

**A few tips for reviewing. Patricia Yancey Martin, August 2010, ASA meeting, Atlanta:**

- 1) Your number one job is to help the author improve the paper (for publication). Even if you recommend to the editor that it be rejected for the journal it is submitted to, YOUR JOB is to help the author improve the manuscript (and thereby learn about the craft of publishing).
- 2) Write your comments in any fashion, order, etc. that works for you BUT before submitting the review, organize and edit as follows:
  - a) Start by recognizing the paper's and author's strengths (however modest they are), e.g., awareness of appropriate literature, success at describing theory, use of a national data set, etc. etc. In short, comment positively on some aspect(s) of the paper at the start. Even POORLY written/conceptualized papers require a great deal of effort and it is our job, as reviewers, to recognize that if we possibly can.
  - b) Put the itty bitty comments (litany of spelling errors, verb-subject errors, lack of clarity, etc. etc.) at the end.
  - c) At the start of the review, make general comments that, as you understand, summarize the paper's aims and contributions. (As YOU read the paper! Not as the abstract or author claims.) In your view, what does the paper do or aim to do? Does it then do that? If YOU, as reader, miss the mark, the author will recognize (one hopes) that the writer/manuscript is less than clear. And will, again we hope, correct for that issue in the revision.
  - d) Edit out any 'attitude' that may have crept into your comments, based on your emotional reactions. Here are examples of "attitude" that is gratuitous and fails to help the author.

"This paper makes no sense!"

"This author must not have any colleagues who will read and offer constructive criticism."

"Why did the author say to go to a URL site for details on the methods. This is totally inappropriate and ridiculous!"

"I happen to know these data well and this study totally distorts and misuses them! The author should attend a workshop at XXX to figure out what he or she is doing."

Think about how the points in the above-comments might be made without being smart-alecky and destructive . . for example:

"I urge the author to clarify (and further develop) the focus and contributions of the paper so readers like myself can better understand. As it stands, I am unclear."

"Before the author resubmits the paper, and after revising it (based on this and other reviews and the editor's directions), I urge him/her to ask a friendly colleague to give it a read and answer this question: Is the question (or point) of the paper crystal clear? Are its contributions to sociological insights/knowledge about society clear? If that person says no, ask them to explain and revise again before resubmitting."

"I have to say: I was taken aback by the author's suggestion that the reader consult a website to learn more about the data for this study. In my view, all important information belongs in the paper (although I am not opposed to the fact that "supplementary" information/data is available at such a site). I suggest that all the reader needs to know about the data and methods be included in the paper.

"I am familiar with the data for this study and am concerned that some of the ways it is used here is unusual, possibly wrong. The author may benefit from contacting XXXX to inquire about his/her interpretation of the data (particularly, e.g., relative to blah blah) to be sure their understanding/use is correct. I have found, in fact, that participating in workshops about a complex data set is immensely useful. The US government supports sociologists to

attend such workshops often, primarily in summer. The author may want to look into that possibility.”

- 3) Provide guidance on missing sources. One of the more useful things a reviewer does is to direct authors to publications that centrally relate to the paper’s agenda but which are missing. Be as specific as possible, e.g., give names of authors and journals and if you can, the paper’s approximate title & year of publication. (Enough information so the author can find the source.) If you feel strongly about how a source can be used to improve the paper, be specific and explain your reasoning. For instance, suppose the author has used the concept “feminist identity” in the title and yet the paper never defines feminist identity or reviews theoretical work about what it is, whether it exists, how it works, is ‘acquired,’ etc. If you can give the author specific help in this regard, do so.

Here is an excerpt from a review that I wrote recently; it was a second review of the paper (and I read the first draft too). I feel badly that the paper is still not up to par and I try in my comments to keep my frustration and/or disapproval low key. The authors have worked hard on the revision; that much is clear. But they are saying they do one thing while presenting evidence about another dynamic. So . . . all I can say is how I see it. And the editor and authors must take it from there.

The authors of this paper clearly know the social movement literature and have (now) done a thorough review of theory and research on collective identity. And they have a rich, rare, and valuable data set that social movement and gender scholars can learn from. I also think they probably have a good paper here somewhere. But, again, I have concerns. I remain puzzled about why they say the paper contributes to an understanding of HOW collective identity emerges. They claim to be telling a story about **how the x’s activists’ collective identity developed**. Yet, as I read the paper, they fail to tell that story. They *do tell a story about a social movement organization*, its history, its opponents, its tactics and strategies. But they do not show how the collective identity of the XXX activists/environmentalists developed over time. As it stands, the paper is (potentially) a story of the XXX activists’ social movement group/initiative. It is not centrally about collective identity and its emergence over time. The following comments contain suggestions for remedying the situation and, perhaps, changing the focus of the paper to the movement organization’s mobilization tactics, etc., and away from the emergence of the activists’ collective identity. Blah blah. .

4. Reserve your recommendation about publication (yes or no, reject, revise & resubmit, etc.) for the Editor only. It is the editor’s call. An editor can go against the views of the reviewers, even if we (authors) sometimes feel this is unwarranted. In any case, be very clear in your comments to the Editor about your recommendation. But let the author know how the paper can be improved regardless of whether the journal to which it is submitted accepts it.