

Reviewer Guidelines for *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity*

Thank you for agreeing to review a manuscript for *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity (SRE)*. Reviewing peer manuscripts is one of the cornerstones upon which our discipline is built. As such, it is very important that you take reviewing seriously. *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity* publishes only the best sociological work in the study of race and ethnicity – regardless of theoretical, epistemological, and methodological orientation. As a peer reviewer, you should reap intellectual benefits of the review process, benefit from reading the most cutting edge research in the sociology of race and ethnicity, and have the additional satisfaction of constructively assisting the author in making their manuscript the strongest and most contributive it can be. All of this emerges from your prompt, full, and constructive peer review of the manuscript.

In addition to publishing original full-length manuscripts, *SRE* also publishes pieces on the pedagogy of sociology of race and ethnicity. If you are reviewing for this section, please note that the Pedagogy Section of *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity* provides a space dedicated to publishing cutting-edge work related to the teaching of the sociology of race and ethnicity, from introductory undergraduate courses to advanced graduate courses. Manuscripts should not exceed 2500-3000 words in length, including references and footnotes. Papers might address theory, teaching assessment and reflection, analysis of resources, class exercises, service learning or a combination of these topics. All submissions should be clearly informed by the current literature, and (if applicable) provide evidence of teaching effectiveness.

Recently, the American Sociological Association published an article on the best practices of reviewers in the discipline (Brunsma, Prasad, and Zuckerman 2013). What the authors found is summarized here:

- The average time spent on reviewing manuscripts was 3.4 hours with fairly wide variation. Often this variation depends on the qualities of the manuscript;
- Related, the best reviews tend to be ones that are done fairly soon after agreeing to do the review, instead of awaiting the final reminder;
- Lengths of reviews range from 1-3 single-spaced documents;
- Those who review many manuscripts have found that it is better to write the review with the “forest” in mind – the big picture, central issues and arguments in the manuscript, while not forgetting the “trees.” In other words, long lists of negative and problematic details without the bigger picture, makes the reviews less useful for the author;
- Importantly, the found that reviews that are constructive, kind, supportive, are much more useful than those that are destructive, mean, etc. In other words, review unto others as you would have them review unto you.

Their conclusion was this:

“Although the responses do not reveal a silver bullet that can magically reduce manuscript review times, one element of good practice is clear: when you agree to do a review, actually put into your schedule the time that it will take to do it (three to four hours on average). It may be helpful to both author and reviewer if reviewers keep

comments to big picture, substantive issues, particularly ‘how the argument holds together; connections between argument and analysis; methodological clarity and appropriateness.’”

At *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity* we agree with these sentiments of best reviewing practices and believe this will lead to shorter review times, stronger reviews, and, ultimately, a much healthier journal with indeed the best sociological research in race and ethnicity.

One of the top (and most effective) journals in our discipline is *Gender & Society*. What follows is drawn heavily from their *Guidelines for Gender & Society Reviewers* (2011). These guidelines provide more specific advice for reviewing manuscripts in a journal that desires not only the strongest reviews, but also the most constructive, supportive, and kind ones.

- First, read the paper;
- Begin by identifying the paper’s aims, as you see them (this may differ from the author’s statement), clearly stating what the paper argues, and what its contribution is meant to be. This should be one or two sentences that help the editor and author know whether the paper’s main point has come across. In addition, note the strengths of the paper (even if you do not think the paper as a whole is strong);
- Next, present the comments you see as most central to an effective revision of the paper. As Ferree (2004) notes, the core of the review should identify whether the research question contributes to larger theory, whether the analysis actually answers the research question, and whether the conclusions flow from the analyses. Identifying weaknesses can help the author craft a stronger paper, which sometimes means reframing the piece theoretically, refocusing the question, or reinterpreting the analysis;
- Here, you want to provide clear advice about how the author might address the problems you have identified or the questions you have raised. For example, if you feel the author is missing crucial references that would help them build a better argument, provide those references; if you think the author needs to provide more information about methods, explain what is missing; if you have problems with the analyses or feel that they are not persuasive enough, explain how the analyses could become more persuasive. Do not be overly specific and nitpicky, rewrite the paper for the author, or flood the author with many pages of comments;
- End with the small points that will not dramatically change the paper’s form or argument, such as formatting of tables or figures, excessive use of jargon, writing errors, or other minor changes. Reviewers need not provide line-by-line editing. The journal will help with copy-editing the manuscript – the reviewer’s time and attention is better spent on ensuring that the argument is sound;
- After writing the review, go back through it and edit out any language that seems emotionally laden. For example, rather than saying “This paper is terrible,” you might note, “This paper has weaknesses in both its theoretical framework and its empirical analyses,” or even “While focused around a very interesting case, this paper currently has weaknesses in both its theoretical framework and its empirical analyses.” Using neutral or supportive language will make the author much more likely to heed your comments. You may indeed feel that the paper is terrible, and that the author has wasted your time and energy. But that frustration shouldn’t spill into your review. The goal is to improve the paper. Very occasionally, the reviewer may be so at odds with a paper that it is

difficult to write a fair review. In this case, be honest with the editor and author about the intellectual disagreement that affects your reading of the paper;

- Finally, make sure that your review does not notify the author of your recommendation (as the final call is the editor's); if recommending a rejection, feel free to list a more appropriate journal.

The best review is a constructive review that truly betters the paper. Thank you so much for taking part in this work for the journal!