

internationally, especially when sovereign restrictions are expanding as information becomes an increasingly critical national resource.

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## Conflicts of Interest in Science: How Corporate-Funded Academic Research Can Threaten Public Health

Sheldon Krimsky. 2019. New York, NY: Hot Books. [ISBN 978-1-5107-3652-8. 392 pages, including index. USD \$27.99.]



Eroding public trust in science as exemplified by the anti-vaccine movement and climate change skeptics makes *Conflicts of Interest in Science: How Corporate-Funded Academic Research Can Threaten Public Health* particularly relevant today. If scientists are viewed as biased, the results of their research

may be dismissed, even if they are scientifically sound. That is why even the appearance of a conflict of interest is detrimental to scientific integrity, Sheldon Krimsky notes.

The book collects his published writings on the prevalence and potential impact of (perceived) conflicts of interest among scientific authors, particularly in biomedicine. It presents 21 articles published between 1985 and 2017 in chronological order. Topics include the social cost of corporate sponsorship of academic research, financial ties between guideline panel members and pharmaceutical companies, scientists as entrepreneurs, the editorial practices of medical journals, and transparency of financial ties between study authors and companies that might profit from their results, among others.

As might be expected with this approach, Krimsky's study results are re-used in multiple articles on similar topics. He traces the distinction between "pure" and "applied" science to the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Nowadays,

however, Krimsky differentiates between purely academic and industry-funded research. Focusing on medical studies, he observes: "Many medical schools operate on a system where faculty may have tenure but must raise their own salary from sponsored research" (p. 107).

Such a system raises questions about the trustworthiness of the reported results. While financial interests, such as the need for sponsored salaries, do not always influence the research outcome, they may well determine what is—and is not—studied. Such conflicts of interest may also introduce unconscious bias on the researcher's part. And then there is, of course, direct influence, such as Krimsky's own experience with industry trying to suppress his students' environmental report.

In an afterword, Krimsky recommends: transparency through disclosure policies, including sanctions for authors who fail to disclose their conflicts of interest; rejection of private university funding that limits investigative autonomy; strict adherence to government guidelines on advisory board members and their financial interests; a ban on government employees' financial interests in for-profit companies in their field; public availability of company research on drugs, medical devices, pesticides and chemicals, and independent evaluation of these items and substances. "No company should serve as both manufacturer and sole evaluator of their products," Krimsky concludes (p. 315).

While *Conflicts of Interest in Science* raises many interesting issues and provides useful evidence, it could have benefited from more thorough copy editing, especially of the front and back matter.

### Barbara Jungwirth

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