

Public Lecture

“Life Science and Society: Social Studies of Credibility and Control”

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This lecture examines the social processes that allocate credibility and control in the contemporary life sciences. Through what mechanisms do actors in potentially controversial areas of research establish their credibility? How do actors capture and contest control over the products of research? This lecture addresses these questions using examples from genome research. In examining credibility, the lecture will consider the question of how scientific advisory committees such as those established by the U.S. National Research Council (1988) build and maintain their credibility. Such a committee wrote the influential report *Mapping and Sequencing the Human Genome*, and played an influential role in structuring the U.S. genome program. A dramaturgical approach will be used to systematically analyze how credibility is produced. The talk shows how strategic management of the display of information is central to producing credible science advice. The lecture will also use a dramaturgical approach to explore how actors attempt to control access to the products of research during social interaction. Using ethnographic examples from face-to-face interaction at meetings of genome researchers, the lecture will illustrate how actors engage in selective revelation and concealment of scientific knowledge and how this process shapes control over knowledge and over the capacity of audiences to be confident about what they know.

Suggested readings

Hilgartner, S., *Science on Stage: Expert Advice as Public Drama*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000. Chapter 2.

Hilgartner, S. (2012) “Selective flows of knowledge in technoscientific interaction: information control in genome research,” *British Journal for the History of Science*, Vol. 45, pp. 267-280.