Reviewer's report

Title: Publication bias in situ

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Reviewer: Johannes L.H. Evers

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In this manuscript the author argues that apart from traditional well-recognized publication bias (the file drawer phenomenon) a more subtle form of publication bias exists, consisting of the underreporting of parts of the analysis performed in a study, i.e. those parts that fail to render significant results. The term introduced for this form of publication bias, "in situ publication bias" suggests this form of publication to be a minimal, benign (clinical definition) or at most premalignant stage of full-blown publication bias. This is misleading. In fact, PBIS is publication bias in its purest form, perhaps more hidden, but definitely at least as malignant as the traditional PB. Labelling it differently will compound the problem, or will not help solving the matter, at least not for clinicians. Whether it has any philosophical or theoretical advantages however also remains to be seen. This referee, a clinician, is not impressed. This PBIS problem seems to be rather artificial, and the idea of considering not publishing part of the analysis performed in the context of a particular study being very different from not publishing a study at all does not appeal. Investigators, editors, referees, readers of research casu quo research publications should be aware of the many potential forms of bias, especially in observational studies. PB is one of these. Whether PB is considered as pertaining to not publishing anything or not publishing everything, although theoretically appealing, in clinical practical sense is an exercise in futility.