

STRUCTURE, POWER, AND DISCOURSE: AN ANALYSIS OF DISCIPLINE IN AN URBAN HIGH SCHOOL

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Abstract:

This article looks at one instance of a teacher attempting to discipline students for sexually profane heteronormative language and the resulting events that demonstrate a discipline over all discourses in the school. Using Fairclough's critical discourse analysis (2005) to analyze the narrative, I argue that the discourse in the school reinforces a scalar net of power, which creates an organization much like a prison by structuring power in both an intertwined and hierarchical manner among other things (Morgan, 2006). That structure, represented by the metaphor of the prison, then reinforces a power over discourse that is oppressive. A major implication of the analysis is the need for a changed discourse in the school.

Introduction

As a teacher who has worked in four different districts, discipline and control are concerns for me. A bigger concern, however, is supporting a safe and accepting environment for all students. Unfortunately, research shows that students who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, and queer (LGBTQ) often find school to be a hostile environment (GLSEN, 2005). Given my concern for LGBTQ students, I feel that language that is demeaning and degrading to LGBTQ students as well as those who do not fit gender norms must be addressed (Pascoe, 2007). Specifically, I question the reach of discipline and power in schools and how discipline both reflects the organizational structure of a school and perpetuates inequities such as the marginalization of LGBTQ students.

This article looks at one instance of a teacher attempting to discipline students for sexually profane heteronormative language and the resulting events that demonstrate a discipline over all discourses in the school. This instance is particularly interesting because of the nature of profanity, which itself is both an expression of power and a tool of oppression (Pascoe, 2007). As will be noted later, the profanity at issue in the incident analyzed here oppresses non-heterosexuals and reinforces heteronormativity, the privilege and power associated with heterosexuality. Using Fairclough's critical discourse analysis (2005) to analyze the narrative, I argue that the discourse related to heteronormative profanity in the school reinforces a scalar net of power (characterized by intertwined and hierarchical relations among staff and students), which creates an organization much like a prison (Morgan, 2006). That organizational structure, represented by the metaphor of the prison, then reinforces an oppressive power.

Because merely uncovering this oppression is not enough, I use critical theory as a frame for the study. Theories that are critical work to uncover oppressive structures and seek remedy for them (Habermas, 1971). I use this as a framework for this study because discipline is an area of schools that cannot be avoided but can be made less oppressive. Because the theoretical frame to be used is critical and because the narrative used involves significant interaction among individuals, critical discourse analysis and specifically the critical realist approach will be used (Fairclough, 2005). Critical discourse analysis is concerned with revealing social inequities that are a result of discursive practices, which include both verbal and written language. Critical discourse analysis is frequently used in organizational studies because it can contribute to "processes of social change" (Fairclough, 2005, p. 924). The critical realist approach was selected because it is concerned with explaining how human action can impact social worlds like schools, and it can also be a catalyst for change. Using a critical realist approach to critical discourse analysis, I will explain how the social processes surrounding the event to be detailed demonstrate an oppressive power and structure in the school. That explanation will then be used to consider how to change the oppressive environment.

Using a critical theoretical framework, which attempts to "confront the injustice of a particular society or public sphere within the society" (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2008, p. 406), and critical discourse analysis, this article will consider the discourse, power, and organizational structure of a school as they emerge from one disciplinary incident meant to address heterosexist profanity. I will begin with some background about the school and a detailed narrative of the incident. I will follow the narrative with an analysis of the discourse using critical discourse analysis and an identification of the power structure suggested by the discourse analysis. Using both the discourse analysis and the power implications, I will suggest a structural metaphor for the school. This metaphor will allow me to draw conclusions about the oppression taking place in the school in relation to discourse on the issue of heterosexist profanity and suggest areas for change.

School Background and Narrative

The following is a brief description of the school considered here and some background about the issue to be analyzed. The school discussed here is a medium sized urban high school (referred to as MSHS) just outside the limits of a large mid-western city. MSHS has about 1800 students, over 150 faculty and staff members, and serves six small communities. The district website indicates the following student body makeup: 58% Caucasian, 29% Hispanic, 12% African American, and 1% Asian. The major languages spoken in addition to English include Spanish, Polish, and Arabic. The faculty makeup is less diverse with 95% Caucasian, 4% Hispanic, and 1% African American. MSHS employs three full time deans to deal with discipline, and the faculty is also charged with maintaining discipline in the halls and in their classrooms.

There are numerous forms of discourse in MSHS. The focus of this article is on discourse that relates to sexually profane language in the school, a clear issue of discipline and control. This language includes words like “gay,” “fag,” “dyke,” and others. This language will also be referred to as heteronormative as it perpetuates the privilege and power of heterosexuality. While students often use profane language to establish their identity in the school, students also use it as a “disciplinary mechanism” (Pascoe, 2007, p. 53). Students attempt to get other students to normalize their identities by using sexually profane and heteronormative language. Students with their own genders, sexualities, cultures, races, class status, ability levels, etc., make up one area of the discourse. The profane, academic, and in-between language they use with one another can be read as indicative of their power or oppression.

Teachers and administrators are also gendered, cultured, sexual, and racial beings of different classes and abilities. The language they use, accept, ignore, and react to varies, and it is indicative of their identity, their difference from others, and their agency in the organization. Teachers and administrators frequently attempt to control what they consider to be profane language from students, but conflict arises when there are differing opinions as to what constitutes profanity. The narrative to follow will focus heavily on the discourse how to deal with profanity.

My analysis of disciplinary discourse at MSHS is read in light of the heterosexist profanity that abounds in MSHS and the attempts that have been made to address this issue. This is a problem that is particularly rampant in the school and one which I believe contributes to the overall school climate. Of specific concern to me is the prevalence and negative impact of heteronormative language on students and staff who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, or queer (LGBTQ). My interest in this type of language does not, however, limit my read on this organization to heteronormative language that I consider profane. When referring to profane language, I include typical slurs like “shit” and others as well as racial, gendered, classist, or ability degrading slurs.

Prior to taking up this concern, my role at MSHS was that of a teacher concerned primarily with the students in my classroom, which is the role into which most teachers at MSHS fall. Teachers “monitor” the halls, but each teacher’s primary focus is his or her classroom. The issue of heterosexist profanity, however, seemed on the rise to me, and I began to develop my own way of handling the problem (Fairclough, 2005, p. 931). After repeatedly confronting the same group of students whom I did not know in the hall regarding their use of sexually profane language, I attempted to refer them to the deans for discipline. Prior to sending a referral, however, I needed to get a signature from a mid-level administrator, which is tantamount to my asking permission to speak. When I took the issue to him, he asked me to take him to the students. Rather than explaining that the referral was serious as it had been written as incendiary language and potentially punishable by in-school suspension, he said the following to the students, “If this teacher is made uncomfortable by your language again, you will no longer be able to sit in this section of the hallway.”

Irate but impotent, I returned to my classroom, ripped up the referral, and became determined to start a conversation about language at the school. The following grew from this incident and will be used to look at the discourse, power, and organizational structure of MSHS.

In a casual conversation with the superintendent of MSHS’s district I mentioned profanity not as a discipline issue but as an equity issue that I felt needed to be addressed in the school. Without naming or implying the administrator who was unsupportive of me, I explained the situation with the students using sexually profane language. He was in full agreement that there was a problem as well as a lack of agreement about what was or was not profane, and he mentioned that the administrative team had been discussing this very thing. He asked if I would be willing to sit on a committee to look at the issue and if I would also be willing to share names of people who might be interested in this conversation. I agreed, but noted that I did not want to be part of a conversation whose intent would be to merely create punishments for various degrees of profanity. I believe I was clear that I felt it was a discussion that needed to occur because the issue was one that went beyond the students; there is much profanity among the staff in the presence of students as well, including heteronormative language. He felt my concerns were legitimate and alluded to the fact that we both knew which teachers would only want a disciplinary policy and which wouldn’t even engage in the conversation due to their own use of profanity. The conversation ended with a plan to discuss names for a committee later in the week.

Later that week I emailed the superintendent a list of names as representative of various departments, genders, sexualities, ethnicities, and viewpoints as I could think of. Days after this I was informed that a committee had already been formed with mostly administrators - two deans, the athletic director, the head of counseling - and two teachers, the only females. He said that the head of the committee (a dean) would be contacting me to bring me up to speed with their work.

When the head of the committee and I finally spoke, I was told that the committee's goal was to improve the climate of the school. He told me that ideas being considered were "MSHS-bucks" to be given to students doing the right thing for use in the cafeteria or on school apparel and a list to be posted in every classroom of the most important rules to follow. He was very explicit about naming the people who had these ideas instead of just leaving it for me to assume that they were group ideas. I explained that I did not believe I could help him with those ideas as I do not generally support token societies or rule lists. I explained that my concern was specifically with profanity and that rules against it or tokens for those who do not use it were not likely to address either the students who were currently using the language or the oppressive effects that language was having on others. I suggested that much more conversation was needed and asked him to consider value statements instead of rules to be posted in classrooms, explaining that we make rules based on values. He did not disagree with me and invited me to the next meeting of this committee. I got the distinct impression from him that this issue was not one that he wanted to deal with, but that if he did have to deal with it, he would put something together quickly rather than thoughtfully.

Prior to my meeting with the head of this group, there had been one meeting of the committee on school climate. Following that there was one other meeting. When I arrived at the meeting the committee was talking about enforcement of existing dress code and electronic device usage policies. There was much lamenting over teachers' various degrees of attention to these policies and the need for teachers to get on board with enforcement of these policies in the halls.

As the conversation continued to focus on getting teacher buy-in and enforcement, I wondered aloud if all teachers a) knew about the rules, b) supported the rules, or c) felt that enforcing rules was a priority over classroom and academic relationships. When there was complete silence I continued. I noted that I did not feel that policing for cell phones was either effective use of my time or a valuable lesson for students. Instead, I mentioned that I would rather teach them respectful and honest use of the device, like silencing it while in class, because I value an understanding about situational use of dress, language, technology, etc. While the silence continued I explained that my presence on the committee was really only due to my personal concern with the use of heterosexist profanity in the school. I was told at that point that one of the rules that would be posted in the classrooms addressed language. I asked if all teachers would agree as to what constituted inappropriate, obscene, profane, or incendiary language, the categories in our school regulatory policy, and again was met with silence.

The meeting ended with little more conversation, but the head of the committee said he would try to compile the thoughts from the committee and run something by us later that week. He did come to me a few days later with a draft poster to be hung in each classroom. After reading through it and before commenting, I asked if he was under pressure to produce something. It seemed to me that there was much more to discuss. He said he was not under pressure, but that he wanted something to bring back to the administrative committee before the end of the year. I then shared my thoughts about the poster. "It's a list of rules," I said. He said, "I knew you were going to say that." I asked, "What values drive these rules?" Then I started writing on his poster. His later draft had something that resembled values with bullet points of the "rules" under each. While this was a step in the direction for which I had hoped, it reflected only his and my thoughts – not exactly something that would garner the "buy-in" that the committee was looking for at the committee meeting.

Discourse Analysis

This narrative is an example of how discourse is indicative of power and the structure of an organization. The following critical realist approach to discourse analysis will demonstrate how the above incident represents the perpetuation of the status quo and the oppression of non-elite groups. Fairclough says that critical realism in discourse analysis can address "four broad sets of research issues" that relate to organizational change, which is the goal of this research. These issues include "the problems of emergence, hegemony, recontextualization, and operationalization" (Fairclough, 2005, p. 932). The following briefly illustrates how the narrative demonstrates the existence of these four problems.

One problem related to organizational change is emergence. Emergence is the process of "new discourses" (Fairclough, 2005, p. 932) arising in organizations and is also characterized as "reweaving" (Fairclough, 2005, p. 932) existing discourses. In the example above, emergence is occurring on multiple levels. My initiation of the topic of profanity as an issue is a new discourse because the issue is being brought forth by a teacher and not an administrator. This is a reweaving of roles that "may contribute to changes in organizational structures" (Fairclough, 2005, p. 932). Further, the emergence of the topic is a new discourse for the school; it requires new ways of thinking about and speaking about language. Another new discourse is being initiated in that the dean is head of the committee being created by nature of his position change for the next school year.

Typically, a dean would not chair a committee of this nature given his existing is subordinate to two members on the committee, but in the role for which he was slated he would be equal with those two members. Emergence can result in the new discourse being “institutionalized” (Fairclough, 2005, p. 932), but it can also result in a return to the original structure of discourse, which is the case with the example above. Although the emergent discourse concerning heterosexist profanity was pursued, it was quickly reconstituted into the existing discourse of rules and discipline, and then lost entirely. Because the discourse was lost, the status quo gets perpetuated and students subject to heterosexist profanity have little recourse.

Another problem to be considered in critical realist discourse analysis is hegemony, which is referred to as “the processes of particular emergent discourses (and not others) and associated narratives becoming hegemonic in particular organizations” (Fairclough, 2005, p. 932). This means that some emergent discourses will get accepted into the controlling organizational discourse and others, as noted above, will be oppressed to preserve a status quo. Discourse analysis of the above scenario couldn’t more accurately demonstrate this. It was a teacher not an administrator who brought the emergent discourse of profanity in the school to the attention of the superintendent. While the issue was momentarily take up by the superintendent, the topic and the progress of the discussion were subsumed by the administrator in charge of the committee. This resulted in the specific discourse related to heterosexist profanity being lost in the organization’s hegemonic narrative of rules. Discourse analysis highlights this problem and as I will note later can lead to change.

Recontextualization can also be addressed with this discourse analysis. Recontextualization is “the dissemination of emergently hegemonic discourses across structural boundaries” (Fairclough, 2005, p. 932). For example, an organization might mandate the adoption of external discourse for internal change. The hegemonic mandate crosses structural boundaries by making that which is external internal (Fairclough, 2005, p. 933). The example provided above does not explicitly demonstrate this problem. However, because the suggestion for the “rules” poster came from an administrator and was so heavily pursued, it suggests that the creation of a rules poster was mandated. Further evidence of recontextualization will be found in the poster, which will be made by the head of this committee. Even if approved by the three teachers on the committee, it will be passed down from the head of the committee in his position of authority to department chairs, who have slightly less authority, who will pass it to teachers who have even less authority, who will then pass it on to students. In this way, the hegemonic emergent discourse moves from top to bottom in a hierarchical system. This represents a serious problem because as the rules poster becomes a hegemonic discourse in the school, other discourses, such as those related to changing the oppressive culture of heterosexist profanity use, are lost.

Finally, the realist approach to critical discourse analysis considers the issue of operationalization. Operationalization can be seen when hegemonic emergent discourses are evident in “new ways of (inter)acting . . . their inculcation in new ways of being . . . their materialization as objects and properties of the physical world” (Fairclough, 2005, p. 932). There is no way yet to tell if the hegemonic emergent discourse of the rules poster described above will become operationalized. It will, however, be easy to watch for this. If teachers spend more time on discipline than teaching once the poster is hung, it will be a sign that operationalization has occurred. The problem with this is that as new ways of interacting based on the rules poster become operationalized, it becomes more difficult to introduce new discourses.

Fairclough is clear that he believes these areas “can productively be addressed . . . [for] organizational change” (2005, p. 932). Before considering how they may be addressed, however, I use the issues that arise from the analysis and the narrative to explore their implications for the power structure in MSHS.

Discourse and Power

The narrative and the brief analysis of the discourse above demonstrate the structure of power in MSHS. Power is significant to this study because it influences discourse and can be a support for or block to change. The study of power has many facets. Foucault suggests that we ask (among other things), “what . . . is this power . . . what are these various contrivances of power . . . what are their mechanisms, their effects, and their relations?” (1972, pp. 87-88). In answer to these he suggests a “methodological course” (Foucault, 1972, p. 102) that would include identifying the production of effects in relation to it. The following will further analyze the discourse at MSHS in relation to the issue of profanity and discipline.

Looking at power as the production of effects is what Foucault calls the “economic functionality of power” (1972, p. 88). He says, “power is conceived primarily in terms of the role it plays in the maintenance simultaneously of the relations of production and of a class domination which the development and specific forms of the forces of production have rendered possible” (Foucault, 1972, pp. 88-89). For example, class domination and hierarchical power division are possible in MSHS because as a student, one is able to use sexually profane or derogatory language, a production, to maintain class domination or hierarchical power over students who are LGBTQ. For example, in the hallway situation that sparked the above narrative, the students using the profane language were themselves subject to class domination. Though white students, they were white students from a neighborhood representative of a lower class, which sets them apart based on their class. Their use of sexually profane language gave them power over another class of students.

Other examples of power as production and class delineation abound in the MSHS example shared at the start of this article. My attempt to use a disciplinary referral to control student language is a demonstration of this power. The mid-level administrator's use of his authority to override my referral is a demonstration. The potential for the dean to pass down a rules poster to departments is a demonstration. Each of these demonstrations creates what Foucault refers to as a power net. No one entity maintains all the power. Rather, power "circulates . . . through a net-like organisation. And not only do individuals circulate between its threads; they are always in the position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising power" (Foucault, 1972, p. 98). Given the image of a net, it is important to position that net of power and influence. Foucault's general vision of a net is clearly articulated in the power at play in MSHS, but Foucault does not address the position of the net. The net could be one that is horizontal, representing varying and changing points of power at an equal level, or it could be vertical, representing increasing levels of power.

The net of power and influence at MSHS is not a horizontal net. A net of power that is horizontal may demonstrate that discourse can be emergent. Any individual could introduce a discourse and see it pursued. The discourse analysis above demonstrates that this is not the case at MSHS. Further, a horizontal net of power may also be better at resisting hegemonic and recontextualized discourses. If power was truly equally distributed there would be less chance that discourses would be subsumed in the context of other discourses proposed by those with more power.

Rather than horizontal, the net of power at MSHS rises at a reasonably steady angle creating a ladder made of this web, similar to that in many American high schools. It is a scalar net. Students, teachers, etc. can move up and possibly down this ladder. Students become teachers; teachers become chairs or directors, etc.; and occasionally a chair or director will return to the classroom. There is a clear scalar element to the net of power at MSHS. While there are connections among the steps, students are on the bottom rungs, teachers above them, chairs above teachers, deans above them, other building administrators above them, the principal above them, and the superintendent near the top. Likely, the school board holds a position at or near the top as well, depending on the board and its relation with the school.

Despite the clear scalar nature of power in MSHS, it is not the existence of a general power over a person that makes him or her exert power over others or that oppresses. It is one's "immediate social entourage" (Foucault, 1972, p. 101) that creates such things. Therefore, the scalar form of power does not indicate that power has come down to produce what we see with students. Rather, there should be an "*ascending* analysis of power" (Foucault, 1972, p. 99). This means that the reproduction of power we see of students over other students is not due to the power over them. Rather, their position is rooted in "the family, of the immediate environment, of the cells and most basic units of society" (Foucault, 1972, p. 100). This is to say that the power that has created students who use language to exercise power over other students is not that from above them, but that from below and around them.

Much more can be said about power, and as noted earlier, the picture drawn above is basic in scope. However, the image suggested below, based on an analysis of discourse and power creates a fuller picture of MSHS in regard to this issue of profanity use and discipline. That image, in the form of a metaphor, will lead me to draw conclusions about the oppression taking place in the school in relation to discourse on the issue of heterosexual profanity and suggest areas for change.

A Structural Metaphor to Illustrate the Discourse and Power Analyses

I have attempted to frame MSHS using an analysis of discourse and power. Together they suggest an image of the organization. Gareth Morgan's *Images of Organization* (2006) looks at numerous metaphors to provide images of organizations that can be used to help leaders "navigate some of the ambiguity and flux" (Morgan, 2006, p. xi). In this case, an image may help suggest ways to approach changing the environment at MSHS, which currently ignores heterosexual profanity. Morgan is clear that no one metaphor can tell the entire story of an organization. Rather, viewing an organization through different situations will produce different images or understandings. That said, metaphor does imply "a way of thinking and a way of seeing that pervade[s] how we understand our world generally" (Morgan, 2006, p. 4). Because the look at MSHS thus far is a general look, a metaphor is the perfect culmination to this analysis. It will tie together the discourse and power that has been heretofore addressed in relation to the discipline and the use of profanity.

Although no one metaphor can accurately capture an organizational structure, identifying one with the most connections can support rationales for change. MSHS resembles several of Morgan's metaphors in an area of two, but the most appropriate metaphor for illuminating the organizational structure of MSHS is that of "organizations as psychic prisons" (Morgan, 2007, p. 207). Of psychic prisons Morgan says, "human beings have a knack for getting trapped in webs of their own creation" (Morgan, 2007, p. 207). Given the net structure of power in MSHS, Morgan's assertion is both true and indicative of MSHS. This metaphor gives an important understanding of MSHS as it explains how people create the webs in which they get tangled through their own "conscious and unconscious life" (Morgan, 2006, p. 234). For example, I became entangled in the web of profanity and discipline through my own decisions to act. Had I not acted, however, I would have been complicit in perpetuating the heteronormative status quo.

Organizational theorists posit numerous rationales for organizations operating as psychic prisons, and many of those are illustrative of MSHS and the discourse and power evidenced in the issue of heterosexist profanity. First, the allegory of the cave as a psychic prison presumes that a man who breaks free of the chains in the cave and brings back “new knowledge” will be “ridiculed for his views” (Morgan, 2006, p. 208), because “favored ways of thinking and acting become traps” (p. 211). This is evident in MSHS with the inability for the committee to move away from discussing rules, a favored way of thinking, to values, a new way of thinking. The danger with this element in the “psychic prison” organization is that it leads to “groupthink” (Morgan, 2006, p. 211). When an organization has a powerful groupthink new ideas are not even brought up for consideration as there is an “assumed consensus” that the existing thinking is appropriate and correct. The non-decision that occurs as a result of groupthink is a form of power noted by Bacharach and Baratz in “The Two Faces of Power” (1962). Defining power in this way further solidifies the psychic prison; the more people hold back from bringing forth issues for consideration, the more power is given to those whose thinking is reified by the lack of deliberation and decision.

Another interesting aspect of the psychic prison metaphor in relation to MSHS is in the “organization and the patriarchal family” (Morgan, 2006, p. 218). Here, the prison is based on a traditional male dominated family structure where the father and his views are dominant, and daughters merely follow directives from their fathers. The scenario surrounding my raising the issue of profanity at MSHS demonstrates this in many ways (which is commentary on me that is slightly uncomfortable to articulate). First, when the mid-level administrator told the students that if I was bothered again they would have to move, he was very much acting as a father to a child – removing the basis for distress. Rather than acknowledging the issue as being one owned by the students, he made the issue one that resided in my female sensitivities. I allowed him to do this when I ripped up the referral without pushing the issue. Further, the superintendent’s placing me on a committee doing things similar to addressing profanity rather than actually forming a committee on that issue in specific was a form of placation that one would see with father and daughter. While he originally told me that we would form a committee together, the final decision was made without my being present, as if he consulted with a spouse, was to merely add me to a male administrator dominated committee. This demonstrates the appeasement and control pattern of fathers over children. The committee formation brings up a final demonstration of the patriarchy evident in many psychic prisons. The committee had on it before my arrival four males and two females; the males were administrators, and the females were teachers. My arrival added a third female, but yet another teacher voice. The dominant voice therefore was one of authority and maleness – patriarchal.

A third notion of the psychic prison, and one that is even more personal than that noted above, is the link between “organization, death, and immortality” (Morgan, 2006, p. 219). Here, Morgan notes that “in investing our time and energy in a favored project, we convert the flight of time into something concrete and enduring” (Morgan, 2006, 221). This project can also be viewed as a surrogate “doll, teddy bear, or blanket” (Morgan, 2006, p. 227). The premise is that in the face of our own imminent death and in the absence of the “transitional object” of childhood, people in organizations will create projects or issues that will serve as a demonstration of immortality and a replacement for the teddy bear of childhood. Thus, people in organizations attempt to create their own area in the web/prison that is the organization. In looking at my decision to make my concern over profanity a larger issue, I am both trying to make my mark on the organization and trying to give myself something to hold onto in the face of what feels like entrapment in the organization. This form of psychic prison can be quite confining because the person creating this project or issue weaves themselves into the web and becomes part of the perpetuation of a shadowy reality (characteristic of the cave).

There are other aspects of the psychic prison that Morgan details that fit MSHS, but I believe it to be clear from the examples above that MSHS fits the metaphor in many ways. While the metaphor does not define the organization in its totality, it does work to explain the discourse and power at work in the example issue relating to the use of heterosexist profanity and the surrounding attempts at discipline. Understanding the school organization in this way also explains why change is difficult. Viewing organizations as psychic prisons is all about seeing how the conscious world is created through individual’s unconscious feelings, beliefs, experiences, etc. For this reason, and because Morgan tells us “that it is possible to release trapped [unconscious] energy in ways that may promote creative transformation” (2006, p. 235), it is crucial that leaders see the psychic prison and work to uncover the unconscious constructions that created it.

Conclusion – Using Discourse and Power Analysis and Structural Metaphors for Change

An analysis of MSHS demonstrates that it acknowledges new discourses only when presented by those with power high on the scalar chain. This perpetuates hegemony by either ignoring or recontextualizing new discourses that seek to disrupt the status quo. Discourse analysis not only reveals this, but also supports my argument that power in this school, that which produces effects or reproduces effects, is a scalar net of power. This power is therefore both pervasive and hegemonic. Together, these illustrate a school characterized by the organizational metaphor of a psychic prison. Individuals in the system are caught in webs which reproduce inequality and oppression by disciplining discourse at various levels. These webs, however, can be challenged through a change in discourse.

At MSHS students discipline one another’s discourse through their use of heterosexist profanity. Teachers discipline students to

elicit behaviors they deem appropriate for schools. Administrators discipline teachers by controlling what discourse is given consideration and what is not. In the narrative included here, the silenced discourse challenging an unwritten policy ignoring heterosexist profanity is an exercise of power that affects students who are hurt by the profanity, which includes students who are LGBTQ as well as many who are not. As Pascoe notes, the discourse is meant to discipline behaviors that are deemed abnormal. Therefore the heteronormative status quo continues unchallenged.

Despite what may seem a static picture of this school as an unchangeable place where oppression is left unchecked, Fairclough is clear that he believes that the problems exposed through a critical realist approach to discourse analysis, such as those listed above, “can productively be addressed . . . [for] organizational change” (2005, p. 932). Morgan also believes change is possible within the image of a psychic prison. He notes that “change will occur spontaneously only when people are prepared to relinquish what they hold dear for the purpose of acquiring something new” (Morgan, 2006, p. 229). While it is perhaps understandably cynical to assume that people will never voluntarily relinquish those things most dear to them, I argue that recognition of how one came to hold said thing so dear is a step in that direction. In my own experience, by reading my organization in this way, I recognize my own complicity in the organizational structure and the perpetuation of the very status quo that I hoped to interrupt, that of marginalizing LGBTQ students. Change may not be as simple as asking school stakeholders to identify their pet projects then read Morgan, but there is a kernel of an idea there.

Analyses of discourse and power can suggest several avenues for approaching change. With regard to the problem of emergence in the discourse analysis, we learn that teacher initiated discourses related to issues of oppression may be ignored or subsumed in other discourses. This does not mean that issues challenging the status quo have no chance of gaining traction. Rather, it means that there must be a larger group pushing the discourse that is inclusive of individuals at varying points on the scalar net of power. Further, identification of the hegemonic structure can be a block to change for equality, but it can also serve as an alternative way into a discourse. For example, while I tried to push for a new discourse regarding heterosexist language, a starting point may have been to discuss it in terms of rules first and then the values that support those roles, creating safe spaces for all students. Using the hegemonic rules discourse may serve as a way to begin a larger discourse regarding the value in non-oppressive language and attitudes.

Because the discourse and power are indicative of the psychic prison metaphor, it is valuable to consider how this metaphor can also suggest avenues for change. One element of the psychic prison clear in the discourse at MSHS is groupthink. Without an analysis to identify this, one would never be able to challenge it. Understanding the groupthink that leads to various discourses can suggest ways to approach new discourses. The groupthink at MSHS tends toward control and punishment. Attempts to change this must not ignore it; instead they must use it. This metaphor also demonstrates how the structure prevents issues from arising for consideration. Knowing this should push individuals seeking change to bring forward issues that would create social change and push them until the structure bends, which it can. Part of that structure preventing new discourse is patriarchal, and this must be both identified and challenged for change to occur. In order to avoid entrapment in the organization by the patriarchal structure, individuals must find ways to be heard and challenge the patriarchy.

The implications of this are clear. The status quo, which perpetuates marginalization of LGBTQ students, continues with a discourse of administrative mandates. Therefore, the discourse must be changed. When issues related to discipline or equity, among others, arise in the school, there must be conversation among all stakeholders – teachers, students, administrators, parents, etc.. Rather than perpetuating what has been described here as a scalar net of power, individuals at MSHS should work to build what Foucault calls as discursive power, “something closer to a social dialogue . . . a set of meaning-making practices” (Wilchins, 2004, p. 59). Incorporating discourse among all interested parties has the potential to develop practices more equitable and representative of all, including the LGBTQ community. By making meaning together, methods of addressing concerns will receive wider support than those that come from the top down.

Discourse and power can be ignored in many organizations, including schools. However, as this example shows, much is explained about MSHS through a look at how discourse, power, and discipline impact attempts to disrupt the status quo that turns a blind eye to the marginalization of LGBTQ students. This understanding yields ways to challenge the status quo of the structure and raise issues concerning equality and oppression. This is, of course, a look at one example challenging marginalizing practices in one school based on only two characteristics of that issue (power and discourse) from the lens of someone interwoven in the organization. The same issue can be looked at historically, politically, socially, or in a number of other ways and from a number of other positions. For this reason it is important to be clear that although this analysis provides some insights into how to use analyses for change, this read on MSHS is a limited perspective of a very large and complex organization that has been created by many people, living and dead, over many years and through innumerable changes. It is a snapshot in time of MSHS through the eyes of a teacher who perhaps just misses her “blanky.”

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