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**A critique of Post Modernism(s) in Nursing Literature  
from the Perspective of Habermas' Critical Theory**

**Thesis submitted by**

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## **Abstract**

### **A critique of Post Modernism(s) in Nursing Literature from the Perspective of Habermas' Critical Theory**

The aim of the thesis was to examine the strengths and weaknesses of postmodernism(s) and the influence it had on the nursing discourse. This was to be achieved by using Fairclough's critical discourse analysis to examine the nursing literature. A literature search was conducted on major data bases of nursing journals, and after inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied 167 articles became the data for the study. The order of the discourse revealed that the dominant features included the following findings: 75% of the articles make reference to the theme of power; Foucault was the dominant theorist; and 73% of the articles were published in five nursing journals.

Further analysis was conducted concerning the theme of power relating to articles that utilised Foucault and postmodern critical theory. Articles that drew primarily from Foucault articulate an approach to power that exhibits high levels of consistency. This was not the case when Foucault was used in conjunction with other theorists or in the case of the postmodern critical theory articles. These articles included a high level of variation, confusion and contradiction. The Foucauldian critique of critical theory has had a profound impact on the discourse and this was particularly evident concerning issues relating to emancipation, empowerment and reflection. From the Foucauldian perspective these concepts were considered to be overly ambitious and privileged particular groups. In the case of reflection they undermined the 'self' by engaging in self-surveillance. Stripped of their emancipatory agenda, the postmodern critical theory articles lose their *raison d'être*.

The findings have been interpreted using a framework based on Habermas' critical theory concerning his theories of communicative action and instrumental rationality. Further impact on the discourse emanates from societal and contextual issues concerning publishing and government funding since the discourse almost entirely originates from the university sector. This reveals that the postmodern nursing discourse, as a whole, is marginalised through issues relating to journal 'impact factor' ratings and research quality frameworks.

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