

To: REDACTED

Associate Peer Review Manager

From: Dr. Mike Sosteric

Associate Professor

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January 6<sup>th</sup>, 2025

Dear [REDACTED]

I am compelled to share this formal complaint regarding the editorial practices of *Sociological Forum* concerning the desk rejection of my manuscript, "Religion Matters, But It's Only Half the Story". The rejection lacked transparency, fairness, and a legitimate justification—violating COPE (Committee on Publication Ethics) guidelines and contradicting both Wiley's ethical publishing standards and the journal's own stated policies. In this letter, I outline the inconsistencies in their reasoning, including a contrived post-hoc justification that conflicts with their published invitation for authors to "write and respond" to *Forum* submissions. Despite multiple attempts to seek clarity and ethical oversight, the editorial team failed to provide a satisfactory explanation or identify an avenue for resolution. The editors also stonewalled requests for direction to an *independent* ethical oversight body at Wiley, or to indicate whether this exists or not. I eventually had to seek out the body myself.

These events raise serious concerns about bias, accountability and fairness in their editorial process, and I am now requesting redress in line with ethical guidelines.

#### Time Line

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On December 10 I submitted my paper "'Religion Does Matter' But It is Only Half the Story." to *Sociological Forum*. This paper was submitted to the Forum section of the journal in response to a previous article, more of a Forum submission really because of its short length, by Samuel Perry

entitled entitled “Religion Does Matter (And Doesn't Go Away When Sociologists Ignore It).” (Perry 2023)

On December 16 I received a desk rejection from Tammy L. Anderson, Ann V. Bell, and Asia Friedman. In violation of COPE Core Practices which require that a specific, transparent reason be given, no specific reason was given, only the subtle, editorially inappropriate statement “To put this into context, we accept less than 15% of the manuscripts we receive.”<sup>1</sup>

On December 16 at 12:07 I sent an email response back to SF asking for a reason for the rejection. After waiting over twenty-four hours for a response, I sent another email Dec 17 at 16:43 asking for the editors to provide a reason for the rejection. I cited COPE Core Practices and pointed out that their journal was in violation of these standards.

On December 18<sup>th</sup> at 6:43 am, the editors sent a response back saying that “Your manuscript was submitted as a ‘forum reply’ article. However, as it is not a response to a previously published Forum article (our short commentary section, distinct from our original research articles), it is not appropriate for that article type.”

On Wed December 18<sup>th</sup> at 6:55 I sent a response back indicating that my article was a response to Perry (2023). To this the editors responded “Dear Dr. Sosteric, Your manuscript was submitted as a “forum reply” article. However, as it is not a response to a previously published Forum article (our short commentary section, distinct from our original research articles), it is not appropriate for that article type.”

To this I respond with a screen shot indicating that journal specifically and clearly invites authors to both “write or reply” to the Forum on any topic of sociological interest, particularly ones likely to stimulate robust exchange of ideas. I also pointed, in an email dated Dec. 18th, 9:32 am, after going through previous Forum submissions, that “none of them appear to be in response to previous forum submissions. All of them appear to be one-off articles dealing with one or another substantive issue.”

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1 For the record, suggesting a paper is rejected because the journal rejects a lot of papers does not come anywhere near being a meaningful justification. It reads more like an attempt to belittle the author and prevent them from questioning the editorial decision. It’s a common practice, but it should embarrass those who use it, and it should be ended immediately.

## Participate in the journal's namesake — **write or reply to the Forum!**

We are committed to upholding the unique namesake tradition of the journal. To do so, we are soliciting short works of up to 2000 words that reflect the spirit and tradition of the Forum. We welcome submissions on any topic of sociological interest, particularly those on contemporary social issues likely to stimulate a robust exchange of ideas, which we will publish in the form of Forum Replies in subsequent issues. You can find Anne Roschelle's recent Forum essay on social inequalities and abortion [here](#).

At this point it became clear to me that the editors were likely expressing personal bias, violating the journals own policies and violating COPE guidelines which require them to:

- **Base decisions solely on the merit, scope, and quality of the manuscript.**
- Ensure that editorial decisions are **consistent and objective**.
- Communicate decisions with authors in a manner that is **transparent and honest**.

Since

- no substantive reasons for the desk rejection were ever provided, despite repeated requests
- the paper is well-written and carefully documented,
- the paper addresses a topic previously broached in the journal (sociological bias against religion),
- the paper extends that discussion to include another well-known sociological bias against studying mystical experience,
- the paper is very likely to stimulate robust dialog,
- the rejection letter and subsequent responses clearly violate COPE guidelines,
- the editors seem to be intentionally grasping for “technicalities” while blatantly ignoring their own published call for papers,

I can only assume the desk rejection occurred because the editors themselves have personal biases. I began to ask for direction to an independent over-site body but was repeatedly stonewalled.

I would like to note that both COPE and Wiley stress the importance of maintaining trust between editors, authors, and the academic community. Editorial decisions must demonstrate:

- **Consistency** with established submission guidelines and practices.
- **Respect** for authors through clear and fair reasoning.

Unfortunately, editors achieved neither consistency with their own established guidelines and practices nor respect for the author through clear and fair reasoning. This entire incident points to serious problems with editorial integrity at this journal and seriously undermines trust in the process of Sociological forum. Indeed. When editors attempt to construct a justification post-hoc—particularly one that conflicts with published policies—they undermine the integrity of the editorial process. This practice not only violates ethical guidelines but also risks perceptions of bias and unprofessionalism.

I believe my paper should be published in the Sociological Forum. I also believe a letter of apology is in order.

Sincerely,

Dr. Mike Sosteric