V EMANCIPATORY METHODOLOGY

Resolving the dilemma posed by the colonising nature of research has been addressed by several feminist scholars and researchers (Bowles and Duelli Klein, 1983; Harding, 1991; Lather, 1991; Mies, 1984; Roberts, 1981; Smith, 1987), and more generally in the social sciences (Bernstein, 1983; de Koning and Martin, 1996; Oliver, 1992; Reason, 1988; Reason and Rowan, 1981). It is suggested that the alternative to illusory value-free knowledge is emancipatory knowledge. The aim of emancipatory research is to increase: "... awareness of the contradictions hidden or distorted by everyday understandings", and in so doing to direct "attention to the possibilities for social transformation inherent in the present configuration of social processes" (Lather, 1986, p. 259).

Ethical Issues

The research industry is a massive one across all fields and disciplines; it takes place not only in universities or research institutes but in government departments, private companies, local and national service agencies, and in voluntary bodies. Cultural capital, of which research is a fundamental part, parallels industrial, financial and agricultural capital as a source of wealth and power. Unless it is shared with those who are directly affected by it, research data can be used for manipulation, abuse and control. The importance of democratising research arises therefore because knowledge is power.

Although conventional human rights thinking focuses on political rights in the more restricted political sense, there is also a need to recognise the importance of human rights in relation to the operation of public and private institutions and systems which exercise control over people's lives but which are not democratically appointed. Research-generating institutions and Universities are such bodies, as they play a central role in validating and developing cultural forms and scientific knowledge which underpin social, economic and political policies in society.

Emancipatory research involves a recognition therefore of the moral right of research subjects to exercise ownership and control over the generation of knowledge produced about them and their world. As Heron (1981) observes this is a human rights issue. It constitutes part of peoples' right to political membership of their community. If people are structurally excluded from democratic engagement with research practice, they are precluded from assessing its validity in an informed manner. They are effectively disenfranchised from controlling the creation and dissemination of knowledge about themselves and/or about institutions and systems within which they live and work.

For persons, as autonomous beings, have a moral right to participate in decisions that claim to generate knowledge about them. Such a right does
many things: (1) it honours the fulfilment of their need for autonomously acquired knowledge; (2) it protects them from becoming unwitting accessories to knowledge — claims that may be false and may be inappropriately or harmfully applied to others; (3) it protects them from being excluded from the formation of knowledge that purports to be about them and so from being managed and manipulated, both in the acquisition and in the application of knowledge, in ways they do not understand and so cannot assent to or dissent from. (Heron, 1981, p. 35).

Although the moral or human right to know applies primarily to research on persons, it is also of significance in other fields including research in the physical sciences. The most obvious example arises in relation to research involving experimentation within the natural environment (as in the case of the nuclear industry) or the development of genetically modified foods; these, and indeed many other forms of research, much of which is not so high profile, have serious health and environmental implications not only for the living generation but for future generations. Concealment of the scope and impact of research may add to the power and influence of the companies and states that produce it, but it also creates a world order in which ordinary people are politically and informationally disenfranchised. Research and information enfranchisement must complement political enfranchisement.

Often a research information deficit can be the differentiating factor between having a meaningful or an alienating experience in an organisation. An immediate and concrete example arises in the field of education. Parents who know the basic research findings regarding such practices as streaming and ability grouping can exercise control over schools and teachers in a way that other parents cannot. Knowledge about the effects of different forms of ability grouping enables them to act in a way that protects the interests of their own child; they can exercise strategic choices such as moving the child to a more supportive school if they find her or him in the “wrong” class. No such possibility exists for those who do not even know the implications of different forms of grouping in the first place. Similar examples could be taken from the health services where, for example, women and men are not aware of research findings regarding the long-term implications of taking different types of drugs and medication. Those who have access to (and can decode) the information are in control and can exercise choices in a way that those without it cannot.

Not only can people not make informed decisions if they lack information, neither can they participate effectively in public debates or policy partnerships. Even when and if people are given a partnership role, they may lack the technical knowledge to participate effectively. They can be physically present but technically absent, living in fear of a professional put down from those who are
part of the research-informed. What is at issue is not only the exercise of
democratic procedures in research production therefore; the effective democratic
dissemination of research findings is also essential. Much research is closeted
and used selectively by researchers, policy-makers or service-providers as the
politics of the situation allows. Such practices ensure that people are managed
and manipulated from the top and outside.

Reciprocity in the Research Relationship

Emancipatory research also involves developing a reciprocal relationship
between the researcher and the research subject. This requires a democratisation
of the research relationship so that the research process enables participants to
understand and change their situation. This is especially important for research
in the area of equality, as research which is not oriented towards transformation
effectively reinforces inequality by default. It allows inequality to persist by
diverting intellectual and public attention elsewhere.

Reciprocity involves engaging participants firstly in the research planning
and design, as it is only through such participation that marginalised groups
can begin to control the naming of their own world. If research participation is
confined to the interpretation or theoretical elaboration stage, it may be too late
as issues which are not central to the group or community may have become the
focus of attention in the first place. Involving research subjects in planning
poses numerous challenges to researchers and theorists, not least of which is
the information and expertise differential between the researcher and the subject.
Mutual education is at least a partial solution to this dilemma; there is an
especially strong onus on the researcher to facilitate and promote education
given the power differential between them and the research subject (Heron,
1981). Integrating education with research, imposes time and resource
constraints on research, however, which cannot be easily set aside. And neither
the funders nor the research subjects themselves may be interested in bearing
the cost.

Reciprocity also demands that the research enables people to know and control
their own world. This takes time, trust and negotiation; it is quite possible that
the researcher and participants may not agree on the definition of the inequality,
or indeed how it should be addressed. Kelly's (1996) research shows how working
class community groups themselves interpreted unemployment according to
quite different socio-political frames — ranging from radical to reformist to
localist — although the formal class identity of all twelve groups involved was
the same.

Recognising the very real practical difficulties posed by reciprocal research
relations is not a sufficient reason to discount them. Operating out of principles
of reciprocity, albeit imperfectly, would radically alter the way in which research
is planned and conducted; this is important in restructuring power relations and would be an important movement towards the democratisation of research in itself.

Dialectical Theory Building

Another feature of praxis-oriented research is its use of dialectical theory-building rather than theoretical imposition (Lather, 1991). Research respondents are not only involved therefore in the design of the research but also in the construction and validation of meaning. To undertake theory-construction in this manner represents an enormous challenge for researchers as it imposes a substantive educational commitment upon them (Heron, 1981). A dialogical approach to theory building is even more demanding, in many respects, than partnership in empirical research, as it involves the accommodation of two very different epistemological standpoints on the world, the academic and the local or particular. It demands theoretical construction in a language which is recognisable and meaningful across disparate communities; the theorist can no longer construct a view of the world without knowing and recognising the view of the “other”, however the latter may be defined. What dialectical theory building involves therefore is the democratisation of theoretical construction; a reordering of power relations between the academy and the named world. Yet theoretical imposition is the natural predisposition of most researchers given traditional academic training. The author assumes the superiority of their “framework”, grounding frameworks in the context of lived understandings challenges this tradition and informs and enriches understanding.

Reflexivity

Systematic reflexivity is also a requirement for emancipatory research as it is only through the constant analysis of one’s own theoretical and methodological presuppositions that one can retain an awareness of the importance of other people’s definitions and understandings of theirs. Although reflexivity is necessary, it is not a sufficient condition for emancipatory research. An ethically disinterested reflexivity would not suggest any change in research practice. If reflexivity is to facilitate change it needs to be guided by principles of democratic engagement and a commitment to change.

VI EMANCIPATORY RESEARCH IN PRACTICE: COALITIONS AND PARTNERSHIPS

There are a number of practical problems posed by the emancipatory methodology, including the fact that it does increase the cost of the research. This is not necessarily something which will be supported by research funders,
The role of research in emancipatory social change

Although it may change over time when the importance of dialogue and its educational outcomes are appreciated. There is also very little research training available in most educational institutions on emancipatory methodology although there are exceptions to this (Reason, 1988) especially in feminist-led courses in recent years.

A further dilemma for the operation of emancipatory research is establishing procedures whereby radical understandings can be utilised for challenging structural inequalities. Even if radical understandings emerge from research, which for example, happened in Kelly's (1996) work, there may be no mechanism within the emancipatory method to move this understanding into discourses and political practices which would enable it to become active in the struggle for equality and social justice. Emancipation cannot be conferred by one group (academics) on another (oppressed or marginalised people) no matter how well intentioned the researchers might be (Martin, 1994, 1996).

While Mies (1984) shows how particular research led to important policy changes in Germany in relation to policies on women and violence, what is not clear is what makes it possible for this to happen. Is egalitarian development left contingent on a particular set of historical and political circumstances? One fact which does appear to be important is to involve marginalised groups themselves at all stages of the research, including the policy-related implementation stage, if action is to be taken. For this to happen, research organisations have to enter into new relations of dialogue and coalition with community or other groups which may be anathema to their organisational or cultural traditions. Certainly universities and research institutes have rarely established procedures for entering into dialogue with research participants in marginalised groups and communities. While liaisons with such groups may be permitted, they are usually kept at the periphery of the organisation where they exercise marginal power, often in adult education departments or women's studies departments.

Within current emancipatory discourse, the choice about whether or not to use emancipatory methods is left to the researcher; there is no serious attempt to identify the kind of structural conditions necessary to ensure that emancipatory methods are implemented on an ongoing basis. To institutionalise a truly radical approach to research, however, would require the development of new structures at both university and departmental level (and ultimately at central university and research planning level). Similar challenges would arise for institutes and bodies undertaking research elsewhere. Procedures would have to be put in place whereby those who are marginalised and oppressed in society can enter into dialogue about all research undertaken in their name. They would not simply be dependent on the good will of individual researchers allowing them to enter into dialogue on their own terms. Rather, community groups or
other representatives of marginalised groups would be involved on an ongoing basis in planning, monitoring and commenting on research. They would play a very different and more powerful role than if they are simply research subjects being given the opportunity to participate or dialogue about research at the will of the researcher.

This would require a radical change in the structuring of departments in the university and the management of research operations. It would involve the establishment of Research Coalitions with those marginalised groups and communities who are so often the objects of research. Such groups would move from being objects to subjects, from being respondents to being partners; they would have the opportunity to define research agendas relating to their own lives. No one would have the authority to name, codify and claim scholarly understanding and ownership of someone else’s world without debate, negotiation and, ultimately, consent.

Under a Research Coalition arrangement, power would be shared. The researchers would have to explain and justify the nature of their proposed research and theory about marginalised groups to the groups themselves. This is not to deny the difficulties involved. The academic voice is validated by virtue of its scientific origin; it is structurally defined as superior to the local or community voice. Thus any research partnership between researchers and the community is not an equal one, in the sense that prior cultural relations define it otherwise. To say this is not to suggest that the power differential in Research Coalitions cannot be managed and controlled. It merely highlights the importance of enabling those who are not full-time researchers to have the capacity and skill to name their research agendas in the partnerships. A further difficulty arises from the volatile character and composition of community groups themselves. Such groups are not necessarily constituted in a democratic or representative manner; they often lack formal procedures of accountability to their own constituency. Their effectiveness as representative bodies has to be constantly monitored therefore. While this is not essentially a research problem, it is nonetheless an issue which has to be addressed in partnership contexts (Sabel, 1996).

If Research Coalitions were to be established, it is evident that the onus of responsibility for setting them up rests initially with those who exercise control over the research process. Negotiations and discussions need to be set in train to identify the needs and interests of both parties, and to resolve the barriers which need to be overcome. These include barriers relating to differences in research expertise, language usage, life experiences, and attitudes to, and experiences of, research.

The experience of Local Area Partnerships in Ireland has shown that community representatives cannot be fully effective participants without resourcing
(Lynam, 1997). If marginalised groups were to participate effectively in the research process, training, resourcing and support would be essential, although the knowledge differential is not only confined to them. Academics also experience a (frequently unacknowledged) knowledge differential about the daily lived reality of the groups about whom they write. Such living knowledge represents an important resource which the community groups would bring to the Research Coalitions.

To be effective Research Coalitions would need to be complemented therefore by Learning Partnerships. These would be mutual education forums for academics, researchers and community personnel, so that each could share their definitions and interpretations of issues and events. In this way research agendas could be assessed and prioritised. The Research Coalitions and Learning Partnerships would inevitably facilitate action for change, as the communities where action is required would be directly involved in defining and interpreting their own situations. The research understandings available to them would be a powerful tool in negotiations with politicians and policy makers.

What is at issue here is the case for an extended epistemology within the academy (Heron, 1981, pp. 27-31). Most empirical research is in the domain of propositional knowledge. The outcome of research is stated as a set of propositions, which claim to be statements of facts or truths about the world. These theoretical constructs or empirical statements are artefacts or constructs about the world; they do not constitute the world in and of itself. They provide a framing of the world, a context for giving meaning; they are not synonymous with the experiential knowledge of the world. Experiential knowledge involves knowing the world in a direct face-to-face encounter. “It is knowing a person or thing through sustained acquaintance” (ibid., p. 27). Knowing poverty or racism through the medium of academic frameworks, and framing propositions about it empirically and theoretically makes an important contribution to human understanding. However, it is but one window on reality; it can only offer a limited perspective. While it is clear that academics do not claim to offer a “complete understanding” of any phenomena, the reality is that academic definitions of situations have status and power over and above other understandings. The meaning of poverty or inequality as it is understood and acted upon at policy level is as researchers have defined it; it is not as poor people see it (O’Neill, 1992).

The need to democratise the creation of academic knowledge therefore arises from the simple fact that such knowledge is acted upon as the defining understanding of a situation. With the advancement of information technology, the likelihood is that this trend will grow rather than retrace. The scope for creating massive databases on people of both a quantitative and qualitative nature has been greatly enhanced by computer developments in recent years.
With this, the scope for researchers to colonise the life worlds of those who are marginalised is likely to increase considerably unless democratisation of the research process is introduced.

While the democratisation of the research process is necessary across all fields, it is especially acute in the equality field. In general, those who carry the burden of inequality are far removed from the life-world of researchers. By virtue of their personal experience, however, they have a better vantage point for understanding the totality of the social world that creates inequality than those who enjoy its advantages. They have a much deeper understanding of how particular laws, policies and procedures operate to promote inequalities than those who are advantaged by same (Connell, 1993, pp. 39-41; Hooks, 1994).

The importance of establishing Learning Partnerships between researchers and the community arises not only from the point of view of respecting the fundamental human rights of those about whom we write, but also as a means of realising change. While critical theorists place considerable store on developing theories, including theories jointly created by researchers and participants, they do not make clear how such understanding will lead to change. Most academic productions remain confined to a narrow community of readers and listeners. No matter how radical the knowledge may be, its transformative potential is far from self evident unless it is available and disseminated in accessible form to those about whom it is written or whose lives are affected by it. Learning Partnerships arising from Research Coalitions would allow this to happen. They would ensure that an avenue of communication is established so that those who have most to gain from transformative action have the knowledge to act. The Learning Partnerships would provide a forum for challenging biases and deceptions thereby reinforcing the incentive to act. Those who have experiential knowledge of inequality and injustice can ally this understanding with academic knowledge to create a new and deeper knowledge of their world. This deeper understanding can challenge established “wisdoms” and “ideologies” around inequality and injustice. Learning Partnerships would provide the opportunity to link analysis directly into a community of participants with the potential to act.

Knowledge, no matter how radical in intent, is not inherently transformative. Even if critical intellectuals shift from being “universalising spokespersons” for marginalised groups to being “cultural workers whose task is to take away barriers that prevent people from speaking for themselves” (Apple, 1991, p. ix) this does not guarantee change. It is not self evident that deepening knowledge of injustices and inequalities, among marginalised communities or peoples themselves, will inevitably lead to transformative action outside of the research field; there is always an element of choice. Understandings need to be linked into a political forum so that knowledge does not become redundant and divorced
from action. If Learning Partnerships are created between academics and community representatives, then it also seems necessary to develop Equality Action Plans on a collaborative basis. Action needs to be planned and implemented for changing structures at the political and related levels. Without integrating planning for change into the entire process there can be no guarantee that it will happen.

VII A CHALLENGE TO THE ACADEMY

What is being proposed here in terms of Research Coalitions and Learning Partnerships would be seen by many academics as a challenge to their intellectual autonomy. And it does pose serious questions about the nature of independence for the universities and research institutes if taken seriously. However, the professional ideology of "freedom and independence" within the universities is itself in need of deconstruction. As Bourdieu (1988, 1993) has noted the nature of the freedom which academics exercise is in fact seriously circumscribed by numerous conventions and controls. There are many forms of subtle constraint and censorship which operate for intellectuals, although these are rarely named as such. To be published requires a high degree of conformity to the paradigmatic rules of the day within one's disciplines, and breaking out to create new forms of knowledge, either within existing disciplines, or through the creation of new disciplines can be heavily sanctioned.

The secret resistance to innovation and to intellectual creativity, the aversion to ideas and to a free and critical spirit, which so often orientate academic judgements, as much at the viva of a doctoral thesis or in critical book reviews as in well-balanced lectures setting off neatly against each other the latest avant-gardes, are no doubt the effect of the recognition granted to an institutionalized thought only on those who implicitly accept the limits assigned by the institution. (Bourdieu, 1988, p. 95)

Freedom of expression is allowed, but the publication and dissemination of that expression is often dependent on working within the received wisdom. And this is even more true when trying to establish new forms of knowledge or understanding. While resistance to innovation may be concealed within established disciplines, more open resistance has confronted new disciplines such as Women's Studies and Equality Studies. There is a need therefore to establish the procedures and practices of those who control academic knowledge and discourse. This would help clarify the power relations within which intellectual life operates, and may be necessary before dialogue can be satisfactorily introduced.

What is being suggested here is that the forces of conservatism within the academy exercise a power over academic freedom which is too rarely named.
The forces countering innovation operate both within and between disciplines; the control which medicine has traditionally exercised over nursing is an example of the latter, while the marginalisation of feminist research within male-dominated disciplines is an example of the former. At other times, the forces of conservatism arise from the simple organisational dynamics of academic careerism itself. Although academics may have tenured posts (as most full-time academics do in Ireland) the freedom which flows from this does not always encourage people to think critically; rather people become beholden to the concept of the career — moving upwards promotionally within the system. All too frequently the line of least innovation is the line of ascent. Organisational recognition comes more readily to those who conform to the dominant norms and paradigms. This breeds a culture of conformity, silence and academic orthodoxy which belies the very freedom granted by the academy. While it is clear that people do innovate and resist the forces of conformity within the academy in many different ways, it is also evident that this often happens at considerable personal cost, especially when the innovations challenges traditional values and practices among dominant groups.

Giving a role to marginalised groups to set out the terms in which knowledge about themselves and their world is created is merely to recognise that such groups have hitherto exercised little power in relation to the definition of knowledge. If there is to be a serious attempt to decolonise the knowledge and understanding of oppressed groups in society, then it seems essential to put mechanisms in place to ensure that emancipatory methods are not always an optional extra, something to be granted on a case-by-case basis at the behest of experts. Without structures there can be no guarantee that partnership-based dialogue will happen.

The academy needs to be reconstituted in its structural relations with marginalised groups if resistance is to be effective. Otherwise systems of dialogue will be completely one sided, with all the choices about initiating or ending dialogue being with the researcher. Allowing the researcher to decide on all occasions whether or not their interpretations of other people’s worlds will be shared and/or challenged is to perpetuate the highly unequal power relations which now underpin the social construction of knowledge in academic life. This perpetuates a practice wherein the naming of one’s own world, especially by marginalised people, is effectively in the hands of academic power brokers, no matter how well intentioned these might be.

VIII CONCLUSION

Radical researchers occupy a contradictory class location in relation to the academy. On the one hand, like all other academics, they are part of a cultural
elite which receives salaries and work privileges in excess of many other occupational groups by virtue of their claim to expertise. On the other, they are working as agents for change and social transformation to create a more egalitarian society, one which may not endow their own groups with the same "freedom from necessity" to research and to write.

A genuine and ongoing commitment to change cannot be guaranteed in this type of situation by simply relying on some form of subjective reflexivity. While reflexivity is essential, it is but one element in the process of creating emancipatory research methodology. If the aim of critically inspired thought is to make theory, method and praxis inseparable from each other, then it is necessary to create structures which guarantee that this will happen rather than leave it to the good will or interest of individual researchers. Moreover, granting the researcher a veto on whether or not to utilise emancipatory methods on equality issues is to disempower the research participants in the very way that critical theorists have strongly criticised in other contexts. The only way in which people can exercise, ongoing, systematic influence on naming their own world is by being centrally involved at all stages of the research process, including design, interpretation and outcome-implementation. For this to happen, procedures for Research Coalitions would need to be developed between research bodies, universities (and their departments) and communities and groups who are being researched. In addition, Learning Partnerships need to be established to enable researchers to learn (in the doing of research) about the role of experiential knowledge in understanding and, to enable marginalised peoples to name their own world in their own words. Finally, if knowledge is to have transformative potential at a structural as well as an ideological level, then Equality Action Plans need to be developed from the research findings.

For Equality Studies and other cognate fields to have moral, intellectual and political credibility it is incumbent upon researchers to implement the emancipatory research methods as outlined. If it confines its emancipatory actions to the operational stage of the research and ignores, the conceptualisation, design, interpretation and action stage, then it is belying the notion of emancipation in its more substantive sense. To operate a more radical form of emancipatory method does present many new and exciting challenges not only for research but for other work in the University as well. Clearly, if emancipatory methods are being employed in research this also calls into question the authenticity and suitability of current pedagogical and assessment methods, most of which are based on strongly hierarchical view of both teacher student relationships and indeed of knowledge itself.

Many Irish Universities and Colleges of Higher Education claim service to the Community as one of their objectives. If this is the case, then there is a need to identify the many different Communities with whom we are to work. In this
paper, it is suggested that marginalised and excluded groups in our society are part of the Community; indeed very often such communities comprise the subject matter of social scientific research, but rarely the research designers or partners. The paper suggests that it is time that Research Coalitions were established between the Universities and social excluded Communities to enable the latter to control the naming of their own world.

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