

**Hybrid intellectuals:  
Toward a theory of think tanks and public policy experts in the United States\***

Thomas Medvetz  
155 Myron Taylor Hall  
Institute for the Social Sciences  
Cornell University  
Ithaca, NY 14853  
Tel: (510) 717-8666

DRAFT: 3 December 2007 (second version)

Comments are welcome. Please do not cite, quote, or circulate without permission.

**Abstract**

Drawing on archival records, interviews, and an original database of the educational and career backgrounds of policy experts, this paper examines the growing sphere of American think tanks. I develop a relational conception of think tanks as structurally hybrid offspring of the more established institutions of academics, politics, business, and journalism – the “parental” ties being at once material and symbolic: material because these anchoring institutions provide support, patronage, and personnel to think tanks, symbolic because the figures of the policy aide, the academic scholar, the entrepreneur, and the journalist supply the imaginary models from which policy experts fashion their mixed self-understandings. The relational mode of analysis moves the study of think tanks beyond the essentializing question of whether policy experts are at bottom “bona fide intellectuals” or mere “lobbyists in disguise.”

**Key words:** think tanks • intellectuals • knowledge production • American politics • relational analysis

**Word count:** 9,135 (text only)  
13,298 (including footnotes and references)

**Biographical sketch:** Thomas Medvetz (tmm92@cornell.edu) is a postdoctoral associate at the Institute for the Social Sciences at Cornell University. His current research examines the history and present-day effects of American think tanks.

---

\* This research was supported by awards from the Social Science Research Council’s Fellowship Program on Philanthropy and the Nonprofit Sector, the National Science Foundation (Dissertation Improvement Grant #0526199), the Phi Beta Kappa Society, Alpha Chapter, and the University of California, Berkeley Graduate Division. The author is grateful to Jerome Karabel, Loïc Wacquant, Gil Eyal, Charles Camic, Stephanie Mudge, Malcolm Fairbrother, the members of Neil Fligstein’s Center on Culture, Organizations, and Politics, and the anonymous *AJS* reviewers for their helpful comments.

**Hybrid intellectuals:  
Toward a theory of think tanks and public policy experts in the United States**

*Drawing on archival records, interviews, and an original database of the educational and career backgrounds of policy experts, this paper examines the growing sphere of American think tanks. I develop a relational conception of think tanks as structurally hybrid offspring of the more established institutions of academics, politics, business, and journalism – the “parental” ties being at once material and symbolic: material because these anchoring institutions provide support, patronage, and personnel to think tanks, symbolic because the figures of the policy aide, the academic scholar, the entrepreneur, and the journalist supply the imaginary models from which policy experts fashion their mixed self-understandings. The relational mode of analysis moves the study of think tanks beyond the essentializing question of whether policy experts are at bottom “bona fide intellectuals” or mere “lobbyists in disguise.”*

Over the last four decades, the intellectual pronouncements of an expanding breed of organization known as “think tanks” have become a fixture of public debate in the United States. Since 1970, as the number of American think tanks has more than tripled (Rich 2004), their affiliated policy specialists have taken on a more visible public role. Representatives from think tanks now commonly testify as experts before Congress (Rich and Weaver 1998; McCright and Dunlap 2003), speak as news media pundits (Rich and Weaver 2000), issue countless “policy briefs” (Smith 1991a; Abelson 2002), and draft transition manuals for incoming presidential administrations (Edwards 1997; for examples, see Feulner 1980). Yet despite their proliferation and growing visibility, think tanks and their expert staff members have garnered relatively little attention from social scientists, including sociologists (but see Domhoff 1967, 1970, 1978, 2006).

Many fundamental questions about think tanks therefore remain unresolved, including the basic problem of defining the empirical object in light of the category’s

ever changing boundary.<sup>1</sup> Also understudied are the major social characteristics of think tank-affiliated policy experts and the resources marshaled by think tanks in their efforts to cultivate authority. For example, what is the typical career pathway into the think tank?

I argue that the social space of American think tanks is marked by a multi-level structural hybridity that extends from the individual policy expert to the organization, and from the organization to the broader system of relations in which think tanks are embedded. Starting with an account of policy experts' professional self-understandings, I show that such actors draw on four idioms – those of the *scholar*, the *policy aide*, the *entrepreneur*, and the *journalist* – to construct a mixed occupational identity.<sup>2</sup> Then I argue that the mental representations of policy experts mirror the heterogeneous social organization of the space of think tanks. Think tanks depend on the more established institutions of academic, political, economic, and journalistic production for financial support, patronage, personnel, and formal partnership. The institutional anchors of the think tank world thus match the symbolic bases of the policy expert's mixed professional role.

---

<sup>1</sup> As James (1998:409-10) notes, "Discussion of think tanks...has a tendency to get bogged down in the vexed question of defining what we mean by 'think tank' – an exercise which often degenerates into futile semantics." A brief genealogy of the term is therefore in order. Dating to the nineteenth century, the phrase "think tank" was originally a colloquial expression for a person's head or brain. The term was first applied to organizations only in the 1940s – and then mostly in an informal manner to refer to ad hoc groups or research centers notable for their high concentration of "brainpower." Even after the term came into common use, its denotation changed considerably. "Think tank" acquired a meaning akin to its current one – i.e., a category of formal organization engaged principally in the production or dissemination of policy research – with the emergence of government contract institutes such as the RAND Corporation (established in 1946). The term is thus historically anachronistic, post-dating the oldest such organizations by more than half a century, since policy groups originating in the Progressive Era, such as the Brookings Institution (established 1916) and the Council on Foreign Relations (1920), are now commonly recognized as prototypical think tanks. For a prominent attempt at definition, see Stone (2001).

<sup>2</sup> For an analysis that similarly identifies the cultural idioms used by a group to construct a distinctive mode of perception, appreciation, and action, see Wacquant (2001).

This relational analysis moves the study of think tanks beyond the futile and essentializing question of whether policy experts are at bottom “bona fide intellectuals” or mere “political mercenaries.” By considering both the set of institutional forces in which think tanks are embedded and the distribution and functioning of policy experts’ folk understandings, this theory avoids the errors built into narrowly structuralist and constructivist accounts of the think tank. An integrated approach captures an important structural tension at the heart of the think tank: namely, that while policy experts operate under conditions of profound political and economic constraint, their professional success turns on an ability to signal an association with academic production as a legitimating strategy.

#### *Data and analytic approach*

The paper draws on three kinds of data:

- (1) Using organizational biographies, personal resumes, and curriculum vitas, I compiled a database of the educational and career backgrounds of the expert staff members (n=1011) at twenty-two major think tanks. These data include previous employment, concurrent professional affiliations, educational degrees attained, and academic disciplines studied.
- (2) I conducted 43 formal interviews with individuals variously situated throughout American think tanks and proximate institutions. The think tank interview subjects ranged from founders and upper managers to rank-and-file researchers and staff members. I also interviewed people who deal routinely with the work of think tanks, such as Congressional staff members, newspaper and magazine reporters, and

administrators of philanthropic foundations.

(3) I collected archival records from fourteen manuscript collections (both organizational and personal) at various historical archives, including those of the Library of Congress, the Brookings Institution, the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, the American Enterprise Institute, the Columbia University Rare Book and Manuscript Collection, the Wisconsin Historical Society, and the Bancroft Library of the University of California, Berkeley.<sup>3</sup> Records include the self-accounts of key figures in the field, organizational histories, personal letters and memoirs, mission statements, biographical accounts, and materials concerning the founding and decision-making processes of think tanks.

In combination, I use these data to examine two levels of social structure: first, the mental representations of the actors who inhabit think tanks, or their common categories of perception, appreciation, and action; second, the durable patterns of similarity and difference, collaboration and competition, and domination and subordination that supply the principles of the think tank sphere's organization. The goal of the analysis, however, is to span the divide separating these levels by investigating their mutual conditioning.<sup>4</sup>

#### FOUR IDIOMS OF DUTY AND DIFFERENCE AMONG POLICY EXPERTS

Strip away the job titles and party labels, and you will find two kinds of people in Washington: political hacks and policy wonks. Hacks come to Washington because

---

<sup>3</sup> I selected these archives because each one contains a sizable repository of data related to think tanks, donor foundations, or individuals who had a hand in founding or managing key think tanks. For example, the Wisconsin Historical Society contains the complete archives of the Institute for Policy Studies, a left-wing think tank. Most of these archives were recommended to me by knowledgeable think tank staff members.

<sup>4</sup> In this respect, the paper's analytic strategy is based on the synthetic approach elaborated by Pierre Bourdieu. See especially Bourdieu (1964, [1980] 1990, 1985, 1988, [1989] 1996) and Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992).

anywhere else they'd be bored to death. Wonks come here because nowhere else could we bore so many to death. These divisions extend far beyond the hack havens of political campaigns and consulting firms and the wonk ghettos of think tanks on Dupont Circle. Some journalists are wonks, but most are hacks. Some columnists are hacks, but most are wonks. All members of Congress pass themselves off as wonks, but many got elected as hacks. Lobbyists are hacks who make money pretending to be wonks. *The Washington Monthly*, *The New Republic*, and the entire political blogosphere consist largely of wonks pretending to be hacks. “The Hotline” is for hacks; *National Journal* is for wonks. “The West Wing” is for wonks; “K Street” was for hacks. After two decades in Washington as a wonk working among hacks, I have come to the conclusion that the gap between Republicans and Democrats is as nothing compared to the one between these two tribes.

–Bruce Reed (2004)<sup>5</sup>

How do think tank-affiliated policy experts understand their own role? What are their common styles, manners, and professional sensibilities? What are the lines of difference separating them? My finding is that, lacking a conventional definition of what it means to be a “policy expert,” such actors improvise one using a mixture of ready-made cultural materials supplied by the more established institutions to which they are linked. Policy experts draw especially on four idioms to characterize their own social role, those of:

- (a) the academic scholar, who must generate authoritative knowledge according to the standards of rigor and cognitive autonomy established in the university;
- (b) the policy aide, who must make himself intimately familiar with the unique rules of order, procedural details, and temporal rhythms of electoral politics;
- (c) the business entrepreneur, who must be an effective “salesperson” in a “marketplace of ideas,” and;
- (d) the journalist, who must disseminate knowledge in a format that is both accessible and compelling to political actors and the wider public.

---

<sup>5</sup> The *Washington Monthly*, *New Republic*, and *National Journal* are all political magazines; “The Hotline” is the *National Journal*’s “blogometer,” a daily compendium of political web blogs (see <http://blogometer.nationaljournal.com/>, retrieved on July 31, 2006); “The West Wing” is a television series that aired on NBC from 1999 to 2006; “K Street” was a short-lived HBO television series that aired in 2003.

These tropes have a double valence, functioning both as anchoring metaphors and as bundles of literal claims about the proper style and manner of the policy expert. Not content to choose just one of these practical models, policy experts share a professional ethos that is predicated on the strenuous goal of mastering and juggling all four. A kind of *dispositional hybridity* thus prevails as the distinguishing mark of the policy expert's subjectivity.

This section runs through these four idioms and discusses how each one guides and conditions the self-understandings of policy experts. The next section shows how the mixed professional stance of the policy expert mirrors the heterogeneous social organization of both the think tank and the loosely bounded system of relations in which they are situated.

*"The Wonk": the policy expert as academic scholar*

Think tank-affiliated policy experts commonly invoke the figure of the academic scholar in characterizing their own professional role. Like their academic kin, policy experts say they aspire to produce cumulative knowledge based on rigorous empirical data for publication in books and articles. In this conception, the individual expert should possess a set of exceptional personal characteristics to equip him<sup>6</sup> for such production, including a sharp analytical mind, social scientific training, and freedom from both

---

<sup>6</sup> I use the pronoun "him" not only for stylistic purposes but also to reflect the predominantly male make-up of the think tank world. There is reasonable evidence to support this claim. For example, in 2001, *Washington Post* columnists Morin and Deane (2001) reported on the gender imbalance among policy experts at seven major think tanks (Urban, CSIS, Brookings, Heritage, Cato, AEI, and IPS). In combination, their count showed 279 men (67.9%) and 132 women (32.1%) working as expert staff members at these organizations. The only think tank in the group that had more female than male policy experts was the Institute for Policy Studies (11 to 6). The most "gender-unbalanced" think tank was the Cato Institute (35 men, 1 woman).

partisan bias and political and economic constraint.<sup>7</sup> Prestigious educational credentials count favorably as well. The academic idiom commonly extends from the actor to the organization: if the policy expert is like a scholar, then the think tank is said to be like a “university without students,” in the often used expression of the Brookings Institution.<sup>8</sup>

Though hardly ubiquitous, the language of academic production is adopted by, and applied to, think tanks in a number of ways. Such organizations commonly refer to their expert staff members as “scholars” and “fellows,” irrespective of academic affiliation or background, and describe their intellectual production as “scholarship.” Some think tanks have endowed staff positions reminiscent of university professorships. For example, the Heritage Foundation has the Chung Ju-Yung Fellow for Policy Studies; Brookings has the Bruce and Virginia MacLaury Chair in Economic Studies; and AEI has the Joseph J. and Violet Jacobs Scholar in Social Welfare Studies. Other think tanks explicitly compare themselves to universities. In 1997, for example, the Cato Institute launched a division called the “Cato University” that offered educational seminars for aspiring libertarians.<sup>9</sup> A few think tanks, including the Brookings Institution, have world wide web addresses with the suffix “.edu,” and at least one organization, the RAND Corporation, has a degree-granting capacity.<sup>10</sup> Finally, in a typical journalistic account,

---

<sup>7</sup> Take, for example, Strobe Talbott, president of the Brookings Institution, speaking to the *Washington Post*: “We make a real effort to keep our policy [analyses] objective in the sense that we let chips fall where they may as we identify the big questions and seek the big answers – rather than letting our product be skewed in any fashion by ideological or partisan preferences.” *Washington Post* online chat, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/>, retrieved on September 14, 2004.

<sup>8</sup> See, for example, Weaver (1989) and Tolchin (1983), in which Brookings Institution policy expert Herbert Kaufman says, “This is a university without students.”

<sup>9</sup> See <http://www.cato-university.org/>, retrieved on June 15, 2006.

<sup>10</sup> The Frederick S. Pardee RAND Graduate School awards degrees in policy analysis, which the organization describes as “a multidisciplinary, applied field that tries to use research to unlock difficult policy problems.” See <http://www.prgs.edu/curriculum>, retrieved on July 31, 2006.

Bai (2003) characterizes the Heritage Foundation as “like a university unto itself.” The academic world thus supplies a source domain from which policy experts figuratively characterize their own social role.<sup>11</sup>

The conceptual linkage between think tanks and scholarly production also becomes apparent in personal interviews with policy experts. The following interview excerpts illustrate the widespread use of this mental model:

- I: What are the major considerations discussed in a board meeting?  
 DB: Our board wants to know if we’re publishing good quality scholarship and if it contributes to making America a better place.<sup>12</sup>  
 \*\*\*
- I: What are the forms of expertise that you have to have?  
 CP: ...You can’t sell superficial ideas on any sustained basis, so you also have to be generating serious analysis...so that your work is credible and is recognized by academic leaders and policy leaders as something that they should pay attention to.<sup>13</sup>  
 \*\*\*
- I: What are the marks of a good research product in the context of the policymaking process?  
 JW: Well, good research is good research, whether it’s policy-oriented or not. It’s transparent. It’s replicable.<sup>14</sup>  
 \*\*\*
- GA: Brookings has a very— it’s like a university. The range of views there, the range of opinions. The one thing that is consistent is that the people they have there are of the highest caliber. They have all the badges they need to accumulate to be viewed as an expert.<sup>15</sup>

The fact that policy experts and their audiences adopt an idiom of academic production is not surprising given that the earliest think tanks were founded with the express purpose of spanning the divide between universities and politics (Critchlow 1985; Smith 1991a, 1991b). The mission statement of the Brookings Institution, for

---

<sup>11</sup> “Source domain” is a linguistics term that refers to the conceptual basis of a metaphor. See, for example, Lakoff (1987).

<sup>12</sup> Author interview, David Boaz, Cato Institute, November 24, 2003.

<sup>13</sup> Author interview, Clyde Prestowitz, Economic Strategy Institute, July 28, 2003.

<sup>14</sup> Author interview, James Weidman, Heritage Foundation, June 26, 2003.

<sup>15</sup> Author interview, Greg Anrig, Century Foundation, November 22, 2003.

example, reads in part, “In its conferences, publications, and other activities, Brookings *serves as a bridge between scholarship and policymaking*, bringing new knowledge to the attention of decisionmakers and affording scholars greater insight into public policy issues.”<sup>16</sup> The academic idiom thus takes pride of place as the symbolic point of departure from which policy specialists construct their self-presentations. Despite the idiom’s salience, however, policy experts frequently qualify this notion when speaking about other aspects of their role.

*“The Hack”: the policy expert as legislative aide*

A second language of professional duty imagines the policy expert not as a scholar, but rather as a policy aide whose first obligation is to be familiar with the distinctive rules of order, procedural details, temporal rhythms, and norms of reciprocity guiding American politics. In this view, the essential characteristics of the think tank-affiliated expert are the ability to anticipate “hot” policy issues before they arise and the capacity to churn out useful reports quickly to coincide with these developments. Like a congressional aide, the policy expert should possess detailed knowledge of the workings of legislative and executive agencies and a familiarity with the language of policy debate. In this trope, prior political experience is an asset, and the measure of a good policy report is less its scholarly rigor than its functionality in the policymaking process.<sup>17</sup>

---

<sup>16</sup> See, for example, Brookings Institution (2007); emphasis added.

<sup>17</sup> For example, consider the following interview quotation from policy expert Bruce Stokes: “Having former government service helps a lot. I think there’s a certain aura that comes with, ‘He is the former ambassador to the Soviet Union,’ or, ‘He is the former Undersecretary of State.’ You know, the fact that it was twenty years ago and you’re kind of pontificating on a subject that you did absolutely nothing on at that point in your life, that doesn’t matter. It’s just, ‘The former this.’ You know, people need a title, and

Being “too scholarly” is, in fact, a fatal flaw.<sup>18</sup>

According to Richard Munson, executive director of the Northeast-Midwest Institute, “You have to...know how to move [an idea] through the policy labyrinth that is this legislative body and administrative body”:

- I: And what are the considerations that are taken into account?  
 RM: Well, it’s various things. Who sits on what [congressional] committee? Who has seniority? Who sets the policy agenda for that committee? What other stakeholders can be aligned with the proposal that you have that would make it more acceptable to the powers that be on the relevant committees that have to deal with this?  
 I: Coalition-building?  
 RM: Yeah, coalition building. Vote-counting, in a way. At the end of the day, on a particular subcommittee, are you going to get out of there with a favorable vote or not? You’ll not always, but often, have to think, “Will it sell on the Hill?”<sup>19</sup>

In this model, the policy expert succeeds if and to the degree that he or she becomes an effective player in the policymaking process. Supplying legislative testimony, briefing members of Congress, and writing “talking points” memoranda are all commonplace activities. Cultivating access to influential networks and staying on top of political developments are likewise among the policy expert’s most important tasks.

According to Brookings Institution fellow Alice Rivlin, Brookings “tries to keep current, I mean, to be working on things that are relevant and also fundable.... The funders want you to be working on things that are hot issues at the moment. And they

---

that helps.” Author interview, Bruce Stokes, *National Journal* and Council on Foreign Relations, June 30, 2003.

<sup>18</sup> Reflecting on the American Enterprise Institution’s declining status in the think tank world in the 1980s, Heritage Foundation fellow Lee Edwards reports, “They [had] become more interested in debating the issues, not [in] having a point of view. They had also gotten into the habit of doing big long studies, fat studies and volumes, and so forth – being a little too, in their writing, perhaps a little too scientific.” Author interview, Lee Edwards, Heritage Foundation, July 8, 2003.

<sup>19</sup> Author interview, Richard Munson, Northeast-Midwest Institute, July 10, 2003.

also want you to shift around.”<sup>20</sup> Clyde Prestowitz of the Economic Strategy Institute similarly explains, “You have to be in tune to [policy] developments and take advantage of opportunities to use those developments and respond to them by writing articles, getting that in the press, getting testimony up on the Hill. ... You have to understand the issues and the players in the policy areas that you’re dealing with.”<sup>21</sup> In this view, the policy expert’s job is to generate studies in keeping with the established rules of the political field. Failure to do so can marginalize a think tank politically and compromise its ability to attract financial support.

Importantly, policy experts commonly invoke the legislative aide trope to distinguish think tanks from research universities and to distance themselves from academic scholars. As Strobe Talbott, president of the Brookings Institution, points out, “One difference between a think tank and a university is that we do not go in much for ‘pure’ research – which is to say, we emphasize research that is relevant and useful to policymakers.”<sup>22</sup> An important point of differentiation lies in the separate languages of policy debate and academic argumentation. As Mark Agrast of the Center for American Progress explains, “There are...folks in academic life who have learned a certain style of communication that works very well within their own peer group but doesn’t translate easily into either the Washington environment or the broader national policy drama.”<sup>23</sup> Likewise, Greg Anrig of the Century Foundation observes that, “Academics are especially forced to be very narrow in their focus...[and] have no incentive to do other

---

<sup>20</sup> Author interview, Alice Rivlin, Brookings Institution, February 11, 2004.

<sup>21</sup> Author interview, Clyde Prestowitz, Economic Strategy Institute, July 28, 2003.

<sup>22</sup> *Washington Post* online chat, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/>, retrieved on September 14, 2004.

<sup>23</sup> Author interview, Mark Agrast, Center for American Progress, July 27, 2004.

kinds of work that would be broader policy-oriented work if they're situated in an environment where they're trying to get tenure."<sup>24</sup> A policy expert, by contrast, must speak the language of political debate.

Another point of differentiation from scholarly work lies in the distinctive *temporality* of policymaking, to which policy experts must orient their production. For example, to the question, "What are the marks of a good researcher here?", Tim Ransdell, director of the California Institute, replies, "Timeliness. It's not just seeing something, but it's also getting it out fast. I think the value here is being able to rip things out in a hurry. The staff here is really good at that."<sup>25</sup> William Galston, a veteran of several think tanks, likewise observes, "The policy process occurs in real time, and so coming out with a really useful study two years after the reauthorization of the bill is of no earthly use to anyone who is engaged in the real policy process. So one thing think tanks are aware of is the policy schedule."<sup>26</sup> The fact that policy schedules constitute "real time" in the minds of some policy experts illustrates their orientation to the regularities of the political field, even as it distances them from the elongated cycles of academic production. The political and academic idioms thus not only coexist in the minds of policy experts, but often compete with one another.

---

<sup>24</sup> Author interview, Greg Anrig, The Century Foundation, November 21, 2003.

<sup>25</sup> Author interview, Tim Ransdell, California Institute, July 21, 2003.

<sup>26</sup> Author interview, William Galston, University of Maryland, June 3, 2004. Anti-tax activist Grover Norquist highlights the difference between academic and political temporalities in similar terms:

I: What are the marks of a good policy report?

GN: Timeliness. Legislation moves at certain times. A study of the impact of the French Revolution done at a university is interesting this year. It will be interesting in five years. A study on why a particular piece of legislation would be good or bad for the economy is only of interest in the context of the fact that the legislation is going to be discussed and voted on.

Author interview, Grover Norquist, Americans for Tax Reform, August 2, 2004.

*“The Policy Entrepreneur”: the policy expert as salesman*

A third language of professional duty imagines the policy expert not as a scholar or a policy aide, but rather as an entrepreneur in a “marketplace of ideas.” Policy experts routinely invoke the concepts of salesmanship and commercial transaction to characterize their setting and the attributes needed to excel in it. In this metaphor, the policy expert’s goal is to market his or her intellectual wares to three kinds of consumers: legislators, who “buy” ideas by incorporating them into policy; financial donors, whose purchase is somewhat more literal because it involves giving money to the think tank; and journalists, who figuratively buy think tank studies by citing them and quoting their authors. In this model, policy experts should possess the attributes of a successful promoter: good “people skills,” a taste for marketing, and a knack for re-packaging old ideas. The idiom commonly extends from the actor to the organization: like corporations vying for market share, think tanks are said to compete with one another in a crowded space.

Clyde Prestowitz, founder and president of the Economic Strategy Institute, describes the successful policy expert in the following terms:

You gotta be a salesman. You have to present your ideas crisply, convincingly, interestingly, and you have to have enormous energy. You have to have what the salesmen call “closing ability.” Not only do you make the presentation, but you have to ask for the order. And the order may be a donation or the order may be a bill or a policy idea that you’re trying to sell. But you have to be able to ask for the order and get it.<sup>27</sup>

Edwin Feulner, co-founder and president of the Heritage Foundation, similarly reflects on the secrets of the successful think tank: “The key ingredient is the person who heads

---

<sup>27</sup> Author interview, Clyde Prestowitz, Economic Strategy Institute, July 28, 2003. The question posed to Prestowitz was, “What are the specialized forms of expertise that you have to have?”

it...must be entrepreneurial enough to see the unique need [and] salesman enough to convince others (donors, professors to write the papers, and policy makers and journalists) to listen to him and his people.”<sup>28</sup>

Use of the salesmanship metaphor is not limited to conservative policy experts. Left-wing journalist and Center for American Progress fellow Eric Alterman uses the same trope in an interview:

- I: Can you tell me something about the set of skills that you need in order to be a successful think tanker, for lack of a better term?
- EA: Well, there is sort of a public policy entrepreneur personality...which basically involves being a good schmoozer. That’s really all there is to it.
- I: Schmoozer with journalists? With political figures?
- EA: With whomever. I mean, a lot of academics are very inarticulate, more so in the hard sciences than in the short [*sic*] sciences. You know, they write essays and they’re shy and stuff. [In] think tanks, you’re better off being somewhat gregarious and not being that shy about selling yourself.

Not only are the characteristics of the entrepreneur useful in the think tank, Alterman suggests, but being “too much” of a scholar counts as a shortcoming. In the words of another respondent, the policy expert must be “innovative” and always able “to come up with sort of a new twist or a new angle on an idea.”<sup>29</sup>

The salesmanship idiom is not new, having crystallized by the early 1980s in the widely used expression “policy entrepreneur.”<sup>30</sup> Like the policy aide metaphor, the

---

<sup>28</sup> *Washington Post* online chat, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/>, retrieved on September 11, 2004. Feulner went on to say of the meteoric rise of his organization, “If an entrepreneur markets what people want, he will be successful. That’s what it’s all about.” Twenty years earlier, Feulner (1985) used similar imagery in a speech:

It takes an institution to help propagandize an idea – to market an idea... organizations like the Institute of Economic Affairs or the Adam Smith Institute in London, my own Heritage Foundation in the U.S.... Proctor and Gamble does not sell Crest toothpaste by taking out one newspaper ad or running one television commercial. They sell and re-sell it every day, by keeping the product fresh in the consumer’s mind. The institutes I have mentioned sell ideas in much the same manner.

<sup>29</sup> Author interview, Richard Munson, Northeast-Midwest Institute, July 10, 2003.

<sup>30</sup> The earliest use of this term in a major newspaper appears to have been in Hall (1983). A notable use of

language of entrepreneurship is commonly used to distinguish policy experts from academic scholars. For example, Bruce Stokes, a veteran of several think tanks, explains:

There are people who are wonderful thinkers, wonderful writers, but they feel very uncomfortable promoting themselves. And what you need is self-promoters. I think that some of the best people in this game have been shameless self-promoters.... They've got to want to sell their idea. They've got to be willing to make the phone calls to the press, push to get on the TV show, stay up nights writing the extra op-ed piece. People who are neurotic that way often are the best people. People who say, "Well, I've said all I have to say on that idea. It's here. Now I want to go and do something else," they don't tend to be as successful.<sup>31</sup>

Policy experts thus invoke the logic of commerce not only to suggest that the desire and capacity for self-promotion are essential in the policy research world, but also to differentiate themselves from scholars.

*"The Correspondent": the policy expert as journalist*

If think tank-affiliated policy experts commonly talk of selling their wares to journalists, then at other times their figurative goal is simply to *become* a journalist. Newer and less salient than the previous idioms, this fourth trope prescribes that policy experts disseminate knowledge in a format that is both accessible and compelling to political actors and the wider public. In this view, the most coveted abilities are a knack for writing in plain language and a willingness to compose short, compact studies in a

---

the expression is in Rothenberg's (1987) profile of policy expert Pat Choate, "The Idea Merchant":

Choate is known in Washington as a "policy entrepreneur," part of a small community of academics and writers whose articles and speeches and fat Rolodex files help to set the national political agenda. Says William A. Galston of the Roosevelt Center for American Policy Studies, a liberal think tank: "A policy entrepreneur is analogous to the entrepreneur in the private sector. He is the person who creates the venture, who invents the concept of the product and then goes out and markets it." The difference, Galston adds, is that "Pat Choate's working with political capital, not cash."

<sup>31</sup> Author interview, Bruce Stokes, *National Journal* and Council on Foreign Relations, June 30, 2003.

form similar to newspaper articles.<sup>32</sup> Policy experts must “have a sense of what’s going to be newsworthy,” in the words of interview respondent. According to Richard Munson, they should be “able to consolidate their technical, complex ideas into something that is really very understandable – that is, a sound bite, if you will.”<sup>33</sup> Says Eric Alterman: “It’s true in journalism and it’s true in think tanks: to be a successful think tank person, you need to be able to write in a way that is understandable to non-specialists.... It’s a matter of making complicated matters understandable in colloquial terms.”<sup>34</sup>

Journalistic writing has become a standard point of reference for policy experts as think tanks have converged on media visibility as both a means and a marker of success. Once media-shy, many think tanks now employ communication specialists, maintain media outreach departments, and reward their scholars for publishing op-ed pieces in the newspaper and appearing on television (Weaver 1989).<sup>35</sup> This shift has steered many think tanks toward brevity and accessibility in their intellectual production. For example, asked to describe a good policy argument, Mark Agrast of the Center for American Progress says,

First of all, it has to be intelligible. It has to be brief, and digestible. We don’t tend to generate large major reports.... By and large what we produce is less than

---

<sup>32</sup> Typically, the figurative journalist to which policy experts refer is a newspaper or magazine reporter. However, sometimes he or she is a broadcast reporter, in which case the most prized assets are comfort and eloquence on television:

With doing broadcast interviews – well, specifically TV – your body language is so important. As important, if not more important, than actually the words that you use. Fred [Smith, Jr.] is very good at it. He’s got the energy and the quips, and the producers love him, so he’s on TV a lot. And of course he does radio well, too. But his energy— he really does TV. That’s his forte.

Author interview, Jody Clarke, Competitive Enterprise Institute, December 16, 2003.

<sup>33</sup> Author interview, Richard Munson, Northeast-Midwest Institute, July 10, 2003.

<sup>34</sup> Author interview, Eric Alterman, Center for American Progress, November 21, 2003.

<sup>35</sup> A striking symbol of this shift came in the 1990s, when the Brookings Institution, an organization once averse to news media attention, built an \$800,000 television studio on its own premises. Author interviews, Stephen Hess, Brookings Institution, July 16, 2003; Ed Berkey, Brookings Institution, March 28, 2006.

ten pages and our talking points are one page. And our columns are 750 words. They're op-ed length because we want people to actually be able to read them and digest them and apply them. So I think the most important characteristic of the work we're trying to put out is that it be accessible and respectful of people's information overload, and their limited time.<sup>36</sup>

In short, policy experts must adapt their writing to the fact that publicity is increasingly the coin of the think tank realm.

As think tanks seek public visibility through the news media, acquiring the modes of perception of the journalist becomes a prized ability. When asked to name the most desirable outlets in which to be quoted, cited, or to publish their work, for example, policy experts deploy fine-grained categories of evaluation:

[In the] print media, the place to be is the *New York Times*. The *Wall Street Journal*, if you're an economist. *The Washington Post* for local Washington exposure, including the Congress and the government, but the *Washington Post* doesn't have the national reach that the *Times* and the *Journal* do.<sup>37</sup>

\*\*\*

The *Wall Street Journal* or the *Financial Times*. On trade or budget [issues], those are the papers that you want to reach for. *The New Republic* or the *Weekly Standard* are more niche-oriented weeklies, one being more liberal, one being more conservative, but we have friends in both.<sup>38</sup>

\*\*\*

If you want to get your article talked about, it had better be in the *Post*, the *Times*, or the *Journal*. In magazines, *The New Republic*, the *Atlantic Monthly*. I think to a lesser extent *The Weekly Standard* and *National Review*. ...*Harpers*, I think, has become kind of ridiculous. And the *Atlantic Monthly*...has just soared beyond *Harpers*.<sup>39</sup>

\*\*\*

S: Andy Kohut, who's my boss at Pew, places incredibly great store in the [PBS *Jim*] *Lehrer Show*. It's true, they'll give you five to seven minutes or whatever as opposed to forty-five seconds. It's true that thoughtful people watch it...

I: You're on [NPR's] *Marketplace*.

S: Yeah, I'm on *Marketplace*. But that's not nearly as good as being on *All Things Considered*. You know, just a bigger audience and you get more time and, again, a thoughtful audience. [It's] useful in part because I'm

<sup>36</sup> Author interview, Mark Agrast, Center for American Progress, July 27, 2004.

<sup>37</sup> Author interview, Alice Rivlin, Brookings Institution, February 11, 2004.

<sup>38</sup> Author interview, Charles Kolb, Committee for Economic Development, November 26, 2003.

<sup>39</sup> Author interview, David Boaz, Cato Institute, November 24, 2003.

amazed at the number of people who listen to NPR commuting. You know, serious people.<sup>40</sup>

Clyde Prestowitz summarizes: “Public relations, media relations – or media savvy – is a very important aspect of the business.”<sup>41</sup>

Like the policymaking and entrepreneurship models, the journalism trope is commonly invoked to distinguish policy research from academic production. In this model, the policy expert must develop greater “self-discipline” than his or her academic counterparts in preparing ideas for public presentation. American Enterprise Institute fellow and ex-political science professor Norm Ornstein reflects on the considerable level of mastery needed to write newspaper op-ed pieces: “This is an acquired skill and something that is difficult for most academics to do. If you are used to writing journal articles or writing books, there is no discipline that comes to bear in the sense that you have got to limit this to a small space.”<sup>42</sup> Compared to academic writing, Ornstein says, composing op-ed pieces for the newspaper “is harder to do. It takes more internal discipline.... You don’t have the luxury of meandering around. You’ve got to focus and pinpoint.” In sum, many policy experts, even those who do not have professional backgrounds in journalism, look to journalistic writing as a model for concise, non-technical argumentation.

*On the thorny synthesis of contradictory roles*

---

<sup>40</sup> Author interview, Bruce Stokes, *National Journal* and Council on Foreign Relations, June 30, 2003.

<sup>41</sup> Author interview, Clyde Prestowitz, Economic Strategy Institute, July 28, 2003.

<sup>42</sup> Author interview, Norm Ornstein, American Enterprise Institute, June 15, 2004.

Disentangling the idioms on which policy experts draw to arrive at their unique self-understandings is a deceptive analytical act, since the most distinctive feature of this professional ethos is its hybridity, or its strong emphasis on the goals of balancing and reconciling these functions. Policy experts seek to cultivate a mixed disposition by incorporating a set of contradictory habits and skills. A peculiar consequence of this goal is that to embody too fully any one of these roles – that is, to be “too” academic, political, entrepreneurial, or journalistic – is to marginalize oneself in the world of think tanks. The policy expert’s role thus demands a delicate symbolic balancing act from which a unique, albeit synthetic, professional identity emerges.

As the founder and president of the Competitive Enterprise Institute explains, “At CEI, we really want you to try and always have one foot in the analytic camp and one foot in the advocacy camp.”<sup>43</sup> Economist Henry Aaron of the Brookings Institution characterizes his organization – a very different think tank – in strikingly similar terms: “We’re Janus-faced, looking in both directions.”<sup>44</sup> Alice Rivlin likewise explains how Brookings recruits new staff members:

- I: If you’re hiring a new scholar here at Brookings, what are the marks of a good policy researcher? Who are you looking for?
- AR: Good track record in writing stuff, usually.
- I: Writing, like, op-ed pieces, or writing in academic journals?
- AR: Writing both. Brookings would look for somebody who had written a really good book on something or a series of not-too-academic journal articles. But if there had been some op-eds and things, that would be a plus. If this was a person who was a good speaker and presenter, that

---

<sup>43</sup> Author interview, Fred Smith, Jr., Competitive Enterprise Institute, December 16, 2003. Smith has no relation to Frederick W. Smith, the founder and CEO of FedEx.

<sup>44</sup> Author interview, Henry Aaron, Brookings Institution, November 19, 2003. Aaron referred to Brookings’ dual orientation to academic and political debates. He continued, “I would say the relative importance of the face looking toward the academic world has diminished. It’s uneven. We still put out a journal called *Brookings Papers on Economic Activity*...but little of the rest of the activities here by most of the staff aims toward, [or] would count favorably, if they were applying for a university job.”

would be a plus.<sup>45</sup>

In such accounts, representatives from think tanks emphasize the need to develop disparate skills as a prerequisite for membership in their ranks.

The goal of merging contrasting professional styles is doubly difficult, however – first, because each role requires a great deal of social learning, and, second, because the sensibilities they imply tend to be at loggerheads. The latter obstacle can be especially troublesome, as Bruce Stokes explains:

There was this emphasis while I was [at the Council on Foreign Relations] to turn out shorter, more punchy, policy-oriented things, not big academic [things]. Well, for a long time a mixed message was given. You were also supposed to produce the big book that would change the thinking in your field. Well, generally, the people who exist can't produce [both]. I mean, you either get guys who do that or you get guys who do the short, punchy stuff, but generally the same person can't do both. Not only because he doesn't have enough time, but it's a different personality, you know. It's a different *mind* who does that kind of stuff.<sup>46</sup>

Eric Alterman similarly expresses the sense of liminality that may result from this conflict: “I personally exist in a kind of never-never land of the nexus of all of these worlds – journalism, academia, think tank, politics – and none of them entirely satisfy me.”<sup>47</sup>

The propensities of the scholar, in particular, run counter to the emphases on fast turnaround, aggressive self-promotion, and journalistic brevity that guide the think tank's intellectual production. Consequently, the policy expert's relationship to academic production is one of special ambivalence. Marked by alternating affinity and disenchantment, this professional stance often begins with an announcement of scholarly

---

<sup>45</sup> Author interview, Alice Rivlin, Brookings Institution, February 11, 2004.

<sup>46</sup> Author interview, Bruce Stokes, *National Journal* and Council on Foreign Relations, June 30, 2003.

<sup>47</sup> Author interview, Eric Alterman, Center for American Progress, November 21, 2003.

detachment, only to be followed by a sharp critique of “ivory tower” disengagement. Policy experts sometimes praise their organizations in a manner that underscores their association with research universities. “Like a good academic institution,” says Norm Ornstein, “there is a real protection of academic freedom” at the American Enterprise Institute.<sup>48</sup> Yet stated affinities with academia commonly give way to pointed critique. The central criticism directed toward scholars by policy experts is that academic debates are too insular. “There are countless disciplines that are very inward looking,” says Adam Meyerson, former vice president of the Heritage Foundation. “I would say inward looking, incestuous, and not very interesting. And that don’t add much, don’t have much wisdom to contribute to anybody outside of their discipline.”<sup>49</sup>

The charge of insularity has two components. The first is that academic social science is marred by empty or ritualistic displays of statistical proficiency. Many policy experts, for example, suggest that the statistical modeling favored by their academic counterparts contributes little to actual policymaking discussions. In the view of one policy expert, “These economists like to build their models that have nothing to do with the real world and that’s one of the reasons I think the think tanks have risen. They are more interested in talking about what the real world is.”<sup>50</sup> The second part of the charge of insularity, and a curious analog to the critique of statistics, is that the discursive turns in the humanities and social sciences have encouraged excessive abstraction and

---

<sup>48</sup> Author interview, Norm Ornstein, American Enterprise Institute, June 15, 2004.

<sup>49</sup> Author interview, Adam Meyerson, Philanthropy Roundtable, March 16, 2004.

<sup>50</sup> This sentiment was not uncommon in my interviews. Another policy expert makes a similar point: “In economics they put a lot of stock in economic modeling and, I have to say, I just find that such a waste of time because I could show you anything you want in an economic model. The question is, is it really saying anything about the world? ...To me it’s just absolutely pointless. It is a ritual that gets people tenure.” However, because of the candid nature of these comments, I have chosen to protect the anonymity of the respondents.

relativistic thinking among scholars. Heritage Foundation fellow Lee Edwards explains this view:

I think what had happened [when Heritage began] is that professors had become increasingly more and more arcane in their studies, had turned inward, affected by the various trends which were going on at that time, whether it was Foucault or Derrida and all the rest of those guys. You know, “Nothing is real. It’s all relative.” Well, that’s not exactly what a politician wants. He’s looking for some answers to a particular problem, not, “Well, there *is* no answer.”

In both cases, the charge is that academic scholars render themselves irrelevant to policy debates through their excessive insularity.

In summary, the duties of the policy expert give rise to an elaborate symbolic balancing act that commonly involves signaling similarities to and differences from actors in proximate institutions. This self-presentation pairs an announcement of scholarly detachment with a tacit willingness to abide by the established rules of the political field, which require fast turnaround in one’s intellectual production, aggressive self-promotion, and general accessibility in one’s writing. At times, this mixed stance turns positively cumbersome, as in the Manhattan Institute’s stated goal of “Combining intellectual seriousness and practical wisdom with intelligent marketing and focused advocacy.”<sup>51</sup> At other times, the juggling act gives rise to apparent hair-splitting, as in a self-description by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (1979:7): “We think of ourselves not as an advocate of certain policies or positions, but as a facilitator of significant advocacies by conflicting contributors to the dissensus.”

Additional blurriness arises from the fact that many think tanks permit their policy experts to advise politicians and candidates for public office, but usually require them to

---

<sup>51</sup> Manhattan Institute website, [http://www.manhattaninstitute.org/html/about\\_mi.htm](http://www.manhattaninstitute.org/html/about_mi.htm), retrieved on May 24, 2007.

separate such consulting from their official organizational duties. Thus, Brookings Institution fellows are permitted to advise candidates “in a personal capacity, outside regular business hours and without use of Brookings resources,” while the American Enterprise Institute explains that its “scholars and fellows frequently do take positions on policy and other issues, including explicit advocacy for or against legislation...[but] when they do, they are speaking for themselves and not for AEI or its trustees or other scholars or employees.”<sup>52</sup> The Institute for Policy Studies is similarly equivocal in its claim that it “works with but is independent of political parties and movements.”<sup>53</sup>

Competitive Enterprise Institute president Fred Smith, Jr. offers an apt, if idiosyncratic, summary of the policy expert’s complex stance:

I use the analogy – I’ve used it for years – public policy is...like having a vaudeville act or something. You go up on the stage and you’re juggling and you’re singing, and you’re balancing. And then you run behind the curtain and run up in the audience and applaud madly. And then you run back up on the stage and you juggle. And then you run back and applaud madly. If you do it right, all of a sudden other people start applauding and you’ve got a hit.<sup>54</sup>

In many cases, policy experts describe feeling pulled in opposite directions by the demands of their job. Even as they lay claim to an academic form of authority, for example, most report neither reading the major academic journals in their fields (much less devoting time or energy to publishing in them) nor attending academic conferences.<sup>55</sup>

Nevertheless, the assertion of scholarly detachment is an essential component of the

---

<sup>52</sup> Brookings Institution website, <http://www.brookings.edu/index/aboutresearch.html>, retrieved on May 24, 2007; American Enterprise Institution website, <http://www.aei.org/about/filter.all/default.asp>, retrieved on May 24, 2007.

<sup>53</sup> Institute for Policy Studies website, <http://www.ips-dc.org/overview.htm>, retrieved on May 24, 2007.

<sup>54</sup> Author interview, Fred Smith, Jr., Competitive Enterprise Institute, December 16, 2003.

<sup>55</sup> For example, Dean Baker of the Center for Economic and Policy Research elaborates his view that academic journals are politically irrelevant: “The journals are just, they just exist to grant people tenure, I think. It’s just part of the hierarchy in the discipline.” Author interview, Dean Baker, Center for Economic and Policy Research, June 11, 2003.

policy expert's stance because it suggests insulation from political and economic constraint – the hallmark of the intellectual's authority.

#### ORGANIZATIONAL AND FIELD-LEVEL HYBRIDITY

The hybridity of the policy expert's professional identity has its analogues at higher levels of social organization, including both the think tank and the broader set of relations in which think tanks are embedded. The remainder of this analysis is taken up with this proposition. First, I show that think tanks are structurally heterogeneous organizations in terms of their *personnel*, or the kinds of social actors they recruit to be policy experts; their *resources*, or the sources of funding they rely on for material support; and their patterns of *formal affiliation* with other organizations. Second, I show that competition and difference among think tanks gives rise to an internally variegated social space. Think tanks are therefore best conceptualized as making up a structurally intermediate system of relations that traverses, links, and overlaps the anchoring institutions of academics, politics, business, and journalism. Finally, I inquire into the relationship between the structural hybridity of the think tank universe and the mixed professional dispositions of the policy expert. Far from arbitrary or indiscernible, this relationship is highly intelligible, since the symbolic bases of the policy expert's role match the institutional pillars of the think tank arena.

#### *Hacks vs. wonks: stylistic differences among policy experts*

The first source of organizational and field-level hybridity is the uneven appropriation by policy experts of the four professional idioms outlined above. Simply

put, rarely are the models of the scholar, the policy aide, the entrepreneur, and the journalist applied in a perfectly balanced or consistent manner. In practice, some policy experts share greater affinities with academic scholars, while others more closely resemble legislative aides, business entrepreneurs, or journalists in their intellectual production. Consequently, the opposition of the “wunk” and “hack” discourses supplies one of the major internal structuring principles of the think tank universe. In this classification, “wonks” are the more academically affiliated experts, or those who bring to the production of policy research technical skills and credentials; by contrast, “hacks” are those who enter this contest with fewer educational credentials, but tend to be more closely aligned with centers of political and economic power. As John Cavanagh, president of the Institute for Policy Studies, laments, “Mostly all those skills don’t come together in one person, and so...almost everyone we hire, I believe, is stronger in one side or the other.”<sup>56</sup>

In addition to offering positive bases of self-identification, then, the four professional idioms supply a *means of differentiation* among policy experts. This insight leads to a basic observation about the think tank’s internal topology. Whereas existing accounts typically emphasize political ideology as the major structuring principle of the think tank world (see, e.g., Fischer 1991; Ricci 1993; Stefanic and Delgado 1996;

---

<sup>56</sup> Author interview, John Cavanagh, Institute for Policy Studies, August 26, 2003. On a similar note, Greg Anrig, vice president of the Century Foundation, explains: “It really is difficult to find somebody who is very smart and knowledgeable [and] who also is able to write effectively and clearly for people who aren’t experts and can talk to the media to provide sound bites.” Whereas academic scholars tend to be too narrow in their focus, “people from [Capitol] Hill...are more likely to have the skills to be able to communicate and talk in sound bites. The flip side of that, though, is the heft. They typically don’t have Ph.D’s, by and large. They haven’t developed an expertise beyond the ‘faster turnaround’ kind of stuff.” Likewise, Anrig says, journalists “haven’t had an opportunity to develop a focused expertise in a particular realm.” Author interview, Greg Anrig, The Century Foundation, November 21, 2003.

Callahan 1999), I argue that a deeper separation arises from the different emphases placed by policy experts on the various aspects of their professional role. The discourses of the “hack” and the “wonk” point to a basic divergence between authority based on academic credentials and authority based on political and economic power.<sup>57</sup>

Figure 1 heuristically depicts the relations among policy experts in terms of an analytic space anchored and delimited by the four institutional poles of politics, academics, business, and journalism. The diagram is meant to capture parsimoniously the propositions outlined above. For example, we can speak alternately of an actor’s or an organization’s centrality or marginality within the space of think tanks, or of the same actor’s proximity to or distance from each of its anchoring poles. In keeping with the discussion of professional identity, the diagram lists four “polar” kinds of policy experts, each corresponding to one of the field’s parent institutions.<sup>58</sup> The figure nonetheless suggests *dispositional hybridity* as the basic principle of centrality within the think tank universe, since any actor who ventures too close to any one of its anchoring poles risks being “drawn off the edge” by its quasi-magnetic pull. For the remainder of this discussion, I use variations on this figure to depict additional structural features of the world of U.S. think tanks.

---

<sup>57</sup> This point resonates among policy experts. For example, asked how he classifies the think tank world, AEI fellow Norm Ornstein sees greater similarity between his organization and its ideological rival, the Brookings Institution, than between AEI and its conservative ally, the Heritage Foundation: “There is a real distinction between think tanks like AEI and Brookings and the Urban Institute, say, places that are in some respects rough copies of universities without students...and places like Heritage and some of the others, that are called ‘think tanks,’ that have a few scholars but are more lobbying organizations who try to affect more directly policy decisions.” Author interview, Norm Ornstein, American Enterprise Institute, June 15, 2004.

<sup>58</sup> The EC and CC notations refer to economic and cultural capital and are meant to underscore the proposition that the opposition of credentials and material resources supplies the major structuring principle in the space of think tanks. See, for example, Bourdieu ([1989] 1996).

**[FIGURE 1 HERE]***Educational and career backgrounds*

The stylistic differences among policy experts mirror their divergent educational and career pathways into the think tank. Data on the formal educational backgrounds of policy experts show that the overall volume of “academic capital” in the think tank world is high, but that academic credentials are distributed in a highly uneven manner within and across organizations. Figure 2 depicts the relative proportions of doctorate, master’s/professional, and bachelor’s degree holders among the expert staff members at twenty-one major think tanks.<sup>59</sup> The figure shows that certain organizations (e.g., IIE, Hoover Institution, Brookings Institution) have expert staffs composed mostly of doctorate degree holders, while others (e.g., Institute for Policy Studies, Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, and the Competitive Enterprise Institute) employ relatively few doctorate holders and even a substantial share of bachelor’s degree holders.

**[FIGURE 2 HERE]**

When the data are aggregated, a broader picture of the role of educational credentials in the think tank arena begins to emerge. All of the policy experts counted here report at least a bachelor’s-level education, and a large majority (90.1%) have attained a graduate degree of some kind. However, the population of policy experts at these organizations is divided roughly in half between those who hold a doctorate degree

---

<sup>59</sup> See the appendix for a list of acronyms and abbreviations.

(51.2%) and those who do not (48.8%).<sup>60</sup> Not only is attaining a doctorate degree far from compulsory, but there is little indication that having a highly educated staff is strongly linked to dominance or subordination in the competition among think tanks. Certain long enduring, highly visible, and well-funded think tanks such as the Cato Institute, the Center for Strategic and International Studies, and the Heritage Foundation are situated in the bottom half of this group. As we would expect of any space of intellectual production, then, educational credentials play an important role in commanding access to the valued positions within think tanks; yet this fact is mitigated somewhat by the presence and effectiveness of other forms of authority – especially, I will argue, political, economic, and journalistic authority.

There are parallel differences among policy experts with respect to career background. Figure 3 reports on the previous occupational affiliations of the expert staff members at the same twenty-one think tanks. To construct this figure, I coded the self-reported career backgrounds of policy experts (n=876) according to nine structural origins, plus one additional “other” category.<sup>61</sup> The categories are “academic,” “academic/state,” “state,” “state/profit sector,” “profit sector,” “profit sector/journalism,” “journalism,” “journalism/academic,” and “hybrid.” The category “hybrid,” situated in the center of the figure, refers to occupational backgrounds that combine experience in *three or all four* of these sectors, or backgrounds that combine two structurally opposing

---

<sup>60</sup> This rate of doctorate attainment is far lower than in the corresponding arena of academic production. For example, Cataldi et al. (2005:24) list the rate of full-time instructional faculty with “doctoral or first-professional” degrees in the social sciences (93.5%), natural sciences (89.8%), and humanities (83.4%).

<sup>61</sup> “Other” (6.0%), which is not included in the figure, refers to individuals with career backgrounds exclusively in other sectors, which typically means in the fields of non-profit research and advocacy. A policy expert who reported no prior job experience would also fall into this category. The figures presented here refer to proportions of the total population of experts in the database.

locations – academic/profit or journalism/state.<sup>62</sup>

**[FIGURE 3 HERE]**

Placing the data in our analytic space shows think tanks to be unevenly populated, with the largest share of policy experts reporting mixed occupational backgrounds. The figure’s shaded areas – the “state-academic,” “state,” and “hybrid” sectors – represent the most densely inhabited regions of this social space. Fully 58.7% of think tank experts occupy one of these three sectors. By contrast, the three lightly shaded areas, representing the “academic,” “state-profit,” and “journalism” regions, make up the think tank field’s major “suburbs.” These are somewhat densely populated regions, but less so than the core area. The remaining, non-shaded parts of the figure refer to the most thinly populated regions of the space of think tanks. Most strikingly, 56.8% of the policy experts report job experience in two or more of the four career sectors considered here, and 22.9% of the experts list what I classify as profoundly “hybrid” career trajectories. Policy experts with job credentials in both the state and academic sectors (20.0%) and the state-sector only (15.8%) are the next most common kinds, followed by academic-only (12.6%) and “state-profit” (9.1%) backgrounds. About 5.3% of the policy experts report career backgrounds in journalism only. Expanding the notion of career hybridity to include those who have worked previously in one of these four sectors *plus* in the non-profit sector increases the level of occupational hybridity to 69.4%.

Figure 4 takes the think tank organization, not the individual policy expert, as the unit of analysis to make much the same observation as the previous one. The figure

---

<sup>62</sup> Out of this hybrid group (which totals 22.9%), 16.7% have job experience in three or all four career sectors, 2.9% in the academic and for-profit sectors, and 3.3% in the journalism and state sectors.

reports the modal career background of the expert staff members at several major think tanks and locates these organizations accordingly in our analytic space. I find patterned variation among the think tanks. For example, at such venerable “wonk havens” as the Brookings Institution, the American Enterprise Institute, the Hoover Institution, and the Institute for International Economics, a plurality of policy experts reports “state-academic” career backgrounds. By contrast, at the more “ideological” think tanks, such as the Heritage Foundation, the Center for Strategic and International Studies, and the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, the largest share of policy experts report “state-only” career backgrounds.

Two organizations, the Cato Institute and the Competitive Enterprise Institute, are situated nearer the business pole of the space of think tanks in terms of staff composition. Likewise with respect to the journalism pole: the Institute for Policy Studies and the New America Foundation employ large numbers of policy experts with experience in newspaper and magazine reporting. Finally, at several think tanks – the Council on Foreign Relations, the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, the Center for American Progress, and the Hudson Institute – “hybrid” career backgrounds are the most common kind. Significantly, at no think tank in the database does the largest share of experts report an exclusively academic career background. Even those organizations with the most academic reputations, such as Brookings and Hoover, while employing many ex-academic scholars, tend to hire ex-academics who have also established careers in politics.

**[FIGURE 4 HERE]**

*Financial resources*

Think tanks are structurally heterogeneous with respect to their financial resources as well, relying on such disparate sources of funding as philanthropic foundations, individual donors, state agencies, business corporations, and labor unions for support. Figure 5 gives a broad overview of the funding patterns for twenty-five major think tanks, selected for their primacy in terms of budget size, staff size, and public visibility. These data establish a rough differentiation among three kinds of organizations: (1) think tanks that depend mostly on short-term donors; (2) those that rely primarily on government grants and contracts; and, (3) those whose income is largely self-generated through investments, conference and membership fees, and proceeds from the sale of publications. The distribution of organizations across the three categories is uneven: twenty of the twenty-five think tanks in the group fall into the first (“donor-dependent”) category, within which there are gradations of financial autonomy. Of the remaining five organizations, three (Urban, RAND, NBER) are primarily government-funded, while two (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Century Foundation) generate the majority of their own revenue.<sup>63</sup>

**[FIGURE 5 HERE]**

Disaggregating the broad category of “donors” reveals further differentiation within and among think tanks. To obtain data of this kind, scholars must rely on two non-systematic sources: voluntary disclosures by the think tanks and the self-reports of donors. Table 1 presents an overview of contributions received by nine of the “donor-

---

<sup>63</sup> Investment income and corporate subscriptions typically represent the largest share of self-generated income for the major think tanks. Putting aside CEIP and the Century Foundation, a separate analysis of IRS 990 tax returns and annual reports reveals that only five of these think tanks (Hoover, Brookings, CFR, AEI, JCPES) generated more than 10% of their revenue through investment income in 2004-5.

dependent” organizations.<sup>64</sup> These data represent approximately \$149 million worth of contributions made during two years, 2002 and 2004. Of this total, the largest share of funding came from individual donors, while the next greatest sum came from philanthropic foundations. Business corporations and labor unions gave smaller but still sizeable amounts. These findings are consistent with those of other scholars who have shown that the major American think tanks are supported by a broad mixture of donors, of which individual contributors, foundation grants, and corporate giving make up the largest share (Rich 2004; Smith 1991a).<sup>65</sup>

**[TABLE 1 HERE]**

*Patterns of formal affiliation*

Finally, a complex system of formal affiliations links the world of think tanks to more established organizations in the academic, political, economic, and journalistic spheres. Many think tanks are spin-offs or ancillary partners of larger entities, especially political organs such as state agencies, congressional coalitions, political parties, and activist organizations. For example, the RAND Corporation and the Urban Institute are each harnessed to specific federal agencies, having in effect been designated as official

---

<sup>64</sup> The remaining eleven think tanks in the donor-dependent group either offer no categorical information on their contributors in their most recent annual reports, or simply did not publish an annual report. The Institute for International Economics, the Progressive Policy Institute, and the Center for American Progress fall into the latter group.

<sup>65</sup> These numbers yield a picture similar to a separate count of the contributors listed (without donation sums) in a collection of think tank annual reports. Again, individual donors make up the largest share (45.6%) of contributors, with foundations (32.9%) and corporations (14.7%) next. There is nonetheless considerable organizational variation. For example, 30.9% of the major donors listed in the Hudson Institute’s 2002 annual report were business corporations. The Brookings Institution is noteworthy for taking substantial contributions (10.5% of its 2003-4 donors) from foreign governments.

organs of intellectual production.<sup>66</sup> Other think tanks operate in a relationship of reciprocal exchange with parties and activist organizations, such as the Progressive Policy Institute, an arm of the Democratic Leadership Council, and the Worldwatch Institute, an environmentalist think tank.<sup>67</sup> Table 2 lists some of the most prominent such relationships.

**[TABLE 2 HERE]**

This table includes only the most unambiguous cases of “junior partnership.” By contrast, many think tanks are attached informally or less conspicuously to outside entities. The conservative Heritage Foundation, for example, was established in 1973 by two Republican legislative aides, Edwin Feulner, Jr. and Paul Weyrich, to provide an organized research operation to congressional allies.<sup>68</sup> In a personal interview, Weyrich is notably candid about how his status as an aide to Republican Senators Carl T. Curtis and Gordon Allott facilitated close ties between Heritage and the party:

Both were members of the Senate leadership, so you get to meet lots of people when you’re in the leadership. So we targeted [Capitol] Hill and our niche was to be very responsive to whatever need was expressed. In the meantime, I went and helped organize the Republican Study Committee, and it became a generator

---

<sup>66</sup> Taking its name from the phrase “research and development,” the RAND Corporation was originally established as a project of the Douglas Aircraft Company in 1945 and spun off as an independent entity in 1948. Since its inception, RAND has performed contract research for the U.S. Department of Defense, producing technical analyses related to military planning (Dickson 1971). Similarly, the Urban Institute has carried out extensive research on the implementation and evaluation of social policies, the largest share of which has been for the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. HUD provided over 90% of the organization’s initial funding in 1968 (McGann 1992:736), but the Department of Health and Human Services, and, increasingly, the Department of Education, are major patrons of the Institute as well.

<sup>67</sup> Worldwatch “works with a network of more than 150 partners in 40 countries ...[to] maintain a pivotal role in the global environmental movement.” Worldwatch Institute, <http://www.worldwatch.org/node/1004>, retrieved on July 31, 2006.

<sup>68</sup> Heritage has no formal affiliation with the Republican Party and also routinely partners with advocacy groups such as the American Conservative Union, the Club for Growth, and the Family Research Council. Heritage’s success spawned imitators like Democratic counterpart the Center for American Progress. John Podesta, former chief of staff to President Bill Clinton, played the leading role in its founding in 2003.

of requests. Likewise, in 1974, Dick Thompson and I, along with Senators Curtis and [James A.] McClure, organized the Senate Steering Committee and, again, it became a generator of requests. Both of these are caucuses of conservative members, and so when they knew that there was an institution that was available, they would write us a letter and say, “Can you do a study on such-and-such?” Very quickly, the number of requests far exceeded our ability to meet them.<sup>69</sup>

While Heritage maintains no formal ties to the Republican Party, the organization’s stewardship of Republican causes has been well documented.<sup>70</sup>

Other think tanks are explicit about their role as adjuncts of business corporations. For example, the president of the Competitive Enterprise Institute explains pointedly, “I probably have as much business funding as any group out there.... We have to illustrate that business needs allies in the war for survival. We’re sort of a ‘battered business bureau.’ Businessmen who get in real trouble may well then decide they need allies, and they’ll reach out and say, ‘Is there anyone out there we can help whose work parallels our interests?’”<sup>71</sup> Lee (2003), for example, identifies CEI among the recipients of more than \$1 million in annual donations from the Exxon Mobil corporation to “Washington-based policy groups that, like Exxon itself, question the human role in global warming.”

Finally, some think tanks have tight but informal partnerships with journalistic organs. The New America Foundation, for example, not only employs many ex- and part-time journalists, but in 2002 forged an agreement with *The Atlantic* magazine to co-produce an annual “State of the Union” issue featuring essays by New America experts. The first version of this issue featured thirteen policy essays, twelve of which were

---

<sup>69</sup> Author interview, Paul Weyrich, Free Congress Foundation, June 29, 2004.

<sup>70</sup> See, for example, Callahan (1999:2) who calls Heritage “the de facto research arm of the GOP.”

<sup>71</sup> Author interview, Fred Smith, Jr., Competitive Enterprise Institute, December 16, 2003.

written by New America staff members (Morin and Deane 2002). Other think tanks self-publish magazines and policy journals as one component of their operations.<sup>72</sup>

## CONCLUSION

This paper addresses several outstanding problems in the study of American think tanks, including the basic obstacle of defining the empirical object.<sup>73</sup> As I have suggested, the absence of a clear definition of a think tank is attributable not to some kind of scholastic failing, but rather to a *constitutive blurriness* in the phenomenon itself. Think tanks are structurally ambiguous organizations, existing in an intermediate zone between the institutions of academics, politics, business, and journalism. Adding to this structural blurriness is the fact that the category's boundary is actually one of the stakes of competition among policy experts.<sup>74</sup>

Rather than decide on paper what counts as a “think tank,” we must approach this as an empirical question. I advance a relational notion of think tanks as structurally hybrid offspring of the more established institutions of academics, politics, business, and journalism – the “parental” ties being at once material and symbolic: *material* because

---

<sup>72</sup> Prominent examples include *Foreign Affairs* (Council on Foreign Relations), *Foreign Policy* (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace), *City Journal* (Manhattan Institute), *The American* (American Enterprise Institute), and *The Cato Journal* (Cato Institute).

<sup>73</sup> The sources of ambiguity are various: are think tanks public or private organizations? Profit-making entities or necessarily not-for-profit? Must an organization produce original research in order to qualify as a think tank, or merely disseminate it? Furthermore, given the common proviso that a think tank must be a “formally autonomous” organization, how closely can it be tied to outside entities, such as the state, and still qualify as a think tank? In other words, what constitutes autonomy? To put the question another way, what distinguishes a think tank from an interest group, a lobbying shop, or a public relations firm, on the one side, or a university-affiliated research center, on the other?

<sup>74</sup> See, for example, Rich (2004:13), who notes both “the eager efforts of some interest groups to win the label ‘think tank,’ for whatever added credibility and stature it might bring their efforts,” and the fact that “some think tank leaders are actually reluctant to have their organizations categorized as think tanks,” presumably because it puts them in questionable company.

these anchoring institutions provide support, patronage, and personnel to think tanks, *symbolic* because the figures of the policy aide, the academic scholar, the entrepreneur, and the journalist supply the imaginary models from which policy experts draw in fashioning their mixed self-understandings.

This approach has the merit of overcoming two fallacies that follow from narrowly constructivist and structuralist accounts of the think tank. On the one side, some studies exhibit the *literalist fallacy* of adopting uncritically the folk categories that circulate among policy experts and implicitly conflating these with the social reality of the think tank universe. In such instances, a set of professional idioms is smuggled into scholarly writing without a reflexive account of their origins or use.<sup>75</sup> The danger in this reduction is that it blocks off an analysis of the structural patterns that obtain behind the backs of policy experts. In particular, this tendency obscures one of the most determinate features of think tanks' existence: namely, their profound dependence holders of political and economic authority for support, patronage, personnel, and legitimation. As I have argued, a proper social scientific study must begin by establishing a basic epistemological break with the primary experiences of the policy expert.

On the other side, narrowly structuralist accounts render think tanks as instruments of economic and political power as opposed to bona fide organs of intellectual production. Most notably, power structure theories such as those of Domhoff

---

<sup>75</sup> For example, consider the following uses of the entrepreneurship idiom in scholarly writings. Weaver (1989:563) argues that think tank “managers must be concerned with finding a viable niche in a crowded, fragmented market.” McGann (1992:738) notes that increased competition among think tanks has prompted them to develop “innovative technologies and products in order to seize a share of the market.” Finally, Smith (1991a:215) contends that “specialization – or finding an exclusive market niche – was the one common trait of successful entrants into the ideas industry.” My view is that invoking this language of markets and entrepreneurs is less problematic than the outright failure to examine reflexively the structural origins and practical uses of this mental model.

(1970, 1978, 1983) and Peschek (1987) consider think tanks as key nodes in an elite “policy-planning network.” The chief merit of this approach is its refusal to draw the boundary of the think tank universe as the think tanks themselves draw it – or, in other words, its insistence on bringing into the analysis the “outside” figures whose virtual invisibility in the policy research world should not be confused with *marginality*. These include the financial sponsors, trustees, politicians, bureaucrats, and journalists whose considerable demands and restrictions condition the think tank’s intellectual production. In other words, this perspective successfully avoids the literalist fallacy. But it is no less reductive since it leaves the actual character of the think tank’s peculiar authority unexamined. As I have suggested, the professional standing of a given policy expert lies not just in his brute political or economic power, but also in his success in cultivating at least the appearance of scholarly detachment. In short, to strip think tanks of the *vener* of academic proficiency is to block off an analysis of the very real effects that this veneer produces. Ignoring the *relations of meaning* that obtain among policy experts therefore obscures an important dimension of their political functioning.

A thoroughgoing account must therefore reconstruct both the system of institutional forces in which think tanks are embedded and the structural bases, distribution, and uses of the folk categories that circulate in this setting. This paper takes an initial step in this direction. My central finding is that while policy experts are subject to a series of intractable determinations – including the particular rules and temporality of the American political field, the priorities of financial sponsors, and the proclivities of journalists as suppliers of public visibility – they must nonetheless cultivate a form of intellectual authority through their ongoing assertions of scholarly detachment. A basic

structural tension thus deeply marks the American think tank. The policy expert's scholarly posture operates at loggerheads with the other aspects of his or her role. Yet this stance cannot simply be abandoned because it offers an efficient strategy for constituting cultural authority. Signaling proximity to the world of scholarly production is an important strategy in their efforts to institutionalize their particular vision of the "expert."

## REFERENCES

- Abelson, Donald E. 2002. *Do Think Tanks Matter?: Assessing the Impact of Public Policy Institutes*. Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press.
- Bai, Matt. 2003. "Notion Building." *New York Times Magazine*. October 12: 82.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. 1964. "The Attitude of the Algerian Peasant toward Time," p. 55-72 in *Mediterranean Countrymen*. Jesse Pitt-Rivers, ed. Paris: Mouton.
- . [1980] 1990. *The Logic of Practice*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- . 1985. "The Genesis of the Concepts of *Habitus* and *Field*." *Sociocriticism* 2(2): 11-24.
- . 1988. *Homo Academicus*. trans. Peter Collier. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- . [1989] 1996. *The State Nobility*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Bourdieu, Pierre and Loic Wacquant. 1992. *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Brookings Institution. 2007. *Brookings Institution Press Spring 2007 Catalogue*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution.
- Callahan, David. 1999. *\$1 Billion for Ideas: Conservative Think Tanks in the 1990s*. Washington, DC: National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy.
- Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. 1979. *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace in the 1970s*. Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for

International Peace.

- Cataldi, E.F., Bradburn, E.M., and Fahimi, M. 2005. *2004 National Study of Postsecondary Faculty (NSOPF:04): Background Characteristics, Work Activities, and Compensation of Instructional Faculty and Staff: Fall 2003*. U.S. Department of Education. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics. Retrieved July 31, 2006 from <http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch>.
- Critchlow, Donald T. 1985. *The Brookings Institution, 1916-1952: Expertise and the Public Interest in a Democratic Society*. DeKalb, Illinois: Northern Illinois University Press.
- Dickson, Paul. 1971. *Think Tanks*. New York: Atheneum.
- Domhoff, G. William. 1967. *Who Rules America?* Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc.
- . 1970. *The Higher Circles*. New York: Vintage Books.
- . 1978. *The Powers That Be: Processes of Ruling-Class Domination in America*. New York: Random House.
- . 2006. *Who Rules America?: Power, Politics, & Social Change*. 5<sup>th</sup> edition. Boston: McGraw-Hill.
- Edwards, Lee. 1997. *The Power of Ideas: The Heritage Foundation at 25 Years*. Ottawa, Ill.: Jameson Books.
- Feulner Edwin J., ed. 1980. *Mandate for Leadership: Policy Management in a Conservative Administration*. Washington, DC: Heritage Foundation.
- . 1985. "Ideas, Think-Tanks and Governments." *Quadrant*. November: 22-26.
- Fischer, Frank. 1991. "American Think Tanks: Policy Elites and the Politicization of Expertise." *Governance* 4(3): 332-353.
- Hall, Carla. 1983. "Outsider at the Center: The Contrary Ways Of Richard Dennis." *Washington Post*. June 29: B1.
- James, Simon. 1998. "Review of *Capturing the Political Imagination: Think Tanks and the Policy Process*." *Public Administration*. 76(2): 409-10.
- Lakoff, George. 1987. *Women, fire, and dangerous things: What categories reveal about the mind*. Chicago: University of Chicago.

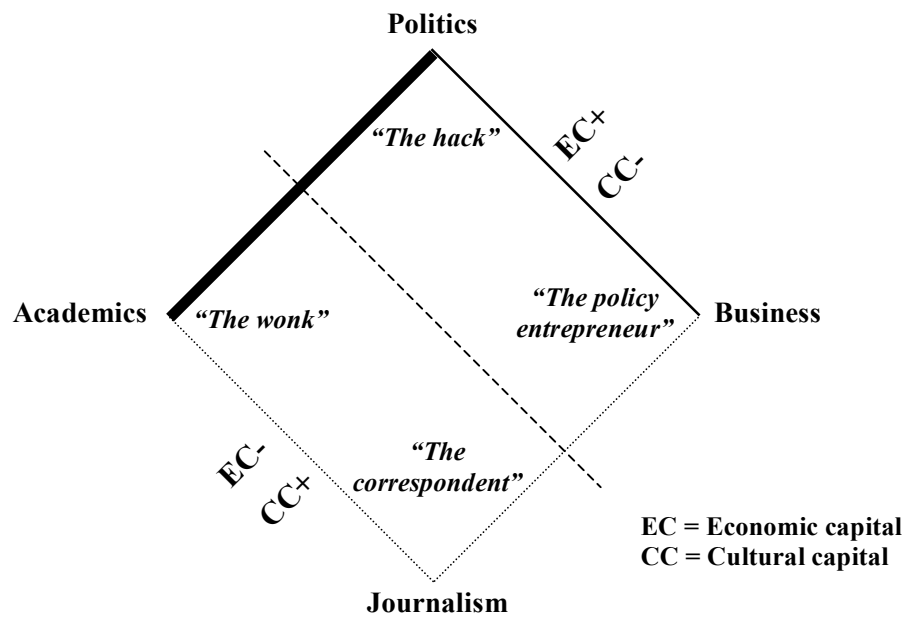
- Lee, Jennifer. 2003. "Exxon Backs Groups That Question Global Warming." *New York Times*. May 28: C5.
- McCright, Aaron M. and Riley E. Dunlap. 2003. "Defeating Kyoto: The Conservative Movement's Impact on U.S. Climate Change Policy." *Social Problems* 50(3): 348–373.
- McGann, James G. 1992. "Academics to Ideologues: A Brief History of the Public Policy Research Industry." *PS: Political Science and Politics* 25(4): 733-740.
- Morin, Richard and Claudia Deane. 2001. "Media's New Sugar Daddies: Foundations." *Washington Post*. May 15: A15.
- . 2002. "The Hot New Americans Get Hotter." *Washington Post*. November 26: A27.
- Peschek, Joseph G. 1987. *Policy-Planning Organizations: Elite Agendas and America's Rightward Turn*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Reed, Bruce. 2004. *Washington Monthly*, "Bush's War Against Wonks." March.
- Ricci, David M. 1993. *The Transformation of American Politics: The New Washington and the Rise of Think Tanks*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Rich, Andrew. 2004. *Think Tanks, Public Policy, and the Politics of Expertise*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Rich, Andrew O. and R. Kent Weaver. 1998. "Advocates and Analysts: Think Tanks and the Politicization of Expertise." p. 235-254 in *Interest Group Politics, Fifth Edition*, Allan J. Cigler and Burdett A. Loomis (eds.). Washington, D.C.: CQ Press.
- . 2000. "Think Tanks in the U.S. Media." *Press/Politics* 5(4): 81–103.
- Rothenberg, Randall. 1987. "The Idea Merchant." *New York Times Magazine*. May 3: 36.
- Smith, James A. 1991a. *The Idea Brokers: Think Tanks and the Rise of the New Policy Elite*. New York: Free Press.
- . 1991b. *Brookings at Seventy-Five*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution.
- Stefanic, Jean and Richard Delgado. 1996. *No Mercy: How Conservative Think Tanks and Foundations Changed America's Social Agenda*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

- Stone, Diane. 2001. "Think Tanks." Pp. 15668-71 in *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences*, edited by Neil J. Smelser and Paul B. Baltes. Oxford: Pergamon.
- Tolchin, Martin. 1983. "Brookings Thinks About Its Future." *New York Times*. December 14: A30.
- Wacquant, Loïc. 2001. "Whores, Slaves, and Stallions: Languages of Exploitation and Accommodation among Professional Fighters." *Body & Society* 7(2-3): 181–194.
- Weaver, R. Kent. 1989. "The Changing World of Think Tanks." *PS: Political Science and Politics*, September: 563-78.

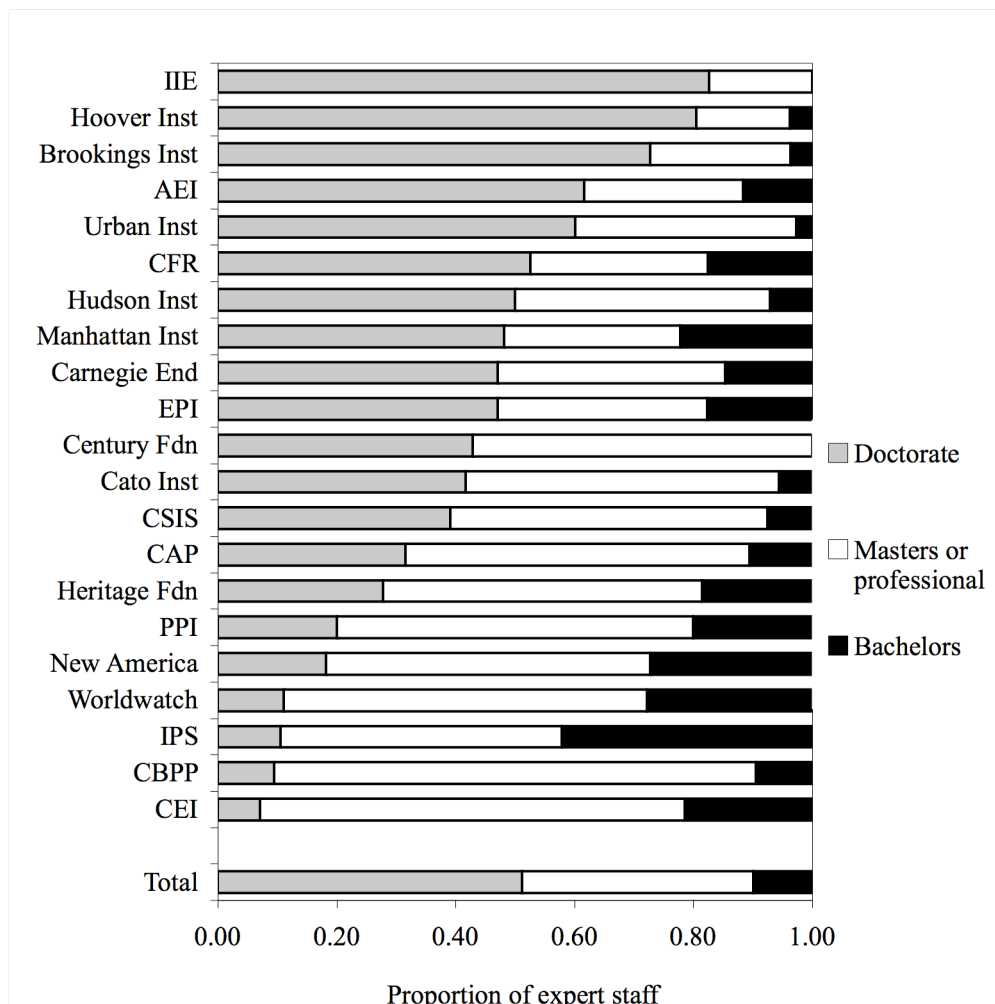
## APPENDIX: LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AEI	American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research
CAP	Center for American Progress
CBPP	Center on Budget and Policy Priorities
CEI	Competitive Enterprise Institute
CFR	Council on Foreign Relations
CSIS	Center for Strategic and International Studies
EPI	Economic Policy Institute
HUD	Housing and Urban Development (Department of)
HHS	Health and Human Services (Department of)
IIE	Institute for International Economics
IPS	Institute for Policy Studies
JCPES	Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies
NBER	National Bureau of Economic Research
PPI	Progressive Policy Institute
RAND	RAND Corporation

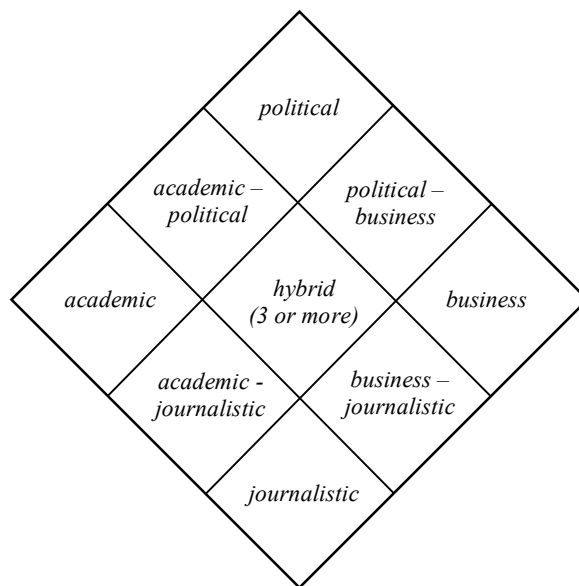
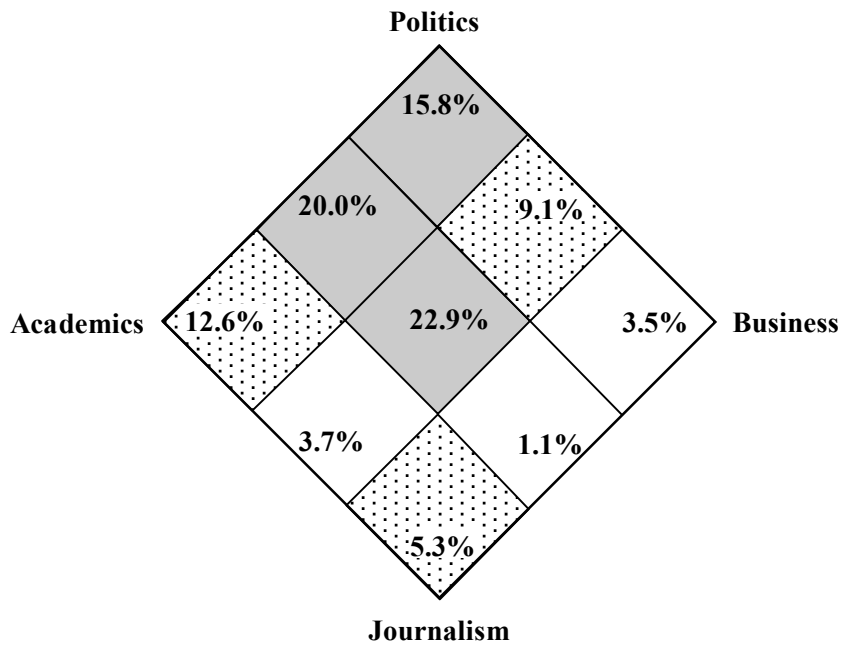
**Figure 1: The space of American think tanks**



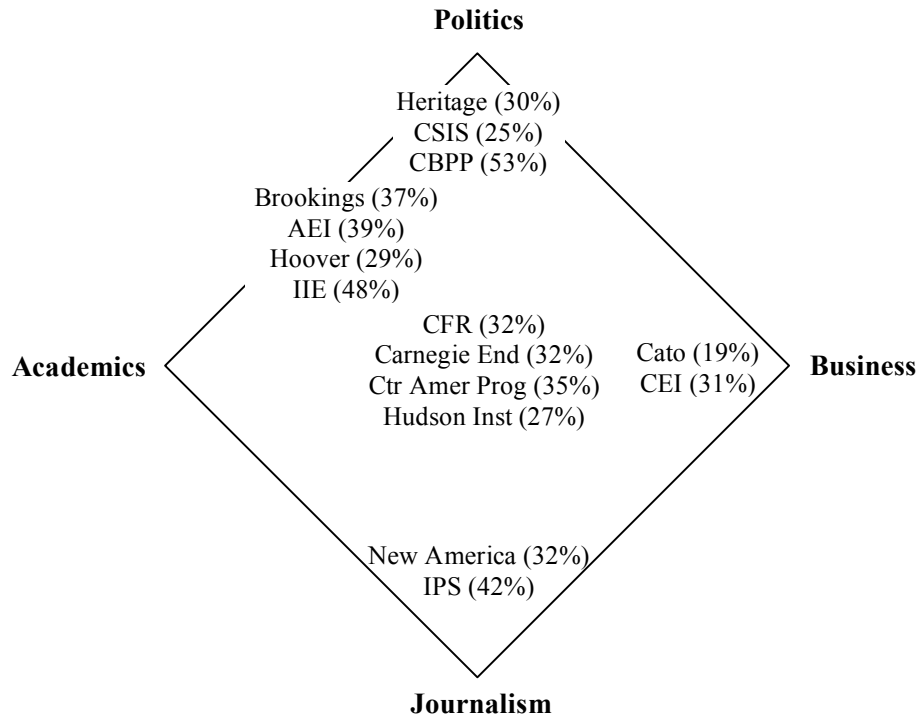
**Figure 2: Educational attainment of expert staff at major think tanks**



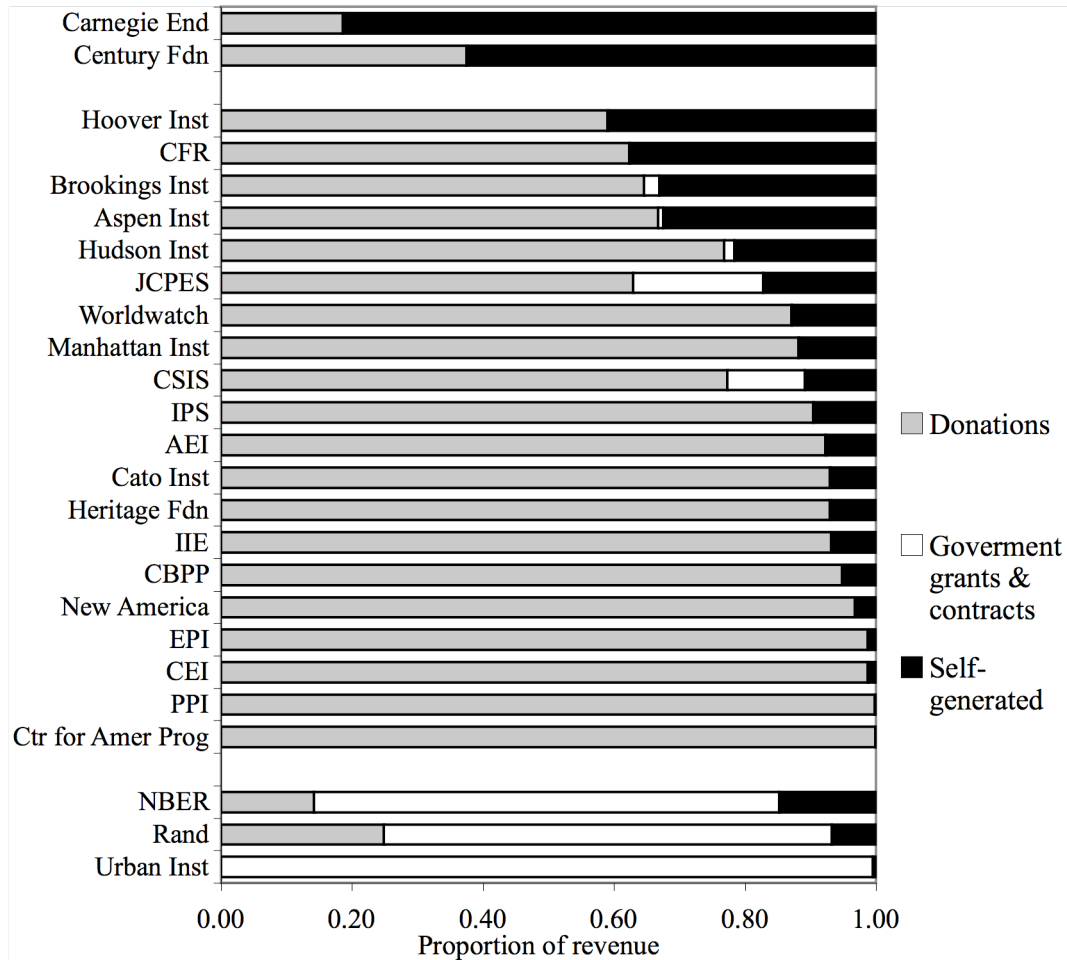
**Figure 3: Distribution of policy experts in space of think tanks by career background**



**Figure 4: Selected think tanks in social space, by experts' modal career background**



**Figure 5: Revenue sources for twenty-five major think tanks, 2003**



Source: 2003 IRS-990 tax forms. Self-generated revenue includes income from investments (securities, interest on savings, etc.), conference and membership fees, rental income, and proceeds from the sale of publications. In most cases, this figure is calculated by adding lines 2, 3, 4, 5, 6c, 7, 9c, 10c, and 11 of the organization's IRS-990 tax return. Figures for the Hoover Institution were calculated from the organization's annual report, since Hoover does not file its own federal income tax return.

**Table 1: Contributions to nine major think tanks by donor category**

	Year	Individuals		Foundations		Corporations		Labor unions		Total \$
		\$ (mil.)	%	\$	%	\$	%	\$	%	
Heritage Fdn	2004	21.3	67.1	8.5	26.6	2.0	6.3	0	0	31.8
AEI	2004	9.3	38.2	9.1	37.3	6.0	24.4	0	0	24.4
CSIS	2004	1.6	10.1	7.5	46.8	6.9	43.0	0	0	16.0
Cato Inst	2004	11.0	80.4	1.8	13.0	0.9	6.5	0	0	13.7
EPI	2002	0.1	1.8	2.0	55.8	0.1	3.9	1.4	38.6	3.6
JCPES	2002	0.1	4.7	1.7	56.9	1.2	38.5	0	0	3.0
IPS	2004	0.5	21.4	1.8	78.6	0	0	0 <sup>1</sup>	0	2.3
<b>Total</b>		<b>44.0</b>	<b>46.4</b>	<b>32.3</b>	<b>34.1</b>	<b>17.0</b>	<b>18.0</b>	<b>1.4</b>	<b>1.4</b>	<b>94.8</b>
		Contributions (undiff.)				Corporate membership fees				Total
		\$		%		\$		%		\$
CFR	2004	10.3		70.0		4.4		30.0		14.8
Aspen Inst	2004	28.3		72.2		10.9		27.8		39.3
<b>Total</b>		<b>38.6</b>		<b>71.6</b>		<b>15.4</b>		<b>28.4</b>		<b>54.0</b>

<sup>1</sup>The Institute for Policy Studies acknowledges the support of two labor unions, AFL-CIO and AFSCME, in its 2004 annual report, but does not list labor unions as a donor category on the income statement contained in the same report.

Source: EPI and JCPES 2002 annual reports; AEI, Aspen, Cato, CFR, CSIS, Heritage, and IPS 2004 annual reports.

**Table 2: Organizations and think tank affiliates**

Organization type	Parent organization	Think tank
State agency	Department of Defense	RAND Corporation
	Depts. of HUD, HHS, Education	Urban Institute
Political party	Democratic Leadership Council	Progressive Policy Inst.
Congressional. coalition	Northeast Midwest coalition	Northeast-Midwest Inst.
	California congress. coalition	California Institute
Social movement	Environmental movement	Worldwatch Inst
		Resources for the Future
Political candidate	Newt Gingrich	Progress & Freedom Fdn.
University	Georgetown University	CSIS
	Stanford University	Hoover Institution