



“Conflict of Interest: None”

One Journal Editor's experiences of conflict of interest
and
a tentative framework for identifying vested interest

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Outline

- ✓ Why are we here
- ✓ Is the gambling industry an issue?
- ✓ Some stories
- ✓ Some caveats
- ✓ Frameworks for deciding on funding acceptance
- ✓ A word of caution
- ✓ Conclusions



Why are we here

“It is the job of science to advise, to be helpful to, and to support the policy process, but its inalienable responsibility is also to criticise, question, test and be awkward. Science has to have a larger vision of itself than its being merely a biddable management tool” .

(Edwards, 1993: 13)

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“A submitted manuscript is the intellectual property of its authors, not the study sponsor. We will not review or publish articles based on studies that are conducted under conditions that allow the sponsor to have sole control of the data or to withhold publication.”

(Davidoff et al., 2001b: 463)

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Is the gambling industry an issue?

- The links between different dangerous consumptions industries are substantial:
- Altria (formerly Phillip Morris) owns controlling stake of SABMiller – the world's largest brewer
- In Australia, Woolworths Liquor Group owns ALH gaming venues, as well as Dan Murphy and BWS
- We don't know the extent of cross-ownership/multi-national involvement

THE GAMBLING INDUSTRY

- funding opportunities from gambling industry sources have increased significantly
- relationships with SAPROs have been noted
(Social Aspect Public Relations Organisations; Adams & Rossen, 2006)
- Significant government vested interest (little motivation to change)
- Negative public perceptions can have major effects on the sale of their products
- 'Our need for operating money usually wins out however.' (Berdahl & Azmier, 1999, p. 15)



Gambling industry is a vested interest

- Many of the same people and organisations as tobacco, alcohol and maybe even junk food
- Follow the same tactics as other vested interests
- More sophisticated than alcohol/tobacco
 - Far greater proportion of researchers linked to industry
- Current institutional practices fail to identify or deal with these interests in an equitable manner
- We require more solutions/resources to ensure the integrity of the evidence base

Who can act?

Academic journals

- > Author statements, outing authors/funders, editorials

Institutions

- > Ethical guidelines, training

Professional societies

- > Codes of conduct, awareness raising

Individual academics

- > 'Outing' funders, (PERIL analysis)

Addiction's Col questions

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

req Declare any sources of funding of all the authors that may be relevant, including current funding of posts and funding for the research being reported. If none declare 'none'.

req Declare any connections of any of the authors with the tobacco, alcohol, pharmaceutical and gaming industries (or bodies such as social aspect organisations that receive funding from them) irrespective of whether it relates to the current research, including research contracts, consultancy, employment and stocks. If none declare 'none'.

req Declare any contractual constraints on publishing that existed with regard to the research being reported; for example if the contract gave the funder a right of veto. If none declare 'none'.



Case study one - denial

First submission:

Conflict of interest: None

Second submission:

“The author did not receive funding support for this work and, to my knowledge, has no relationship to any other activity that benefits directly from alcohol, gambling and other dangerous consumption industries. However, I have received research funding from the ????, a charitable body who funds its research programme based on donations to the ??? industry. I have also undertaken consultancy work from various ??? companies.”

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Case study 2 - denial/attribution bias

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National Center for Responsible Gaming, which is a non-profit funded by gambling industry sources to conduct research on problem gambling



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Case Study 2b - 'hidden funding'

First submission: Conflict of interest: None

Second submission: Acknowledgements

“This study was supported partly by funding from an incentive grant for new investigators from the Institute for Research on Pathological Gambling and Related Disorders (IRPG), ...The IRPG receives funding for this programme from the National Center for Responsible Gaming (NCRG). The NCRG and its activities are supported by contributions from the casino gaming industry, equipment manufacturers, vendors, related organizations and individuals...

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Case study 3 - identity management

“Dr. ?????’s main support throughout his professional career has been from ????? University and other academic sources. He has occasionally received expenses and/or fees for work he has done on behalf of World Health Organization, International Center for Alcohol Policies, and agencies of various governments, as well as some food, beverage, and transportation industries.”

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Case Study 4 - getting grumpy

XXX has participated in scientific meetings co-sponsored by the pharmaceutical industry. He has received funding for research projects that were indirectly financed through sales of the alcohol and tobacco industry via taxes (i.e., funds from the XXX Alcohol Monopoly or the Tobacco Prevention Funds). He cannot exclude having collaborated in international projects, in which partners received funding from the industry either directly or indirectly via social aspect organizations. Participating as an expert in XXX committees such as those planning the new XXX Alcohol Program or preparing changes of the XXX Alcohol Law, he has regular connections with representatives of the alcohol industry who similarly participate in these committees. I can't know, not even for my institute wither there are connections with the industry (I think we get money for ads from the pharmaceutical industry in our home journal "XXXX), b) I got a fee for a presentation 7 years ago and then found out that the conference was partly sponsored by the pharmaceutical industry; I'm pretty sure that I did some more presentations where there has been sponsoring by whosoever. I just got another invitation for a XXX prevention day that brings together researchers and preventionists ...

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And...

for a better future!!!! Of course bags and conference material will be partly sponsored by the pharmaceutical industry. c) XXX is currently developing a national alcohol program; there are round table discussions that include representatives of the alcohol industry, so I do have connections with people from the alcohol industry.

So clearly I do have "connections" with the alcohol industry.

What about grants from the XXX alcohol monopoly (that is financed with the famous XXX alcohol tenth (e.g. a part of the tax on spirits, which more or less is kind of money from alcohol sold by the alcohol industry))? The gaming industry has to pay into funds for prevention from which I got a grant, does this count too? The same is true for the XXX tobacco funds.

I've certainly also received money from collaborations with other institutes (or foundations), e.g. in the UK, who were partly co-financed with industry money through so-called charity funds. (I think almost all university in the UK have such funds, but I can't know, if my collaboration fell under such a sponsoring; how can I?).

...finally

My feeling is that all these statements just create hypocrites or force us to stretch the truth. And most of these statements have nothing to do with quality of research.”

But, she has a point. We do need to decide where this ends and come up with better systems.

And – the current system doesn't work



Frameworks for deciding on funding 'appropriateness'

2 types:

➤ **Ethics-based frameworks**

- Very little done in the area – much more work needs to be done
- Funding regulation is a matter of beneficence and informed consent for research participants (Miller, Moore, Strang 2006)

➤ **Decision making frameworks**

- **PERIL** – Peter Adams (2007)

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PERIL - Adams (2007)

Purpose

- > refers to the degree to which purposes are divergent between funder and recipient.

Extent

- > is the **extent** to which the recipient relies on this source of funding. As the proportion of income increases, it becomes more difficult to separate from expectations associated with the source.

Relevant harm

- > is the **degree of harm** associated with this form of consumption. The level of harm generated by different forms of consumption varies.

Identified

- > Funders are unlikely to contribute anonymously because for them the point of the exercise is often to be **Identified**, to form a visible association with public good activities for the purposes of positive branding. This in turn can be used for political or commercial purposes.

Link

- > The more direct the **Link** between funder and researcher, the stronger the influence and the more visible the association.



Is Purpose enough to create Peril?

“DrinkWise Australia is an evidence-based organisation focused on promoting change in Australia’s drinking culture.”

But,

some would argue that their stated goals do not reflect the purpose they serve:

Hall, W., & Room, R. (2006). Assessing the wisdom of funding DrinkWise. *MJA* 185 (11/12), 635-636.

Miller, P., & Kypri, K. (2009). Why we will not accept funding from Drinkwise. *Drug And Alcohol Review*, 28(3), 324-326.

Miller, P. G., Kypri, K., Chikritzhs, T., Skov, S., Rubin, G., Stanley, F., et al. (2009). Health experts reject industry-backed funding for alcohol research. *Medical Journal Australia*, 190(12).

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'Purpose'

- The purpose of the organisation distributing the funds can differ from their original source.
 - For example, Quit, in Australia, derives its money from taxation raised from the sale of cigarettes.
 - AERF was created by funds from the alcohol industry, via a levy
- However, if the purpose of the body can be reasonable asserted to be in line with industry goals (such as self promotion or avoidance of certain issues in favour of others),
- The processes should be questioned:



How do we determine purpose?

- Representation
- Processes
- Outputs
- Industry behaviour



Industry representation on board

- where does the control lie?
- Are 'independent' board members really so?
- Is there any such thing as acceptable industry representation?
- "the perception that donor organisations should still retain a significant say in how the money is used" (Adams and Rosen, 2006: 11)
 - I see no sustainable argument for that in health/social research
- Some governments around the world insist on industry representation for some funding bodies (e.g. AERC).
- A single industry representative on a strong board of more than 10 others may be acceptable, dependent on whether adequate decision making processes exist.
- BUT, experience from other fields suggests a 'tainting' effect

(Wagner, W., & Steinzor, R., 2007)

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Process

➤ **Funding Policy:**

- freely available set of funding policies
- peer reviewed to ensure they are targeted at issues relevant to the field.

➤ **Peer Review:**

- integral to all elements of the funding process
- reviewers should have declared conflict of interest
- at least one of three should have no declared conflict of interest.

Process (2)

➤ Transparency:

- All decisions should have feedback to applicant and minutes of meeting available to the public.
- All projects funded should be listed in an Annual Report, freely available on the organisation web site.
- Reviewer selection process should be listed
- Conflict of Interest policies should be documented.

Outputs

- Peer reviewed articles/reports
- Non-peer reviewed reports
- Media releases
- Levels of control
 - Did funders 'edit' substantial findings
- 'badging'
 - PR is the major raison d'être for many industry funded SAPROs

Industry behaviour

- ? Have the organisations changed behaviour at all
 - ? Particularly, if they receive research findings suggesting they should
- ? Are they behaving in a way that accords with public health imperatives
- ? Do they adhere to codes of practice
 - ? Most SAPROs have board members whose own companies constantly ignore own codes of practice

Caveats

- Not all vested interest is 'bad'
 - many of us have a vested interest in 'doing good' according to our own values
- Many people in 'industry' genuinely want to help
- Guidelines/questions should be focussed on the future
- Hostile funding environments need to be considered
- Choices must ultimately provide people with options

A word of caution

- ☹ Dangerous consumptions industries have deep pockets and have engaged in predatory litigation
- ☹ A court case doesn't need any basis
- ☹ Universities do not have insurance to cover statements outside of academic forum which **DIRECTLY** relate to your employment
- ☹ Legal support will only be provided for activities **DIRECTLY** related to your employment

Summary



- Every individual, discipline, and funding organisation brings its own agenda to the research process.
- Addiction scientists should be vigilant about any funding source
 - Before accepting funding, you should carefully consider how much the scientific activity might promote the interests of an industry
- Funding obtained from most sources can be legitimate, if:
 - the funding source does not impose rigid limits on the types of research to be conducted.
 - grant review process independent, transparent and peer reviewed
 - consistent with scientific and public health aims

Conclusions

- A complex issue with a great deal of work to be done
- WHO practice of 'consultation', not 'collaboration' is a safe position to start with
- History tells us clearly that profit and public health are competing, not complimentary, interests

“A "No" uttered from deepest conviction is better and greater than a "Yes" merely uttered to please, or what is worse, to avoid trouble.”

Mahatma Gandhi



Thank you.

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