I'm sorry you dislike my research, but thanks for the brochure

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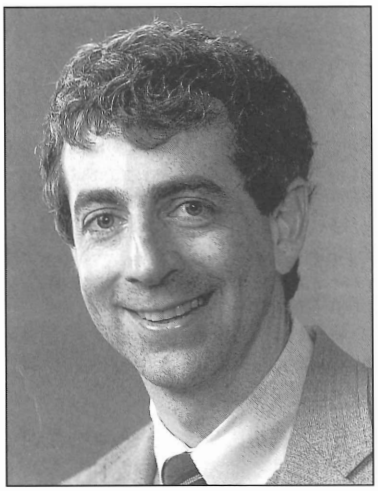

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AT LEAST TWO groups claim they read every research journal article—editorial referees and the senior faculty who decide qualifications for tenure or promotion.

Supposedly, the reviews are on the nature of research and the scholar's contributions to answering interesting questions. But anyone who has gone through either process often wonders just what some of the reviewers read.

Like Gene Siskel reviewing a movie based on the script that he felt should have been written, comments often make you wonder, "Did they read my paper?" They criticize your failure to address points that you did address. They might dislike your conclusions, while not stating why they might be in error.

"It's an interesting study," the comments might note, "but you didn't cite Ira Levent's wonderful paper," yet it's sometimes not clear how that paper would have influenced the research conceptualization. Others might say they "don't like" the numbers you found, you didn't use the hot statistic of the month, or the survey didn't use the scientific method. (I had one paper rejected with a note that "[My] research topic is advertising, not marketing.")

The effects of this process are seen in many papers. A coresearcher once gave me a poorly written text chapter he wanted included in the references. Although possessing (at best) the most oblique relevance to our study, he feared that the author might end up as a journal referee.

These reviewers and colleagues are commenting on the research they would like to do, not what you did. A faculty member once told me his research must use the "scientific method" (as defined by his department faculty) if he ever hopes to be supported for tenure or promotion at his university, even if that method isn't useful or relevant to answering the questions raised in his particular area of expertise.

Everyone seems to dislike some research. However, buyer behavior theory indicates this is logical, since few studies aim at everyone's interests. In such a diverse field, no one claims to be interested in every area of marketing research.

No one reads everything. I have never met anyone who claimed to read every issue of *Journal of Marketing* from cover-to-cover.

But few base their criticisms of research on a lack of interest in the topic. Instead, they seem to say, "The research isn't pure enough for me."

As a result, the often-repeated complaint is that the bulk of marketing research is irrelevant. Relevance can mean all sorts of things, but all faculty members feel they're qualified to judge all journals' articles' "value."

But that is the heart of the problem. Instead of reveling in the diversity of our discipline, faculty disparage new ideas or unusual approaches to old problems. Differing opinions are condemned as "bad" with the fervor of opposing protester groups clashing in front of an abortion clinic.

Maybe marketing research suffers not from irrelevance, but ethnocentrism. In many instances, the researchers are themselves quite narrow: pedantic arguments over the proper "method" replace answering whether an inquiry can add insight to a broad range of marketing issues. Statistics replace conceptual analysis.

In the beginning (that is, at the start of academic research in marketing efforts, back before the glacier melted), marketing research was interdisciplinary with scholars and researchers coming from a variety of fields. But, over time, that has changed. Today, many (most?) researchers have studied marketing as a specialized field.

Too many people now are concerned about the "purity" of the field, as they oppose research by people trained in nonbusiness disciplines, such as psychology or communications. In other words, many scholars often bog down in discussion of the "proper methods" for all research, instead of trying to apply the plethora of perspectives from different disciplines to answer important and pressing questions.

For many researchers, the nature of the research questions becomes secondary to presenting the all-important value of a particular research approach they wish to encourage. Their comments are a virtual brochure on a favored research method or approach to data analysis.

A friend in another department once told me that he just tries to publish articles that will make him famous. Some colleagues (or journal referees) might dislike his research saying "It's not what I would do," but he just wants to generate discussions of ideas.

"For promotion, my senior faculty insist they must like the research," he once complained. "But my publications will not make me famous with them. They already know me."

In the end, to get the research manuscript published, we change the verbs, alter the writing style, and include a few gratuitous citations the reviewers requested. We write, revise, alter, and edit.

Though the research is long done (and not to be redone), we try to meet the editorial demands of the referees so that the paper will be published. And, if we successfully go through the process, we eventually see a set of proofs showing the work that will appear in the journal.

Only then we realize that the paper was revised yet again by a copy editor. After all that rewriting, we might not even recognize the final article. ■