

## *Symbolic Interaction* Statement on Publication Ethics

Most statements on publication ethics have been written by biomedical journals for their own communities, although they typically purport to apply to everybody and have been adopted by some international journal publishers and research funders as if they were universal. This statement is informed by the thinking of the Committee on Publication Ethics ([www.publicationethics.org.uk](http://www.publicationethics.org.uk)) and by Wiley-Blackwell's own *Best Practice Guidelines* ([www.BlackwellPublishing.com/PublicationEthics](http://www.BlackwellPublishing.com/PublicationEthics)) but is adapted to the issues, concerns and established approaches of the social sciences and humanities. Where issues are not covered here, the editors, editorial board and owners of the journal will make reference to such sources in framing their approach but will at all times consider their appropriateness in application to the fields of scholarship represented in the journal.

The statement is divided into four sections, covering the rights of research participants and the responsibilities of authors, reviewers and editors.

### **Rights of Research Participants**

Research participants have fundamental rights to privacy, to the extent that this is appropriate in the setting where research is conducted. Where data are collected by the observation of public places, they have a right to expect that their individual identity will not be identifiable in published work. Where data are collected in private places, or at the researcher's initiative in public places, participants have the right to take autonomous decisions about whether or not to take part in studies. 'Public' and 'private' are defined here in common sense rather than legal terms: a shopping mall may be legally private space but would be treated as if public by most users, for example.

*Symbolic Interaction* is an international journal and, as such, we do not seek to prescribe any particular approach to the ethical governance of research. We expect that any paper submitted will have been approved by such bodies as may be relevant in a particular national context. However, our fundamental concern is with the conduct of research as a professional matter. Approval by an ethical committee does not guarantee ethical research and research that has not been approved by an ethical committee is not necessarily unethical. Where a study raises ethical issues, particularly in relation to vulnerable groups or populations or to decisions not to disclose wrongdoing to competent authorities, we expect that authors will acknowledge and discuss the issues, and justify their approach, or cite other reasonably accessible publications from the study which contain such discussions. This is especially relevant to covert research, or research involving deception, which has a legitimate place in the social sciences but which should be reserved for those circumstances where its use can clearly be warranted. Observations in public places are not considered to be covert research: this is understood to mean the deliberate penetration of private spaces for the purposes of adding to the wider understanding of society and human behaviour.

The editors, editorial board and journal owners expect all papers submitted to respect the rights of research participants as outlined here.

## **Responsibilities of Authors**

### 1. *Who is an author?*

An author is someone who satisfies all three of the following criteria:

- a. Has made a substantial contribution to the conception and design of a study, or the acquisition of data, or the analysis and interpretation of data;
- b. Has drafted the paper or revised it critically for important intellectual content;
- c. Has had final approval of the version to be published.

No-one should be named as an author unless they satisfy these criteria: everyone who satisfies these criteria should be named as an author. Authors must publish under their own names unless there is an explicit agreement with the editors that it would be appropriate to use a pseudonym in order to protect an author or a research site.

If you are working with a research team, especially if it is multidisciplinary, we recommend that you discuss expectations of authorship at an early point and establish an agreed approach in order to avoid subsequent arguments. We expect that everyone who is named on the paper to share collective responsibility for its compliance with our approach to publication ethics. The team leader or Principal Investigator is ultimately responsible for the ethics of the research itself. This person need not be an author but should be identifiable from the acknowledgements. If we have concerns about the ethics of a study, we reserve the right to make a direct approach to the Principal Investigator in investigating its conduct.

### 2. *Study Design*

Research participants have a right to expect that the studies in which they are involved are carried out to appropriate standards of scholarship. Poor quality research abuses the goodwill of the people who take part and is inherently unethical. Editors and reviewers for *Symbolic Interaction* will always try to ensure that published papers promote a high standard of scholarship in sociology. The research design should be clearly described in any paper, or through citation to other reasonably accessible publications from the study.

### 3. *Data Analysis*

Research participants have a right to expect that data will be analysed in a fair, responsible and disinterested fashion. Editors and reviewers for *Symbolic Interaction* will always try to ensure that published papers promote a high standard of scholarship in sociology. Fabrication or falsification of data are unacceptable and will be treated as misconduct, although we distinguish this from the legitimate editing of qualitative data to protect the identities of research participants. This is acceptable provided that it does not alter the substance or evidential value of the data involved. All sources and methods must be fully described in the paper, or through citation to other reasonably accessible

publications from the study. The paper should also mention any relevant issues of potential bias and explain how these have been dealt with.

#### 4. *Plagiarism*

Other scholars have a right to expect that any use of their ideas or data will be given proper credit. Plagiarism ranges from the unreferenced use of other people's, published or unpublished, ideas to submission of a complete paper, sometimes in a different language, which is passed off as the work of the person submitting it, rather than the original author. All sources must be disclosed and credited. We reserve the right to use plagiarism-detection software without prior consultation.

#### 5. *Redundant Publication*

Redundant publication occurs when two or more papers, without full cross-reference, share the same hypothesis or question, data, discussion points or conclusions. This is regarded as a major sin in the biomedical sciences because it may mislead systematic reviewers who are performing secondary statistical manipulations on published work. In the social sciences, it is accepted that it may often be appropriate to publish similar materials in journals with different readerships so that findings receive appropriate dissemination. This is particularly important when social scientists are working within multidisciplinary teams or seeking to reach professional audiences through publication in journals read by those professions. The problem occurs when such duplication is not acknowledged through relevant self-citation. This is not a licence to submit the same text on multiple occasions: *Symbolic Interaction* is a sociology journal and expects submissions to be focussed on sociological issues rather than on issues of policy or practice that might be relevant to other readers. We expect that anything submitted to *Symbolic Interaction* can be clearly distinguished from any other account of the research submitted to other sociology journals.

#### 6. *Multiple Submission*

Multiple simultaneous submission of the same paper to different journals is unacceptable. If we find out about it, we will withdraw the paper from consideration and ensure that the other journal editors are also aware that it has happened.

#### 7. *Conflicts of Interest*

These are an author's commitments that may not be apparent to a reader or which may influence the judgements of reviewers or editors. The key question for an author to ask themselves is whether revelation of these commitments would cause a reasonable reader to feel misled or deceived. Such commitments may be personal, commercial, political, academic or financial. Relevant interests must be declared to the editors and should be summarized in a note at the end of papers. If your research has received any funding, whether externally or from your university, you must declare this in the same note or in the acknowledgements to the paper.

#### 8. *Media Relations*

In some countries, scholars are under pressure to court favourable media coverage of their work in order to demonstrate its 'impact'. This must be balanced against the scholarly objective of ensuring that new knowledge is only accepted as a valid addition to the discipline as a result of rigorous and impartial peer review. The substance of papers submitted to the journal should not be made available to the mass media until the peer review process is completed. If a paper is accepted, the editors and publishers will be pleased to work with authors to ensure maximum publicity for their research. If material appears in the mass media before peer review is completed, we reserve the right to withdraw the paper from consideration.

See also: Wager E & Kleinert S (2011) Responsible research publication: international standards for authors. A position statement developed at the 2nd World Conference on Research Integrity, Singapore, July 22-24, 2010. Chapter 50 in: Mayer T & Steneck N (eds) *Promoting Research Integrity in a Global Environment*. Imperial College Press / World Scientific Publishing, Singapore (pp 309-16). (ISBN 978-981-4340-97-7)

### **Responsibilities of Reviewers (Referees)**

#### 1. *Who is a Reviewer?*

A reviewer, also known as a referee in some countries, is an external expert chosen by the editors to provide written opinions on papers that have been submitted, with a view to improving them. The role of reviewers is to advise the editors. The final responsibility for decisions on what is and is not published rests with the editors, who may take a different view from that of the reviewers, based on their wider view of the pool of submissions, the mission of the journal and the space available in the journal. *Symbolic Interaction* operates a double-blind peer review process, where authors are expected to anonymize their papers and reviewers' identities remain confidential unless they choose to disclose them.

#### 2. *What do we expect from reviewers?*

- a. Reviewers should provide constructive, speedy, accurate, courteous, unbiased and justified reports;
- b. Reviewers must not make use of any data, arguments, interpretations or findings in any paper they are invited to review unless they have the author's permission;
- c. Reviewers must maintain the confidentiality of the manuscripts they are asked to assess;
- d. Reviewers must declare any relevant conflicts of interest to editors when they are invited to review a manuscript;
- e. Reviewers must independently consider whether the ethics of research reported in a paper are professionally acceptable: this must not be assumed from the presence or absence of approval by an ethical review committee;

- f. Reviewers must consider the possibility of plagiarism in papers they are invited to review and draw the editors' attention, in confidence, to any material that they consider to be problematic.

## **Responsibilities of Editors**

### 1. *Role of Editors*

The editors of *Symbolic Interaction* are appointed by the President and Executive of the Society for the Study of Symbolic Interaction on the recommendation of the Publications Committee. They have exclusive responsibility for decisions about whether to accept or reject papers. Where breaches of this statement are identified, or there is evidence that suggests research misconduct, the editors will work closely with the President and representatives of the publishers to determine what action would be appropriate. This may take a variety of forms, from a private reprimand to a formal communication to an author's employer or funder, where behaviour is considered to be particularly serious.

### 2. *General Duties*

- a. The editors' decisions to accept or reject a paper for publication will be based only on the paper's importance, originality, clarity of expression and relevance to the mission statement of the journal, relative to the pool of submissions and the space available;
- b. The editors will treat all submitted papers as confidential and will not make use of any data, arguments, interpretations or conclusions without the author's permission;
- c. The editors will screen all papers submitted for publication to determine whether they are relevant to the journal's mission statement and show sufficient importance, originality, and clarity of expression to justify taking them into peer review;
- d. The editors will clearly identify any content, such as book reviews or Editors' Invitation sections, that have not been subject to full peer review.
- e. The editors will give sympathetic and impartial consideration to studies that challenge or debate with work that has previously been published in the journal;
- f. If a published paper is subsequently found to contain major flaws, the editors will ensure that the record is corrected prominently and publicly.

### 3. *Conflicts of Interest*

Where editorial conflicts of interest have implications for the review process, this will be led by another member of the editorial team or referred to the Chair of the Publications Committee to oversee the process. In particular, any submission by a member of the editorial team, a research fellow or assistant working on a grant held by a team member, a student currently supervised by a team member, or a current collaborator of a team member, will be referred to the Chair of the Publications Committee.

4. *Advertising*

Advertising in *Advertising in Symbolic Interaction* is a matter for the publishers. Editorial decisions will not be influenced by advertising revenue or reprint potential.

5. *Complaints*

All complaints should be directed to the editors in the first instance. If these cannot be resolved satisfactorily, the complainant may ask for the matter to be reviewed by the President of the Society for the Study of Symbolic Interaction, or an independent person nominated by the President. The decision of the President, or their nominee, shall be final and binding on all parties.

6. *Guest editors*

This code applies fully to any person who may be invited to act as a Guest Editor for a special issue.

See also Kleinert S & Wager E (2011) Responsible research publication: international standards for editors. A position statement developed at the 2nd World Conference on Research Integrity, Singapore, July 22-24, 2010. Chapter 51 in: Mayer T & Steneck N (eds) *Promoting Research Integrity in a Global Environment*. Imperial College Press / World Scientific Publishing, Singapore (pp 317-28). (ISBN 978-981-4340-97-7)

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