

**MARIUSZ FINKIELSZTEIN**

## **BOREDOM AND DIRTY WORK AT THE UNIVERSITY CONTEXT**

The Concept of *Dirty work* originated from Everett Hughes's paper from 1962 titled *Good People and Dirty Work*. He defined *dirty work* as an activity or a task that, for some reason, is perceived as something that should be done, but nobody willingly wants to do it. Hughes' example of dirty work was "liberating" German society from Jews during the Nazi regime. However, the concept of dirty work not necessarily must involve such ultimate matters.

The phenomenon of tasks and activities that no one wants to do willingly is present in the university milieu. Many PhD students and academic staff are involved in dirty work activities within their academic duties. In recent years, academics are forced to do more administrative and bureaucratic work, which they often perceive as dirty, unwanted, unnecessary, or simply stultifying. This problem is clearly visible in the Polish context, where the bureaucratization of academia is still overwhelming and financial support by the state not sufficient to hire additional administrative staff (e.g., European grant's experts). Due to these, many academics are diffused and, in their own opinion, not adequately focused on their core work (didactics and researching). Some of them express even a strong discontent by this situation. For many, exhausting and humiliating is the parametrical system of evaluation scientific work, which makes them engage in many *dirty*, senseless, meaningless, purposeless activities, including forms filling and reports/applications writing. Some of them perceive it as dirty, even such activities as teaching students or conference meetings. In many cases, dirty work is conveyed to PhD students so that it can serve as a visible sign of social status. As in many other work types, the higher is your position in the hierarchy, the smaller amount of dirty work you have to do by yourself because you can delegate it to others.

This subject is organically connected to boredom, which for many is taboo because it is a widespread conviction that intelligent men are never to be bored. However, contrary to this assumption, boredom is prevalent at the university (see Finkielsztein 2014, Baghdadchi 2005), and many research show that the most intelligent individuals are the most susceptible to boredom and the cause of that is inadequacy between task difficulty level

and individual's skills (see Csikszentmihalyi 1975). Dirty work is exactly the case inasmuch many such tasks are felt to be under one's qualification or even dignity and are incompatible with one's professional vocation. In many cases, it causes boredom, which is characterized by lack of subjective meaning (it can have some sense for somebody else), meaningless routine, lack of engagement, weariness, decreased satisfaction and effectiveness and sense of dragging time, to number a few.

Presented material derives from my qualitative sociological research on academic boredom, which I have carried on at the University of Warsaw since 2012. In the research, I used the principles of grounded theory by Anselm Strauss and Barney Glasser, which stresses the importance of the inductive method of empirical research. Theories and thesis are to be grounded in empirical data. Thus, researcher should start without any hypothesis or previous theory background. In this manner, I pursued participant observation of university classes, scientific conferences and other staff meetings, then interviewed students and university teachers (casual interviews, focused group interview and individual in-depth interviews). As an additional material I used internet survey with students, which provided a lot of qualitative data as well (open questions).

In the presentation I would like to show connections between concept of dirty work by Everett Hughes, one of the most influential Chicago authors, and academic boredom, which is still an understudied phenomenon, most likely because of its latent and shameful character. For many people, scientist's work is still strongly connected with passion, interest and scientific curiosity. Not so many are ready to overtly admit that there are moments of painful boredom and futility in their work, and that it is probably inescapable element of academic work or maybe even its integral, inward quality. Instead neglecting the issue, it should be pursued in order to receive its better understanding, which is important to improve and change academic life, both students and university teachers.