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Academics and Student Supervision: Apprenticeship or Exploitation ?

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Social scientists have too often trained their powers of observation narrowly and neglected to study critically either the work of fellow academics in areas of speciality other than their own or the social structures that affect the quality and nature of academic work. In addition the moral and ethical aspects of social research have commonly been ignored, with the cry of 'value-free' research hiding social situations and research that are based on the most value laden power relationships. It is in order to correct this bias that I wish to draw attention to the implications of a practice that appears to be current within some sections of social science in Australia.

The issue on which I wish to focus is the practice among academics of not adequately attributing credit to students in publications where the bulk of the research has been carried out by students. It appears that Australian social scientists have begun to adopt a practice that has become the centre of concern in all areas of academia in the U.S.,[1] and to a lesser extent in the sciences here in Australia.[2] This is the practice whereby the supervisor of a thesis is named as 'senior author' (or even sole or co-author) upon publication of part or all of the research carried out as the thesis research of a student supervised by the academic. This practice has, I believe, serious implications: if the research reported in the thesis was *not* the sole and independent research of the student then it should never have been submitted as a thesis which is supposed to re-

present a student's sole and independent work. If the latter is the case, then academics appear to be gaining undue credit for what is often merely editorial work in preparing an article for publication and one would expect such editorial work to be acknowledged in the more usual manner of a footnote of thanks by the student who actually carried out the research. To be named as author or senior author of a piece of research that has already appeared under the sole authorship of a student is quite misleading. However, many academics, rather than seeing student thesis supervision as a teaching obligation, appear to believe that their own name is better known and should appear first, or that the student is undergoing an 'apprenticeship' and that it is the academic's right to be 'recompensed' in this manner. It is my contention that this procedure is one in which there is exploitation of the student's position and work, and as this appears to be a growing practice, I believe that the academic community must turn its attention to its consequences and implications. It is to this end that this article is written.

> At this point in the original manuscript the author cited several examples of the type of case which he believed should be examined in the light of his concern about this practice. However, this section has been deleted because our request to one of the writers mentioned to participate in the discussion met with the threat of legal action.   —Ed.

It is to be hoped that before the Australian situation begins to approximate the overseas situation, the question of academic morality and ethics with regard to the student/teacher role will become a major focus of attention. The question of ethics not only focuses on the protection of students' work from practices which permit its use by staff, but also on situations in which students become cheap labour for academics' own research projects. This situation has become quite common in the U.S. where many Australian behavioural scientists are trained and from where many Australian university departments are recruiting staff. With the increase in the U.S.-influenced behavioural orientation of much of social science in Australian universities, we might expect an increase in the level of post-graduate (and honours) student exploitation. Hagstrom (1965: 134) has empirically demonstrated

that in the U.S., disciplines with a behavioural emphasis are closest of the social sciences to the "hard" sciences in the exploitation of students.

There are several consequences of permitting a situation to develop where students become badly-paid research assistants to academics. First of all, students are placed in compromising situations, in that questioning the theoretical assumptions and significance of a senior academic's research interest can be a dangerous operation. This has serious consequences for the critical evaluation of schools of thought and programs of research.[3] For example, we might note the role played by students in the celebrated "J phenomenon affair" where a false scientific theory became temporarily entrenched in a university partly through enmeshing students in its study.[4]

This growing tradition of having students working on an academic's own research interests also has other effects. Those who take University Statutes seriously and work in an "independent" manner on projects of their own creation, developing their own theoretical and research interests, are at a serious disadvantage *vis à vis* those students who work under or with an academic on the academic's own project. The latter students typically have the resources, expertise and equipment that either have already been assembled by the staff member (and his previous students) or are procured with little trouble through the influence and personal interest of the staff member concerned. Indeed, far from the situation of universities promoting free and independent enquiry among students, it is certainly not rare to find staff members who are only interested in supervising (or encouraging) students if the students can contribute to the staff members' pet projects or are prepared to work within the staff members' theoretical framework and research orientations. While many students feel the exploitation that arises in academia (Hagstrom, 1965: 134), they often adopt their mentors' view of this as a necessary "price" for progress into academia, and presumably look forward to the time when they too can assist their own professional advancement through the exploitation of their own students. Bernal, in his classic study of **The Social Function of Science,** (1939), which discusses much that is relevant both to "hard" science and social science, devotes a whole section to "The Problem of Getting On":

"There are, of course, in this field, as in all others time-honoured methods; one of them is to pick your chief wisely and make yourself agreeable to him. It does not follow that the best scientists are the best research directors; some of them are so wrapped up in their own work that they see their students for an hour or so once a year; others are so interested in their students that they are apt to forget that they have not done all the work themselves. It is always a distressing experience for a young man to find that age and genuine eminence are not guarantees against the temptation to enjoy credit for what one has not done. Perhaps the most convenient chiefs are those amiable scoundrels who establish a kind of symbiosis with their research workers, choose good ones with care, see that they are well supplied with apparatus, attach their own names to all their papers, and when at last they are found out, generally manage through their numerous connections to promote their protege into a good position. Independence of spirit is not at a premium in the scientific world. The young research worker who remarked, when asked his views on scientific collaboration by an eminent professor at a selection committee, that he did not intend to be anybody's lackey, did not get the post, and it was years before his undoubted gifts and character began to win him any recognition, while far less able but more pliable contemporaries were already sitting in professorial chairs." (84).

Other areas of ethical concern relating to the relationship of academics to the work produced by students include the advantages gained by staff members who have access to the unpublished work (essays and theses) of students. This situation often brings to the notice of the staff member ideas and data to which he might not otherwise have access or have his attention drawn, and is a similar situation to the opportunity given to journal referees and editors to benefit from their access to as yet unpublished materials (see Glass, 1965). The teacher additionally has the opportunity to *commission* his students to do work in certain areas in which he is interested. Even where academics do not do this with unethical intent, they are still in a position to use information presented to them by their students. Glass sees the problem here not so much in outright plagiarism (which of course occurs[5]) but rather in the "inadvertent" gains which accrue to those in power in academia:

"What is far more dangerous, I believe, because it is far more insidious and widespread, is the inevitable subconscious germination in the mind of any referee of the ideas he has obtained from the unpublished work of another person. If we are frank with ourselves, none of us can really state where most of the seminal ideas that lead us to a particular theory or line of investigation have been derived." (1257).[6]

In the light of these generally undiscussed and unacknowledged realities of academic life, one cannot but view with derision the stance of those academics who, while relying on student work to help them in their own research, oppose group learning and assessment situations, promote individual competition among their students, and adopt a highly repressive attitude towards students gaining outside help with their work, which they call "cheating".

While we cannot hope to "solve" the ethical problems involved in the supervision of student research by academics, we can ask that these situations be given much more scrutiny than at present, in order that students realise *their* academic rights and the staff their moral responsibilities. An immediate practical solution to one situation may be to have post-graduate and honours students work, not under one academic supervisor who might unduly influence and exploit the student's research interests, but supervised by a committee of say three academics, chosen by the student to assist him in developing his own research interests.[7] This committee could also act as an examining committee and so avoid the present horrendous and morally indefensible situation where a student's research is sometimes tailored to the wishes, opinions and even demands of his or her supervisor, and is then rejected by other academics appointed as examiners. In this situation, the student is required to pay the consequences of ill-informed supervision.[8]

However, given the realities of academic professionalism and power-relationships within Australian universities, it is unlikely that the much-needed scrutiny of research and learning structures will eventuate, particularly when codes of ethics produced by the various professional associations of academic disciplines, contain such indefensible clauses as:

"Should a member have cause to disagree with a colleague on professional issues he must nevertheless refrain from criticising him in public in a manner which casts doubt on his professional competence."[9]

Such codes would appear to be more designed to protect the association and its members from scandal and exposure than to force academics and their professional organisations to use their expertise for the improvement of society and academia. The two main principles relating to writing and publishing in the above-cited code of ethics state:

"A member must not publish as his own work that which is not essentially his, or to which he has not made a significant contribution

A member must not try to prevent the publication of a critical review of his work."[9]

In not considering such issues as procedures for protecting students being supervised by academics, these codes are, I believe, seriously deficient. Some professional codes of ethics do treat the matter in more detail. For example, in the U.S. where the potentially exploitable position of students is being increasingly recognized, such codes as that of the American Psychological Association's **Ethical Standards of Psychologists** at least deals with the *degree* of credit to be assigned in the authorship of research. Their code states that "credit is assigned to those who have contributed to a publication, in proportion to their contribution, and only to these" (Spiegel and Keith-Spiegel, 1970: 738). However, in a study of U.S. academic behaviour with relation to this code of assigning publication credit, there was found to be a fairly strong feeling among American psychologists that university staff members should not use their positions of influence *vis à vis* their students, in order to gain senior authorship or even co-authorship for research predominantly carried out by students (Spiegel and Keith-Spiegel, 1970: 741). This was particularly the case with regard to work carried out as part of a dissertation where it was felt that a student was supposed to be carrying out his own original research and that guidance of the student throughout the project is actually a teaching obligation on the part of the staff member.

If we in Australia are to cope with the moral issues on which this paper has focused, there must be intense and continual discussion of these matters within the pages of journals such as this one and within class rooms in which the individual acts of staff and students are subjected to the same

deep scrutiny as are the more acceptable social phenomena studied by social scientists.

FOOTNOTES

I am indebted to Ann Baker, Carol Clementi, Bob Connell and Clyde Manwell for their assistance in the preparation of this article, and to Trudi Hislop for her efficient typing of its many drafts.
1. See Hagstrom, (1965, esp. "Exploitation of Students": 133 ff.); and Wolfe (1969: esp. 3-4).
2. See, for example, the critical reference made about the unacknowledged primary role of students of Adelaide University in many research publications (On Dit, October 22, 1971: 221).
3. On this see Kuhn, (1962) and Blissett, (1972).
4. Thus the celebrated J. G. Crowther in his Fifty Years with Science (1970) has written of the effects of the acceptance of the validity of the "J-phenomenon" by Barkla, head of Department of Physics at Edinburgh:
    His research students had to discover facts about the non-existent J-phenomenon, which he [Barkla] thought he had discovered many years ago. I was fascinated by . . . wonderful Scottish metaphysical disquisitions on the possible meaning of observations and measurements. The upshot was that while nothing definite had been found, there was certainly something there. A year or so later I would meet the same men, who in the meantime had obtained their Ph.D.s; their language about the J-phenomenon was now unprintable. (127).
5. Very occasionally one has plagiarism of lecturer's work by students. For a celebrated example of this, see the Foreword to R. W. M. Dias and G. B. J. Hughes' text Jurisprudence (1957) which explains that the joint authorship is a compromise to solve an obviously difficult situation where Hughes had used notes he took as a student while attending Dias' lectures to write the first edition of this text which came out under Hughes' sole authorship. Significantly, the Third Edition (1970) has now appeared under the sole authorship of Dias. I am indebted to David Plant for drawing my attention to this case.
6. Merton, in his "The Ambivalence of Scientists", (1963: 91 ff) devotes a whole section to what he calls "Cryptomnesia" or "unconscious Plagiary".
7. While my concern in this study has been to focus mainly on the relationship of academic staff to their senior and post-graduate students, it should not be forgotten that there are other serious issues of ethical responsibility with regard to undergraduate students. For example, it should at least be mentioned here that serious reservations may be expressed about the social situation that permits (through subtle and not-so-subtle pressure) academics to study students and other members of society in a way, and with resources, that would never allow the reverse to occur, that is, for the researched to study the researcher.

For two discussions of this moral problem see Horrobin (1969: esp. 139-140), and Nicolaus, (1969).
8. In this there are parallels to what occurs in undergraduate courses when students are subjected to bad teaching. See my "Teaching Sociology", (1972: 114).
9. Australian Psychological Society (1970).

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Role Ambiguity of Graduate Students: Research Colleague or General Factotum

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The focus of this paper is on negative considerations regarding student involvement in team research. It may be that the advantages for graduate students in this type of research are more apparent than real. The problem of role ambiguity can be exacerbated by ambivalent attitudes of professors toward students as research colleagues (Borg and Gall, 1971: 39-40) and women graduate students face "the additional hurdle of their sex" (Altbach, 1970).

An examination of the Education Index for the last five years reveals that there is little discussion of the role of graduate students in educational research. A selection of methodology texts written in the last decade similarly shows little concern with the research contribution of graduate students in liaison with faculty members.

However, Borg and Gall have pointed out the many advantages that accrue to graduate students when they are invited by faculty members to do field research. These advantages include: (1) financial support, (2) opportunities to take part in a larger, sophisticated study of complex design, and (3)

ing flexible public transport (such as computer-operated mini-buses), underground freeways, increased use of electronic communication in preference to trips, closed cycle eco-systems, better access to outdoor recreation and open space, and reducing perception of overload by the creation of visual beauty.

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HOW SHOULD SOCIAL SCIENTISTS STUDY VALUES?

The social-psychological approach illustrated by N. T. Feather and G. Wasyluk in their investigation, "Subjective Assimilation Among Ukrainian Migrants: Value Similarity and Parent-Child Differences" (1973) leaves much to be desired both theoretically and methodologically. My first major reservation about the research is that there is a generally uncritical acceptance of the dated theoretical, and narrowly behavioural, approach to the study of values and value "systems" as developed by Rokeach. One must question the practice of measuring "values" simply by ranking Australians on the rather ambiguous and arbitrary 36 value names selected by Rokeach for use in the United States. One might also question any research procedure that forces subjects into selecting among only these "given" values. Given the opportunity, subjects might well identify for themselves quite different values that they maintain relate more appropriately to their lives. Not to deal with these other values is to deny social reality and prefer data that fit nicely into the **social scientist's** accepted modes and techniques of analysis.

In carrying out Rokeach type value research, social psychologists should no longer ignore the growing body of research on ideology and social action. Connell and Goot (1972-3), for example, have set out a trenchant critique of value research that relies on the "forced choice" questionnaires. Their suggestions for an alternative and potentially more fruitful approach (1972-3: 185ff) support the above contention that to draw on available research into ideology will assist social science break through the rather sterile behavioural and descriptive (rather than **explanatory**) studies that have characterised much of U.S.-derived social psychological "value" research.

Methodologically one might query the cross-cultural validity and reliability of the value terminology used by Feather and Wasyluk, particularly when Rokeach's terms are presented to people whose mother-tongue is not English, when the terms are fairly ambiguous even in English, and given that any explanation of these terms had to be made by the Ukrainian migrants' children against whose values the parents' values were to be compared! Connell (1972) has made an empirical examination of the specific biases introduced when children are used to administer questionnaires to their parents in a situation where value differences between the two generations are to be examined. His main critique centres on the fact that typically (and this is the case with the Feather and Wasyluk study) the response rate among parents is relatively low and this self selection biases the sample **towards** high generational value correspondence. Connell observes that

"It is not hard to see that with this method, the students who did get their parents to do the job would generally be those who had a closer relationship with them, and hence quite probably those who shared their opinions most closely" (326).

In addition, Connell points out that to concentrate (as Feather and Wasyluk have) on the average values between generations, without also explicitly comparing this to the within-family "pair" correspondence, considerably lessens the value and theoretical usefulness of the study.

Since the authors admit (30) that many extraneous factors such as the educational level of the migrants' children, could easily be producing the relationships found, it is strange that such controls were not introduced.

Another methodological reservation with the study is the continual and inappropriate use of tests of significance. The subjects studied do not in any way represent a random sample and the authors admit a fairly low parental response rate (50 to 60 per cent) even within their non-random sample. The "Australian students" in the study came from a university science students association, yet in other studies, Feather (1970 and 1971) has maintained that science students' values differ in many respects from other students, such as those in Humanities. As this limitation is acknowledged in the study along with many other qualifications and assumptions, we must

wonder why the study was **still** carried out. In this situation tests of significance and any worthwhile generalisations about Australian society are quite untenable[1].

While this particular study is thus methodologically imprecise, my major reservation remains the theoretical one concerning the validity of the Rokeach approach to the study of values.

FOOTNOTE

1. For a discussion of the misuse of tests of significance in American and Australian social research, see Webb and Clements (1972), and Edwards (1971).

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MANY ROADS LEAD TO ROME: A REPLY TO WITTON

Witton's comments on the validity of the Rokeach Value Survey used in our study (Feather and Wasyluk, 1973) would deserve more attention had he at least indicated some acquaintance with the many studies using the Rokeach procedure and with their theoretical rationale. Some of these investigations have been mainly concerned with obtaining descriptive information about the value systems of different groups, (in passing, it seems naive of Witton to claim that descriptive studies are "sterile" since it would be difficult for any science to progress without reliable descriptive information), while other studies have been more closely related to a theoretical framework—for example, to an analysis of the nature and structure of value-attitude systems and the effects of inconsistency within these systems (Rokeach, 1968), or to a general approach dealing with the

individual's attempts to resolve discrepancies in organized cognitive structures, usually compromising in some way between stability and change (Feather, 1971, 1972). Witton's implication that these value studies are sterile, descriptive, and behavioural is far from the truth and based upon a superficial acquaintance with the literature.

He also adopts an extreme position in arguing against the use of questionnaires, particularly forced-choice ones. We doubt that Connell and Goot (1972-73) would want to adopt such an extreme stance. Witton appears to believe that the use of questionnaires is **the** social-psychological approach (a very narrow view considering the many other procedures for data collection and analysis that social psychologists have pioneered). We would certainly not want to restrict value research to questionnaire administration. Many roads lead to Rome and detailed studies filling in the fine-grain of the structure revealed by Rokeach's procedure would obviously be worthwhile. Such studies will involve multidisciplinary efforts.

In the Value Survey, Rokeach has provided a procedure that has general application, using lists of values culled from many sources so as to cover a very wide spectrum (Rokeach, in press). The question of how respondents might interpret the value labels is an interesting research problem (if indeed answerable), just as is the question of how respondents may interpret other stimuli—for example, the questions asked of them in a face-to-face interview concerning political ideologies. Those using the Value Survey have been more concerned, however, with looking for consistent regularities in response, and meaningful results have been obtained in a variety of contexts. Moreover, the average value systems are very similar when one employs different assessment procedures—ranking, rating, and pair-comparison (Feather, in press) or semantic differential (Rokeach, in press). Note that the rating and semantic differential procedures do not involve forced-choice. Let us not shut our eyes to a useful technique because of some simplistic notion of what social science is about.

Witton's comments on the methodological deficiencies of our study provide little that is new. We noted in at least two places in our paper that we made the most of a situation (so often the case in applied social research) where one has to build upon available resources, using samples that