



Why Not Honest Issue Advocates?

The Honest Broker: more than meets the eye.

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The first time I heard the term “Honest Broker” was at a convening of researchers who study the use of research evidence (URE). I was two months in as program officer at the William T. Grant Foundation, which has a major focus on studying and improving evidence use to benefit youth. It was like learning a new dialect: I understood the words being spoken— “evidence standards,” “research evidence” – but in this new context, their application was unfamiliar. The idea of an “Honest Broker” seemed logical enough. I knew nothing of its origins or application, but something qualified as “honest” seemed like a good thing. Over two years later, I have come to appreciate the complexity of Roger Pielke Jr.’s (2007), *Honest Broker* – and develop a critique of its idealized use in much of the policy and practice literature.

Coming to the Field of URE from a Critical Perspective

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Black children). The critical lenses I employ also shape how I make sense of my identity as a Black, Haitian, U.S. immigrant woman; my professional engagements in and out of the academy; and my standpoint about evidence use. This journey has been informed by the questions and challenges of critical theories, especially Critical Race Theory (CRT).



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The panic and rage behind stringing together the words “critical,” “race,” and “theory” is in no small part due to a lack of understanding of what it is. CRT is a departure from Critical Legal Studies (CLS), a theory that asserts that the law reflects and reproduces the inherent social biases of society. CRT founders like Derrick Bell, Alan Freeman, and Richard Delgado crystallized and sought “**to change the bond that exists between law and racial power**” [i]. In response, CRT and intersectionality scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw and fellow legal scholars held CRT Workshops to give racial analysis a place in CLS.

Like other theories, CRT is a method of analysis for understanding the human condition. I love CRT scholar **Angela Harris’s succinct**

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health to immigration studies, criminal justice, and economics, sociology, history, anthropology, and political science[iii].

Applied to scholarship, CRT facilitates a racially conscious analysis of taken-for-granted assumptions about research being colorblind, colormute[iv] or race neutral. It pushes us to look at the consequences of *not* questioning the assumptions and motivations that undergird our work; including our theoretical frameworks, the questions we ask, the people we study, who has decision-making power, and how we conduct, measure, analyze, conceptualize, and disseminate our findings. CRT also facilitates a racially conscious analysis of the concept of the Honest Broker.

The Honest Broker: More than Meets the Eye?

In **his 2007 book**, Roger Pielke Jr. describes the Honest Broker as one of four roles that scientists can take vis-à-vis policy and politics. The other roles include being a *Pure Scientist* (who simply shares information), a *Science Arbiter* (who, like a hotel concierge, makes information available to decision-makers), or an *Issue Advocate* (who seeks to advance a particular agenda). In contrast to these, *Honest Brokers of Policy Alternatives* provide decision-makers a whole range of options from which to choose and are ideally comprised of a body of several experts with a range of perspectives. Though focused on environmental science, technology, industrial science, and food studies, Pielke's characterization of the Honest Broker role has been applied across various fields of study, including health and social science research—and has influenced research use in many sectors, including educational interventions, criminal justice policies, and anti-poverty programs. In many of these research and policy areas, scholars have demonstrated how

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endnote that nuances his central argument that serving as an Honest Broker helps researchers avoid conflations of scientific and political debates, whether they do so inadvertently or by acting as a *Stealth Issue Advocate* (who invokes the authority of science yet works to restrict the range of choices available to decision-makers). This is his point: “One can also be an Issue Advocate for *ends* (e.g., ending poverty) and an Honest Broker of Policy Alternatives on *means* (e.g., alternative actions available to achieve the goal of ending poverty)” (p. 163, emphases mine).

Getting Honest about Honest Brokers

It is this nuance that I want to contribute to the URE literature, precisely because it connects the insights from CRT to our dominant understandings of research as value neutral. Re-imagining the notion of a *Stealth Issue Advocate*, then, I call for a new role for researchers who advocate for just ends but present decision-makers with a **range** of evidence-informed means to achieve those ends – the *Honest Issue Advocate*. This also refuses the dichotomy that a researcher is either honest or an advocate[vi].



I call for a new role for researchers who advocate for just ends but present decision-makers with a **range** of evidence-informed means to achieve those ends – the *Honest Issue Advocate*. This also refuses the

“advocate” lays bare the problematic mainstream logic undergirding roughly two hundred years of research “demonstrating” the superiority of white people through the use of the dominant scientific logic of colorblind racism. There is nothing honest about this ‘laissez-faire’, ‘symbolic,’ or ‘new’ racism’ **“because it is believed to be ensnared in the white supremacist notion that race is a real form of difference”[vii]**. Colorblind racism is thus advocacy for white supremacy and functions to *intensify racial difference while masking as its obliteration*. Yet, research evidence generated by BIPOC scholars evidencing the strengths in BIPOC people and communities is viewed as unscientific and biased and dismissed as advocacy.

Integrity is a core value for most researchers I know. We conduct rigorous studies, and hope our research is meaningful and impactful. In our professional training, we are taught that rigor and impact require us to be objective and dispassionate, and that politicizing science is wrong. What these admonitions miss, however, is what critical perspectives help us to see: that all science is political and denying it doesn’t make it less so.

We are long past time and patience for programs, policies, and practices baked in white supremacy masking as neutral and evidence based. As Honest Issue Advocates, let’s be forthcoming about our commitment to just ends, like racial equity and BIPOC communities flourishing, while providing access to a broad range of evidence to decision makers to achieve these ends.

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