



Rethinking Domination and Resistance: Challenging Postmodernism

by Aaron Schutz

The emergence of postmodern ideas in the educational literature has complicated the field's understandings of oppression and resistance. While important, this postmodern influence has been problematic in its tendency to stress the relatively nurturing forms of "pastoral" control generally experienced by the privileged. Such a focus can direct attention away from the often brutal discipline experienced by those who are more marginalized. The article examines contexts where pastoral or disciplinary forms of control predominate, noting the limited forms of resistance (if any) generated by each. It then looks to more sophisticated visions of resistance developed by scholars and activists. The article concludes by exploring the limitations inherent in any single approach to understanding or resisting domination.

Over the past two decades or so, the emergence of postmodern ideas in educational circles has complicated our understandings of oppression and resistance (e.g., Davies, 1997; Hunter, 1996; Lather, 1991; Popkewitz, 1998a; Schutz, 2000). Perhaps the most famous postmodern effort to contest simple ideas of oppression comes at the beginning of Michel Foucault's (1977) *Discipline and Punish*. Foucault plunges readers into a description of the 1757 torture of the regicide Damiens, from his screams to the "red hot pincers . . . poured molten lead, boiling oil, burning resin," and more applied to his body (p. 3). Then, without transition, he presents the entirely banal daily calendar and rules of a "house of young prisoners in Paris" (p. 6), showing how every moment is planned out and defined for the prisoners. His goal in presenting such a stark opposition is to force readers to consider whether the increasingly modern, aseptic approach of the "house" is truly more civilized than the "red hot pincers." As he notes later, what is key in new control techniques such as those in the "house" is the way they individualize each subject by constantly monitoring his or her divergence from "normal." In the "house," every departure from the norm is sanctioned in an attempt to eliminate uniqueness and ensure that each prisoner takes on a "normalized" identity.

Elsewhere, Foucault examines even more complex (and, he asks, more insidious?) forms of control and domination. He distinguishes between relatively crude *disciplinary* power, which, like that in the "house" or in military camps, is overtly (often "vi-

olently") imposed, and more subtle *pastoral* power, which operates more subversively and indirectly (Bevir, 1999). Whereas children in the "house" are sanctioned when they act incorrectly, Foucault and later interpreters (e.g., Popkewitz, 1998a; Rose, 1994) show how clients of therapists and social workers, as well as students in democratic classrooms, are nurtured and helped to embody "better" ways of being. In this way, pastoral forms of control often co-opt individual and group agency.¹

Perhaps the simplest way to understand the distinction between disciplinary and pastoral modes of control (see Bevir, 1999, p. 355) is to compare traditional with more progressive classrooms. The traditional classroom is generally set up in rows. All students face the teacher, who directs classroom activity, distributes preestablished collections of knowledge, and sanctions those who do not follow the rules (through demerits, visits to the principal, bad grades, etc.). Progressive classrooms, in contrast, are often set up in a circle where students can creatively and critically interact with knowledge and each other. Thus, they seem to allow more freedom.

From a postmodern perspective, however, the key difference between the two approaches resides largely in *how* they control. In the circle, the students and the teacher collectively monitor each other. Through apparently free and empowering interactions, they teach each other the *correct* way to participate. In progressive settings such as this, the "governing of the individual" occurs not "through . . . explicit defining of [set] procedures" as in more traditional settings, "but through the deployments of [particular ways of] reasoning" (Popkewitz, 1998a, p. 24). Unlike traditional settings that tend to sanction divergences from a static norm, then, pastoral settings *foster* particular forms of creativity, often harnessing them to serve the (loosely coupled) systems in which participants are enmeshed. And because control in progressive classrooms is distributed throughout the environment instead of located in (apparently) identifiable figures or systems, it is extremely difficult for participants to detect or resist.

The complexity of pastoral domination is often reflected in the convoluted writing of postmodern attempts to describe it and in the general refusal of postmodernists to clearly delineate what "counts" as oppressive. In fact, the refusal to land firmly on any definition of "empowerment" or "oppression" is a central characteristic of most postmodern writing.² Instead, postmodernists generally emphasize that no practice (e.g., neither traditional nor progressive teaching) is ever clearly dominating or empowering. They worry that any specific vision of empowerment may turn out, from a new perspective or in a new context, to be dominating. They also show how both pastoral and disciplinary forms of domination always coexist, even in contexts

where one may predominate (Bevir, 1999). Assertions that postmodernism promotes a vulgar relativism are largely misplaced, however. In fact, more sophisticated postmodern writings generally evidence a deep fear of an increasingly complex and invisible web of (largely pastoral) domination that co-opts human agency (for overviews, see Connor, 1997; McGowan, 1991). The complexity of postmodern writing often obscures this, however, leading postmodernists and their critics to speak past each other.

Although I often wish postmodernists wrote a bit more clearly, I laud postmodern efforts to enrich our conversation about oppression (Schutz, 2000). I worry, however, about the tendency of postmodern writers to focus on pastoral forms of control.³ In this article, then, I explore the possibility that postmodern fascination with the pastoral may divert attention from the blunt discipline generally experienced by those at the bottom rungs of society. I look to different examples that indicate how these different forms of oppression tend (or fail) to incite different forms of resistance. I then explore a range of efforts by scholars and activists to develop more effective resistance strategies. I conclude by noting limitations of my discussion as well as implications for educational researchers.

It is important to emphasize from the beginning that this largely theoretical discussion is not meant to fully capture the rich complexities either of postmodernism or of forms of oppression and resistance encountered in actual settings. As Dewey (1902) noted more than a century ago, mistaking abstractions for reality is like mistaking a map for actual geography. Instead, I hope my rough distinctions contribute to a more nuanced dialogue about the relationships among oppression, resistance, and privilege.

Domination and Privilege

The postmodern tendency to focus on increasingly sophisticated forms of pastoral control can obscure the fact that only a quite small portion of society is most fully exposed to such practices. In fact, we are surrounded by arenas of precarious existence populated by people who, in many cases, would be lucky to have access to advanced “pastoral” contexts. Soja (2000), for example, describes a contemporary Los Angeles with

a growing population of “new orphans” fill[ing] the streets with children abandoned by (or voluntarily abandoning) their parents and . . . elderly poor . . . abandoned by their children. Bands of homeless runaway youth compete for living space in desolated “landscapes of despair” . . . while older forms of domestic and industrial slavery and peonage have re-emerged in new guises, as immigrants . . . are imported and sold to wealthy households as live-in domestic servants. . . . A “sweatshop economy” of Dickensian proportions gathers other immigrants, often undocumented and mainly women, into hazardous worksites toiling for sub-minimum wages backed by constant threats of deportation. And huge homeless populations overflow from Skid Rows to form their own geographies throughout the urban fabric. (p. 278)

Similar descriptions have been written about spaces populated primarily by other people of color, poor Whites, and others (see, e.g., Kozol, 1991; Wacquant, 2002).

As Soja implies, the “developed” world has increasingly shifted away from “pastoral” and even “disciplinary” efforts to normalize large segments of its population. Instead of actively monitor-

ing individuals, our society has moved toward collective and relatively “passive” warehousing of these “others” to suffer and rot, interning them in segregated communities and (often) schools. For these “waste products of social control, the ever growing numbers of people who cannot be integrated,” who are literally not worth integrating “into the ‘normal’ social order,” what is necessary is not Foucault’s “corrective and interventionist surveillance of individuals” (Dumm, 1993, p. 188), but a careful policing of the boundaries between “us” and “them.” (Of course, such spaces only seem like wastelands from outside; in fact, they contain rich cultures and traditions [Wacquant, 1997].)

Only the dominant classes, often “knowledge workers” secure in their literally and metaphorically gated communities, are generally privileged to receive the (quite costly) benedictions of pastoral control. Less privileged workers (factory laborers, hamburger flippers, housekeepers, etc.) generally experience more blunt “discipline” and are often threatened with the loss of their positions, with the possibility that they might fall into the realm of the “excluded” (see also Carlson & Apple, 1999; Ehrenreich, 2001; Harvey, 1993).⁴ I focus on pastoral and disciplinary contexts here, leaving a discussion of “exclusion” for later work.

The Velvet Cage: Pastoral Control in New Capitalism

Gee, Hull, and Lankshear (1997) argue that “new” capitalism seeks to be fundamentally different than the “old” capitalism. “Old capitalism,” as they describe it, looked much like Foucault’s prison, a *disciplinary* form of control. It “was alienating. Workers were forced to sell their labor, but often with little . . . investment in the business.” “New capitalism,” however, operates much more through postmodern processes of *pastoral* control. Workers “are asked to invest their hearts, minds, and bodies fully in their work. They are asked to think and act critically, reflectively, and creatively” (p. 7). The systems they are enmeshed in seek to transform them “into committed ‘partners’ who engage in meaningful work, fully understand and control their jobs, [and] supervise themselves” (p. 29; see Popkewitz, 1998a).

While the new pastoral capitalist vision “offers a less alienating view of work and labor,” Gee et al. (1997), like many postmodern writers, note that “in practice[,] it can also amount to a form of mind control and high-tech, but indirect, coercion” (p. 7). Hierarchy is not eliminated in these new forms of control. Instead, it becomes “nonauthoritarian,” as workers participate in “distributed systems [where] . . . control is distributed throughout the system and not in any ‘center’ that monopolizes power, knowledge, or control” (p. 51; see Foley, 1999).

Gee et al. (1997) argue that these new forms of social control are also visible in a number of cutting edge efforts to reform pedagogy, as particular strata of the educational system seek to prepare students for new capitalist worksites. They focus on an influential project directed by Ann Brown and her colleagues in which students educate each other through complex collaborative processes. Like new capitalists, however, Brown et al. (as cited in Gee et al., 1997) note that their classrooms are actually “not so democratic” (p. 65). Although there is no single “leader” and there is no “center, only a flexible network of distributed roles and responsibilities,” the activities of the group as a whole serve purposes set for them by the institution of school, the teacher, and

the researchers (Gee et al., 1997, p. 62). In fact, as many postmodern writers note (e.g., Popkewitz, 1998a), multiple systems of control often work together without any clear locus of control at all. Gee et al. (1997) argue that such pedagogical strategies “can be used as devices to ‘manipulate’ people . . . into accepting, trusting and committing themselves to the goals and values . . . of the leader (teacher) and the organizational system (technologies and activities) within which she operates” (p. 64).

By obscuring the extent to which the aims of collaborative action serve externally provided goals, educational approaches and worksites such as those of Brown et al. (as cited in Gee et al., 1997) seek to eliminate any clear manifestation of power that might be contested. Instead of suppressing the agency of participants as more disciplinary approaches might, pastoral approaches co-opt the creativity of participants by recruiting their desires and motivations. Pastoral models like Brown et al.’s represent sophisticated examples of the kind of hidden domination many postmodernists fear.

Postmodern writers tend not to discuss a second mechanism that co-opts the agency of participants in pastoral settings, however. Those in pastoral settings generally receive more material resources than those subjected to disciplinary regimes. For example, pastoral schools tend to be populated by middle- to upper-class students and tend to have better physical plants, higher paid teachers, more enrichment activities, and so forth. Workers at pastoral worksites are generally paid more, have better benefits, and operate in more luxurious settings than those who are less “skilled.” The privileged, then, have strong incentives to follow the rules and to become “who” systems ask them to be, and they are surrounded by examples of the disciplined and excluded who have not.

Gee et al. (1997) explore the contradictory and often oppressive consequences of this new capitalism. In the last chapters of their book, they show the limited ways such advanced ideas actually play out in worksites populated by low-income temporary workers, as well as how workers in less powerful countries are often excluded. Instead of replacing older hierarchical forms of capitalism, Gee et al., among others, show how the development of largely pastoral “new capitalist” practices for the privileged often proceeds side by side with (and informs the development of) “increasingly disciplinary and insecure employment conditions” (Collinson, 1994, p. 58) primarily for the marginalized. They acknowledge a key point, then: Pastoral domination is largely a “problem” for those who are most privileged.

Disciplinary Control and the Marginalized

Classrooms like Brown et al.’s involve extremely demanding, expert forms of instruction. Just as few workers can hope to participate in “new capitalist” practices, very few students will ever have access to this kind of instruction. As Anyon (1980; see Smerdon & Burkham, 1999) has shown, marginalized students often experience overtly disciplinary forms of teaching that map onto the kinds of jobs they tend to end up in. It is, of course, true that such students also experience pastoral forms of domination, for example through mass media that helps them decide “who” they are, what they need, how they should seek pleasure, and perhaps most problematically, frames their understandings of social problems and possibilities for political action. However, in the institutions they operate within, their experience is primarily disciplinary.

What I find interesting is that, in contrast with more pastoral settings, research indicates that disciplinary contexts tend to generate resistance. While Foucault (1980) was certainly correct to note that “there are no relations of power without resistances” (pp. 141–142), it is also clearly true that some contexts generate less resistance than others. For example, Scott (1990), in his analysis of struggles around the world, notes that overt domination often fosters oppositional perspectives. A range of empirical work has shown much the same thing in schools. As Gutierrez et al. (Gutierrez, Larson, & Kreuter, 1995; Gutierrez, Rymes, & Larson, 1995) note, a rigid teacher script that does not respond to the experiences of students “is precisely what fosters a continuing underlife” (Gutierrez, Rymes, & Larson, 1995, p. 462; see also Anyon, 1980; Lave & Wenger, 1991; McNeil, 1988; and Raywid, 1993, to name only a few). In other words, in disciplinary contexts students generally understand they are dominated and respond in ways that contest this domination (whether or not they understand this as “resistance”). (For discussions of resistance in education, see Knight Abowitz [2000], Pitt [1998], and Munro [1995]).⁵

In fact, research indicates that students very quickly learn to look beneath the explicit ideology of disciplinary teachers and schools, discovering the real bottom line in terms of what is required of them by the system. For example, in her research on a school where teachers were limited to largely scripted instruction, Shanks (1994) found, in the words of one student, that “only the surface is important” (p. 46). Students understood that “work needs to be finished, but not necessarily understood” (p. 48). My point is not that statements like these represent modernist “truths” about the world; instead, they reflect situated, problematic, tension-filled practical “insights.” For example, while students may develop quite sophisticated understandings of how forms of oppression affect them directly, they may have little or no knowledge of the larger social, cultural, and institutional systems that support this treatment. Nonetheless, students in this study clearly understood that their instructional activities had little to do with goals relevant to them, and they responded in ways that indicated this understanding (see also Weis, 1990).

We (Schutz & Harris, 2001) found much the same thing in our study of an alternative middle school we call New Hope, a place for students who had been pushed out of the traditional school system. For many students, New Hope was their last chance. Like Gutierrez, Rymes, and Larson (1995) and Willis (1977), among others, we stress the creativity of student resistance in the New Hope context. When we conducted our study, New Hope was in crisis, and the teaching in the school consisted largely of the completion of worksheets. Teachers at this school constantly told students to complete their “work,” to do their “work,” or that they did not “work” hard enough, often linking this to success beyond school. Although staff often did try to connect with students on a personal level, most also constantly belittled their academic commitment and abilities. In response, the students developed innovative strategies for completing worksheets. For example, they found that information in one section of a worksheet often contained the answers to another section. Thus, they were able to complete significant parts of these sheets without really having to engage with the actual content. At other times, they simply

found innovative ways to cheat. And these approaches seemed necessary for student survival, since students were often given more work than it was reasonable to expect them to complete in the time they were given. Students who did not learn such “short cuts,” who actually attempted to complete the sheets as they were designed, generally fell behind.

Like Gutierrez et al., we saw that student “underlife” in New Hope generally remained below the level of explicit opposition. But, along with Shanks (1994), we also saw how student “short cuts” as well as outright “cheating” often actually made the system of schooling work more smoothly. In fact, it was student resistance that allowed the New Hope system of worksheets, and its underlying moralistic ideology of “work,” to remain intact. If students had actually tried to complete worksheets the way they were supposed to, the entire system would have ground to a halt. Solarzano and Delgado-Bernal (2001) discuss the wide range of similar writing showing how such “self-defeating resistance helps to recreate the oppressive conditions from which it originated” (p. 310).⁶

The “underlife” resistance skills students learn in such classrooms may serve the interests of their future employers in much the same way as they seemed to serve the implicit interests of New Hope. For example, Hull (1993; Gee et al., 1997) describes the experiences of a group of largely temporary employees—electronic component assemblers in a Silicon Valley factory. Most of the jobs marginalized students are destined for involve similar temporary positions with low pay and generally without benefits (Carlson & Apple, 1999; see Biddle, 2001). Despite attempts to introduce “new capitalist” collaborative approaches to these workers, the challenges and costs of developing such practices ultimately limited these changes to window dressing. The actual working conditions of the assemblers changed little, remaining subject to extremely hierarchical, “old capitalist” procedural controls. (Similar stories could be told about service workers [Wacquant, 2002].)

Hull shows how, like the students in New Hope, these workers were often caught between following the rules and actually completing the job they were given. In some cases, they engaged in a kind of “underlife” activity that allowed them to complete their jobs by modifying the rules. Here, although “successful” resistance actually served what they were resisting, it at least allowed them to survive and maintain their jobs. At other times the workers followed the rules to the letter, often hurting productivity. In fact, “work-to-rule” is a classic strategy of worker resistance (Herman, 1998), since abstract guidelines and theories never capture the complexity of actual practices. By “working to rule,” workers essentially refuse to contribute their creativity and innovation to the process they engage in. Thus, whereas pastoral contexts directly co-opt the agency and creativity of participants, seeking to prevent resistance, disciplinary settings seem often to seek the opposite, harnessing participants’ agency *through* resistance. As a result, while there may be potential in the mere fact that students often develop creative forms of resistance in oppressive circumstances, the “underlife” forms they generate seem unlikely to be very productive for them in either the present or the future. (In fact, as Willis [1977] showed, even resistance that does not seem to serve the system may generally prove unprofitable.) Furthermore, students’ rich experiences of local operations of oppression do not necessarily help them under-

stand how larger systems of power produce this treatment, limiting their efficacy.

One counterintuitive way to frame the central challenge faced by marginalized and oppressed students is that schools do not *dominate* them effectively enough. Their teachers do not initiate them into the “cultural capital” (Bourdieu, 1998), the complex pastoral collaborative practices required by “new capitalist” business processes. And without such capacities students have little chance to join and be dominated (and coddled) by high paying, high tech, high collaboration, new capitalist jobs in the future. Instead, marginalized students generally learn how to operate effectively within, and are largely restricted to, “disciplined” contexts.

Efforts to provide marginalized students with complex new capitalist learning often appear to backfire, however. Analyzing a national data set, Smerdon and Burkham (1999) found a surprising number of teachers in high poverty schools who reported using “constructivist” teaching methods. They draw on other evidence, however, indicating that most of these teachers seek to control discipline problems by making school more fun. In other words, the particular forms of “active learning” techniques these teachers use, like the worksheets in New Hope, are frequently disconnected from actual learning (see also Delpit, 1988). These students face a double bind, then: Their resistance is short-circuited, but they do not benefit from initiation into robust postmodern forms of democratic engagement. They experience only a faulty simulacrum of postmodern domination (although, given the limited benefits of the resistance strategies they do develop, this is probably still preferable to overt discipline in most cases).

Furthermore, even if we knew how to promote more pastoral domination in schools, it would not really help most of these students. In fact, the idea that all, most, or even many marginalized students will gain access to the kinds of high paying jobs held by the elite is simply a fantasy. There simply are not enough to go around, and someone has to do the “grunt work” (e.g., Brosio, 1998; Harvey, 1993). So, while I am all for more effective teaching and learning, I think it is also important to understand how our tendency to focus almost exclusively on “improved” education and on the labor mobility of a few individuals as an answer to inequality has severe limitations.

Pastoral and Disciplinary Strategies of Resistance

I have distinguished here between the privileged, who are more likely to experience pastoral systems of control, and the relatively marginalized, who tend to populate disciplinary settings. And I have argued that the postmodern focus on the complexities of pastoral control can obscure these experiences of the marginalized. Furthermore, while discipline tends to foster forms of resistance that pastoral processes generally sublimate, I have shown how disciplinary settings often seem to co-opt this resistance. A key question remains: Are there approaches that can more effectively contest these forms of domination? In response, in this section I explore more sophisticated visions of resistance drawn from the writings of postmodern thinkers and from activists working in more disciplinary contexts.

Despite the complaints of critics, if one looks closely across the wide range of postmodern writings, one actually finds many sophisticated conceptualizations of human agency and resistance (see Atkinson, 2002; Jakobsen, 1998; Lather, 1991; Phelan, 1994;

and Schutz, 2000, to mention only a few). Judith Butler's (e.g., 1993) writings are a good example. First, Butler argues that every action is unique to one extent or another. No matter how dominated a person is, then, his or her activities always have subversive potential. Because social systems *exist* only in the actions of those who embody them, distributed forms of pastoral power, especially, are constantly threatened by the unpredictable ways people enact them. Second, Butler argues that social and cultural systems are never entirely complete, always including "outsides" that define their boundaries (see also Laclau & Mouffe, 1985). For example, homosexuality is often viewed as an "outside" that does not fit within but also defines the margins of dominant heterosexuality. Yet, those who embody aspects of the "outside" of such systems paradoxically also constantly threaten the "truth" of these systems because they show that alternatives are possible.⁷ Given the limits of space, I focus on these two conceptualizations, drawing examples of what they might look like from David Halperin's (1995) *Saint Foucault*.

As an example of the first strategy of resistance, Halperin (1995) examines efforts informed by Foucault to develop an aesthetics of individuality, looking for example at forms of "gay gym culture," where "gay men work out not in order to conform to an average or received standard of male beauty but in order to develop a specific part of their body . . . that holds a special significance for them or for their sexual partners" (p. 118). The aim of this aesthetics of individuality is not to simply fashion a new and static "identity," but instead to "use one's relation to oneself as a potential resource with which to construct . . . new styles of personal life that may enable one to resist or even to escape one's social and psychological determinations" (p. 76). In this way, these men resist efforts to provide them with socially defined identities and relationships. Through unpredictable processes such as this, Foucault hopes that we might invent "new rights and establish . . . new kinds of relationships that might entail their own privileges, duties, and rights" (p. 80), including a new "eroticism" (p. 96). Foucault hopes that efforts like these could become part of an endless political "experiment we perform on ourselves" (p. 106), constantly undermining social efforts to capture and control us.

Halperin (1995) also explores examples that resemble Butler's second kind of resistance, noting that Foucault's writings indicate how homosexuality provides an "outside" for heterosexuality, refusing to fit within the structures of "normal" forms of pleasure and relationship. Homosexuality, then, has the potential to undermine the dominance of heterosexual "truths" in society. Because homophobic oppression often contains "no fixed prepositional content" (p. 45), taking on different and often contradictory forms, Halperin argues that it is very resistant to simple logical arguments or facts, encouraging gay activists to pursue more fluid postmodern modes of resistance. Instead of fighting for the right to be a recognized, "normalized" identity collectively standing against heterosexuals, for example, Halperin notes that the activist group "Queer Nation" used the term "queer" to "define (homo)sexual identity oppositionally and relationally *but not necessarily substantively*, not as a positivity but as a positionality, not as a thing but as a resistance to the norm" (p. 66, italics added). (Of course, this term has since lost much of its subversive potential.) Forms of activism such as this do not sim-

ply fight for recognition as an additional acceptable form of sexuality but contest the idea that acceptable and unacceptable forms of sexuality should be defined in the first place. In other words, Queer Nation, among other groups, contests dominant efforts to foster, direct, limit, and produce people in particular relations while at the same time ruling out others. By refusing the role of a substantive "outside," such strategies threaten efforts to present heterosexuality as a coherent and stable "truth" in opposition to a similarly stable homosexuality.

By refusing the call to coalesce into clear identities, individuals engaged in an aesthetics of the self (e.g., Halperin's, 1995, body builders) and groups engaged in non-"identity" politics (e.g., Queer Nation) refuse to be told the "truth" about who they are, showing through their activities that there is no such static "truth" to be found. At the same time, they undermine the idea that particular collections of practices are "right" or "empowering."

Dangers arise, however, when these postmodern forms of resistance are (implicitly or explicitly) presented not as limited and strategic ways to contest particular forms of power but as "truths." In fact, Butler (1993) and Halperin's (1995) approaches seem specifically designed to destabilize *pastoral* forms of control. While nonheterosexuals are, of course, often subjected to quite brutal discipline (and even torture) in our society, Butler and Halperin stress more subtle aspects of domination. Attempts to contest power through "aesthetic" and "outside" approaches address pastoral systems with no clear central locus of control. However, while he increasingly focused on pastoral forms of control, Foucault understood that simpler binary visions of oppressor and oppressed do, in fact, usefully describe crucial aspects of many contexts (Butin, 2001).

Such binary conceptions of power seem especially important to those who are the most marginalized in our society (Tate, 1997). The students in New Hope, for example, clearly distinguished between representatives of oppressive power and those who were oppressed—they knew who was in charge and who was not. Their experiences were much different from those in Brown et al.'s classrooms (see Gee et al., 1997). Mirroring what I have already stated, then, I am convinced that postmodern visions of resistance are often less relevant to those who are enmeshed in more disciplinary regimes. As Collins (1998) notes, the postmodern tendency to stress the fluidity of power relations often appears to result in part from the largely pastoral, generally privileged experience of many of those promoting these ideas (see also Lichterman, 1996; Rose, 1997). (In this vein, it is interesting to note that Queer Nation often fractured along lines of privilege [Halperin, 1995, p. 64].) In fact, in contrast with Queer Nation, those who are more subject to disciplinary forms of oppression tend to employ collective action strategies that are explicitly designed to polarize conflicts into a clear "us" and "them." Here I examine the tradition of community organizing indebted to the efforts of Saul Alinsky.

Alinsky (1971) began his efforts to organize marginalized communities in the 1930s. It is his basic approach to organizing, developed and evolved by those who came after him, that currently predominates among community organizers.⁸ In contrast with the New Hope students' lack of understanding of the larger systems they were enmeshed in, Alinsky's approach included a "power analysis" of a particular context, tracing the individuals,

institutions, and social assumptions that affected a specific oppressed context. From the myriad “problems” afflicting a community, Alinsky and his leaders would coalesce specific “issues” that could be directly fought for. For example, when Alinsky worked in Rochester, New York, he helped the African-American community focus its relatively vague despair about poverty and racism into an effort to force Kodak, the largest employer in Rochester, to provide jobs for African Americans in the central city. He would usually try to bring different community leaders together by fighting and winning an initial battle over something small, showing that it is possible to produce concrete changes through solidarity. He constantly fostered a polarized understanding of conflict, staging dramatic struggles between “good” and “evil” (see Reitzes & Reitzes, 1987, for an overview).

It is important not to oversimplify Alinsky’s approach, however. He and his leaders understood that situations were more complex than they presented. Their efforts intentionally simplified the complexity of oppressive situations, strategically assigning responsibility to individuals and groups and creatively precipitating clear structures of social and economic domination from the complexity of lived experience. This allowed the development of contexts in which large numbers of participants could participate in the battles without a nuanced understanding of the issues involved, and it fit the largely binary and disciplinary understandings of power often held by those at the bottom. At the same time, however, by creating contexts for learning amidst action, Alinsky and his leaders sought to teach all participants how the complex and often contradictory currents of power moved in their city as well as strategies for contesting these forces (see Reitzes & Reitzes, 1987).

More recent organizing groups have instituted quite extensive processes for training key leaders in shared language about and understandings of the enterprise they are engaged in (e.g., see midwestacademy.com). And once a particular goal is achieved, a new issue must be developed that generally requires a reframing of “us” and “them.” Enemies in this model are not static entities or individuals, then, but instead fluid and strategic achievements that allow a community to act as a coherent collective (see Laclau & Mouffe, 1985). In fact, community organizers often declare that they have “no permanent enemies and no permanent friends.” Although current approaches to community organizing are not as combative as Alinsky’s, organizers still seek to direct the anger of the oppressed into effective strategies of resistance through power analyses and to develop collective identities through polarization (see Shirley, 1997; Warren, 2001).

Models such as Alinsky’s hook into the visceral experience of oppression felt by many of those who are disciplined and excluded. While postmodernists like Halperin also often respond to the felt experiences of those they address, the nuance of postmodern approaches seems to require more work to help actors see the relevance of fluid postmodern strategies of resistance. While, as Halperin notes, recent gay activists often had Foucault’s *History of Sexuality* in their back pockets, most participants in Alinsky’s efforts did not have much of anything in their pockets.

Just as with Halperin’s (1995) approaches, however, the organizing model has many limitations. Unlike postmodern approaches, for example, the organizing model can only address issues that can usefully be framed on the model of “us” versus “them.” In contrast with postmodern visions, then, organizers

must be able to usefully assign “responsibility” to a specific group or individual. Furthermore, although they do not often admit this, organizers often struggle to bring actors together across race, culture, and class (see Law, 1993). Alinsky-style organizing, then, is only one of a broad range of strategies (including more postmodern ones) for effecting social change.¹⁰

From Analysis to Action

One of the limits of scholarly discussions of domination and resistance in education is that resistance practices tend not to be taught in schools. Schools are generally not places where one is explicitly taught to contest institutions. The primary institution in most children’s lives *is* the school, and schools have little incentive to encourage their charges to resist them. In fact, as shown earlier, the forms of resistance that schools do tend to (implicitly) encourage often end up serving the interests of the systems of school.

Nonetheless, I think it is crucial that educators think more deeply about ways to initiate students into different resistance practices. First of all, simply asking such questions helps focus us on the ways that schools are and are not empowering. Second, even in relatively average K–12 schools there are opportunities for helping students learn to resist oppression. While Alinsky’s combative approach and Halperin’s visions of sexual activism seem to go beyond what most schools can stomach, less radical approaches have been successful. For example, the most comprehensive Alinsky-based approach in schools I know of is the multistate project called Public Achievement (publicachievement.org). In Public Achievement, college student coaches work with small groups of K–12 students, helping them learn how to effect change by actually engaging in a project that they are interested in. In their college class, the coaches learn a modified and toned-down version of community organizing. In Milwaukee, while groups have occasionally engaged in projects that have led Public Achievement to be expelled (as, for example, when the students decided they wanted to do something about “bad teachers”), and while private schools seem more open to the project than public ones, Public Achievement continues to be active in schools around the city.

From a postmodern perspective, Cris Mayo (1997) has attempted to conceptualize a more Foucauldian approach to sex education, arguing that “the categories and foundations of identity that education provides [constrain] not only students’ range of identity possibilities but may also hamper their ability to engage with others, either those who do not conform to identity standards or those who inhabit other identity categories” (p. 5). Among other goals, by exploring contradictions and historicizing the category of “adolescent” with students, Mayo hopes to help young people challenge “self-fulfilling prophecies” of “recklessness” and “unsafe sexual activity” (p. 4). (And, of course, approaches such as this are not limited to issues of sexuality.) There is no reason why Public Achievement or Mayo’s approaches might not be replicated elsewhere.

Furthermore, while our ability to engage students in practices of resistance may be limited in most schools, we often forget about the many places beyond schools where education takes place (e.g., McLaughlin, Irby, & Langman, 1994). In my university, I teach in a “community education” program in which many students will

end up working with children and adults in these often more institutionally open settings (www.epcs.soe.uwm.edu). And one of our core classes has long been "Introduction to Community Organizing."

Finally, as in my department, colleges and universities are more likely to allow instruction on the kinds of issues discussed in this article than contexts populated by younger students. But while classes in a range of departments have long engaged with postmodern analyses of power, it is not clear how many help students translate these into concrete strategies of resistance. And only a few courses around the nation teach Alinsky-based community organizing (though the number is growing; see <http://comm-org.utoledo.edu>). There is an enormous need for such courses drawing from multiple traditions, however, since few people in this country encounter coherent models for social action of any kind. Even in our relatively activist department, while students have at least heard about the civil rights movement, few arrive with a clear sense of other examples of social action in American society or of the strategies that informed these efforts. In response, we have recently developed a more comprehensive undergraduate Certificate in Community Organizing (www.epcs.soe.uwm.edu).

Multiple Perspectives and the Limits of Knowledge

My aim in this article has been to "challenge," not attack, postmodernism. As I have elsewhere (e.g., Schutz, 2000, 2001), I seek to encourage more *strategic* deployments of postmodern ideas, and of theory more broadly, in education. As I noted in the introduction, I seek not new "truths," but instead a more nuanced dialogue about the relationships among oppression, resistance, and privilege in education.

In this, I follow Arendt (see Schutz, 2001) in her (somewhat postmodern) efforts to emphasize the limits of attempts to accurately capture the shifting sands of human experience. As Eisner (cited in Clark, Herter, & Moss, 1998) also notes, "theory not only reveals, it conceals. . . . The visions we secure from the theoretical potholes through which we peer also obscure those aspects of the territory they foreclose. And foreclose they do" (p. 202; see also Greene, 1994). Like these scholars, I am convinced that the search for single, fully adequate ways of seeing or of acting, even in specific contexts, is not only doomed to fail but actively misleads scholars and their readers about the inescapable complexity of the world. Here at the end, then, it is important to reemphasize some of the limitations of the binaries (e.g., privileged/marginalized, disciplinary/pastoral) that have structured my analysis.

It is crucial, for example, to acknowledge that, in reality, every person is always subjected to multiple, overlapping, and often inseparably intertwined forms of control, even if one or another may predominate at a particular time or place. In fact, in some cases the very act of distinguishing between forms of control may mislead *because* it creates an (always somewhat) artificial separation that strips away key aspects of the complex interactions taking place in a specific situation. Focusing on particular conceptions of domination (such as "pastoral" and "disciplinary") invariably obscures processes of social control that do not easily fit within these terms. Postmodern writing generally refuses the binaries I have depended upon partly for this very reason (see Lather, 1998).

For example, while I think foregrounding associations between privilege and forms of resistance helpfully reveals some limits of many postmodern writings, this association oversimplifies the complexity of real contexts. Even if particular approaches to resistance seem *designed* to respond to specific forms of oppression, for example, this does not necessarily limit the *effects* of these strategies. Thus, the Foucauldian resistance strategies discussed by Halperin have the potential to reduce both pastoral *and* disciplinary oppression experienced by those who are seen as sexually "different." If distinctions between heterosexuals and "others" become more fluid, it will become more difficult to define who is different and wrong. At some points, more pastoral-oriented strategies may, in fact, be relevant for those facing more disciplinary contexts, and vice versa. Instead of looking for simple rules, then, it is always incumbent on actors and researchers to examine the trade-offs involved in choosing between different ways of acting and making sense in different contexts.¹¹

My discussion is also not meant as a simple demand that scholars focus exclusively on the conditions of the marginalized. As Michelle Fine (1998) has convincingly argued, for example, such a focus leaves us with little understanding of how the privileged dominate others and are themselves enmeshed (often through pastoral processes) in systems of domination. We especially need research that "probes how individuals inhabiting a space of dominance construct their sense of Self through the denigration of Others" (p. 146).

In fact, it is important to stress that, even when it takes on largely pastoral forms, the oppression experienced by the relatively privileged can still come with real pain as individuals and groups become trapped in particular identities, roles, and more because of their class, sex, ethnicity, and so forth. This is especially true of those who cannot (or refuse to) live up to the demands of pastoral settings. Even those who are able to perform the roles set out for them may experience these roles as oppressive, however. One of the more famous discussions of this came in Betty Friedan's (1963) *The Feminine Mystique*, which showed how middle- and upper-class women have often been imprisoned in seemingly empowering motherly and other roles.

The Friedan example, however, brings us back to the constant relevance of privilege to discussions of domination and resistance of all kinds. In the 1970s Friedan's work, among others, was used by the largely White and middle-class leaders of the feminist movement to describe the experience of all women, often marginalizing the very different perspectives and experiences of poor women and women of color (e.g., hooks, 1989). In fact, always in somewhat unique ways, issues of privilege have emerged in every social movement I know of, including the civil rights movement(s), community organizing, eco-activism, activism around sexual orientation, and more (see, e.g., Halperin, 1995; Jakobsen, 1998; Lichterman, 1996; Rose, 1997).

If educators hope to foster a more equitable society through their efforts—and I think many do—then they cannot avoid thinking more carefully about the pluses and minuses involved in different ways of understanding domination and resistance. And, despite their complexity, we cannot afford to ignore postmodern analyses of power and the models of resistance that have emerged from these analyses at different times. Instead of simply promoting or rejecting particular ways of understanding and acting, we

must continually work to understand where and when particular analyses and practices of action are more and less relevant.

NOTES

¹ Postmodernists often have good reasons for circling around the idea of domination without ever clearly defining this term. But because my goal in this article is to examine different forms of oppression, I need an at least tentative definition of what *counts* as dominating. Thus, I look to Dewey's (e.g., 1916) understanding of freedom as the capacity to frame and effectively act towards one's goals. I tentatively define dominating settings as those that, in one way or another, seek to prevent agents from actively framing their own goals. Unlike Dewey, however, in postmodern fashion I leave open any definition of "free choice."

² Those seeking more nuanced definitions of postmodernism (and discussions of the limits of attempts to define this term) should see McGowan (1991) and Connor (1997).

³ I use the terms "tendency" and "focus" quite purposefully here. In fact, more sophisticated postmodernists in education do sometimes address this never entirely accurate binary between pastoral and disciplinary, occasionally exploring issues of discipline in detail. For example, Popkewitz's rich (1998a) essay does note, in passing, the importance of the placement of people in simple binary categories. But the vast majority of the article (as in many of his other recent articles) focuses on pastoral structures of control. In *Struggling for the Soul*, Popkewitz (1998b) engages with binaries similar to those I discuss in this article in more detail, but from within a largely pastoral frame where power, for example, lacks any clear locus of control. In fact, Popkewitz (1998a) acknowledges his interest in the ways more pastoral systems of control increasingly goes beyond the "traditional notions of race and class" that still provide clear anchor points for disciplinary actions. A similar tendency can be seen in the writings of Lather. Despite her willingness to experiment with different ways of enacting postmodern perspectives, she remains focused on an essentially pastoral political project (see, e.g., 1998, 2001). Even more nuanced postmodern thinkers, then, focus on the pastoral, and this represents a robust, central (and, I would argue, defining) characteristic of postmodern theory. Gore's (1999) more recent writing may provide an example of postmodern work that appears to be moving in a more balanced direction.

⁴ Of course, this implies (but does not require) Marxist analyses of labor control (see Allman, 1999, and Brosio, 1998).

⁵ Also, see Krips (1990), who argues that resistance in a Foucaultian framework always already enmeshes one further in power, creating new relations of domination even as it alters others.

⁶ Solorzano and Delgado Bernal (2001) rightly note that there are more "forms of resistance that may lead to social transformation" (p. 310) than this work acknowledges, but this does not eliminate the real tendency they have identified.

⁷ I simplify Butler's view of the outside somewhat, as she focuses on forms that do not coalesce.

⁸ See Alinsky (1971), Kahn (1982), Reitzes and Reitzes (1987), Shirley (1997), and Warren (2001). I also draw from my own experience with different organizing groups.

⁹ Although there is not space to discuss it here, it is important to note that the confrontational aspects of community organizing often take place in spaces outside the direct control of institutions. It is often in their roles as "excluded," then, that those who are marginalized develop counterinstitutions with the capacity to contest inequality. In fact, community organizations often fight for the right to *enter* disciplinary settings, as in the demand for low-skilled employment at Kodak. Such efforts reveal a very conflicted relationship with discipline.

¹⁰ See also Solorzano and Delgado Bernal (2001), who struggle with the tensions of similar kinds of direct action.

¹¹ Thus, I do not advocate a return to the kind of rationalist critical theory rightly critiqued by Ellsworth (1989).

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