Could I Write Like Carol Weiss?

Øyunn Syrstad Høydal[1]

Abstract   Academic papers in the social sciences were once more essayistic in their form. The carefree launching of concepts and ideas of academic value were the order of the day, all without the security of the present standardized paper format inspired by the natural sciences. This text draws on the most cited paper by the acclaimed scholar Carol Weiss, as an outset to discussing academic writing; why we write as we do and what we may lose by doing so. This means exploring the history of academic writing as well as discussing the complex, yet exciting, relationship between writing, identity, language, and the very process of conducting research.

Keywords   Academic writing · Social sciences · IMRaD · Academic papers · Academic quality · Academic capitalism

Starting to Wonder

I remember my first academic workshop. Someone had read my paper and was unhappy with it: Have you ever heard about the IMRaD format?[1] I said yes. That was a lie. Or perhaps not. I *had* heard about IMRaD or similar guidelines for structuring of academic papers, but simply paid them little attention. I thought academic writing could be done in various ways if the structure was logical and easy to follow, and the reader was provided with new insights. Perhaps I was wrong.

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[1] The IMRaD (Introduction, Method, Results, and Discussion) format is a way of structuring a scientific paper.

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I did my PhD on the use of evaluation in Norwegian agencies, and I began by reading the classics. Articles and books mostly written in the 1970s and early-1980s, or what Henry and Mark (2003) described as 'the golden age of research on evaluation use'. In this period, large empirical studies of the relationship between evaluations and policymaking were performed, with many of its concepts and theoretical perspectives remaining popular today. Carol Weiss (1927–2013) was the star of the golden age. According to Wikipedia, Weiss, a professor of education at Harvard, published 11 books and over 100 journal articles.[2] However, it was not before I started to read more recent papers on evaluation that I realized that Weiss was not only an outstanding academic, but also an excellent communicator. She let the format follow the content, in contrast to present scholars who seem to follow such guidelines as the IMRaD – originally a concept from the natural sciences (Sollaci and Pereira 2004). Papers are now structured by the components of Introduction, Method, Results, and Discussion, with a dash of theory added for the sake of social sciences.

In 'The many meanings of research utilization', published in 1979 by the *Public Administration Review*, Carol Weiss launches seven modes of research use. Her framework includes such concepts as *the enlightenment* and *the political use* of knowledge – concepts which remain popular today. In fact, according to Google Scholar, the paper has been cited over 3,000 times. This is in sharp contrast to the fact that Weiss herself had 11 references (that's it) in her 5-page-long paper. Another fascinating element is the general style of the paper. She writes simply and clearly. Weiss announces her seven categories without any fuss. It's a theoretical conceptual paper solely built upon Weiss's own thoughts. Moreover, the paper lacks the current obligatory references to a research gap, and you find no long list of arguments about why her categories are of any academic value. Weiss simply does not hide behind other scholars or justify her work by listing all she has ever read about research utilization. She simply seems confident enough that her own ideas have academic value.

Yet, she was not alone. She belonged to what seems like a generation of academics – or maybe a window of opportunity in academic history where you could write in a more essayistic or free form. Other examples include the well-known garbage can-paper by Cohen, March and Olsen in *Administrative Science Quarterly* in 1972 and Zuckerman and Merton´s 'Patterns of evaluation in science' in *Minerva* in 1971. Something has changed.

This realization made me wonder whether I could try to write like Carol Weiss, or if the current norms for academic writing hinder scholars from stepping outside the standard format if they want to be published in mainstream social sciences journals. I am also curious about the consequences of the strict framing of academic work, which, by its very nature, is an innovative and creative intellectual activity. In this paper, I will use Weiss's most cited paper as an outset for discussing academic writing and why we write as we do. This will involve exploring the history of academic writing to search for the driving forces behind the present paper format. In addition, I will discuss writing within a system governed by numbers and the complex, yet

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[2] Carol Weiss – Wikipedia.

exciting, relationship between writing, identity, language, and the very process of conducting research.

Academic Quality

Before I continue, I believe it is necessary to reflect on what defines academic quality. Contemporary scholarly knowledge is created and communicated primarily through writing papers, and journals are key sites for certifying knowledge and defining academic quality (Aksnes et al. 2019; Vanderstraeten 2011). Based on a historical overview of the literature, Langfeldt et al. (2020) identified three elements considered important for the consensus of what is good research: originality/novelty, plausibility/reliability, and value/usefulness.

Although there may be some consensus on the main elements which constitute research quality, the devil's in the details. Quality concepts or definitions are shaped and have meaning within specific academic fields or contexts, and the divide between scholars over ideas of academic quality is, for instance, evident in discussions concerning the value of different methodological approaches. An interesting case is the widespread adoption of the originally medical concept of a so-called *evidence hierarchy* by the social sciences. According to this hierarchy, large quantitative datasets, randomised control trials, systematic reviews, and meta-analyses provide better or more accurate knowledge than qualitative approaches, which traditionally hold a strong position within the social sciences (Borgerson 2009). Despite being criticized, this ranking of methods has altered social science research over the past decade (Parkhurst and Abeysinghe 2016; Smith and Haux 2017; Stockard and Wood 2017). The concept of an evidence-hierarchy has, for instance, been a driver behind an exponential international increase in the number of systematic reviews and meta-analyses. While such studies intend to provide useful overviews of high-quality quantitative studies, they also tend to exclude research based on qualitative data – regardless of its quality (Smith and Haux 2017; Stockard and Wood 2017). This is a tendency that indicates how ideology can systematically redefine methodological quality.

By delegating the definition of quality to an institutional arrangement, such as academic journals, specific criteria, goals, and instruments are made possible and authoritative (Dahler-Larsen 2019). The number of academic journals and the variation of academic niches they represent enables researchers from most academic traditions to find their *journal(s)* and *academic communities* where perceptions of academic originality, reliability, or usefulness may differ significantly from other journals – even those seemingly within the same academic field. Hence social scientists operating in line with medical ideals and their opponents tend to publish in separate journals and reproduce their contrary views within safe spaces.

When academic communities (e.g., journals) develop an understanding of academic quality, I believe perceptions of academic writing or presentation form represent a central aspect in addition to elements like originality, reliability, and usefulness (Langfeldt et al. 2020). Corpus studies have, for instance, revealed an enormous diversity in academic discourse, consisting of a mass of disciplinary and

sub-disciplinary variations (e.g., Hyland 2004; Hyland 2002). These include different ideals regarding language, structure, and length – which also partly reflect the underlying styles of scientific thought, where different disciplinal clusters emphasise different elements. The natural sciences are less concerned about social validation than the social sciences, and the humanities afford less weight to contextualizing research in previous work (Winter 2009). However, the understanding of what constitutes *good academic writing* could also vary within the same discipline at the same institution, as reported by students who receive inconsistent feedback from different members of the academic staff (Lea and Stierer 2000). This illustrates how personal preferences also play a role in such matters.

A Very Brief History of Academic Writing

Despite the different traditions and views on academic writing, a general standardization of the academic paper has taken place. Historically, standardization reflects a shift in researchers' attitudes to publishing or communicating their findings; from protecting their discoveries against intellectual theft to the current system where scientists receive recognition in exchange for sharing their findings – and where publication becomes the way of doing science (Johnson et al. 2017).

Contemporary academic writing originates from the classical essay, which origin is an elastic and literary form. According to Peters (2008), the academic essay underwent a first transformation when it was adopted as a way of evaluating students. Accordingly, the essay moved away from its literary origin to '… a logical and factual treatment of a topic in an objective register...' (p. 826).

While we take the present format for granted, it is fascinating to learn how even what we tend to see as an objective and almost given form of reporting in the natural sciences used to be quite different. When examining papers from the 17th century, Gross et al. (2002) observe a prose style '…with strong verbs in the active voice, first-person narrative, imaginative language, minimal abstraction, little esoteric terminology (except for the many Latin names of plants), and few quantitative expressions or theoretical explanations' (p. 29). By comparing the style, presentation, and argumentation of a selection of international natural science papers over 300 years, Gross et al. (2002) claim the 20th century sample stands out as homogenic in its style and presentation, despite the rise of markers of personal expression. The uniformity includes a marked increase in the use of citations over the last 75 years and a dominating presentation norm *in line* with the IMRaD format. The same shift has seemingly spread to the social sciences (Mahon-Haft 2007; Ruiz-Corbella 2023) and other academic fields (Berge 2007; Gustavsson 2012; Molinari 2022).

The IMRaD format was originally used in the natural sciences to structure experimental reports and was first adopted by medical editors in the 1940s. During the post-war academic expansion, the format became increasingly popular and believed to both facilitate the peer-review process for the vast number of medical articles being published and to benefit readers (Huth 1987). By the 1970s, the IMRaD structure was applied by 80 percent of leading medical journals (Sollaci and Pereira 2004).

Parallel to the standardization in format, English became the academic lingua franca, used in over 90 percent of scientific communication. This means that not only the English language, but also the Anglo-American way of organizing and structuring academic texts have become dominant. While English writing tends to follow a linear development, writers of Romance languages and Russian use digressions, and introduce new elements and material as the text progresses. Moreover, Chinese, and Korean writing tends to be more indirect (MacKenzie 2015). The Anglo-American tradition could also be described as "writer-responsible", implying that the writer primarily is responsible for effective communication. While in other languages, such as Japanese, the reader would take the greatest responsibility (Hinds et al. 1987). The "writer-responsible" and linear Anglo-American tradition represents a way of structuring papers that closely aligns to the well-defined IMRaD model, for which there has been a growing demand in all the social sciences within the last decades (Marta 2018). This could explain the growth in experimental papers at the expense of essays, theoretical foundations, or critical analyses. When studying the implementation of the IMRaD structure in sociology, Pontille (2003) finds significant differences between the more empirical and quantitative-oriented American sociology (which has adopted the IMRaD) and the more qualitative- or philosophically oriented French or continental sociology. However, the contextual differences in the adoption of methodological perspectives as well as the IMRaD guidelines could also be the result of a "race for scientific authenticity" in American sociology, a process that includes the adoption of quantitative perspectives from psychology (Pontille 2003). Both the "race for scientific authenticity" and the general adoption of the IMRaD format could be seen as reflecting the general status of *the hard sciences* in society as well as academia.

It has proven difficult to find empirical studies of the changes in social science papers from a broader perspective, i.e., not using the IMRaD as an outset. This could partly be due to the increasing influence of the IMRaD or possibly due to the format being an easy-to-measure indicator. It could also be a consequence of IMRaD due to its dominance in high-ranking journals, are prioritized by the search engines. Hence the use of the format and the reporting of its influence might be overrated. Still, due to the lack of other empirical perspectives, the paper inquiries into changes in academic writing using the IMRaD format as an indicator or sensitizing concept.

Driving Forces, Support, and Critique

Since the Second World War, universities, academic culture, writing, and publishing have been transformed by the growth in institutions, students, and staff – as well as new digital opportunities. According to Fyfe et al. (2017), the expansion was gradually accompanied by public authorities' worries about rising costs, changes in funding, and growing government demands for accountability, for instance, in the form of number of academic publications. The increasing internationalization of academia reinforced the tendency towards evaluating merit through publication and, in the same period, academic publishing transformed from a modest but necessary part of the academic expansion to big business. Due in large part to digital technologies,

such business has dramatically transformed over the last 30 years (Fyfe et al. 2017). These processes of change led to an academic production focus, which again pulled in the direction of an increasing standardization of academic papers – in terms of both language and format. For instance, visibility in databases like Web of Science and Scopus has been imperative to receive government support in many national performance-based research funding systems. The fact that most databases have not included other academic work than papers written in English has been central in the present status of English in academic publishing (Hicks 2013). According to Gustavsson (2012), the general standardization of higher education in Europe was later intensified and legitimated by the Bologna Process (beginning in 1999), which reinforced an instrumentalist view of higher education and linked quality to external results. From this perspective the general standardization of academic papers has been seen as a measure to communicate effectively in the increasingly international and complex world of research (Gross et al. 2002; Kazak 2018).

Graff and Birkenstein (2008) highlight aspects of standardization as a form of democratization of academia. By setting clear standards and being transparent about expectations, all students can receive the academic socialization that the most privileged take for granted. While MacKenzie (2015) claims a more standardized presentation form could lead to a decreased use of *snobbish social science jargon* in academic papers, thus making them more accessible to a broader audience. Similarly, the consistent structure of the IMRaD could be positive for readers, writers, and editors over the previous essayistic style of writing. The format does not require scientists to also be capable essayists, and the standardized form and clear headings have made scientific papers much easier to skim (Moskovitz et al. 2023).

According to Labaree (2020), concepts like the IMRaD *could* represent useful guidelines, however, he criticizes the current use for being rigid and compares contemporary presentation of research with a set of fired jars waiting to be filled: 'Not only are the jars unyielding to the touch, but even their number and order are fixed. There are five of them, which need to be filled in precise order: research question, literature review, methodology, results, and conclusions. Don't stir. Repeat' (p. 8).

Academic fields tend to champion the IMRaD where the process of research and writing is more often intertwined than in the natural sciences, where the results might not precede the discussion and analysis, '… and where the results are intrinsically connected to the theoretical apparatus assumed, which problems the results are solutions to, and how the project was conceived at the start' (Gustavsson 2012). Along the same lines, but from another disciplinary perspective, Peter Brian Medawar (Nobel Prize in Medicine) criticizes the IMRaD for turning papers into fraudulent endeavours by 'providing a totally misleading narrative of the processes of thought that goes into the making of scientific discoveries' (Ruiz-Corbella 2023: 570).

Sword (2009) takes yet another stand, claiming that there is room for a broader variety in academic writing than academics tend to believe. Accordingly, while many editors are open-minded because they want to reach a wider audience, the problem is the lack of academics with the guts to initiate this shift. Sword calls for academics who '… dare to write differently, replacing impersonal research reports with real-life stories ...' (p. 320). Further still, Yoo (2017) describes the

tension between her desire to write more creatively and the pressure to conform to academic discourse, or what she describes as 'writing for production' (p. 446). Ultimately, she feels she must adopt the standard format in order to be published. While guidance in academic writing was not something students expected – nor was offered – 50 years ago (Wilkinson 2021), modern students are now trained to follow current standards and often pay for courses on *how to get published*. In this way, writing standards are efficiently reproduced and form part of our academic habitus. These standards are subconsciously taken for granted before you accidently stumble across Carol Weiss and the like and begin to wonder.

Back to Weiss

When Weiss wrote her most published paper at the end of the 1970s, she was 50 and an acclaimed scholar, and her position and experience could explain why she wrote with such ease and confidence. However, even Weiss gradually changed her style. A shift occurred at the end of the 1990s, most visibly in the increasing number of citations. In 'How can theory-based evaluation make greater headway' (1997), she includes 37 references and, in contrast to her most cited paper from 1986, she frames the more recent paper in relation to her field, or academic community:

> The idea of TBE has generated considerable interest (Weiss 1972; Cronbach et al. 1980; Chen and Rossi 1987, 1993; Lipsey and Pollard 1989; Scheirer 1987; Patton 1989; Chen 1990; Bickman 1987, 1990; Mark 1990; Smith 1990; Weiss 1995), but it appears to be having only marginal influence on evaluation practice. (p.501)

Her last article, 'The fairy godmother – and her warts: Making the dream of evidence-based policy come true' (Weiss et al. 2008), is a standard academic paper – with 77 references. Despite the aligning of imposed used of evaluations with the fairy godmother, it continues to serve as an example of what Sword (2009) might label 'stylish academic writing'.

The changes in Weiss's writing could be seen as a testimony of the general standardization of papers in this period. Regarding the early writings by Weiss and her colleagues, the world was new. They established academic fields and did not have to worry about their position within a tradition through references to prior studies or competing theoretical perspectives. However, her last paper was published at a time when the standardization had already progressed significantly. Due to the number of papers published on knowledge use since the 1970s, it also seems fair that she gives the readers an overview of central concepts, contributions, and discussions in the field. Alternatively, perhaps she does so to establish a position in a specific part of this field, or to explain why yet another contribution is needed. However, academic writing is more than individuals communicating research results and defining their place.

Academic Writing as Identity Work and an *Indicator* of Success

Academic writing is an essential part of the currently dominating academic capitalism (Collyer 2015; Gingras 2020). This refers to a system where universities have become managerial apparatuses that intend to control the performance of academics by a range of metrics and instruments. In this system, such numeric indicators as the number of publications and citations become prime indicators of personal and institutional quality and success (Aksnes et al. 2019; Dakka and Wade 2019; Riad Shams 2019). At an individual level, the total number of publications, number of publications per year, and journal name recognition were the most valued factors in review, promotion, and tenure among American and Canadian academics (Niles et al. 2020). However, even in countries where the national authorities traditionally have secured the autonomy and economy of academic institutions and their staff, the number of published academic papers is believed to be central in recruitment, promotion, and rewarding (Nelhans 2022; Rasmussen 2015). Other aspects of academic quality, such as originality/novelty, plausibility/reliability, and the value of the research, are seemingly playing a less central role in defining personal success – at least if one's research is not of *a new vaccine-character*.

In a system ruled by numbers, writing effectively is imperative, and the IMRaD or similar recipes are believed to be timesaving (Ruiz-Corbella 2023). While writing academic books might bring success and fame in the long run, the process of writing and publishing books takes time, hence such activities might be less attractive at least for academic newcomers. The focus on efficiency and numeric production stands in contrast to the classical academic principles revolving around such values as professional autonomy and intellectual curiosity (Riad Shams 2019). Somewhere in-between the influence from these two paradigms, members of the academic community must construct their academic identity and find their flock. According to Inouye and McAlpine (2019), academic identity is reflected in the research contribution academics wish to make, the scholars they cite, and the methodologies and theoretical approaches with which they align. Academic writing is at the core of this identity work, and it is in the process of writing that new knowledge, thoughts, and ideas are developed (Dakka, Inouye and McAlpine 2019; Jørgensen 2019).

According to Hayot (2014), academic writing transcends mere words on a page – rather, *it is a procedure*. Writing creates ideas and is a part of the research process itself – that is, writing is researching – and it is impossible to see the full potential of one's ideas before they are placed together in written sentences. During the writing process, the logic and consistency of ideas and arguments get challenged and tested. By muddling through the text, new perspectives, categories, and patterns might occur. Consequently, the findings could be lifted to a more interesting analytical level which, again, could potentially change the whole paper and its contribution to research. Hence, the current norms for academic writing could be disturbing and counterproductive, hindering the creativity and testing central to the process of writing/thinking (Langum and Sullivan 2020). It could also reduce such aspects as writing for pleasure or writing as a way of expanding or developing an academic identity (Gill 2009; Johnson et al. 2017).

Studying PhD-students, Langum and Sullivan (2020) observe how the significance of communication in academic work makes it hard to separate between academic identity and the identity as writers. Writing is also intimately related to who we are as individuals, and our personal experiences and writing records influence our academic writing (Inouye and McAlpine 2019; Pavlenko 2003). While the current standard has seemingly embraced the use of personal pronouns in the text (Gross et al. 2002), thus acknowledging the presence of a researcher/writer, the researcher *as a human being* remains practically unaccepted. Personal experiences and cultural background continue to be hidden behind the apparent objectivity of the text.

Language is another aspect of this discussion. Writing in another language affects our refining and testing of ideas, as well as the results and communication of this process. Studies which conclude that language is not a problem because non-native English speakers are published in high-ranking journals forget to consider the workload behind these papers (Langum and Sullivan 2020). The process of writing in a second language is also believed to be especially demanding for academic newcomers (Langum and Sullivan 2020). In addition, research suggests that it is harder for readers to process and memorize information presented in a manner different from their traditional regional or national form (Mackenzie 2015).

The conflict between traditional academic ideals and the contemporary logic of production leads to the development of academic coping strategies to meet numeric requirements, as well as making room for personal academic projects. Such strategies include writing several papers based on a single idea, writing quantitative reports as opposed to (supposedly) time-consuming theoretical papers, or publishing chapters in tri-authored books (Collyer 2015; Riad Shams 2019). While most academics seemingly handle the somewhat competing ideals of academic life, the emphasis on publication as measures of success could lead to a general anxiety related to writing. This is especially common among early career researchers (Gill 2009; Johnson et al. 2017). However, the same tendencies might be relevant for academics who started their career during an earlier regime, and then suddenly found themselves being evaluated after new numeric standards. According to Enders et al. (2014), academic capitalism also leads to more risk-averse research, following the dominant trends in academic fields as well as the agendas of external funders. *Risky research* is considered to include moving into novel fields and investing into projects with little short-term output.

An Experience of Writing and Conducting Research

My own experience from working with this paper echoes aspects from the literature. For a long time, all I had was a title based on a vague impression that academic writing had changed over the years. Then, a workshop in academic writing made me take a new look at the original paper by Weiss and write my first pages. Pages clearly inspired by Weiss and her lack of academic formality, enabled by the workshop focusing on form and process rather than the usual emphasis on theoretical perspective, data, and results. When I continued writing, I was surprised to learn that I automatically chose a style closer to that of a standard

academic paper. The form I in many ways felt like rebelling against had become a part of me and my academic habitus, my academic identity. While this came as an amusing surprise, the influence from academic capitalism is harder to accept.

As an early career researcher, I am eager to reach the next step in the academic hierarchy, which is reached through publishing. In fact, the main criterium is a certain number of papers published in international peer reviewed journals (OsloMet 2023). I feel anxious when papers are rejected, or the review process takes ages, and my publication record drops below my peers – as well as relief when the stats align after a successful review process. As a qualitative researcher, I have been critical of my quantitative colleagues writing several papers based on tiny variations in one dataset. Still, I have wondered how to practice an equivalent qualitative salami-slicing.

The fear of lagging behind my peers has kept me away from this paper for quite some time. I did not want to waste time on a draft that I was unsure that anyone would publish. This feeling was related to the rather vague outset of the paper, its format, and my entrance into a new academic field. I was worried that my take on academic writing would be seen as naïve, old news, or in other ways as a waste by the gatekeepers of the field. In addition, I was frustrated because I wasted (…) days on identifying and reading articles to which I ultimately don't refer. As if *learning* is a waste in an academic life, while the *production*, or rather the *publication*, of papers is a sign of academic success.

Language was another aspect. English is my second language, and writing this paper has been especially challenging due to its personal and essayistic form. Following a stricter academic format, like the IMRaD, would have eased the work. When Sword (2009) calls for *stylish academic writing*, I love the idea, but dislike the fact that I would have to respond to this call in a foreign language – meaning it would come at a price. As a reply to Sword, I would like all native English speakers to write their next paper in rhyme.

I kept on writing for several reasons. First, I want to believe in Sword (2009) when she claims there is room for a broader variety in academic writing. This viewpoint is intertwined with my academic identity; I would like to be the type of academic who does not mindlessly obey the mandates of academic capitalism, and I come to realize that discussing the paper format is central in this regard. This urge to be a small-scale rebel is deeply rooted in my identity, and writing this paper has been a reminder of how such aspects as writing, thinking, learning, and personal and professional identity are hard to separate. Writing this paper has made me more aware or conscious of the current academic culture, where academic capitalism is the dominating ideal which influences our way of writing from the first initial training session and feedback from colleagues. I see my own urge to *boost my academic production* rather than spending time on reading and writing to develop as an academic. However, I would like to end up wiser, not just more experienced, effective, strategic, and better paid.

Another reason for continuing this project was that I liked it. I enjoyed starting from scratch in a new field. I liked the feeling of discovery, being challenged, and not repeating myself or reusing concepts and references. It felt like taking a risk, like living on the academic edge.

The Bigger Picture

Academic writing takes place under the influence of two different paradigms. Although they may agree on general aspects of academic quality – they seemingly encourage different forms of academic writing. In a regime governed by numbers, effectiveness becomes an important coping strategy, and using a standardized format can certainly be effective. It is also useful for the reader who knows where to find the methods section and how to scan an abstract. From my perspective, the issue does not reside with the IMRaD format or similar guidelines. In fact, I believe that such standards have, to some extent, contributed to the clarity and logic of academic writing by emphasizing the core components of an academic paper. The problem lies in the forces that have transformed the standards from the natural sciences into a universal template for all academic writing. This process has gradually made alternative methods of academic writing less appealing to most social sciences journals. By never questioning the efficiency ideas behind the current standardization of academic papers, we are all contributing to reproducing academic capitalism.

According to Molinari (2022), a major problem in academic writing is the failure to separate between an epistemological understanding of academic writing as a method for representing knowledge, and academic writing as *a product and object of standardized convention*. While writing in the natural sciences generally could be seen as more of a product reporting research, academic writing (at least in the qualitative tradition) of the social sciences *is researching*. If I write my papers following a strict recipe, there is limited room for the required curiosity, creativity, ambitious attempts, and failures, learning, and academic development to perform good research. Open-ended processes influenced by our everyday experiences, our history, and identity – the factors which will hopefully distinguish human-authored papers from the legion of ChatGPT copies. This should open for a broader discussion concerning the inclusion of the researcher in standard academic papers.

There should also be room for debating whether guidelines from the natural sciences need to be adjusted to a new academic reality within the social sciences. Social sciences are not cumulative in the same way as medical research. While the development of a new medical treatment will follow from a long chain of experiments and studies, new concepts or theories in the social sciences do not necessarily follow this pattern. In this respect, the rigidity of the current paper format could hinder the creation or discussion of new ideas and theories. Indeed, the current system has a conserving effect and potentially hampers academic development. According to Mahon-Haft (2007), the standardization of contemporary sociological papers presents challenges concerning the influence of these texts beyond the academic field. This is due to their increasingly technical and objective tone. The very standardization, which is perceived as enhancing clarity and promoting effective reading among academics, might be seen as a complicating or alienating factor for readers outside the academic realm.

Academic capitalism appears to have resulted in a change of genre at the expense of essays, theoretical foundations, or critical analyses (Ruiz-Corbella 2023). It is believed to be more efficient to not only write like a natural scientist, but also to work like one. This development comes on top of a general mainstreaming of

academic research (Enders et al. 2014). When the championing of efficiency not only influences how we write but also on how we choose our topics and methodologies, we would do well to recognise the writing on the wall. This development rocks the fundamental ambition of the social sciences; seeking to understand the complexity of society and human life. A project which, in its very nature, calls for a myriad of methods, theories, framing, and an open mind.

Back to the Beginning

Back to the opening question: Could I write like Carol Weiss? The short answer is *no*. Due to structural changes in academia and the social sciences, I could not write a paper like Weiss did in the late 1970s. Neither do I have her insights, experiences, or academic standing. However, I could use my own experience and take the time to question the status quo and explore my opportunities for challenging the current norm as a social scientist, a researcher, author, lecturer, and reviewer. Sword (2009) calls for academics who '… dare to write differently', and I believe we all should take the time to reflect over how we write and why we do so, because the papers we write are closely linked to the research we perform, and this research should be relevant to more than ourselves.

Declarations

Conflict of interest The author has no conflict of interest to disclose.

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