

## **SYMPOSIUM: ETHICS IN REFEREEING**

*In a recent discussion on the SPORHIST discussion list, Steve Reiss raised concerns about the ethics of refereeing, referring to a specific instance where a supervisor published a review of the work of a student. To summarise these debates and to look for ways of dealing with similar situations, the ASSH Bulletin invited two academic sports historians to comment on the ethics of refereeing—Editor.*

### **ETHICS IN THE REVIEW AND REFEREE PROCESS**

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Recently I wrote in glowing terms about a book in my column for H-Arete. I pointed out that I had read the manuscript while it was under development and that I had been thanked by the author in the preface. I believe, and I think most people would agree, that given my level of association with the book prior to publication I should not do a formal review for either a journal or a newspaper.

Of course not everyone is in agreement on these matters as can be seen in the practices of some reviewers in the field of Sport History or in the historical profession generally. Some discussion of these issues was triggered by a note to the SPORHIST LIST by Steve Riess in which he pointed out that a review of a recent book written for a professional journal had been done by the person who had been the thesis director for the author of that particular book. It seems self-evident to me that this was inappropriate, but obviously it did not seem so to the reviewer.

The American Historical Association has a formal position that offers guidelines in the matter of conflict of interest. Two sentences seem pertinent here:

A conflict of interest arises when an individual's personal interest or bias threatens or appears to threaten to compromise his or her ability to act in accordance with professional or public obligations. . . . An individual should normally refuse to participate in the formal review of work by anyone for whom he or she feels a sense of personal obligation, competition, or enmity.

Clearly reviewing the work of one's student should never be done.

In general I would say that any prepublication reading or review of a manuscript for the publisher or the author should exclude you as a reviewer.

There are of course less obvious issues and situations. If you know an author, and we know most of the people in our field, should you review that author's book? Maybe, but maybe not. What is the standard to make that