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Transparency in Communication: An Examination of Communication Journals' Conflicts-of-Interest Policies

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Transparency in Communication: An Examination of Communication Journals' Conflicts-of-Interest Policies

By Lawrence Soley and Sarah Bonewits Feldner

Increased corporate-sponsored university research and professorial consulting has caused medical, psychological, and other scientific journals to adopt conflicts-of-interest disclosure policies. This study examines editorial policies concerning conflicts of interest at communication journals in the context of Habermas's theory of communicative action. The results show that communication journals do not have the same mandatory disclosure requirements that journals of other disciplines have. In this regard, communication research journals are similar to the mass media. Consequently, the article suggests that disclosure policies are needed if communication research journals are to function as part of a larger dialogic process. Moreover, communication researchers are not in a position to criticize the mass media for failing to disclose conflicts of interest when their own journals do not require disclosure.

Habermas's (1981/1984, 1981/1987) theory of communicative action suggests that the only way society can build consensus—including political and scientific consensus—is when the conditions of the "ideal speech situation" are met. This means that all participants in social discourse have the same opportunity to initiate and participate in discourse and that the discourse is transparent. Transparency includes several elements, including speakers' being sincere and honest about their intentions.

Habermas's theory of communicative action provides a theoretical lens for examining the editorial processes of the mass media and academic journals, whose reports claim to be based on "objectively-collected observations." The lens is particularly useful for evaluating conflicts of interest that arise during the editorial process because these affect the transparency of communications. Conflicts of interest can arise as a result of conglomerate media ownership, the media's reliance on elite news sources, or even professors' participation in corporate-funded research. This study examines these conflicts of interest and suggests that the mass media need to disclose conflicts of interest to create transparency, but that academic journals must do this, too.

Conflicts of Interest, Transparency, and the Publication Process

During the 1991 Gulf War, news reporters' use of "expert" sources to comment about

military strategy and the nature of the Iraqi government attracted attention from communication researchers and media critics (Kurtz, 1991; LaMay, 1991; Margolis, 1991; Steele, 1992; Weisberg, 1991), who pointed out that the experts' political partisanships or financial conflicts of interest were rarely revealed to news consumers. In Habermas's theory, this violates the transparency of the communicative dialogue.

For example, Kurtz (1991) reported that analysts from the Center for Strategic and International Studies, a Washington, D.C.–based think tank with a "markedly conservative" bent, were frequently interviewed, but that the political ideology of the think tank and its sources of funding, which included the Pentagon, other federal agencies, and "defense contractors such as Boeing, General Dynamics, Rockwell, Honeywell, Rockwell and Westinghouse" (p. W28) were not revealed in news reports. Steele (1992) also found that news media rarely revealed Gulf War analysts' conflicts of interest, concluding "there is nothing wrong with using opinionated experts. The problem arises when an opinionated expert is presented as a neutral one; this is both unfair to the expert and the public" (p. 52).

After Operation Desert Storm, researchers continued to examine the use of experts, who frequently commented about domestic politics and elections. As during the 1991 Gulf War, analysts' partisan political affiliations and conflicts of interest were rarely disclosed (Nimmo & Combs, 1992). According to Herman and Chomsky (1988), hiding the political partisanship and conflicts of interest of expert news sources helps maintain the fiction that news is unbiased, when in fact a limited spectrum of elite viewpoints are expressed.

The disclosure of experts' backgrounds and possible conflicts of interest is important not only because it exposes the narrow range of discourse within the mass media and improves dialogic communication but also because sources presented as unbiased appear to have a substantial impact on public opinion. Page and Shapiro (1983), Page, Shapiro, and Dempsey (1987), and Jordan and Page (1992) examined the impact of different source types on long-term public opinion change and found the effect of expert sources to be positive, in contrast with clearly biased sources, such as political party members and lobbyists, who either had no impact or a negative impact on public opinion change. The credibility of "experts" is high because they are portrayed as being experienced and nonpartisan, Page et al. (1987) concluded.

More recently, attention has turned to the conflicts of interest of university scientists, who are often quoted as experts in news stories and presented as detached analysts (Noble, 2000). As an example, Munro (2002) observed that newspaper reporters quoted professor Irving Weisman in recent years in more than 160 articles about the embryo stem cells controversy. In almost all of the articles, Weisman was described as a professor at Stanford. However, Weisman

is also the founder and principal of three companies, Systemix, Inc., Celltrans, Inc., and StemCells, Inc. The latter two companies are engaged in research using stem cells. Munro also provides examples of other entrepreneurial professors, such as Indiana State University's David Prentice and Harvard University's Doug Melton, who have been quoted in dozens of news stories about the stem cell controversy but whose business activities are rarely disclosed.

Munro (2002) observed that university scientists might have other conflicts of interest, such as patent ownership, not just financial stakes in companies, which can affect their attitudes toward, and comments about, research developments and government policies. Munro contends that these conflicts of interest should be revealed in news stories and that news organizations should also learn and reveal the conflicts of interest of university scientists who author opinion articles. As an example of the media's failure to disclose possible conflicts of interest, Munro provides the example of Harvard professor Jerome Groopman, who has authored numerous op-ed articles about government policy and research but whose byline does not reveal that he is a board member of Advanced Tissues Sciences, Inc.

Beginning in the mid-1980s, many medical and scientific journals required authors of research articles to include financial disclosure disclaimers, something that is not required by news media. For example, the *Journal of the American Medical Association* has required authors since 1989 to disclose all "affiliations with or involvement in any organization or entity with direct financial interest in the subject matter described in the manuscript (e.g., employment, consultancies, stock ownership, honoraria, expert testimony)." By 1994 to 1995, nearly half of medical journals with circulations exceeding 1,000 had written policies regarding conflicts of interest (Krimsky, 1999). Using Habermas's framework, these disclosures increase transparency and contribute to communicative dialogue.

Research reveals the need for complete disclosure because financial relationships as simple as grant funding can affect the outcome of research. Friedberg, Saffran, Stinson, Nelson, and Bennett (1999), who examined articles published in medical journals, found that research funded by pharmaceutical companies was significantly more likely to report that the pharmaceutical companies'drugs were cost-effective than was independently sponsored research. Stelfox, Chua, O'Rourke, and Detsky (1998) examined the funding and conclusions of published research about calcium-channel antagonists and found that researchers supporting the use of the antagonists were significantly more likely to have financial relationships with manufacturers of calcium-channel antagonists. Similar findings about the impact of financial sponsorship were found in studies of nonsteroid, antiinflammatory drugs, the effects of second-hand smoke, and even baby formula (Friedberg et al., 1999).

Conflicts of Interest in Communication-Related Disciplines

Business professors, in addition to professors in bio-technical fields, consult. At more prestigious institutions, the consulting can produce six-figure supplements to university salaries (Cobb, 1991). As in the biological sciences, this has produced some conflicts of interest that have not been revealed in mass media and journal articles. For example, marketing professor Jagdish Sheth, currently at Emory University, published an op-ed in the *Chicago Tribune* titled, "Caller ID Benefits Outweigh Perils." The op-ed described the benefits of caller ID technology, which Illinois Bell was seeking to have the Illinois utility commission approve. Sheth (1991) described himself in the byline as "the founder of the Center for Telecommunications Management at the University of Southern California."

An observant *Tribune* reader wrote a letter to the editor noting that Sheth's op-ed was "consistent with that taken by Illinois Bell in their current proposal before the Illinois Commerce Commission" (Gassman, 1991, p. 26). The reader had about a year earlier attended a seminar where Sheth revealed "he (or one of his companies) had performed consulting work for Ameritech, Illinois Bell's parent company." The letter concluded, "I find it disturbing that no mention was made in his column of his past (or perhaps, present) affiliation with an organization that stands to benefit from the action he is recommending" (p. 26). Sheth also cowrote several articles about telecommunications that appeared in marketing and communication research journals, including *Industrial Marketing Management* (Saghafi, Gupta, & Sheth, 1990) and *Telecommunications Policy* (Sheth & Sisodia, 1993), which did not mention his consulting activities.

Another marketing professor wrote a letter to the editor of *The New York Times* criticizing the newspaper's quoting research critical of the tobacco industry. According to Baruch College marketing professor Jean J. Boddewyn (1995), "The 1991 studies of Joe Camel Advertisements that appeared in the Journal of the American Medical Association have been debunked by at least three reputable advertising scholars.... Yet you keep quoting them" (p. A16). As occurred with Sheth, a letter to the editor in response to Boddewyn noted, "Professor Boddewyn is not the detached scholar that his letter implies. He has been paid by, and frequently appeared as an 'expert witness' for, the tobacco industry" (Soley, 1995, p. A22). The letter pointed out that "at least two of these three 'reputable scholars' [alluded to by Boddewyn] received tobacco industry funding. They did not disclose this in their articles." Moreover, Boddewyn published a research article in the *International Journal of Advertising* criticizing tobacco advertising bans (Boddewyn, 1994), but the byline accompanying the article did not mention his tobacco industry ties.

Communication professors have also published articles and even books without

revealing the sources of their research funding. Simpson (1994) reveals that much of the seminal persuasion research establishing mass communication as a separate field of study was secretly funded by U.S. government agencies concerned with propaganda and psychological warfare, but the funding was not publicly revealed at the time by the researchers. According to Simpson (1994), more than 75% of the annual budgets of Paul Lazarsfeld's Bureau of Applied Social Research, Hadley Cantril's Institute for International Social Research, and Ithiel de Sola Poole's Center for International Studies came from the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency and other government sources.

As an example of the impact of this funding, Simpson (1994) cites the example of Project Revere, a message diffusion study financed in large part by a covert U.S. CIA grant. The research resulted in approximately 50 published research articles and monographs and eight master's theses, including articles appearing in the *Journal of Communication, Public Opinion Quarterly*, and the *American Journal of Sociology*. The articles did not reveal the sponsorship of the research, and some members of the research team say they were unaware of the CIA funding (Lowery & DeFleur, 1995).

Simpson (1994) concludes that government funding for mass communication research during the Cold War era shaped the discipline, affecting which articles were accepted for publication by leading journals, created leadership positions in the discipline for researchers receiving government funding, and even determined the paradigm under which most research was conducted.

Although the Cold War has ended and covert government funding for communication research has probably disappeared, conflicts of interest in communication research have not ended because of the influx of money from the private sector. Although no statistics are available by discipline, the U.S. Department of Education reports that university revenues coming from outside sources such as corporations have increased by 155% between 1992 and 2000. Bonewits and Soley (2004) suggest that corporate research funding, the endowing of chaired professorships, and the creation of corporate-financed, on-campus think tanks can also produce conflicts of interest. White (2000) reports that numerous corporate- and CEO-funded think tanks or research centers, such as the Garn Institute of Finance at the University of Utah and the Maguire Oil and Gas Institute at Southern Methodist University, have been established on college campuses. Like beltway think tanks such as the Center for Strategic and International Studies, they produce reports that "gain an aura of objectivity because they are produced at universities rather than public-relations departments" (White, 2000, p. 33).

As an example of this type of conflict of interest, *Journalism Monographs* carried an

article on the origins of democracy in Taiwan suggesting that Chi-chung Yu, a Kuomintang central committee member and publisher of the *China Times,* contributed to the democratization of Taiwan (Lee, 1993). However, the journal article did not reveal that the author headed an on-campus research center funded by Yu's *China Times* Cultural Foundation (Lee, 1990).

Theoretical Framework: Habermas and Academic Publishing

Jurgen Habermas's theory provides a useful perspective for examining the issue of potential conflicts of interest in the publication process. Many communication scholars have used Habermas's theoretical work to explore related issues such as communication ethics (e.g., Haas & Deetz, 2000), organizational legitimacy and public relations (e.g., Leitchy & Warner, 2001), and communication and power (e.g., Mumby, 2001).

Using this framework, academic journals serve as part of a larger dialogue among authors, editorial boards, and readers. Habermas's (1981/1984, 1981/1987) ideal communication community provides a model for the role journals should play in creating a productive dialogue. Specifically, Habermas called for a removal of barriers to free and open communication. The type of communication that Habermas calls for is based on rightful legitimacy claims that can be publicly debated. Research findings and results constitute a particular form of legitimacy claim. Because of this, readers should have all information regarding conflicts of interest to judge the legitimacy of the claims.

The ideal communication community rests in Habermas's (1981/1984) colonization thesis. Habermas contends that the steering mechanisms of money and bureaucracy have overtaken communicative acts geared toward establishing greater understanding between the parties involved. In response to this colonization, Habermas argues that communication should be geared toward mutual understanding. Every claim is a claim of validity that should be criticizable. Colonization blocks this potential for critique. The interests of money and power govern interactions, obscure relationships, distort communication, and prevent social actors from reaching understanding.

The colonization thesis is particularly salient in current discussions of the academy in light of the changed relationship between academics and corporations. The increase in corporate research sponsorship, funded research centers, and consultancies can be seen as a form of corporate colonization. The challenge for academics is to find ways to create the balance that Habermas proposes. As such, Habermas's theory provides a useful framework for fostering dialogue about issues that affect the academic publishing process.

Research Question

As Simpson (1994) and the articles in *Telecommunication Policy* (Sheth & Sisodia, 1993), *International Journal of Advertising* (Boddewyn, 1994), and *Journalism Monographs* (Lee, 1993) show, conflicts of interest arising from undisclosed research funding and consulting can lead to conflicts of interest among authors of communication research articles. The question therefore arises: Do communication research journals have conflicts-of-interest disclosure requirements, as American Medical Association journals and many other medical journals do? Clearly, readers of journal articles have the right to know if authors have financial interests in the subject of their articles.

To answer this question, a research study was conducted, analyzing the manuscript submission guidelines of communication research journals and asking editors about their journals' policies. In addition, the editors were also asked about their journals' requirements concerning reviewers, who have a major say in whether articles are published. Reviewers with financial ties concerning the focus of a research article have as many conscious or unconscious motivations to support or oppose publication as do authors.

Method

To determine whether journals in the communications fields have conflicts-of-interest disclosure requirements, two methods were employed: an analysis of the "guidelines for submission" published in communications journals and their Web pages and a survey of journal editors, querying them about their journals' conflict-of-interest disclosure requirements.

Guidelines for Submission Analysis

The guidelines for submission pages appearing in 35 communication journals or the journals' Web pages were obtained. The 35 journals included National Communication Association–affiliated (e.g., *Quarterly Journal of Speech* and *Communication Monographs*), International Communication Association–affiliated (e.g., *Journal of Communication* and *Human Communication Research*), regional (e.g., *Western Journal of Communication* and *Communication Studies*), journalism (e.g., *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly* and *Newspaper Research Journal*), advertising (e.g., *Journal of Advertising* and *Journal of Current Issues and Research in Advertising*), telecommunications (e.g., *Telecommunications Policy* and *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media*), critical theory (*Women's Studies in Communication* and *Media, Culture and Society*), and education (e.g., *Communication Education* and *Journalism Educator*) journals. A complete list of the journals appears in

Appendix A.

The expectation was that—at the least—journals of the National Communication Association would have disclosure requirements because the organization's "code of professional responsibility" requests members to "report all financial support for research and any financial relationship that the researcher has with the persons or entities being researched, so that readers may judge the potential influence of financial support on the research results" (National Communication Association, 2005). However, this requirement is not included in the *National Communication Association Publication Manual* (revised June 2003). As a consequence, disclosure is considered an ethical responsibility of researchers, not a requirement imposed by, or on, editors.

The submission guidelines were analyzed for disclosure requirements, using the coding procedure reported in Appendix B. The first question used to code the guidelines was based on the National Communication Association's "code of professional responsibility," the second was based on the American Medical Association's disclosure statement, and the third was based on the wording of the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (APA). If the answer to any of these three questions was yes, the guideline was coded as having a disclosure requirement. When the guidelines for submission did not explicitly state that disclosure was required, the journal was also coded as not having disclosure requirements.

However, a number of journals instructed authors to follow the guidelines of the 4th or 5th editions of the APA manual. The 4th and 5th editions of the manual require authors submitting manuscripts to APA journals to disclose conflicts of interest, stating that "if any relationships may be perceived as a conflict of interest (e.g., if you own stocks in a company that manufactures a drug used in your study), report them" (p. 204) in the acknowledgment paragraph. The 3rd edition of the APA manual did not contain this disclosure requirement.

Because it was unclear in the communication journals employing the APA citation style whether authors submitting manuscripts were also required to disclose conflicts of interest, and because it is possible for a journal to have disclosure requirements not described in the guidelines, a survey of the 35 journal editors was also conducted, asking them about their journals' disclosure requirements.

Survey Method

Questionnaires were mailed to the 35 editors with a signed cover letter explaining that the purpose of the study was to examine the "manuscript submission guidelines for journals" and requested that the questionnaires be returned in the enclosed self-addressed, stamped envelope.

In the case of international journals, such as *Telecommunications Policy*, international response coupons were enclosed with the questionnaires and envelopes rather than stamped envelopes.

The cover letter did not promise the editors anonymity, but the questionnaires and envelopes were not coded to identify each responding editor.

The questionnaires asked the editors a forced-choice question about whether their journal has "a mandatory disclosure requirement concerning financial conflicts-of-interest" such as "expert testimony, consulting, stock ownership and the like for article authors" (see Appendix C). The questionnaire asked the editors where the policy could be found. The questionnaire also asked the editors whether their journal had a similar conflict-of-interest policy for editorial board members and whether they believed "that a conflict-of-interest requirement" should be instituted for communication journals.

A week after the cover letters and questionnaires were mailed to editors, follow-up postcards were sent, thanking editors who returned their questionnaires and stating, "If you have forgotten to return it, I would appreciate your returning it at your earliest convenience." The follow-up closed with the statement, "I realize you are very busy, but your participation is extremely important to the study."

Results

Analysis of Guidelines for Submission

The submission guidelines were analyzed by two coders, who unanimously agreed on their coding. Of the 35 guidelines analyzed, only 1 had a disclosure requirement, and this 1 was weaker than the APA manual's disclosure requirement (see Table 1). The one publication was *Journal of Advertising*, which was involved in a controversy arising from its publishing an article on tobacco advertising research by a tobacco company consultant (Pollay, 1994). *Journal of Advertising*'s "manuscript submission guidelines" state that authors are to, "per the request of the American Academy of Advertising, please disclose all sources of funding for the present manuscript." However, the guidelines also inform authors that they are "not [to] include information on...organizations consulted, etc.," possibly watering down the affirmative disclosure requirement.

Another journal, *Communication Monographs*, suggested that the author should include "other background (e.g., prior presentation of results, grant support, acknowledgements)" information in the "author note," but this was not coded as a conflict-of-interest disclosure requirement because it only alluded to the method for acknowledging a grant.

None of the remaining guidelines had disclosure requirements, including the National

Communication Association journals, although 20 of the 35 (i.e., 57%) requested authors to follow the guidelines of the 4th or 5th editions of the APA manual. Most of these guidelines merely requested authors to follow the style, rather than practices, described in the APA manual. For example, *Communication Studies'* submission guidelines report that "manuscript preparation, source citations, and reference style should conform" to the APA manual but does not require authors to follow the APA's disclosure requirements. Similarly, the *Journal of Applied Communication Research* reports that "manuscripts, abstracts, references, figures and tables must conform to the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (2001, Fifth Edition)" but does not mention disclosure of conflicts of interest.

Consequently, even though communication journals require authors to employ the citation style recommended by the APA manual, the wording of the guidelines suggests that they are not requiring authors to follow the disclosure requirements demanded by APA journals. Using Habermas's framework, this omission is problematic because it restricts readers' access to relevant information regarding the work, thus reducing transparency. Furthermore, if we accept Habermas's contention that intellectuals are particularly responsible for fostering conditions that promote dialogue and the ideal speech situation, then editorial guidelines should promote greater disclosure.

Survey and Questionnaire Results

The analysis of these submission guidelines suggests that disclosure policies are absent or obscure at best. Although some may argue that disclosure is implied by the journals' adherence to APA guidelines for publication, guidelines are ambiguous about whether they adhere to APA disclosure standards for potential conflicts of interest. Beyond this, the results of the questionnaire sent to the journal editors reveal that whether the journals and authors are conforming to APA standards is of little importance because the vast majority of editors believe that their journals do not have policies on potential conflicts of interest.

In total, 24 of the 35 (i.e., 68.6%) journal editor questionnaires were returned. Although considered an adequate response rate for survey research (Wimmer & Dominick, 2002), about one third of editors did not complete and return questionnaires.

Of those responding, 22 (i.e., 91.7%) indicated that their journals do not have mandatory disclosure policies concerning authors' financial conflicts of interest arising from research funding, expert testimony, consulting, stock ownership, and the like (see Table 2). Also, 23 (i.e., 95.4%) indicated that no such policy existed for reviewers and editorial board members. Finally, 3 (i.e., 12.5%) replied that they think a conflict-of-interest requirement should be required for

communication journals, whereas 12 (i.e., 50.0%) believed that no such policy was needed. The remaining respondents either did not answer or indicated that they did not know.

Of the editors, 21 included open-ended comments, explaining or adding to their closed-ended responses. These comments fall generally into three general categories: First, some editors do believe that a policy should be included in the interest of fairness; second, a few editors suggested that it was not the journal's responsibility to impose such a policy; third, a vast majority of the open-ended responses suggested that a conflict-of-interest policy was either unnecessary or not relevant to the type of research published in the journal.

The three editors who indicated that some type of conflict-of-interest policy was necessary followed up their responses with comments such as, "It is probably time we start moving in that direction [establishing a conflict-of-interest policy]." Another commented that a conflict-of-interest policy was needed to be "free of any appearance of prejudice and favoritism." The other explained, "Some statement would be very useful, I think, in case the results (or the board member reviews) could be skewed, or raise questions about potential for skewing, by financial interests." Such views were rare among the editors, and equally rare was that 2 of the 3 respondents identified themselves—Linda Steiner and James Dillard.

Of the editors who felt that a conflict-of-interest policy was not necessary, two indicated that a policy was unnecessary because it was the responsibility of either the author or the author's institution to monitor potential conflicts of interest. As one editor commented, "I would expect a reviewer or author to disclose conflicts of interest or any sort (personal or financial) as a general ethical consideration." A different editor explained, "Most doctoral institutions have conflict-of-interest procedures and forms, and IRB committees generally take care of funding issues. I don't think editors should be required to do yet another task on behalf of the discipline or institutions."

Many of the editors' comments suggested an inherent belief that a conflict-of-interest policy was not needed because they did not know, or had never seen occurrences, of conflicts of interest or that the research that they published was not susceptible to such conflicts. In the first case, editors made comments such as: "I am naïve I guess. My journal is an ethics journal, and I would hope that my authors and editorial board members are above all this mess"; "Not an issue that has ever arisen in 20 years"; and "Can't imagine a possible scenario! It's never come up!" One of these comments was made by an editor whose journal was involved in a conflict of interest that was described earlier.

Beyond those editors who felt a policy was unnecessary because they had never encountered any conflicts of interest were those who suggested that communication research

was not prone to such conflicts. This feeling was typified by the following comments: “I can’t speak for any other journal, which might publish articles with potential for profit, but that’s not the case with the materials in [this journal], so I’d consider such a policy unnecessary and superfluous”; “I am willing to learn more, but I have not yet seen indicators that financial conflicts of interest are likely in communication research”; and “Such situations are rare in our field i.e. a genuine conflict-of-interests that is relevant to the editorial process.” The editor of a communication history journal wrote, “I am the editor of a media history journal and the issue of funding rarely arises .... Funding facilitates historical research but not in the way it does social scientific research.”

One editor did not believe that conflicts of interest arise in the communications discipline and believed that mandating disclosure was too burdensome. The editor wrote:

> If you are asking should such disclosure statements be required, I would say no. I haven’t witnessed the kind of research in our journals that would necessitate such disclosures. The last thing I want to see is another layer of paperwork on the publication process.

However, one has to assume that conflicts of interest have arisen in the communication discipline, but journal editors are simply unaware of them. Research suggests this is the case. For example, a survey of administrators in journalism and mass communications departments (Coulson, 1990) found that two thirds of the administrators encouraged their faculty to consult. The survey also found that 39% of full professors and 37% of associate professors engaged in consulting. More than 50% of the consultants working at public universities and 30% at private universities published research based on their consulting, suggesting that at least some research published in mass communication research journals has not been independent of possible financial conflicts of interest.

In addition, a survey of members of the National Communication Association’s organizational communication division found that nearly three fourths worked as part-time consultants, although the majority made relatively little money from it (Schamber & Ruffoni, 1994). The number of communication faculty engaged in consulting has probably increased since 1994, as universities have been pressuring faculty to participate in business-university relationships. We are not suggesting that all research based on consulting or that is corporate-funded is tainted, but we do believe that these produce conflicts of interest that should be addressed, particularly by journals.

The editors’ responses to the open-ended questions are consistent with the results of the

closed-ended responses. In general, a majority of the editors believe that no conflict-of-interest policy is in place for their journals, and most believe that such a policy is not needed.

Discussion

The fact that few journal editors feel that policies about disclosing conflicts of interest are needed leads to a number of questions about the state of the relationship between the communications discipline and corporations. First, it is possible the editors are correct in their assertion that these conflicts are unlikely and rare. This assertion suggests that the communication discipline is sufficiently different from others, such as marketing and psychology, so as to be immune from conflicts of interest or that its members are not conducting research that can influence broader social institutions, including corporations. However, Simpson's (1994) analysis of past funding suggests that this may not be the case.

Pinto-Duschinsky (1998) provides examples of how even historical research and text analyses are affected by corporate interests. Pinto-Duschinsky demonstrated a link between funding of research about Nazism by German corporations and the conclusions drawn by the studies. Both Deutsche Bank and Volkswagen funded historical research that could shield employees from war crimes and justify the companies' participation in Nazi programs, claiming that these corporations did only what was necessary.

Pinto-Duschinsky (1998) notes that historians often feel compelled to accept these projects because they give researchers access to company archives, and these same corporations often are tied to other important research grants and fellowships. This observation differs sharply from that expressed by the editor of the communication history journal, quoted earlier. In short, a survey of the landscape of research and publication simply does not support the notion that the communication discipline is not susceptible to conflicts of interest.

Professorial conflicts of interest need to be addressed against the backdrop of current trends within higher education, to which Pinto-Duschinsky (1998) alludes. With shrinking state and federal support, universities are forced to operate in the market economy and seek out new sources of funding (Currie & Newson, 1998; Slaughter & Leslie, 2001; Sosteric, Gismondi, & Ratkovic, 1998). As universities increasingly align themselves with corporations, professors are under increased pressure to secure external funding for their research (Blumenstyk, 1998; Brainard, 2000; "Faculty Bonuses," 2002; Maslen, 2001). Addressing the case of Australian universities, Simon Kent, the research director for Australia's national union for university staff, explains,

> Universities have gone from wanting money to needing it, and it affects their culture and their behavior. Our concerns are twofold: First, business sponsors drive the type of research that is undertaken, and second, they control the outcomes, the conditions under which the results can be published. (quoted in Maslen, 2001, p. A54)

Despite these concerns, U.S. universities actively promote faculty incentive programs that reward faculty who secure external funding and grants ("Faculty Bonuses," 2002), and books such as *Get Funded: A Practical Guide for Scholars Seeking Research Support from Business* (Schumacher, 1992), *Survival Skills for Scholars: Developing a Consulting Practice* (Metzger, 1993), and *Consulting: Part-Time and Full Time Career Options for Scholars and Researchers* (Wright, 2002), which support this trend, are marketed to faculty at national conferences. National communication organizations even encourage this trend. For example, the National Communication Association's *Spectra* has carried articles about professors' consulting activities (e.g., Eadie, 1998). Taken together, these factors create conditions where corporate funding can be expected to increase in all disciplines in years to come.

In response to those editors who suggest that disclosure of conflicts of interest is necessary but should be left to the institutional review boards of authors' universities, we point to the disparity in policies existing across universities. If all universities were monitoring sources of funding, consulting, and entrepreneurial activities with equal rigor, journals would not need conflicts-of-interest policies. However, a large disparity among university conflicts-of-interest policies has been reported, and many universities maintain professors' financial activities are private issues (Blumenstyk, 1998; Brainard, 2003). As such, university policies do not provide sufficient assurance that authors will publicly divulge conflicts of interest.

Second, the editors' comments on whose responsibility it is to monitor potential conflicts of interest and the corresponding contention that communication research is relatively immune to conflicts of interest speak to the intended purpose of the journals. Some may contend that the purpose of academic journals is to simply disseminate research to a broader audience. This perspective is indicative of the conduit view of communication. The conduit model posits communication as a direct transfer of information (Axley, 1984; Putnam, Phillips, & Chapman, 1996). This perspective of communication is what Deetz (1995) calls an expressive view in which communication simply functions as a vehicle for transferring information from one source to another. In effect, this view is similar to that expressed by mass media, which see their role as disseminators of information. This might explain why scholarly communication journals approach conflicts of interest in a manner similar to mass media.

However, a more nuanced view of communication holds that there is more to the communication process than the mere sharing of ideas. Rather, communication creates meaning and is an engagement between parties involved in an interaction. A dialogic view holds that truth is not discovered simply in the transfer of information but rather is created through an engagement between parties in interaction (Deetz, 1995; Habermas, 1981/1984, 1981/1987).

Habermas's theory of colonization of the lifeworld provides a critical perspective for interpreting university culture, including the research and publication process. It is possible that research funding or a consultant's fee do nothing to change the views of authors or readers; however, the reader should have the ability to engage the work with this knowledge and make that determination. This is currently not the case, as communication journals do not proactively require authors to disclose this information.

Habermas's theory suggests that authors should be required to disclose potential conflicts of interest so that readers have the full opportunity to determine the overall legitimacy of the claims (i.e., the findings in their research). This way, journal publication can be seen as providing an avenue for dialogue between researcher and readership.

Moreover, academicians are in no position to criticize mass media for not disclosing conflicts of interest, when their academic journals do not require disclosure. Editors and editorial boards of academic journals can contribute to the process by making disclosure a requirement. In doing so, they can demonstrate that open dialogue and transparency are priorities for their publications. Even if conflicts of interest are not problems at this juncture, these policies would nevertheless be another step toward achieving Habermas's "ideal communication community." If this were done, communication journals could serve as role models for mass media, a role that they cannot now serve.

Biographies

Lawrence Soley is the Colnik Professor of Communication, named for a former Milwaukee television personality who endowed that professorship, in Marquette University's Diederich College of Communication, named for a Landmark Communication Inc. executive and his wife, who are alumni and major donors to the college.

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Appendix A: Journal Titles

American Journalism
Communication Education
Communication Law & Policy
Communication Monographs
Communication Reports
Communication Research
Communication Studies
Communication Theory
Critical Studies in Media Communication
Howard Journal of Communication
Human Communication Research
International Communication Bulletin
International Journal of Advertising
Journal of Advertising
Journal of Applied Communication Research
Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media
Journal of Communication
Journal of Communication Inquiry
Journal of Current Issues and Research in Advertising
Journal of Intercultural Communication Research
Journal of Mass Media Ethics
Journal of Radio Studies
Journalism & Communication Monographs
Journalism & Mass Communication Educator
Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly
Journalism History
Management Communication Quarterly
Mass Communication & Society
Media, Culture & Society
Newspaper Research Journal
Quarterly Journal of Speech

Appendix A: Journal Titles (continued)

Southern Communication Journal
Telecommunication Policy
Western Journal of Communication
Women's Studies in Communication

Appendix B: Form for Coding Manuscript Submission Guidelines

1. Do guidelines request authors to disclose financial support for research and/or financial relationships that the researcher has with persons or entities being researched?

   Yes_____ No_____

2. Do guidelines request authors to disclose funding sources, employment, consultancies, stock ownership, or honoraria that are related to the issue being researched?

   Yes_____ No_____

3. Do the guidelines ask authors to disclose any relationships that may be perceived as a conflict-of-interest?

   Yes_____ No_____

4. Do the guidelines report that authors should follow style of, or conform to, the 4th or 5th editions of the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*?

   Yes_____ No_____

Appendix C: Survey Questions

Does your journal have a mandatory disclosure policy concerning financial conflicts-of-interest concerning funding sources, expert testimony, consulting, stock ownership and the like for article authors? _____yes _____no

If yes, what does this policy state? (please attach copy if this is more convenient)

_____

_____

_____

If yes, where can this policy be found (e.g., published submission guidelines, in the copyright waiver form, web page, etc.)? _____

_____

Does your journal have a mandatory disclosure policy concerning financial conflicts-of-interest concerning funding sources, expert testimony, consulting, stock ownership and the like for reviewers and editorial board members? _____yes _____no

If yes, what does this policy state? (please attach copy if this is more convenient)

_____

_____

_____

Do you believe that a conflict-of-interest requirement is required for communication journals? _____yes _____no

Why or why not? _____

_____