

# Depoliticising society. The strained relationship between science and politics in psychology

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Within philosophy of science the belief in universal, value-free science has been largely abandoned over the recent decades due to the epistemological and moral bias latent in Western “white male” metaphysics (Code, 1991; Lloyd, 1993). However, as this paper will examine, psychology as an academic discipline may yet have to adapt to this widely accepted theoretical criticism regarding its own underlying presumptions. This suspected neglect is discussed in relation to Sandra Harding’s notion of *depoliticisation* applied to three cases: (1) A recent debate on caregiving and fatherhood in Norway, (2) a debate on infidelity in a Norwegian newspaper, and (3) the conduct of the research project The Bergen Child Study (2002—). The three case studies illustrate how some psychologists may no longer theoretically embrace universal realism, but in psychological research and in public debate that draws on psychological experts, this ideal of knowledge still persists in all three cases. The explanation for this might be that the psychologists in question in their clinical practice, or their research, are professional representatives of an internal belief system where the psychologist’s role is to uncover and ultimately heal what is really “out there.”

*“Critics of positivism in Norway won every battle in theory, but lost the war in practice.”  
(Eriksen, Hompland & Tjønneland, 2003)<sup>i</sup>*

According to the philosopher of science Sandra Harding (1992) the ideal of ‘objectivity as neutrality’ is widely accepted to have failed across several disciplines, such as the humanities, the social sciences and jurisprudence. Harding claims that it has become necessary to draw a distinction between neutrality and objectivity; giving up the ideal of the former does not necessarily imply giving up the ideal of the latter. Harding’s argument goes as follows: The demise of the neutrality ideal must not necessarily lead to the epistemological relativism that many fear. On the contrary, not only is it still meaningful to pursue truth claims in the social sciences, but it is even *more* meaningful now since objectivity is strengthened with the arrival of less partial, distorting, and biased outcomes of research (Harding, 1992). Harding is here thinking about researchers who willingly and consciously reflect over their particular affiliation to specific values and norms.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Harding (1992) denotes standpoint theory as the most fruitful path for science, due to the fact that it takes the fall of the neutrality ideal seriously. Standpoint theory means to detect certain values and interests that are inherent to scientific practice by contesting them from outside, from a critical point of view, often from the point of marginalised groups – from the standpoint of others. Harding stresses that standpoint theory is often prematurely discarded as a type of perspectivism. However standpoint theory is fundamentally not about marginal lives, but about the rest of the local and social order

and addresses how science systematically conditions these categories and borders. The goal is not to generate 'ethnoscience', but sciences that openly reflect by giving casual accounts of their social conditioning. With this important specification Harding also makes standpoint theory an interesting strategy for psychology. For instance, much psychological research has given voice to different abnormal conditions in recent years, but this still leaves distinctions between science and ethnoscience pretty much intact. Standpoint theory, conducted properly, accounts for psychology's role in the organization of everyday life and social order. However, this is the ideal, but far from the current state of affairs.

More to the point, Harding (1992) proposes two familiar types of relationship between the social sciences and politics: The traditional notion of politics, from a scientist's perspective, is a view of politics as an overbearing force that may influence scientific discovery, and in so doing advance the interests of certain agendas or groups. This kind of politics acts on the sciences from outside and represents what Harding labels *politicising*; science is (mis-)used as an instrument for a predefined end. A well-known example is research opposing the documented negative effects of passive smoking sponsored by tobacco companies (Diethelm & McKee, 2006). Harding's second notion of the relation between politics and science works in the opposite direction. Here science is "injected" into the social strata as an authoritative regime of knowledge which results in *depoliticisation*. Depoliticisation in general means to remove the political aspect of a social phenomenon. Harding (1992) uses as an example how the Nazis sought a depoliticisation of debate around questions of crime, poverty, and sexual or political deviance by framing them within a surgical or medical vocabulary. In general, fundamental normative values are concealed as purely empirical matters which can be decided and solved by science.

Much of the literature in philosophy of science, whenever documenting wrongdoing, draws examples from totalitarian regimes from the 20<sup>th</sup> century, such as Harding's case from the Nazi rule. This is seemingly done with a pedagogical intent, since the examples or the ethical violations are often clear-cut and dramatic in their consequences. There is however a risk that the reader comes to believe that ideological abuse of science is something of the past. In other words there is an assumption that in our present age scientists have become more "morally mature" and would act out against any misuse (of science).

However, the concept of depoliticisation has in more recent years been used as an analytical tool for addressing what many believe is a governmental abdication by leaving fundamental decision-making in modern democracies to technocrats and experts. A good example of this is the political economy of British New Labour, which critics claimed removed the political character of decision-making among other things by giving state managers arm's length control over crucial economic and social decisions whilst they simultaneously benefited from the distancing effects of depoliticisation (Burnham, 2001). Another example is the notion of empowerment, which is based on the intent of transference of power from authorities and experts towards vulnerable groups of people by activating their own human resources (Rodwell, 1996). However, the popularity that the concept of empowerment has enjoyed in recent decades has made critics question whether liberation, as a political collective movement, is in danger of being replaced by the prospects of individual-therapeutic growth, which depoliticise

the structural aspects behind the problems people come to face in late modern society (Townsend, 1988).

I will now turn specifically to psychology's potential role in depoliticisation. Psychology in Western democracies such as the USA and Great Britain has evolved as an essential social institution in a wide range of areas, from clinical psychology, to organizational psychology, to sports psychology, ever since the rebuilding phase after World War II (Rose, 1999). In Norway, psychology, both as a scientific and a clinical enterprise, enjoys a central and integrated position within the Scandinavian Welfare model, where it serves as a crucial part of the public mental health services. The fact that psychology's growth as a profession in Western democracies, perhaps almost unparalleled in the history of professions in recent times, could be used as an argument for its usefulness and necessary role in the organization of the social sphere within a modern liberal democracy. This fairly optimistic and enthusiastic explanation is most commonly adapted by the psychological associations themselves (Jansz & van Drunen, 2004).

From the perspective of the sociology of knowledge, psychology's increasing influence can also be understood as a certain type of technology that has been successful because of its applicability and usefulness for decision-makers. An even more critical approach would relate the question of success within science to the question of power, and more importantly, power for whom? For instance, some sociologists have labelled psychology's vast influence in Western society's over the last decades as *the age of psychology* (Havemann, 1957), *the triumph of the therapeutic* (Rieff, 1966/1987), and *therapy culture* (Furedi, 2004). This not only implies that psychology is an increasingly influential contributor that leaves a profound mark on society, but that it has more or less formed a cultural framework of meaning that lends its vocabulary to contemporary selfhood (Illouz, 2008; Madsen, 2011). The increased influence of professions in the conduct of civil society in late modernity requires a great deal of responsibility from professionals as they become ever more influential and powerful. This I argue should be of particular concern for psychology since it is a practical discipline that both deals with and affects peoples' lives directly and indirectly. Harding's notion of depoliticisation shows this in a very suggestive manner. The process of depoliticisation is something that in its very nature is immanent and to a large extent hidden from ideological debates: "In contrast to "intrusive politics," this kind of institutional politics does not force itself into a pre-existing "pure" social order and its sciences; it already structures both" (1992, p. 567). Although it is not possible to deal with psychology's influence on Western society at large in this paper, I will attempt to illustrate how depoliticisation might be said to work along a smaller scale within Norwegian psychology and public life today.

I will now briefly examine one aspect of the question of science and politics in psychology, through Harding's (1992) concept of depoliticisation, as applied to three cases. First, the Norwegian debate on caregiving and fatherhood is used to illustrate how research may prove depoliticising in a debate over family politics. Second, a newspaper debate on infidelity and monogamy shows how use of clinical experience as a source of authority may have normative implications. Third, a research project, The Bergen Child Study (2002—), is analysed in order to raise awareness of how research and scientific knowledge could be interpreted as a way of depoliticising the social order. These three case studies are meant as descriptions of how researchers and health professionals

often appear in contexts where the lines between research and science, and politics and ideology are blurred.

## CASE STUDIES

### **Case 1: Deducing from research to politics: The debate on caregiving and fatherhood in Norway**

From time to time researchers in psychology and related disciplines involve themselves in ongoing political debates. Typically, these are debates which involve values regarding the status and function of the family, caregiver, sexuality, and gender roles, among other topics. During the spring of 2008, the position of the father as a caregiver was much debated. The Norwegian government considered passing legislation on a “use-it-or-lose-it” basis in order to make more fathers take out paternity leave from work during the child’s first year. Up until then parents in Norway were free to choose from different options regarding the parental leave of absence: From the traditional option, where the mother stays at home during the whole period, to a half and half split. At the time only 19% of Norwegian fathers took a parental leave of absence beyond their six-week quota (Ministry of Children, Equality and Social Inclusion, 2008). Since then, the paternity leave has been expanded into 12 weeks (and is currently in the process of being expanded to 14 weeks), which appears to have led to a much higher percentage of Norwegian fathers taking paid leave of absence.

The Government’s billing proposal for an altered parental leave arrangement was welcomed by left-wing politicians, feminists, and interest-groups working to strengthen fathers’ rights in caregiving; while liberals, moderate conservatives and Christians conservatives opposed the proposal. Two Norwegian professional psychologists from the Norwegian University of Science and Technology, Leif Edward Ottesen Kennair and Turid Suzanne Berg-Nielsen, made contributions to the public debate primarily by questioning whether it was in the child’s best interest to try to impose a split between caregivers during the first year of living (Engh & Ruud, 2008; Vikøy, 2008). The psychologists engaged in this debate by using science as an authoritative source: “Research shows that....” For instance the child psychologist Berg-Nielsen expressed her concerns in an interview with Norway’s largest tabloid newspaper VG which contained an alarming headline warning readers against the proposition: “Changing caregiver may harm the infant” (Vikøy, 2008). The attachment studies it appears Berg-Nielsen referred to (although not cited explicitly in the interview) supposedly showed increase in levels of stress for infants when the primary caregiver changes during the first year of living. In Berg-Nielsen’s (2010) recent work, she explains that these kinds of reactions may have an evolutionary explanation – the infant is “programmed” to respond with intense stress reactions and high levels of cortisol when the preferred caregiver is absent or does not respond to the infant’s signals. Berg-Nielsen refers, among other things, to an overview article by Gunnar and Donzella (2002), which reports on past studies on rodents and primates suggesting that responsivity and regulation of the limbic hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenocortical (L-HPA) system later in life may be formed by social experiences (like caregiving) during early development.

It should be noted that Berg-Nielsen underlined that she was only referring to what current research found, and maintained that she was not necessarily arguing for the abolition of the planned bill. Still, what is interesting is the weight science gets in the debate regardless of the validity of the research as opposed to other sources such as a layperson's experience. Berg-Nielsen stressed that she had no interest in taking sides, but nonetheless argued that the debate had turned "ideological" and up until now neglected the child's best interest: "My point is that the child has been shoved to the background in this ideologically fuelled debate" (Vikyøyr, 2008, p. 4). Her words disclose the psychology profession's underlying belief in scientific neutrality. Important questions of whether fathers should be nudged to legally obtain a father's permission is a question of politics, morale, and values. This does not mean that we should discard relevant research. It does mean, however, that we should be aware of how research introduced into the debate is framed, and in whose interest it might be serving. Researchers in the case in question, like Berg-Nielsen, often appear to disregard the difference between scientific findings and the subsequent use of them in public debates. Whereas the former can be close to neutral sometimes, the latter definitely never is.

When psychologists participate in these type of debates, their views have a high degree of impact due to their position as experts and their role as communicators of knowledge and truth claims. As one of the fathers put it in the debate on the proposal: "When it comes to the child's best interest, the views held by a handful of psychologists outweigh the experience of a hundred thousand men" (Brock, 2008, p. 4). Hence, psychological research introduced in debates like this runs the risk of depoliticising the idea behind all politics; the just distribution of duties and rights in society, in this case between men and women, and mothers and fathers.

### **Case 2: From clinical practice to family politics: A debate on infidelity, monogamy and the nuclear family in Norway**

A review of profiled Norwegian psychologist and expert on cohabitation Frode Thuen's book *Infidelity*, by the gender researcher Wencke Mühleisen (2006a), stirred another interesting public debate. This involved different expert groups on infidelity, monogamy, and the nuclear family's role in modern society, and highlighted dilemmas in the relationship between clinical expertise, gender and family politics.

Thuen's book on infidelity, which warned against the destructive effects of breaches of trust within relationships, caused Mühleisen (2006a) to attack Thuen for being an advocate for a psychological regime that defined infidelity as an abnormality. Both Thuen (2006a; 2006b) and psychiatrist Hans Olav Tungesvik (2006) defended the status of monogamy and marriage between a man and woman as a societal institution that is in line with individual psychological needs of men and women such as the need for stability and safety. In her response, Mühleisen (2006b) repeated and expanded her criticism of psychology's defence of the status quo and pointed to the liberating effects of opening up the traditional heteronormative marriage and the nuclear family. She pointed to Sweden, where the organization Feminist Initiative has suggested a new cohabitation law in which numerous ways of living together were treated equally.

Both Thuen (2006b) and Tungesvik (2006) take what could be called an individualistic, therapeutic stance towards Mühleisen's (2006b) support for alternative lifestyles. They

argued that this was both incomprehensible and insensitive to their clients whom often fell victim to infidelity. They further claimed that they dealt with “reality” while Mühleisen was in no contact with the moral dilemmas people face in their everyday life from her “ivory tower” at the Centre for Gender Research at the University of Oslo.

Thuen (2006b) was, however, the most open minded to alternative lifestyles of the two and allowed himself to speculate about a future in which men and women might organize their lives differently, and stated: “...it is difficult to see what the state or the professions could do to achieve this – if that is the desired goal” (Thuen, 2006b). The argumentation seem to follow a certain type of “reactive logic”: Psychology’s goal is to deal with current affairs, and these ongoing psychological interventions have nothing to do with how those current affairs are formed. Thus, psychology is understood as a passive and receiving piece of society’s machinery.

How is this debate on infidelity, monogamy, and the nuclear family then related to the overall question being asked here, namely the relation between science and politics? The answer lies in health professionals’, such as prominent therapists Frode Thuen and Hans Olav Tunesvik, understanding of their role regarding the social strata. They could be said to argue from the standpoint of the Hippocratic Oath: Thou shall heal whenever it reduces suffering. There is nothing wrong with the Hippocratic Oath, the problem is rather when this is the *only* oath the professional accepts. The concept of depoliticisation is here relevant once again. Even the private question of lifestyle such as the organization of the individual’s life and cohabitation choice is in one sense also a question of politics. As much as we would like to think of our innermost preferences and desires as something natural, there is good reason to understand these as influenced by shifting historical and cultural ideals (cf. Deuber-Mankowsky, 2008). This option still appears as an unrealistic fantasy for both Thuen and Tunesvik based on their current experiences, which they believe gives them a precise idea of what is “naturally” good for people, and they reject Mühleisen’s speculations about other ways of life. The old distinction from 18<sup>th</sup> century philosopher David Hume (1739/1985) seems relevant here and could be used as a principle of caution: *Ought* doesn’t necessarily follow from *is*. Implied: The transition from the sphere of nature to the sphere of culture and morals and back again is not straightforward. Simply put, there are both descriptive and normative dimensions to academic enquiry.

### **Case 3: Research dictating politics: The Bergen Child Study (2002—)**

The Bergen Child Study is a longitudinal study of children’s psychosocial development and mental health and is historically one of the most comprehensive studies of the prevalence of mental health problems in the Norwegian population ever conducted. The project is a direct result of policy-makers’ escalation plan for mental health services, where one aspect is to develop and increase the capacity for treatment of children, and adolescents, based on clinical knowledge, stressing that the earliest possible intervention gives the best possible estimate. The project’s aim is to map the need for health services for these groups through a longitudinal follow-up of three classes of school children in Bergen. The project is organized in four sections that began in 2002/2003, continued in 2005/2006 and 2008/2009, and will conclude in 2011/2012 (Bergen Child Study, 2008).

The project method included questionnaires, given to teachers and parents, about the clinical symptoms of school children. The participation in the study was quite high. Approximately 75% (7,007 children) of those approached complied and participated in the first round of investigations, while the participation rate dropped to around 60% (5,185 children) in the next round (Bergen Child Study, 2008).

After the design and first round of data collection, it was clear that ethical issues emerged in the study that researchers had not considered beforehand. For instance, what about the children where they found positive indicators for one or more clinical symptoms that did not receive proper treatment and/or professional support? Should the researchers inform participants of other possible symptoms? The former was decided upon with the moral reasoning that it was unethical to have sensitive information about a child's condition and not inform parents, who then were presented with the indications and given the choice to act or not. The wide range of supposedly discovered psychopathology amidst young children that the Bergen Child Study initially found led a number of parents to withdraw from the project and openly criticise it for falsely constructing abnormalities among children (Pettersvold & Østrem, 2012).

This research project is interesting in the context of the relationship between politics and science for a number of reasons. The project may be seen as a government initiated epidemiological mapping of the population's mental health, which some critics would say resonates as attempted social control. It is also a large-scale intervention into the social sphere of relationships between teachers and pupils and between parents and children. For some participants, being in the study meant the start of a long-term enrolment with public mental health services. What is unique in the study is its size and the access that researchers have been given, even though it might affect a whole age class of children in Bergen and their family and schools. However, this could be said to represent a form of depoliticising individual differences that originally may be strongly related to class distinctions, learning difficulties due to differences in background, socio-economic resources, quality of teaching, and flaws in the Norwegian school system (cf. Hansen, 2011 for an analysis on how social class is reproduced). It may even be said to cover up values increasingly stressed in modern society, such as the ability to attend and subdue impulses, work independently in the absence of outer enforcement and ultimately become a self-governed citizen in line with the ideals of neoliberal rule of conduct (Dean, 2009). There have been reported surveys indicating that socioeconomic background amongst parents still plays a significant role in the educational success of pupils in Norway, especially in primary and secondary school (Ministry of Finance, 2009). By first mapping the prevalence of mental disorders and learning difficulties amongst school children, and secondly as a result of this adapt political strategies to deal with the problems one runs the risk of depoliticising. For instance, where politically produced socio-economic factors are swept under the carpet, the responsibility for mental health is placed on the shoulders of the individual student, worker and citizen.

## **DISCUSSION**

Harding (1992) stresses that the 'neutrality ideal' provides no resistance to the production of systematically distorted results which may result from the process of depoliticisation. She suggests that the neutrality ideal actually functions to certify the

allegedly value-neutral, normal and natural knowledge production through scientific policies and practices. Normalizing politics could be said to be at work in the cited examples as well. When the psychologist in the debate about caregiving and fatherhood utters “Research shows that...”, she is seemingly given extra trustworthiness when pros and cons are summed up as it is believed to be value-free. In the case of infidelity, monogamy, and the nuclear family, the therapists (a psychologist and a psychiatrist) claim to know best because of their allegedly privileged position working with clients, and the unique insight into human nature that they provide. In public discourse little thought appears to be given to the fact that their very practice and their rationality about “damaged life” are being used as a straightforward argument for monogamy and the status quo. The case of the research project The Bergen Child Study is funded by the Norwegian government with the intent on measuring prevalence in the population, and on the background of these measures restructuring the health services for children and adolescence. At face value this seems reasonable and useful. However, the ethical dilemmas mentioned above could all be said to concur with the type of normalizing politics Harding speaks of in relation to the process of depoliticisation. This could mean a mapping of the population on a grand scale or providing sensitive information about children that later may come into the hands of insurance companies, for example. Perhaps more alarming is the perspective of the research project as an injection of a certain type of clinical rationality and terminology into the social strata. For example the questionnaire handed out to parents and teachers may potentially transform the horizon of understanding in which they view the child or the pupil. Typically the ethical aspects in these kinds of research projects concern matters of privacy and consent whereas the governmental motivation behind these kinds of large knowledge building projects are not really reflected upon at all. This indicates a widespread neglect or perhaps blindness to the negative effects from the depoliticisation process, which Harding warns against, within psychology. In the case of The Bergen Child Study, the researchers also seem willing to accept the ethical issues and risks involved probably as a result of their shared belief in a higher course according to the psychologist ethos: Which follows the basic premise that “the truth is out there”, ready to be uncovered, in the form of mental health disorders; and the more and the earlier we know about this the better can we help. This may give us insight into how a version of the scientific position of universal realism, often carelessly referred to as «positivism», is still at work, with real consequences.

In the three case studies the mixed field of science and politics demonstrates a tendency for psychologists to take a somewhat conservative stance, often dictated by their belief in scientific knowledge about human nature. Why is this so? Are research and science necessarily always conservative in its nature? Or is it the application of research and science which is conservative in its nature? If the latter is true, it would mean that authoritative use of “Research shows that...” arguments often is something introduced in the decision process on the basis of pre-existing value-beliefs. It is easy to construct counterexamples where science could be viewed as something radical against the status quo, going against commonly held beliefs. An example could be Bruce Bagemihl’s (1999) research published in the book *Biological Exuberance: Animal Homosexuality and Natural Diversity*, which examined alternative sexuality in the animal kingdom and demonstrated same-sex sexual activity amongst many species. These results caused quite a stir over the ‘true nature’ of human sexuality, and the book was even referred to



in the Supreme Court decision *Lawrence vs. Texas* (2003) that struck down sodomy laws that made same-sex illegal in Texas and subsequently thirteen other states.

Why is it that meta-debates on the underlying value system of psychology's corpus of operation are seldom raised in public? As stated above, there exists widespread literature that argues that the objective, unbiased position is more or less impossible to attain (for an overview with particular relevance for psychology cf. Gergen, 2001). This is also a relatively uncontroversial argument in the philosophy of science today to which many scientists would concur (cf. Rosenberg, 2005). From my experience, the label that often is associated with the universal realism standpoint, namely 'positivism,' is now almost regarded as a pejorative term in Norwegian public and academic debate. A 'positivist' is someone who is reactionary, outdated, biased and socially irresponsible. The situation where positivism is being treated as socially unacceptable, or to be more moderate, something unfashionable, has rather unfortunate implications. The consequence of the fear for a stigma among scientists within psychology appears to result in a situation with little debate when it comes to fundamental questions of the nature of the research being conducted.

A common denominator in all three cases presented here appears to be the idea that the actors themselves represent neutrality as experts conveying the insights psychological research has provided us with into parenting, infidelity and mental health in children. The social world of human relations, politics and certain interests are perceived as external to psychology. Therefore, when these two spheres meet from time to time the actors get to play the part of truth tellers in contest with ideological politicised positions, such as the Norwegian socialist government or feminist forces in society seeking to challenge heteronormativity. It looks as if one is very careful not to politicise science, but the actual ongoing depoliticising, which psychology and other sciences provide, remains largely concealed.

### **The road not travelled**

How should research as critical reflection position itself then when the object of interest itself is viewed as something political and problematic? How could the psychologist's in the three cases drawn on psychology possibly in a different manner?

The concept of depoliticisation involves distortions and exploitative consequences. Harding (1992) reminds us how the Nazi's frequently used science as a means to depoliticise fundamental human concerns such as crime, poverty and sexual or political aberration by casting them in surgical or medical terms. This ideology is from our contemporary perspective relatively clear to us. But she also relates the question to Western scientific institutions and practices which shape our imagination and ultimately structure the shape of the social order itself. If we reserve this question within psychology, we might ask: What does this mean in practice? What could the social world have looked like had it not been for psychology's depoliticised structuring? Is it even possible and meaningful to imagine that things could have been different? On the one hand, one could imagine a hollow land at the other side of history with a different subject, who relates differently towards himself and his social surroundings. On the other hand, one could also lessen the burden of the philosophical imagination and answer in a concrete manner: Maybe the structuring of the current social order favours

certain groups and interests, and part of psychology's depoliticising role leads these power structures, which are often taken for granted, intact? According to Prilleltensky (1989) the idea of "value-neutral" psychological knowledge means that its agents support the status quo, which prevents changes that might enhance the well-being of the population and at worst endorses unjust practices. This is close to Mühleisen's (2006a) final argument in her review of Thuen's book *Infidelity*: "If the most repressed expression for both modern love and contemporary political life is "Maybe things could have been different," does this imply that infidelity also represents a challenge to other promises of faithfulness?" (p. 12).

## CONCLUSION

There exists widespread literature that argues that the objective, unbiased position is more or less impossible to attain in science (Code, 1991; Gergen, 2001; Lloyd, 1993). This is a relatively uncontroversial argument in the social sciences, including psychology today. However, even if this refutation of the strictly objective ideal in science is mostly accepted, the consequence for research practice is more questionable. As I have meant to illustrate with the three case studies exemplifying depoliticisation, there still appears to exist a neutrality ideal in science that leads scientists and researchers to conduct research that may not openly claim to be unbiased, but nevertheless is applied in public debate as if this is still the ideal.

A position that recognizes one's own interests would, on the other hand, openly flag the biased nature of one's own position and hypothesis making as introductory remarks to the reader. This solution however raises concerns regarding the general validity and reliability of the research and could possibly destabilise science from the value-free and protected sphere from which it normally draws its authorization. The ambitious goal of most psychologist-researchers to unveil universal structures may therefore be the stumbling block that still preserves psychologists' biases and value-blind operations in the social strata. Even though the programme of positivism and even the criticism of it is being viewed as passé. Paradoxically, the view of science as post-neutral from feminist-inspired criticism may have led researchers to be less open about their beliefs in neutrality and belief in a superior position unaffected with biases. All professionals should therefore be challenged to confront the "enlightened enemy" within. The best method might be old-fashioned sober argumentation combined with critical and brave examination of psychology's casted shadow. Perhaps this is really what Harding envisioned by standpoint theory all along?

In this paper I have presented Sandra Harding's notion of depoliticisation - a theory of how science can influence politics and public debate. Three cases studies involving psychological research, clinical practice in public debates and a government supported longitudinal study of the prevalence of mental health disorders were meant to illustrate how depoliticisation occurs within a Norwegian setting. Hence, depoliticisation might be a rewarding concept in order to fully grasp how psychology might function ideologically in structuring the shape of the social order itself. However, as always more research is needed as the generalizability of three cases studies is limited.

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<sup>i</sup> All quotes originally in Norwegian have been translated to English by the author for the purpose of this article.