

## **Equality Studies, the Academy and the Role of Research in Emancipatory Social Change**

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*Abstract:* 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 generation and dissemination of knowledge about themselves and/or the institutions within which they live and work.

This issue is especially acute for marginalised groups and communities who are the subjects of so much social scientific research. Such research is frequently undertaken without the involvement of the groups or communities in question. The ownership of data gives researchers and policy-makers power over the groups which may add to their marginalisation; there are now people who can claim to know you better than you know yourself. Without democratic engagement therefore, there is a real danger that research knowledge can be used for manipulation and control rather than challenging the injustices experienced.

This paper analyses the role of research in relation to social change. It explores, in particular, the implications of utilising an emancipatory research methodology in the study of issues of equality and social justice. While recognising the difficulties involved in developing an emancipatory approach to research, it is argued that such an approach is analytically, politically, and ethically essential if research with marginalised and socially excluded groups is to have a transformative impact.

### I INTRODUCTION

#### *Origins of Equality Studies*

As both the academic origins and historical development of Equality Studies has been analysed elsewhere (Lynch, 1995; Baker, 1997) these matters will not be discussed here. However, some key factors facilitating the development of Equality Studies will be presented to help contextualise the debates presented in the paper.

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Equality Studies began in response to a series of research practices, political changes and institutional initiatives which had developed in Irish intellectual and political life in the late 1980s (Lynch, 1995). It resonated with similar developments in other countries including the development of Women's Studies; Disability Studies; Peace Studies; Racial and Ethnic Studies; and Gay and Lesbian, Studies. In academic terms, it was first an attempt to develop both an inter-disciplinary and a pluri-disciplinary project around the study of equality issues. There was a widely shared view among many of us working within different disciplines in the University, that no single discipline provided a comprehensive view of the complex subject of equality, or indeed an adequate analysis of how to address inequalities and injustices as they arose. A co-operative, interdisciplinary and pluri-disciplinary mode of inquiry was deemed essential. Equality Studies brought together sociologists, political theorists, lawyers, economists, feminists and policy analysts, each with a unique contribution to make to the understanding of equality and social justice.

Another generative force in the development of Equality Studies was the visible failure of liberal public policies to promote radical social change in society in the post-war era. A large body of research on equality issues, both nationally and internationally, particularly on questions such as social-class related inequality, gender inequality, and poverty, indicated that liberal policies were not effective in eliminating major social inequalities within our own society, or indeed internationally (Arnot, 1991; Arnot and Barton, 1992; Baker, 1987; Breen *et al.*, 1990; Callan, Nolan *et al.*, 1989; Clancy, 1988; Cobalti, 1990; Fischer *et al.*, 1996; Nolan, 1991; Shavit and Blossfeld, 1993). In addition, it was increasingly evident with the growing emergence of "the politics of difference" that social justice was not purely about economic justice in a simple distributive sense; it was also about cultural and political justice (Fraser, 1995). While economic equality remained central to any egalitarian project, it was increasingly evident that the boundaries of class had been increasingly altered by gender, race, age, ethnic and dis/ability-related differences (Young, 1990); cultural and political institutions reproduced inequalities outside the economic realm.

There were therefore, a series of generative forces which led to the development of Equality Studies, including intellectual, institutional and political developments. All of these factors presented a challenge to all those interested in egalitarian theory and policy, to develop a deeper understanding of what constituted an egalitarian society, and an improved analysis as to how to develop it.

### *The Intellectual Focus*

Equality Studies is focused on the analysis of significant equalities and inequalities in human life, both as it has been and as it might be (Baker, 1997,

p. 62). It involves the research of at least five key issues, including: (1) the analysis of patterns of equality/inequality and their interrelationships; (2) the development of explanatory frameworks for the understanding of equality/inequality; (3) the identification of core principles or equality objectives which egalitarians are trying to achieve; (4) the identification of institutional and policy frameworks for achieving equality; and (5) the articulation of political strategies for egalitarian-based change. While the identification of patterns of inequality and the development of explanatory models for understanding them (issues (1) and (2)) is part of the work of several major disciplines within the social sciences, Equality Studies tries to go beyond this. It attempts to anchor explanatory frameworks to normative egalitarian theory, thereby breaking the traditional dichotomy which has developed between normatively and positively-oriented disciplines within the social sciences. It tries to articulate a vision of an egalitarian society and global order which is grounded in the analysis of institutional, policy and political frameworks which facilitate or inhibit egalitarian change (Lynch, 1995, pp. 101-102).

Equality Studies works within an epistemological tradition which supposes that the purpose of academic discourse is not only to describe and explain the world, but also to change it. It shares its intellectual and epistemological origins with critical theory (as developed by Habermas particularly), Marxism, Feminist theory, and other inter-disciplinary fields of investigation focused on transformative action including Disability Studies and Women's Studies. The basic questions it asks are not only descriptive or explanatory therefore, they are also visionary and utopian. It tries to focus on potentiality as well as on actuality, on what is possible as much as on what is; it attempts to develop a concept of the alternative rather than simply accepting the given.

Like other cognate disciplines and fields of enquiry, Equality Studies also recognises that research is inevitably politically engaged, be it by default, by design, or by simple recognition. No matter how deep the epistemological commitment to value neutrality, decisions regarding choice of subject, paradigmatic frameworks, and even methodological tools, inevitably involve political choices, not only within the terms of the discipline, but even in terms of wider political purposes and goals. The academy itself, and academic knowledge in particular is deeply implicated in the business of power.

One of the purposes of this chapter is to examine the structural conditions under which Equality Studies (and other cognate disciplines focused on the study of inequality or injustice) operates within the academy. These are conditions of work which it shares with many other researchers in the human rights and social scientific fields, conditions which impinge directly on the outcomes of research. For it is the case, that many of those who study issues such as human rights, race, gender, social class, poverty or disability are not

simply detached scholars with no interest in policy or change. Most work on such issues because of the apparently unjust and evil outcomes which blatant racism, sexism, homophobia, classism, and/or disablism visit upon society (Siraj-Blatchford, 1995, p. 209). Their work has its origin in the Enlightenment vision of education and research as tools for the development and improvement of society, even though such a vision may not always be explicitly articulated. The question which has to be addressed first however, is whether the academy, which is so deeply implicated in the cultural reproduction of elites, can facilitate emancipatory change *via* research and education.

Given the embeddedness of the academic world in the business of cultural production and reproduction, it is not at all self evident how a given discipline or academic discourse can contribute to radical social change. Universities *qua* institutions are engaged in elite forms of cultural production. Moreover, they are heavily engaged in the practice of cultural monopoly, not only through their selection procedures for students and staff, but also through their rigorous boundary maintenance procedures within and between disciplines, and between what is defined as academic knowledge and what is not (Bourdieu, 1978, 1984). Yet, within all institutions there is scope for resistance; there are contradictions which can be exploited and utilised at all levels of education, including higher education (Giroux, 1983).

## II RESEARCH ON EQUALITY AND THE LIMITATIONS OF TRADITIONAL POSITIVIST<sup>1</sup> METHODOLOGIES

There has been very little independent research funding available to the social sciences in Ireland since the foundation of the State. Although State aid for social science research was substantially increased in 1998, the research fund of the Irish Social Science Research Council (SSRC) was only in the region of £100,000 *per annum* as recently as the mid-1990s. While some of the international research foundations did offer grants to Irish researchers, there was no major Foundation within Ireland sponsoring social scientific research. Up to the end of the millennium, therefore, the bulk of the money available for social science research was available for commissioned studies for State-sponsored projects. Such funding provided the core funding for the work of the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) and the Educational Research Centre (ERC) (Drumcondra). The absence of either a well-funded SSRC, or well established research foundations, has meant that Irish researchers have had two options in

1. While positivist here refers primarily to quantitative studies, much of qualitative research operates out of similar principles in its research design (Oliver, 1992; Jayaratine and Stewart, 1995).

relation to research funding: either they undertook government-funded research (if and when they were invited to tender for it), or they sought out some of the minor funding offered by a host of voluntary, statutory and other agencies.

The lack of funding for basic research meant that much of the work undertaken was of an applied nature, frequently designed to answer a specific policy query for the funder. Such a system was, and is, heavily biased in favour of empirical (especially quantitative) research in the positivist tradition. The published work of the ESRI and the ERC exemplifies the strong hold which positivism has had in the social sciences in Ireland. Although there have been moves away from this tradition in recent years (as is evident from the nature of the material published increasingly in the *Irish Journal of Sociology* or in *Irish Educational Studies*), positivism still maintains a strong hold on social scientific practice. In view of its strong position, it is important to identify its strengths and limitations, especially in relation to such a morally loaded subject as equality.

Much of the policy debate about poverty and inequality in society generally (especially in terms of social class/socio-economic groups) has been framed within the language-of-analysis of positivism. In the education area in particular, work within the positivist tradition has played an important role in the policy arena. The work of what are sometimes called the "equality empiricists" has been especially effective in holding the State to public account regarding the implementation of its stated policies on equality. In Ireland, for example, the work of Breen *et al.* (1990); Clancy (1988; 1995); Callan, Nolan *et al.*, (1996); Cormack and Osborne (1995); Dowling (1991); and Hannan, Smyth *et al.*, (1996) has played an important role in challenging the State on the effectiveness of various policies for the promotion of social justice in education and society generally. In certain respects, this type of "political arithmetic" is crucially important for holding the State publicly accountable. It is a vital tool of democracy in a world where inegalitarian ideologies are gaining hold:

At a time of increasing social inequalities and injustice, when the "self-regulating" market threatens to undermine the foundations of social solidarity; ....and when the dominant ideology of meritocracy in liberal democratic societies has been seriously weakened at the same time that right wing politicians proclaim the "classless society", a new political arithmetic must be asserted as a vital tool of democracy as well as of sociology (Brown *et al.*, 1997, p. 37).

When positivist research is sufficiently critical and independent, it also has the potential to facilitate social and individual reflexivity; it informs the general body politic, giving them access to knowledge which is detached from the powerful interests of government and media (Halsey, 1994).

In the international arena the merits of traditional positivist methodologies

for the understanding of social phenomena generally, and inequality in particular, have been debated intensely in recent years. Positivism has not been without its defendants; Hammersley (1992, 1995) although not subscribing to a crudely positivist view, has been among the more vocal of these. Postmodernists, critical theorists and feminist scholars have been, however, among the most ardent critics of positivist epistemologies and methodologies (Bernstein, 1976, 1983; Harding, 1987, 1991; Harre, 1981; Humphries, 1997; Lentin, 1993; Reay, 1996; Smith, 1987; Stanley and Wise, 1983). Their work demonstrates how, despite its visible benefit as a tool of political arithmetic, mainstream positivism has severe limitations from both a philosophical and a moral standpoint (Reason and Rowan, 1981; Reason, 1988).

The model of the person employed is one which regards people as "units of analysis", it treats them as "variables" whose attributes can be neatly reified into dependent and independent types. People are not defined therefore in a holistic way; understanding of their subjectivity and their relational conditions of structured inequality often become invisible. What Bourdieu (1973) once referred to as "the substantialist atomism" of the social sciences, conceals the structural and relational conditions which generate inequality, injustice and marginalisation. The person is treated as a detached atom (undoubtedly with attributes of gender, class, race, ethnicity, etc.); the language-of-analysis does not identify the sets of relations through which particular attributes are translated into particular inequalities. The research focuses on how particular characteristics, such as colour, class or religion, are associated or correlated with particular outcomes, such as occupational status, education or legal provision. There is a tendency to locate the causative factors contributing to particular inequalities, therefore, in the attributes of those experiencing inequality, in their gender, poverty, or race, rather than in the structured relations, the planned and unplanned exclusionary systems, which transform individual attributes into generative forces for inequality.

Moreover, once the research has identified correlations and associations between individual attributes and inequality outcomes, this is generally regarded as sufficient for promoting an understanding of the underlying causes of inequality. This methodological individualism creates a silence around the social, economic, political, legal and cultural relations of inequality. There is no space in which to debate or frame radical structural critiques or alternative visions based on relational understanding.

While it could be argued that the failure to examine the relational character of inequality is a universal problem within the social sciences, rather than one which is tied to positivist methods, the fact that the issue has received so little attention is undoubtedly related to the culture of assumed objectivity which dominates positivist discourse. The role of the researcher is defined as that of

"disinterested" observer and analyst; one is expected to discover "truth" via the use of reliable research instruments and rational discussion; the goal is to represent reality accurately, no matter how limited that particular reality may be. The researcher is defined as beyond politics, their knowledge is "innocent" untainted by political agendas. Thus, a culture of objectivism prevails which precludes a debate about the politics of research production. It allows methodological individualism to persist as long as it operates according to the scientific canon of objectivity. There is no framework for analysing the epistemological and ethical limitations of one's own position; questions regarding the purposes and outcomes of research are defined as being the work of policy-makers rather than researchers.

The methodological individualism underpinning positivism also focuses attention on the powerless rather than the powerful, while failing to explore relations between the two. While there are studies of inequality which focus on the impact and influence of the powerful and wealthy in society (studies on white collar crime by McCullagh (1995) and Tomlinson *et al.*, (1988) being cases in point), there are proportionately many more studies on the vulnerable and subordinate (Chambers, 1983). The lack of a substantial body of empirical data in Ireland on the egalitarian/social justice implications of the operation of the money markets or the ownership structures of equities and other forms of corporate and productive wealth;<sup>2</sup> indicates how biased the focus of analysis has been. We are often presented with a detailed analysis of the life style of those who are subordinate or poor, while little attention is devoted to the analysis of the generative forces and processes which maintain others in positions of dominance and/or affluence.

The relative social scientific silence which exists around the relational systems governing the interface between the powerful and powerless, is no doubt related to the ability (including legal protections) of particular groups to hide from the research gaze, and to refuse access to sensitive information; the poor are studied as they are on open access; the rich are not. Whatever the reason, the focus of research attention on the attributes of those experiencing inequality means that the causes of injustice are often sought in the lifestyle of the marginalised themselves, the most visible and measurable group. Poor people or ethnic minorities thus become associated with, or even "blamed" for crime, not the poverty-inducing and degrading structures which induced and facilitated crime in the first place.

The dichotomy which is drawn between fact and value in the positivist tradition also discourages analysis of the impact of funding bodies on the nature

2. In his analysis of *The Wealth of Irish Households*, Nolan (1991) noted that one of the biggest problems in examining wealth distribution was the lack of accurate and comprehensive data.

of the questions asked. When research on equality is funded by the state, for example, it is frequently undertaken for the purposes of controlling or containing the "problem of inequality". Big research studies based on national data sets are big business. The research is designed to answer the questions of those who pay for it: it is undertaken in a managerial context.

Furthermore, large-scale studies of poverty, such as those currently being undertaken across several countries in the EU, are prime examples of state-funded, top-down surveys.<sup>3</sup> They are designed and planned by "experts" generally without systematic dialogue and collaboration with the subjects of the research. Such research often "studies those at the bottom while holding up its hands for money to those at the top" (Reason and Rowan, 1981, p. xv). The methodologies and interpretations employed are based on models and paradigms which have been derived from a conception of poverty developed by academics, and approved by senior policy analysts and policy-makers, without the consent of those who are the subject of the research.

Without intent, this type of research can and does operate as a form of colonisation. It creates public images about groups and contexts of inequality (in both the academic and the policy world) over which most people participating in the pain and marginalisation of injustice and inequality have little or no control. Poor people, Travellers, asylum seekers, disabled people, and increasingly, women, become the subjects of books and papers in which their lives are recorded by professional middle class experts who are frequently removed from their culture and lifestyle. This creates a context in which professional researchers know and own (as do the policy institutions and state departments which pay them) part of people's world about which people themselves know very little. By owning data about oppressed peoples, the "experts" own part of them. The very owning and controlling of the stories of oppression adds further to the oppression as it means that there are now people who can claim to know and understand you better than you understand yourself; there are experts there to interpret your world and to speak on your behalf. They take away your voice by speaking about you and for you. This is sometimes referred to as the "hit and run model of research" wherein the career advancement of the researchers is built on their use of alienating and exploitative methods of inquiry.

Colonisation by experts is especially acute for low income working class communities and for ethnic minorities and other groups, such as Travellers, whose

3. The European Community *Household Panel Survey* and the *Irish Household Budget Survey* are examples of this type of research. National data bases on poverty and related issues are collected through these.

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cultural traditions are strongly oral, (Lynch and O'Neill, 1994).<sup>4</sup> For "Classes exist twice over, once objectively, and a second time in the more or less explicit social representation that agents form of them" (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 37). While there are women, albeit upper middle class women, who can challenge, mediate and redefine the images of women in the policy and academic arena, and while the same holds true for many other groups such as disabled persons, religious or ethnic minorities, this cannot happen for working class people; by designation, working class people are not part of the defining classes in society.

Within traditional positivist research, reflexivity is not a requirement of the research task. The fact that the perspective of the expert is only one viewpoint, and one which is generally at least one step removed from the oppression, is rarely discussed. Researchers present what is a select viewpoint as one which is more comprehensive and epistemologically powerful than others; it is often presented as being superior to that of other researchers (especially ethnographic researchers), and to that of people living out inequality. The net effect of interpreting the world from the perspective of the "expert" is that the viewpoint of the outsider is privileged over that of the insider who has experienced the inequality. The privileging of the expert produces perspectives on inequality and injustice, therefore, which are politically and emotionally detached from the experiences which generated their articulation in the first place.

While academic understanding involves abstractions, the abstractions need not revisit the research subjects as "expert opinions" which are superior to their own understanding.<sup>5</sup> It is possible to create knowledge and understanding through partnership between the researcher and the research subject, while recognising the differences between the two positions. Knowledge created in this manner is owned by the research subject in a way that non-partnership-knowledge is not. The fact that the subject is co-creator of the knowledge means that they can exercise control over definitions and interpretations of their lifeworld. They are also in a position to be introduced to research practice through their ongoing involvement in the research process.

<sup>4</sup> An example of how academics may inadvertently structure the exclusion of marginalised groups occurred at a conference organised in TCD on July 18 1997 on "Travellers, Society and the Law". All the lecturers were professionals and there was no space in the programme for the Travellers' perspective. In addition, the fee for the day was £100, so it was only those with access to resources could attend.

<sup>5</sup> At the Irish Conference on Civil and Social Rights in the European Union, Dublin, May 7-8, 1997, a number of working class community activists were highly critical of one of the speakers who made no attempt to communicate his academic ideas in accessible language (the audience included community activists from various non-governmental organisations, researchers, policy-makers and administrators). The response to this criticism was (unfortunately) one of dismissal; the speaker justified his approach on the grounds that it was only possible to communicate (sic) his ideas in a particular type of language code.

### III THE NORMATIVE AND TRANSFORMATIVE TRADITION IN CRITICAL AND FEMINIST RESEARCH

Both critical theory (in the Habermasian tradition) and feminist theory have played a central role in generating a critique of positivist discourse; in this sense, they have formed the intellectual backdrop to debates about emancipatory research. Given this, it is important to comment on the development of emancipatory research and theory to date.

#### *Critical Theory*

One of the important contributions which critical theory has made is to highlight the importance of the emancipatory potential of research. Research within the critical paradigm has had an "emancipatory interest" which seeks to free people not only from the domination of others, but also from their domination by forces which they themselves do not understand (Habermas, 1971). Although critical theory shared Durkheim's commitment to the scientific analysis of society, critical analysis was also oriented to the emancipatory transformation of society. The scientific analysis of the world was not seen as an end in itself. It was regarded as a necessary step towards understanding which would guide transformative action, and would help create a world which would satisfy the needs and powers of women and men. What distinguished critical theories therefore from the positivist disciplines was their emphatic *normative* and *transformative* orientation. They were theories with a "practical intent" (Benhabib, 1986, p. 253) working on the assumption that we live in a world of pain but that "much can be done to alleviate that pain, and that theory has a crucial role to play in that process" (Poster, 1989, p. 3).

Research within the critical tradition also tries to highlight the contexts and spaces where resistance is possible. In *Communicative Action*, Habermas notes that the "seams between systems and lifeworld" offer special scope for resistance in the contemporary era. He regarded conflicts and contradictions emerging in areas of cultural reproduction, social integration and socialisation (rather than distribution) as offering special scope for transformative action.

Both critical and feminist theory have also presented an enormous counterpoint to positivist hegemony and the values it endorsed. They have challenged the epistemological foundations of positivism, in particular the naive understanding of value freedom and objectivity. The work of critical theorists shifted interest from the almost exclusive concern with "how biased is the data?" (a concern most often expressed when the academic and policy interrogator did not like the findings) to concern about whose interests are served by the bias (Lather, 1991, p. 14). It has highlighted the interests of the "disinterested" researcher and her funders.

Overall critical theory encourages self-reflection on behalf of the researcher and the research subject. It promotes a deeper understanding, both on the part of those being researched and of the researcher herself, and of the issues being examined. The goal is not just to generate empirically grounded theoretical knowledge but to ensure that people know and understand their own oppressions more clearly so that they can work to change them. Dialectical theory building replaces theoretical impositions by experts. Research subjects are therefore actively involved in the construction and validation of understandings created about themselves. The relationship between researcher and researched is reciprocal rather than hierarchical (Fay, 1987); it is ultimately concerned with eliminating inequalities.

How effective critical theory has been overall in producing knowledge which has transformative outcomes is the subject of considerable debate. Some regard critical theory as having become estranged from its audience (Fay, 1987; Cocks, 1989) while others regard much of the research on women undertaken in the name of critical theory as being a new form of imperialism operated by western women on women in majority world countries (Lugones and Spelman, 1985). Apple (1991, p. ix) holds that critical theorists need to shift from being "universalizing spokespersons" *on behalf of* oppressed groups to "acting as cultural workers whose task is to take away the barriers that prevent people from *speaking for themselves*". Lather (1991) has called for the development of research approaches which empower those involved to change the world as well as understanding it. She has suggested that the methodological implications of critical theory have remained relatively unexplored.

#### *Feminist Theory*

Feminist scholars have been especially effective in challenging the core epistemological and methodological assumptions of mainstream social scientific practice. They have challenged patterns of bias in research design, including the absence of research on questions of central importance to women; the focus on elitest research topics; the naive understanding of objectivity; the improper interpretation and overgeneralisation of findings; and inadequate data dissemination (Jayaratne and Stewart, 1995, p. 218).

Not only have feminist theorists been to the fore in the critique of positivism, they have also been leaders in developing a theory of emancipatory action through education and research (Harding, 1987; Humphries and Truman, 1994; Lather, 1991; Lentin, 1993; Mies, 1984; Smith, 1987; Stanley and Wise, 1983; Weiler, 1988). They have encouraged women to engage in action both in and through education, and through research; they have also attempted to document the type of the procedures which must be followed in order to create an emancipatory research approach. Lather claims that:

... the development of emancipatory social theory requires an empirical stance which is open-ended, dialogically reciprocal, grounded in respect for human capacity, and yet profoundly sceptical of appearances and "common sense". Such an empirical stance is, furthermore, rooted in a commitment to the long-term, broad-based ideological struggle to transform structural inequalities (Lather, 1986, p. 269).

The challenge posed by critical and feminist theories for research in terms of reflexivity, dialogue and co-operation with marginalised people, are considerable. An even greater challenge is how to establish collaborative practices between theorist/researcher and marginalised peoples which will ensure that the understandings arrived at can work towards a transformative outcome. To confront the latter challenge is to confront the forces of interest within the academy itself.

#### IV CHALLENGES AND ISSUES TO BE ADDRESSED IN DEVELOPING AN EMANCIPATORY RESEARCH MODEL

While several feminist theorists have engaged with the contradictions of their class position in relation to emancipatory research, critical theorists often tend to ignore the logic of the sets of cultural relations within which academic knowledge is produced. Critical theorists, no more than other intellectuals "tend to leave out of play their own game and their own stakes"... Yet, "the production of representations of the social world, which is a fundamental dimension of political struggles, is the virtual monopoly of intellectuals..." (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 37). Even academics who are themselves critical of the failure of critical theory to problematise its own fundamental assumptions, do not address themselves to the problem of the academically embedded context in which theory is constructed (Sayer's, 1995 critique of critical theory is a case in point). Academics create virtual realities, textual realities, ethnographic and statistical realities. These overhang and frame the lived existence of those who cannot name their own world; it is frequently in the context of these detached and remoter realities that public policy is often enacted. The frame becomes the picture in the public eye. Yet theoretical knowledge has serious limitations imposed upon it by the conditions of its own performance.

The relations of cultural production within which critical theory, feminist theory, and egalitarian theory are produced are generally no different to those that operate for the study of nuclear physics, corporate law or business and finance. Although some academics may view themselves as radical, reforming, feminist or emancipatory, they occupy a particular location within the class system (Bourdieu, 1993, pp. 36-48). They are part of the cultural elite of society.

It is the designation of cultural elitism which provides them with the structural conditions to write; it gives them credibility over other voices and reinforces the perception of superiority which maintains the salary differentials between themselves and other workers. Being granted the freedom from necessity to write and discuss is a privilege which academics (be they liberal, radical or conservative) in well-funded universities are rarely asked to reflect upon, however.

Yet, academics are also subordinate to powerful corporate interest groups in the business and industrial sector. In a sense, therefore, they occupy a contradictory class location (Davies, 1995), being at once an elite in the cultural sphere and relatively subordinate in the industrial or financial sphere. Thus, while the concept of the "free-floating, disinterested intellectual" may be part of the ideology of academia it is not grounded in any sociological reality; even radical intellectuals are culturally, and relatively financially, privileged.

Operating within a contradictory state, of being personally radical and publicly privileged, makes it difficult for many politically left-wing academics to be progressive in cultural or university politics. It is much simpler to be progressive in general politics that do not touch the core values of one's own work. Bourdieu (1993, p. 45) suggests that there is no easy resolution to this dilemma for radical intellectuals. He proposes a radical, ongoing reflexivity wherein one prepares "the conditions for a critical knowledge of the limits of knowledge which is the precondition for true knowledge" as the principal protection available. In this way, researchers know where they themselves stand in the classification system.

Even if academics do engage in ongoing reflexivity, this does not alter the structural conditions under which they work. The dilemma posed by unequal power between researcher and research subject is not readily resolved, even when the researcher works with emancipatory intent (Lentin 1993, p. 128; Martin, 1996). It is generally the researchers who produce the final text, the written record of the research event. This gives them a power of definition which cannot be abrogated at will. Moreover, the very efforts of those interested in transforming the relations of research production (from those of dominance to those of partnership or emancipation) are deeply implicated in the exercise of power. One cannot escape the reality of power relations even within the language of emancipation.

In addition, intellectuals work in institutions which lay down working conditions based on the dominant meritocratic principles of our time — ostensibly at least, promotion is based on merit. The way in which merit is measured is in terms of conformity to the dominant norms of intellectual and academic discourse. This includes not only writing with the dominant paradigm (Kuhn, 1961) but writing about what is currently intellectually fashionable. Without at least a nodding recognition of the importance of the dominant discourses, then one's

work is not likely to be published.<sup>6</sup> And it is through their publications that intellectuals in universities are generally assessed. While "there is something desperate in the docility with which "free intellectuals" rush to hand in their essays on the required subject of the moment" (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 43) the fact remains that academics jobs and incomes are often dependent on such conformity.

Not only does the academy generally only recognise those who conform to the intellectual norms of the day, it penalises those who attempt to redefine the purpose of the academy. Lectures, consultations and involvements with non-academic bodies do not count in terms of the enumerations of one's work or achievements.<sup>7</sup> This acts as a very effective control on academic work limiting and containing interests within the safe confines of the university. It also works effectively to preclude intellectuals from involving themselves, and the university, in radicalising initiatives. While "established or tenured" academics can afford to indulge in such developments, sanctioning *via* limited promotional opportunities continues to exercise control even over these.

Yet, public lectures and involvements with voluntary, statutory, community and other organisations is essential if research findings are to be circulated outside the narrow confines of the academy. Given that the production of scientific knowledge generally is often legitimated on the grounds that it will contribute to progress, and to the ultimate general good of humanity, it is difficult to see how this can happen without the dissemination of the findings outside the academy in accessible contexts and language.

What is interesting about the boundary maintenance which goes on in universities is that it is not confined to any one field (Bernstein, 1971). It occurs within and between disciplines, and between the university itself and the "outside community". Academic knowledge is defined as "superior" knowledge. The fact that the academic perspective is only one viewpoint, and that it may need to be complemented by other forms of understanding by non-academic research subjects is largely ignored (Lather, 1986). The parameters within which academic dialogue takes place, therefore, are narrowly defined thereby inhibiting criticism of academic discourse itself, and prohibiting academics from understanding the world from the perspectives of the "other" outside the academy.

6. While there are exceptions to this most notably intellectuals who are in the position of defining what is or is not in fashion, most academics, especially those without tenure, are not in that position.

7. An interesting example of this is the way in which inventories of academic activities and research publications are compiled; only lectures to one's academic peers are generally counted as being of high standing; the same principle applies to publications. While this is understandable from the perspective of the academy, it shows how the University systematically devalues dialogue with persons and bodies other than academics.