Discerning Bias in Research: Challenging Epistemological Assumptions.

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Introduction

Penelope Harnett

> Objectivity cannot be equated with mental blankness; rather, objectivity resides in recognizing your preferences and then subjecting them to especially harsh scrutiny – and also in a willingness to revise or abandon your theories when the tests fail (as they usually do)
> Gould 2000, 104-105.

This booklet is designed to support doctoral students to reflect critically on research literature and their own research. It provides different perspectives on ways in which research may be questioned and offers insights into possible bias. The authors provide examples from a range of subject disciplines employing different methodologies and claims for the validity of their research. Such a multi- disciplinary approach is important for understanding and researching citizenship which is, in itself, a multi-disciplinary concept. However, this may create challenges in determining which paradigms and which data might be more useful or reliable for answering research questions. An awareness of researchers' viewpoints is important. We need to have a view on knowledge: what counts as worthwhile knowledge and what are worthwhile subjects to research. Alongside these points, we need to know more about the status of the data and how the data were obtained.

Context is important too. Research seeks to unravel the questions which interest people at different points of time. So, our current concern in the political and social world for human rights and individuals in society is reflected in a surge of interest in identity studies including both children and adults which intersect with gender, cultural, class and other groupings; studies which explore how individuals make sense and interact with different communities; how policy is played out in practice.

Bias in research is probably best understood from an epistemological standpoint. Beliefs about knowledge and its acquisition have changed over time. Nineteenth century positivism has been challenged by more complex interpretations and re- interpretations of existing knowledge and the creation of new forms of knowledge. All disciplines have seen a proliferation of different ways of researching; an expansion of different research questions to interrogate, and the formation of a variety of sub disciplines. The booklet provides examples of how certain paradigms have become more influential; how some knowledge may be more valued than others and how some knowledge claims for validity have changed over time.

The above all challenge our epistemological beliefs. On the one hand knowledge might be viewed as objective; something which is tangible and known; a collection of undisputed facts, events and information which are held external to the researcher. In this case, knowledge is ' an empirical object of rational enquiry' (Whitehead and McNiff 2006, 33), and claims for its validity are about 'observable, measurable phenomena' (Scott and Usher 1999, 12), alongside analyses of research procedures and methodologies.

On the other hand, others might view knowledge as more subjective; something which is more intangible and experienced. Different interpretations and perspectives may influence how knowledge is viewed. Linked with this is a different notion of social being; that reality is a product of individual consciousness (phenomenology) and that humans construct their own interpretations of reality in different ways.

Put simply, in critiquing research, account needs to be given to ontological assumptions about social reality and aspects of the social world; epistemological assumptions concerning the nature of knowledge, what constitutes knowledge and how it may be represented; and the methodologies which are employed deriving from these assumptions (McNiff with Whitehead, 2002).

Researchers and scholars may place themselves on different points along this continuum of beliefs summarized in the following table:

Positivistic approach	**Anti-positivistic approach**
Objective	Subjective
Quantitative research techniques	Qualitative research techniques
Experimental	Naturalistic
Outsider research	Insider research
Impersonal	Individual
Certain assumptions taken for granted	Taken for granted assumptions investigated
Macro concepts: society, institutions	Micro concepts; individual, personal constructs, negotiated meanings norms, roles, positions
Generalise from specific	Interpret the specific
Statistical analysis	Non-statistical analysis
Pure	Applied

←——————————————————continuum——————————————————→
(adapted from Opie 2004, 8)

Awareness of different epistemological and ontological understandings is key to our understanding of research and potential bias. It is crucial if we are to be critical of research which is used to push particular agendas such as the use which politicians make of particular 'nuggets' of research information. In terms of citizenship as well , active participation in democracy and commitments to social justice require critically engaged citizens who are prepared to question assumptions and different knowledge claims. Researchers too, need to be active citizens demonstrating characteristics such as respect for difference as well as honesty in conducting and presenting their research as open to scrutiny.

The importance of knowing ways in which research has been represented is evident in the different examples included within this booklet. Authors of vignettes have employed a variety of genres in writing about research. Different disciplines have their own modes of representation and their own expectations on the extent to which the researcher's voice may be heard either explicitly or implicitly in reporting research. Doctoral students need to be aware of these different linguistic styles as they develop their own writing genre and find ways to express their opinions and their research clearly.

The examples included in this booklet are designed to encourage critical reflection and to promote dialogue on discerning bias in research. Readers may choose to analyse the examples within the continuum outlined above or they might choose to consider them for the insights which they provide as they undertake their own research. However, in whatever way they are used, the examples should provide readers with a more critical understanding of potential bias within research.

History: the influence of external bias

Luigi Cajani

Historical research - and the teaching of history with it - is especially exposed to external bias because of the special role in shaping social and political consensus by defining allegiances, collective identities and borders of exclusion, which has been given to it by political powers since the first half of the 19th century, when it became an unfailing part of the school curricula in European states: a true *instrumentum regni*, aimed at raising good patriots – and good soldiers. Among the many examples two will suffice to give an idea of the mentality of that epoch. One is taken from the official school curriculum of the Kingdom of Savoy in 1856:

> We believe that, instead of a world history too difficult to teach and to be learned, the history of our nation fits much better for these pupils. This choice is reinforced by the consideration that through history lessons pupils must learn the events of ancient and modern Italy, must get useful examples of patriotic love and conform themselves to the highest spirit of nationality and of civic dignity (*Istruzioni* ,1991).

The second example is taken from a text addressed to French teachers by Ernest Lavisse, a prominent French historian and author of an influential history textbook, where one can recognize the consequences on the French patriotic feelings of the ruinous defeat suffered at Sedan by the hand of Prussia in 1870:

> Moral and patriotic teaching: this must be the outcome of history teaching in primary education. ... Our very flesh and blood is at stake. In other words, if pupils are not imbued with the living memory of our national glories; if they do not know that our ancestors fought for noble reasons upon one thousand battlefields; if they do not learn how much blood and how many efforts were spent in order to accomplish the unity of our fatherland and to draw thereafter, out of the chaos of our aged institutions, the laws that made us free men; if pupils do not become citizens conscious of their duties and soldiers who love their guns, teachers will have wasted their time (*Lavisse*, 1885).

This model of the use of history, developed in Europe, and extended all over the world, accompanied by tools of control and censorship, from the official approval of history textbooks to the use of the penal code, lead to many cases of conflict and repression when historians did not accept the role that was imposed on them. In 1986 Marc Ferro published a seminal book (Ferro, 1986), where he gave an overview of the various forms of political bias on history

worldwide, from the Soviet Union to India, from China to Japan, from Egypt to Iraq. Twenty years later, after many political changes in between, Giuliano Procacci gave an updated picture (Procacci, 2005), which shows that nothing has changed, rather, that history wars are becoming more bitter .

The case of Japan is probably one of the best known, because of the diplomatic conflict and the street demonstrations in China and in South Korea which broke out in 2005 when the Japanese Ministry of Education approved a history textbook, published by a private right wing company, which heavily downplayed the Japanese war crimes during World War II. It must be emphasized however, that this textbook was rejected by practically all Japanese teachers, who thus showed a strong democratic commitment, and that in the same year a group of Chinese, South Korean and Japanese historians published a book depicting the common contemporary history with a pacifist approach (Iwasaki & Narita, 2008).

Also in Greece there is state control of textbooks: in 2007 a new history textbook, which rejected the traditional nationalistic and anti-Turkish approach, was abolished by the Right government, even though it had received wide support by Greek historians, after a campaign of harsh criticism organized above all by the Orthodox Church and by right wing parties and social organizations (Liakos, 2008-2009).

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, history wars arose between Russia and some of the surrounding European states, above all those which were previously part of the Soviet Union, like the Baltic republics, where the arrival of the Red Army at the end of the Second World War was considered an occupation and not a liberation from the Nazis. One of the most heated controversies arose in 2007 when the Estonian government decided to remove the monument to the liberating Soviet soldier from the square in the centre of Tallinn, where it had been erected in 1947, and to relocate it in the Defence Forces Cemetery of the city. Similar controversies took place also within Poland, Latvia and Ukraine. Russian political authorities reacted with an initiative which criminalized any historical interpretation considered detrimental to its image, and in connection to that of Soviet Russia. In May 2009 Russian President Medvedev established a Commission (made up mostly of senior military, government and intelligence officials, with only a small number of historians and journalists) with the the task of analysing the falsification of historical events which belittle and scorn the international prestige of the Russian Federation, and of developing a strategy of counteraction. In connection with that, a bill is being discussed in the Federal Parliament which would enable the imprisonment of Russian and foreign citizens for up to three years for accusing the Red Army of atrocities or illegal occupation during the Second World War (Osborn, 2009; Abdullaev, 2009).

A particular case of laws on historical events is evident in the so called *lois mémorielles* in France: first the *Loi Gayssot* in 1990, punishing the denial of the Holocaust, second a law of 2001, which recognised the Armenian genocide during World War I, then the *Loi Taubira* in 2001, which declared slavery and the slave trade practised since the 15th century in America, the Caribbean, the Indian Ocean and Europe to be a crime against humanity, and finally the *Loi Mekachera*, in 2005, which established provisions in favour of French citizens repatriated from the former colonies, and also ordered school history teaching to emphasize the positive role of French colonialism, above all in Northern Africa. This enforcement of an official interpretation of an historical event scandalized French historians and school teachers, and gave birth to a great wave of protest and initiatives, among them the petition *Liberté pour l'histoire* (*Une petition*, 2005), which enlarged the criticism of all the three previous laws and asked for their abolition. As a consequence, in April 2008 a parliamentary commission was appointed in order to investigate the policy of historical memory. The commission interviewed many historians, jurists, philosophers, journalists, ministers, politicians, representatives of associations, and most of them expressed their worries about the consequences of these laws. In its final report, unanimously approved, the commission declared that the existing *lois mémorielles* could not be touched, for political reasons, but that no more laws assessing historical facts should be introduced, above all when they included a criminal prosecution (Assemblée Nationale, 2008).

We can therefore observe that political bias is a constant threat to historians. Significantly, the International Committee of Historical Sciences during its congress held in Sydney in 2005 amended as follows the first article of the Statutes in order to express its commitment in protecting research and teaching freedom: '

> It shall defend freedom of thought and expression in the field of historical research and teaching; it opposes the abusive use of history, and by all means at its disposal, it ensures the respect of professional ethical standards among its members.

The (partially) good news is that the previous cases (and many others, which could be presented) show that in democratic societies the reaction of historians can be effective in limiting the politicians' intrusion. Better results can be expected in the future, if mobilization will be organized not only in the domestic arena, but at international levels.

The social psychology of bias in social science research

Marta Fülöp

Bias in social research refers to the adoption of a particular perspective from which some things become salient and others merge into the background. It is a conscious or unconscious tendency on the part of a researcher to produce data, and/or to interpret them, in a way that inclines towards erroneous conclusions which are in line with his or her commitments (Hammersley & Gomm, 1997). Biases can derive from both internal (e.g. the subjectivity of the researcher) and external sources (e.g. the influence of the researcher's social context).

An example of internal bias is when Rosenthal (1994) writes about the unintended social psychological effects of psychological experimenters on the results of their research. He was among the first to argue that once a particular interpretation, explanation or theory has been developed by a researcher he or she may tend to interpret data in terms of it, be on the look out for data that would confirm it, or even shape the data production process in ways that lead to error (Hammersley & Gomm, 1997). In a series of studies he proved that when experimenters were led to expect certain research findings, they were more likely to obtain those findings from their research subjects. These effects were found not only with human subjects, but also with animal subjects. When experimenters were led to believe that they were working with rats who could find their way around mazes well, the rats learned 'faster'! He also implied that the expectancy effect may be found not only in case of psychological experiments, but also in medical research etc.

Reaction to Rosenthal's work also provides a good example which illustrates external bias. Rosenthal wrote at least a dozen papers on this effect between 1958-1963, but all of them were rejected by the journals of the American Psychological Association and he received 'unfriendly reactions' to his results. His results were met with 'incredulity', maybe because they questioned the total objectivity of psychological experimentation. His famous research, the 'Pygmalion in the classroom' (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968) however proved the significant role of subtle processes of unintended social influence in producing expected outcomes and those results could not be ignored anymore.

Pressures to conform to existing norms and dogmas can be strong in science and deviation can be severely reacted against. What is considered to be true scientifically becomes that which is taken to be true by a powerful, highly acknowledged scientist or within some powerful scientific community whose members share a particular perspective. If we follow the history of Margaret Mead's first major

work, 'Coming of Age in Samoa' (1928), we can see how the scientific community reacts to revealing bias in research.

This book launched Margaret Mead's, career, which led to her becoming one of the most renowned figures in American anthropology, if not in the world (Strain, 1997 Http://www.stpt.usf.edu/~jsokolov/314mead1.htm.) However, later research, carried out by Derek Freeman (Freeman, 1983) and Martin Orans (1996) proved that her work was full of bias. Although, both anthropologists had suspected for a long time that Mead's analysis was flawed they were impressed by her fame and prestige. The pressure to conform and not to question an authority in science was so strong that even though they realized the bias in Margaret Mead's work, they did not communicate it openly. 'In my early work I had, in my unquestioning acceptance of Mead's writings, tended to dismiss all evidence that ran counter to her findings.' – writes Freeman in the preface of his book 'Margaret Mead and Samoa: the Making and Unmaking of an Anthropological Myth' (Preface, pages xiv-xv., 1983). Dr. Martin Orans, Emeritus Professor of Anthropology at the University of California, Riverside, wrote in his book "Not Even Wrong" (1996): 'The greatest fault lies with those of us like myself who understood the requirements of science, but both failed to point out the deficiencies of Mead's work and tacitly supported such enterprise by repeatedly assigning it to students.'

Apart from the internal difficulty in challenging a scientific authority, Freeman had to face the reactions of the scientific community as well. Freeman tried to publish his criticism of Mead as early as 1971, but American publishers rejected his manuscript. In 1978, Freeman sent a revised manuscript to Mead, but she was ill and died a few months later without responding. When, after her death, he attacked Mead and her work, leveling charges of bias, and insinuating academic fraud, Freeman found himself on the outside of the anthropological circle. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Derek_Freeman It took almost two decades for his work to be accepted and acknowledged by fellow anthropologists.

Shadish et al (1994) in their chapter in the book 'The Social Psychology of Science' summarize the role of social psychological processes in scientific research. For instance they study the role of social comparison (Festinger, 1954). Social sciences function in greater uncertainty according to Kuhn (1970) therefore scientists in this field rely more on social comparison and seek others' opinions more than physical scientists do. Cognitive dissonance reduction can also play a role in expressing conflicting views. It is, for instance, dissonance producing for scientists to have serious theoretical disagreements with colleagues whom they like. Dissonance reduction sometimes may involve changing one's theoretical position in deference to good collegial relationships. The pressure to conform can be high in scientific circles also because authority structures

exist in which one scientist is subordinate to another, with the other sometimes calling for obedience even explicitly (Shadish et al, 1994). This problem can be approached from the majority-minority dynamics as well. New ideas almost always begin with the achievement of a single scientist or a small minority group. Depending on the level of discrepancy between existing and new ideas, a conflict arises. If there is little discrepancy, the new idea may catch on quickly, but if the discrepancy is substantial, it can slow down the recognition of new paradigms or theories (Shadish et al, 1994). Intergroup relations in science are also significant, for instance, in relation to the role of stereotypes concerning a certain scientific group. For example, if one group of scientists perceive another to be generally less competent in the area, they may tend to ignore the data they present. As scientists do not have time to read in all related fields, they inevitably rely on some degree of stereotyping and attend the works of established authorities rather than the ones who are not considered 'number one researchers'.

Ruling scientific paradigms influence what is published and what is rejected, what research is supported by grants and what cannot be followed-up because of lack of resources. Ideas, even if they make no sense, ad absurdum can be published by prestigious journals if they fit the ruling scientific discourse of a dominant scientific group. Alan Sokal's example was one of these. In 1996, Sokal, submitted a paper for publication in *Social Text*, a journal committed to post-modernist ideas, as an experiment to see if a journal publishes an article that makes no sense but fits the editors' ideological preconceptions (Sokal, Bricmont, 1998). The paper was accepted and by this Sokal aimed to prove that the success of a paper is not necessarily judged by its quality, but by its 'proper' academic- political message.

Hammersley & Gomm (1997) when they call the attention to bias in research refer to Pettigrew (1994) who described how funders, including governments can define the goal of research in terms other than the pursuit of knowledge. It may be the case that those research projects are financed by government departments, which seem to be designed to ensure that published findings will support current policy.

It is highly important that new researchers are fully aware of these processes in order to be able to influence or withstand them consciously and skilfully for the sake of high quality scientific research.

Discerning bias in personal epistemologies

Penelope Harnett

I would like to introduce myself. I work in teacher education and train primary and early years teachers. My research interests include analyzing education policy with particular reference to curriculum development and investigating learning and interactions in primary and early years classrooms. I am interested in life history research and how individuals' past and current experiences influence their beliefs and practices. I studied history at university and am interested in how history is taught in schools.

Why you may ask, have I included this short biography at the beginning of this vignette? Some readers might find writing in the first person unfamiliar and question the validity of sharing personal experiences with an outside audience. Who is interested in my personal life? Of what relevance is it to research – surely researchers aspire to be objective and neutral? To answer such questions I would argue that experiences shape the way that we are; how we see ourselves; how we interact with others and how we think others perceive us. In terms of conducting research therefore our experiences and life histories have the potential to be very influential – both in terms of what we research and which methodologies we employ.

The well known historian E.H. Carr once talked about facts being, 'like fish on the fishmonger's slab. The historian collects them, takes them home, and cooks and serves them in whatever style appeals to him' (Carr 1968, 9). In this respect the way that facts are interpreted becomes all important, as we see in the other examples presented in this booklet. Therefore, if we are to consider possible bias in research it may be important to consider the beliefs and values of the researcher. All researchers make selections on what to research, what data to omit, which methods to utilize and judge certain data to be more important than others.

In the example which follows I would like to illustrate how my own beliefs about children's learning in history changed over a period of years as a result of my own research and also in response to changing views on children's learning.

The introduction of the history National Curriculum into England in the early 1990s presented teachers in classrooms with many challenges. For teachers of primary aged children (5-11years) a statutory methodology for teaching history was introduced which included encouraging children to work from a range of sources of information; including pictures, documents, artifacts and historic sites. In fact children were to develop the skills of a historian in constructing their own knowledge of the past. Little research had been conducted previously on young children's abilities to work with

different sources of information and the introduction of the National Curriculum served as a catalyst for developing my own interest in researching what children could learn from observing historical pictures.

My training and experience as a primary teacher had always encouraged me to 'start with the child', so when I planned my research project, I decided to interview children individually, giving them different historical pictures to look at and asking them a variety of questions which were kept sufficiently open in order to elicit their views on the pictures. The children were permitted to respond in whatever way they chose and I hoped that this would provide me with some insights into how they constructed their knowledge.

Children made some interesting observations about the pictures and some conclusions were drawn about progression in children's skills in reading historical pictures (Harnett, 1993). However, I soon began to recognize some limitations to this research. Data were dependent on children's language and the ability which they had to express their views and explain their reasons, yet I found that I had created a research situation where there were limited opportunities for them to do this. Children were interviewed individually and as a researcher I did not engage in conversation with them about their views. They were in fact operating as lone scientists trying to construct some understanding from the historical pictures presented to them and possibly not really understanding why they were doing it at all.

Influenced by theories based on the work of Vygotsky and Bruner, I began to conceive learning in more social constructivist terms where language has a central role to play. In a later study, I planned activities for groups of children to interact with each other as they worked on defined tasks which required them to use language to explain their views and to listen to those from others. As they explored historical pictures I was able to observe how children supported each other; helped each other refine and clarify their ideas and how they worked together for some common understandings. I learned not just what they observed from the pictures but also how they were able to make sense of their observations in terms of their existing historical understandings (Harnett, 1998).

Findings from the second research project were richer and reflected how my beliefs on learning and teaching had developed from a purely constructivist approach to a more social constructivist perspective. As a result of this shift in my beliefs, I now question the results of my earlier research and in particular the methodology which I employed. Yet this earlier research is still in the public domain; it can't be withdrawn. Other researchers need to analyse its validity – to seek out its limitations and also to appreciate the context in which the research was carried out.

The two examples quoted here are a narrative of my own learning journey through research. In terms of understanding identity, life histories and narrative research may provide much fruitful data. At this point in time as local, national and European legislators increasingly exercise control of people's lives through a variety of legislation embracing education, social, financial and economic activity, this is particularly important. It is also important as previous traditional trajectories for people's lives are becoming more fractured and dislocated (Beck, 1992). Conversely too, in terms of the future, Wright Mills' description of the sociological imagination, reminds us that, ' many personal troubles cannot be solved merely as troubles, but must be understood in terms of public issues' (Wright Mills 1959, 248) , so that indirectly, individuals may also collectively contribute to future policy making.

In terms of policy analysis, narrative and life history approaches may contribute to a number of different levels identified by Bowe et al. (1992). They may enhance understanding of the contexts of influence – the prevailing ideas and ideologies which inform policy or the context of production – the creation and discourse of the policy itself. In terms of practice, narrative research may provide insights into the different ways in which policy is interpreted and implemented. Policy texts are read in many different ways and there may be multiple interpretations for any given text. So teachers in the classroom, although nominally all following particular curriculum policy will all interpret its requirements according to what they believe is important and these beliefs will stem from their own experiences and views of knowledge.

Research which interrogated the implementation of the history curriculum in English primary schools illustrates this point well. When interviewed, teachers often reflected on their own learning of history and used this to talk about how they viewed history and how they taught the subject in the classroom (Harnett, 2000).

At the beginning of this vignette I indicated that researchers may be influenced by their past experiences, beliefs and values and in this example we can see how this can be true for all people as present actions are filtered through recourse to their pasts. This point is also reflected in constructivist approaches to learning which emphasize how new understandings are developed on the basis of existing knowledge, a feature which was evident in the children's responses to historical pictures cited earlier.

So where does this leave us in trying to discern bias in research? Some points that we might need to be aware of include;

- How different contexts may influence research
- How particular methodologies might support particular findings and discriminate against others.

- The importance of questioning how research has been constructed and what it seeks to achieve

And finally....

To uncover and question the epistemological assumptions of the researcher - I have tried to make explicit some of my own beliefs about knowledge throughout the discussion above. Following on from this – I would expect you – the reader – to discern what you might consider to be biased and which claims might be more valid in what I have written. And in leaving it up to you – I recognize how for everyone of us, our own knowledge and experiences creep into our unconscious representations of reality.

Four perspectives on discerning bias.

Roger Johansson

Discerning bias is certainly important and relevant, and one that has been highlighted in methodical and theoretical debates. As the concept of the 'modern' is challenged – from a postmodern perspective – such criticism calls into question what we understand as 'research' and historical 'fact'.

I do not have an answer to the above question, but I will however, discuss four perspectives from which we can come closer to answering it.

My first perspective is on history as a subject; could there be a 'history', or a narrative, without an historian? An historical perspective on the historiography of the subject.

Since the Enlightenment, thinkers have had an ambition to make history more scientific. It was argued that humanity existed under the same positivist methodical and theoretical standpoint as science and that it was desirable to erase the historian from his research ((Iggers, 1975). Today, this has been questioned: '[h]istory is both a subject, or what has happened, and the process of recounting and analyzing that subject' (Wilson, 2005).

Most historians take a methodical and theoretical standpoint which includes the historian in the research process. (Johansson, 2001; Berggren, Johansson, 2006; Rüsen, (ed.), 2002; Aronsson, 2004; Jensen, 2003) In the history society of today the history subject is didactic which includes the research process and the historian as an important part of the process. – '…memory is historically conditioned…It is stamped with the ruling passions of its time' (Samuel, 1996).

Further, if we also include the historian in the production of historical 'facts', we have to acknowledge the question of biases as a part of the research conducted.

My second perspective questions the impact of historians themselves as a starting point of their research results. *What implications do these facts have on the interpretation of research results?*

Historians or scientists do not live their everyday lives in a vacuum; gender, generation, ethnicity, sexuality, religion, social background and nationality, all mean something. They influence when to:

- consider starting a research project;
- choose what questions to ask;
- choose what kind of sources to use as an empirical framework for the research;

- decide what methodological and theoretical framework which will be used in the research;
- choose to be a part of a particular academic milieu or society.

And perhaps the most important question of all; what implications do these conditions have for the interpretation of the research results?

If I tried to find some books in my bookcase which stress the importance of the person behind the research results, I am quite sure that my first books would come from the feminist field of sociological and historical research. In Sweden it was feminist historians who first brought up the importance, and highlighted 'gender' behind the research as a part of the interpretation. (Carlsson Wetterberg and Jansdotter, (ed), 2004). A similar process, but in a different context could be applied to the publication of American textbooks. It was the civil rights movement in the USA which demanded the right for the ethnic minorities to write their own history, and the inclusion of an increased number of black teachers and students as a requisite for an African-American perspective. (Moreau, 2003; Zimmerman, 2002).

The point is that different groups in our societies have claimed their right to take part, and also to write and teach history. Conservative reaction against these claims called them the 'Humpty Dumpty of scholarship' (Oshinsky, 2000) meaning that this would be the end for a common national (or western) history about the nation.

Aspects closely related to the process of globalization raise important questions as to whether the writing of history and scholarship have undergone a process of westernisation over the last two and a half centuries. If we discuss bias in research we have to ask ourselves if we, perhaps unknowingly, transmit Western ideas in our history education in order to protect Western domination also in the non-Western world (Iggers and Wang, 2008). The German historian Jörn Rüsen asks some important questions in the light of globalization: What is history? Does 'history' as an academic discipline represent a specific mode of historical thinking that can be defined in contrast to other forms of historical consciousness? (Rüsen, 2002)

My second question is therefore about the impact of historians themselves as people; what are the implications of their 'life stories' or social identities for the interpretation of the research results?

My third perspective on the question of bias in research is about the research process and research ethics.

You could also understand bias as an aspect of ethics in the research process; as examples of normative research when the researcher tells how something should be. For example; some educational research

during the sixties and seventies was financed by government foundations, raising potential problems concerning expectations and dependency.

Another way to understanding bias as an aspect of ethics in the research process is related to human dignity. In a Swedish context two well-known examples are the 'Saturday evening candy' research and the sterilization programs in Sweden which continued until 1974.

In the Nürnberg codex from 1947 international agreements were approved, pledging scientists not to violate human dignity or carrying out experiments without the consent of the persons participating in the test. Still, in Sweden there was a huge research programme going on – the Vipeholm research programme - using patients in a mental hospital as test subjects where the patients were given different kind of sweets. The results gave rise to the recommendations well-known as 'Saturday evening candy'.

Another programme carried out was a sterilization programme which was closely related to modernisation and seen as both normal and morally acceptable in the 'modern' world, within different social systems as various as the Soviet Union and the USA (Broberg and Tydén, 1991; Broberg and Roll-Hansen, 2005). As a part of the modern concept the question soon became a question for the specialists (Bauman, 1994). Academics such as Michel Foucault have analyzed oppression of people without power living on the edge, assaulted by the society (Foucault, 2000). One conclusion is that there is no distinct barrier between science and values.

Ethics and bias in the research process also challenge historians to view generously the ideas and varying opinions of colleagues; to let different scientific directions, also contradictory ones, become visible. This is what we as scientists call scientific honesty or decency. Disinterestedness and organized scepticism are key words. To practice research is to consider interpretations that are different to your own.

My fourth and last perspective suggests that ways to discern bias in research is about being reflective over your results and your own bias in your research process – reflexivity.

When the history journal, Past and Present, celebrated its fiftieth anniversary, one of its founders, the English historian Eric Hobsbawm was asked to reflect on the changes in historiography. The title Life in history includes both his personal history and his own contribution to history (Hobsbawm, 2002).

To be reflexive is to be reflective over different levels in the research process. Anthony Giddens used the concept 'double hermeneutic' (as interpretation of the interpreting subject) to describe the process (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2008).

When Hobsbawm reflects over the changes the history subject has gone through and his own part in the process he concludes:

> Political pressures on history…are greater than ever…At the same time…history has become more central to our understanding of the world than ever before…we have an adequate framework to study it as genuinely global history. (*Hobsbawm*, 2002)

And Hobsbawn includes the historian (and himself as a personal reflection) in the production of history when he concludes: 'I wish I were young enough to take part in it.'

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