

Grievances on Academic Pretension

The Problems Institutional Pretension Poses to Equality in Educational Outcomes

Academia is intimidating and this is not without reason. The system of academia today is a system that exists primarily to protect itself. It guards itself against the challenge of the common peoples by burying itself in piles of arbitrary cultural cues and sheer mass of over-complication. This is academic pretension. Academic pretension is, perhaps, one of the most pervasive and problematic regions within the system of higher education. Academic pretension, loosely defined, is the aggregation and sustenance of *artificial* barriers erected between an individuals ability to contribute actively to new, valuable understandings and the actualization of the ability to research those understandings. The gap between these two is closed through the attainment of resources, which include and are not limited to: advanced degrees, time, wealth, and cultural cues. Simply stated, though it appears all individuals have equal opportunity in the ability to attain high levels of involvement in academia, there exists a level of pretension and exclusiveness that only serves to isolate individuals and compartmentalize between disciplines, turning academia into a landscape for the sustenance of affluence.

While it is true that there are certainly more pressing issues to be solved with larger impacts than the problem of academic pretension, it is important to recognize the substantial role academia has in shaping perceptions and discourse on research and future findings. Ultimately, the lofty and pretentious nature of academics serves to discourage those of lower economic classes who would otherwise find academics interesting. As noted by Torche, the gap between minorities and educational outcomes vanishes as individuals attain higher levels of education, only to reemerge in post-graduate levels. Instead of encouraging new research and findings, academia seems to be a mechanism for the promotion of existing class and power structures to remain in power.

On Academic Pretention

Academic pretension is coercive, requiring research and researches alike to fit into certain, designed molds. In coercing research to “common accepted discourse” and a certain “canon”, research that is not as easily understood, yet is wholly accurate could be completely disregarded. Research that supports the thoughts, opinions, and beliefs of those within the discourse is praised at a higher level than those that challenge those perceptions. This is problematic to the core rationale with which research and academics exist.

One notable consequence of this is that academic pretention creates boundaries between disciplines. It is notable that multiple disciplines overlap in talking about what is scientifically the same observation, but labeled by different disciplines completely different things. This cross-over not only encourages inefficiency within research and understanding,

Academic pretension worships individuals and not ideas. In worshipping individuals, the focus is misdirected. Yes, we must give credit where credit is due; after all, researchers have few incentives to obsess over vast amounts of literature as it is. Yet, we must not forget the true focus. All researchers arguably should be intimately passionate with discovery and newer, broader understandings, rather than the pursuance of affluence through names and labels. What is important is the contribution; the attachment of a name only serves to puff the ego of the contributor. This is a problem symptomatic of larger institutional problems within the system of higher education and one not easily removed.

Academic pretention encourages inefficiency and ambiguity in writing. This is particularly noticeable in the humanities, where one can say absolutely nothing in hundreds of pages, buried under meaningless jargon and confused conceptual understandings. The language barrier be-

tween the academic and unacademic writing is, without a doubt, substantial. There is no penalty placed on those who cannot convey or articulate even the simplest of ideas. Hundreds of pages are written, not because they are needed, but because they satisfy an arbitrary prerequisite for what is considered “good, respectable” research. This wastes time; precious time that could be better spent reading and absorbing information that would lead to eventual meaningful research findings. Time is valuable, especially the time of some of our brightest minds.

Sociological Approach

The problems that academic pretension poses can and should be explained by sociological theories.

It is clear that between the three main sociological approaches that the problem of academic pretension can be best explained through Cultural Capital Theory (CCT). In the definition of academic pretension, it is important to emphasize the arbitrary nature between the differences in the conceptualization and actualization of research. Many people possess the ability to become great academics, but many more lack the ability to ascend to academia, largely as a result of collective cultural cues on the individual. The amalgamation of cultural cues on the individual eventually combine to work in favor or against the individual. For instance, having Ph.D’s in the family and being “bookish” and fascinated with reading can and likely do comprise various notable cultural cues. While not everyone is made to be an academic, not all academics should be (for the most part) affluent and white.

Solution

The solution is to promote an atmosphere of simplicity in writing; to abstract from the writing the most important, key points. The form of the essay is an outdated medium in conveying research. There has been advancement, notably the creation of headers and subheaders, but I recommend a wholesale stripping. If we wish to convey information better, why must we use this outdated medium? We say that one should dedicate the time and effort in order to be accepted into the club that is graduate level education. It is seen as inextricably difficult to attain a Ph.D, no doubt. Yet, shouldn't this be made easier? Isn't it desirable to have more minds contributing to the development and progress of society? I should think so.

My personal solution is to strip research of much of its excess. In place of the essay as a medium for communication of results among various discourses academia should use summaries and outlines. Seasoned researchers know to gloss over less important parts of the research—why must we be forced to stumble through thickets of verbosity to arrive at a simple, easily understandable conclusion? I can't imagine that research papers are presented to those who use all this information in aggregate in their present form. No. They can and, truthfully, should be presented in a clearer, more time-efficient manner.

In addition to this simplification, we need a reduction of language to essentials. Words that promote academic pretention by having momentary usefulness or are isolated by discipline do not need to exist. Words are beautiful and allow creative expression, but there should be no room for this creative expression where clear communication is so heavily emphasized.

In simplifying the literature, we promote the equalization and balance of education access, eventually working toward the desirable balance of educational outcomes. Moreover, we speed up the process of innovation and discover, lowering the resource strain that academia already suffers.