Whose side are we on and for whom do we write?

Notes on issues and challenges facing those researching and evaluating public policy.

Jon Warren, Department of Geography , Durham University

Kayleigh Garthwaite, Department of Geography , Durham University

Abstract

Howard Becker (1967) posed the question "Whose side are we on?", a question which has become an enduring part of discussions within social scientific methodology. This paper explores the key issues in Becker's argument and considers its relevance to researchers today, locating this within a consideration of evaluation based research and policy. Many of the issues Becker discusses remain relevant, yet what has changed radically is the context within which academics operate. In an era where academics and their research are becoming increasingly commodified, this paper contends that the question of who the academic serves and writes for is increasingly important.

Key Words

Academia; hierarchy; Research Excellence Framework; evaluation

Introduction

Almost fifty years ago the American Sociologist Howard S. Becker gave his presidential address

to the annual meeting of the Society for the Study of Social Problems. Becker chose to address

the question "Whose side are we on?. Becker's paper and the questions it posed the social

scientific community have endured. Its central concerns are about whom the academic speaks

for and the extent to which their position in relation to the communities they study, and the issues upon which they comment, should be made clear to their audience. Becker rejects the idea that social scientists can remain fully objective or value free. At the heart of Becker's (1967: 239) argument lies the assertion that: *'The question is not whether we should take sides since we inevitably will but rather whose side are we on?'*, leading to the article being seen as politically and epistemologically radical (Hammersley 2001). Becker's thesis has become an enduring part of the social scientific methodological canon often encountered at an early stage of undergraduate methods courses. The text is often interpreted as being a rallying call for the social scientist to take up the cause of those who do not have power - the social "underdogs" - and can be read as such. Nonetheless, it is much more than just a polemic. "Whose side are we on?" invites the social scientist to recognise that they and their work are part of wider power structures and that research is in all circumstances a political activity. As Hammersley (2001: 91) has further contended: *'Becker believes that systematic and rigorous sociological research inevitably tends to have radical implications'*.

Whilst this paper wishes to explore the key issues in Becker's argument and consider its relevance to researchers today, it will not provide a detailed analysis of the work; that has been done many times before (for example, see Gouldner 1975; Hammersley 2000; 2001; and Liebling 2001, amongst others). Although the key issues Becker discusses are still as relevant today as they were in the late 1960s, 'with the rise of neoliberalism, new public management ,austerity and increasing emphasis on assessing the impact of public services, what has

changed radically is the context within which academics now operate. As well as the question of whose side we are on, the question of who the academic serves and writes for is becoming increasingly important. This paper explores the way in which we need consider whose side we are on as researchers, and the extent to which our work contributes to the cause of that side. It explores accusations of bias, what such accusations actually consist of, and how they can be addressed.

Background and context

Locating Becker

Becker was writing as American involvement in Vietnam approached its peak, and at the height of the civil rights movement. His article can be seen as a part of something bigger, something much wider. This wider question was whether social research and the individuals engaged in it were part of the established order or could contribute to the emerging counterculture. The thread which runs through "Whose side are we on?" is a political one. It was also a question faced by intellectuals in general and not just social scientists. Tom Wolfe (1968: 32) writing on the Californian counter-culture of the mid to late sixties summed it up in this phrase: *'You're either on the bus or off the bus'*, a division apparent within Becker's "Whose side are we on?"

As we have already established, Becker rejects the possibility of objectivity; accordingly, Becker presents the reader with a way to think through their response to any accusation of bias. He defines this as: *'an accusation that the sympathies of the researcher have biased his work and*

3

distorted his finding' (Becker 1967:239). Such accusations are, for Becker, the consequence of societal power relations and what he terms the "*hierarchy of credibility*" (1967: 242). Becker (1967:242) explains this as a hierarchy which is taken for granted, a dominant ideology based on the assumption that:

> *"Everyone knows" that responsible professionals know more about things than laymen, that police are more respectable and their words ought to be taken more seriously than those of the deviants and criminals with whom they deal.*

Consequently, Becker (a sociologist primarily interested in deviant behaviour) argues that the key relationship between groups within the hierarchy of credibility is that which is between the "superordinate" groups and the "subordinate" groups:

> *The superordinate parties in the relationship are those who represent the forces of approved and official morality; the subordinate parties are those who, it is alleged, have violated that morality.*
>
> Becker (1967: 240)

As he further explains:

> *Thus, the police are the superordinates, drug addicts are the subordinates; professors and administrators, principals and teachers, are the superordinates, while students and pupils are the subordinates; physicians are the superordinates, their patients the subordinate.*
>
> Becker (1967: 240)

According to Becker (1967: 241), superordinate groups and the explanations that reflect their interests dominate the hierarchy of credibility, and their preferred version of social reality always holds sway: '*In any system of ranked groups, participants take it as given that members of the highest group have the right to define the way things really are'.* This is problematic for the social scientist as any accusation of bias from the superordinate group will also have a high degree of credibility, whilst any accusation which comes from the subordinate side is likely to be dismissed. If the social scientist aligns themselves with the subordinate group, they are therefore putting their own credibility at risk:

> *The hierarchy of credibility is a feature of society whose existence we cannot deny, even if we disagree with its injunction to believe the man at the top. When we acquire sufficient sympathy with subordinates to see things from their perspective, we know that we are flying in the face of what "everyone knows." The knowledge gives us pause and causes us to share, however briefly, the doubt of our colleagues.*

> Becker (1967:243)

The academic researcher finds themselves embroiled within this hierarchy and its power relations. The researcher may wish to criticise social relations and the superordinate group. Within this structure, credibility is not an objective set of practices. Although there are conventions that the researcher must conform to, these ultimately need to be underwritten by the individual's membership, or at the very least by close association with the superordinate group. Otherwise, their credibility, which can be defined as their ability to comment upon issues and for those comments to be perceived by both the superordinate group and their academic peers as legitimate, can be seriously impaired.

Becker rightly emphasises the importance of these hierarchies in shaping and maintaining social processes. Academic endeavour itself is bound up with what Mol (1999) was later to term ontological politics:

> *Ontological politics is a composite term. It talks of ontology - which in standard philosophical parlance defines what belongs to the real, the conditions of possibility we live with. If the term ontology is defined with that of politics, then this suggests that the conditions of possibility are not given. That reality does not precede the mundane practices in which we interact with it, but is rather shaped within these practices*

> Mol (1999:74-75)

What guide to action does Becker offer the social researcher? Essentially, Becker suggests that as researchers we should be honest, recognise that our research will be on a side, but we should also uphold rigorous standards of craftsmanship in the work we do. We can then address any accusations which arise from any side in a straightforward manner. "Whose side are we on?" is then, above all, a plea for the social scientist to maximise their credibility by maintaining their personal and professional integrity:

> *We take sides as our personal and political commitments dictate, use our theoretical and technical resources to avoid the distortions that they might introduce into our work, limit our conclusions carefully, recognize the hierarchy of credibility for what it is, and field as best we can the accusations and doubts that will surely be our fate.*

> Becker (1967: 247)

Changing Times

The context within which academics find themselves almost half a century on from Becker is a radically different one. Political choices must still be made, but those decisions are increasingly restricted by economic constraints together with the frameworks of professional assessment and career progression that academics have become increasingly entangled with. "Whose side are we on?" makes no reference to the two issues which rightly or wrongly dominate the academic world today; the need to secure research funding, and the requirement to produce publications in order to achieve and maintain personal and institutional status. These issues both have the potential to impact upon professional integrity.

The ascendancy of neoliberalism and the associated discourses of 'new public management', during the 1980s and 1990s have produced a fundamental shift in the way universities and other institutions of higher education have defined and justified their institutional existence, according to Olsen and Peters (2005). For Giroux (2002) neoliberalism affects the ways we address the meaning and purpose of higher education. The relationship between the delivery of public services and academics who are seeking to understand and assess those services can be argued to be closer than ever before; it is a consequence of the complex interaction of several factors. These factors include: the current economic situation and the drive towards austerity that has characterised the response of Western governments to the global economic financial crisis; the diminishing funds available from traditional funding sources such as the publicly funded research councils in the UK (ESRC the Economic and Social Research Council's expenditure on grants fell from £201million in 2011-2012 to £193 million in 2012-2013) and

well established charitable bodies, for example, Nuffield, Joseph Rowntree Foundation and the Leverhulme Trust; the increasing number of academics that are looking to access such funds; the imperative for public services to reform and launch new initiatives; and the need for the evaluation of such initiatives. As Rothschild (2009) has pointed out, the underpinning values of such evaluations and the evaluation process itself are likely to be driven by the values that underpin neoliberalism.

The logical response to this situation from institutions and the academics working within them has been to seek a plurality of research funding sources with the aim of becoming less dependent upon the traditional research funding bodies listed above.

For those working in the areas of health and the social sciences, for example, accessing research funds by offering their services as evaluators of public services or wider policy initiatives has become both an attractive and necessary option. Despite cuts in funding to the public sector bodies who may wish to commission such research, the current extent of reform programmes and initiatives means that evaluation work will be essential in determining the efficiency of current programmes and the further development of policy. Funds for evaluation will thus be protected to a great extent. Doing such research also presents considerable challenges for researchers. Let us pause for a moment and consider why policy makers and commissioners seek the services of academics? It can be argued that whilst academics may be able to provide specialised research skills, in the evaluation of public services the social research skills to do such work may be available from other sources.

Increasingly, in a climate of cuts the public sector and third sector providers are finding employing researchers "in-house" a luxury they are unable to afford. Academics then offer a way to get research and evaluation work done, and crucially as compared to other third parties they offer a high degree of validity due to their place in what Becker termed the "hierarchy of credibility". It is, of course, advantageous for a group, service or department to be able to show that their project, initiative or service has been assessed by a university department. As a result, the research done by academics may be used for political purposes and projects which they may not necessarily have envisaged. This is inevitable and can only be avoided by the researcher considering carefully the group they decide to work for and speculating about the possible uses of any work they may produce. However, there is another danger in such relationships for researchers; the independence of judgement and lack of interference normally afforded to them by traditional sources of funding. In Becker's terms, the researcher is in the subordinate position whilst the funder is the *de facto* superordinate - not by virtue of their knowledge, but by their economic power.

The idea that policy should be based on some kind of evidence, research or expertise has been regarded as taken for granted in most parts of the West. In terms of the UK, this has not been without drama and much debate has arisen about the relationship between evidence and politics (Monaghan 2011). The connection between evidence and policy is clearly fraught with difficulty. Learning 'lessons' from research findings and adopting them successfully in professional practice entails complex issues of education, relationships and collaboration

(Head 2010: 79). Misunderstandings are much more likely to arise from a lack of a common culture and different working practices, for instance, the failure of the academic to speak the language of the organisation they are working for and vice versa. The academic may also approach the research task in a different way and may see themselves as having obligations not only to the funder, but to their institution, to their participants and to the ethical codes of their professional subject. Drawing on an example from recent evaluation work we have been involved in (Warren *et al*. 2013), during a conversation about a research proposal with an organisation they remarked: "We don't usually scrutinise the services we commission *this much*". This illustrates how social scientists' ideas of good practice may differ from the usual standards of scrutiny the organisation adheres to. Walshe and Rundall (2001) and Davies *et al.* (2008) discuss attempts to promote linkage and exchange between the research and practitioner communities and to build awareness, receptiveness and capacity in research use among healthcare managers. They found barriers relating to research use are still deeply embedded in cultures, incentives, structures and organisational arrangements. Additionally, the extent to which the specific skills of research are valued and regarded as valid may differ. It may also be the case that the commissioners of research may be primarily interested in data, but not in the processes and subtleties of research practice. These differences may also be linguistic and presentational; for example, critical analytical discussion may be eschewed in favour of an executive summary and a technical response to the original research brief. Research conducted be Page *et al.* (forthcoming 2014) surveyed 205 academics who had recently completed commissioned research for government departments found evidence that

the commissioners had in many cases made significant efforts to try and get politically congenial results from the research. Importantly, they also report that all of the researchers who felt this to be the case also claimed to have successfully resisted these pressures.

Evidently, the commodity academics offer to external funders which makes them preferable to non-academic researchers is their integrity, which is conferred upon them by their academic status. Its central values of academic freedom and the ability to express views which diverge from the funders also has the capacity to bring them into conflict with funders who do not share or recognise the same values. However, it is this integrity and all that goes with it that gives their work credibility, as it can be seen as both a quality control mechanism and a reflection of academics "superordinate" status. This integrity can only be preserved by individuals making careful choices. We would argue that these choices are rather more constrained in our current context than they were in Becker's time. Another set of pressures which academics increasingly face are the processes of institutional and professional audit which have developed within Higher Education (HE). Perhaps the question is less about 'Whose side we are on?' and increasingly becoming 'Who we are writing for?'

Discussion

Who do we write for?

The following section explores how academics must now consider issues of performance alongside other concerns relating to ethics, reflexivity, rigour and funding. Research is a central

element of the scholarly activity of modern higher education (HE), alongside teaching, administration and academic service (Boyer 1990; Brew 2006). Traditional perceptions of university research and the researcher invoke images of the isolated scholar, ivory tower, blue skies research, and the Oxbridge Don (Raddon 2011). Although within HE this is often felt to be an antiquated, idealised view of the lived reality of the researcher (Blaxter *et al*. 1998), currently it could be argued that society's recognition of academic research is changing – and not necessarily for the better (Raddon 2011). Increased teaching loads together with administrative demands, means that those working in the majority of HE institutions are increasingly finding less time for research. Factors exacerbating this include a greater hierarchy developing between research and teaching (particularly in relation to promotion, but also in differentiating institutional types). Additionally, greater social demand for research that has clear impact, application, and demonstrates value for public money and provides an evidence base for policy and practice is also important (for examples, see Becher and Trowler 2001; Deem and Lucas, 2006; Harris 2005; Holligan 2011; Robertson and Bond 2001). McDowell (2001: 95) highlights the conflicting priorities facing the researcher in terms of the purposes of, and the audiences for, the research - an issue that has become increasingly prevalent in day-to-day academic practice:

> *It is sometimes hard even to raise the question 'for whom am I writing?' when the answer may include for, with and about the informants (which are not at all the same thing), for the funding body, for academic peers, for the next research assessment exercise, to improve one's own status, to gain promotion and so forth. It is often difficult for a researcher to disentangle these audiences and motives and to address their implications.*

Alongside these concerns, for Raddon (2011) there is a sense of something lost, together with a conviction that changing practices are forcing researchers and academics into ways of being that are alien to them (Harris 2005; Ruth 2008). The key instigator of change with the UK has been the notion of research assessment within higher education institutions (HEIs).

RAE and REF

A significant policy move in the UK which has heightened the sense of a changing environment for research in HEIs was the identification of research activity as a key performance indicator and public funding mechanism (Lucas, 2006). The first Research Assessment Exercise (RAE), then known as the Research Selectivity Exercise, was set up in 1986. There have since been four exercises following this in 1989, 1992, 1996 and 2001. University departments are required to submit their research output to duly-constituted subject panels, whose membership is meant to reflect a breadth and depth of expertise sufficient to assess quality on a five-point scale. In actual terms, this means that the higher the score, the greater the level of funding. The RAE was introduced in the UK as a means of evaluating research performance across HEIs, disciplines and, more recently it can be argued this evaluation also extends to individuals and will become the Research Excellence Framework (REF) in 2013 (Pettigrew 2011). The UK is not alone by any means. Similar exercises were introduced elsewhere; for example, in 2003 in New Zealand with the Performance Based Research Fund, the Hong Kong RAE in 1994, and Excellence in Research for Australia in 2010 for all disciplines.

RAE was based on a peer review approach to performance based research funding, with expert panels appointed to make judgements every three to five years about the quality of the research completed by academics in different disciplinary groupings. When it was initiated in 1986, the RAE accounted for 10% of the research funds distributed to academic departments; this figure increased to 30% in 1989 and to 100% in 1992 (Harvie 2000: 110). RAE results are interwoven with a significant proportion of HEIs' funding, which therefore increases pressure on staff classified as 'research-active' to perform to certain criteria. Striving to become 'research-active' means that people are increasingly aiming to publish in what are considered in the academic community as higher ranking journals, thus creating a highly competitive market for researchers (Elton, 2000; Talib and Steele, 2000).

The REF and its predecessor the RAE perform multiple functions. They are at once a resource allocation mechanism to reward high research performers and admonish the lesser performers; a quality assessment mechanism; and crucially a potential mechanism of culture change for all the academic communities in the UK higher education system. The RAE has added to other career, professional and self generated pressures and may have created a displacement of goals. For some publishing has become an end in itself. It can be argued that including the impact of research in the social, economic and cultural spheres beyond academia is an important corrective to this displacement of goals, and by shifting the focus from the intermediate good of published outputs to the final good of scholarly impact (in the outputs criteria) and policy/practice impact in the impact criteria, there may indeed be the impetus for

significant behavioural and cultural changes to our practice as scholars. Enhancing scholarly quality remains important but in time this opening up of the impact agenda may well create greater legitimacy for a portfolio approach whereby academics have a number of research interests within their field and are able to publish more widely. Whilst this can be construed as a positive, this is accompanied by a danger that academics may become "jacks of all trades" in order to keep achieving and to churn out publications; increasingly likely if scholarship is defined in terms of publication in A-rated journals.

Research assessment has undoubtedly altered researchers' work practices, with Collini (2009) likening academic scholars to 'door to door salesmen'. Research assessment has resulted in certain aspects of research activity becoming less attractive for the individual and less likely to be recognised by HEIs. This includes longer term research projects; research with harder-to-measure impact and publication/dissemination of research for non-academic audiences or outside the top-ranked academic outlets (Elton, 2000; Holligan, 2011; Lee and Harley, 1998; Lucas, 2006; Talib, 2001). In the UK, the impact of the RAE on HEIs has varied somewhat according to the type of institution (Lucas, 2006). In 1992, the Further and Higher Education Act granted polytechnics and colleges of HE the ability to award degrees, changing their status to 'new' universities. Polytechnics were established in the 1960s to teach more technical subjects at tertiary level and there was traditionally a strong divide between these and universities. As a result, pre-1992 HEIs are generally regarded as more research focused, and post-1992 HEIs as more teaching focused, putting more pressure on these institutions to

perform well in the RAE, whereas post-1992 HEIs have attempted to gain a higher proportion of their income via teaching activity, according to Raddon (2011).

Commentators have argued that RAE has been a leading factor in universities becoming more market orientated. Deem *et al*. (2007) argue that there has been a significant move towards a corporatised, service focused HE. Alongside this there has been a fracturing of the sector in the UK. The last 20 years have seen the growth of casualised and contract research work in UK HEIs (Bryson, 2004). The need for researchers and academics to attract externally sourced research funds and to demonstrate publication performance limits opportunities for intellectual work and independent forms of research in HE, arguably stifling creativity (Holligan, 2011; Roberts, 2007). The same tensions that may restrict creativity may have deeper and arguably more serious consequences; if freedom to study and comment on issues is restricted to research which "pays its way" then the opportunity for academics to have the freedom to control their own research agenda itself is under threat. This, of course, is an essential prerequisite for being able to take sides and challenge prevailing assumptions in the manner Becker envisaged. Ironically, the positive discourse of creativity as capital, when operationalised in an environment influenced by 'managerialism', may have the unintended consequence of stifling the very creativity that the discourse of creativity as capital was designed to engender (Walsh *et al*. 2011).

The 'performative' model outlined by RAE suggests that the worth of an academic is becoming increasingly defined by externally imposed grading criteria, discourses of journal paper

production and successfully gaining external funding. Roberts (2007) argues that this performance-based measurement of research cultures could lead to the 'death of the professor' (Lyotard 1984). The exact nature of the 'professors' role is of course always a matter for debate and reflection; as noted above, Becker argued that the academic role was inherently political due to the status of academics and academic knowledge. The point Roberts makes is not that there is a need for the academic as an independent or somehow neutral arbiter, but that there should be scope within the role of the academic to make judgements, state their position and debate the issues. The academic always interprets knowledge and in doing so inevitably takes sides. Roberts (2007: 353) argues that if '*a knower is no longer required to pass on to those seeking to know, professors or teachers could conceivably be replaced by computers…online systems of learning*'. Referring to the RAE, Roberts (2007: 359) concludes that:

> *Production matters more, and indeed comes to stand in for creativity, critical thought and collegiality. Having a love of learning, a passion for teaching, and a commitment to intellectual integrity become relevant only insofar as they can be harnessed for the production process and repackaged as 'quality assured'… outputs.*

Alongside pressures of where to publish, how often and having the time to do so, academics also need to be wary of the decreased funding opportunities available, particularly given the current era of austerity we are witnessing. For instance, seventy-five percent of research funds of the selective funding allocations to university departments in the 2001 RAE went to only 24

of the 174 higher education institutions which applied for research funding (McNay 2003: 6). Government funding to universities to support basic or blue-skies research has declined significantly (Baty 2009); with some arguing that the government is treating universities as 'supermarkets' (Corbyn 2009). It could also be suggested that REF and the impact agenda stifle creativity, as academics may lean towards writing funding bids that may be safer in terms of acceptability; for example, academics may shy away from certain topics that are less likely to receive funding in order to secure a grant.

Enter Impact

Ultimately, the RAE exercises in the UK have emphasised the need for academic research to take account of its social purpose, a purpose broadly enshrined in improving the world around us. The new Research Excellence Framework (HEFCE 2011) is arguably not much different from its RAE predecessors, except perhaps in its increased emphasis on the 'impact' of research. Pain *et al*. (2011) observe that while the audit culture is now well established within UK universities, the focus on impact, which will carry a weighting of 20 per cent within the 2014 REF assessment (HEFCE 2011), is a new feature of the system. Measuring impact was introduced with the express purpose to assure that money allocated to research from the public purse was well spent. Barnett has criticised the Research Assessment Exercise, suggesting that quantity of research publications is favoured over distinctions of quality or

even demand (Barnett 2000). As a result, Barnett feared that the impact agenda would diminish our conceptualisation of knowledge, by only recognising that which we can count.

Who defines and how they define what "well spent" means is and will remain crucial. Formerly, ideas about the intrinsic value of knowledge have largely justified academic researchers' creative freedom, but as Becker stressed the value of knowledge is not intrinsic it's value is assigned by social processes within which academics are key players and active participants Such ideas are now being superseded by an imperative to produce knowledge deemed socially and economically relevant (Harris 2005; Ozga 1998). The practical outcomes of this shift are visible in moves away from professional accountability and towards 'managerialism' (Deem *et al*. 2007), cost-effectiveness and impact (Harris 2005; Research Councils UK 2011). The necessity of generating funding influences researchers' choice of projects, pushing them towards lower-risk but 'publishable' work. The impact agenda thus communicates an implicit and negative discourse of creativity as liability: risky, of lower priority and potentially wasteful. Whilst it is clear that dissemination is not in itself impact, those scholars who adopt a portfolio model of publishing and thereby reach out to many stakeholders have a further advantage (Pettigrew 2011).

Debates about dissemination have never been more topical than in the face of the current – and highly contentious – inclusion of economic and social 'impact' as a criterion for assessment in the 2014 Research Excellence Framework (REF). Despite such critiques, there are also arguments for a more positive view of impact; this is particularly the case for researchers with

a strong commitment to working with stakeholders (Rickinson *et al*. 2011) and research participants (Pain *et al*. 2011). For Pain *et al.* (2011), the new focus on impact provides additional leverage that can be used to promote the value of more equal research relationships and to enable universities to play a stronger role in generating progressive social change.

Conclusions and implications

Whilst Becker's question "Whose side are we on?" is still relevant to social scientists and should be considered when they make decisions about the nature and purpose of their work, the context within which they have to consider such decisions has radically changed. When Becker gave his address the choice was about to which cause the social scientist might lend support by using their privileged position in the hierarchy of credibility. In keeping with the times it was felt that this was likely to be society's underdogs:

> *It is no secret that most sociologists are politically liberal to one degree or another. Our political preferences dictate the side we will be on and, since those preferences are shared by most of our colleagues, few are ready to throw the first stone or are even aware that stone-throwing is a possibility. We usually take the side of the underdog.*

> Becker (1967:244)

Things are different today - underdogs are unlikely to have extensive funds required to commission the services of social scientists. Academics and researchers must now negotiate a HE landscape characterised by performative measures and constant grading. It can be argued universities are in danger of being treated as 'supermarkets' (Corbyn 2009) with the danger

that those commissioning research and evaluation will place increasing demands upon researchers and become ever more specific in what they demand for their money. Ideas about the use of quasi experiments within social and public policy have become widespread and are seem by many commissioners as the de facto 'gold standard' for research designs, yet the evidence they produce is not always followed. For that to happen, results need to suit political agendas. This was, of course, precisely what Campbell (1969; 1973) was attempting to avoid in his advocacy of such methods as he assumed universally accepted and objective 'best evidence' was achievable. The problem that researchers are left with is that preconceptions regarding a hierarchy of evidence from non-expert commissioners may result in limiting what the academic researcher's methodological toolbox is allowed to contain. The subsequent danger is that such demands will erode the very "commodity" of academic integrity which they seek, with what Becker described as our superordinate status in the hierarchy of credibility subordinated to economic necessity. Furthermore, this process may well be accelerated by academics themselves in the race to secure more funding. It seems likely that this current context will continue to present further difficulties for academics and researchers given increased funding cuts and austerity in a risky financial climate, resulting in researchers having to address a further question of 'Who am I writing for?' There are numerous answers to this question; it could be for a specific cause, it could be for the funder, it could be for the principal investigator; it could also be to gain promotion and further one's own status. However, one thing is clear - in order to make the best of the opportunities social and public policy research and evaluation offers us, we need to uphold and maintain the key values of academic freedom.

The right to express views which differ and my conflict with funders without fear of reprisal from them or our institutions is essential if the integrity and credibility of academic research is to survive. If we fail to do this, whose side we are on is irrelevant.

References

Barnett, R. (2000) *Realising the University in an age of supercomplexity.* Buckingham: Society for Research into Higher Education.

Baty, P. (2009) UK urged to increase investment in higher education. *Times Higher Education Supplement,* September 8: 4.

Becher, T. and Trowler, P.R. (2001) *Academic Tribes and Territories: Intellectual Enquiry and the Culture of Disciplines,* 2nd ed., SRHE and Open University Press, Buckingham.

Becker H. S (1967) Whose Side Are We on? *Social Problems,* 14, 3, pp. 239-247.

Bernard, G. W. (2000) History and Research Assessment Exercises. *Oxford Review of Education*, 26, 1, pp. 95–106.

Blaxter, L., Hughes, C. and Tight, M. (1998) Telling it how it is: accounts of academic life. *Higher Education Quarterly,* 52, 3, pp. 300-15.

Boyer, E.L. (1990) *Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professoriate*. The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, Wiley, New York, NY.

Brew, A. (2006) *Research and Teaching: Beyond the Divide*. Palgrave Macmillan: London.

Bryson, C. (2004) The consequences for women in the academic profession of the widespread use of fixed term contracts. *Gender, Work and Organization,* 11, 2, pp. 187-206.

Collini, S. (2009) Commentary: impact on humanities. *The Times Literary Supplement*, 13 November, pp. 18–19.

Corbyn, Z. (2009) The small scientist. *The Times Higher Education Supplement*, no. 1912, September 3: pp. 36–9.

Davies, H. T., Nutley, S., and Walter, I. (2008) Why 'knowledge transfer' is misconceived for applied social research. *Journal of Health Services Research & Policy*, 13, 3, pp. 188–190.

Deem, R. and Lucas, L. (2006) Learning about research: exploring the learning and teaching/research relationship amongst educational practitioners studying in higher education. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 11, 1, pp. 1-18.

Deem, R., Hillyard, S. and Reed, M. (2007) *Knowledge, Higher Education, and the New Managerialism: The Changing Management of UK Universities.* Oxford University Press: Oxford.

Elton, L. (2000) The UK research assessment exercise: unintended consequences. *Higher Education Quarterly,* 54, 3, pp. 274-83.

Ecoonomic and Social Research Council –Annual Financial report and accounts 2012-2013 http://www.esrc.ac.uk/_images/ESRC_12_13_AR_tcm8-27176.pdf

Giroux, H. A. (2002) Neoliberalism, corporate culture, and the promise of higher education: The university as a democratic public sphere. *Harvard Educational Review*, 72, 4, pp. 425-464.

Gouldner, A. (1975) *For Sociology: Renewal and Critique in Sociology Today*. Harmondsworth: London Pelican.

Hammersley, M (2000) *Taking Sides in Social research: Essays on Bias and Partisanship*. London: Routledge.

Hammersley, M (2001) Which side was Becker on? Questioning political and epistemological radicalism *Qualitative Research,* 1, 1, pp. 91-100.

Harris, S. (2005) Rethinking academic identities in neo-liberal times. *Teaching in Higher Education,* 10, 4, pp. 421-33.

Harvie, D. (2000) Alienation, Class and Enclosure in UK Universities. *Capital and Class*, Vol. 71, pp. 103–132.

Head, B. W. (2010) Reconsidering evidence-based policy: Key issues and challenges. *Policy and Society,* 29, 2, 77-94.

HEFCE (2011) *Research excellence framework REF 2014 timetable*. http://www.hefce.ac. uk/research/ref/timetable/(accessed June 2012).

Holligan, C. (2011) Feudalism and academia: UK academics' account of research culture. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education,* 24, 1, pp. 55-75.

Lee, F.S. and Harley, S. (1998) Peer review, the research assessment exercise and the demise of non-mainstream economics. *Capital & Class*, 22, 3, pp. 23-51.

Leibling, A. (2001) Whose Side are We on? Theory, Practice and Allegiances in Prisons Research *British Journal of Criminology,* 41, 3, 472-484.

Lucas, L. (2006) *The Research Game in Academic Life.* Society for Research into Higher Education and Open University Press: Maidenhead.

Lyotard, J. (1984) *The postmodern condition: A report on knowledge*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

McDowell, L. (2001) 'It's that Linda again': Ethical, Practical and Political Issues Involved in Longitudinal Research with Young Me. *Ethics, Place & Environment: A Journal of Philosophy & Geography,* 4, 2, pp. 87-100

McNay, I. (2003) Assessing the assessment: An analysis of the UK research assessment exercise, 2001, and its outcomes, with special reference to research in education. *Science and Public Policy* 301, pp. 1–8.

Mol, A. (1999) 'Ontological Politics: A Word and Some Questions'. In: J. Law and J. Hassard (eds.) *Actor Network Theory and After*. Oxford: Blackwell; Keele: The Sociological Review.

Monaghan, M. (2011) *Evidence versus politics: exploiting research in UK drug policy-making*? Bristol: The Policy Press.

Olssen, M., and Peters, M. A. (2005) Neoliberalism, higher education and the knowledge economy: from the free market to knowledge capitalism. *Journal of Education Policy*, 20, 3, pp. 313-345.

Ozga, J. (1998) The entrepreneurial researcher: re-formations of identity in the research marketplace. *International Studies in Sociology of Education*, 8, 2, pp. 143-53.

Page et al (Forthcoming) Evaluation under contract: government pressure and the production of policy research' (with LSE GV314 Group) *Public Administration.*

Pain, R., Kesby, M. and Askins, K. (2011) Geographies of impact: power, participation and potential. *Area,* 43, pp. 183–8.

Pettigrew, A. M. (2011) Scholarship with Impact. *British Journal of Management,* 22, pp. 347–354.

Raddon, A.E. (2011) A changing environment: narratives of learning about research. *International Journal for Researcher Development*, 2I, 1, pp. 26 – 45.

Research Councils UK (2011) *Excellence with impact*. http://www.rcuk.ac.uk/kei/impacts/ Pages/expectationpolicies.aspx (accessed June 2013).

Rickinson, M., Sebba, J. and Edwards, A. (2011) *Improving research through user engagement.* Routledge: Abingdon.

Roberts, P. (2007) Neoliberalism, performativity and research. *Review of Education,* 53, 4, pp. 349-65.

Robertson, J. and Bond, C.H. (2001) Experiences of the relation between teaching and research: what do academics value? *Higher Education Research and Development,* 20, 1, pp. 5-19.

Rothschild K. W. (2009) Neoliberalism, EU and the Evaluation of Policies Review of Political Economy, Volume 21, Number 2, 213 – 225, April 2009.

Ruth, D. (2008) Being an academic: authorship, authenticity and authority. *London Review of Education,* 6, 2, pp. 99-109.

Talib, A. (2001) The continuing behavioural modification of academics since the 1992 research assessment exercise. *Higher Education Review*, 33, 3, pp. 30-46.

Talib, A. and Steele, A. (2000) The research assessment exercise: strategies and trade-offs. *Higher Education Quarterly,* 54, 1, pp. 68-87.

Walsh, E., Anders, K., Hancock, S. and Elvidge, L. (2011) Reclaiming creativity in the era of impact: exploring ideas about creative research in science and engineering. *Studies in Higher Education,* pp. 1–15: http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/03075079.2011.620091. Walshe, K., and Rundall, T. (2001) Evidence-based management: From theory to practice in health care. *Milbank Quarterly*, 79, 3, 429–457.

Warren, J., Bambra, C., Kasim, A., Garthwaite, K., Booth, M., and Mason, J. (2013) Prospective pilot evaluation of the effectiveness and cost effectiveness of a 'health first' case management service for long-term Incapacity Benefit recipients. *Journal of Public Health*, pp. 1-9, doi:10.1093/pubmed/fds100.

Weiss, C. H., Murphy-Graham, E., Petrosino, A., and Gandhi, A. G. (2008) The fairy godmother—and her warts making the dream of evidence-based policy come true. *American Journal of Evaluation*, 29, 1, 29-47.

Wolfe, T. (1968) *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test.* Bantam Books: New York.