

## Issues of Validity in Openly Ideological Research: Between a Rock and a Soft Place

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In this paper, I attempt to reconceptualize validity within the context of openly ideological research.<sup>1</sup> The usefulness of this reconceptualization is tested by applying it to examples from three explicitly value-based research programs: feminist research, neo-Marxist critical ethnography, and Freirian “empowering” research.<sup>2</sup> Finally, validity issues within research committed to a more equitable social order are discussed.

### The Context From Which I Speak

*The attempt to produce value-neutral social science is increasingly being abandoned as at best unrealizable, and at worst self-deceptive, and is being replaced by social sciences based on explicit ideologies.*

Mary Hesse (1980)

To say that positivism remains the orthodox approach to doing empirical research in the human sciences is not to deny that we are in a postpositivist era.<sup>3</sup> Thomas Kuhn wrote that “rather than a single group conversion, what occurs [with a paradigm shift] is an increasing shift in the distribution of professional allegiances” as practitioners of the new paradigm “improve it, explore its possibilities, and show what it would be like to belong to the community guided by it” (1962, pp. 157–158).

The foundation of postpositivism is the cumulative, trenchant, and increasingly definitive critique of the inadequacies of positivist assumptions in the face of the complexities of human experience (Oppenheimer, 1956; Kaplan, 1964; Cronbach, 1975; Bernstein, 1976; Mishler, 1979; Giroux, 1981; Guba & Lincoln, 1981; Feinberg, 1983; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As the orthodox paradigm for inquiry in the human sciences proves obsolete, new visions are required (Rose, 1979; Schwartz & Ogilvy, 1979; Hesse, 1980; Reason & Rowan, 1981). The result is a rich ferment in contemporary discourse regarding empirical research in the human sciences—a discourse spanning epistemological, theoretical, and to a much lesser degree, methodological issues.<sup>4</sup>

This paper is rooted in that rich ferment and has two basic premises. The first is that “since interest-free knowledge is logically impossible, we should feel free to substitute explicit interests for implicit ones” (Reinharz, 1985, p. 17). As the phrase “openly ideological research” implies, I take issue with the claims of positivism

regarding objectivity and neutrality. Feminist research, neo-Marxist critical ethnography, and Freirian “empowering” research all stand in opposition to prevailing scientific norms through their “transformative agendas” and their concern with research as praxis (Rose, 1979). Each argues that scientific “neutrality” and “objectivity” serve to mystify the inherently ideological nature of research in the human sciences and to legitimate privilege based on class, race, and gender.

Within this frame of reference, research which is openly valued based is neither more nor less ideological than is mainstream positivist research. Rather, those committed to the development of research approaches that challenge the status quo and contribute to a more egalitarian social order have made an “epistemological break” from the positivist insistence upon researcher neutrality and objectivity (Hesse, 1980, p. 196).

The second premise in this paper is that for those exploring the possibilities of a postpositivist paradigm, the central challenge is to formulate approaches to empirical research which advance emancipatory theory-building through the development of interactive and action-inspiring research designs. There is a pioneering dimension to this task. Since the formation of the Frankfurt School, critical theorists have been calling for such research while spinning obtuse webs of abstract “grand theory” (Mills, 1959; Kellner, 1975, p. 149; Stanley & Wise, 1983, p. 100).

Fifty years ago, the Italian neo-Marxist Antonio Gramsci urged intellectuals to adhere to a “praxis of the present” by aiding developing progressive groups in their effort to become increasingly conscious of their own actions and situations in the world (Salamini, 1981, p. 73). What are the implications of this advice from Gramsci for those seeking empirical approaches which can change, rather than merely describe, the world? The task of this paper is to explore the central questions in the effort to formulate an approach to empirical research which both advances emancipatory theory-building and empowers the researched.

Of the three openly value-based research programs discussed in this paper, neo-Marxist critical ethnography (Foley, 1979; Ogbu, 1981; Maseman, 1982) is the most advanced in terms of developing empirical approaches for the building of emancipatory social theory. All empirical work within this research program attempts to problematize what goes on in schools in terms of the reproduction of social inequality and the potential for social transformation. Such theoretical emphasis, however, brings to the fore the danger of conceptual overdeterminism: circular reinforcement of theory by experience conditioned by theory.

The recent empirical emphasis in neo-Marxism has been primarily interested in the creation of an empirically informed Marxism to meet the criticisms of those such as Bottomore (1978) and E. P. Thompson (1978) who argue that too much of neo-Marxist social theory is “an immaculate conception which requires no gross empirical impregnation” (Thompson, 1978, p. 13; see also, Kellner, 1975, p. 149; Wright, 1978, p. 10; Krueger, 1981, p. 59; Comstock, 1982, p. 371). Theoretically guided empirical work exploring the mirror-image relationship between schools and the needs of corporate capitalism was the first to be produced (Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Apple, 1979b). More recently, given the extensive critique of an over-socialized conception of human nature as empirically inaccurate and politically suicidal (Apple, 1979a, 1980-81; Wrong, 1961; Giroux, 1981, 1983; Willis, 1977), empirical studies of human resistance to hegemonic forces are burgeoning (see, for example, Willis, 1977; McRobbie 1978; Everhart, 1983; Miller, 1983; Anyon, 1983).

Such research is a beginning, but the lack of clear strategies for linking theory and research is pervasive. Although some attention is beginning to be focussed on the need for an approach to research which advances egalitarian transformation (Apple, 1982; Fay, 1977; Comstock, 1982), the methodological implications of critical theory are relatively unexplored (Bredo & Feinberg, 1982, p. 281). There is also a lack of self-reflexivity in the empirical work that exists within critical inquiry. Sabia and Wallulis point out that, too often, critical self-awareness comes to mean "a negative attitude toward competing approaches instead of its own self-critical perspective" (1983, p. 26).

Research within a postpositivist context mandates a self-corrective element to prevent phenomena from being forced into preconceived interpretive schemes. Postpositivism has cleared methodology of prescribed rules and boundaries and has created a constructive turmoil as a result of successful challenges by philosophers of science during the past several decades (Polkinghorne, 1983, pp. 4–5). Because we are not able to assume anything, we must take a self-critical stance regarding the assumptions we incorporate into our empirical approaches. No longer does following the correct method guarantee "true" results: "Method does not give truth; it corrects guesses" (Polkinghorne, 1983, p. 249). If critical theory is to change the way social science is conceived of and practised, it must become genuinely reflexive (Moon, 1983, p. 30).

While the development of empowering approaches to empirical research is at the heart of Freirian research and, increasingly, of feminist research, they, too, by and large suffer from a lack of self-reflexivity. My central argument is that new paradigm researchers must begin to be more systematic about establishing the trustworthiness of data. Reducing the ambiguity of what we do does not mean we have to deny the essential indeterminacy of human experience, "the irreducible disparity between the being of the world and the knowledge we might have of it" (White, 1973). But if we want illuminating and resonant theory grounded in trustworthy data, we must formulate self-corrective techniques that will check the credibility of our data and minimize the distorting effect of personal bias upon the logic of evidence (Kamarovsky, 1981).

I offer the following reconceptualization of validity in the hope that it will aid those of us who work within openly ideological research programs to focus more of our energies on how best to establish data credibility. Our task is to create a body of research exemplars that will stand as testimony to the vigor that comes, not from positivist retrenchment, but from viewing the move into the postpositivist era with a sense of possibility.

### **Between a Rock and a Soft Place**

*Relevance without rigor is no better than rigor without relevance.*

*Egon Guba (1981)*

To recast a familiar metaphor, the "rock" is the unquestionable need for trustworthiness in data generated by alternative paradigms (Guba, 1981) and the "soft place" is the positivist claim to neutrality and objectivity (Campbell, 1981).<sup>5</sup> Within

newly emerging patterns of inquiry, approaches to validity must reach beyond the obfuscating claims of objectivity used by positivism to skirt the role played by researcher values in the human sciences.

Specific techniques of validity are tied to paradigmatic assumptions (Guba & Lincoln, 1981; Morgan, 1983). Positivists formulate tidy, quantifiable procedures based on "the first positivist assumption" that natural science methods are appropriate for the study of human beings (Westkott, 1977). The classic psychometric approach to establishing data trustworthiness focusses on the measurable. In spite of "validity coefficients" and "multitrait-multimethod matrices," however, validity remains elusive. Basic construct validity, so central to theory construction (Cronbach & Meehl, 1955), continues to defy quantification. Error-of-estimate formulae and multiple-regression equations are substituted for the much slipperier process of searching out and establishing independent, external validity criteria.

Within conventional, positivist research, the quantifiable concepts of discriminant and concurrent validity rise to the fore; factor analysis carries the weight of construct validity; and face validity, so inherently impressionistic, is defined as rapport and public relations and relegated to a distinctly second-class concern (Kidder, 1982). Statistical manipulations replace the logical grounding of constructs. Reliability, for example, while held to be necessary but not sufficient in establishing validity, often stands alone in experimental and quasi-experimental research—mute testimony to the lack of attention paid to construct validity. At best, this leads to consistent subjectivity. At worst, it results in the reification of constructs that are the projections of social biases, masculinity-femininity being but one prime example (Constantinople, 1973; Lewin, 1984).

With the present epistemological and methodological ferment in the human sciences, however, paradigmatic uncertainty is leading to the reconceptualization of validity. Efforts to set subjective, tacit knowledge apart from the "context of verification" are seen as "naïve empiricism." The process of inquiry is increasingly viewed as a tapestry in which tacit knowledge is the "warp" and propositional knowledge the "woof" (Heron, 1981, p. 32). With no ready-made formulae to guarantee valid social knowledge, "we must operate simultaneously at epistemological, theoretical and empirical levels with self-awareness" (Sharp & Green, 1975, p. 234). What we are faced with is a lack of workable procedures or specific rules for analyzing and verifying data (Huberman & Miles, 1983, p. 282). Our best shot at present is to construct research designs that push us toward becoming vigorously self-aware.

Going beyond predisposition in our empirical efforts requires techniques that will give confidence in the trustworthiness of data. Reason (1981) wants "objectively subjective" inquiry (p. xiii). Guba and Lincoln (1981) argue, more systematically, for analogues to the major criteria of rigor within the orthodox paradigm. Guba (1981) states that the least we should expect in establishing trustworthy data in new paradigm research is triangulation, reflexivity, and member checks. Reason and Rowan (1981) advise borrowing concepts of validity from traditional research but refining and expanding them in ways appropriate to "an interactive, dialogic logic" (p. 240). Building on all of this, what follows is a reconceptualization of validity appropriate for research openly committed to a more just social order.

## Reconceptualizing Validity

*The job of validation is not to support an interpretation, but to find out what might be wrong with it. A proposition deserves some degree of trust only when it has survived serious attempts to falsify it.*

*Lee Cronbach (1980)*

Once we recognize that just as there is no neutral education there is no neutral research, we no longer need apologize for unabashedly ideological research and its open commitment to using research to criticize and change the status quo. The development of data credibility checks to protect our research and theory construction from our enthusiasms, however, is essential in our efforts to create a self-reflexive human science. To guard against researcher biases distorting the logic of evidence within openly ideological research, the following guidelines are offered.

*Triangulation*, expanded beyond the psychometric definition of multiple measures to include multiple *data sources, methods, and theoretical schemes*, is critical in establishing data trustworthiness. It is essential that the research design seek counterpatterns as well as convergences if data are to be credible.

*Construct validity* must be dealt with in ways that recognize its roots in theory construction (Cronbach & Meehl, 1955). Emancipatory social theory requires a ceaseless confrontation with the experiences of people in their daily lives in order to stymie the tendency to theoretical imposition which is inherent in theoretically guided empirical work. A *systematized reflexivity*, which gives some indication of how *a priori* theory has been changed by the logic of the data, becomes essential in establishing construct validity in ways that will contribute to the growth of illuminating and change-enhancing social theory.

*Face validity* needs to be seen as much more integral to the process of establishing data credibility. Guba and Lincoln (1981) refer to “member checks” which they consider to be “the backbone of satisfying the truth-value criterion” (p. 110). Reason and Rowan (1981) argue that such member checks (recycling analysis back through at least a subsample of respondents) need to become a standard part of emancipatory research designs: “Good research at the non-alienating end of the spectrum . . . goes back to the subject with the tentative results, and refines them in the light of the subjects’ reactions” (p. 248).

*Catalytic validity* (Reason & Rowan, 1981, p. 240; Brown & Tandom, 1978) refers to the degree to which the research process re-orientes, focusses, and energizes participants in what Freire (1973) terms “conscientization,” knowing reality in order to better transform it. Of the guidelines proposed here, this is by far the most unorthodox as it flies directly in the face of the essential positivist tenet of researcher neutrality. My argument is premised not only on a recognition of the reality-altering impact of the research process itself, but also on the need to consciously channel this impact so that respondents gain self-understanding and, ideally, self-determination through research participation.

My concern is that efforts to produce social knowledge that is helpful in the struggle for a more equitable world pursue rigor as well as relevance. Otherwise, just as

“pointless precision” (Kaplan, 1964) has proven to be the bane of the conventional paradigm, the rampant subjectivity inherent in the more phenomenologically based paradigms will prove to be the nemesis of new paradigm research.

### *Feminist Research*

The overt ideological goal of feminist research is to correct both the *invisibility* and the *distortion* of female experience in ways relevant to ending women’s unequal social position. This entails the substantive task of making gender a fundamental category for our understanding of the social order, “to see the world from women’s place in it” (Callaway, 1981, p. 460). The methodological task becomes that of generating and refining interactive, contextualized methods which search for pattern and meaning rather than for prediction and control (Reinharz, 1983). While the first wave of feminist research operated largely within the conventional paradigm (Westkott, 1979), the second wave is more self-consciously methodologically innovative (Eichler, 1980; Reinharz, 1983; Stanley & Wise, 1983; Bowles & Duelli-Klein, 1983).

A few examples will illustrate how such an unabashedly ideological perspective works to frame research approaches and questions. Mies (1984) field-tested seven methodological guidelines for doing feminist research in an action-research project in Cologne, Germany, designed to respond to violence against women in the family. Highly visible street action drew people who were then interviewed regarding their views on wife beating. The resulting publicity led to the creation of Women’s House to aid victims of domestic abuse. Principles of action and egalitarian participation, developed through life histories, guided consciousness-raising regarding the sociological and historical roots of male violence in the home. The purpose was to empower the oppressed to come to understand and change their own oppressive realities. Oakley (1981) studied the effects of motherhood on women’s lives over an extended period of time through a series of interviews that focussed on “interactive self-disclosure,” a collaborative dialogue seeking for greater clarity. Carol Gilligan’s work on female moral development (1977, 1982) and the highly contradictory body of work on female achievement motivation (Horner, 1969; Sassen, 1980) serve to counter interpretations that view women as deviants from male-established norms. Such work asks, “How do male-based constructs need to be reformulated from the vantage point of female experience?”<sup>6</sup>

Gilligan’s work clarifies the distortion of Kohlberg’s androcentric conception of moral development which values autonomy at the expense of interrelatedness. Her research suggests that the female conception of a moral problem may come from conflicting responsibilities rather than from competing rights and that resolution requires contextual thinking rather than formal abstraction. For women, morality seems defined in terms of interpersonal responsibilities rather than individualistic rights. Gilligan’s findings challenge the assumed centrality of male experience in theories of development and expose the all-male samples underlying purportedly “universal theories.” Hence, her work is an oft-cited exemplar in feminist research.

Gray (1982) writes that Gilligan’s initial concern was the shakiness of construct validity based on hypothetical rather than real-life moral dilemmas. During the Viet Nam War, she intended to interview young men making draft-resistance choices, and she got an all-female sample quite by accident when the war ended (p. 52). Abortion had recently been legalized, and Gilligan soon recognized the moral

dilemma of whether to carry a child to full term as a real-life situation with great potential for expanding the methodology of moral development research beyond hypothetical situations.

Twenty-nine women, diverse in age, race, and social class, were referred by abortion and pregnancy counselling services and interviewed. Three of Kohlberg's standardized hypothetical moral dilemmas were administered during the second half of the interview. By allowing categories to arise out of the language of respondents, Gilligan discovered a central tension in women's lives between selfishness and responsibility to self as well as others. In a culture that on the one hand equates feminine goodness with self-sacrifice and on the other hand equates adulthood with separation, individuation, and detachment, women were caught in a classic "double bind."

By structuring the research to focus first on the contextual particularity of a pressing real-life moral dilemma, Gilligan discovered that respondents refused to formulate an ethics abstracted from contextual complications. Their response to the hypothetical dilemmas was, "The wrong questions are being asked," and they insisted on information regarding the lives of the characters. This led Gilligan to surmise that decontextualized hypothetical dilemmas deny the central female experience of contextualized interrelationship and, hence, create Kohlberg's "objective principles of justice" as a *research artifact*.

This is all very interesting as a critique of Kohlberg, but what corrective mechanisms did Gilligan use so that her interview data become scientific research rather than impressionistic journalism?

*Triangulation of methods* is apparent in the inclusion of both interview data and Kohlberg's standardized hypothetical moral dilemmas, but convergence seems to be sought rather than disconfirmation. Criteria for including/excluding data are not given, and there is no indication of a conscious search for counter-patterns. The triangulation of different data *sources* is not strong; especially at risk is the small (n=29) all-female characteristics of the sample. How can one argue for gender-specific patterns based on a single-sex sample and a gender-specific situation? The triangulation of different *theories* is strong. Gilligan worked with Kohlberg for several years. Her work is, in essence, a critique and revision of his theory-building. The theoretical vitality of what she is doing comes largely out of her strong grounding in Kohlberg's notably different theoretical constructs: the universal, invariant sequence claims, the hierarchical nature of his theory with its relegation of relational concerns to a second-class status, and the assumption that valid data can be evoked on the basis of standardized, hypothetical moral dilemmas.

*Construct validity* is premised on the convergence of Gilligan's review of psychological and literary sources with the research data and the comparison of Kohlberg's categories with categories arising out of the language of respondents. Some degree of self-reflexivity can be ascertained from the development of theoretical insights, but this is by no means systematized.

*Catalytic validity* undergoes an interesting development. As respondents began to examine their own thinking, a pattern developed whereby they moved from a conventional feminine construction of the moral problem (equating feminine goodness with self-sacrifice) to a recognition of the conflict between the dependence and

self-sacrifice of femininity and the choice and existential responsibility of adulthood. Hence, the research process provided an opportunity for respondents to grow through thoughtful assessment of their experiences. This seems to be an unexpected and relatively unnoted aspect of the research, however, and was in no way consciously invited through the research design. Also, no effort is made to triangulate this growth in self-understanding. This leaves the claims of growth wide open to both the limitations of self-reporting and the projection of the researcher's aspirations for respondents onto the data analysis.

*Face validity* is perhaps the most seriously lacking. The research design called for two interviews, approximately one year apart. Neither categories nor conclusions were recycled back through respondents. This would have been relatively easy, and the payoff in both construct and catalytic validity would likely have been worth the effort.

The intellectual power of Gilligan's work is such that concern about establishing the trustworthiness of her data is subsumed by the provocativeness of her theorizing. But issues of data trustworthiness concern her—one of her Ph.D. students worked on a coding system that allows reliable data aggregation across interviews in a sample selected to *refute* a sex differences hypothesis; another worked on self-constructed moral dilemmas that focus on the interaction between justice and caring in an effort to deepen construct validity; Gilligan moved into open-interviewing with adolescent females around self-identity and self-defined moral dilemmas. Additionally, Gilligan and her students work as a team to stress reflexivity.<sup>8</sup> As she and her students move from exploratory, hypothesis-generating work to theory construction and validation within a long-term, ongoing research program, validity issues grow increasingly important. That Gilligan is fully cognizant of this speaks hopefully for the continuing importance of her work.

#### *Neo-Marxist Critical Ethnography*

The overt ideological goal of neo-Marxist critical ethnography is to expose the contradictions and delusions of liberal democratic education in order to create less exploitative social and economic relations (Willis, 1977; Apple, 1980–81; Reynolds, 1980–81). The substantive task is the portrayal of the role of schooling in the reproduction of inequality in all of its content and specificity, its contradictions and complexities. The methodological task is the ethnographic revelation of participants' views of reality, where these views come from, and the social consequences of such views, all situated within a context of theory-building. The overriding goal, then, is to produce "an adequate theory of schooling in the context of cultural imperatives" (Ogbu, 1981, p. 9). The theory is to make clear "the order of structural transformation necessary to honor commitments to human rights and justice" (Pinar, 1981, p. 439).

Within this theoretically guided search for data, which is the dominant characteristic of critical ethnography, reality is held to be something more than negotiated accounts. Critical ethnographers hold that by limiting analysis to the actors' perceptions of their situations, non-Marxist ethnographies and phenomenological research reify interpretive procedures and reduce research to a collection of functionalist, subjective accounts that obscure the workings of false consciousness and ideological mystification (Foley, 1979). They argue that Marxism's profound scepticism of



both appearances and common sense produces a more valid analysis than does phenomenological research. Such scepticism, however, is tempered by an opposition to reductive forms of determinism as the central theoretical inadequacy of orthodox Marxism: the economic reduction of humanity to pawns in the great chessgame of capitalism (Apple, 1982; Giroux, 1981; Willis, 1977). Willis writes:

Capital requires it, therefore schools do it! Humans become dummies, dupes, zombies. . . . This will not do theoretically. It will certainly not do politically. Pessimism reigns supreme in this, the most spectacular of secular relations of predeterminism. (1977, p. 205)

The following examples illustrate how this research program frames its questions. Do progressive, liberal primary schools focus more on liberation than on social control (Sharp & Green, 1975; Apple, 1979b)? How do young working-class males deal with their entrapment in the lower rungs of the hierarchical work world (Willis, 1977)? How do working-class females deal with the school's efforts to prepare them for their primary roles as wife, mother, and reserve labor force (McRobbie, 1978)? Where do teachers' "common-sense" views of student differences come from and how do these views affect kids' life chances (Carlson, 1980)? How do students react to curricular offerings sanitized of any sense of struggle and oppression (McNeil, 1981)?

Paul Willis's *Learning to Labor: How Working Class Kids Get Working Class Jobs* (1977) is the standard work in the critical ethnography of schooling (Apple, 1979a). A three-year participant observation study of 12 "disaffected" male teenagers in a working-class British industrial area, it focusses on the transition from school to work in order to shed light on the willing acceptance of restricted work opportunities on the part of working-class youth. Using informal interviewing, regular and recorded group discussion, diaries, and participant observation in and out of school, Willis collected data throughout "the lads'" last two years of schooling and into the first six months of work. Parents, teachers, and work supervisors were included in the interviews. Participant observation included attending classes as a student and working alongside the lads at their jobs. The research design included comparative case studies selected to be similar in sex, patterns of friendship grouping, and likelihood of leaving school at age 16.

Theory guided the search for oppositional, counter-school group members as the main research sample used to substantiate the concept of working-class resistance to official authority. Theory guided the search for contradictions: that between teachers' expressed goal of enabling working-class students to transcend their class-limited lives versus teachers' efforts to stymie the "self-disqualification" of disaffected students from the meritocratic merryground (p. 148); that between the lads' "felt sense of cultural election" as they moved into the adult world of work and money versus the too-late recognition of the determinants that settled a major life decision to their disadvantage (p. 107). Theory guided the "plunge beneath the surface of ethnography in[to] a more interpretive mode" (p. 119) to transcend the limitations of the "ethnography of visible forms" (p. 121) which is as likely to conceal as reveal cultural dynamics. Theory guided the view of humans as active appropriators who reproduce existing structures of inequality only through struggle, contestation, and partial penetration: "Just because there are what we call structural and economic determinants, it does not mean that people will unproblematically obey

them” (p. 171). Theory guided the interpretation that while the cultural freedoms of capitalism are essentially used for self-damnation, permanent struggle is the deeper reality.

Within research so theoretically top-heavy, what self-corrective mechanisms did Willis use?

*Triangulation of methods* is strong, especially the combination of interviewing and participant observation. The triangulation of different data *sources* is also quite strong. The comparative case studies are built into the research design, and the search for counter-patterns as well as convergences is documented. The wide array of subjects observed and interviewed over the course of this extended three-year study is notable. The triangulation of different *theories* is present in that Willis’s theoretical advances are premised on reformulations of both the liberal theory of schooling with its espousal of equal opportunity through meritocracy and the over-determinism of orthodox Marxism.

*Construct validity* is strengthened by collecting data at work and at home as well as at school. Especially powerful in establishing the meaninglessness of working-class jobs is the interview data with fathers and shopfloor supervisors. But there is no systematic self-reflexivity. Given the centrality of theory, it seems of paramount importance to document how researcher perspectives were altered by the logic of the data. With no account of this, one is left viewing the role of theory as nondialectical, unidirectional, an *a priori* imposition that subsumes counter-patterns.

*Catalytic validity* comes through in the following interview transcript:

Something should have been done with us, I mean there was so much talent there that it was all fuckin’ wasted. . . . We’ve just been thrust into society too soon, we’ve been brought up to be too selfish . . . we couldn’t care less, you see on the tele so many people fuckin’ affluent, you just want to try and do that, make it, get money, you don’t care about others, the working class. (pp. 195–198)

But this was in no way an intended aspect of the research and the lads’ continued sense of cultural election in the face of meaningless work comes through clearly, indicating that the catalytic validity was minimal.

*Face validity* was consciously built into the research design, but only at the end. Willis brought the lads to the university at the conclusion of the research to discuss how they saw his role as researcher and what the “results” of the research meant to them. Marxism has long been infamous for its alienating jargon. The methodological appendix makes clear that the lads had no inkling of what Willis was getting at in his text: “The bits about us were simple enough. . . . It’s the bits in between. . . . Well, I started to read it . . . then I just packed it in” (p. 195).

Overall, this is a stellar exemplar of theoretically guided ethnography. The extended time spent in the field using a wide variety of methods and the invitation of disconfirmation through the use of comparative case studies are its methodological strengths. Notable weaknesses are twofold. One is the lack of systematic self-reflexivity; the other is the lack of attention to catalytic validity. Regarding the latter, while Willis acknowledges the general responsibility of the researcher to the researched, he views it in terms of enlightening those with the cultural authority to redirect policy rather than helping respondents gain understanding of and control

over their own lives: "The progressive use and mobilization of the research on a wider political and pedagogic place must be the main form of return and repayment [to the researched]" (p. 221). There is a failure to use the research process itself to empower the researched.

### *Freirian "Empowering" Research*

The last of the counter-research programs rooted in the search for a science "derived from the radical needs of the oppressed" (Rose, 1979, p. 280) is modelled after Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1973). The openly ideological goal is to blur the distinctions between research, learning, and action by providing conditions under which participants' self-determination is enhanced in the struggle toward social justice (Hall, 1975, p. 30; Heron, 1981, p. 35). The substantive task is to delineate collective identification of and solutions to local problems in ways that link this process to larger structural issues (Hall, 1981). The methodological task is to proceed in a reciprocal, dialogic manner, empowering subjects by turning them into co-researchers. Ideally, such research involves participants in the planning, execution, and dissemination of social research (Rowan, 1981, p. 97).

Historically, this research program is a descendent of Lewin's action research. But Lewin's goal was self-management within a society assumed to operate from a consensual value base (Sanford, 1981, p. 178), whereas Freirian research focusses on promoting liberation and growth within a society assumed to be class divided and, hence, inequitable. Two concepts characterize this body of research.

The first is the effort to democratize knowledge and power through the research process (Hall, 1981). Freire's concept of cultural imposition becomes a critique of methods which impose a substantive focus and alienating methods on research subjects. Such a "cult of expertise" is part of the unequal relationships inherent in an oppressive social order. Mainstream researchers "live patronizingly in a delusion of relevance" (Maruyama, 1974). The researcher's role as a privileged possessor of expert knowledge must be reconceptualized as that of a catalyst who works with local participants to understand and solve local problems. The researched become as important as the researcher in formulating the problem, discussing solutions, and interpreting findings (Hall, 1975).

The second concept characterizing Freirian research is designed to have "an arousal effect," to reorient participants' perceptions of issues in ways that influence subsequent attitudes and behaviors (Brown & Tandom, 1978). The "vivification" of "ideas that open beyond themselves" (Torbert, 1981, p. 148) can energize the desire to do things differently *provided the issues are of central importance to the participants*. Self-determination, hence, requires both the demystification of ideologies that distort dominant and oppressive social relationships and the empowerment of the oppressed so that they can take charge of improving their own situations.

Much of the empirical work within this research program is conducted with adult populations in Third World countries. Literacy work is where Freire began to formulate his pedagogical ideas. Others have used local participant-conducted surveys to guide development priorities in Africa (Swantz, 1975); to train inmates to study violence (Maruyama, 1969); to assist Norwegian bank employees to assess the effects of the installation of computer terminals (Elden, 1979); and to help impoverished farmers in India improve local agricultural practices (Tandom, 1981).

While there are no oft-cited exemplars in this research program, Swantz's work

(1981) is typical. Working through the University of Norway and the government of Tanzania, Swantz's team conducted a four-year participatory research project to study the process of change in rural villages. Researchers lived in the village and took part in daily activities in order to become familiar with the context of acute problems. The researchers' role was to probe and stimulate the villagers' formulation and to search for solutions to their perceived problems. Theory was used dialectically to problematize the contradictions underlying daily difficulties so that policies and strategies could be formulated that would create long-term solutions (p. 286).

As well as day-to-day informal participant observation, various seminars involving all adult villagers were taped and reports were distributed to all participants (although no mention was made of how literacy rates affected this); villagers were involved in the design of surveys; task groups worked on such projects as collecting local music and storytelling; villagers helped design and conduct training programs for agricultural, veterinary, and health care officers. All phases of the research were characterized by a continuing mutual feedback process.

The self-corrective mechanisms were:

*Triangulation of methods* is strong: extensive time in the field included participant observation, grounded surveys, and interviews. *Data sources* were extremely varied at both the local and national level. *Theory* triangulation is especially strong. In arriving at a sense of development that reflected villager needs and aspirations, theoretical constructs were triangulated from four sources: (1) concrete case material and the incorporation of the villagers' own thinking on issues; (2) the need for guidelines for national development policies; (3) the commitment to derive theory in ways that would directly benefit the villagers' own micro-level development process; and (4) *a priori*, loosely neo-Marxist theoretical constructs such as sexism and the contradictions inherent in social stratification. What is noteworthy in this process is how concrete situations influenced theory-building and proceeded in a manner that fostered the participants' awareness of their own resources and their right to influence decisions concerning themselves.

*Construct validity* was grounded in the dialectic between *a priori* theory, the villagers' own ways of thinking, and the researchers' long-term involvement in the productive work of the village.

*Catalytic validity* was consciously built into the research design and can be detected in the activism of pastoral women over the course of the research, particularly in their growing insistence that they be given literacy skills (p. 286), and the changed behavior of the pastoralists as a group reflected in their insistence on their right to be part of local decision-making (p. 291).

*Face validity* permeated the research process in both systematic and informal ways. Analytical categories and emerging conclusions were continually recycled back through the respondents. As this was a report of research in progress, it remains to be seen what form the final report will take and whether there will be an effort to assess validity through participant reaction to the results of the research.

A reading of Swantz's earlier work (1975) recommends caution in celebrating the empowering dimensions of participatory research. The gap between intent and practice is noted, but subtle coercion and external imposition permeate her efforts to get villagers to perform a self-study of local resources. Her later work seems more

authentically participatory, and one can surmise that important lessons were learned regarding the involvement of participants as co-researchers.

Given this caveat, the strengths of Swantz's research regarding validity are the continuous feedback system and the dialectical development of theory which strengthen construct validity and the changed behavior of villagers which bespeaks the high quality of the study's face and catalytic validity. Its central weakness is the lack of systematized self-reflexivity, but, given the dialectical approach to theory construction, such a lack is by no means as critical in this research program as it is in the theory-laden empirical work of critical ethnography. Additionally, this was a team effort so one can assume a degree of reflexivity, although Reason and Rowan warn against "consensus collusion" (1981, p. 244).

### **Beyond Predisposition**

*The structures and procedures of [emancipatory] research are open to many questions and uncertainties; but it seems that social scientists concerned with the analysis of the societally shaped consciousness and subjectivity of various groups should engage in it experimentally, that is, with an open mind. Further exploration of the theoretical and methodological possibilities . . . should be . . . on the agenda.*

*Marlis Krueger (1981)*

These case studies of the treatment of validity in openly ideological research were chosen both for their typicality and in the case of Gilligan and Willis for their exemplary status. By looking at how the best examples of a research program deal with establishing data credibility, potential strengths and troublesome weaknesses become most evident. While by no means exhaustive, the following issues seem of pressing importance for openly ideological researchers.

#### *Is the Method the Message?*

The effort to create an emancipatory social science must confront the need for methods that are at least nonalienating, at best empowering. The classic quandry of ends over means can be seen most starkly in comparing the role of the researcher in Freirian and neo-Marxist research. The former works intentionally at thwarting the cult of expertise that has fostered what Reinharz terms the "rape model" of research: career advancement of social scientists built on alienating and exploitative methods (1979, p. 95). Within Freirian research, the inquiry process itself is committed to enhancing the personal power of participants. The neo-Marxist researcher, in contrast, is seen as "interpreter of the world," exposé of false consciousness (Reynolds, 1980-81, p. 87).

This nondialectical perception of the role of the researcher confounds the intent to demystify the world for the dispossessed. Respondents become objects, targets of research, rather than subjects who have been empowered to understand and change their situations. While there is at least some needed revision of the tendency to dismiss resistance to Marxist interpretations as "false consciousness" (Apple, 1980-81, p. 81; Fay, 1977), empirical and theoretical insights continue to be aimed at other intellectuals. Building a more just social order becomes a matter of "getting more people to talk the way they do" (Browning, 1983, p. 55). Only those with advanced

education have a shot at piercing through the theory and the jargon and arriving at a greater understanding of social forces.

Neo-Marxist empirical inquiry is too often characterized by an attitude captured in the words of one research team: "We would not expect the teachers interviewed to either agree with or necessarily understand the inferences which were made from their responses" (Bullough, Goldstein & Holt, 1982, p. 133). Given the all-male research team and the largely female teacher subjects, one could make much of the gender politics involved in such a statement. What are at issue here, however, are the implications of such a stance for the purposes of emancipatory theory-building.<sup>9</sup> And what becomes apparent is that the neo-Marxist agenda for equalizing social power is stymied by tendencies to elitism and alienation engendered by its own research methods.

In contrast, participatory research and, increasingly, feminist research stress the use of the research process to empower participants through emphasis on both face and catalytic validity. Yet neo-Marxist theory makes it clear that establishing validity in the eyes of respondents is not enough to make data credible. Neo-Marxist assumptions regarding false consciousness and ideological mystification argue cogently that phenomenological, astructural, ahistorical perspectives stymie the development of emancipatory social theory. Given the reciprocally confirming nature of hegemony, analysis should not be limited to the actors' perceptions of their situation. Our common-sense ways of looking at the world are permeated with meanings that sustain our powerlessness. There are, hence, limits on the degree to which "member checks" (Guba & Lincoln, 1981) can help establish data validity. Perhaps, like reliability within positivism, building catalytic and face validity into our research designs is a necessary but not sufficient technique for establishing data credibility.

### *Must We Choose Between Conceptual Vigor and Methodological Rigor?*

I am not the first to note that leftists are better at criticizing existent research than at creating an empirically informed Marxism (Karabel & Halsey, 1977, p. 55; Dickens, 1983, p. 155). But if the ultimate goal of our work is transformative social praxis, theory is needed which explains lived experience. Such theory can only evolve through empirical grounding. Because of the lack of self-reflexivity in neo-Marxist empirical work, there is no way of assessing the degree to which this happens. On the contrary, one is left with the impression that the research conducted provides empirical specificities for more general, *a priori* theories.

Critical ethnography is an important perspective in the development of a human science that contributes to social change. But praxis is a two-way street produced in the interaction between theory and practice. While there may indeed be no theory-independent facts (Hesse, 1980, p. 172), moving beyond predisposition requires systematizing procedures for minimizing and/or understanding the ways that the investigator's values enter into research. Empirical validation requires a critical stance regarding the inadequacies of our pet theories and an openness to counter-interpretations. In cautioning that conceptual validity precedes empirical accuracy, Michael Apple (1980-81) continues to not see the validity problems inherent in the largely undialectical role that theory plays in critical ethnography. Empirical evidence must begin to be viewed as a mediator for constant self- and theoretical interrogation if neo-Marxist theory is to prove any more useful in the struggle against privilege than has bourgeois liberalism.

Mitroff and Kilman (1978) argue that what makes theory provocative is how *interesting* it is, now how *true* it is. Truth becomes indeterminant at the theoretical level; theory exists precisely because of the need to take credible leaps into the unknown. But the issue is not theoretical vigor versus methodological rigor. The vitality of postpositivist research programs necessitates the development of credibility checks that can be built into the design of openly ideological (and phenomenologically based) research. Both our theory and our empirical work will be the better for the increased attention to the trustworthiness of our data.

I grant that few appropriate mechanisms exist. This is new territory. Though unassailable answers to questions of rigor are the illusion of naïve empiricists, making our data and analyses as public and as credible as possible is essential. The present turmoil in the human sciences creates the freedom to construct new designs based on alternative tenets and epistemological commitments. As Polkinghorne notes:

What is needed most is for practitioners to experiment with the new designs and to submit their attempts and results to examination by other participants in the debate. The new historians of science have made it clear that methodological questions are decided in the practice of research by those committed to developing the best possible answers to their questions, not by armchair philosophers of research. (1983, p. xi)

The task is to get on with it.

*What Minimal Standards Might We Begin to Move Toward?*

What I have found over and over again in the methodological literature of openly value-based research is a fuzziness on the need for data credibility checks. Reason and Rowan argue for the researcher's self-actualization through engagement in personal and interpersonal development (1981, p. 246). Lacey (1977) and Rose (1979, p. 14) argue that an appeal to the reader's own experiences is at the base of perceptions of truth in research. Sharp and Green (1975, p. 228), Willis (1977), and Mies (1984) argue that the validity of emancipatory empirical work can be judged by its effects on social policy. What rises to the fore in this literature is that researchers recast the issue as the failure of mainstream research in its insistence upon neutrality and scientific objectivity. But to recognize the pervasiveness of ideology in the human sciences and to acknowledge personal bias are not sufficient to foster a body of empirical work suitable for our theory-building. Haphazard considerations of the need for trustworthy data are not enough if openly ideological research is to be accepted as data rather than as metaphor by those who do not share its value premises.

Whether we can do research that appears valid from multiple points of view or whether Heron is correct that truth in research is a function of shared values (1981, p. 33) is presently a moot issue. Given the primitive state of validity issues within openly value-based research (Feinberg, 1983; Reason & Rowan, 1981; White, 1973; Dickens, 1983, p. 151; Moon, 1983, p. 171), we need to recognize that the "spectre of relativism" may be our inevitable companion as we reshape science and move away from its positivist incarnation (White, 1973, p. 170). We also need to recognize Lee Cronbach's point that "to call for value-free standards of validity is a contradiction in terms, a nostalgic longing for a world that never was" (1980, p. 105).

By arguing for a more systematic approach to triangulation and reflexivity, a new emphasis for face validity, and inclusion of the new concern of catalytic validity, I stand opposed to those who hold that empirical accountability is either

impossible to achieve or able to be side-stepped in new paradigm research. At minimum, I argue that we must build the following into our research designs:

- triangulation of *methods*, *data sources*, and *theories*
- reflexive subjectivity (some documentation of how the researcher's assumptions have been affected by the logic of the data)
- face validity (established by recycling categories, emerging analysis, and conclusions back through at least a subsample of respondents)
- catalytic validity (some documentation that the research process has led to insight and, ideally, activism on the part of the respondents)

## Conclusion

As the shakiness of validity within the positivist paradigm and the pervasiveness of ideology within the human sciences are increasingly acknowledged (Fay, 1975; Bernstein, 1976; Mishler, 1979; Nowotny & Rose, 1979; Hesse, 1980), we see that what is at first impression the "hard place" of validity coefficients and multitrait-multimethod matrices is, in fact, a soft spot. The "rock" is not the unassailable validity of positivist research findings but rather the need to establish the trustworthiness of data which are "qualitative, fleeting, and, at times, frankly impressionistic" (Reason, 1981, p. 185). For new paradigm researchers, the task becomes the confrontation of issues of empirical accountability in our methodological formulations, the need to offer grounds for accepting a researcher's description and analysis, and the search for novel, *workable* ways of gathering validity data.

Ignoring data credibility within openly value-based research programs will not improve the chances for the increased legitimacy of the knowledge they produce. Agreed-upon procedures are needed to make empirical decision-making public and, hence, subject to criticism. Most importantly, if we fail to develop these procedures, we will fail to protect our work from our own passions, and our theory-building will suffer.

Reason and Rowan's call for "a new rigor of softness" (1981, p. 490), a "validity of knowledge in process" (p. 250), an "objective subjectivity" (p. xiii) may be the best that we can do. But let us begin to move toward that.

## Notes

1. I use "ideology" in the expanded neo-Marxist sense of including the need to explore the social genesis, limitations, and transformative possibilities of points of view. This notion is opposed to orthodox Marxist usage which sees ideology as a distortion of reality, protective of existing power arrangements.

Apple's recent formulation of ideology reflects the revised neo-Marxist usage of the term based on Gramsci and Althusser. Gramsci theorizes that ideology comes in progressive as well as oppressive forms and Althusser distinguishes between practical and theoretical ideologies. The former posits ideology as the material and common-sense aspects of daily life rather than merely ideas. People *inhabit* ideologies which speak to both determinant and creative/autonomous qualities of culture (Apple, 1982, p. 112. See also Wexler, 1982; Giroux, 1983).

I am aware of the argument that, for analytic usefulness, the term must be bounded. Barrett (1980), for example, argues both against an "unacceptably expansionist definition of ideology" (p. 253) and for a recognition that the concept is inadequately theorized in both



Marxist and feminist theory (p. 84). While thoroughly agreeing with the latter, I would argue against the former if Marxism and feminism themselves are to be viewed as the social constructions that they inherently are. To do otherwise is to become dogmatic, thereby crippling the thrust toward a critical social theory.

2. While it is tempting to use the phrase "openly ideological research paradigms," I agree with Guba and Lincoln that *paradigm* should be reserved for "axiomatic systems characterized essentially by their differing sets of assumptions about the phenomena into which they are designed to inquire" (1981). Neo-Marxism with its theory-generated search for data and its assumptions of a singular material reality of dominance and oppression and the historical inevitability of a more just social order (Ullrich calls this the "doctrine of eventual salvation" [1979, p. 132]) qualifies it as an inquiry paradigm. But Freirian research, although grounded in a dialectical, loose neo-Marxism, shares the assumptions of the naturalistic, interpretive paradigm (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). And feminist research operates out of both the conventional and naturalistic paradigms. Additionally, with the development of Marxist-feminist theory, there is a growing body of feminist empirical work that shares the assumptions of the inquiry paradigm of neo-Marxism (e.g., McRobbie, 1978; Sacks, 1984).

3. In an appendix to his *Methodology for the Human Sciences* (1983), Polkinghorne traces the history of the term "human science." He argues that "behavioral sciences" retain the spectre of behaviorism and the prohibition against consciousness as a part of scientific study. "Social science" carries connotations of natural science in its nomothetic or law-seeking mode of inquiry. "Human science," he argues, is more inclusive, using multiple systems of inquiry, "a science which approaches questions about the human realm with an openness to its special characteristics and a willingness to let the questions inform which methods are appropriate" (p. 289).

4. Exceptions to this lack of attention to the methodological implications of the postpostivist era are: Guba and Lincoln, 1981; Reason and Rowan, 1981; Comstock, 1982; Reinhartz, 1983; Polkinghorne, 1983; Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

5. Brofenbrenner originally recast the metaphor in terms of rigor vs. relevance (quoted in Guba, 1980, p. 13).

6. An encouraging example of the impact of feminist criticism on more mainstream behavioral researchers is David McClellan's *Power: The Inner Experience* (Irving Press, 1975). Unlike his earlier work on achievement motivation, McClellan looked at both sexes and discovered that power works differently for men and women: "Power motivation apparently helps women develop into higher stages of maturity, just as it hinders men" (p. 96).

A far less encouraging example is Elizabeth Dodson Gray's discussion of Kohlberg's recent *The Philosophy of Moral Development* (Harper & Row, 1981), with its "Six Universal Stages." Gilligan's work is consigned to one paragraph and dismissed: "The gender implications of her work are never acknowledged, and the limitations they imply for the 'universal stages' are never even raised! . . . How long will male scholars in patriarchy . . . refuse to acknowledge the relativity of their own gender standing point? How long can they ignore the sociology of their own knowledge?" (Gray, 1982, p. 56).

7. For expanded critiques of Gilligan, see *Social Research*, 50(3), 1983, entire issue.

8. Talk delivered by Carol Gilligan at the American Educational Researchers' Association Special Interest Group/Research on Women in Education, mid-year conference, Philadelphia, November, 1982.

9. I explore the methodological implications of critical theory, especially the need to create research designs that empower the researched, in Lather (1986).

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