

ETHICS, SPORTS HISTORY REVIEWING AND OTHER MATTERS

Roy Hay
Deakin University
haysoc@deakin.edu.au

After I had made a tiny contribution to a debate on Sporthist List on ethics in the teaching and writing of sports history, the editor of the *ASSH Bulletin* asked me to write a brief piece for the next issue. It is at times like these when one realises how great a loss the society has suffered through the passing of its leading ethical practitioner and writer Bob Paddick, who set standards of scholarship and humanity to which the rest of us can only aspire.

The original debate was begun by Steven Reiss who was concerned that a named academic had reviewed the published work of his student in a learned journal and this raised, in his mind, serious questions of conflict of interest and ethical probity. What began as a low key but serious debate on a matter of principle was derailed by an intemperate ad hominem attack on Reiss by Jon Entine, accusing him of violating the standards he claimed to support. Entine's diatribe was based on what he thought was Reiss's slight of Entine in an article in the *Journal of Sport History* in 1998, which turned out not to have been written by Reiss at all, but by Patrick Miller. Miller incidentally stood by his article.

Dick Crepeau, who is a fount of sound sense in these matters, argued that 'any prepublication reading or review of a manuscript for the publisher or the author should exclude you as a reviewer'. He wrestled with the idea of reviewing the work of someone known to you, or who mentions you in the preface of the book in question. Given the relative sizes of the North American sports history pool and the Australian, these issues arise much more frequently in our tiny outpost of scholarship. I feel for our editors as they try to maintain standards of scholarly objectivity and disinterested judgment, and yet get the flow of material which comes across their desks handled with probity, dispatch and fairness, both procedurally and practically. As I said on Sporthist List, 'Even blind refereeing is very hard since many writers can easily be identified. Yet we cannot send everything overseas for assessment without running into other kinds of problems, lack of knowledge of fields, delays in processing, accusations of cultural cringe, etc'.

There is no lack of advice on ethical standards available in the scientific community. The ethical guidelines to publication of chemical research of the American Chemical Society include eleven Ethical Obligations of Reviewers of Manuscripts, written in clear, simple prose. They cover the obligation we accept to review as members of the scientific community, the reasons why one should reject an invitation to review, the identification of conflicts of interest and the appropriate responses: 'A reviewer should not evaluate a manuscript authored or co-authored by a person with whom the reviewer has a personal or professional connection if the relationship would bias judgment of the manuscript'. Sound practical advice is included. 'Reviewers should

explain and support their judgments adequately so that editors and authors may understand the basis of their comments. Any statement that an observation, derivation, or argument had been previously reported should be accompanied by the relevant citation. Unsupported assertions by reviewers (or by authors in rebuttal) are of little value and should be avoided'. The last of this set of guidelines is similar to my comment on the original debate, 'The review of a submitted manuscript may sometimes justify criticism, even severe criticism, from a reviewer. When appropriate, such criticism may be offered in published papers. However, in no case is personal criticism of the author considered to be appropriate'. My less precise comment was 'moderation in ad hominem and vigorous debate on issues, play the ball not the man seem to be the relevant cliches for the moment'.

Steve Geitschier raised the conflict of interest issue in a slightly different context, that of reviewing in non-academic sports journals. 'What I would urge upon our colleagues is quite simple: full disclosure, in two senses: first, when discussing a reviewing assignment with the assigning editor; and secondly, when necessary, within the text of the review itself'. This seems a very good rule of thumb and it is incumbent on reviewers to draw the attention of the editor to any conflict they may perceive, which they may believe the editor has not raised. The reader should be placed in a position where he or she can exercise informed judgment about the relationship between the reviewer and the author(s) of the work under consideration.

Coincidentally with the request from the editor of the *ASSH Bulletin*, I received an e-mail from the Ethics Committee of Deakin University seeking clarification of our intended procedures for the security, and the subsequent destruction, of information collected by means of interview for our research on the social history of Australian soccer. Australia's new privacy legislation which seeks to ensure that data collected for one purpose on the basis of informed consent is not used for another purpose without the specific agreement of the person who provided it, raises serious issues for historical scholarship. An appeal to this legislation was used by the University to inhibit the provision of a list of members of the university in a CD-ROM accompanying a history of the university. Since the members had not agreed to their names being collected for this purpose the list might not be provided to the researchers.

So two important issues arise. Should historical evidence collected for one purpose be destroyed when that purpose has been achieved? Should information collected for one purpose only be used in perpetuity for that purpose in the absence of informed consent to change of use? In the latter case this would seem to be diametrically opposed to the canons of historical scholarship of the American Historical Society, which include: 'Historians should carefully document their findings and thereafter be prepared to make available to others their sources, evidence, and data, including the documentation they develop through interviews'. If material is destroyed after the completion of research, does this rule out the possibility of detection of certain forms of scientific fraud which have been known to occur? As the AHA

says, 'All historians share responsibility for maintenance of the highest standards of intellectual integrity. When appraising manuscripts for publication, reviewing books, or evaluating peers for placement, promotion, and tenure, scholars must evaluate the honesty and reliability with which the historian uses primary and secondary source materials. Scholarship flourishes in an atmosphere of openness and candor, which should include the scrutiny and discussion of academic deception'.

Each of the issues raised here could be the subject of an article in itself, and other contributors to this debate may take some of them much further. It is an appropriate time for the society to engage in debate on these matters, particularly as I have argued above in the context of a very small group of practitioners seeking to maintain standards of scholarship that match those in the rest of the world and simultaneously encourage a wider community of those interested in the history of sport to join us in our enterprise.

REFERENCES

1. Steven A Riess, Ethics, ISPHES – Sport History Scholars List, SPORHIST@PDOMAIN.UWINDSOR.CA, Sun, 13 Jan 2002 10:38:45 –0600.
2. Dick Crepeau, Re Ethics, *ibid*, Monday 14 Jan 2002, 10:26 AM.
3. American Chemical Society, Ethical Guidelines, <http://pubs.acs.org/instruct/ethic.html>, accessed 15 February 2002; See also, American Mathematical Society Ethical Guidelines, <http://www.ams.org/secretary/ethics.html>; American Historical Association, Statement on Standards of Professional Conduct, <http://www.theaha.org/pubs/standard.htm#Scholarship>.
4. Steve Gietschier, Re Ethics, Sport History Scholars List, SPORHIST@PDOMAIN.UWINDSOR.CA, Mon, 14 Jan 2002 10:51:00 EST.
5. Though not perhaps for commercial organisations. See the Important notice regarding privacy issued by the ANZ Banking Group, February 2002 and the list of organisations and individuals to whom 'personal information about you that we obtain from you or from anyone else, regardless of how or when it comes to us', may be communicated.
6. American Historical Association (AHA), Statement on Standards of Professional Conduct, <http://www.theaha.org/pubs/standard.htm#Scholarship>.
7. AHA, Updated statement on plagiarism.