

Deconstructing the evidence-based discourse in health sciences: truth, power and fascism

Unbelievably, this prime piece of postmodernist bollocks is even worse than [Barry's paper!](#)

Download [the full paper here](#) (if you can bear it). [Dave Holmes](#) RN PhD, [Stuart J Murray](#) PhD, [Amelie Perron](#) RN PhD(cand) and [Genevieve Rail](#) PhD, *Int J Evid Based Health* 2006; 4: 180, 186.

The authors of this paper are from Department of English, Ryerson University Toronto, Ontario, Canada, and Faculty of Health Sciences, School of Nursing, University of Ottawa, Ottawa. [Ryerson University](#) is an ex-polytechnic which became a university in 1971. It [runs courses](#) in Traditional Chinese Medicine (but, at least, no homeopathy). In Canada, as here, it seems that such institutions are the first to damage their new reputations by encouraging gobbledygook like this.

[Stuart J. Murray](#) lists his interests as “phenomenology, Foucault, bioethics, biopolitics, and psychoanalysis. Currently researching a project on posthuman “life” in digital and mediatized contexts.” In [his contribution](#) to the McLuhan International Festival of the Future he says (*apropos* of McLuhan) “We will be frustrated if we look here for a firm, communicable content.” *Well that's very true.*

Abstract

Background Drawing on the work of the late French philosophers Deleuze and Guattari, the objective of this paper is to demonstrate that the evidence-based movement in the health sciences is outrageously exclusionary and dangerously normative with regards to scientific knowledge. As such, we assert that the evidence-based movement in health sciences constitutes a good example of microfascism at play in the contemporary scientific arena.

Objective The philosophical work of Deleuze and Guattari proves to be useful in showing how health sciences are colonised (territorialised) by an all-encompassing scientific research paradigm “that of post-positivism ” but also and foremost in showing the process by which a dominant ideology comes to exclude alternative forms of knowledge, therefore acting as a fascist structure.

Conclusion The Cochrane Group, among others, has created a hierarchy that has been endorsed by many academic institutions, and that serves to (re)produce the exclusion of certain forms of research. Because ‘regimes of truth’ such as the evidence-based movement currently enjoy a privileged status, scholars have not only a scientific duty, but also an ethical obligation to deconstruct these regimes of power.

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Unfortunately, the nature of this scientific fascism makes it attractive to all of us the subjected. In Foucault's words: the major enemy, the strategic adversary is fascism. . . . And not only historical fascism, the fascism of Hitler and Mussolini which was able to mobilize and use the desire of the masses so effectively but also the fascism in us all, in our heads and in our everyday behavior, the fascism that causes us to love power, to desire the very thing that dominates and exploits us. (p. xiii) Fascism does not originate solely from the outside; it is a will within us to desire, although often unwittingly, a life of domination. Such a “lovable” fascism requires little more than the promise of success (grants, publications, awards, recognition, etc.) within its system to get us to participate wholeheartedly. Perhaps it is time to think about governing structures that impose their

imperatives (academic, scientific, political, economic) on academics and researchers, and to ask ourselves what drives us to love fascist and exclusionary structures.

The Cochrane Group has created a hierarchy that has been endorsed by many academic institutions, and that serves to (re)produce the exclusion of certain forms of knowledge production. Because EBM, as a “regime of truth”, currently enjoys a privileged status, there exists a scientific and ethical obligation to deconstruct such regime. Given the privileged relation to knowledge defining the intellectual mission, intellectuals are well located to deconstruct the ‘truth’ and to ‘speak truth to power’, to use Foucault’s expression. Unfortunately, most would prefer not to hear alternative, marginalised discourses because the latter tend to expose the very power relations that create our current situation and prop up those academics/scientists with a vested interest in the status quo. However, we believe that one of the roles of the intellectual is to decolonise, to deterritorialise the vast field of health sciences as it is currently mapped out by the EBM.

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Final remarks

Critical intellectuals should work towards the creation of a space of freedom (of thought), and as such, they constitute a concrete threat to the current scientific order in EBHS and the health sciences as a whole. It is fair to assert that the critical intellectuals are at ‘war’ with those who have no regards other than for an evidence-based logic. The war metaphor speaks to the ‘critical and theoretical revolt’ that is needed to disrupt and resist the fascist order of scientific knowledge development.

Raymond Tallis, in [his review](#) of *Intellectual Impostures*, said

“The profound significance of S & B’s [Sokal and Bricmont’s] wonderfully written, deeply passionate and authentically erudite book, is that, by shining real light on the fake jewellery of the leading postmodernist theorists, it has shown what has happened to academic humanities over the last thirty years under the influence of individuals like Kristeva for whom intellectual legerdemain has become a way of life.”

“Academics intending to continue as postmodern theorists in the interdisciplinary humanities after S&B should first read *Intellectual Impostures* and ask themselves whether adding to the quantity of confusion and untruth in the world is a good use of the gift of life or an ethical way to earn a living. After S & B, they may feel less comfortable with the glamorous life that can be forged in the wake of the founding charlatans of postmodern Theory. Alternatively, they might follow my friend Roger into estate agency — though they should check out in advance that they are up to the moral rigours of such a profession.”

And it seems that some people still haven’t noticed. But then the abuse of scientific language by people who don’t understand it (or whose intent is to deceive) has been the mainstay of quackery for several hundred years. Plus ca change.

What can one say in the face of such gross betrayal of everything we have learned since the enlightenment? I suppose one simple explanation that its paranoid style, and its imagined conspiracies are all a manifestation of a giant chip on the shoulder from people who feel that their genius has not been recognised appropriately by those who fund research. But that is a matter for psychiatrists, not me.

Ben Goldacre, who first drew my attention to this paper, comments on his [Badscience](#) site, and has now written about it in his regular column in the [Guardian](#).

“Even from looking at the title, you just know this academic paper from the September edition of the International Journal of Evidence-based Healthcare is going to be an absolute corker. And it uses the word “fascist” (or elaborate derivatives) 28 times in six pages, . . .”