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## **Resistance leadership: The overlooked potential in critical organization and leadership studies**

*Heather M. Zoller and Gail T. Fairhurst*

### **ABSTRACT**

This article examines the role of leadership in mobilizing collective resistance in the workplace. Given the scarcity of dialogue between critical scholars and leadership studies, relatively little consideration is given to the role of leadership in resisting and potentially transforming structures of domination. The article describes some of the reasons why these areas of research have produced so little mutual work. We then make the argument that theories of leadership can be useful to the study of resistance by providing a grounded approach to theorizing agency, highlighting the role of mobilization and influence in change, and emphasizing participant attributions. In doing so, leadership studies gain important insights about the influence of deep structure power issues on perceptions of leaders, as well as material and symbolic limits on mobilization. The article adopts a dialectical perspective as a way of understanding issues of resistance leadership, and then discusses how existing literatures, read with this dialectical approach, can be brought to bear on significant questions concerning the practices of resistance leadership.

### **KEYWORDS**

communication ■ critical studies ■ discourse ■ leadership ■ resistance

When examining relationships between resistance and leadership, scholars generally understand leadership in terms of the management of dissent. Writers in the managerial tradition often address how leaders can deal

effectively with employee dissent, from shutting down 'illegitimate' forms of dissent to encouraging employee voice in the interest of improved decision-making (Hamilton & Sanders, 1992; Wicks, 2002). Leadership is usually equated with management in this writing. However, an interesting alternative emerges when we conceptualize resistance as a potential form of leadership.

On one level, this is hardly news given that in social movement research the quintessential dissenter is often an opinion leader (Stewart et al., 2001). Yet, in the organizational literature, relatively little consideration is given to the role of leadership in resisting and potentially transforming structures of domination. In this article, we discuss why so little dialogue has taken place between critical and leadership scholars. We argue that theories of leadership can illuminate the study of resistance by providing a grounded approach to theorizing agency, highlighting the role of mobilization and influence in change, and emphasizing participant attributions. In turn, leadership studies gain important insights about the influence of deep structure power issues on perceptions of leaders, as well as material and symbolic limits on mobilization.

We also propose a dialectical perspective as a way of understanding resistance leadership and discuss how existing literatures, read with this dialectical approach, can inform the practices of resistance leadership. We begin by discussing why critical organizational and leadership studies have produced comparatively little mutually informed work.

### **Critical organizational and leadership studies: An overlooked potential**

Although critical organizational studies have embraced the importance of teams, little research has addressed leadership as a significant concept. One reason for this oversight may be the conflation of leadership with the study of leadership, which is largely quantitative and managerially focused. As a result, leadership may be equated with the managerial role itself, so that only those in organizationally sanctioned roles count as leaders. A second factor may be a tendency to view leadership as a form of domination, such as we find in Hardy and Clegg (1996) who lump leadership with other 'mechanisms of domination' like culture and structure. This view may lead critical scholars to devalue leadership, given preferences for understanding deep structures of power over relational approaches. In so doing, critical scholars may overlook actors' everyday social theorizing and attributions of leadership accorded to themselves or others.

Leadership studies generally also have little engagement with critical theories. There are several forces at work here because of the quantitative

and managerial focus of much of the mainstream leadership literature. Such a focus produces a kind of theoretical and methodological individualism – what Gronn (2000) refers to as ‘belief in the power of one’ (p. 319). Agency is exaggerated to sometimes heroic proportions (Yukl, 1999), while much of the literature ‘floats ethereally’ above task accomplishment (Robinson, 2001). Moreover, much leadership research is conducted within schools of management where researchers’ overriding concern is with managerial effectiveness instead of social critique. Power is viewed relatively simplistically, operating mostly on the surface while deep structure concerns routinely get overlooked. Adopting a critical perspective toward power may be unappealing to the degree that it would ask theorists to consider leadership actors as passive receptors of meaning as much as they are its managers and transformative agents (Fairhurst, 2007) as well as to focus less on the leader and more on the leadership situation (Rost, 1991).

Existing research that does address issues of power and leadership illustrate the potential utility of dialogue between these respective theorists (Barker, 2002; Collinson, 2005; Fairhurst, 2007; Foster, 1986). We would like to explore this dialogue from a communication perspective, as we believe there are multiple ways this literature can be expanded. In particular, we focus on the role of leadership in resistance efforts, primarily in corporate organizations. This focus distinguishes leadership from management, a move that will help bring attention to the leadership potential among all relevant organizational members. Here our goal is to understand leadership ‘wherever it lies’ (Robinson, 2001: 100). We argue that together, resistance and leadership can help us to understand mobilization processes, particularly the ways in which covert and individual forms of resistance may move to more overt and collective forms of resistance. Finally, it may also elucidate how and why attributions of leadership emerge.

### **Critical perspectives on resistance**

Critical and discursive accounts of organizations emphasize organizations as sites of struggle over the production of knowledge, meaning, and identity, as captured by Foucault’s concept of ‘power/knowledge’ (Foucault, 1995). Discourse perspectives investigate the construction of reality usually by distinguishing between little ‘d’ discourse as language and social interaction and big ‘D’ Discourse à la Foucault as a system of thought, ideas, assumptions, and practices (and points in between) (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2000). The critical tradition also investigates the ways in which constructed realities are tied to material practices as both antecedents and outcomes. Critical and discursive approaches address the complexity of power relations,

with particular interest in the role of resistance. Here, we describe the growth of complexity in resistance research with dialectical theorizing, elucidating some common points of contention in the literature, while noting how temporary, covert and individual forms of resistance have come to dominate the agenda.

Critical research has broadened our conceptions of resistance. Morrill et al. (2003) define 'covert political conflict' in terms of the 'contestation of institutionalized power and authority, perceptions of collective injury, social occlusion, and officially forbidden forms of dissent' (p. 391). Critical studies look to both symbolic and material forms of resistance such as ambivalence, resignation, toleration, theft, non-cooperation, sabotage, confrontation, collective action, formal complaints, legal action, or violence (Tucker, 1993). Critical scholars also emphasize the contestation of identity, given managerial attempts to regulate identity and the way that dominant frameworks can colonize individuals' quest for self-definition, coherence, and meaning (Collinson, 1992; Mumby, 2001). Poststructuralist perspectives, in particular, view the self as produced, reproduced, and transformed in complex and even contradictory ways within relations of power (Tretheway, 1997).

Importantly, many critical organizational studies focus on power and resistance as a dialectical relationship rather than as a binary. Mumby (2004) defines power 'as a dialectical phenomenon characterized by interdependent processes of struggle, resistance, and control' (pp. 240–1). Indeed, Collinson (1994) argues that the concepts are mutually constitutive. A number of scholars provide contextualized investigations of the ways in which organizational members construct, reinforce, and contest relations of power, at times simultaneously (Collinson, 1992; Kondo, 1990). These studies caution against treating resistance in essentialist terms.

For instance, Prasad and Prasad (2000) insist that resistance is socially constructed in situ. Knights and McCabe (2000) point out that a multiplicity of responses from actors at all levels of the organization may be resistant – and, importantly, behaviors cannot automatically be categorized as resistance (Larsen & Tompkins, 2005). Kondo (1990) criticizes attempts to sharply distinguish conformity and resistance, noting that people may consent to, cope with, and resist relations of power at the same time at different levels of consciousness.

The dialectical approach to power and resistance can be a significant curb to the tendencies to go too far in either celebrating or dismissing the significance of organizational resistance. Yet even within the dialectical perspective, disagreements continue over the issues of agency and the possibility of subverting versus reinforcing domination. Foucault's work becomes a procrustean couch of sorts as scholars argue the possibilities for agency

within his work. Our own reading of Foucault locates agency in the act of choosing among multiple Discourses, while recognizing that one is never outside of Discourse; we simply move from one discursive network to another (Calas & Smircich, 1999). Nevertheless, resistance to a Discourse is achievable, suggesting possibilities for simultaneous control and change where behavior can be reproductive at one level and resistant at another because of the space of action that multiple Discourses make available (Daudi, 1986).

However, as Collinson (2005) notes, some researchers 'have so tightly locked control and resistance together that it precludes other practices' (p. 1427). Kondo (1990) levels this critique against Willis (1977), yet her own work can be read as largely equating the concepts of resistance and acquiescence. We find that the dialectical view can be employed in ways that direct attention towards 'carnival', those temporary subversions of power that ultimately reinforce existing regimes (Bakhtin, 1981; Rosen, 1988). As research seeks everyday agency, we have not connected the everyday with efforts to transform relations of domination. In this essay, we argue that discursive, attributional, and distributed views of leadership rescue the possibility for agency in transformational change without placing agency outside of power relations.

A second debate within the dialectic emphasizes hidden versus overt resistance. Hodson (1995) argues that early critical organization studies viewed micro-level events as inconsequential or merely reproductive of capitalist relations, believing that 'since capitalism continues to exist, workers must not be resisting enough' (p. 82). This is obviously no longer the case today, as many scholars turned their attention to covert, micro-level forms of resistance (Collinson, 1992; Kondo, 1990; Tretheway, 1997). For instance, Scott's 'hidden transcripts' (1990) have been examined as employee non-conformist discourse that occurs outside the purview of management such as humor and bitching (Tracy, 2000). Employee irony and cynicism are investigated as relatively private ways to resist managerial influence (Fleming & Spicer, 2003; Fox, 1985), along with ambivalence (Gabriel, 1999), foot-dragging, disengagement (Prasad & Prasad, 2000), sabotage, theft and non-cooperation (Morrill et al., 2003). Ganesh et al. (2005) argue that the pendulum has swung to the point that organizational scholars now may overlook more overt forms of resistance.

Notwithstanding Kondo's insistence on the complexity and importance of everyday employee behavior, this focus can be problematic as it often represents coping within the status quo rather than challenging power relationships. We do not want to downplay the importance of the individual's ability to 'read through' power relations and its role in warding off

additional inequity, yet we note with Fleming and Spicer (2003) that the 'disagreeing but willing' worker still fulfills managerial imperatives. Although management has used identity issues to achieve consent, identification is a means to achieve certain behavioral outcomes rather than an end in itself. Scholars drawing more heavily from a Marxist tradition such as Cloud (2001) call for attention to what Zald and Berger (1978) call 'social movements in organizations', yet the methodological difficulty of linking hidden transcripts with overt forms of political action makes this difficult. We believe leadership can help us to see linkages between hidden transcripts and more overt forms of resistance, including dialectical ones, given that efforts may move back and forth seamlessly.

A third issue within the dialectic is the degree to which research focuses on individual or collective resistance. Ganesh et al. (2005) argue that much existing critical organizational research conceptualizes resistance as individual. They suggest that one reason is an interpretation of Foucauldian theory that locates power in diffuse knowledge networks, thereby locating micro-processes of resistance as the individual ability to penetrate dominant meaning systems. The focus on power as the construction of identity places emphasis on resistance as the ability of individuals to construct their own identities in ways contrary to dominant organizational narratives (Tracy, 2000; Trethewey, 1997). Ganesh et al. see the focus on individual over collective resistance as ironic in a field dedicated to organizing. As a result, more attention is given to two consequences of resistance described by Putnam et al. (2005) – voicing interests and altering subjectivity, while less attention is given to the third – changing structural arrangements.

This is not to suggest that collective resistance has been ignored. Organizational studies, particularly in Europe, focus on collective resistance, defined by Fleming and Spicer (2003) as overt actions such as union formation, strikes, and coordinated output restrictions. However, much of this work presents the collective already formed (Cloud, 2005). This is not surprising given the practical difficulties of accessing collectivity formation. However, we believe that Ganesh et al.'s call for greater attention to mobilization of individual action toward collective attempts at social change can provide important insight into organizational political conflict. Some research has captured the relationship between hidden transcripts and more overt opposition; for example, Rodrigues and Collinson's (1995) study showed that worker cynicism in a newsletter helped bolster traditional forms of employee dissent. Fox's (1985) work on British industrial relations elucidates the thresholds from passive approaches to organized opposition and even to anti-authority approaches. We believe theories of leadership may expand our ability to address these linkages while maintaining the dialectical perspective on power and resistance.

## Relevant leadership perspectives

As noted in the introduction, leadership research often focuses on the management of employee dissent and resistance, largely conceptualizing resistance as a problem (Hamilton & Sanders, 1992; Wicks, 2002). However, several leadership research traditions can be used to turn this focus on its head by examining the role of leadership in resistance efforts themselves. Yet, how are we to use this research if we have eschewed essentializing resistance while mainstream leadership theorizing essentializes leadership? This is done by locating leadership in the leader (trait theories), the situation (situational leadership theories), or some combination thereof (contingency leadership theories) (Grint, 2000). We take Boje's (2001) stance here and ask whether some essentialist argument is worth hanging on to, if only temporarily, especially if the contents of these theories are the 'good reasons' actors use in accounting for their (always contestable) leadership attributions.

For example, neo-charisma theories emerged with late 20th-century new market economies concerned with global outreach, technological advance, and cost-saving labor practices. Organizations sought senior executives who could effectively reshape their organizations to win market share in a globally competitive environment. 'Leaders' were cast as the change agents, capable of sweeping organizational transformation (Bennis & Nanus, 1985; Kanter, 1983; Kotter, 1990). Transformational (Bass, 1985), charismatic (Conger & Kanungo, 1987; Shamir et al., 1993), and visionary (Westley & Mintzberg, 1989) leadership theories explained leaders' extraordinary capabilities in terms of charisma, personal appeal, and a powerful vision to produce change. 'Managers' became the technicians with day-to-day know-how and skill, a particularly important function at middle and lower hierarchical levels. Importantly, leaders' unique communication expertise was designated as the 'management of meaning', suggesting that leaders could not always control events, but they could control the context under which events were seen (Weick, 1979). While it is unfortunate that some of this literature suggests that leaders are the only symbolizing agents (Fairhurst, 2001), Shotter (1993) suggests that leadership emerges in exactly those moments when actors are able to provide an 'intelligible formulation' of what for others may be 'a chaotic welter of impressions' (p. 157). This notion strikes at the very heart of leadership as the management of meaning, which may be one basis for collective action.

Moreover, in speculating about where 'visions' come from, neo-charisma writers suggest that visions are born of some kind of transformative experience (Parameshwar, 2006), what Bennis and Thomas (2002) call 'crucibles' or defining moments. Leaders' passage through these experiences often occasion powerful emotions in themselves or others, forcing them into

the role of 'toxin handlers' of intense emotions that draw others to them (Frost, 2003). Also, that which emerges as a solidified vision is because leaders putatively have a heightened sensitivity to the environment (Conger & Kanungo, 1987). They are able to discursively penetrate the multiple and often conflicting Discourses in a situation to find room to maneuver or a space of action, thus providing a novel, yet attainable foundation for collective action. In addition to demonstrating sophisticated rhetorical skills and a compelling vision, Conger and Kanungo (1987) assert that acting in a counter-normative manner, demonstrating personal commitment and courage through risk taking, and displaying confidence and expertise are also likely to win charismatic leadership attributions. Follower attributions aside, the neo-charisma tradition is clearly more leader-focused.

A second, follower-oriented leadership tradition that can inform critical scholars is that of leadership as a social construction. In one view, leadership is explicitly a lay construct invoked by actors based on attributions of personal potency (Calder, 1977). This tradition explains how our implicit theories of leadership, or presuppositions about leadership effectiveness, function in judging others' abilities. For example, leader categorization theory suggests that the decision to label someone a leader involves matching another's observed behavior to the prototypes that define our 'leader' category, such as 'influential', 'visionary', 'change agent', and so on (Lord & Maher, 1991; Lord et al., 1984). Social identity theory examines the means by which individuals transform (self and other) social identities by adopting the categories of the group as membership becomes more salient (Hogg, 2001). Leaders, in effect, emerge as the quintessential group members. For example, Platow et al. (2003) report on a set of idealized behaviors such as greater influence, trust, fairness, and charisma that appear typical of all in-group members for whom leadership may be attributed. Perceptions and judgments about leadership depend upon how closely an actor's behavior matches the behaviors of the in-group prototype.

Moving away from the implicit leadership theorists, Meindl et al. (1985) argue that lay attributions of leadership are often romanticized because too often leadership is cast as *the* cause of organizational success or failure when a more complex explanation is in order. Nevertheless, other writers in the social constructionist tradition hold that as long the concept of leadership is invoked by actors for attributions of personal potency, the concept is worthy of study (Meindl, 1995). This argument gains further steam if one examines the futile search for *the* definition of leadership on which leadership scholars can agree (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2003; Barker, 1997; Rost, 1991). Any such definition is easily contested, thus for actors and analysts alike leadership has that 'eye of the beholder quality'. Taking this position as a starting point has led constructionist leadership scholars like Fairhurst (2007)

to challenge leadership psychology's individualism by balancing it with a discursive view, one that locates leadership in communication and discourse (broadly defined). From a discursive view, leadership patterns are always co-defined. Leadership as the management of meaning also need not be performed by only one individual appointed to a given role; it may shift and distribute itself among several organizational members (Gronn, 2000). A discursive view also challenges leadership psychology's essentializing theory by departing from realist conceptions of truth and representationalist views of knowledge to focus instead on the constructed and contestable aspects of leadership interaction. Such a view would problematize the in situ emergence, and possible contestation, of dissent leaders.

Finally, drawing from other authors and adding our own insights drawn from critical perspectives, we describe a third perspective – leadership as political. For example, Barker (2002) argues that the community qua system and its politics are leadership's proper arena. Leadership is less about the imposition of structure and control relative to an a priori configuration than a perception or attribution of emerging structure in a dynamic or chaotic system. Leadership is thus not about the person in charge but about the way one or more actors engages the community and its mores in collective action. It is a process of dynamic exchange and interchanges of values, although the nature of the exchange and the range of values can vary widely. For Barker, leadership is a process of energy in the community and a deviation from convention.

Barker also endorses Foster's (1986) notion that leadership is a political relationship 'that has critical assessment as its root' (p. 114). Such an assessment demystifies structure, treating it instead as a medium and outcome of social interaction. It also examines the moral order and the power/knowledge(s) brought to bear in setting and solving problems, paying particular attention to the role of language in transformative action (for example, strategic ambiguity). From a critical perspective, we would add that attributions of leadership themselves are formed and influenced by power/knowledge constructions, such as what is the task at hand and what counts as advancing it. Thus leadership attributions are a complex process, but play a role in the development of resistance efforts.

The idea that leadership is political helps to decouple 'leadership' from 'management', although many still equate the two. Recalling earlier discussion, taking a non-essentialist and critical approach to dissent leaders requires that we do not also uncritically celebrate dissent. Dissent leaders are never 'outside of power', and as Mumby (2005) suggests, research is best when it overcomes the dichotomy of resisters as free autonomous agent or as actors subsumed by power systems. Discursive approaches to leadership spotlight the possibility of leadership as discursive autonomy (having chosen

one alternative over another), while situating that leadership within multiple Discourses of power. Of course, the outcomes of dissent may challenge or reinforce organizational power relations, and they may well resist one form of social domination while reinforcing another (Kondo, 1990). Furthermore, not all forms of dissent or resistance are aimed at greater equity in the distribution of power and participation. Visions of organizational justice do not animate all forms of resistance, although we do focus on the role of perceived unfairness and injustice as a key resource of dissent mobilization (Rupp et al., 2006). Thus, resistance leadership requires complex, grounded theorizing.

In the next section, we use existing examples to investigate resistance leadership. We do not propose to 'answer' these questions here fully, rather our hope is to show how the combined perspective of critical organizational and leadership studies can illuminate these processes and map the ground for future research.

### **Dialectical tensions in resistance leadership research and practice**

Dialectical theorizing is uniquely suited to studying resistance as a form of leadership. As Benson (1977) notes, 'The mobilization of participants to pursue their interests and to reach out for alternative structural arrangements is a significant component of a dialectical analysis of power' (p. 9). Leadership scholars like Collinson (2005) pose a 'dialectics of leadership', criticizing unhelpful dualisms such as leader-followers, control-resistance, and dissent-consent. Such dualisms reify power and restrain agency to a chosen few. In the next section, we describe leadership processes involved with resistance and extend Collinson's (2005) arguments. We have already described a dialectical view of power and resistance, noting the need to understand relationships between resistance and reproduction. We discussed the inter-relatedness of overt and covert behavior as well as individual and collective levels of action. We also described a dialectical view of leadership that questions sharp distinctions between leaders and followers, emphasizing the ways in which these concepts are both mutually dependent and flow into one another. Figure 1 summarizes the dialectical tensions named thus far.

However, there are at least four additional dialectical tensions that may play key roles in fomenting collective and transformational change, including reason and emotion; worker and manager; discourse and Discourse; and fixed and fluid meaning. We believe that managing these tensions is key to resistance efforts, and exploiting them can be an important resource for

Excessive amounts:Excessive amounts:**RESISTANCE**  $\longleftrightarrow$  **REPRODUCTION**

Make leaders into heroes, saviors

Minimize actors' ability to 'act otherwise'

Needed: Views of behavior that can simultaneously be reproductive and resistant**COVERT**  $\longleftrightarrow$  **OVERT**

Privilege hidden transcripts

Privilege public political action

Needed: Both overt and covert forms of resistance, including the politics of ambiguity**INDIVIDUAL**  $\longleftrightarrow$  **COLLECTIVE**

Focus only on voicing interests, altering subjectivity

Emphasize an already formed collective and structural change

Needed: Views of resistance that reveal mobilization processes and attendant outcomes**LEADER**  $\longleftrightarrow$  **FOLLOWER**

Emphasizes only one leader

Ignores how leadership may shift and distribute itself

Needed: Views of leadership that accommodate both asymmetric and mutual influence**REASON**  $\longleftrightarrow$  **EMOTION**

Privilege logic and reason

Privilege emotions

Needed: View of how emotion and reason intertwine**WORKER**  $\longleftrightarrow$  **MANAGER**

Ignore the managerial work aspects

Privilege rank over employee status

Needed: A view of how members all along the hierarchy may resist**discourse**  $\longleftrightarrow$  **DISCOURSE**

Privilege language and interaction

Privilege systems of thought

Needed: A view of how both d/Discourse structure reality**FIXED MEANING**  $\longleftrightarrow$  **FLUID MEANING**

Privilege a priori meaning systems; ignore dissenters' need to stabilize meaning

Emphasize how dissenters disrupt stable meaning systems

Needed: View of how resisting leaders manage both the fluidity and fixity of meaning potentials**Figure 1** Key dialectical tensions in resistance leadership

dissent leaders. To undertake this task, we draw from four published works dealing with resistance leadership and its possibilities.

Drawing from Fairhurst et al.'s (2002) study of the contradictions and unintended consequences of three organizational downsizings in a construction firm, the first work describes resistance from the middle – specifically, a mid-level workforce restructuring manager who challenged the organizational hierarchy to offer workers a more equitable downsizing. These were no ordinary construction workers, but ‘legacy’ workers who for generations worked to support the Cold War efforts of the United States. The site had shifted from a manufacturing operation (of uranium metal products) to environmental remediation (a construction concern). After witnessing two failed downsizings, this manager creatively drew from the resources around him (including the US Department of Energy, his firm’s customer) to craft a ‘velvet boot’ in opposition to many in senior management.

The second and third works deal with resistance from below, at the employee level of a factory. The participant ethnographies of Graham (1995) and Kondo (1990) are used together here because both researchers joined the workforce of a factory in order to study it. Graham chose to become part of a resistance and share leadership in her US location, while Kondo declined in her Japanese location.

Finally, the film *Maquilapolis* (Funari & De La Torre, 2006) depicts mobilizing for corporate changes as it follows two Mexican women, one who fights for severance that the Sanyo Corporation ‘*maquiladora*’ legally owes workers when they relocate to Indonesia, and another who fights for environmental clean-up at an abandoned battery reclamation center. The film-makers provide cameras and filmmaking training to these women so they may tell their stories, share them, and promote their own forms of self-organizing.

## Resistance leadership processes

This section poses four important questions related to resistance leadership arising from a dialectical view. We synthesize available research from a number of traditions as we explore some initial responses to these questions. We also describe how leadership has been implicated but not developed in much of this research and how our understanding of resistance can be advanced through such development.

### How do leadership relationships develop among potential resisters?

Of course, the deceptively simple answer to this question suggests that asymmetric influence by one or more actors using oppositional discourse gets

labeled as 'resistance leadership'. However, even conventional wisdom on emergent leadership advising would-be candidates to speak early and often (Hackman & Johnson, 2004), or critical enjoiners to provide trenchant sensemaking and problem-setting that penetrate relations of power are deceiving (Scott, 1990). This is because complex emotions fuel dissent, and early leadership attributions often hinge on how they are addressed.

Scott (1990) notes that, 'The practices of domination and exploitation typically generate the insults and slights to human dignity that in turn foster a hidden transcript of indignation' (p. 7). Thus, strong emotions often interlace with perceived injustice (Greenberg & Colquitt, 2005). Those who best formulate Discourses of dignity and justice for the marginalized assuage the insults and slights, while proffering a kind of 'wish fulfillment' of redistributed power. However, who may be likely to formulate such Discourses of dignity and justice and under what conditions? The charismatic leadership literature suggests that some individuals in some situations (for example, crises) are going to have a heightened sensitivity to the environment (Conger & Kanungo, 1987), thus they may notice more and notice more *earlier* than those around them. Moreover, Frost (2003) notes that some individuals appear uniquely capable of handling negative or 'toxic' emotions, absorbing and responding to them in ways that many would just as soon avoid. Given the right circumstances, if certain individuals are more sensitive to breach, infraction, or boundary-crossing earlier than others and are willing to confront the attendant toxicity, their ability to coauthor an emotionally resonant, counter-narrative is aided considerably. Consistent with the reason-emotion dialectic in Figure 1, these individuals may take transcripts of emotionally laden criticism of work practices that develop as a group and frame these efforts in a way that emboldens individuals by infusing emotional talk with 'rational' or instrumental arguments. As such, convincing co-authoring requires a willingness to move beyond extant discourse to formulate others that resonate with dignity and redressed power imbalances. Leadership attributions are thus likely to emerge.

For example, consider the workforce restructuring manager (WRM) in Fairhurst et al. (2002) who witnessed an initial harsh, unsuccessful downsizing of legacy workers of a Cold War manufacturer now in environmental remediation. Although we typically associate resistance with employees, managers are themselves employees of the organization and are capable of resisting dominant policies and practices. Moreover, non-supervisory employees are increasingly expected to engage in what has been traditionally thought of as managerial work, particularly in post-Fordist contexts. Thus members all along the organizational hierarchy may be involved in resistance efforts, as suggested by the worker-manager dialectic in Figure 1. Note this middle manager's decision to 'step up to the plate' to lead when

queried by the interviewer (I) about the second of three downsizings, which involved meetings with about-to-be downsized employees:

I: Were you charged with workforce transition at that time?

WRM: Not officially. It was still one of those quasi-portfolio assignments at that time, but I stepped up to the plate, I guess, is the best way to put it. And my manager at that time later acknowledged the fact. Finally, somebody had to stand up. And one of the things they complimented me on was the fact that when there's people actually targeted to be part of that reduction process, none of the [senior] leadership people ever showed up [to meetings]. And he [WRM's manager] was just irate about the fact that, 'You [referring to senior management] sent John [the WRM] to slaughter and none of you people bothered to show up to offer any support'.

I: And were you 'slaughtered?'

WRM: No . . . Was I nervous? Absolutely. Because these were people who worked at this facility, some of them for 28 years, who were literally within hundreds of days of retirement – full retirement – who had just been told either voluntarily leave the facility or we're going to fire you or lay you off. We had people who had sick children in the hospital, who had wives who were sick, who had husbands who had lost their jobs. It was a very threatening time. And I wouldn't be lying to you if I told you that probably was the most gut-wrenching time of my entire life . . . I got the stories. I got the heartache from the employees, and it was tough to look at those people . . . Somebody had to look at them and talk to them openly and honestly and say this is not your fault. It's not something you did; it's not something you said. And I went home . . . with my guts in knots with the dry heaves and the whole works . . . But that was a life-changing moment for me. Those four or five days we met with people I decided we gotta approach this from a better, faster, cheaper, smarter, kinder, gentler, more moral way of doing things.

The WRM proposed an alternate system for his firm's third downsizing that sought to balance the interests of the company and employees, but drew the ire of senior management (Fairhurst et al., 2002). However, the above quote

suggests the genesis of the WRM's Discourse of dignified downsizing as he 'got the stories' in meeting interactions, which suggests the reciprocal relationship between 'discourse' and 'Discourse' (see Figure 1). Note the emergence of the WRM's acknowledged leadership in providing a forum for the surfacing of such stories and the absolution of blame. Note also his capacity as a 'toxin handler' of extreme emotions (Frost, 2003) that likely kept him from 'slaughter' as the sole representative of management in these meetings – and the courage required to 'step up to the plate' in this regard. Finally, in the last line of the quote, consider WRM's balanced focus on emotional ('kinder, gentler, more moral') and rational ('faster, cheaper, smarter') issues, which (theoretically) should foster more common-ground solutions with senior management. All such elements contributed to WRM's perception as a (dissent) leader as corroborated by site interviews (Fairhurst et al., 2002).

Graham (1995) provides another example of emergent leadership among factory workers (of which she was one) when she describes a refusal to work overtime. When her section learns only on the day in question that overtime is required, her team leader asked members individually if they could stay. Graham and another female teammate could not. According to existing company rules, employees could not be required to work unless the overtime was announced during the previous workday. However, her team leader tells them that human resources indicated that employees who left would receive an unexcused absence (the implications of which were unclear). In response to this statement, a third member of the team refused to work the overtime. The car production manager was called in, who threatened to discipline her. Graham replied, 'this was not an emergency, so how could he discipline me? He said, "anyone who leaves the line while it is moving is in jeopardy of being fired"' (p. 124). Graham warned the other teammates to expect this intimidation, and she found one in tears (although still planning to leave). At this point, the team leader announced that she also was leaving in protest. The car-side manager warned the team leader that her job was in jeopardy. Graham says:

The women held their ground. Finally, when faced with the intended departure of four team members, and the fact that this would shut down the line, management backed down. I suggested to the manager that if he agreed that no one would get an unexcused absence for leaving . . . both the team leader and the other protestor would agree to stay . . . Our resistance to overtime was seen as a rejection of the company's philosophy of forced cooperation by team members.

(pp. 124–5)

Here we see Graham develop a leadership relationship with her team as her arguments, along with managerial responses, secure the support of her team leader. The car manager reinforced this relationship by bargaining with Graham and ultimately accepting her solution to the situation. Further, like the WRM example, the attribution of Graham's leadership not only suggests sensitivity to perceived unfairness and a willingness to confront toxic emotions (in this case, intimidation), but also courage in the face of fire, or (potential) 'firing', and a willingness to seek a common ground in a negotiated settlement of the issue. Yet, we also see that leadership relationships are neither fixed nor dichotomized here (Collinson, 2005); actions that provoke collectivity formation are distributed in the team, and Graham's role as resistance leader appears to end along with the incident. Those who act as leaders in one instance may yield to others in another.

In both of the preceding examples, we see leadership emerge in initiative-taking and convincing individual and/or collective performances. What 'convinces' are the particulars associated with initiative-taking – unconventional solutions to problems, courage, 'toxin handling', and so on. However, leadership relationships can also emerge when individuals are chosen by others to lead. For example, Kondo described an incident in the Japanese confectionary company that she studied and worked in when employees were venting frustration over work conditions, triggered by anger that the owner offered leftover, damaged sweets to them for a sale price. After suggesting a mass absence, one worker asked Kondo herself to intervene, based on her expert status, by asking the 'shacho' when he would offer a half-price sale on regular goods. Kondo considered but does not intervene for fear of jeopardizing her study, and this ends their attempts to get the sale. When resistance efforts do gain traction, leaders can be chosen through processes in various degrees of formality. For example, nascent company unions develop voting procedures, or advocacy groups choose members through consensus (Fox, 1985). It is likely that such choices are influenced by perceptions of leadership at early influence stages, although this deserves further investigation.

### What sources of power do resistance leaders draw on and develop?

The question of resources is closely related to constructions of leadership. Leadership energizes resistance to the degree that actors have access to or develop sources of power with marginalized groups. Hardy and Phillips (2004) discuss available sources of power in organizations, including formal power, critical resources, network links and social relationships, and discursive legitimacy. Resistance leadership is often linked to access to formal

power or critical resources, which include information, money, reward power, and expertise (Zald & Berger, 1978). Yet, resource mobilization theories may emphasize access to power rather than the ways that resistance leaders without the necessary formal power or resources *create* resources of resistance by building network links and alliances and developing discursive legitimacy.

The examples above illustrate the value of expertise and formal power to resistance efforts, but in different ways. Kondo is asked to intervene on behalf of employees because of her status as an expert and, likely, because of her role as an outsider with putatively less at stake than long-term employees. By contrast, the WRM had a sanctioned, managerial role. Unlike his predecessor, he initiated and developed strong network ties to his firm's customer, the Department of Energy (DOE). These ties enabled him to argue from DOE Discourses around what is owed to a legacy workforce as a means of justifying a more employee-centered downsizing.

Given that the ability to invoke Discourse in everyday discourse depends in part on relationships of power, such meanings must be deployed in ways that build legitimacy, and potentially, create alliances. Here we see the utility of neo-charisma theories, which describe the skills involved with creating visions and managing meaning in ways that build resources. This process can be internal to an organization, but as Zald and Berger (1978) note, social movements in organizations often are dependent upon society at large for ideological acceptability and support. Leadership skills, then, may include the ability to frame emerging goals in ways that resonate with broader social Discourses as a means of gaining both 'internal' and 'external' support.

We can further explicate the notion of 'skills' by noting that a Discourse only suggests that linguistic resources are *potentially* available, such as terms, tropes, metaphors, themes, commonplaces and habitual forms of argument (Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Wetherell, 1998). They represent what members of a (linguistic) community potentially could use, not how they are deployed by specific individuals (Hammersley, 2003). Leaders often appear verbally skilled and, in the case of charismatic leaders, there appears to be a 'something more' or added presence to the deployment of available Discourses (Gardner & Aviolo, 1998). Note the WRM's observation that, 'I've been told I could sell snow to an Eskimo or shit to a farmer'. Moreover, his downsizing explanations and 'sells' were routinely accompanied by a disarming use of 'I'm just an ol' country boy', disclaimers followed by incisive analyses, humor, and a fondness for farm life stories that were well suited to the mostly rural population that constituted the site's workforce.

Thus, the WRM could ably invoke an alternative Discourse of dignified downsizing, albeit at odds with the dominant construction industry frame used by senior management where workers were temporary and disposable. The WRM also exhibited the verbal acuity needed to build consensus around this alternative, reflecting the way that ‘discourse’ and ‘Discourse’ dialectically intertwine (see Figure 1). As such, his firm’s third downsizing strategy that was a true ‘velvet boot’ for employees was favored by the DOE despite strong objections from many in senior management. All of these resources kept the WRM in his job even when senior management sought to reassign him – although senior management would eventually have their way when they downsized the WRM’s entire staff.

Graham draws from official company policy in her refusal to work overtime, noting that if the overtime was not announced in the previous day, she was not required to stay. This policy does not operate as much of a resource against management as the manager simply replies that anyone leaving the line while it is in motion can be fired. In Graham’s telling, it is the group solidarity itself that causes the manager to back down. In this sense, group agreement builds resources as it builds collectivity. Thus, Graham and her co-workers’ arguments about the fairness of company policy contribute to group solidarity over the workers’ refusals to work overtime. Here we see leadership operating in relational terms among the group (see Figure 1), although any such ‘relationship’ is situated and variable.

### **What is the role of leadership in coalescing individual and covert resistance into collective and overt attempts at change?**

This is obviously quite a broad question that requires attention to communication processes in particular contexts. Hodson (1995) states that in resistance aimed at deflecting abuse, workers must first ‘symbolically reject the definition of the situation provided by those in power’ (p. 84), in order to allow new meanings to develop. We argue that leadership plays a significant role in transforming such rejections into collective action.

Many forms of resistance are treated as individual efforts, such as venting, vengefulness, and duplicity. Yet, Hodson (1995) notes that in order to achieve long-term limits on abuse in coercive systems, ‘Support from other workers is often necessary for the viability of worker actions directed toward deflecting or vindicating abuse’ (p. 87), such as effort bargaining, developing alternative procedures, and restricting output. Other strategies are treated as group-level phenomena, such as Scott’s (1990) description of ‘massing’, wherein the physical acts of assembling may embolden dissenting subordinates in ways that move hidden transcripts toward more open challenges to

the system. He argues that the visual impact of collective action conveys a sense of power to participants and adversaries, yet ‘provides each participant with a measure of anonymity or disguise, thereby lowering the risk of being identified personally for any action or word that comes from the group’ (p. 66).

However, rather than dichotomize between individual or collective resistance, we must look at individual–collective relationships in order to see collective formation, as Figure 1 suggests. For example, those who understand the visual impact of collective power often lead by encouraging or providing for such forums, much as the WRM did in scheduling workforce restructuring meetings among workers. Scott (1990) adds that in massing, ‘if something is said or done that is the open expression of a shared hidden transcript, the collective exhilaration of finally declaring oneself in the face of power will compound the drama of the moment’ (p. 66). These open expressions of resistance may be seen as acts of courage resulting from or leading to leadership attributions. Interestingly, Scott begins his treatise by quoting George Eliot (1859/1981) who observes that no action is possible ‘without a little acting’. Fleming and Sewell (2002) also used the drama metaphor, arguing that resistance is often a form of show for an audience. Note that the dramatic flourishes associated with the speaking of truth to power are often physical or material such as gestures (for example, the peace sign, arms raised, or other expressions of solidarity), chanting that gains in momentum and volume, sloganeering through signage, apparel changes (for example, arm bands, t-shirts, or buttons), and the like. Moreover, consider how solitary acts such as an individual’s walking-out, shutting down of a machine, or other refusal to work that, in turn, trigger further acts of defiance, *done for an audience*, can interlace the social and material for a stunning visual impact.

Earlier we argued that leadership focused on managing emotions is key to early attributions of leadership. However, we must also note that individuals who effectively manage emotions resulting from attacks on dignity and perceived unfairness may be seen as leaders simply because they provide coping mechanisms or expediency arguments that might actually deter mobilization (Fox, 1985). Much of the resistance literature focuses on emotional transgression as a relatively backstage phenomenon or focuses directly on resisting emotional display norms (Fuller & Smith, 1991). We wish to highlight the range of emotion work in which resistance leaders might engage.

We have also discussed the foundations of resistance in terms of evaluative judgments of unfairness, unreasonableness, or inconsistency. As products of sensemaking, they often occur amidst intense emotional

experiences such as disappointment, hurt, ambivalence, depression, anger, and sometimes rage. Here we note that emotional reactions, like the perceptions underlying them, are not just personal responses to occurrences, but are also socially constructed in communication with others more or less influential. In turn, these constructions impact actors' 'rational' and collective calculation of available resources to resist (see Figure 1). Furthermore, decisions about what constitutes 'emotionality' and 'rationality' are embedded in power relations that may be at the crux of developing collective resistance efforts. As Sturdy and Fineman (2001) note, 'collectivization may be regarded as being as much to do with the mobilization of dissent and anger' as the issue itself (p. 149).

Effectively managing emotions (including physical and material expressions) suggests complex political skills. Individuals may emerge as resistance leaders in the ways they are able to affirm individually felt emotions, labeling what is only vaguely felt or sensed, but also extend in one way or another. Drawing from Tronick and colleagues' (1998) notion of 'emotional scaffolding', Fairhurst (2007) argues that certain leaders are able to take their emotional cues from followers while simultaneously helping to 'scaffold' or channel such emotion in more or less productive ways. While these leaders are greatly influenced by the emotions of those around them, they also appear wise to the influence possibilities associated with their temporal flow. Thus, 'management of meaning' is as much 'management of feeling'.

For example, Graham (1995) used Discourses around Japanese concepts of self-management and extant organizational policy to fight the overtime requirement. However, her refusal gains traction from other employees as it articulates simmering employee anger around this issue. Before this incident, she describes angry reactions when the team leader asked employees to stay after shift to put away their tools because the line would no longer stop five minutes early. Employees privately complained, saying things like 'this is the kind of bullshit that brings in a union', and 'this place is getting too Japanese around here'. She says, 'From that day on, whenever the line ran up to quitting time, all of us on the team dropped whatever we were doing and immediately walked out, leaving the team leader to lock up the tools and clean the area' (p. 122). That same month, after resentment grew about the mandatory overtime, when the line kept moving after shift, 'nearly everyone on the car side put on a coat and walked out', although leaving a moving line is a cause for firing 'and everybody knew it' (p. 123). Thus her refusal to stay overtime is an explicit statement of the relatively covert (or unspoken in the case of the walkout) transcripts of anger about management demands. This group emotion helps to explain why her steadfast refusal to

back down to the intimidation of management, and her public refusal of these demands, garners the support of others including her team leader. We also see Graham scaffolding the feelings of team members as she affirms their feelings while warning them that they will face the same intimidation from the car manager that she does. She channels the anger and emotions of her co-worker in tears to move their case forward and create a sense of group solidarity. This solidarity, she suggests, is ultimately what causes management to acquiesce and gives her the opportunity to negotiate an alternate outcome.

Rather than view mobilization as a leadership trait or a fixed skill set, it is necessary to pay attention to contextualized interaction, understanding how opportunities for acts of courage and emotion management are created through embedded group processes as well as happenstance (such as not being able to stay at work when asked). Of course, groups may strategically create opportunities in order to kick-start collective action. Grassroots leadership training often focuses on doing just that. And although training may appear to treat leadership as a fixed skill, these programs often focus on building agency by challenging employee identities and encouraging critical questioning so as to create, recognize, and exploit opportunity (Barge, 2001). This type of training can be a key component of the spread of social movements out of workplaces.

For example, the film *Maquilapolis* (Funari & De La Torre, 2006) depicts two women who agitate for change. Carmen Duran presses for severance pay from the Sanyo Corporation by filing a labor claim with Mexico's department of labor. This claim results from the work of Grupo Factor X, who trained her to become a '*promotora*' or advocate. Carmen says Grupo Factor X helps women learn about their rights as laborers and women, and then these women share what they learn about the law with others: 'You're a student and you become a teacher'. Carmen's co-workers find a lay legal advisor to help them with the process, and they successfully plead their case to the state to require Sanyo to pay their legal severance of a few thousand dollars versus the \$800 that Sanyo offers. The company hoped they would give up their claim, worried about the legal precedent. The legal advisor tells them 'they [Sanyo] have all the money in the world but they can't take away your dignity. Your dignity can defeat anybody.' Lourdes Luhan explains that she became a *promotora* when she was asked to take a health survey from the San Diego Environmental Health Coalition (SDEHC). When she did, she noticed skin problems, anencephaly and other health problems in the community. She links this to the lead recycling plant Metales y Derivados. In collaboration with the SDEHC, five women create the Chilipancingo Collective for Environmental Justice, which brings international media

attention to the problem through protest, highlighting health harms to local residents and their children.

This conception of leadership training is an important element of transnational grassroots network building. Throughout this article we note that certain skills or abilities of individuals may be used to mobilize action. However, if 'leadership' is not to be treated as an innate trait, we must recognize that context-sensitive skills such as framing and emotion management can be taught or encouraged. We see in the case of Carmen how the program helps these women face the intimidation of company and government lawyers, reminding us that even courage is situational, and can be cultivated. Training and development issues around matters of courage, morality, and overcoming political expediency are particularly important when resistance moves beyond surface challenge and change within the employment contract to its radical revision and rejection (Fox, 1985). Only future research can address such resistance leadership pedagogy concerns.

### How do resistance leaders attempt to make the discourse of change 'stick'?

Here we are asking how changes wrought through resistance efforts become normalized or institutionalized, especially at the organizational or larger social level. While Zald and Berger (1978) do not invoke the concept of leadership in their discussion of social movements in organizations, they note that to achieve change, movements must be able to sustain conflict and create viable bargaining (for example, through the use of symbols to create win-wins), two functions that leadership communication may serve.

For example, Weick et al. (2005) suggest that sensemaking around unmet expectations is not about 'truth and getting it right. Instead it is about continued redrafting of an emerging story so that it becomes more comprehensive, incorporates more of the observed data, and is more resilient in the face of criticism' (p. 415). As a result, narrative skills are elements of resistance leadership. Rhetorically sensitive individuals may avail themselves of a number of discursive strategies described by Hardy and Phillips (2004) as ways of making discourse/Discourse gain traction or 'stick'. These include the use of genre (that is, conforming to appropriate genres), intertextuality as the evocation of other texts, and distancing, which they describe in terms of abstracting local texts beyond the situation.

As Figure 1 suggests, a key dialectical issue in resistance leadership is the fixed versus fluid nature of meanings. Managerial scholars often treat organizational resistance as disruptive of stable meanings, cultures, or

systems, which must therefore be managed (Fairhurst & Zoller, in press). The assumption often is that dissenters, almost by definition, destabilize meanings to disrupt the flow of organizing, while management seeks a return to the status quo. However, resistance leaders must manage both the fluidity and fixedness of meaning potentials, taking both a long (big 'D'iscourse) and short (little 'd'iscourse) view of social process. Resistance leadership may involve disrupting a stable meaning system in talk-in-interaction, but invoking fixed organizational or extra-organizational policies in the process. For example, Graham draws from what we might think of as stable meanings, including written organizational policies and Japanese philosophy taught to employees during their training, to resist overtime requirements. At the same time, she destabilizes the unwritten rule that management is ultimately able to make any decision they want. Additionally, systemic organizational change requires lasting power, that is, it must stabilize itself vis-à-vis alternative Discourse(s) that can compete successfully with more dominant Discourses. Otherwise, it supplies few linguistic resources to resistance recruits who wage their own conflicts and may enlist others to the cause. For example, the WRM's immediate manager in human resources reported feeling energized by the 'velvet boot' downsizing and took it upon himself to change the written protocols of the firm so that a balance of company and employee interests would be reflected in future downsizings.

Resistance efforts also may become fixed as they are formalized, whether officially recognized by organizational managers or not. Membership groups may form including unions, support groups, or employee advocacy committees. Resistance efforts can lead to broader social changes in norms, policies and laws. Resistance groups may help to build broader networks, coalitions, and movements directly or simply through modeling successful actions for others. In these instances, it is often resistance leaders who act as boundary spanners to create linkages with other groups. For example, Obach (2004) notes that it is usually union leadership who works to develop coalitions with environmental organizations to pressure employers to develop more sustainable occupational and environmental health practices while saving jobs. Given the immense amount of potential conflict among these groups, these leaders must be skilled at building consensus across working and middle-class groups and framing interests in ways that can be mutually beneficial.

The growth of transnational companies represents a challenge to forming collective resistance across the entirety of an organization, yet as the *Maquilapolis* example shows, economic globalization has been met with growing transnational networks among employees, community members,

activists and non-governmental organizations. By refusing to back down in the face of intimidation and indifference, these women build resources that help them achieve significant changes in the form of policy enforcement, transnational environmental action, and legal precedent. (The Chilipancingo Collective eventually signs a unique cross-border agreement with the US and Mexican governments to remediate the waste site.) In part, these resources are created by forging common interests across borders, skillfully exploiting the health issue to gain media attention (Zoller, 2005) and employing the existing legal system. This activism occurs only when leadership education altered their sense of self and facilitated a vision of possible social change. The *promotora* system cultivated continued mobilization as the women share their knowledge with others through Grupo Factor X and through border tours that introduce the world of the *maquiladora* to foreign tourists. Furthermore, the production of the film itself allows them to share this model with a wide audience, making it available for others to enact.

## Conclusion

We conclude by reiterating two of the basic themes of this article. First, we urge more dialogue between leadership and critical researchers in order to understand resistance leadership. While each field may find aspects of the other objectionable, a rejection is unwarranted especially when the boundaries of a field and the phenomena it purports to study blur and become viewed as one. It was our goal in this article to articulate and navigate these boundaries in order to highlight how leadership studies can serve critical theory through a grounded approach to theorizing agency, highlighting the role of mobilization and influence in change, and emphasizing participant attributions – and how critical theory can serve leadership studies in resistance leadership by articulating issues of deep structures of power and material and symbolic constraints on mobilization.

Second, we urge readers to guard against a simplified view of resistance leadership, such as casting it as ‘asymmetric influence’, ‘one or more actors who give voice to oppositional discourse’, or essentialized in any enduring way. Influenced by Bennis, Riley (1988) argues, leadership must be understood with a sense of the aesthetic, ‘forms of analysis that are sensitive to style, to the creation of meaning and to the dramatic edge of leadership . . . To use (leadership) terms as mere categories of behaviors runs the risk of stripping them of this power and moving them to the level of the mundane – plain-label symbols’ (p. 82).

Just as leadership cannot be captured as ‘mere categories of behavior’, so too must power not be viewed simplistically. As Foucault (1995) describes, relations of power ‘are not univocal; they define innumerable points of confrontation, focuses of instability, each of which has its own risks of conflict, of struggles, and of an at least temporary inversion of the power relations’ (p. 27). As such, resistance leadership emerges from dynamic and evolving relationships *among resisters* as well as *between resisters and their targets*, yet always in particular social and historical contexts.

To capture the dynamism, we propose a dialectical framework that goes beyond the work of Collinson (2005) by focusing on the potential relationships between leadership and resistance. Thus, we posit dialectical relationships between: resistance and reproduction, covert and overt resistance, individual and collective, leader and follower, reason and emotion, worker and manager, discourse and Discourse, and fixed and fluid meaning. While we adopt the dialectical approach to understanding resistance and control, we take issue with iterations of the dialectic that presume the interlocking of resistance and control, and in so doing, discourage discursive efforts towards transformational change. We do not suggest that resistance leaders step outside of power to create collective action, nor do we deny that such collective actions may well reinforce existing power relations. Instead, this article brings attention to the mobilization of collectives, and how that gets achieved in everyday organizational life. Leadership concepts help us to see mutual influence between individuals and groups, and groups-information. Yet, there is still much to learn because a complex view of resistance leadership views it from all sides – those in and out of power as well those on the rise, and issues of justice, ethics and moral accountability at every turn. Leadership concepts will not explain all aspects of resistance and care must be taken by analysts to avoid the romanticization of resistance leadership to which actors and analysts may fall prey (Meindl et al., 1985). With such a lens, what is gained and what is lost through resistance leadership may be made more clearly known.

Our analysis suggests that interview data make it difficult to capture the layered communication processes involved in mobilization as they actually occur. Yet it is possible that interviews intent on understanding resistance leadership can tap into actors’ everyday attributions and accounts of the role of leadership. On the other hand, ethnography holds the potential for capturing these everyday processes as they unfold, but we note the difficulty of being in the ‘right place at the right time’. Moving forward, then, researchers can capitalize on the strength of different methodologies to understand contextualized experiences of leadership in resistance. Doing so

can add to, refine, and enhance the theoretical and practical issues we describe in this article.

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**Heather M. Zoller** is an Associate Professor of Communication at the University of Cincinnati. Her research in organizational and health communication focuses on the politics of public health, with emphasis on the influence of corporations, public health organizations, and activists on public discourse and policy. Research topics include corporate health promotion, occupational health and safety, globalization, and health activism. Theoretical concerns include power and resistance, dialogue and participation, issue management, and identity. Heather Zoller has published in journals including *Communication Monographs*, *Communication Theory*, *Management Communication Quarterly*, *Health Communication* and *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, and is the co-editor of the forthcoming book, *Emerging perspectives in health communication: Meaning, culture, and power* (Routledge) with Mohan Dutta.  
[E-mail: heather.zoller@uc.edu]

**Gail T. Fairhurst** is a Professor of Communication at the University of Cincinnati. Her research interests include organizational communication, leadership, and organizational discourse. She has published over 50 articles in communication and management journals as well as book chapters, including contributions to *The Sage handbook of organizational discourse* and *The new handbook of organizational communication*. She is the author of *Discursive leadership: In conversation with leadership psychology* (Sage, 2007) and co-author of *The art of framing: Managing the language of leadership* (Jossey-Bass, 1996, with Robert Sarr). Her work has been the recipient of numerous awards including the 2005 International Communication Association award for 'Outstanding Article' for the communication discipline, and the 1997 'Best Book' award from the National Communication Association, Organizational Communication Division. She also serves on several editorial boards and is currently serving as an associate editor for *Human Relations*.

[E-mail: fairhug@ucmail.uc.edu]