

Reviewing manuscripts that focus on other countries: Suggestions for American reviewers.

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You might be asked to review a manuscript submitted to an American journal that focuses on another part of the world for two different reasons. The most common reason why you were chosen is because you listed this region as part of your expertise. Sometimes editors will seek you out because you are an expert on that particular theme even though you may not know about that region of the world. In the first case, even if you are an expert on that region, you may know about some arenas of scholarship but not others, or you knew about the place a long time ago and you have not kept up with the literature.

Can you conduct reviews if you are not the perfect match? Based on my experience as Deputy Editor of *Gender & Society*, where I was responsible for most international submissions, I would say ‘Yes, you can.’ Follow these rules:

1. Do let the editor know about the limits of your expertise. Sometimes it is hard for the editor to judge the extent of your expertise when they are reading the list you provided. For instance, even though I am a skilled reviewer on many aspects of the US, I do not have sufficient knowledge of the scholarly gender literature on American Christianity. Similarly, no editor really expects you to know everything about a region. If you specify the limits of your knowledge, it is easier for the editor to assess how many reviews they need to get a good quality review of a particular manuscript.

2. Practice good principles of reviewing. (a) Try to “mentor” the article. Pick out the strong points and try to suggest how the article can be improved, instead of being critical only. (b) Even if you are not impressed with the article, express your concerns in supportive language. This is especially important because you may be communicating with scholars in another parts of the world. (c) Provide detailed comments so that the author (and editors) can follow your reasoning.

3. Do not try to make all internationally focused manuscripts fit theoretical concepts that have been developed on the basis of data on America (or Anglophone Euro-America) alone. This is, perhaps, the single most important principle to follow when you are making substantive comments on international articles.

Some “common” concepts may not be applicable at all or they may work in different ways in other parts of the world. For instance, we tend to think of intersectionality in terms of gender/race/class in the US. But racialization may not be *the* primary process of marginalization in other countries. Other processes of marginalization—caste, religion, ethnicity etc.--may be far more relevant to the study. So it is better to *discuss* intersecting marginalization processes instead of

simply suggesting scholarly work on gender/race/class intersections. You might consider prefacing your remark with a phrase like “In American sociology gender scholars increasingly use an intersectional approach where they examine the intersections of gender/race/class.....perhaps you should consider the marginalization processes that intersect with gender in this region.....” In other words, try to generate a conversation on the processes of marginalization in different countries.

Similarly, the structures of institutions vary around the world. For instance exactly who is included in a “nuclear” family varies very significantly around the world. If you are not sure what the author meant, ask for clarification. Do not assume the author meant a two-parent, hetero-sexual, nuclear family.

Try to strike a balance between the background details an author is expected to provide on another country and the report of the actual research. Since the page limits remain the same for every author, asking for a lot of background details affects the author’s ability to present nuances of the research. Try to ask for minimum details that are relevant to the theme alone.

International articles are very valuable for expanding our collective understanding of scholarship in other countries. Encourage authors to draw on “local” scholarship. If an international article is being written almost wholly based on Euro-American literature, you might want to ask for more reference to scholarship from those countries.

4. It is okay to **direct scholars to scholarship in other languages**. Since you cannot assume the author knows the language, you might provide a brief overview in English of what you would like the author to consider. While your objective is not to provide an entire literature review, there may be places where you push for more international scholarly engagement. If particular issues and social concepts best capture the realities of a region, and there is sufficient scholarly literature on these concepts, ask the author to consider these concepts. Such engagement, where it is relevant, will enrich everyone’s scholarship. For instance the term Sanskritization is used to describe upward mobility of caste groups, but this mobility has varying gendered consequences. Help the author to work out the implications of their study.

AND,

5. If you are reviewing articles in social life in more than one country, please remember that people who are racial minorities in the US, may be members of majorities elsewhere.