X posts and who brought them to your attention without any further delay.** I note here that, according to Altmetrics (<https://frontiers.altmetric.com/details/158097957>), there were 2,625+ X posts from 2,355+ X users. Several means say four to seven or so. Are you saying that all this is because, say 5 out of 2,625 posts, were "flagged" to Frontiers somehow by someone?

Re Frontiers Policies. The paragraphs you quote from your policies merely describe your "principles for peer review", not the actual detailed policy. The detailed policy on Manuscript acceptance is clear that the acceptance is decided by the handling editor, in this case, Dr. Jaswal, who also happens to be Associate Specialty Chief Editor:

The editor can then either accept the final version of the manuscript or request further changes as necessary, typically within a few days. Acceptance of a manuscript can be decided by the handling editor and does not require the approval of the specialty chief editor.

Acceptance by the handling editor moves the article into the final validation phase, during which Frontiers' peer review team performs final technical and quality checks, including whether the review was performed adequately. Should the manuscript fail the final checks, it can either be put back into review to address the identified issue(s) or else the provisional acceptance decision can be overridden and the manuscript will be rejected at this stage without publication.

The article processing charge (APC) is payable within 30 days of acceptance and is required before final publication of the manuscript.

Although Frontiers fabricated the historical record, the facts are as follows: (1) Dr. Jaswal accepted the manuscript, (2) the final quality checks were performed and the manuscript was approved, and (3) the abstract was published and the proofs produced. There was no longer any option "to put [the manuscript] back into review..."

With respect to concerns raised or flagged post-acceptance, Frontiers has two relevant policies as far as I can tell. First, the "Malpractice and misconduct" part of your policies states:

Frontiers will investigate allegations of misconduct both before and after publication. Corrections or retractions will be published if necessary, in order to maintain the integrity of the academic record. Our [research integrity team](#) should be contacted immediately on suspicions of misconduct. Frontiers also

investigates allegations made on social media or other relevant websites as we become aware of them.

This policy states that “allegations of misconduct both before and after publication” will be investigated and “correction or retractions” will be published. The policy does not allow “unpublishing” already published abstracts or articles. More critically, as of today, you disclosed no allegations of “malpractice and misconduct”, you disclosed no “suspicions of misconduct”, and you made no findings of any malpractice or any misconduct.

Frontiers also has an explicit “Comments and complaints policy” (<https://www.frontiersin.org/guidelines/comments-and-complaints-policy>). Under this policy, “Only complaints regarding the scientific/academic validity or ethical or legal aspects of the work or its review will be considered.” Ergo, the policy does not allow you to consider whether a word “mere” or “only” should be used, whether a word “massive or word “large” should be used, etc.. I highlighted this policy to Frontiers in my previous communications but it was ignored. Critically, the Comments and complaints policy does not allow “unpublishing” of already published abstract nor article. It only allows “corrigendum” or “retraction”.

Finally, Frontiers is a member of COPE. I suggest that you read COPE Guidelines post-publication and retraction guidelines at <https://publicationethics.org/postpublication> and <https://publicationethics.org/retraction-guidelines>.

Re Provisional Acceptance. In para 3, you state that “the handling editor had provisionally accepted your manuscript.” Your statement is false. Dr. Jaswal, the handling editor, Assistant Specialty Chief Editor, “accepted” the manuscript and did not say that she “provisionally accepted” the manuscript in her acceptance letter. Your policy does not speak of “provisional” acceptance, it only speaks of “acceptance.” The published abstract said “Accepted” and not “Provisionally Accepted.” The article passed the final quality checks too.

Re Rejection of Accepted Article based on “concerns expressed by the chief editor.” The sudden rejection was triggered by “several posts” on X, as you say (and you forgot to mention that those several posts were out of 2,600+ posts). You repeatedly refused to reveal those posts and instead, Dr. Davelaar, Specialty Chief Editor, came up with some “issues”.

I responded to those “issues” on Feb 6, 2024, and I pointed out that they were unwarranted, misrepresentations, false, and/or patently false. Dr. Davelaar did not read our article, did not comprehend what he was reading, or decided to maliciously unpublish our article.

Given Frontiers’ unwillingness to review Dr. Davelaar’s actions and take our emails seriously, I had no choice but to publicly defend our reputation and I posted more fulsome response to Dr. Davelaar’s concerns. It is now at <https://www.bobuttl.net/2024/02/15/when-chief-editors-reviews-go-off-the-rails-frontiers-dr-eddy-davelaars-criticism-of-our-accepted-meta-analysis-and-our-detailed-response/>.

Here is one particularly egregious example of Dr. Davelaar’s falsehoods:

Dr. Davelaar wrote: “The discussion starts by stating that later Wechsler tests are harder than earlier test [true]. Yet, the meta-analysis did not take this into account [patently false]. In and of itself, this influences the perceived decline in IQ over the years.”

I responded: “The statement that “the meta-analysis did not take this [Flynn Effect] into account.” is patently false. See the method, results, and figures that were corrected for Flynn Effect. Please read the paper before criticizing it.”

Please look at a caption of Figure 9, in an article proofs (see attached page), and read with me:

A relationship between mean **FSIQ adjusted for Flynn Effect** [emphasis added] and year of assessment for the United States μ/g samples ($k = 102$). The figure includes the meta-regression line with 95% CI bands.

The adjustment for Flynn Effect takes into account that “later Wechsler tests are harder than earlier tests”. Conveniently, the text below the figure again repeats that “Figure 9 shows the same data but with FSIQs adjusted for the Flynn Effect...”, and so on. It is impossible to miss. I also highlighted in yellow on this one page only.

If you read it, and if you comprehend it, you must agree with me that Dr. Davelaar’s “issue” was unfounded and that his statement that “meta-analysis did not take this into account” was egregiously false. As I said above, Dr. Davelaar either did not read it, did not comprehend it, or maliciously decided to unpublish our paper. Only he knows what he did but he did not respond to my request for clarifications and did not take up an opportunity to explain himself. Dr. Jaswal did not respond either. In fact, no one did. Either way, Dr. Davelaar demonstrated that he is either unable or unwilling to evaluate our manuscript.

Re Dr. Davelaar’s false reasons for unpublishing our manuscript. In your para 4, you admit that the reasons Dr. Davelaar gave in his Feb 9, 2024 rejection (Frontiers Rejection #2) were false. You claim that Dr. Davelaar gave the false reason because “there are a limited set of standard ‘reasons’ to reject a manuscript.” It does not matter whether Dr. Davelaar gave false reasons by clicking a button or writing it out himself. He knew it was false when he clicked the button, and the falsehood was disseminated.

You go on and explain Frontier’s fabrication of the article’s history: “Again, due to technical limitations, when an article is moved back into review the review process is reactivated by default.” How you end up lying does not matter. What matters is that Frontiers/Dr. Davelaar knowingly fabricated a history of our article.

Perhaps, as Head of Research Integrity, you should focus on bringing Frontiers processes in line with honesty and integrity requirements as detailed in COPE Guidelines. You should be concerned that, if you are correct about the “technical limitations”, Frontiers is habitually and knowingly disseminating falsehoods to authors and fabricating historical records because of “technical” limitations. This undermines Frontiers’ reputation, more precisely, it obliterates it.

Re Your assurances that Dr. Davelaar “has looked at the email sent responding to the concerns raised, however, their [Dr. Davelaar’s] concerns remain” You are not Dr. Davelaar. Only Dr. Davelaar can explain how he “looked at the email”, for example, did he flip through it, did he consider it, did he carefully check the article to see if we conducted a meta-analysis on FSIQs “adjusted for Flynn Effect”? We do not know. However, we do know that Dr. Davelaar doubled down on his prior falsehoods. Clearly, Dr. Davelaar is unable or unwilling to perform his duties as the Specialty Chief Editor.

I understand you do not have expertise in this area but if you do open the manuscript, and look up Figure 9, you will see that “FSIQ adjusted for Flynn Effect” is right there. You will also find it in Methods, Results, Table 3 – see the last column and see the note under Table 3 “FSIQ w/Adjustment for Flynn Effect (0.3 IQ points per year),” etc. You should perhaps take that to the highest levels of Frontiers and alert them that Frontiers made grave errors and disseminated grave falsehoods by relying on Dr. Davelaar’s actions. I will copy this email to the Leadership so that they have heads up.

You can also read our response:

<https://www.bobutt1.net/2024/02/15/when-chief-editors-reviews-go-off-the-rails-frontiers-dr-eddy-davelaars-criticism-of-our-accepted-meta-analysis-and-our-detailed-response/>

Re: APC Charges of USD 3,295.00 I am pleased to note that you finally sent USD 3,295.00 to my credit card. Unfortunately, you did it incorrectly. You breached the contract in unpublishing our published article, and accordingly, you have to reverse the charge rather than simply return USD 3,295.00 back to my credit card. When I paid the APC charges, the charge on my credit card was CAD 4,566.55 which included your APC USD 3,295.00, CAD 111.38 exchange fee, and 1.38590283 exchange rate. When you refunded USD 3,295.00 I only received CAD 4,441.00 at 1.347799696 exchange rate. This leaves me short of CAD 125.55 due to differences in exchange rates and exchange fees. There are two options how to deal with this: (a) you sent me CAD 125.55 or (b) I notify the credit card company to remove your original charge on the grounds that you did not deliver the services. Once this is done, I will send you back CAD 4,441.00 minus the fees it will cost me to send it to you. Let me know which way you want to proceed. Another option is we settle CAD 125.55 under *Alberta Consumer Protection Act* in the Court of King’s Bench in Calgary, Alberta, Canada.

Re: You say that “If a revised manuscript is sent with the edits requested, the manuscript will be reinstated and assessed by them both [Dr. Davelaar and Dr. Jaswal]. First, I cannot fix that which is not broken. Second, I cannot persuade Dr. Davelaar given his unwillingness or inability to comprehend the facts (or his maliciousness) and proclivity to falsehoods. Third, as Dr. Davelaar demonstrated, he is either unwilling or unable to perform his duties as Specialty Chief Editor. In my opinion, Dr. Davelaar ought to resign, or at minimum, recuse himself from having anything to do with our paper. I am certainly not going to waste more of my time submitting anything to Dr. Davelaar for consideration.

If you rejected the manuscript before you published the abstract, I would not bother to deal with Frontiers at all. However, you published the abstract and then you unpublished it. As you must realize, unpublishing the abstract was not only a breach of contract but also serious defamation in front of tens of thousands if not millions of people.

In my opinion, you can still reverse Dr. Davelaar’s actions but you would have to act promptly. The first step is to apologize. The second step is to reverse Dr. Davelaar’s actions and immediately restore the abstract, immediately publish the article, and immediately notify thousands of people who requested a copy through your portal that it was published. I have no faith that anyone in Frontiers can recognize Frontiers’ mistakes and perform the reversal. But if by any chance someone is, please contact me.

Best regards,

Dr. Bob Uttl

Attachment Author Proof Figure 9 page

[Quoted text hidden]



Author’s Proof -- Figure9-AdjustedForFlynnEffect-highlighted.pdf

474K