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CORRESPONDENCE

WHERE THERE'S SMOKE...

Editors,

I enjoyed the excellent and insightful discussion “Honestly, Who Else Would Fund Such Research? Reflections of a Non-smoking Scholar,” by Michael Marlow, in the May 2008 issue of *Econ Journal Watch* ([link](#)). I learned a lot from what the author had to say in that article.

Through my membership and participation in the eco-spiritual community, (Children of Gaia Iseum, Fellowship of Isis), as well as my involvement with informal social and political activism networks such as The Anti-Fascist League, I contributed to a social atmosphere in which unfairly judging a researcher’s integrity on the basis of their source of funding has become commonplace. Yes, I was a true believer, for nearly thirty years, that corporate funding necessarily creates bias favorable to the funder. I didn’t have to actually read corporately-funded studies to justify denouncing them as frauds and their authors as corrupt. I “magically” knew this must be the case. I behaved like an ignoramus with regard to this matter and I deeply regret having engaged in pre-judgment and unfairly maligning academics involved in such research.

I am not generally disposed to pre-judgment, but I sincerely believed that there was essentially unlimited access to genuinely “neutral” sources of funding. I had been led to believe this was the case, by the writings of leaders in the fields of deep ecology and consumer protection. Therefore, I concluded that researchers working for corporations must be motivated by nothing but greed.

It has only been within the past few years, as a result of intensive research I’ve conducted, that I’ve woken up to the reality that genuinely “neutral” sources of research funding are almost entirely mythical. The reality is that government and non-profit funding is severely limited in some areas and is itself controlled by people who have social, political and public policy agendas of their own. I have finally realized that, if an academic wishes to pursue a hypothesis that is unlikely to support the agendas of government agency or non-profit funders she may find herself with no alternative but to seek or accept corporate funding, that the very fact of her having received corporate funding will be employed by people like I used to be, to dismiss her and her work without even reading it.

I had always believed that government agencies and non-profit organizations involved in public health promotion, social justice, and consumer protection were involved in uncovering and denouncing biased corporate-funded research because they wanted ALL research to be genuinely unbiased. I never imagined, until recently, that some of them were eliminating competition for calculated control over public and policy-maker's thinking. And then I discovered Social Marketing and "health communications"—was my naive bubble burst!

Rather than clearing the field of deceptive, manipulative misrepresentation, some of these agencies and groups were actively copying the very same techniques and technologies employed by industry, for their own purposes. And this included and continues to include commissioning research studies that have very little to do with advancing scientific knowledge and everything to do with calculated propaganda! So much for "the public interest." I don't trust any of these agencies or groups anymore, (but I do actually read the studies, now, since I can no longer trust anything that anyone else tells me about them).

Another person who has addressed these issues with uncommon integrity is A. Thomas McLellan. His article "Implicit Demand Characteristics in Research Funding Sources—It's Not Just Some Sources," published in *Addiction*, also upsets taboos by arguing that institutionalized bias exists on all sides of research funding (McLellan 2007). He is one of a very select few other writers to have confronted these issues with the kind of honesty and candor found in Marlow's article.

Respectfully,

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REFERENCES

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- McLellan, A. Thomas.** 2007. Implicit Demand Characteristics in Research Funding Sources—It's Not Just Some Sources. *Addiction* 102 (7): 1035–1037. [Link](#).

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