

BOOK REVIEW

THE SOCIAL PRODUCTION OF RESEARCH: PERSPECTIVES ON FUNDING AND GENDER

REVIEWED BY:

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Acker, Sandra., Ylijoki, Oili-Helena., and McGinn, Michelle. K. (Eds.) (2024). *The Social Production of Research: Perspectives on Funding and Gender*. Routledge. Pages: 250. Price: 49.99 USD (paper).

When you read this volume you will be heartened by the commitment to understanding—as the title suggests—the social production of research, and its relations with funding and gender. The scholarship in this book makes visible the dilemmas, contradictions and paradoxes that exist and often give rise to disparities in who receives research funding. Any notion that there is a singular and complete solution to this issue is soon dispelled. You will not find a checklist or template to solve this problem; rather, you will come away with ideas on how to address the various layers that contribute to disparity, not only in research funding, and (this is the salient point), the *kind* of research that gets funded. You will learn, or deepen your understanding of, or become more attentive to the ways in which the enactment of policies and procedures (intentionally, or not) contributes to disparity.

The decision of the editors of this book to categorize by theme rather than by country interrupts a reading of the social production of research as being the same in different countries; that is, the finding that women and other traditionally marginalized groups, specifically black women, are less likely to receive major research funding is common across the chapters, but how that comes into being is different in differ-

ent countries and sometimes within one country. That being said, of course reading individual chapters is productive and meaningful. The volume focuses on research from Canada, Finland, Sweden, and the United Kingdom (UK).

The different research methodologies described in this volume, alone, makes it worth the read. Semi-structured interviews and policy analyses structure many of the investigations that also give insight into different methods used to address the social production of research. The use of observers to document what happens in adjudication meetings/review panels and the analysis of such observations is insightful. Affective cafes, qualitative case studies, and diary projects provide important insights. Historical accounts of policy changes and the impact of COVID or Brexit provide important context and challenge the idea that policy is context free. Similarly, the focus on practice, and how policies, procedures, etc., get enacted, makes visible the daily workings of production in higher education. You will read how policies and procedures are acknowledged and engaged and developed to promote equity; but sometimes the interpersonal interactions reinscribe social inequities that these policies and procedures are designed to lessen.

The four sections of the volume are: 1) Introduction; 2) Stability and Change; 3) Care and Conflict; and 4) Funding and Defunding.

1) Introduction: The editors outline the rationale for the volume's layout and alert the reader to potential differences in what is meant by researchers in different countries and settings. Also, international differences in overarching themes, such as precarity, are described. For example, in Canada it is frequently teaching in higher education that is marked by precarious employment, in contrast to Finland, where employment as a researcher is more often precarious. In this section of the book, following the Editor's Introduction, Sandra Acker provides an overview from the literature on research, funding, and gender.

2) Stability and Change: Gabriele Griffin offers a view of funding stability, mainly short-term, in digital humanities and audit cultures, and the impacts on career trajectories, with women's careers seeming the most affected. Additionally, the liability of newness and uncertainty can lead to tendencies to "remember the old and forget the new" (p. 40), undoing practices and policies to address gender imbalances.

Barbara Read and Carole Leathwood document how major social events such as COVID and Brexit differentially impact access to funding along the axes of gender, race and contract type, and, just as importantly, the loss of networks of collaboration. This loss "deepened existing patterns of social inequality" (p. 57).

In Finland, external funding provides increased stability, and who the monies are granted to, the university or the individual, impacts decision making. In this chapter, Marja Vehviläinen, Hanna-Mari Ikonen and Päivi Korvajärvi, share, as an example, how a loss of ownership of research can occur following parenting leave.

Using a diary and interview approach, Kate Carruthers Thomas speaks to how competition and gender disparity impact who receives funding, and how "new" universities embrace identities of teaching and not research. In the UK, during times of pressure (e.g., COVID) it was research that suffered.

3) Care and Conflict: Oili-Helena Ylijoki shares the career stories of two women, and demonstrates how research funding success, as a marker of excellence, has become a competition fetish. Also outlined are the ways in which calls for efficiency that led to the merging of units impacted research and individual researchers; in one example, researchers no longer had access to space. Ylijoki notes that policies and procedures designed to address gender imbalances in research funding, but with no concurrent attention to practices, do not lead to increased equity.

Marie Vander Kloet and Caitlin Campisi make visible how members of the academic community straddle different positions, and clearly point to how those involved in care work in relation to research and administration occupy spaces in contradiction to the careless neoliberal workers.

That women are often asked, once again, to make their emotions fit the dominant ideals of what it means to be a researcher is laid bare in the work of Johanna Hokka, Elisa Kurtti, Pia Olsson and Tiina Suopajarvi. Such implicit requests and practices to produce different emotional states often are made visible in the context of funding decisions/interactions for equity seeking groups. Importantly, that women are not powerless, and engage in grass-roots approaches to resist competition and audit cultures is discussed.

Shirley Anne Tate's research makes visible the need for representation of black women on research funding committees. Committees may not have nuanced understanding of the subjects of race, anti-black racism, and misogynoir; therefore, funding applications related to these subjects are often unsuccessful, and, by extension, career trajectories blocked.

4) Funding and Defunding: The ways in which gender bias can creep into adjudications, resulting in women's voices being ignored, and how often women are asked to do affective work to avoid conflict is clearly laid out in Lambros Roubanis's work. Her observations of different review panels and how interactions can bias who receives research funding is detailed and helpful. Careful attention to peer-review and

how “status-related biases can be quite difficult to separate from legitimate disagreements” (p. 169) is necessary in promoting equity.

Indicators of research promise and achievement often ignore systemic barriers when it comes to promoting equity in research funding success. Merli Tamtik and Dawn Sutherland outline for us a historical account of changes to the Canadian Research Chairs Program (1999 to 2019-onwards) to address equity concerns. They note there is still a checkbox quality to reaching targets and that “the definition of excellence . . . remained unchanged for decades” (p.184) as did the accompanying indicators of excellence (e.g., peer-reviewed publications).

Lisa Lucas provides an insightful overview of the funding policy landscape in the UK. In resistance to individual competition, female academics in Lucas’s research note that “collaboration, support, and mentoring were crucial in developing large funding bids” (p. 199) and, by extension, career progression. There is a wealth of experiences contained within this chapter.

Liisa Husu and Helen Peterson close out the volume by offering an analysis that speaks to the social nature of gender and how its interpretations and definitions are “translated into measures, activities, and policies” (p. 206) in organizations. Monitoring of councils/committees by observers to produce reports with recommendations to improve the review process results in fascinating reading, and is a way to continuously address equity and drive change.

Attention to the research in this volume expands understanding and shows ways to approach gender equity in funding. Without attention to funding, the status quo is maintained regarding the types of research undertaken and knowledges produced.