

CHAPTER 3: A CRITICAL THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK FOR SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH 79

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CHAPTER 3: A CRITICAL THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK FOR SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH

3.1 Introduction

In chapter 1 the background to this study was sketched. Four distinct factors that informed the scope of the study were described, namely, political choices in research training, personal (in)experience, the changing context of education in South Africa and past research on methodology courses in South Africa. The research question was finally delimited to ‘What do the curricula of research methodology courses look like and what are the beliefs held by academics that inform the way in which they think they should or should not construct under-graduate research methodology courses?’ The theoretical stance that was chosen as a framework for this study, critical theory, was briefly introduced. The aim of this chapter is to provide a more comprehensive discussion of critical theory. It begins with a brief section on the stages that Western philosophy has moved through according to Degenaar (1997). The final stage of this philosophy provides the impetus for choosing critical theory in this study. A history of critical theory is presented, together with an examination of three variants. The original form (the first variant and first generation) of critical theory became known as the Frankfurt school because of its location at the University of Frankfurt in Germany. It was principally driven by Adorno, Marcuse and Horkheimer. The second variant of critical theory was different from the first in that it proposed a more positive outlook where people were viewed as more active in determining their own destinies. One of Adorno’s assistants, Jürgen Habermas, became an important figure at the Institute of Social Research, which was reconstituted in 1953 in Frankfurt after it had become fragmented due to the Second World War and consequent emigration to the United States of some of its proponents. Habermas’s work is the third variant of critical theory and is considered to be the second generation of this movement. Although this historical background is provided under the umbrella of critical theory, Held (1980, p. 14) pointed out that “critical theory ... does *not* form a unity; it does not mean the same thing to all its adherents” in that the two generations of critical theorists had differing views.

The discussion of the variants and generations of critical theory is left at this point to progress to a more current view of the tenets of this philosophy. This includes concepts such as power and hegemony, critical enlightenment and ‘emancipation’, the politics of knowledge and social disregard. A critical realist ontology informs this study, a position that proposes that there is an external, autonomous world that functions independently of scientific knowledge of the laws that cause natural events. Humans represent this world through social activity. An objective realm thus exists, that is a dimension that all people refer to, perhaps in multiple ways. When all the members of a group agree on a common understanding it becomes an intersubjective realm or shared world. Normative judgements are made of the shared world and are often expressed as what this world ‘should’ look like. The discussion of the epistemological claims of a critical theory concentrate on Habermas’s (1974) three cognitive interests: empirical-analytic, historical hermeneutic and critical sciences. It is argued that a Habermasian approach to epistemology

would incorporate more than one of the cognitive interests and this leads into a presentation of different perspectives of methodology and method in a critical theory. A précis of a feminist viewpoint of social research concludes the section.

The chapter ends with a discussion on reflexivity. This is defined in multiple ways as the researcher's monitoring of the progress of the research in order to make necessary changes, a report of the role that the researcher's subjectivity played in the research, a facilitation of the audience's understanding of how the researchers reached their understanding of a phenomenon and/or re-creating the role of the respondents, their relationships to the researcher and the status of their accounts. Although reflexivity is viewed as essential to this research project, an important distinction is made between reflexivity and critical reflection. It is argued that, unlike reflexivity, critical reflection mobilises researchers to take action once they have realised what needs to be done to emancipate oppressed individuals from their situation. The conclusion of this study will thus encourage practical, implementable courses of action.

3.2 *Beyond post-modernism*

Degenaar (1997) distinguished between three different discourses that have existed in Western history: pre-modern, modern and post-modern. In pre-modern discourse, an individual did not engage in self-critical thinking in understanding the world. The language of the community (so-called 'primitive cultures') people belonged to structured the world for them; understanding was thus collective in nature. Modern discourse rejects the assumptions made by pre-modern cultures by striving towards a rational explanation of the world. Rationality is universally valid and thus the 'Truth' can be discovered about reality. In contrast, post-modernism is sceptical of a meta-narrative and therefore allows for many ways of understanding or "a diversity of modes of inquiry" (Mourad, 1997, p. 114).

Polkinghorne (1983) encouraged the post-modern belief in 'pluralistic epistemologies' where different systems of inquiry are located in a community of 'like-minded interpreters' who decide between knowledge claims:

"Truth" is a construct which, under examination, reveals itself to be something like an onion; the layers of perspectival understanding can be peeled away until there is nothing left at the core. "Reality" is views; it is not a thing which lies behind views and causes them (p. 251).

Knowledge is thus a human construction as knowledge claims are evaluated within communities according to the standard that exists of what is acceptable as knowledge by that particular community. As the context within which systems of inquiry are positioned represent an epistemological position, Polkinghorne (1993) proposed epistemological pluralism where alternatives to one way of knowing are acknowledged and engaged with.

Degenaar (1997) suggested that there is a fourth kind of discourse, which he believed is the discourse we are currently engaged in. According to Degenaar, we are in a 'second reflection', which allows us to distinguish between pre-modern, modern and post-modern discourse. On reflecting on this distinction, it is assumed that we have the ability to reflect (critically) on the discourse we are engaged in at a particular time. The practical form that this fourth discourse might take is the best of each of the previous discourses "... while at the same time going beyond them, in order to take into account the patterning of social behaviour" (Porter, 2002, p. 59).

If we critically reflect on the way in which we do research before, during and after any undertaking, we are acting reflexively. (Parker [1999], however, makes an important distinction between reflexivity and critical reflection and this will be discussed in a later section). How do we know what our epistemological assumptions are and how they influence our perception of research? How can we attain the distance we need to comment on the forces that shape the research curricula we construct? How can we improve the current state of the curriculum through the discovery of these forces and take action based on our findings? Critical social theory is the paradigm of choice for this study as it gives the researcher the framework to answer some of the questions posed. From an ontological point of view the power of critical theory lies in its ability to move beyond the description and interpretation of individual behaviour without which, according to Porter (2002), an in-depth investigation into why certain phenomena occur would not be possible. In Carspecken's (1996, p. 6) opinion, "... critical theory has provided the most convincing answers to knotty epistemological questions begged in every act of inquiry" because it recognises the relationship between power and knowledge and does not allow power to corrupt truth claims. Also, critical theory best suits the researcher's own view of social reality and preference for methodological plurality.

3.3 Critical social theory: the emancipatory paradigm

As will be described below, critical social theory has its roots in a specialised research programme at the University of Frankfurt's Institute of Social Research (which became commonly known as the Frankfurt School). The context in which critical social theory arose was characterised by the domination of certain socio-economic classes over others and thus a movement developed to theorise about solutions to the oppression of the working class. Answers were sought in theories dealing with society and politics. Marxist theory, for example, was revised to render it more applicable to current conditions (Manias & Street, 2000). As Kincheloe and McLaren (2000) pointed out, however, "[c]ritical theory is a term that is often evoked and frequently misunderstood" (p. 279). The philosophers linked to the Frankfurt School did not present a common critical theory as can be seen from the different variants described below. It is with this in mind that the recognition must be made that there are several critical theories and thus it would be senseless to attempt to position critical theory as if it forms one united approach today. As Honneth (1999) argued, the original tradition of the Frankfurt school no longer exists as a distinctive project and its philosophy needs to be revised in many ways. Yet there are principles of critical theory that appear across most current texts and it is these beliefs that will be used to describe the

underpinnings of the paradigmatic stance taken in this study. Some reconceptualisations of critical theory proposed by Kincheloe and McLaren (2000) will also be added and applied to this research.

3.3.1 A history of critical social theory

The history of critical theory is set out in this section following its development from its origin with the Frankfurt school in Germany. This variant of critical theory is known as the first generation of critical theory. Marcuse and Fromm, who became leading philosophical figures in the United States, propounded the second variant that became popular among alternative political movements and academics in the 1960s. The third variant and second generation developed in the initial context in which critical theory was shaped when Jürgen Habermas proposed his views on society.

3.3.1.1 Variant one: the original Frankfurt school and its move towards cultural pessimism

Critical social theory (also referred to as critical social science) originated in the late 1920s in what is known as the Frankfurt school, an independent interdisciplinary research school associated with the University of Frankfurt. The research programme undertaken at this school included knowledge from disciplines such as sociology, philosophy, psycho-analysis and economics. The principal proponents of critical theory include Adorno, Marcuse and Horkheimer, although Alvesson and Sköldbberg (2000) provided a longer list (and readings) of social scientists linked to the Frankfurt school¹. The works of Marx, Weber, Kant, Hegel and Freud motivated the original team of scientists to formulate a theory that would not only interpret the social world, but also transform it. Babbie and Mouton (2001) named Marx as the greatest inspiration for this task, but the social and political contexts that the advocates found themselves in was also a contributing factor. These influences included post-war World War I Germany that was suffering from an economic depression, dissent and strikes in Europe that marked a crisis in capitalism, and the rise of authoritarian styles of governance such as communism in the Soviet Union. Although Marx's influence was great, critical theorists found economic and social explanations for social phenomena inadequate. Research was thus focused on topics such as dominance and authoritarian relationships (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2000; Kincheloe & McLaren, 2000).

Ten years after the establishment of the Frankfurt school, the Nazi occupation of Germany forced the Jewish members and adherents of Marxism to relocate to California. The nature of the American social sciences further shaped the ideas of critical theory as Horkheimer, Adorno and Marcuse felt it necessary to comment on the unquestioned use of empiricist research to study human behaviour, a methodology that critical theorists had abandoned after the first decade of their work (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2000). They also criticised American culture as following a one-sided rationality, being over-commercialised and

¹ Held (1980) made a finer distinction, referring to the Frankfurt School as being specifically constituted by Horkheimer, Adorno, Marcuse, Lowenthal and Pollock, and the Institute of Social Research as being all the individuals associated with the Institute.

too eager to use science and technology to understand and control nature² (the aim of Enlightenment). This is known as the 'critique of instrumental reason'³ (Theunissen, 1999).

Horkheimer⁴ and Adorno viewed technological progress as evil, thereby breaking with Marx's theory that production and the development of technology would lead to the liberation of the working class (Roderick, 1986). Below is a lengthy description of this American 'counterculture', which Gellner (1996) called 'alright' but potentially 'dangerous' because the ease of achieving the life-style of this culture could lead one to take it for granted:

As society gets richer and richer, the amount of time we spend, in serious work, in production, and in exploration of the world diminishes. There we have to behave ourselves according to the Enlightenment rules. The amount of time we spend in leisure goes up, and in the leisure zone, which is a kind of one big Disneyland, we do witness what might be called a Californiaization of culture, of which the late Paul Feyerabend made himself a prophet, where indeed anything goes and there are no constraints. So we are encouraged in this by our environment, which no longer has these Weberian qualities of requiring order and discipline (that goes for the work period); however, all the gadgets are made as intuitively accessible as possible, and people get used to the idea of a very user-friendly universe, in which you do what you fancy and it is alright (p. 82).

Furthermore, Horkheimer and Adorno claimed that the standardisation of people's needs, desires and wishes would make them open to manipulation and control and "turn the individual into an uncritical, passive object, well adapted to the logic of mass production and mass consumption which pervades all areas of society from the aesthetic to the political" (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2000, p. 114). This inspired Adorno and Horkheimer's (1986) *Dialectic of Enlightenment* and Marcuse's (1964) *One Dimensional Man*. Also, although American society espoused equality among all people, discrimination on the basis of race and class was still prevalent (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2000). Critical theorists had thus become cultural pessimists and criticised the effects of rationality on society (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2000).

3.3.1.2 Variant two: Constructive contributions from critical theory

The members of the Frankfurt school found that they were not as influential in the United States as they had originally been in Germany and this is perhaps why Kincheloe and McLaren (2000) reported Horkheimer and Adorno's return to Germany in 1953 to re-establish the Institute of Social Research. Also, Nazism had been defeated which meant that circumstances were once more favourable for the members of the school to return to their place of birth. Together with Marcuse another influential figure in critical theory, Erich Fromm, decided to remain in the United States. Both produced works that took on a more positive, optimistic tone compared to those of Adorno and Horkheimer. This marks a second

² 'Nature' refers to external environments, society and the inner being of people (Roderick, 1986).

³ The Frankfurt School defined 'instrumental reason' as follows: it is "the almost total political and administrative domination of social life through the increasingly efficient and predictable techniques developed and stabilised by institutions such as the military, the bureaucracy, the schools, business and, in particular, 'the culture industry' " (Roderick, 1986, p. 36).

variant of critical theory that is characterised by Marcuse's proposal that "there is renewed hope that social forces can be mobilized to question the dominant social logic, and that people can make themselves architects rather than victims of this logic" (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2000, p. 114). People were thus seen as taking on a more active role in determining their own destinies. Resistance towards dominant ideals plays a key role in opposing the standardisation and control of society; students and alternative groups such as the feminists and environmentalists are examples of this questioning movement.

It was Fromm, however, in *The Sane Society* (1956) and *To Have or to Be?* (1976), who went a step further than Marcuse's critical reading of Freud to conclude that people are able to control their impulses and drives. As people have the power to make their own choices they have potentialities or "possible futures that can be accommodated by the present" (Willig, 1999, p. 40). People exist in a certain *Umwelt* or environment that allows or affords them certain things (Bhaskar, 1998a). For example, we can experience an urge towards just being or the need to have (to own and control something) which Fromm saw as an existential choice "powerfully influenced by the social and economic context which characterises the individual" (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2000, p. 115). Yet Marcuse became a popular philosopher in his own right, revered by students in the 1960s for providing a space for people to recognise that they are able to determine their own potential by resisting and changing dominant institutions of power instead of remaining victims of an unjust society. The tenets of critical theory thus became the path to liberation through action and intervention and were adopted by the New Left, a movement that adopted critical theory as its political consciousness in the 1960s (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2000).

3.3.1.3 Variant three: Jürgen Habermas and the second generation of critical theory

Jürgen Habermas became involved in the reconstituted Frankfurt School when he became an assistant to Adorno. The variant of critical theory developed by Habermas in the 1950s is considered to be the third one (after that of the original Frankfurt school and Marcuse's and Fromm's versions). This formed the second generation of the Frankfurt research programme and allowed Habermas to become the most influential contributor to current critical theory (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2000; Held, 1980; Honneth, 1999). An entire section of this discussion is dedicated to Habermas's contribution to critical theory for two reasons: (1) Habermas is considered to be a very important figure in the development of critical theory, and (2) Habermas's ideas on epistemology and methodology support the researcher's own viewpoints on the production of knowledge.

Habermas admired the ideas in Adorno and Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* and was sympathetic to Marxist theory ideals that sought a transformation of society away from the domination of elitist classes over the labour force. As Honneth (1999) noted, however, Habermas moved away from Marx's 'paradigm of production' to a 'paradigm of communication'. In this paradigm Habermas (1979)

⁴ Initially, Horkheimer advocated technological control over nature so that society could plan the world in an organised and rational manner. He later rejected this thesis and sided with Adorno (Theunissen, 1999).

argued that as beings that have the need to communicate with each other we enter into dialogue in order to reach understanding (*Verständigung*) and consensus (*Einverständnis*). When people communicate with each other, however, there is also the potential of “expressing power and implying socially determined restrictions for the understanding of the social world” (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2000, p. 118). Yet Habermas stated that at its best, communication should be based on the rationality of an argument. He referred to this as ‘communicative rationality’ where our expectation that four taken-for-granted aspects of communication are adhered to: our statements can be understood (are intelligible), they are perceived as true, they are legitimate (in terms of value systems held by the individuals in interaction), and people are being sincere with each other when in dialogue. Thus it is not power or expertise or science and technology that validate arguments for us; people are able to reach consensus in an open dialogue by questioning each other’s viewpoints, justifying their own arguments or amending their assumptions (Habermas, 1979).

The idea of communicative rationality implies that it is important for people to communicate in order to reach agreement on whose viewpoint holds the most validity: “[t]he status of a claim of knowledge, experience or another basis for authority must be communicatively grounded” (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2000, p. 119). Achieving consensus, by questioning the validity of our viewpoints and without capitulating to factors other than good arguments, is thus viewed as a positive action. Habermas thus argued that consensus based on communication would allow individuals to question, by means of critical inquiry, the assumptions they hold in common. Habermas was aware that this situation is ideal and that it seldom occurs. As Wedekind (1997) pointed out, Habermas was aware that achieving consensus is an ‘ideal speech situation’ that can be used as a basis to compare more realistic conversations that are usually not free of power relations. It is thus “this anticipation of an ideal form of discourse which can be used as a normative standard for a critique of distorted communication” (Held, 1980, p. 256). Habermas therefore put this belief forward as the basis of critical theory: if consensus is reached under circumstances such as domination, the communication is distorted and forms the basis of an ideology⁵ that can be disputed through critical reflection. This will lead to emancipation, which allows people to rise above the disingenuous speech situation.

Rorty’s (1979) perspective of what constitutes truth claims mirrors that of Habermas’s as he claimed that truth is a ‘victory in argument’ within a group of conversing people and not a correct depiction of reality. Conversations take place within certain cultural contexts where ‘normal’ dialogue reflects taken-for-granted customs within the group (and therefore what is acceptable). Where he parts from Habermas, however, is in his encouragement of what he called ‘abnormal’ dialogue (ideas that diverge from cultural norms and lead to creativity). The implication of Rorty’s claims for higher education is that dialogues based on abnormal ideas should be engaged in so that innovative knowledge is created (Mourad, 1997). These viewpoints are problematic, however, as both Rorty and Habermas seem to take for granted that by virtue of talking to each other people willingly express different standpoints or are able to critically examine their common practices. Although Habermas (1979) admitted that normative consensus does

⁵ Ideology in this case is defined as “those belief systems which can maintain their legitimacy despite the fact that they could not be validated if subjected to rational discourse” (Schroyer cited in Held, 1980, p. 256).

occur (by a group not questioning their assumptions), it is difficult to prove that communicative consensus takes place (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2000).

Habermas has thus been criticised for his theory on communication by authors such as Brown (1994) and Bubner (1982). Habermas had already realised some of the problems in his reasoning and revised his ideas on communicative consensus, for example, by acknowledging that sometimes people have to compromise, but retained the distinction between legitimate compromise (communicative) and illegitimate compromise (without consensual dialogue taking place) (White, 1988). Post-modernists such as Lyotard (1984) would concur with Rorty that multiple perspectives of the world should be supported. Deetz (1992) viewed conversation as a way of uncovering all the potential meanings that are raised during an exchange of ideas, which he believed would lead to critical self-reflection. Here too is the assumption that people are able to express their alternative view in all contexts or are able to question and move out of culturally accepted norms. In terms of the data collected for this study, concepts such as communicative rationality, normal and abnormal dialogues, legitimate and illegitimate compromise, expression of alternative viewpoints and critical self-reflection, amongst others, will be examined.

Besides Habermas's revision of certain elements of his theory on communication, new understandings of other principles of critical theory have developed. In the section that follows some of these trends will be presented.

3.3.2 *Newest trends in critical theory*

The descriptions above of the early beginnings of critical theory contain useful historical background, while the sections that follow will outline the theory's ontological, epistemological and methodological claims and requirements. Even though theorists such as Habermas revised certain aspects of their work, more recent advocates of critical theory such as Honneth (1999) and Kincheloe and McLaren (2000) provide some new and concrete implications of a criticalist perspective for research endeavours. Certain of these reconceptualisations could be applied to this study and so the most suitable are expanded on below.

3.3.2.1 *Power and hegemony*

Current critical theory rejects, as does Habermas, the traditional Marxist view that economic forces are the cause of all human suffering. Although economic issues do play a powerful role, people's lives are also shaped by other factors such as the domination of one race over another, or one gender over another and so on. As many of these forces as possible, in combination, should therefore be considered when undertaking a critical study. 'Power' in this study is defined in its oppressive role, that is its productive ability to bring about 'inequalities' and 'human suffering' (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2000). This type of power can be enforced through physical means, but in this case the social and psychological aspects are more important. Critical theory also sees power as interactive; it is therefore not who holds

power, but how power is manifested in relationships. According to Carspecken (1996), the following can be said of a critical perspective of power:

Interactive power relations occur when actors are differentiated in terms of who has most say in determining the course of an interaction and whose definition of the interactive setting holds sway. Interactive power is greatest when differentiations of this type are determined without equal communicative inputs from all people involved (p. 129).

Carspecken further outlined four types of power, three of which will be briefly discussed as applicable to this study. The first type of power concerns what is termed 'normative power'. This occurs when figures in authority claim power because of their status position. There is thus a superior and a subordinate actor in this case. The superior actor does not need to provide any reasons for his or her speech or acts, which the subordinate is compelled to obey. For example, a lecturer will convey to a student what knowledge students should have about research methodology and the student accepts this as a natural situation because of the power position that the lecturer holds. The second type is 'coercive' in that the person with less power obeys the superior to avoid some kind of punishment or penalty. Students may therefore comply with what the lecturer says in order to avoid receiving bad marks or even failing the class. In the final case, power is manifested when one participant controls the outcome of the situation, usually not through reciprocal discussion, but through unspoken agreement. This is referred to as 'interactively established contracts' (Carspecken, 1996). There is usually an incentive involved for the student such as passing the course or receiving good marks for acting in accordance with what the lecturer wants.

According to Kincheloe and McLaren (2000), we need to examine how power is established in "social relations that are legitimated by their depiction as natural and inevitable" (p. 283). Societies, mainly through institutions such as schools, provide the space for acceptance of the dominant thoughts and practices (Popkewitz, 1990). According to Schubert (1986), curriculum language has revealed people as products of an assembly line who have to conform to 'the factory model of growth'. If students do not conform to this model, they are reshaped through control and obedience to authority. Images of control and domination prevail, which, it is argued, are against an emancipatory paradigm.

Kincheloe and McLaren (2000) admitted, however, that "all of us are hegemonized as our field of knowledge and understanding is structured by a limited exposure to competing definitions of the socio-political world" (p. 283). Although certain worldviews dominate due to these hegemonic power structures, there is also the implication that there are alternative ways of seeing the world. Thus, critical theorists reject the viewpoint that people are passive recipients ('victims') of and controlled by dominant external forces and recognise the multiplicity of ideas that struggle towards acknowledgement. This also means that not all members of the most powerful group agree on every aspect; sometimes less powerful groups become more dominant or there might be many negotiations for an axis of power. There is thus never totalised, eternal control of one group over another (Scheurich, 1997). Although the scope of this study does not extend to examining multiple sites of power relations between social actors, it is acknowledged

that a one-dimensional emphasis on domination of one group over another is not the only way of representing events.

3.3.2.2 Critical enlightenment and ‘emancipation’

A research project using a critical approach could focus on how societal structures allow individuals or groups to struggle for power; there are thus winners and losers in this game. This study will examine the construction of under-graduate research methodology curricula to identify who gains and who loses in the way that it is shaped: “[p]rivileged groups ... often have an interest in supporting the status quo to protect their advantages” (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2000, p. 281). The privileged group will be those who win by the way the curriculum is developed and the losers will be those who are prevented from taking important decisions that affect their lives. The second role of a reconceptualised critical theory would thus be to find a link between the winners’ interests and how these interests prevent the losers from determining their own destinies. It is acknowledged, however, as described in section 3.3.2.1 that winners might become losers in certain situations and vice versa.

3.3.2.3 The politics of knowledge

‘The politics of knowledge’ is a term borrowed from Terre Blanche and Durrheim (1999a) and denotes the political agendas and interests that influence social science research. These authors discuss two contexts in which research is done: the context of justification and the context of discovery. The former refers to the correct use of scientific methods to come up with and answer research questions (referred to as instrumental or technical rationality by Kincheloe & McLaren [2000]) while the latter refers to the “researchers’ private convictions about what kinds of questions are worthy of being asked, and their social ties to friends, social groups, political agendas and fellow researchers” (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999b, p. 11). Critical theory renounces a methodolatory-only approach to research and encourages researchers to have “an understanding of the value choices always involved in the production of so-called facts” (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2000, p. 282). Popkewitz (1990), for example, provides an explication of how methodology and methods in educational research have a historical foundation and how studies have been carried out within certain social and political contexts. Some funding bodies in the USA and Australia support much research that is based on experimental designs (Young, 1990). The current researcher will thus have to describe how her work fits in with the context of discovery, or the ‘larger political forces’ (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999b) that shape the research agendas in South Africa today.

3.3.2.4 Social disregard (Mißachtung)

Honneth’s (1999) critique of Habermas’s theory of communication is based on the assumption made by Habermas and Horkheimer that a group of people (the proletariat in Horkheimer’s case) share a ‘common, objective interest’ in emancipating themselves from injustices that they suffer due to their membership of a certain socio-economic class. To put it simply, Honneth (1999) questioned whether it is possible to find proof of this pre-theoretical praxis – moral experiences of the group that have not been

“systematically articulated by theory at a more reflexive level in order to give its critique an objective foothold” (p. 326) – existing in everyday life. Honneth rejected Habermas’s assertion that people’s moral experiences are produced by the social and mental limitations placed on their ability to communicate and reach agreement (without the restrictions of power relations). The alternative approach Honneth opted for concerns social recognition and what occurs when people perceive moral injustices as occasions where they are disregarded. Hargreaves (1982) stated that

First, the person must acquire competencies and a sense of making a valid and valuable contribution to the life of groups and institutions of which he or she is a member. Second, the person must have a sense of being valued by others in the groups or institutions of which he or she is a part. When these conditions do not obtain, a person will experience great difficulty in maintaining dignity... (p. 83).

This is referred to as ‘social disrespect’ or *Mißachtung*. What Honneth (1999) argued is that “... what must be considered first of all is the fact that there is an assumption of social recognition, which subjects connect with their normative expectations when entering communicative relationships” (p. 329). When people are disrespected in social interactions (by not receiving the recognition they feel they should) it affects their experience of who they are and results in emotional reactions towards the injustice. Furthermore, Honneth (1999) claimed that it is possible to find evidence of his theoretical model in pre-theoretical praxis, “which a critique of the relations of recognition can use to demonstrate its own basis in social reality” (p. 330). The concept of labour is also brought into this model as a means to achieve individual social esteem; if people feel that they make a significant contribution to the workplace then they will feel respected and recognised. This is not, however, a totalising view of labour as in Marxist theory: “[c]ertain zones of pre-theoretical critique become evident only to the extent that they are analysed in light of a concept of labour that also categorially encompasses the individual’s dependence upon the social recognition of his or her own work” (Honneth, 1999, p. 334). Labour is not defined as being limited to formal employment, but includes, for example, women who stay at home to care for their children.

If Honneth’s perspective is accepted, the implications of focusing on social esteem achieved through the successful contribution that individuals make to their workplace can be translated in this study as a need to examine how a course in research methodology furthers this goal. In other words: Are one of the aims of under-graduate research courses, when they are constructed, to create the space for students to achieve good esteem through the application of their knowledge in their workplace?

3.3.3 Ontological claims of a critical theory

One description of critical social theory is that it reflects on the taken-for-granted structures of socio-economic class and argues that the organisation of society should empower human beings to rise above the constraints placed on them by socio-economic class and its related ideologies that exercise control

over people (Schubert, 1983). This is referred to as the emancipatory⁶ interest of critical theory, in other words, “through revealing systematic distortions in communication and action, [critical sciences] attempt to aid human beings in coming to awareness so that they can make history with ‘will and consciousness’ ” (Roderick, 1986, p. 57). Science – which includes social science – should be aimed at the liberation and emancipation of humans from ‘the dominant culture’ that is perceived as ‘natural’ and ‘inviolable’ (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2000). Critical social science serves to free people from alienation (alienation on an individual level through self-deception or on a societal level because of false consciousness). Humans frequently make mistakes in judging inaccuracies to be true. People are thus alienated from their true selves and from society. The alienating or repressive factors that sustain this alienation need to be transformed or changed through disciplined self-reflection (Mouton & Muller, 1997).

This description leads to the question ‘What is the specific nature of reality (being) that critical theory espouses?’ A realist ontology forms the basis for this study, specifically Roy Bhaskar’s (1998b) transcendental realism (following Porter, 2002, it will be further referred to as critical realism). This position holds that the world is neither constructed by people (and therefore research should not focus only on individual consciousness) nor is it a case of events constantly coinciding (and therefore research should not focus only on finding the laws that govern these occurrences) (Porter, 2002). These positions reflect idealism and empiricism respectively. Rather, a third position is espoused based on the realist assertion that an external, autonomous world exists that functions independently of the knowledge that science has accumulated over time of the laws that cause events in nature (Bhaskar, 1998b)⁷, hence the term ‘realism’. This dimension is intransitive because the objects that constitute the events do not depend on the activity of humans: “... if there were no science there would still be a nature, and it is this nature which is investigated by science” (Bhaskar, 1998a, p. 21). Humans represent (not construct) this world through their thoughts, beliefs, emotions and crafted objects such as art (Churchland, 1985; Parker, 1999). Knowledge production is thus a social activity (Bhaskar, 1998a). A fundamental belief of critical realism is based on Kant’s transcendental question (hence Bhaskar’s use of the term ‘transcendental realism’): “what must be the case, a priori, in order for events to occur as they do” (Porter, 2002, p. 60). The assumption is thus made that there are pre-existing structures that can explain, in terms of society, the way in which human consciousness and actions develop. As such, critical realists can attempt to identify these structures, but any claims about this type of knowledge are viewed as potentially fallible as they fall within the realm of empirical research or reflect “the arrogance of modernist meta-narration” as Porter (2002, p. 60) puts it. Thus, although critical realists and positivists both believe in an external reality, “the post-positivist critical realist believes that *the goal of science is to hold steadfastly to the goal of getting it right about reality, even though this goal can never be perfectly achieved*” (Trochim, 2001, p. 19).

Smith (1990) made the connection between critical theory and a realist ontology as follows:

⁶ Kincheloe and McLaren (2000) highlighted the need to be careful of using terms related to the word ‘emancipation’. As they pointed out “... no-one is ever completely emancipated from the sociopolitical context that has produced him or her” (p. 282) and it is arrogant to suggest that anyone is able to emancipate others.

⁷ Although in earlier works Bhaskar (1989) stated that an analysis (based on realism) of societies could not take place in the same way as a realist analysis of nature, Benton (1985) argued that this was not necessarily true as social structures share some of the properties of the natural sciences. For a full discussion see Benton (1985).

Critical theory acknowledges that there are real objects out there in the world, but the qualifier *modified* means one must fully recognize that the words used to denote objects must be placed within different symbolic fields, and, accordingly, reality can take on different meanings (p. 180).

The way in which the world is approached where various perspectives are imposed on it is discussed in the section that follows.

3.3.3.1 Objectivity

Carspecken (1996) makes an important distinction between objectivity and reality. What the term 'objectivity' signals for critical theorists is the existence of an 'objective realm' or category that people have a common understanding of and base their communication on. One specific object is thus being referred to without being concerned with whether the object really exists if it can be observed (empiricism) or whether it is constructed in the minds of members of a community (idealism). What is important to the critical researcher is to discover how individuals refer to an object and, if their descriptions are different, to find out in what way the truth claims are made and validated. For example, when talking about a prescribed text used in an under-graduate research methodology course, the objective realm is the book that both the interviewer and interviewee refer to. During the course of the interview, however, the researcher may discover that the interviewee has a different understanding of the book than that of the researcher's interpretations. Although there are multiple realities "... a single objective reality is referenced necessarily, and the description takes the form of *different appearances rendered through different interpretative schemes of the same reality*" (Carspecken, 1996, p. 68). Roderick (1986) alluded to this concept of objectivity in Habermas's work, namely that people do not construct different worlds, but that they approach one world with different perspectives. This is the "world of events or facts" according to Habermas (1984, p. 10). In critical theory terms, objectivity therefore does not signify the neutral, value-free position of the researcher (as in positivism), but indicates the shared universe that people refer to in their interactions.

3.3.3.2 Subjectivity

Critical social theory's view on subjectivity reforms the positivist notion that value positions in social research have to be avoided at all costs. As Manias and Street (2000, p. 52) stated, "[b]y targeting the interpretations of participants to generate knowledge, researchers acclaim the value of subjectivity in the research process". The emphasis is therefore on people's inner state such as their thoughts, feelings, drives and motivations (Smith, 1990). Carspecken (1996) further refined this description of subjectivity by distinguishing it from the multiple access that people have to an objective world; the subjective state of an individual is exclusively available to that person (hence the term 'privileged access'). A person can thus consciously (telling someone, for example) or unconsciously (showing physical signs of some emotion) give others access to their subjective state. We have to therefore rely on the sincerity of that person to validate the interpretation that we make of his or her subjective life-world as well as the extent

to which he or she has insight into that life-world. What remains important to the social researcher is to embrace people's subjective states as part of the research process and to recognise that there is a world open to multiple access that is mediated by these states. When a person "finds one's self ... affirmed within a normative articulation that by nature is claimed for an entire group" (Carspecken, 1996, p. 144) this is referred to as intersubjectivity. People's values, beliefs and norms coincide and become a shared world. The normative judgements of the world that individuals share are an essential component of this study as it is important to examine what norms academics share about under-graduate research methodology curriculum construction.

Once this shared world has been established by its members (in social settings and through discussion), they tend to believe in the correctness of their consensual view (Blake, 1997). Could it be, however, that this view (termed normative consensus by Habermas) is necessarily the best claim to truth? Habermas's (1987) idea of the radicalisation of argument holds that even though individuals participate in dialogues that ultimately bring them to share beliefs and reach a consensus that they are comfortable with, the validity of their beliefs could be debated. A group's intersubjectivity should therefore be open to review and discussion (Blake, 1997). The normative stance of the participants in this research should therefore be amenable to questioning.

3.3.3.3 Shared normative judgements

Besides the objective and subjective realms described above, Carspecken (1996) outlined a third world that mediates the truth claims we make. He calls this the normative-evaluative realm as it refers to the positions people take and the norms that they share about what acceptable, typical behaviour is within their group. The normative-evaluative world is determined by the values individuals hold (what is moral and ethical), which inform their norms about how they may act within the context. This is the concept of intersubjectivity referred to above, or 'our world'. Statements reflecting this world are expressed by including the word 'should' to indicate the rules that govern behaviour. A research project's methodology will be heavily influenced by the need to uncover and express normative-evaluative claims as "social regularities occur through the manner in which actors understand norms and values, claim them tacitly or explicitly in all interactions, and negotiate them when disputes arise" (Carspecken, 1996, p. 84). The methodology of this study was thus decided by the researcher's choice of which method would produce the best account and explanation of normative behaviour for the academics that construct under-graduate research methodology curricula, in other words, what does 'our' world look like, what should it look like (the normative-evaluative claims) and why does it appear this way?

3.3.3.4 Relativism

The modernist definition of relativism provided in chapter 2 is based on what Bhaskar (1998a) terms *judgemental relativism*, "which asserts that all beliefs are equally valid, in the sense that there can be no (rational) grounds for preferring one to another" (p. 236). In contrast, *epistemic relativity* acknowledges the social and historical context of knowledge production and makes a distinct choice for one belief or principle over another. Epistemic relativity is important to standpoint methodologies as it relates to the

'strong objectivity' called for by feminists such as Harding (1991). This type of objectivity denounces relativist arguments that all viewpoints are equal; this equivalence allows statements about oppression, for example, to be dismissed as relative to other ideas about the position of power that people hold. Scheurich (1997), however, criticised some of these theorists, such as Bernstein, for retaining some notions of traditional objectivity. Even though Bernstein (1983) was arguing against objectivity, he called for establishing procedures to determine which knowledge claims are better than others. Scheurich, a post-modernist, finds it difficult to believe that criteria of truth cannot themselves be relative to the historical conditions in which they are developed.

Critical theory's response to these perspectives can probably be found in its approach to the way in which claims made by a researcher are validated. According to Carspecken (1996, p. 57), "... a rule of thumb in critical epistemology could be phrased like this: whenever considering a truth claim, examine the validity conditions associated with it". The important ingredients in these conditions are communication and consensus reached within the group of people for which the researcher makes statements (the new definition of objectivity as discussed earlier). To this idea, Hoshmand (1999) added the aspect of experience that a researcher has gained in practice as a basis for evaluating the validity of assertions. A discussion of Rennie's (1999) call for three further elements to be added to the larger framework of a research project will be presented in chapter 4. The conditions surrounding truth claims are thus acknowledged within the context of the transcendental realist assumption that there is a universal reality that people have access to; as outlined above this reality is accessed in multiple ways. The methodology chapter illuminates two of the procedures used to achieve the form of validity that critical theory requires and their application to the qualitative part of the study: peer debriefing and member checks.

3.3.3.5 Value neutrality

Critical theorists reject the notion of the type of objective truth described in chapter 2. It is also argued that its corollary - that a researcher could be a disinterested party and therefore achieve value neutrality - is not possible because all knowledge is influenced by and arises in certain social and historical contexts (Nielsen, 1990; Popkewitz, 1990⁸). Carspecken (1996) noted, however, that "[c]ritical methodologists are not 'relativists'; we do not think that different cultures 'construct' entirely different worlds and thus entirely different 'truths' " (p. 57). Psychology has been guilty of not giving a sufficient voice to the assumptions and value-systems of researchers, thus ignoring the 'human context' in which research is practised and knowledge is produced (Hoshmand, 1999). Because of researchers' responsibility towards stakeholders (who should be involved in the process through discussions and debates), Hoshmand (1999) made the claim that psychology is a 'cultural science'. Hoshmand also pointed to the fact that research is located in a broader context or community such as an academic setting where qualitative researchers can discuss what criteria signify worthy practice. Following Heidegger's reasoning that "makes the individual a *part* of reality, rather than an ego dualistically separated from the world", Rennie

⁸ Popkewitz provides an interesting description of the strategic way in which the social and political values expressed by social scientists were historically separated, by institutional leadership, from their roles as academics in order to guarantee employment opportunities and resources from the economic sector.

(1999, p. 6) placed the researcher's subjectivities firmly within the research process and emphasised the need for reflexivity (see section 3.4 for a discussion of reflexivity).

Based on the discussion in this section, this study subscribes to a transcendental realist, non-relativist approach while acknowledging the social, cultural and historical conditions that offer certain possibilities for action. A reality exists that participants have multiple access to; these individuals shape situations according to their subjective interpretation of that reality and the type of behaviour that is acceptable. It is therefore the purpose of this study to uncover, understand and explain these interpretations as well as provide recommendations for improving the current curricula of under-graduate research methodology courses.

3.3.4 Epistemological claims of a critical theory

This description of the epistemological claims made by critical theory leans heavily on Habermas's conceptualisations of knowledge production, or 'knowledge-constitutive interests' as he refers to it (Habermas, 1971). There may be many other formulations made by critical theorists, but Habermas's version has been chosen for the second reason mentioned in section 3.3.1.3. A brief outline of Habermas's (1971) argument for the three knowledge interests is provided here. The three-part classification has already been stated in section 3.1 and thus a more specific description follows later in this section with quotations from *Knowledge and Human Interests* (Habermas, 1971).

Habermas (1971) viewed the human race (as a unified people) in three ways: firstly as beings that need to produce materials - by manipulating and controlling nature - to survive, secondly as beings that need to communicate with each other using a commonly understood language within communities, and thirdly as beings that need "to act rationally, to be self-reflective and self-determining" (Roderick, 1986, p. 52). Habermas termed this the emancipatory interest, as humans want to be self-sufficient and accountable for their thoughts and actions. People are thus motivated to make knowledge that will allow them to pursue these interests. Habermas adds, however, that only species that is self-reflective, that is, humans, can achieve this production of knowledge (Dews, 1999).

From this line of argument, Habermas (1971, p. 308 - 310) identified the following cognitive interests:

- **Empirical-analytic** – in the empirical-analytic sciences the frame of reference that prejudices the meanings of possible statements establishes rules both for the construction of theories and for their critical testing. Theories comprise hypothetico-deductive connections of propositions, which permit the deduction of lawlike hypotheses with empirical content. The latter can be interpreted as statements about the covariance of observable events; given a set of initial conditions, they make predictions possible.

- **Historical hermeneutic** – the historical-hermeneutic sciences gain knowledge in a different methodological framework ... Access to the facts is provided by the understanding of meaning, not observation. The verification of lawlike hypotheses in the empirical-analytic sciences has its counterpart here in the interpretation of texts. Thus the rules of hermeneutics determine the possible meaning of the validity of statements in the cultural sciences.
- **Critical sciences** – The systematic sciences of social action, that is economics, sociology and political science, have the goal, as do the empirical-analytic sciences, of producing nomological knowledge. A critical social science, however, will not remain satisfied with this. It is concerned with going beyond this goal to determine when theoretical statements grasp invariant regularities of social action as such and when they express ideologically frozen relations of dependence that can in principle be transformed. To the extent that this is the case, the critique of ideology, as well, moreover, as psychoanalysis, take into account that information about lawlike connections sets off a process of reflection in the consciousness of those who the laws are about. ... The methodological framework that determines the meaning of the validity of critical positions of this category is established by the concept of self-reflection. The latter releases the subject from dependence on hypostatized powers. Self-reflection is determined by an emancipatory cognitive interest.

Hoshmand (1999) accused psychology of over-emphasising the empirical-analytic (or technical as she terms it) knowledge interest because psychology positions itself as a science in its disciplinary and professional roles. Yet Hoshmand stated that psychology could play a part in the hermeneutic and critical interests by understanding and explaining subjective experience and meaning as well as fulfilling emancipatory objectives. For Habermas (1988, p. 3), "... the natural and the cultural or hermeneutic sciences are capable of living in mutually indifferent, albeit more hostile than peaceful coexistence, [whereas] the social sciences must bear the tension of divergent approaches under one roof". Scheurich (1997) contended, however, that there is always a struggle for the dominance of one epistemology over another in the social sciences. Although Habermas singled out one methodology that would support the reflective nature of humans (see section 3.3.5), he argued for a pluralistic theoretical and methodological mode of inquiry, recognising that the various approaches have 'relative legitimacy' each with its own strengths and weaknesses. As "... [c]ritical theory does not seek to eliminate any possibly fruitful line of empirical research on theoretical grounds" (Bohman, 1999, p. 59), its task must be to bring different methods of enquiry together. From an epistemological point of view, critical theory would consent to both empirical-analytic and hermeneutic ways of knowing (Babbie & Mouton, 2001), although not all criticalists would agree with this (see Manias & Street, 2000). According to Fay (1975), however, the explanatory function of critical theory is its most essential contribution to the social sciences as theories should be able to explain "the sources and nature of discontent experienced by the social actors" (p. 97) as well as "demonstrate how it is that such discontent can be eliminated by removing the structural contradictions which underlie it" (Fay, 1975, p. 97).

Following Habermas's reasoning, this study views knowledge production as an amalgamation of each of the interests presented above to counter their particular limitations while drawing on each other's strengths. The methodology proposed for this research thus contains elements of the empirical-analytic, historical hermeneutic and critical sciences which will be expanded on in chapter 4. As a basis for this approach a broad overview of different perspectives on the methodology of critical theory is provided below.

3.3.5 Methodology and method in a critical theory: are there any rules?

Despite critical theory's objections to the methodology and methods traditionally used by social scientists, there are limited writings on alternatives (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2000; Bhaskar & Lawson, 1998). However, as will be discussed in chapter 4, authors such as Alvesson and Sköldbberg (2000) attempt to provide some guidelines or advocate their own version of a critical social theory methodology (Carspecken, 1996). There is, however, no unified approach. Willig (1999), for example, encouraged critical researchers to follow an action research methodology "which allows individuals to reflect upon the grounding of their actions in structures of meaning and to identify alternatives ways-of-being afforded by those structures" (p. 43). She advocated working qualitatively (collecting information on the subjective life experiences of research participants) and doing discourse analysis on the data. Muller (2000), however, pointed out his concerns with the action and participatory research approaches that critical researchers promote, noting Shaeffer's (1992) description that it is "a process fraught with difficulties, disappointments and unkept promises" (p. 10). Muller added to this by implying that it is arrogant on the part of critical researchers to assume that they are going to educate the members of a group about the error of their ways and that this will bring about the desired emancipation. Also, equalising the contributions of research participants does not diffuse power relationships or ensure that everyone is an equal partner around the negotiating table because unequal social relations are ever-present. Muller (2000) thus concluded that within a participatory approach, a critical position is still necessary to ensure that the relations between power and knowledge are acknowledged and that the pursuit of self-reflection is realised.

Manias and Street (2000) and Smith (1990) highlighted critical theory's elimination of positivist methods from its research practice. Although Carspecken (1996) admitted that there is some space for quantitative methods to be employed by critical researchers, he makes a strong case for using a qualitative and hermeneutic approach within a criticalist project. Hoshmand (1999) also located hermeneutics within a critical realist perspective and pointed to the centrality of interpretation in qualitative hermeneutic research. Ethnographic research can take a focal position although many of its methodological tenets are problematic (e.g. the power relations between researcher and researched) and should therefore be adapted or revised to better suit the critical paradigm (Porter, 2002). Manias and Street (2000) combined critical social theory assumptions with a Foucauldian analysis by using Foucault's toolbox metaphor, namely, selecting and adapting bits from each approach and being aware that tension may exist between the pieces that have been quilted together.

Kincheloe and McLaren (2000) also emphasised the importance of interpretation in critical research (thus calling it critical hermeneutic) by saying that “in qualitative research there is only interpretation, no matter how vociferously many researchers may argue that the facts speak for themselves” (p. 285). At the same time, Archer (1998) pointed out that accepting without question that understanding is possible through interpretation is problematic as “usually not all is revealed to consciousness and sometimes that is because it is shaped outside our conscious awareness” (p. 199). This is where critical theory contributes in its emancipatory capacity to identify the social conditions in which distorted beliefs are grounded. In other words, critical theory moves beyond meaning (hermeneutics) and cognition (consciousness). The act of revealing, by using a critical perspective, is reflected in Archer’s (1998) assertion that “we do not uncover real social structures by interviewing people in-depth about them” (p. 199). Rather, the researcher has to follow a more subtle method than this.

Habermas’s identification of three different knowledge interests allows critical theory to overcome the notion that the natural and social sciences are separate ontological categories each with its own epistemological approach (Bohman, 1999). For methodological guidelines Habermas turned to psychoanalysis (see Habermas, 1971) because of the essential role assumed by interpretation and self-reflection (Held, 1980; Roderick, 1986). Habermas (1974) viewed self-reflection as paramount for becoming aware of distortions in our social worlds and argued the following:

Self-reflection brings to consciousness those determinates of a self-formative process of cultivation and self-formation (*bildung*) which ideologically determine a contemporary practice and conception of the world ... (leading) to insight due to the fact that what has previously been unconscious is made conscious in a manner rich in consequences: analytic insight intervene in life (p. 22).

Roderick (1986) reported one interpretation of Habermas’s work as implying that the critical theorist is ‘the psychoanalyst of the working class’. Habermas was, however, severely criticised for using psychoanalytic principles⁹ for the basis of a critical social science and later revised some aspects of his earlier work, such as the definition of self-reflection (see Roderick, 1986 for a full discussion). Theorists such as Brian Fay have attempted to give critical theory a more social and historical slant than Habermas’s version (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). Popkewitz (1990) also called for locating methodology and methods in the historical context in which they are practised: “[h]istory becomes a part of the analysis and logic of a science as the researched, research, and researcher are interrelated” (p. 65). From Fay’s statements on the explanatory role of critical theory (see section 3.3.4), a critical methodology should tie the subjective experiences of research participants to a theory of explanation and suggestions for how the lives of people can be improved by the use of the knowledge.

Given the diversity in opinions on what constitutes a critical approach to research, it will be necessary to find a position for this study where the researcher is comfortable and a position that can be related to the

tenets that critical theory hints at for research. The question is thus asked: 'Does the method fit?' A Habermasian approach to methodology, namely, pluralism is argued for in chapter 4.

3.3.6 *Critical feminism*

A brief word on feminism's contribution to alternative paradigms located within the critical tradition is necessary here to highlight other ways in which conducting research from a critical perspective could be conceptualised. This quote from Peplau and Conrad (1989) summarises the feminist viewpoint on conventional psychological research:

... science has consistently given priority to the values of the white, middle-class men who have been its main practitioners. Historically, the sexist values and attitudes of society have biased the development of scientific psychology. Sexism has affected not only the selection of research topics and the development of psychological concepts and theories, but also the research methods used, the applications of psychology to therapy, and the structure of psychology as a profession (p. 383).

According to Hoshmand (1989, p. 3), "[r]esearch methodology, as taught in most graduate psychology programs, has been based on the positivistic tradition of reductive experimentation". This trend is visible in South African social research of the past that was dominated, up to the early 1990s, by experimental research designs (Mouton & Muller, 1997). Feminist authors such as Bozalek and Sunde (1993/4) attributed this state of affairs to the unequal distribution of power between genders in education. They found that their students' doubt about undertaking research stemmed from "the dominance of an educated male elite in South Africa (read: white, middle class), skilled in the quantitative methodological approach to research design" (p. 70). Terre Blanche and Durrheim (1999b) concurred that social research, in general, has been structured according to the conventions of a tradition practised by white males.

According to Neuman (2000), many feminist researchers tend to associate positivism with the male point of view (objective, logical, task-orientated and instrumental). Also, feminist researchers believe that males emphasise individual competition, attempt to dominate and control the environment and focus "on the hard facts and forces that act on the world" (Neuman, 2000, p. 82). According to Wilkinson (1988), well-established scholars with high status (read: white male) are in control of the legitimisation of new knowledge and the methods of inquiry. She described three ways in which the traditional or positivist empiricist paradigm operates to discriminate against women in traditional academic disciplines such as psychology¹⁰:

⁹ Kincheloe and McLaren (2000) have identified post-structuralist psycho-analysis as a new endeavour in critical theory where "critical researchers discern the unconscious processes that create resistance to progressive change and induce self-destructive behavior" (p. 282).

¹⁰ For a detailed discussion of this topic and the ways in which discriminatory practices towards females in traditional academic disciplines can be changed read Wilkinson (1988).

- Control by definition (naming) – the positivist empiricist paradigm is defined as 'normal science' and research that does not conform to it is not valued or dismissed
- Handling 'deviance' – any research or researchers that deviate from the traditional paradigm are handled either by being ignored or being suppressed in some way
- Pretence of meritocracy – an illusion is created merit is judged objectively and that competence will result in some kind of advancement.

As some feminists have argued that women have different values or concerns to men, and that women are outsiders in a psychology created by men, it could be said that women might approach scientific inquiry differently from men and that this would influence the body of knowledge, the methods and procedures used in psychological research. The cultural heritage shared by the founders of modern science (white, upper middle-class men) has helped to sideline voices that do not belong to this group. The recent focus on these voices has resulted in an increased awareness of 'culture' (Vinden, 1999), so much so that Ratner (1997) called for psychology to view culture at the core of its identity. Peplau and Conrad (1989), however, questioned whether epistemological changes in psychology would naturally bring about changes in methods. Unger (1983) emphasised that it is not necessary to criticise techniques or experimentation or quantification, but rather "our unawareness of the epistemological commitments we make when we use such tools unthinkingly" (p. 15). To add further depth to this argument: "the research methods an investigator uses may have much more to do with the person's professional training, the topic of the research, or the methodological preferences of professional journals and funding agencies than with gender" (Peplau & Conrad, 1989, p. 392). In chapter 6 the debate will be developed on the basis of how some of these factors have played out in this study.

From this description it seems that gender is one of the personal characteristics of the researcher that has had a far-reaching effect on social research and the applications of findings to the field of psychology. Other aspects of the research context also contribute to the meaning that is made in the process and therefore the next section deals with a discussion of how the researcher should remain self-conscious during the time in which research is undertaken.

3.4 Reflexivity

The role of reflexivity in social research is the point of discussion in the final section of this chapter. Reflexivity is used unproblematically as a term that describes an essential part of any qualitative research performed today. As Parker (1999) pointed out, however, many researchers use reflexivity as if it is the ultimate solution to any difficulties experienced during the research. This section begins with some definitions of reflexivity. It closes with the distinction that critical theory makes between reflexivity and reflection, and places this study in a specific position regarding this difference.

3.4.1 Reflexivity defined

The recursive epistemology known as reflexivity has recently come to social research, as noted by Brannen and Edwards (1998), and is regarded as a post-modern practice (Lui & Lui, 1997). It is described by Steier (1995) as "a 'bending back on itself'" (p. 71). Mead (as cited in Steier, 1995) defined reflexivity as "turning back one's experience on oneself" (p. 71). According to Fonow and Cook (1991), reflexivity in research is the need to "reflect upon, examine critically, and explore analytically the nature of the research process" (p. 2). Wilkinson (1988) defined reflexivity as "disciplined self-reflection (i.e., the rigorous contemplation of one's academic navel, if you like, in order to assess its origin, nature, and activity – if any!)" (p. 493). Researchers thus continuously monitor the progress of the research and make modifications where necessary or report on their awareness of the role that subjectivity has played in the study. This is to facilitate the audience's understanding of how researchers reached their understanding of a phenomenon (Rennie, 1995).

Reflexivity in the context of research is characterised by (Wilkinson, 1988):

- the belief that there is no fundamental difference between scientists (researchers) and the person they are studying: they are both constructing events
- the requirement that any psychological theory being developed by theorists (or researchers) must apply as much to the theorists as to the person(s) that they are investigating
- a reciprocal relationship between how life experience influences research and how research feeds back into life experience.

When researchers use reflexivity to make necessary changes in the research process as they progress, the process can be referred to as an emergent design because the project plan is not static or pre-determined. Sometimes, however, the original design does not work according to plan when implemented and amendments have to be made as the research unfolds. As was mentioned in chapter one, the current researcher began this study with an entirely different research question and upon reflection changed the direction of the research. The various types of reflexivity presented below contributed to this action.

3.4.2 Types of reflexivity

Many nuances have been given to the term reflexivity. Table 4 explores some of these descriptions: *endogenous* and *referential* reflexivity (May, 1998), *personal*, *functional* and *disciplinary* reflexivity (Wilkinson, 1988).

Table 4 A description of the different meanings of reflexivity

| <i>Type of reflexivity</i> | <i>Description</i> |
|----------------------------|--|
| <i>Endogenous</i> | The actions of members of a community contribute to the constitution of social |

| | |
|--------------------|--|
| | reality, i.e. the methods of the people who are subjects of social research. This type of reflexivity includes the life-worlds of social scientific communities in terms of the way that they construct the topics they investigate and conduct these investigations. |
| <i>Referential</i> | This examines the consequences of the meeting between the reflexivity exhibited by the subjects of social research and that exhibited by the researcher who is part of the scientific community. |
| <i>Personal</i> | This refers to the researcher's own identity as a person. Researchers' work is often an expression of their own values and interests; the topic of study that we choose is often a reflection of something that concerns us personally. The focus is thus on researchers and the way in which they influence the research process. |

... / continued

| | |
|---------------------|---|
| <i>Functional</i> | Here we examine how, for example, the choice of methods and the way we interpret our data is shaped by who we are as individuals. Also, this refers to how our choice of method influences the knowledge we construct when doing research. A continuous analysis needs to be made of the practice and process of research so that we can reveal its assumptions, values and biases. |
| <i>Disciplinary</i> | This entails a self-awareness of a discipline's nature and the influence of the form it takes on the generation of knowledge and methods of inquiry. |

These types of reflexivity suggest that there are two parties: researchers with their identity, disciplinary characteristics and methodological preferences, and the researched who contribute to and reflect on their own life-worlds. Also pointed to is the possibility that both the participants in the research and the researcher may experience an overlap in consciousness (referential reflexivity). Reflexivity can thus be both individual and take place in groups. May (1998) argued that in the history of calls for reflexivity in social sciences, endogenous has been emphasised over referential reflexivity. This has occurred through an over-emphasis on the process of social research compared to what is learnt about social relations. May thus places reflection on the relationship between researcher and researched in a more important light than the research process itself. The influence of the two important role-players in the research process will be discussed in the section that follows: the researcher's role in constructing the research process as well as the role of reflexivity in re-creating the role of respondents.

3.4.3 The researcher's role in constructing the research process and the role of reflexivity in re-creating the role of respondents

The 'reflexive turn' examined above emphasises the researcher's role in constructing the research process and the results of research. The method by which data are captured is constructed by the epistemological distinctions drawn by the researcher: "[t]he observer's observations may include his observing" (Keeney, 1983, p. 32). In most cases researchers decide on the research topic, what questions will be asked, how they go about asking the questions, who will be approached for answers and what will be done with the answers. According to Thompson (1995), reflexivity includes more than the awareness of the researchers' involvement in creating the behaviour that they are studying. Thompson (1995) listed the following additional aspects:

- The researchers' sense of their research field
- How researchers express this awareness in their research actions
- The way in which these actions contribute to the behaviour researchers want to study
- How the observations of behaviour consequently have an effect on researchers' sense of their research field.

May (1998) argued that we should not only reflect on the part we play in the research process, but also on what happens when we meet with our subjects. Fielding (1996) had the following to say about the researcher-subject(s) interaction:

This is the most dynamic exchange and it should be recognised that it is a two-way process: The researcher bears upon the subject/s ... and the subject's responses qualitatively affect the researcher who, in turn, may modify the on-going research procedure (p. 13).

Kvale (1996) stated, however, that when a researcher collects data through face-to-face interviews, "[t]he interviewee's statements are not collected – they are coauthored by the interviewer" (p. 183). The interviewer guides the course of the conversation by formulating specific questions, listening actively and following up on the answers given by the interviewee. The interviewer and interviewee thus co-construct the interview. Kvale (1996) warned that

[t]here is a tendency to take the results of a social interaction, when first arrived at, as a given, forgetting the original discourse and the social co-construction of the final outcomes. Such a reification may be strengthened by the transcription of the interviews; the fixated written form takes over and the original face-to-face interaction of the interview situation fades away (p. 183).

Also, feminist social scientists emphasise the effect of the demographic and personal characteristics of the researcher on the data that is elicited from a respondent. The human attributes that the researcher and respondent share should be recognised and included in the description of the study (Eagle et al., 1999). If the interviewer's role in co-constructing the interview is forgotten, the danger exists that the answers may be viewed as only reflecting the interviewee and "the role of the interviewer as a coproducer and a coauthor of the interview, and of reflecting on the social constitution of the interview, is

then overlooked" (Kvale, 1996, p. 183). This is in contrast to the modernist view of the researcher as an objective, value-free and neutral scientist. One post-modernist perspective doubts, however, the accuracy of stating that meaning is co-produced (Scheurich, 1997). This will be discussed in more depth in chapter 4 where its implications for the interviews conducted in this study are explored.

Reflexivity also plays a role in re-creating the role of the respondents, their relationship to the researcher and the status of their accounts (Burr, 1995). Reflexivity draws attention to the fact that when someone gives an account it is at the same time a description of the event *and* part of the event. These ideas can be compared to Collins's (1999) description of a researcher in a traditional research context:

In traditional research, all the steps in the research plan are decided by the researcher. People providing the data are essential to the plan. Without them there would be no data. Their contributions are, however, structured by what the researcher asks them to do, or observes them doing. The researcher then interprets the meaning of the contribution. There is thus a separation between the roles of the researcher as expert knower, and the subjects of the research, as suppliers of knowledge. The experience of the subject, while being researched is irrelevant to the purpose of research (p. 4).

"People providing the data are essential to the plan. Without them there would be no data" illustrates the importance of the research participants. Gergen and Gergen (1991) stated emphatically that "[i]n no case can one separate what is 'subject' from 'object', 'knower' from 'known' " (p. 77). In other words, the researcher and the research participant are intimately connected and this relationship should be reflected on and reported about in the research project. This points to critical theory's stance that power relations in social research exist and that it is not possible to artificially rearrange these dynamics. Wedekind (1997) had this to say about power in South African social research:

The power relations that exist between (for example) a young white, male, English-speaking, university-based fieldworker and a middle-aged African, female, college-trained, Zulu-speaking teacher cannot be simply overcome by a commitment to equality on either's part (p. 346).

The current researcher did not have totalising power over the researched by virtue of her status as researcher. However, sensitivity towards issues such as the position of interviewees in the academic hierarchy and how this structured the relationship had to be maintained. The researcher was thus not an equal partner in all of the interview situations. In agreement with Scheurich's (1997) post-modern viewpoint, there are times in an interview when one party is more active or passive than another and where differences in clarity occur during and across interviews. Co-authoring an interview is contingent on a range of complex issues.

The chapter that outlines the research design (chapter 4) points out that research of a critical theoretical nature underemphasises the role of empirical material in the process. Empirical material, for the

purposes of this study, is defined as data that is generated by fixed or formalised research procedures, but should not be viewed as “the search for truth” or as “depicting narrow segments of existing ‘reality’ ” (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2000, p. 276). Although the researcher argues for the use of data collected through empirical methods in this study, some examples of the type of reflexivity encouraged by a critical approach will be expanded on in chapter 6. This includes, but is not limited to, the researcher’s “knowledge about society contingent upon societal membership, and reflective critical observations and impressions of social phenomena that one encounters or is actively participating in” (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2000, p. 258). The researcher thus needs a thorough understanding of the context in which the phenomenon occurs in order to place less emphasis on the material itself.

3.4.4 Reflexivity or critical reflection? Action through praxis

There is an important distinction to be made between reflexivity and critical reflection. Keeping to the definitions and descriptions of reflexivity presented in sections 3.4.1, 3.4.2 and 3.4.3 “threatens to lead us into a spiral of self-questioning that prevents us from taking a position ... instead of doing something practical and critical with [our findings]” (Parker, 1999, p. 29). Parker does not advocate the route of critical reflection, however, and calls for a reflexivity that is individual (to the researcher) as well as relational, in other words, “how the subjectivity of the researcher affects and interconnects with that of the researched” (Parker, 1999, p. 32). A relational approach is termed referential reflexivity (see section 3.4.2). In contrast, critical reflection mobilises researchers to take action once they have identified the structures that oppress individuals.

For Freire (1970), awareness for action involves the route of praxis. McWhinney (1997) defined ‘praxis’ by contrasting it with its near homonym ‘practice’. Although praxis and practice sound similar, their Greek roots show otherwise. ‘Practice’ originates from the word *prakteos* (meaning ‘to be doing’) while ‘praxis’ is from the word *prasso* (meaning ‘to pass through as on a journey’ to successfully achieve some goal or end result). Practice is therefore concerned with “a habitual and systematic process of doing” and it “follows an implicit set of rules or theories” (McWhinney, 1997, p. 80). A certain programme is followed, but not necessarily to achieve a goal. Praxis, in contrast, focuses on achieving a goal, but not within the set of rules that limit behaviour as in the case of practice. Praxis therefore transcends theory and practice by “getting results beyond those available within a single domain of work” (McWhinney, 1997, p. 80).

The paradigm of critical praxis is derived from movements such as existentialism, phenomenology, critical theory and personal theorising (Schubert, 1986). Vinden (1999) noted that due to the origin of praxis in the work of Marx and Engels, it may add a Marxist flavour to the theories of some its advocates. Ratner

(1997), for example, claimed that researchers fail to include concrete social activity into their research; his view being that practical social activity is what psychological phenomena arise from and as such have a concrete social character. According to Schubert (1986), critical praxis is a reflection on what it means to be involved in worthwhile experience and how this experience can be pursued when social justice faces certain constraints.

Critical social theory aims to transform unequal power relationships, and thereby improve people's lives, through a specific route of action for change (Fay, 1987; Giroux & McLaren, 1989; McLaren, 1992). This transformation takes place through self-reflection¹¹ (Bernstein, 1978), but in this study it is not oppressed individuals who will be provided with knowledge to reflect on the ways in which they are dominated and to benefit directly from this knowledge. It is the task of the researcher to gather information about the context in which the practices that interest this study take place and to reflect on the structures of these activities with the aim of suggesting changes where necessary. Praxis will therefore be defined for this study as setting a social goal where some form of action can be taken arising from the critical analysis of how under-graduate research methodology curricula are constructed.

The researcher as critical practitioner should, however, not be accepted unproblematically. The reasons for this are twofold. In the first instance, following Habermas's link between psychoanalysis and critical theory, Wedekind (1997) pointed out that self-analysis is virtually impossible according to psychoanalytic viewpoints. Wedekind's (1997) solution is to turn to an outsider "... particularly a trained person, [who] may be able to pick up interesting or problematic aspects of the practice which the practitioner, ..., has not noticed and will therefore not address" (p. 346) which relates to the second problem. The researcher in this study is supposedly the third party, but is herself an insider in an academic institution where relationships between students and lecturers, lecturers and lecturers, lecturers and the wider academic community, and so on are structured in a specific way. The researcher's ability to critically reflect on the research as an insider attempting to position herself as an outsider can therefore be questioned. Perhaps there are methodological solutions to this dilemma. These and other issues will be reflected on the methodology chapter.

To summarise the discussions in this chapter, there are two aspects of critical theory that are essential to this study. In accordance with Popkewitz (1991), these are:

- "To challenge the present as self-evident and undisputed, considering that the seeming inevitability of the present is historically constructed" (p. 231).
- To examine inequality in society and provide "practical solutions by which to contest these inequities through the production of particular courses of action" (p. 230).

The contributions of critical theory to this study are thus twofold. Firstly, critical theory provides a framework for reflecting on the situation that is taken-for-granted, namely, the content of research

methodology courses and the representations of the academics as constructors of the various curricula. Secondly, critical theory encourages proposals for specific actions that might ameliorate the current situation.

3.5 Conclusion

In this chapter it was argued that a critical theoretical approach transcends the alternative paradigms outlined in chapter 2 and that it was chosen for this study as it fits with the researcher's personal viewpoints on the nature of being and does not force the researcher to choose certain research methods above others (as will be discussed in chapter 4). Critical theory was consequently discussed in terms of its history, its newest trends and its ontological and epistemological claims. A transcendental realist ontology is subscribed to with an emphasis on the objective, subjective and normative-evaluative worlds outlined in Habermas's theory of communicative action and further refined by Carspecken. A Habermasian position of epistemological plurality is adhered to, although not all proponents of critical theory are in favour of such an approach. On a methodological level it was stated that there is a lack of a cohesive structure for how to conduct research within a criticalist perspective. A methodology would therefore have to be suggested that would be compatible with critical theory, that would answer the research question and that would be consistent with the researcher's own beliefs. The importance of providing a reflexive account of the research process and identifying a goal for social action concluded this chapter.

The next chapter outlines the methodology beginning with a discussion of the implications of the tenets of critical theory for the research design. It seems from the deliberations that were presented in this chapter that the researcher needs to describe methods that will define the objective realm contained in the research question, namely what is the content of under-graduate research methodology curricula? These methods should also define the subjective and normative-evaluative realms, namely, how is this content represented and how should it be represented? The chapter is thus divided into two sections, each dealing with ways of gathering data to answer two different research questions, the first being 'What is the content of under-graduate research courses in the social sciences, and the second being 'What are the beliefs held by some of the academics who construct and/or teach these courses?'

¹¹ For Habermas self-reflection is not action-orientated. It is, rather "analytic insights [that] intervene in life ..." (Habermas, 1974, p. 23). These insights lead to changes in practice, not just a self-awareness of how particular knowledge was gained. For practical purposes, however, the term critical reflection will be used in this study.