Commentaries

BRIDGING THE INVISIBLE BOUNDARIES

In his magisterial overview, Edwards (2006) makes a convincing case for the global reach and distinction that *Addiction* has attainted in its recent decades. What he does not emphasize so much is the broad range of research disciplines which jostle and find sustenance in its pages. It is true that *Addiction's* stablemate, *Addiction Biology*, takes care of one aspect of the field. But *Addiction* takes in most of the rest—the ‘psychosocial, clinical and public health aspects’, as Edwards characterizes them.

The image Edwards uses for the constituency with which *Addiction* interrelates is the invisible college. As used in a scientific context, the term derives originally from Robert Boyle in the 17th century, at a time when English science was carried on largely by those excluded from the visible colleges of Oxford and Cambridge. It was given modern currency by Derek de Solla Price (1963), to describe ‘informal collectives of scientists interacting in their work on similar problems . . . generally limited to a size which can be handled by personal relationships’ (Merton 1988).

*Addiction's* constituency has clearly grown far beyond what can be encompassed in an invisible college as defined by Price. One can point to two rather visible colleges within the constituency. One is *Addiction's* owner, the Society for the Study of Addiction, which is considerably more Britain-centred than the journal, and perhaps also more clinically orientated. The other is the company of those involved editorially with *Addiction*: as Edwards records, this includes more than 100 Assistant Editors and 50 members of the International Editorial Advisory Board. Both of these are important nexuses of intellectual exchange and collaboration, across as well as within disciplines.

Less obvious, by definition, are the invisible colleges of our field. I say colleges, because the reality, even in our cross-disciplinary field, is that no one can be involved in or expert at everything, and modern science in our field as in all others is marked by great division of labour. So, at least in the usage of the sociology of science, it needs to be ‘the invisible colleges’ in Edwards’ Fig. 1.

Indeed, in daily or periodic face-to-face interactions, and above all these days in listserves and e-mail correspondence, a multitude of invisible colleges operate in our field, to the great benefit of the advancement of knowledge. *Addiction* aspires to reach across these informal groupings, and to a considerable degree succeeds in doing so. The great engine of this in *Addiction* is what Edwards describes as the ‘commissioned’ content. More than impact factor or geographic reach, the debates, commentaries, editorials and other such material are what set *Addiction* apart from other journals in the field, and it is this aspect of *Addiction* which makes the strongest contribution to creating a common arena in which the different invisible colleges can interact, argue and learn from each other. At its best, the ‘commissioned content’ in *Addiction* attains the scientific ideal of being an arena where disciplinary prestige and personal seniority are left behind, and the only considerations are the strength of the evidence and the logic of the argument.

The development of the arena of ‘commissioned content’ in *Addiction* has been largely Edwards’ doing. In my view, it is the most important legacy to the journal and to the field of his time as Editor-in-Chief. Long may it thrive!

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References


IT IS ABOUT PEOPLE

Griffith Edwards’ essay (Edwards 2006) on the story of the Journal so far gives us a glimpse into the reasons for its rise from obscurity to one of the top specialist journals in the field. One of those reasons is not stated in the piece, but it is surely apparent to anyone to who has taken an interest in the journal over the past 26 years—it is the vision of the man himself. I will not dwell on this, but I raise it because I believe it is important to recognize that any enterprise, whether it be a journal or a government, is dependent ultimately on the vision and enterprise of key individuals and the hard work, intelligence and commitment of many more. Bad systems can be made to work by competent, conscientious and good people and good systems can be made to fail by incompetent, careless or ill-motivated people.

We live in a time when it seems that this rather obvious point is being overlooked and when there seems to