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Acts of Resistance: Student (In)visibility

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Abstract This paper argues that public school structures are oppressive for all students. Because of racial, class and gender biases, school environments are often especially problematic for African American and working-class/working-poor students. Boys and girls also experience school differently because of gender roles. These intersecting problems include facing dominant narratives based on stereotypes and discrimination. The current study took place in a school building that serves predominately African American and low-income students. The questions examined include: how does school silence children, and how do children resist being silenced? Observational and interview data indicate that children are disciplined into invisibility by treating them stereotypically and consequently demanding uniformity in their behavior as a way to control their mostly colored bodies. Children resist such treatment through creative and collaborative acts that promote their voice and visibility and which critique the dominant narrative. In general, students attempt to construct an alternative view that allows another, student-generated narrative to emerge.

Key Words children, narrative, resistance, schools

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Acts of Resistance: Student (In)visibility

Introduction

Psychology has a long-standing interest in attending to the person–environment system as the best way to understand individuals, groups, the environment and the co-construction of people and the environment (Bandura, 1999; Brunswik, 1956; Hermans, 2001; Lewin, 1944; Magnusson, 1999; Pettigrew, 1997). Specifically, one conceptualization of cultural psychology attempts to understand how people are embedded in systems and cultures (Overton, 1997; Shweder, 1990). In this approach, person, culture and environment are inseparable and therefore must be studied as one unit. Within this domain of cultural psychology, goals include the study of behavior that is local, variable, context-dependent and contingent, and the study of how this behavior is determined (Shweder & Sullivan, 1993).

Within these varying contexts, cultural psychologists are interested in the social roles placed on the individual by demographic markers such as age, race and gender (Overton, 1997; Shi-xu, 2002). In other words, one area of interest for cultural psychology is examining the person embedded within all these contexts as a whole body. Indeed, the researcher who wishes to understand behaviors must attend to the entire person, the local context and the historical context, attempting to consider all equally (Gone, Miller, & Rappaport, 1999; Shweder & Sullivan, 1993; Zane & Sue, 1986).

When examining this discursive system, it is especially important to analyze the structure–agency dialectic in settings that have traditionally silenced and disempowered people (Feld & Basso, 1996). The disempowered are in positions that provide alternative views of the setting and thus have an important analysis to contribute (Hill Collins, 1986; Selener, 1997). Additionally, if studies dealing with culture are to question hegemony, then researchers must move away from the center and listen carefully to those who have been marginalized (During, 1999; Shi-xu, 2002). This approach of 'listening from below' is usually situated within a neo-Marxist cultural critique and postmodern theories of struggle and resistance. These theories have been appraised as placing more emphasis on class and less emphasis on race, gender and their intersections (Bettie, 2000; McLaren, 1989). In this conceptualization, the work identity is privileged over other identities. Yet the work identity may or may not be the most or the only salient identity to a person in a particular place.

These theories do, however, serve as a beginning point from which to understand how people experience a particular place. Indeed, they provide a framework for understanding power and how silencing, invisibility, struggle and resistance are passed on; this is key in deconstructing and exposing dominant ideology. Additionally, interrogating resistance, including everyday resistance, helps us to further our understanding of power because resistance is diagnostic of and relational to power (Abu-Lughod, 1990; Shi-xu, 2002). The current paper focuses on power and resistance within a school setting. In an effort not to romanticize resistance, I will not simply label behaviors as resistant, but, rather, will draw distinctions between different kinds of resistance and how these acts function in relation to power in the setting. Also, these theories serve as a basis for examining how individual experiences are historically, culturally and socially situated and mediated. Indeed, cultural narratives are often played out in interpersonal situations (Weber, 1998).

Building from theories of resistance, I will attempt to argue from a point that empirically examines the intersecting identities and interplay

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among class, race and gender, highlighting different aspects of identity as they become salient in the setting. I will 'deconstruct and go beyond the other' by revealing what has been hidden (Shweder, 1990). Indeed, I take seriously Shi-xu's (2002) challenge to make visible the issues of power, domination and resistance, so it is a goal of this paper to uncover these systems and offer empirical grounding and evidence for theories of struggle and everyday resistance.

School is a setting where power and resistance can be examined within the structure–agency dialectic. What follows is a discussion of resistance and then a brief critique of the institution of school, including a situation of schooling in the United States today within its broader historical context. Two research questions will then be examined: (1) how does an elementary school silence its students, and (2) how do students work to become more visible in a place that renders them invisible? First, however, I turn to resistance.

Resistance Theory

Resistance can be defined as 'intentional acts of commission or omission that defy the wishes of others' (Ashforth & Mael, 1998, p. 30). Implicit in this definition is that resistance is an exercise of power in reaction to an act of control. Resistance is a response to an institutional definition or dominant narrative, both of which are powerful in terms of meaning-making and shaping discourse. The goal of resistance is to move toward self-definition and self-valuation (Hill Collins, 1986) via an alternative narrative or discourse. Examining resistance, then, entails analyzing systems of power, conflict, mediation and culture.

Ashforth and Mael (1998) provide a framework for understanding resistance: they outline several overlapping dimensions to the phenomenon. It may be *targeted* or directed at the threat, or it may be *diffuse*, or not directed at the threat. The more power the resistor has, the more likely the act will be targeted. Given that children in school settings do not have a great deal of power, it is important to look for diffuse acts of resistance. Resistance may also be *facilitative*, working toward furthering the institutional goals, or it may be *oppositional*, serving as a challenge to institutional goals. Resistance may be *authorized*, that is, within the institution's rules, or it may be *unauthorized*. Finally, resistance may be *individual* or *collective*. In all cases, resistance is most likely to occur when the institution attempts to control identity, goals, values and assumptions, and when the institution threatens the individual's identity.

There is some disagreement regarding what constitutes or should be labeled as resistance. Some argue that an important aspect of resistance

is that there must be a collective struggle to be heard, or to become visible. Without a dialogue or discourse of critique, which may be verbal and/or nonverbal (Hermans, 2001; Lewis & Simon, 1986), the behavior is thought to be oppositional, but not resistant (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1985). One potential problem with this definition is its emphasis on the purpose or goal of the resistance. In other words, the definition assumes intentionality. If this is the case, then it is important to examine what is meant by 'intentional'. Intentionality is not defined by reflection, but rather by action (Overton, 1997). Indeed, intentions may be partially articulated, symbolic, or fully articulated and reflective. In each of these cases, intentionality is still present and therefore it may make more sense to think of resistance as process rather than a fully articulated and cogent position.

A related problem with the above definition of resistance is that it assumes a middle-class understanding. Indeed, a discourse of critique, especially a collective discourse of critique, assumes that one has theorized his/her position systematically as it relates to broader systems of power. This level of theorizing assumes time and access to specific kinds of knowledge that would facilitate the development of systematic critique. Also assumed is that the group in question is located in cultural places where critique and cultural refashioning can be voiced and heard (Spivak, 1988). Some of those who are oppressed, however, are not located in powerful cultural positions and therefore they do not often have the social class, race, gender and/or age privilege to speak for themselves in a culture organized around power and domination.

McLaren (1989) outlines yet another way to think about resistance by arguing that resistance is *always* present when there is hegemony because these constructs are inseparable. The researcher needs to search out less visible forms of resistance by more carefully examining idiosyncrasy, passivity and indifference. Finally, McLaren urges researchers to investigate how this definition of resistance might shed light on gender power relations (and, presumably, how this definition might relate to intersecting identities). The goal of this paper, then, is made more difficult in that it is my intention to weave together a coherent story of resistance based on threads that are occasional, opportunistic and fragmented.

Attempting to utilize McLaren's definition of resistance complicates matters in terms of defining acts as resistant. Who has the authority to define an act as resistance, and what does it take to listen to those with very little power (i.e. working-class children, both white and of color)? Data that constitute this paper deal mostly with ethnographic observations. Given that I have not interviewed all of the students, it is not

always possible for me to locate individual intentions. Yet I have chosen to label specific acts as resistance based on actions. In cases where I have not spoken to students, I have labeled acts as resistance when the following criteria have been met: (1) the act followed an exercise of power designed to control a student's body, identity, goals, values or assumptions; and (2) the same student repeated a comparable act under similar circumstances. In terms of these data, my goal is to present as much detail as possible so that the reader can evaluate the meaning of the action.

A History and Critique of Schooling in the United States

In the United States, schooling became compulsory and state-run during the Industrial Revolution. The Industrial Revolution began in the 1870s, and by the 1880s all US states required compulsory education. During this period, many individuals and families were immigrating to the United States. Compulsory education was designed to assimilate this huge influx by teaching immigrants how to be proper US citizens and teaching them the skills necessary for factory work (e.g. obeying authority, working independently, carrying out rote work). Although the purpose of schooling has been debated and has changed over time, some argue that schools are still organized like factories (Wexler, 1989), and that with the US Presidency of Ronald Reagan in the 1980s came a return to the original purposes of schooling, most markedly in the form of job training (Giroux & McLaren, 1989).

During the Reagan Administration, universal standardized testing became the *sine qua non* to the US schooling experience; this emphasis remains today. Universal standardized testing brings with it a standardized curriculum, which means that schools perform the dual functions of serving corporate interests and imposing cultural uniformity (Giroux & McLaren, 1989). Schooling facilitates job skills, and job growth in the United States has been largely in the service sector. Both the process and curriculum serve to maintain the current labor force stratification that is based on racism, classism and gender roles. For the masses, being a 'good student' translates into being a 'good worker'. Schools are therefore expected to produce workers 'who will put up with regimentation, repression, discipline and deliberately unattractive programs . . . [and who] are ideologically reliable' (Gorz, quoted in Giroux & McLaren, 1989, pp. xv–xvi).

Because of the above-outlined goals, school is a place and an institutional structure that generally tends to make students invisible (Fine, 1989), especially working-class and working-poor male students of color. This is accomplished through the reproduction of the dominant

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ideology. There are two paths that lead to invisibility: imposed uniformity and explicit silencing.

All schools render children invisible, but there is a disparate impact such that the lessons of invisibility are more severe for working-class and working-poor students, as well as for students of color. This is especially true of male students of color because these students have less access to forms of cultural capital that may teach them other roles (e.g. extracurricular activities designed to teach leadership). Part of the rules of school is that children are to sit in their seats, fill out worksheets and do exactly as the teacher says. Students who are working class or of color, then, are taught to obey authority and not question the power structure. These teachings serve to indoctrinate and discipline students into the expectation that they will be silent, conform and go unseen, especially if they are not white and at least middle class.

Students are made invisible through the heightened visibility imposed on them by stereotyping. This seeming paradox requires further elaboration. Schools are built and physically situated so that all behavior is made visible (Foucault, 1975/1979). One way this is accomplished is through the inclusion of many windows and the use of windows as walls within schools. Because of school building layouts, the windows serve to keep staff and children visible at all times, and to render all behavior public. Indeed, the building examined for this study has a high proportion of windows for walls (see Figure 1). As argued by Foucault, this visibility, when combined with the institutional nature of schooling, facilitates the administration of discipline because groups of children are observed, or, rather, stereotyped based on social biases about people from particular demographics. These stereotypes lead to closely monitored behavior wherein any observations are grounds for intervention. Therefore, individuality is muted, subdued and punished; uniformity and silence are facilitated, which consequently renders students both homogeneous and invisible.

Silencing is possible due to asymmetric power relations. The silencing of student voices serves an important purpose: it prevents students from naming what is wrong and developing a shared critique. Developing this analysis is thus difficult, as attempts to speak out are labeled as disobedience. The children who do speak up are branded as troublemakers or labeled as undisciplined. In her study, Fine (1989) found that the students who dropped out of high school were those who were most likely to have a well-thought-out critique of schooling. Students who assert power in a system that minimizes their knowledge and power are often marginalized.

Cultural practices of silencing tend to shift the classroom process

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Figure 1. Pictures of school

from learning to discipline and control. Typical classrooms, then, are those that privilege silence, control, uniformity and, by extension, invisibility (Books, 1998; Delpit, 1995; Fine, 1989; Mikel Brown, 1998;

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Miserandino, 1996). Research question no. 1 deals with this phenomenon of silencing, uniformity and invisibility. How are children in an elementary school building that serves mostly low-income students of color silenced and rendered invisible? Given the above discussion of resistance and the caveat that a struggle against teachers should not be viewed as a condemnation of teachers, we can ask research question no. 2: How do elementary school students work to become more visible in a place that renders them invisible? What is their discourse? Before answering these questions, we must first turn our attention to the methods used.

Method

The Setting

Woodson Elementary School[1] is in a new building that opened in the fall of 1998. It replaced an existing building that was constructed in 1908. Woodson is situated in what has traditionally been the African American and working-class/working-poor area of the town of Corbel. Corbel is a moderately sized mid-western town. Approximately 70 percent of the students at Woodson are African American. Over 90 percent of students participate in the free or reduced lunch program. The teaching staff at Woodson are mostly female and white, and most teachers do not live in the surrounding neighborhoods. This teacher demographic makeup is not unique. According to an educational equity audit (Peterkin & Lucey, 1998), district-wide numbers show that 9 percent of the teaching staff were African American, 88 per cent were white and 3 per cent were other during the time of the current study. Woodson numbers are similar to these, although there may be a slightly higher percentage of African American teachers and a slightly lower percentage of white teachers.

The neighborhoods that surround Woodson School worked diligently during voter registration and the referendum that had to be passed to get the school built. In fact, these neighborhoods had the highest voter turnout and the highest 'yes' vote when compared to other voting districts in the city. This is notable because voter participation is usually below average in low-income neighborhoods in the United States. Woodson is one of few public buildings in this area of town. In fact, the school was built with a community 'wing' that could be opened separately from the rest of the school. This wing is used by neighborhood organizations and other groups such as the city's Park and Recreation Department (e.g. for basketball). Additionally, the playground is superior in its diversity and amount of equipment compared

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to other public playgrounds in the area. Therefore, children are often at the school on evenings and weekends. As a result, the school is a gathering place for its neighborhood residents, and specific aspects of the school (e.g. playground, gym, lunchroom/performance space) hold multiple meanings for many children.

Although the school has brought new possibilities into the community, the school district is not without controversy. When this research was conducted, the Corbel school district was under investigation by the Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights for discriminating against African American children. Potential violations included one-way forced bussing of African American children into white neighborhoods, differential treatment of African American students, and some African American students not receiving Title One support services (e.g. supplemental reading and math instruction) for which they were eligible. An independent audit (Peterkin & Lucey, 1998) showed that African American students were over-represented in special education, remedial classrooms and discipline procedures. These students were also underrepresented in gifted classrooms and lacked Title One services. This is important to know because it begins to describe the situation and experiences of African American students in the district. Unfortunately, these findings are also reflective of what is happening to African American students throughout the United States (National Black Caucus of State Legislators, 2001).

I came to know this school in my work with parents, teachers, children and community members over a five-year period. My main goal was to facilitate the building of bridges between the school and community so that each could view the other as a resource. My main project was to work with school partners to design, build and maintain a community garden on the outskirts of the school property (see Langhout, Rappaport, & Simmons, 2002, for an account). I spent from three to ten hours a week in the school over this five-year period. Based on this long-term sustained engagement, I believe it is accurate to say that I became familiar with the ideology and cultural practices present in the school.

Design and Procedure

Ethnographic Observations
Undergraduate research assistants and I were participant observers in four classrooms, helping to implement a classroom–neighborhood community garden collaboration and a project-based learning curriculum over a four-year period. Contact occurred weekly for the researcher and the research assistants for elementary school quarters 2–4 for the

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first three years of the project, and then twice weekly for the researcher and weekly for the research assistants for the fourth year. All researchers maintained extensive and systematic field-notes, in accordance with the methods outlined in Emerson, Fretz and Shaw (1995). When possible, notes were jotted down while at the school, and those notes were typed and expanded into field-notes at a later date. Field-notes were usually written within 72 hours of the school contact. The purpose of the participant observations was to become acquainted with teachers and students at Woodson, to understand the routines and cultural practices of the setting, to assist the teachers in integrating the community garden into their class curriculum, and to provide an alternative context that might facilitate more student academic engagement.

In year four of this project, we examined a smaller group of children that serves as the sample for this report. After three years of fieldwork in this setting, I was struck by the individual variation in terms of how children responded to different places (e.g. classroom, library, garden and lunchroom) in the school. Participants, therefore, were a purposive sample of students who were involved in the community garden at Woodson. Children were selected by the consensus of the research team based on field-notes from the first three years of this study. The children chosen for in-depth study were selected because they represented a diversity of responses to largely classroom-based garden-related activities (e.g. designing the garden plot, learning about seeds, using a recipe to learn math concepts).

This sampling technique could most readily be described as sampling for theory construction (Charmaz, 1995) by examining some extreme or deviant cases, and some typical cases (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). The extreme or deviant cases were chosen 'to obtain information about unusual cases that may be particularly troublesome or enlightening' (Lincoln & Guba, 1986, p. 200). Two dimensions were used to identify participants: behavior (behaving in school-condoned ways or not) and academic classroom engagement in garden-related work (actively involved or not in general classroom or specific garden-related activities). Children were chosen who represented a variety of responses to behavior rules and academic lessons. (See Table 1 for demographic information about the children.)

Interviews
Interviews served as a way to get children's direct input about school places that they liked and disliked as well as their experiences in those places. The interview protocol was based on prior research by Hart (1979). Given that children may be less practiced in talking about their

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Table 1. List of children

Name	Race/ethnicity	Likely age	Grade
Daniel	African American	7–8	3
Kelly	White	7–8	3
Alena	African American	7–8	3
Darwin	Asian American	8–9	4 (gifted class)
Nell	African American	8–9	4
Yolanda	Latina	8–9	4

Note: Kelly and Alena are in the same class. All other children are in different classrooms.

feelings and experiences than adults, questions followed the suggestions from the place experience literature and focused on assessing feelings and experiences associated with places in a non-intrusive manner (e.g. asking children what they keep in their desks and cubbies, looking for markings that may personalize the space, and paying attention to things from home that are not typically needed at school may all indicate the person's feeling about place). The Appendix includes the questions from the protocol related to the analyses provided here. All interview questions were asked, but the order of asking them was not always the same. Rather, the interview protocol was adapted to the reference point of the child in order to gain more valid information (cf. Briggs, 1986). The researcher interviewed eight children, though some results detailed here deal with children who were not interviewed.

Focused Ethnographic Observations

Where possible, children were observed in their classrooms and other places that they nominated as liked and disliked places to document their behavior. The children were observed by the researcher and research assistants who were at the school for garden-related activities. Each research assistant attended closely to each identified child in the class in order to obtain multiple perspectives on the same child and to provide data triangulation. This method resulted in one to three undergraduates and the researcher observing each child over the course of the spring 2000 semester (a four-month period, for approximately two hours each week per child). The researcher observed students in all other behavior settings.

Data Analytic Strategy

Rappaport (1990), drawing from Lincoln and Guba (1986), gives some guidelines for judging scientific defensibility for interpretive participatory research. The account should include a thick description so that

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the reader understands the context and its potential applicability to other settings. Credibility is gauged through prolonged engagement and observation, data triangulation, negative case analyses and member checks. Dependability is assessed by determining under which conditions the results would be similar.

The data analysis followed procedures outlined by Corsaro (1985), Emerson et al. (1995) and Charmaz (1995). Immersion in the data and daily or weekly reviews while still in the setting facilitated the checking of ideas and hypotheses. As a first step into qualitative interpretative data analysis, I transcribed all interviews. Because of my five-year and ongoing involvement in the setting, I was able to check students' meanings via asking more questions and/or through further observations. This method of analysis helps facilitate the emergence of participant voices.

When reading through interviews and field-notes, I closely followed the strategy outlined by Emerson et al. (1995). I asked, among other things, the following questions: What are the people doing? Why? What meanings are attached to these actions? How do they understand these actions? An open coding is then carried out to identify themes. Next, a focused coding connects themes across instances. Following this, a thematic narrative is developed, which matches evidence to ideas and also refines the themes by looking for counter-examples. Finally, a manuscript is written that incorporates all of the above steps.

The results reported here are based primarily on eight children and five classrooms in one school building. By themselves, these results are exploratory. When examined within the context of the growing literature on children in school buildings (e.g. Books, 1998; Delpit, 1995; Field & Olafson, 1998; Fine, 1989; Mikel Brown, 1998; Sennett & Cobb, 1972), however, we begin to see patterns regarding how children are treated in schools and ways they resist such treatment.

A Note about Ethnography

Some of the stories you will read here make evident the structures under which teachers work. These structures often facilitate what appears to be uncaring behavior on the part of the teachers. Because these behavioral patterns are found across teachers, it makes sense to locate the problem within the broader structures rather than within the teachers. Indeed, it is likely that the societal discourse of schooling in general and schooling for low-income students specifically facilitates certain kinds of teacher behavior. The blessing and curse of the ethnographer is the ability to capture a moment and then provide an in-depth examination of that moment. It would be a mistake, however, to

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think that because specific field-notes are written at the level of individual people, the level of analysis is the individual. The patterns of behavior captured in the field-notes are just that—patterns across people. These patterns show that understanding these behaviors means examining the individuals as well as the broader structures, or the environments in which they are embedded.

Many teachers showed an openness and commitment to this research by allowing an outsider to record their struggles and triumphs in the classroom. The point of this examination into children's experiences is not to demonize teachers, but to understand and describe the interplay between students and the setting. The focus for this research has been on children and their agency within the constraints of their environment. Another equally important line of research could focus on teachers and their agency given the constraints of their environment. Indeed, some teacher disaffection is evident in their behaviors. These instances are not explored in this account because this has not been the focus of the research.

Results and Discussion

Student Silencing and Invisibility

The first research question asked how the elementary school context silences students. To answer this question, we must first understand what those in power say about the children. Once this is explicated, we can then go on to examine how this narrative informs the treatment of students and how this treatment silences them.

Others who have conducted research in this setting (Gathright, 2001; Hyland, 2000; Siegel, 1999) have documented the dominant narrative. This story is generally organized around discipline and behavior: a 'good teacher' is one who can 'control' her or his students. In general, many middle-class white female teachers hold stereotypical views about 'poor' Woodson children and parents. Evidence of these attitudes can be heard daily at the school building when teachers say things like 'all the children here are hungry' (Langhout et al., 2002). Both race and class stereotypes expressed by teachers can be seen in the following comments, all documented by different student-researchers working in this setting: 'Many parents are on crack or in jail', 'The children have to contend with drive-by shootings', and 'The children in my [third grade] class don't know how to read'. Furthermore, the teachers indicate that the children are 'out of control' and therefore cannot learn. The story, then, is one of dysfunction and deficits, and a great deal of time is spent getting children to 'behave'.

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Although all of the above statements are true for some of the students some of the time, this is not an accurate representation for all of the students all of the time, or for the community in which the children live. Even so, these stereotypes have been magnified to include almost all of the children at Woodson (Siegel, 1999). The magnification of the stereotypes also serves to render individual children invisible because they are viewed through a fabricated lens and are consequently not seen. Like Ellison said in *Invisible Man* in 1947,

> I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me. . . . When they approach me they see only my surroundings, themselves, or figments of their imagination—indeed, everything and anything except me. . . . That invisibility to which I refer occurs because of a peculiar disposition of the eyes of those with whom I come into contact. (p. 3)

As with Ellison's invisible man, the actual children are not seen; only the stereotypes are. When a child is seen, race, class and gender are highlighted.

The dominant narrative based on race and class is what we would expect (Delpit, 1995; Sarason, 1995). How then, does this narrative inform how students are directed and mandated to behave when in a school building? How does this behavior create a context of silencing and invisibility? Four examples will be given, each illustrating imposed uniformity or explicit silencing. The first deals with a class's hallway behavior and the second with classroom discipline systems. The third account details discipline in general across demographics, and the final is a recounting of 'Silent Day'.

Hallway

The hallways are a good place to view teacher–student dialogue and student treatment, for several reasons. First, the hallway in and of itself is a structured place[2] in that it is linear, narrow and uniform. This structure facilitates the behaviors the students are expected to perform; their bodies are to be in line, uniform and disciplined. Second, because the halls are visibly and audibly more public than classrooms, the behavior in the halls is thought to reflect on teachers. A teacher who is able to move her students from one place to another with no sound or commotion is thought to be a good teacher because her students are 'under control'. With this goal in mind, almost all of the teachers require students to walk in a single file line and to remain silent while in the halls. In general, being able to walk quietly is important so that other classrooms are not disturbed. The issue here is the process by which this happens and the level of control the teachers have over student behavior and movement. At least one classroom of fourth graders must

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cross their arms and hold their shoulders when they walk down the halls. The following is an interview where a Latina fourth-grade student explains the procedure to me.

Gina: You know what . . . I see your class do on the stairs?

Yolanda: What? (I cross my arms and put my hands on my shoulders.) Oh yeah, fold our arms?

Gina: Umhm. What do you do that for?

Yolanda: So you won't touch nobody.

Gina: Oh, okay.

Yolanda: You won't play around with your hands.

Gina: Umhm.

Yolanda: Don't touch somebody else's back.

Yolanda is able to tell me exactly why she must cross her arms when walking in the halls. She is not allowed to touch anyone or move her hands around. Even the way that she walks is controlled in this setting. All children in this classroom are to behave in exactly the same way, which is to walk in a uniform manner with no expression of individuality; in other words, they are disciplined and their identities are controlled. Even playing with one's own hands is grounds for punishment. It is unlikely that hand fidgeting would lead to disruption in other classrooms. This level of control and surveillance produces uniformity via controlling identity.

This level of control is seen as necessary because the stereotypical view of these children is that they are a moment away from being unruly, 'out of control' or on the brink of 'total chaos'. A teacher who is not a careful monitor of behavior runs the risk of losing authority in her classroom. If this happens, then the teacher is seen as ineffective. Indeed, part of the narrative is that the teacher must be able to control her students before any learning can transpire. The dominant ideology rationalizes this level of teacher control and the teachers' actions instantiate the ideology.

Classroom Behavior Management

The next example, which is also related to control based on student demographics, has to do with classroom behavior management. All the classrooms at Woodson have elaborate systems designed to assess and record student behavior. Most classrooms have a point system, where children lose points for breaking classroom rules. Punishments include losing recess time, revoking privileges, being sent to the Positive Action Center (PAC Room, or discipline room), being sent to the principal or having a parent called. In the following excerpt, Darwin, a

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fourth-grade Asian American boy, explains the discipline system in his classroom.

Darwin: There's a chip board over there. If we were good, then we don't take a chip and that means we, and we stay green the whole day, like I do, and after the day, you can take a green slip ah, and one of them is five minutes of train time.

Gina: Umhm.

Darwin: Now if you stay green for the whole week, you're able to get um, a weekly slip, which includes a no homework ticket, which is, of course, my favorite.

Gina: Oh.

Darwin: And then there's a, if you stay green for the whole month . . . you can go, uh, there's several choices, and it shows here (the board by the teacher's back desk) you get [a choice of] twenty minutes on the computer, video taping the class at work, being [the teacher's] assistant for the day, and lunch with [the teacher]. I've gotten several twenty minutes on the computer and lunches with [the teacher].

Gina: Umhm.

Darwin: If you choose lunches with [the teacher], then you can um, get some fast food, and um, eat good food instead of cafeteria food or a sandwich.

All eight students I interviewed can describe their elaborate classroom behavior management systems in minute detail. Although it may be argued that these systems ensure an orderly classroom, it is my contention that such systems keep behavior at the forefront at all times. During any moment a student can have a chip taken away, a point given or a card changed from green to yellow to red. These discipline systems are prominently displayed in the classrooms and thus made visible for all to see. Such heightened attention to student behavior enforces rigid standards of what is acceptable and what is unacceptable. The issue is how strictly student behavior is to be mandated and who decides the rules of the classroom. How closely should students be watched? Speaking without raising a hand, speaking without being called on, looking in any direction besides the front of the classroom and talking to one's neighbor are all grounds for punishment. All these rules work to standardize children's behaviors, thereby controlling their goals and values and rendering them uniform.

Potentially ambiguous behaviors, such as rolling eyes or sighing, are also likely to lead to punishment, especially if the offender is an African American boy. Here, gender, race and class come together in a way that makes African American boys hyper-visible; their behavior is

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most scrutinized by white middle-class female teachers. Indeed, Darwin, who is bussed to the building for the self-contained gifted program, tells me the following about who gets in trouble for what in his classroom:

Gina: What are the classroom rules?

Darwin: Honesty. In school, respect the rights of others to learn in our classroom. All students must ask permission prior to getting out of their seats. All students must ask permission prior to talking . . .

Gina: Okay, so these are the only rules then, to not get your [behavior] chip moved from green [to another color]?

Darwin: Pretty much, but he [the teacher] kind of makes some [rules] up. Even though I think he thinks all students will respect the rights of others to learn in our classroom, yet actually, it has nothing to do with that when you're just tying your shoe or something like that. Sometimes, if you are just grumpy, he will make you take a chip, and you're not saying anything.

Gina: So then it's not really one of these rules?

Darwin: No.

Gina: Are there certain kids who get chips taken more than others?

Darwin: Yeah.

Gina: And which kids are those?

Darwin: [Names three African American boys in his classroom who live in the surrounding neighborhood]

Gina: And do they get their chips taken because they're breaking classroom rules, or do they get their chips taken for being grumpy?

Darwin: Both.

Gina: Do other kids get their chips taken for being grumpy?

Darwin: Well, it doesn't happen all that often, but it's some other things he makes up. I only think of them really when it actually happens.

Darwin sees that the African American boys in the gifted classroom who live in the surrounding neighborhood (and therefore are working class or working poor) are more likely than other children to be punished for non-specified rules that are not part of the formal behavior program. Darwin says that these same boys are also the children most likely to be sent to the PAC Room. Other children in the building also share Darwin's perception (see Langhout, 2003, for another account). An Office of Civil Rights Department of Education Equity Audit (1997) and a district-wide school climate report (Aber, Meinrath, Johnson, Rasmussen, & Gonzales, 2001) both reach similar conclusions that are consonant with these children's lived experiences. Indeed, African American children in this school district are more

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likely to be disciplined (63 percent of all suspensions are of African American children, although they only make up roughly 33 percent of the student population), with many discipline referrals falling under ambiguous categories such as showing disrespect. African American children are more likely than their white counterparts to perceive this differential treatment.

That the children have learned the lesson of silence and uniformity well via discipline and mandated goals and values is demonstrated by the fact that they are able to verbalize the intended meta-communication. When I asked students what they learned in the classroom, I expected to get answers about math, reading, social studies, and the like. In addition to these kinds of answers, I was told the following:

Yolanda: I learn that you . . . when the teacher's talking, that you need to pay attention to the teacher and when she tells you to, that you can talk, and then you can talk, but if she tell us not to talk, you have to listen to her.

Darwin: [I learned] social studies stuff . . . I learned how to write a lot . . . [and also] to talk, listen to what the teacher has to say, pay attention.

Alena: We learn geometry, um, we learn, we learn like the math, multiplication, adding, um, we learn how to stay in our seats, raise your hand, don't shout out loud while the teacher's talking, um, we, if, if it's time to do something, she tell us to go do it and we, and we do it. That's it!

Kelly *(in a very high sing-song tone):* Nothing!

It appears that students have learned both the manifest and latent curriculum of school (Apple, 1992, 1996). Students understand that in addition to learning about reading, writing, math and social studies, they are to behave, be quiet and be still. Note that most of these answers have more to do with discipline and classroom management than with academics, even though students were responding to the question, 'What do you learn in the classroom?' Students, then, come to understand the purpose of schooling and verbalize this purpose of controlled values, goals and silent conformity.

Silent Day

The final example of how children are silenced at an elementary school building is blatant. Below are field-notes about a third grade's 'Silent Day':

[We] walked into the classroom as [the teacher] was standing at the front of the room talking to the students. I immediately noticed that the students were wearing a piece of masking tape across their chests. On the masking tape were the words 'silent day'. [The teacher] greeted us and said that

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because her class misbehaved when a substitute was in class at the beginning of the week, today was a silent day. She told us and the rest of the class that the students can only listen and they cannot say anything. She went on to say that if the students did need something or had a question, they needed to write it on a piece of paper. . . . The students didn't say a word to me even when I mistakenly asked them an open-ended question. [AR, field-note 11/5/99]

The class seemed very despondent and upset that they were having silent day. . . . [After the outdoor activity,] we were back in the building, near the stairwell. [The teacher] said that she was sorry to inflict this on us [meaning the undergraduates and me]. She told her class that we will be writing about [the outdoor activity] because we cannot talk. [The other third grade teacher] was in the hall at this point, and she said that she wished they had a silent day but 'I would need a muzzle for my class'. She then laughed and looked at [our third-grade teacher], like she was expecting her to laugh. [Our teacher] said that this was not for fun. [RDL, field-note 11/5/99]

Issues of silencing are obvious in this example. Children have been told that they are not allowed to speak, and that if asked a question, they must respond with only yes or no. Silent day was an all-day punishment, with the meta-communication being that when children talk (as they did for the substitute teacher) they must literally be silenced. It is also notable that at least one other teacher does not see this explicit imposition of silence as problematic, but rather as desirable. Furthermore, this comment was made in front of the students. Such an act communicates to the students that they are invisible because even negative things about other students are said in their presence. Here, the students are literally silenced and subsequently rendered invisible through the control of their identities, goals, values and voices.

To summarize the answer to research question no. 1, children are silenced and rendered invisible by treating them based on stereotypes and consequently demanding uniformity of behavior. Students are also literally silenced. In each case, there is a more powerful other attempting to control student identity, goals, values or assumptions. For each class, the hallways and classrooms are places where many teaching staff rigidly define behavior, especially for African American boys. Any deviation from this tightly controlled behavior is met with punishment. Children have no formal say or voice in defining what is appropriate and inappropriate behavior. The goal of heightened attention given to discipline and behavior is to mandate uniformity, which is seen as necessary given who the children are stereotypically believed to be. All students should be quiet, face forward and not speak unless spoken to. These acts serve to render students invisible and re-image the students in ways that the (middle-class white female) teachers find

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acceptable. In other words, this level of attention to behavior assists in controlling the goals, desires, interests and identities of the students. According to Ashforth and Mael (1998), this is an environment where resistance is likely to occur.

Student Voice and Visibility

The second research question deals with resistance, voice and visibility. How do students work to become more visible in a place that renders them invisible? Recall that in order for an act to be considered resistance, it must defy the wishes of others and must, either fully, partially or symbolically, analyze conflict, power, mediation and culture. This dialogue can take the form of struggling to be heard or to be visible, and the dialogue may be verbal and/or non-verbal. Given this definition, I will present four examples where children struggle and resist the dominant narrative about them. Table 2 summarizes these results.

For the first two examples of resistance, visibility and voice, we turn to Kelly, a white overweight third-grade girl. The first example deals with resistance to her classroom behavior program, and the second is an example of Kelly's attempt at visibility; both deal with voice and a critique of power and/or culture.

Resisting Mandated Behavior
Kelly is a student who seems to be more concerned with the process of schooling than the content. She pays close attention to behavior rules, often to the detriment of her academic performance. Although she

Table 2. Student visibility

Example	Effect (critique of dominant narrative; assertion of agency)
Drawing on behavior sheet	Self-definition and valuation by attempting to have a voice in defining and evaluating good behavior. Resistance through redefinition and re-evaluation.
'Big Fat Girl' poem	Bring lived experience to the forefront. Self-define as a writer. Resistance through reclaiming.
PAC Room drawing and discussion	Invoke counter-narrative based on lived experience that children have feelings and are sad and staff are inappropriate. Resistance through redefinition and re-imaging.
Fourth-grade classroom dynamics	Non-verbal classroom dialogue of resistance. Critique is that the teacher is inappropriate, not the students. Resistance through collective compliance.

pays attention to these rules, she is not likely to follow them herself. Indeed, when she is in the classroom, she is often in trouble for bad behavior. Because of her 'bad behavior', she sits in a location that is removed from the rest of the students (see Figure 2). She is on an additional behavior program where she is able to earn a sticker on a sheet twice a day for appropriate behavior. This behavior sheet is taped to the wall next to her desk. This pink sheet reads 'Grade School Daily Report Card' at the top, followed by '[Kelly] raises her hand to speak, keeps quiet, and stays on task'. A happy face follows these words. The page is then divided by day (Monday through Friday) and into morning and afternoon slots, labeled AM and PM. When her teacher determines that she has behaved well for the morning or the afternoon, she gets a sticker for the time slot. When she does not get a sticker, she will draw a sticker in the space. If she fails to get two stickers, she will often tear up the sheet and hide it in her desk.

I interpret Kelly's drawing stickers as targeted individual resistance via redefinition. The identity of a 'proper student' is mandated and controlled by her teacher, a more powerful 'other'. Kelly attempts to be seen as good and to bring to the forefront her identity as a 'good girl' who behaves well. Additionally, Kelly's behavior is targeted because it is in dialogue with her teacher. Furthermore, Kelly's
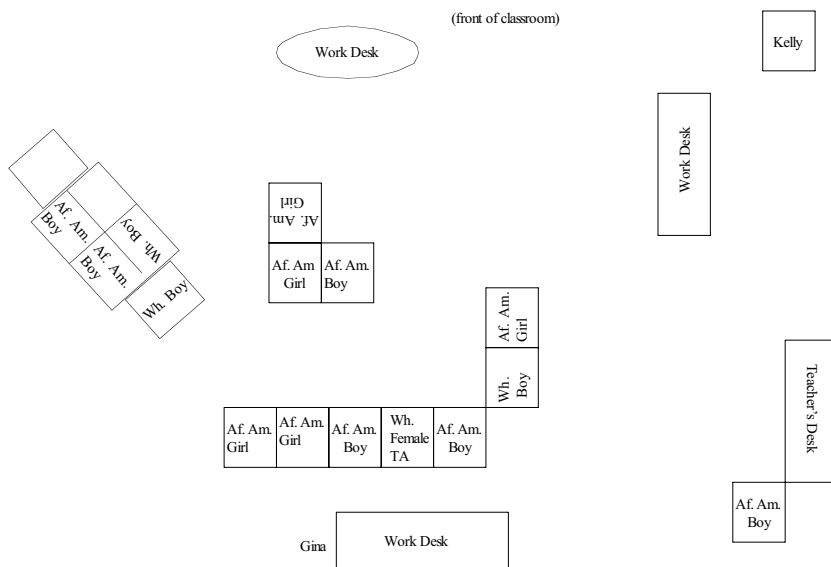

Figure 2. Seating placement for Kelly's class

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behavior is facilitative and unauthorized. She is working within the defined system, but in an unauthorized way because she is not allowed to draw pictures on her behavior chart. Kelly asserts the right to define what counts as good behavior, or to self-define good behavior rather than having the teacher be the only person deciding when she is on- and off-task. She is communicating that her behavior is appropriate and that she can re-evaluate her behavior. She has the final say over the appropriateness of her behavior, and her re-evaluation overrides the teacher's evaluation.

Kelly is critiquing her behavior program and the classroom power structure. She is in dialogue with the 'other' in the setting (i.e. the teacher). The teacher's view is powerful and shapes Kelly's own view, but it does not fully determine it. Kelly resists by attempting to redefine and self-evaluate good behavior, and resists and redefines the power structure by asserting her voice and having the last say in defining good behavior. Here, I borrow from McElroy-Johnson (1993), who defines voice as 'having a place within the academic setting, other than just a desk and a book . . . voice is power' (p. 86). In this redefinition, however, the existing power structure is also reproduced. Indeed, Kelly does not question the use of the behavior sheet in the first place, and her behavior of tearing up the sheet can simultaneously serve to redefine her behavior for herself and reinforce her behavior as undisciplined in the eyes of the teacher.

Visibility through Writing
In the second example of Kelly's visibility and voice, it is important to know more about her academic situation. She receives multiple pull-out services at the building for reading and other academic areas in which she is thought to be behind. In her classroom, she is often slow to start an assignment and does not finish in the allotted time. Her writing is sloppy compared to many of the other children's. For example, when writing 'lines' for bad behavior, she usually writes one sentence per page, which occupies the whole sheet. Other children in her classroom write one sentence per line or one sentence on two lines. Kelly generally writes two sentences in the time that it takes the rest of the students to write ten. The following is a poem that Kelly wrote during a writing exercise.

> The Big Fat gril [Girl]
> there was a
> fat gril[.] [S]he
> was funny looking
> and she was

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ugly.
She was
eating my food
and she ate
It all and
I was mad
and I tood [told]
her mom and
she dittn [didn't] care
because
she is
a pig and
she ate the
food
all and
she eats
aver
thing [everything] in the
hooghes [house] and she
got fat and
fat
and her
mom take
her
to the hopesto [hospital]
because she ate
out lought [a lot]

This poem contrasts with Kelly's other written work: it is longer, neater and written on one page. That she wrote this from beginning to end shows that she has a focus that is not usually evident in her academic work. Indeed, she often does not sit long enough to write something this long. Additionally, the poem tells a story with a beginning, middle, end, and includes a moral (if you eat too much, you may become unhealthy). This writing sample contradicts the story that is usually told about Kelly. The poem shows that Kelly has abilities that are rendered invisible when her classroom work is rote and highly structured. Additionally, the poem indicates that Kelly has something to say about things that are important to her. This is in contrast to most school assignments, which are not about real-life contexts. Kelly is able to write when she is given the chance to say something that, for her, is meaningful. The poem, therefore, defies the teacher's sense of Kelly's identity. Kelly's voice comes through in this poem. Both she and her thoughts are visible. Furthermore, she reclaims a part of her identity that she is taught to despise; reclaiming is another resistance strategy (Crenshaw, 1991). Kelly struggles against the story that she is an

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outcast and cannot write and, for this moment, lives in the story that she is a writer with a legitimate message that is based on her experience. For this reason, the poem is an act of resistance. It is diffuse, facilitative, authorized and individual. In other words, it is not directed at the teacher, it helps Kelly reach the goal of completing the writing assignment, it is within the rules of acceptable behavior and she works alone.

Visibility through Drawings and Stories
Like the poem, the third example of resistance, voice and visibility deals with a creative act. The setting here is the Positive Action Center (PAC Room). This is the discipline room, where children are sent for misbehaving. One day, an undergraduate was working with Daniel, an African American third-grade boy, and his cousin. They talked about the PAC Room. The following is the undergraduate field-note.

> As they were coloring, Daniel's cousin commented on some other boy getting sent to the PAC room. He said if he (Daniel's cousin) got sent there, he would've been 'mad'. I asked him why he would be mad and he said he just would. I asked them to tell me what the PAC room was like. Daniel's cousin offered to draw me a picture. The picture is of Mrs Ross [the PAC room aide] sitting at her desk, with a phone in her hand (she was calling the child's parents, Daniel's cousin told me) screaming at a student at a desk. The student is the only one in the room, and she's crying. Daniel took the picture from his cousin and wrote 'Devil' and 'Mrs Ross' on it. I asked who the woman was and they told me Mrs Ross. I asked if she was really that mean or if they were making that up. Daniel's cousin said, 'No, she's really that mean'. Daniel said 'meaner'. [JV field-note, Sp, 2000]

The picture is a quick sketch (see Figure 3), so the details that are in the picture seem to have even more significance because Daniel's cousin took the time to draw them. In the picture, Mrs Ross's eyebrows are heavily drawn into a 'v', denoting a look of anger. What is most prominent about the child in the picture is her sad affect, indicated by a frown and huge tears rolling down her face.

The collective act of drawing this picture and the discussion that ensues brings children's voices and experiences to the forefront. In this telling, a different story about the children emerges. Here, Mrs Ross is the one who displays inappropriate behavior, not the children, especially not African American boys, who are the authors of the story. Rather, children are treated unjustly and respond through hurt feelings and tears. This is an example of resistance through redefinition and re-imaging. Because Mrs Ross is singled out, the behavior of the students is targeted resistance. It is both authorized and unauthorized. The students are allowed to draw pictures in school, but school staff would

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Figure 3. PAC room drawing

likely find the theme of this particular picture unacceptable. Because the students act and construct the picture together, the resistance is collective. Finally, this act is oppositional because it is not designed to facilitate an expressed school goal. The moment, however, is dialogic in that the children's story directly references and then reconstructs the story of the teachers and staff. In this moment, these two students are visible to the undergraduate and to one another. Although individuality is largely squelched in this setting, Daniel and his cousin are able to relay their struggle, critique and subsequent re-imaging through this dialogic act.

During this study, the building staff renamed the PAC Room the Student Services Center, perhaps in an attempt to redefine what happens there. Most children (for example, seven of the eight who were interviewed) continue to call this room the PAC Room, even though 'Student Services Center' is posted on the door. This act of continuing to call the room the PAC Room can also be viewed as an act of resistance through naming. The staff would like the room to be called something else, but the students refuse to participate in the myth that something happens in the room that is different from what used to happen there.

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These examples so far have been based on a verbal dialogue that critiques the power structure through resistance and struggle, attends to an alternative narrative, and illustrates the dialogic relationship between individuals and the setting. Children have found ways to create and participate in a dialogue that tells an alternative story and reconstructs their identities. The story seems to be that they want to have a voice in determining how the building and, more explicitly, their classroom are run. This is a critique of the power structure. Additionally, they want to be viewed as children who are well behaved. They want to be visible and they want their experiences to be relevant to the classroom.

Visibility through Non-verbal Dialogue
In the final example, the dialogue is non-verbal and the setting is a fourth-grade classroom. In discussing her classroom, Nell tells me, 'It's messy—the floor and the desks . . . The teacher desk junky too.' Nell's recounting of her classroom fits both my and the undergraduates' interpretation of the physical environment. We all experience this room as disorganized, with piles of papers, posters and books stacked in every location, so that there are no cleared common space surfaces.

This classroom is organized so that the children sit in rows, facing the front whiteboard (i.e. dry erase board). There is a sink along the back wall, and directly next to the sink are rolled-up maps and other papers. Movable student cubbies are next to the maps. There are piles and piles of books stacked precariously on top of the cubbies. The next wall houses cabinets and a desk. The desk is not free workspace. It is covered in papers, books and posters. The cabinets have plants and more books stacked on them. In the corner is the teacher's desk, which also does not appear to have any free workspace because of the number of papers stacked on it. There are also often items stacked along the front wall, to about knee height, or to the bottom of the mounted whiteboard. There is another whiteboard on the next wall, which also can be difficult to get to because of items stacked in front of it. This board also has maps hanging above it, which can be pulled down and examined. Finally, there are more mobile student cubbies. In addition to having papers and books stacked on top of these cubbies, there are also books and boxes in front of the cubbies on occasion. These items have to be moved each time that a student wants to get into his or her cubby, which happens several times a day. One undergraduate always commented that she wanted to go into this particular classroom and clean it because the space made it impossible for her to think. She knew, however, that even if she did clean up the space, the

teacher would have it back to being messy again before the end of the week.

Students wad up paper and throw it on the floor in this classroom. There are wadded-up papers, tracked-in dirt and smudge marks all over the floor. The floor is also scratched from desks and chairs being slid across it. Of the classrooms that I am familiar with in the building (approximately nine), this room has the most permanently scratched and marked floor. In fact, because this is a new school building, other classrooms have worked to keep their rooms looking like new for as long as possible.

Nell also tells me about the lack of autonomy and trust she and other students are given in the classroom. She says, 'She [the teacher] don't like people touchin' her computer' and 'We can't even water our own plants no more.' Nell also says, 'Every day she say she gonna move us and she do.' Compared to the other classrooms, this one did seem to change in terms of seating the most frequently, although it did not seem to change every day. Upon further probing, Nell agreed that the seating did not change on a daily basis, but she thought that it changed on a weekly basis. According to Nell, the seating changed when the students were in trouble for misbehaving.

Nell's discussion indicates a lack of consistency in the classroom. From day to day, she cannot even be sure of where she will be sitting. In addition to a lack of consistency, Nell feels that she has little choice or self-efficacy when in the classroom. In many other classrooms in the building, students are allowed to use the computer. This is not the case in this classroom. Additionally, in her interview, Nell complains that the children are not allowed to write on the whiteboard, and that they lost their plant-watering privileges because someone put paper in all the plant containers and then over-watered all of the plants. In some respects, it seems logical for the teacher to then restrict the children from watering the plants in order to insure that the plants live. On the other hand, the over-watering and paper could have been used as a learning opportunity to talk to children about what plants need to live and thrive.

Taken together, all of Nell's comments paint the picture of a classroom that is in the middle of a control war. The teacher has staked out a few things as 'hers' (the boards, computer and plants), and these items cannot be disturbed because the children cannot be trusted to behave appropriately. The other items in the room, however, are almost discarded in the ways they are stacked and put aside. The teacher and children contribute to the general untidiness of the room, which indicates the unimportance of the classroom to both parties.

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My interpretation is that the overall meta-communication to the students in this classroom is that they are not competent, capable or effective (evidenced by the rules that they cannot write on the board, use the computer or water their plants). The children are viewed through a lens of deficits. In turn, the students create a dialogue of resistance through redefinition. Their redefinition is that the teacher's assessment of them is fine because they do not care about this particular space either (evidenced by littering, dirt clods and marks on the floor). I know most of the children in this classroom because of my involvement in their previous third-grade classrooms. In third grade, these same children were not throwing paper on the floor or leaving dirt everywhere. Their third-grade teacher was more invested in their learning process and their academic performance than was their fourth-grade teacher. Additionally, I have observed many of these children once they were in fifth grade. In this classroom, the teacher is very invested in the students as learners. The students behave much as they did in their third-grade classrooms: there are no dirt piles on the floor and there is no littering. The children seem to respect the classroom because the teacher respects them and the work done in the classroom.

In their fourth-grade classroom, children resist the story that the teacher promotes about them by constructing a similar story about her. The children's story of resistance is that the classroom is unimportant because the teacher is unimportant. This story of resistance also serves to perpetuate the current dominant structure. Because the students have been silenced and rendered invisible, they have turned to other modes of dialogue or communication. The teacher yells. The students litter. The students get moved, and they scratch the floors when they move their desks. A student leaves dirt clods along her path when doing the teacher a favor. This diffuse, collective, unauthorized and oppositional non-verbal dialogue speaks loudly and forcefully and serves to create a visual display among the students that the teacher is inappropriate, not the students. The teacher, however, may view this discourse as further evidence of the students' lack of discipline. The lack of discipline is at times difficult to point to because the resistance is carried out through collective conformity. Dirt ends up on the floor because students are doing what the teacher has asked. The floor ends up scratched because students move their desks when the teacher says so. The students are technically complying with what the teacher asks of them, but their compliance is done in a way that registers their objections.

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Conclusion

This school setting is one where many children are disciplined into invisibility because they are seen through stereotypes and are required to behave uniformly. Nevertheless, children have found creative ways to resist. In these actions is hope, not despair. These children have agency and have found ways to make themselves more visible and heard despite the constraints of the setting. They have created a dialogue that is both subtle and powerful. They see injustices and name them, whether it is based on the PAC Room or who defines behavior and how. They resist the story that they are 'out of control' children who must be disciplined and silenced to learn and instead construct a story of visibility founded upon their experience.

Children's identities, especially the identities of boys of color, are threatened via control and discipline. Here, children are rendered silent through controlling and disciplining their bodies in the hallways, through the classroom behavior management system, and by teachers literally demanding silence. When children's identities are threatened via control of their values, motivations, goals or assumptions, they will resist. Their resistance can be verbal (e.g. talking about the PAC Room duty aid), non-verbal or symbolic (e.g. littering in the classroom), targeted (e.g. drawing stickers on a behavior sheet) or diffuse (e.g. scratching the classroom floor), individual or collective, authorized (e.g. drawing) or unauthorized (e.g. littering), facilitative (e.g. trying to reach the goal of behaving well), or oppositional (e.g. working against a school assumption that all teachers are right). In all cases, however, the students struggle to define their own identities in ways that are different from teacher and school definitions.

Theoretical Implications

In this paper, I have attempted to show that different contexts can underscore different parts of a person's identity, as well as subsequent treatment and behavior. Indeed, sometimes race, class or gender is highlighted, and at other times, all three are salient. The meaning of specific acts changes once we understand the role that demographics and concomitant perceptions play in certain contexts. In this treatment, we see that race, class and gender have come together in particular ways that facilitate children being seen through imposed stereotypes and through a discourse of discipline. Individual children are rendered invisible and can voice this invisibility, as well as an alternative narrative that is based on their experience that stands in direct resistance to the dominant narrative about them. Their resistance discourses occur

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through redefining, reclaiming, re-imaging and compliance. At times, the resistance perpetuates the dominant structure. In all these cases, children move back and forth in their roles as 'power holders' and 'power subjects' (Hermans, 2001) as they act both within and against power structures.

It would be inappropriate to read these results as only being applicable to children in schools. Indeed, other researchers have documented resistance in the workplace (Ashforth & Mael, 1998), sports (Broad, 2001), social service organizations (Trethewey, 1997), and against general mainstream norms (Weitz, 2001). In all these cases, identity was curtailed and those who were controlled found different ways to communicate their resistance and to redefine their identities. In its broadest sense, this article demonstrates a similar phenomenon, but with a much younger group of controlled and disciplined people. Examining resistance in children allows us to see how the resistance is manifested for those who are developing and may not yet have the cognitive complexity and language skills to fully name their oppression, yet know that something is amiss.

This paper also raises important questions about theories of resistance. I have argued that intentionality can be determined via action, and that the researcher can label acts as resistance if the act follows an attempt by those in power to control identity, values, goals and/or assumptions, and if there are similar responses to similar controlling events. I have taken this position based on the notion that those who are marginalized in our society have not been given the tools to theorize resistance, so their critique is partial, occasional, opportunistic and fragmented. I have attempted to create a more systematic critique of power based on the commentary and cultural practices that are present in the setting and, with this, have exposed the role of the researcher as a constructor of knowledge, as well as the societal and scientific hegemony which holds that resistance must be theorized by the marginalized to be labeled as such. It is not my intention to speak for the marginalized, but rather to translate experience to other (academic) audiences and to push theories of resistance past middle-class understandings.

Applied Implications

Situating individual behaviors within their social and cultural context can help bring new meaning to these behaviors and stories. Once this is done, what appears to be oppositional can be re-examined as resistance, thus allowing an examination of power and power relations. Also, this treatment offers perceptual clues of how to see silencing,

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struggle and resistance in other settings. Indeed, resistance does not always take the form of petitioning those in power or other related forms. As researchers, we must take responsibility for facilitating the telling of these stories by helping others to hear what is being communicated in resistant acts (Kidder & Fine, 1986). It is especially important that these voices are heard in settings where people do not have the freedom or ability to leave (Feld & Basso, 1996).

Children need to be seen and heard in the classroom; grounding curriculum in student's lived experiences can facilitate student voice and subsequent academic engagement (Dewey, 1916; Katz, 1994; Langhout et al., 2002; Moll, 1997; Wiggington, 1989). Working from children's experiences can be transformational in that it can nurture the alternative story that working-class and working-poor children are interested in and motivated by school, and facilitate student contributions to their own learning process. Researchers and others interested in student's school experiences need to work with teachers to create spaces that bring children's lives and voices into the classroom.

Additionally, researchers should draw similarities between the experiences of children and teachers, in terms of how they are treated and how they encounter school. This can also be done with other groups in settings (e.g. workers and managers). Building solidarity between what appear to be two oppositional groups can begin to make visible the shared experience that both groups have, help each group see the other from a new perspective, and facilitate a shared critique of power structures. Together, these groups can struggle against the dominant narrative and work to change cultures that reproduce ideologies of domination. These acts can work to produce second-order change, or change that is based on relational reconfigurations (Sarason, 1972). If researchers were involved in facilitating second-order change, then they would also be involved in change that is transformational in that, according to Shi-xu (2002), new patterns of discourse would be created that are beneficial to groups who are repressed or marginalized.

Appendix: Abridged Interview Protocol

I am trying to learn about how kids feel about different places at school. I would like to talk to you about places that you like and don't like at school.

1. What places do you most like when you are at school? (Get three places. Go to each place and ask the following questions of each:)

   Can you tell me about the place?
   What do you like about it here?
   Why do you usually come to this place?

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What do you do when you are here?
What do you learn in this place?

2. What places do you not like when you are at school? (Possible probes in case they have problems answering the question: What places do you think are strange or weird at school?) (Get three places. Go to each place & ask the following about each place:)

    Can you tell me about the place?
    What don't you like about it here?
    Why do you usually come to this place?
    What do you do when you are here?
    What do you learn in this place?

3. If the following places have not already been visited, then go to classroom, middle stairwell, bathroom, lunchroom and garden and ask the above questions.

Notes

1. All proper names have been changed.
2. I am indebted to Gina Ulysse for this analysis.

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