

Parker, I. and Shotter, J. (eds) (1990) *Deconstructing Social Psychology*. London: Routledge.

Chapter Four

THE RHETORIC OF PSEUDOSCIENCE

[pp. 61-75]

Celia Kitzinger

[celia_kitzinger@yahoo.com + www.york.ac.uk/depts/soci/s_Kitz.html]

Pseudoscience is would-be ‘science’ that fails to live up to the lofty ideals of True Science - and there’s a lot of it about. Entire disciplines and areas of study have been described as ‘pseudoscience’, including astrology (Furfey 1971: 204), the IQ controversy (Blum 1978), Skinnerian psychology (Machan 1974), bonding theory (Arney 1982), research on the paranormal (Hines 1988), and the whole of social psychology itself, often ‘seen as a trivial pseudo-science that expends a great deal of effort describing or proving what we already know’ (Furnham 1983). The label ‘pseudoscience’ is commonly believed to have a powerful discrediting effect: it is generally thought that research findings which are successfully attacked as pseudoscientific lose their legitimacy as privileged knowledge, and fear of this label is such that we recently witnessed ‘the unusual sight of the many UK universities anxious *not* to be given the half million pounds of the Koestler bequest to establish a chair of parapsychology, lest they be tarred with the brush of giving house room to pseudo-science’ (Wallis 1985).

Over the past few decades, many radical, feminist and humanistic writers have attacked the ‘pseudoscientific’ nature of the psychological theories used to legitimate oppressive practices. Studies of race and IQ have been dismissed as ‘pseudoscientific racism’ (Fryer 1987); studies purporting to demonstrate women’s emotional volatility are ‘pseudoscientific’ (Steinem 1983: 185), and Eysenck’s work on personality constitutes yet another example of ‘pseudoscience’ (Ingleby 1974: 316). The proposed new entry to the American Psychiatric Association’s Diagnostic and Statistical Manual, ‘self-defeating personality’, is intended to describe the [62] person who deliberately chooses mistreatment, failure and humiliation; it has been criticised as a diagnosis likely to be used particularly against women victims of domestic violence and attacked as being ‘without any adequate scientific basis’ (Franklin 1987). It is, some say, ‘pseudoscience’ which allegedly demonstrates the heritability of IQ, the moral inferiority of women and the pathology of homosexuals: it is pseudoscience that proves trade unionism to be against nature, or which relates juvenile delinquency to maternal employment outside the home. Pseudoscience is bad science, false science, erroneous science, science marred by fundamental flaws, science that is only pretending to be scientific, pop science, ethnoscience, scientism, science harnessed to political causes, ideology masquerading under the name of science. In summary, racist, sexist, heterosexist and class biased research is often described by its opponents as ‘pseudoscientific’: at worst, like Cyril Burt’s work on IQ, it is deliberately fraudulent; more usually it is merely influenced by the personal convictions of the researcher or the social stereotypes of the culture, and marked by experimental bias, inadequate sampling techniques, lack of control groups, conclusions that are unwarranted by the data, and by a failure of objectivity.

When an author attempts to persuade readers that a particular piece of research is

pseudoscientific and that its alleged results cannot, therefore, be taken seriously, that author is engaged in what I call 'the rhetoric of pseudoscience'. Rhetoric, in this sense, is language designed to persuade and seduce (see Billig's discussion, Chapter 3, in this volume): it may be flowery and eloquent or succinct and straightforward; it may be dishonestly self-serving or offered in good faith; it may take the form of poetry or of mathematical formulae; it may be truthful or dishonest, empty of real meaning or rich with ideas - what all rhetoric has in common is an attempt to persuade. The rhetoric of pseudoscience constitutes an attempt to persuade the reader that certain alleged findings should not be believed. For example:

Despite the neutral position they attempted to assume, most of the scientists believed Blacks to be inferior to whites. When the evidence appeared to contradict these beliefs, they sought to rationalise it away.

(Jones 1973)

[63]

Post natal depression is not a 'scientific' term but an ideological one. It mystifies the real social and medical factors that lead to mothers' unhappiness.

(Oakley 1979)

Many psychiatrists, by searching for the 'causes' of gayness and then inventing 'cures' reinforce the myth that homosexuals are sick and deviant. (Actually there are psychological studies which show gays to have personalities which are, on the average, at least as well, and perhaps better, integrated and more flexible than those of non-gays).

(Goodman et al 1983: 18)

In these examples, the writers argue that what appears to be supported by science is in fact based only on social beliefs, ideology and myth: evidence which contradicts these myths and stereotypes has been mystified or rationalised away. True science would describe the nature of oppression and demonstrate the equality (or even superiority) of the oppressed.

The rhetoric of pseudoscience is very attractive to many people because it appears to offer a legitimate and intelligible language with which to discredit unpalatable or oppressive research findings. It is sometimes suggested that if only we can demonstrate that a given assertion lacks scientific authority, we can remove its credibility: it will be demoted from fact to fallacy or from truth to hypothesis. As a result, a great deal of feminist social psychology has been devoted to pointing out the pseudoscientific nature of allegedly 'objective' research saturated with male perspectives and values. Such critiques have led many feminists to advocate a stricter adherence to True Science and empiricist methodologies, and to demand that researchers pay more attention to the biasing effects of personal values, build into their research designs increasing numbers of variables (including gender), employ more rigorous sampling procedures and so on (see Harding 1986). 'It is not the scientific method *per se* that we criticise,' says the Brighton Women and Science Group (1980:4), 'but the distortion of that method in the service of particular ideologies.'

But while some feminists have tried to replace pseudoscience with True Science, other feminists have begun to question the whole nature of science itself, rendering problematic the concept of objective knowledge and the special status of scientific [64] methodologies in pursuing it: this means that the distinction between pseudo- and true science is erased as True Science loses the special claim to represent incontestable knowledge that otherwise serves as its

distinguishing characteristic. My discussion of the rhetoric of pseudoscience arises out of the latter position. The argument of this chapter is that radical researchers should eschew altogether the rhetoric of pseudoscience. I offer three overlapping reasons in support of this argument. First, contrary to many people's expectations, demonstrating that a piece of research is pseudoscientific does *not* seem to work as a method of discrediting it: consequently, there is no point in employing the rhetoric of pseudoscience as it does not achieve our aim. Second, I will show how the rhetoric of pseudoscience is institutionalised within psychology and constitutes part of the ritual of academic psychological writing, such that, in using the rhetoric of pseudoscience, we are participating in the production of normal science, rather than presenting a challenge to it. Third, and most importantly, I will show that when we use the rhetoric of pseudoscience to dismiss the research of our ideological or political opponents, any short-term victory we may (possibly) achieve is gained only at the cost of a much more damaging concession - a concession that positivist-empiricist science does indeed have privileged access to true knowledge: in so doing we reinforce and legitimate the power of social science. Finally, I will illustrate these points with reference to the research on lesbianism and male homosexuality, and argue that it is counterproductive for radical psychologists to use arguments which rely on the concept of pseudoscience. Instead of perpetuating the pseudo/true science dichotomy in our own work, we need to deconstruct this traditional distinction. It is not pseudoscience but science itself which we should challenge.

First, on a purely pragmatic level, there are serious doubts about the effectiveness of the rhetoric of pseudoscience as a method of dismissing research findings. The professional psychological literature is full of unsubstantiated claims presented as verified fact and alleged 'findings' which have been dismissed as pseudoscientific by many well-known and respected psychologists: inconsistency, lack of scientific proof, and obvious elimination of critical data are no obstacles to the acceptance of a paradigm or a method' (Lévy-Leboyer 1988). Consequently, even if radicals were [65] able to demonstrate, unequivocally, that a particular model, theory, test or methodology is fundamentally pseudoscientific, there are no guarantees that such evidence will lead to it being expunged from the scientific canon. If the grosser examples of racism and sexism have disappeared from psychology it is more likely to be because they became socially and politically unacceptable than because they have been scientifically disproved. Several reviewers have illustrated the prevalence of pseudoscience in the core textbooks and journals of the social scientific disciplines. One researcher quotes a range of introductory psychology textbooks which claim that women are capable of making finer visual colour discriminations than men, a common belief in western cultures, but a statement for which there is apparently no empirical evidence; the textbooks, nonetheless, 'report this as fact citing either no references or tangential references which don't in fact support their claim' (Reynolds 1966). Another candidate for the label of 'pseudoscience' (also frequently quoted in introductory textbooks) is the Hawthorne data, reanalysis of which has shown 'a vast discrepancy between evidence and conclusions', such that one researcher felt compelled to contemplate 'the gnawing possibility that, if anyone were to take the trouble, the same results might obtain to the reanalysis of the data basic to all of our classic empirical monographs' (Deutscher 1968). This seems not unlikely as, on reanalysis by other researchers, the data published in professional psychology journals is frequently found to involve 'gross errors' (e.g. Wolins 1962), and several psychologists have suggested that work known to be flawed will nonetheless be published as long as it is 'interesting' (e.g. Davis 1971). The well-known Asch effect (a demonstration of social conformity), also typically presented in psychology textbooks as a basic universal demonstration

of the way people are, is another alleged example of 'pseudoscience': it was found to be unreplicable in America just twenty years later, and the sole British study in existence found that on only one out of 396 trials did a subject join the erroneous majority (Perrin and Spencer 1980). Until at least forty years after its invention, research projects continued to use the discredited Bogardus social distance scale (a fact described as 'a shocking condemnation of our professional craft' [Lastrucci 1970J), and journals still accept and publish studies of authoritarianism resting on an invalid F [66] scale, studies of 'human relations' resting on the invalid Hawthorne scale, and opinion and attitude research which has been rigorously criticised for decades (Deutscher 1968). Far from being relegated to the dustbin, 'pseudoscience' is incorporated into and forms a fundamental part of psychology today. The claim that, historically, science develops through a process of rejecting pseudoscience and building on truly scientific and empirically sound research has been described as 'a distortion of the historical record so extreme as to approach caricature' (Farley and Geison 1974).

This widespread retention of pseudoscience is partly due to the fact that if all of it *were* to be expunged there would be precious little psychology left. The idealised norms and practices of True Science are so lofty, its standards so elevated, that the pedestrian offerings of actual scientists rarely or never achieve them. Each person's 'science' is someone else's 'pseudoscience'. Which samples of 'pseudoscience' are retained and which rejected depends on the personal preferences of individual psychologists and on the requirements of psychology as an institution. On an individual level, pseudoscience is research whose findings you dislike. It is common to find that people are far less critical of research logic and methodology when the conclusions are ones with which they are in agreement. In one study, 75 reviewers from a respected academic journal - *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis* - were sent identical manuscripts on a controversial topic in behaviour modification, some with results favourable to behaviour modification, the others with the curves and data tables reversed so that the conclusions challenged behaviour modification. When reviewers read manuscripts in which the data supported their own perspective they rated its methodology as 'adequate' or 'excellent' and recommended that it be published; when the same procedures yielded results that challenged their own perspective, the method was rated as 'inadequate' and the reviewers recommended rejection of the manuscript (Mahoney 1977). The prevalence of pseudoscience is, then, partly a consequence of disagreement amongst social scientists as to the desirable outcome of research, so that each side in any controversy is especially sensitive to the methodological shortcomings of its rivals. In fact much of the research widely believed to be 'pseudoscience' is at the very least equal to its 'scientific' successor in terms of positivist [67] methodology: the work of phrenologists was 'often technically extremely proficient and could not be obviously distinguished as methodologically inferior to that of their opponents' (Wallis 1985), while 'the best of modern parapsychology comprises some of the most rigorously controlled and methodologically sophisticated work in the sciences (Collins and Pinch 1979: 243-4).

On a social level, the scientific status of research seems to be of less concern to psychology as an institution than is its ideological and political function, and if 'pseudoscience' serves a useful ideological function it is retained - perhaps in an adapted or disguised form. The survival of the MMPI despite the 'awesome empirical case against it' is attributed by Rogers (1980) as due to its useful function in reifying the 'psychiatrist as master' ideology. A similar case can be made for the Kohlbergian cognitive developmental model of morality which has been around for more than a quarter of a century; each critical onslaught is met with minor modifications to the scoring manual and the model retained because it serves the useful purpose of reifying and

supporting the liberal ideology of Western democracy. In summary, if certain methods, tests or results serve the vested interests of social science as an institution, then no amount of criticism of their 'pseudoscientific' status will expunge them. Instead of allowing ourselves to be deflected into arguments about scientific evidence, validity, reliability and methodological adequacy, radicals would do better to attack those vested interests directly. Instead of engaging in a doomed attempt to reconstruct 'pseudoscience' for our own purposes, we should be deconstructing the pseudoscience/true science dichotomy and exposing the reliance of True Science on the ideas, ideologies, and material interests of those who author it.

Second, contrary to the claims sometimes made, radical researchers using the rhetoric of pseudoscience are doing nothing new, nothing radical, nothing that cannot be readily incorporated in to institutionalised experimental psychology. Radicals sometimes claim that by exposing the pseudoscientific errors of oppressive research they are 'beating psychology at its own game': in exposing its biases, and drawing attention to its patent shortcomings and failings, they are undermining the established power of science. Even some sociologists of science have claimed that 'most practising scientists regard the existence of error as a threat to the enterprise of science' (Gilbert and Mulkay 1982). This is simply not the case. Pseudoscience is *not* a threat, or even an embarrassment, to the advocates of true science; on the contrary, it is an essential part of the institutionalised support structure of science itself.

Psychology actively encourages its disciples to be alert for pseudoscience, and to be sceptical of the claims of any research to 'truly scientific' status: one of the venerated norms of True Science is 'organised scepticism' (Merton 1968). Science is represented as a self-correcting institution. No one scientist can simply decide to be 'objective' - rather objectivity is the product of a scientific community which monitors and assesses the work of its members: 'objectivity is a matter of the continuous collective correction of each individual sociologists' work by others' (Banks 1979). The unveiling of pseudoscience is thus constructed as an essential part of the progress of True Science. In this way, radicals who expose the research of their colleagues as pseudoscientific are conforming precisely to the rules of scientific endeavour and, in arguing that other people are not playing by the rules, they necessarily reinforce the validity of those rules. In that sense, we cannot 'beat psychology at its own game'. Psychology as an institution is not deeply concerned about which of a rather limited range of possible theories 'wins' - whether the cognitive developmentalists beat the social learning theorists, or the behaviouristic approach defeats the humanistic approach. What matters is that the game should go on. The game of science is constructed as an intellectual battleground where you grapple with opposing theories or results according to the accepted rules and rituals of science as it depends upon controversy and disagreement about a small range of strictly circumscribed issues: rival claims and counterclaims of 'pseudoscientific' activity sustain science as an institution. Socialisation into the scientific community is a process of learning how to be critical about other people's science, how to evaluate theories according to the accepted rules, how to locate holes in the existing literature so that you can confidently end a literature review with the suggestion that 'more research needs to be done....', and hence obtain a research grant, a Ph. D., a fellowship, or another publication. As the first chapters of Ph.D. theses and the introductory sections of research papers illustrate, scientists are required ruthlessly to expose and subject to detailed analysis the pseudoscience of their disciplines as a suitable curtain-raiser for [69] their own superior 'truly scientific' research. One cynic offers this advice to ambitious scientists in search of status and prestige:

Be prepared to point out glaring deficiencies of other studies competitive with your own Slash or at least slightly wound the competition in introductions or literature review sections of papers [...] and make it clear that the 'others' are interlopers and usurpers, deficient in data, naive in conclusions and sterile in concepts.

(Sinderman 1982: 16)

In sum, there is no need to turn to radicals, or to the writings of a sceptical public, in order to find vivid and detailed documentation of the failings of science. The most vicious attacks on pseudoscience, the most conscientious discussions of its errors, the most prolonged complaints about its pervasiveness come from mainstream social scientists themselves. Denunciation of the opposition as 'pseudoscientific' is nothing new; in fact, it constitutes part of the accepted formula for writing academic papers. When we engage in the rhetoric of pseudoscience, far from contributing to the radical deconstruction of psychology, we are participating in the production of normal positivist-empiricist science. Rather than attacking 'pseudoscience' for failing to be True Science, we should be deconstructing True Science itself.

The third and most important reason why radicals should avoid the rhetoric of pseudoscience is because it reaffirms the idealised norms of positivist-empiricist (True) science. Pseudoscience is used to sell true science in the way that Brand X is used to sell New Improved Wonder Washing Powder: pseudoscience leaves dirty rings around the collar - True Science washes whiter. In his book *Winning the Games Scientists Play*, Sinderman (1982:198) describes the 'relish with which the scientific community exposes phonies'. Deliberately fraudulent science is particularly useful to the scientific community because it allows the presentation of such activities not as intrinsic to science but as alien contaminations. Fraudulent scientists are scapegoated so that the purity of the scientific community can be preserved, presenting it as a society of dedicated searchers after truth, harbouring only the occasional 'false prophet' (Kohn 1986) or 'betrayal of truth' (Broad and Wade 1983). As one critic points out, 'the revelation that Burt [70] faked his data serves to exempt the rest of science from social criticism, as if the problem were a few racist apples in the barrel, or "ideology" polluting an otherwise neutral science' (Levidow 1987: 43). (The Register of Chartered Psychologists, introduced in the United Kingdom in 1988, also serves to create the necessary framework for future distinctions between *bona fide* 'real psychologists', whose names appear on the Charter, and unscrupulous charlatans masquerading as psychologists, the 'pseudopsychologists'.)

Most pseudoscience, however, is described not as deliberately fraudulent, but as simply bearing witness to human failure adequately to serve the hard master of empirical science. Defenders of true science describe pseudoscience as a testament to human struggle towards the high ideals we set ourselves. In Karl Popper's words: 'Admittedly, science suffers from our human fallibility, like every other human enterprise [...] But we *learn* from our mistakes: scientists turn our fallibility into objectively testable *conjectural knowledge*' (Popper 1988). As the following examples illustrate, even our errors can be put to good use: 'no experiment is ever a complete failure. It can always be used as a bad example' (Carson's Consolation 1978):

Even though the monograph has little scientific merit, it is of didactic value and illustrates many of the errors that can enter into case studies.

(Rachman 1978)

One of the more important purposes [of this volume] is to train the reader to be a skeptical

and discerning consumer of past, current and future literature on mental health and homosexuality. To this end, a number of otherwise seriously flawed studies may be put to use as illustrations of poor technique or methodological problems.

(Gonsiorek 1982)

The accusation of 'pseudoscience' thus affords the scientist the opportunity to restate and reinforce the norms of scientific methodology, so flagrantly breached by the pseudoscientists. The implication is that if only the correct scientific procedures are [71] followed, then truth (or at least knowledge increasingly approximate to reality) will be revealed.

Compared with the physical sciences, the social sciences have little in the way of incontestable truths or concrete knowledge: 'the difference between what sociologists know and what everybody else knows is practically nil. This certainly isn't the state of affairs in the real sciences such as physics' (Mazure 1968). But our literature reviews, while lamenting the poor quality of the past research are typically confident that future work will bring significant improvement: 'surely almost all the good work and brilliant innovations in social psychology', say the authors of one textbook, 'are yet to come' (Rosenblatt and Miller 1972: 72). The story of scientific progress is told as ever onward and upward toward enlightenment. The 'up the mountain' research saga (Rorty 1980) depicts the apparent progress of social science from the dark ages of conformity to the dictates of social convention and religious prejudice, forward into the brave new world of scientific rigour and objectivity. The history of the notion of 'masturbatory insanity' is often told in this way (Hare 1962); so too are the histories of research on blacks and women, which progress from the early depiction of blacks and women as inferior beings, through a focus on them as being the innocent victims of prejudice, to the now common portrayal of racism and sexism as part of pathological personality patterns. The allegorical meaning of these histories is clear: past research findings symbolise human error, ignorance and taboo, current research findings represent the application of reason, logic and rationality, and psychology itself symbolises the triumphant emergence of scientific objectivity, out of a sea of bias, prejudice, and ideology.

Just as the heretic can only be defined in relation to a body of faith from which she or he dissents, so too pseudoscience is dependent on a concept of true science as objective, disinterested³ uncontaminated by ideologies and free of the taint of prejudice. In complaining that a particular piece of (pseudo) science merely reproduces cultural stereotypes, we imply that true science is (or can be, or should be) able to transcend these contaminating influences, that science is privileged knowledge which, despite its alleged deficiencies in this particular instance can and should be divorced from ordinary everyday conceptualisations of the world. The rhetoric of pseudoscience thus functions as a jeremiad – a [72] rhetorical form devoted to bringing good out of evil: out of the pseudoscience of the past, out of the pseudoscientific moralising and politicising of the present, a new truly scientific psychology is waiting to be born.

My central argument, then, is that when radicals use the rhetoric of pseudoscience we uphold and reinforce the positivist-empiricist model of science as a privileged form of knowledge distinct from commonsense versions of reality and free from political influences. Let me illustrate this argument with specific reference to one particular area of research which has attracted accusations of pseudoscience in epic proportions - the research on lesbianism and male homosexuality. The following discussion is drawn from the more detailed review of this literature in Kitzinger (1987).

Despite more than fifteen years of 'gay affirmative' research from

radical social scientists concerned to counter the traditional social scientific image of lesbians and gay men as sick and perverted, the pathological model is still considered respectable by some researchers (e.g. Kronmeyer 1980; Moberly 1983). In the last two or three years this model has appeared to gain popularity in scientific writing - not because more evidence has appeared to support it, but because of the increasingly repressive political climate, and the moral panic about AIDS. From the early 1970s until recently, however, there was a marked shift away from the pathological model of homosexuality towards a 'lifestyle' model, which presented homosexuality as a normal sexual orientation or choice of lifestyles. This model, too, gained popularity not because of scientific evidence supporting it, but because of the rise of the Gay and resurgence of the Women's Liberation Movements in the late 1960s. Each competing theory arises out of its particular political and social context. It is this dependence of social science on its cultural context and political implications that is obscured by the rhetoric of pseudosciences. In place of explicit political discussion, both sides claim that their model represents true science and that of their opponents, pseudoscience. In so doing, both sides reinforce the notion of science as a privileged form of objective knowledge.

Lifestyle researchers typically recount a story of research on homosexuality which relies on the 'up the mountain' saga. Once upon a time, the story goes, researchers thought that homosexuals [73] were sick and perverted; this is because they were blinded by religious prejudice and trapped by the social conventions of their time. Now we are more sophisticated and objective up-to-date research demonstrates that lesbians and gay men are just as normal, just as healthy, and just as valuable members of a pluralistic society as are heterosexual people. The story tells of the heroic triumph of True Science over pseudoscience. But an alternative way of telling this same story draws on explicitly political language. In 1974 the American Psychiatric Association removed homosexuality from the category of pathological illness. This reclassification did not result from an exhaustive review of the scientific literature, but was decided by members' votes: 'truth' was established by numerical majority. When this decision was made there was a small and tentative body of research literature purporting to demonstrate the mental health of lesbians and gay men, but it was vastly outweighed by the writings of the pathological school: certainly, as the 'pathologists' pointed out at the time, it would have been hard to argue, solely on the basis of this pre-1974 research, that homosexuality is *not* pathological. The decision to depathologise homosexuality seems, then, to have been taken not as a result of scientific enquiry, but rather to have been influenced by the changing social climate and, in particular, by the disruption of APA meetings by Gay Liberation activists for several years previously (a fact never mentioned in the professional literature). It was not the effectiveness of the rhetoric of pseudoscience, but rather overt political protest and large-scale social change that resulted in the (temporary) demise of the pathological model. When lifestyle researchers choose to attribute it instead to the inexorable progress of science, they present an image of science as striving towards objective truth, and obscure the role of political and ideological factors in determining that 'truth'. They also reinforce the notion that the rhetoric of pseudoscience, on its own, is effective in bringing about scientific (and, sometimes, sociopolitical) change.

Just as the lifestyle researchers accuse the pathologists of producing pseudoscientific research which depends on religious taboos and social stereotypes, so too proponents of the pathological model accuse the lifestyle researchers of engaging in pseudoscientific attempts to defend and justify their own deviant sexualities, or of succumbing to Gay Lib propaganda and sexual [74] liberationist ideology. The argument between the two factions then becomes

constructed in terms of who has the best evidence and the most objective methods - who is doing the 'most scientific' research. In this debate the social function of beliefs about homosexuality is obscured. Potentially interesting discussion of the ideological and political uses of various constructions of homosexuality is submerged beneath a welter of discussion about sampling methodologies and testing procedures. Homosexuality and its political context is replaced, as the topic of debate, by an arid and repetitive argument about which side is doing the best science. Both sides, then, accuse the other of pseudoscientific reliance on 'centuries old prejudice' (Birke 1980: 108), 'stereotypes' (Browning 1984), 'popular concepts' (De Cecco and Shively 1984) and 'public opinion' (Gonsiorek 1981). One researcher dismisses the theories of another with the statement: 'One might expect that sort of uninformed flap from Germaine Greer, but not from a scientist' (Karlen 1972). True science, it is implied, is free of the biasing social influences of prejudice, taken-for-granted notions and political ideology. Thus pseudoscience reinforces the image of science as the only legitimate purveyor of valid knowledge. Moreover, the prevalence of pseudoscience is used to justify the need for continuing social scientific research in this area. Lengthy reviews of past research describing the 'sorry state of the literature' and the 'extraordinary inadequacy of the research findings' end with a plea for 'solid empirical research on homosexuality' (Suppe 1981). One researcher first complains - in a rash of alliteration - that the 'sickness theory of homosexuality is shabby, shoddy, slipshod, slovenly, sleazy, and just-plain-bad science' and then goes on to exalt the scientific method claiming that 'the person who could give a good course in science [to psychiatrists] ... would be a major benefactor of mankind' (Kameny 1971). 'It is only with the rubble of bad theories that we shall be able to build better ones, argue Bentler and Abramson (1981). Given that one could equally well argue that a research area so conspicuously lacking in 'truly scientific' findings should be abandoned forthwith, this rhetorical use of pseudoscience can be seen as a selective account of scientific development designed expressly to enhance the image of science. In sum, the recent work of radical researchers on homosexuality is politically counter-productive. Employing the rhetoric of [75] pseudoscience in their anxiety to dismiss the 'pathological' model, they serve a useful function for social science by upholding and reinforcing its institutionalised norms. Their research constitutes an impressively coherent public-relations job on behalf of positivist-empiricist social science.

I have argued in this chapter that when we rely on the rhetoric of pseudoscience to criticise oppressive scientific findings, we are reinforcing scientific norms. Accusations of pseudoscience contain the criticisms within the boundary limits of the positivist-empiricist paradigm. We often resort to the rhetoric of pseudoscience in order to make ourselves intelligible to the opposition: in using it we play by the rules of a game they understand. But in attempting to adhere to those rules, in attempting to speak in legitimate and intelligible ways, we reproduce the very positivist-empiricist discourse we want to challenge. As long as we limit our criticisms to those intelligible within positivist-empiricist science, we are subject to what John Shotter (1986a) has called a 'condition of entrapment': there is no way of demonstrating the invalidity of positivist-empiricism - its very functioning is designed to prevent this. Instead of allowing ourselves to be deflected into arguments about scientific evidence and methodological technique, and thus participating in the production of normal science, we need to take an imaginative leap beyond the boundary walls of the positivist paradigm. Only if we can rise to the challenges of post-positivism can we begin to deconstruct social psychology's oppressive structure and create practical alternatives which will offer real opportunities for radical social and political change.

[End of page 75]