

## Hidden transcripts of flight attendant resistance

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This work builds on past research through a critical discussion of individuals' resistant actions, that is, their ability to enact change within their social systems. Although employees may appear to comply fully with constraining organizational policies and meanings in public discourse, alternative meanings may be constructed in private. Using examples of flight attendant resistance, the author analyzes hidden transcripts—the interactions, stories, myths, and rituals in which employees participate beyond the direct observation of power holders—to provide an avenue to identify resistance and change in the organizing process. Such an understanding challenges the outdated ideal of transmissional meaning, questions organizational power by including the potential for resistance and change, and surfaces hidden constraints and resistances in employee discourse.

### HIDDEN TRANSCRIPTS OF FLIGHT ATTENDANT RESISTANCE

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I don't worry about all the changes they are talking about. I just do what they want me to do, and when they aren't looking, I do what I want.

Terry, a flight attendant for a major U.S. carrier, made this comment to a coworker while I was working with her flight crew. She was referring to recent changes in appearance codes that define the "proper" flight attendant look. Her supervisor had recently told Terry that she could no longer wear the Santa earrings she had worn every holiday season for 15 years. To get around the policy, she took off her earrings when she was in the main lounge (in the presence of supervisors) and then promptly and proudly put them back on once she stepped on board the airplane (outside the presence of supervisors). Terry's comment reveals the ever-present potential for employee resistance and reflects the central question

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of this article—how do those who are seemingly powerless effectively carve out discursive spaces for influences and control?

To explore this question, I present an empirical study of flight attendants' resistance at a major U.S. airline. I assume a critical perspective that recognizes that organizations are not neutral sites of meaning formation but, rather, contested fields where meaning is produced, reproduced, negotiated, and resisted (Mumby, 1993a). In recent years, critical theory has done much to reveal this contested nature of organizational life. However, it has also been criticized for an overemphasis on theory building and a lack of empirical support (Mumby, 1993a, p. 19). Those critical studies that are empirically based challenge the automatic naturalization of managerial forms of control (e.g., Barker, 1993; Deetz, 1995, in press; Light, 1979; Rosen, 1985; Taylor, 1990; Trujillo, 1993), but they have done so somewhat to the exclusion of worker resistance. Some important exceptions have focused on resistance (e.g., Bell & Forbes, 1994; Gottfried, 1994; Holmer-Nadesan, 1996), and this study continues this line of work by offering an empirical study of power relations focusing on worker resistance rather than domination.

To do this, first I combine elements of interpretive and critical theory to understand how power is exercised as a discursive process through which meaning is not only reproduced but produced, negotiated, and resisted. Second, I discuss how most organizational studies focus on observations of public discourse and performances. Such a focus misses possible backstage reproductions of subversive meanings in organizational communication. Like Terry (in the above example), employees may appear to be aligned with or buy into the organizational party line, but such appearances may be little more than a strategic pose. Alternate meanings may be constructed in private. One way to think about private discourse is in "hidden transcripts," the interactions, stories, myths, and rituals in which employees participate beyond the direct surveillance of power holders (Scott, 1990). Careful consideration of such discourse is important to understanding organizational communication because it maintains the open, partial, and temporary nature of even dominant meanings. Toward this end, I provide an analysis of

flight attendant hidden resistance to reified constructions of reality at a major U.S. airline.

**(RE)INTERPRETING CRITICAL THEORY:  
POWER AND RESISTANCE**

In the last decade, there has been much discussion of the "interpretive turn" in social science (Rabinow & Sullivan, 1987) and particularly in organizational studies (Mumby, 1993a; Putnam & Pacanowsky, 1983). This turn reflects a continued interest in understanding social reality and the relationship of the observer to the objects that are under study, claiming there are no truths "out there" separate from human interpretive frameworks. In other words, "the world [may] be out there, but descriptions of the world are not" (Rorty, 1989, p. 5).

From such an interpretive stance, organizational realities appear as partial, inconsistent, fragmented, and complex. Furthermore, from a critical stance, not all descriptions of the world have equal value. In this way, an interpretive approach (assuming multiple perspectives) can be blended with a critical approach (revealing the exercise and abuse of power from participants' points of view) to study organizations as contested sites of meaning.

A critical-interpretive perspective frames our understanding of organizational communication in three specific ways. First, reality is socially constructed in that no single right or true reality can be found. Moreover, oppressive or contradictory realities may be coconstructed and reproduced. Indeed, critical interpretation "attends to the skilled and contingent social construction and negotiation of intersubjective meanings," while at the same time recognizing that these meanings are constrained by the "historical stage on which social actors meet, speak, conflict, listen, or engage with one another" (Forester, 1983, p. 235). Accordingly, a critical-interpretive approach addresses both the "world we are born into" and the "world which we create" (Mead, 1923). Eisenberg and Goodall (1997) describe this as the tension between creativity and constraint. We create the world through interactions but at the same

time, we are rooted in the historical context of the world into which we are born. In other words, persons both are shaped by and shape their worlds through interaction (Banks & Riley, 1993; Forester, 1983; McPhee, 1985; Poole, 1985; Poole & McPhee, 1983).

Second, communication is central to understanding how organizational realities are created. We make sense and create reality through the language we use. Simultaneously, our language choices and constructs confine us. Accordingly, organizational reality consists of "discursive formations" that enable and constrain organizational sense making (Deetz, 1992; Foucault, 1977; Mumby, 1988). The creation and repetition of discursive formations constitutes organizational culture (Pacanowsky & O'Donnell-Trujillo, 1983). Because culture is dependent on the language that constitutes it, it is not self-sustaining; it is the product of members' discourse. Hall (1989) recognizes this process, claiming

Meaning is polysemic in its intrinsic nature; it remains inextricably context bound. It is caught in and constituted by the struggle to "prefer" one among many meanings as the dominant. That dominance is not already inscribed in structures and events but is constructed through the continuous struggle over a specific type of practice—representational practice. (Deetz, 1992, p. 173)

Within organizations, a dominant or "preferred" meaning is produced through members' interactions and reproduced through their representational practices. Representational practices include the acknowledged rites and rituals, goals, and objectives reproduced through socialization in an organization. Much organizational literature focuses on the reproduction of these representational practices (e.g., socialization research that argues individuals are aligned with or buy into organizational practices and critical research that reveals these practices as dominating or constraining). However, the reproduction of representational practices is never complete and hence not a given. It is a continuous struggle enacted by the organizational members.

Third, power relations are reproduced through discursive formations. "Consequently," according to Foucault (1977), "it does not matter who exercises power" (p. 202). Power is not the tool of any

particular agent; it is produced in everyday practices of gestures, actions, and discourse. It is reproduced due to historical context, thereby creating discursive power structures within which individuals operate. From this view, it is not helpful to define the powerful and the powerless. Discursive formations are reified by individuals and treated as objective positions through their repetitive discourse. Consequently, although any particular group does not own language, managerial discourse becomes identified with the powerful, whereas subordinate discourse becomes that of the powerless.

Historically, "fixed" organizational meanings have resulted in the hegemony of a patriarchal network of power relations. As noted earlier, "in the last 10 years critical organizational studies have done much to increase our understanding of these processes and, in particular, have been instrumental in focusing considerable attention on the relationship between communication and relations of domination" (Mumby, 1993a, p. 21). As a result, conversations about organizational life include important discussions about the co-optation of worker's identification (e.g., Barker, 1993; Cheney, 1983; Deetz, 1995; Tompkins & Cheney, 1985), the dominance of capitalistic structures as legitimate forms of organizing (e.g., Deetz, 1992, 1995; Deetz & Mumby, 1990; Mumby, 1987, 1988; Rosen, 1985), and the exclusion of minority voices, in particular the feminine voice in dominant organizational meanings (e.g., Ashcraft & Pacanowsky, 1996; Bullis, 1993; Buzzanell, 1994, 1995; Calás & Smircich, 1989, 1992; Ferguson, 1984; Marshall, 1993; Martin, 1990; Mumby & Putnam, 1992; Pringle, 1988).

However, wherever there is domination, there is also resistance (e.g., Ferguson, 1984; Foss, Foss, & Trapp, 1985; Foucault, 1977; Jermier, Knights, & Nord, 1994). In her discussion of bureaucratic power, Ferguson (1984) explains that "bureaucratization is a process, a moment in a dialectic of domination and resistance that must be constantly reproduced" (p. 19). An emphasis on the production of meaning features the capacity for change (Forester, 1983). The capacity to change creates the ability to both enact and resist the (re)production of dominant (relatively fixed) discursive patterns.

Indeed, "communication occurs between particular actors, but in historical contexts that they inherit, yet may also seek to change" (Forester, 1983, p. 235). As already noted, critical studies in organizational communication have emphasized domination in the "historical contexts that individuals inherit." What is less evident is how employees can and do seek to change organizational meanings.

Several important exceptions focus empirically on organizational resistance and reveal organizations as contested sites of meaning. For example, Gottfried (1994) challenges traditional theories of control and accommodation through a case study of temporary worker resistance. Bell and Forbes (1994) reveal the everyday forms of resistance produced through office folklore such as cartoons, sayings, and pictures posted in work space. Holmer-Nadesan (1996) challenges notions of social determinism by showing how women service workers reflect and resist hegemonic articulations of their identities. In an analysis of women store clerks between 1890 and 1960, Benson (1992) shows that the female clerks would develop informal work groups that deflected management interventions. Hochschild (1983) devotes a small portion of her landmark text to flight attendants' everyday practices of resistance against managerial control.

My study builds on past research by offering an empirically grounded discussion of individuals' resistant actions—their ability to enact change within their social systems. Resistance is central to critical-interpretive organizational theory because it is through resistance that reality retains a dynamic, negotiated quality. Resistance is a process through which meanings are prevented from becoming fully fixed; meanings remain open, partial, and contingent. To gain a more complete understanding of the dynamics of power relations, it is necessary to account for change that may be enabled by resistance.

Overt resistance in public may not be possible due to bureaucratic resistance. Ferguson (1984) argues that although some resistance may be overt, more often people resist individually and covertly. The organization's powerful can control only the public acceptance of the representational practices. Because employees

constitute organizational realities through sense-making processes, they are free to privately construct (and enact) alternative meanings to the party line through hidden transcripts.

### HIDDEN TRANSCRIPTS

In his extensive review of research on resistance, Scott (1990) argues that when compliance is observed in public, critics may assume that the individuals are "duped" or trapped in their own "false consciousness." Yet, this is not the only possibility. Many individuals know what they must appear to do to survive in constraining situations (Scott, 1990). Therefore, instead of focusing solely on the public discourse, there also is a need to understand the private discourse or the hidden transcripts. The term *public transcript* is a "shorthand way of describing the open interaction between subordinates and those who dominate" (p. 2). The term *hidden transcript* is used "to characterize discourse that takes place 'offstage,' beyond direct observation of power holders" (p. 4).

The public transcript is always questionable.

The greater the disparity in power between dominant and subordinate and the more arbitrarily it is exercised, the more the public transcript of subordinates will take on a stereotyped, ritualistic cast. In other words, the more menacing the power, the thicker the mask. (Scott, 1990, p. 3)

In this respect, if a researcher relies solely on public transcripts, she or he receives only one version of organizational reality: "Without a privileged peek backstage or a rupture in the performance we have no way of calling into question the status of what might be a convincing but feigned performance" (Scott, 1990, p. 4). Therefore, using Scott's framework, it becomes premature to assume that organizational members are duped—ignorant of the very constraints they (re)enact (e.g., Shorris, 1981).

Having said this, there is considerable debate over what constitutes real resistance. To the critical neo-Marxist, only large-scale changes in material conditions count. Consequently, these critics

see what looks like resistance as a psychic coping mechanism that in fact allows individuals to reproduce dominant systems. Contrary to these approaches, I side with Mumby (1997), who argues that hidden transcripts show that each discursive moment opens possibilities for resistance and change. Hidden transcripts demonstrate "how low-profile forms of resistance can lead to the systematic undermining of the dominant hegemony" (Mumby, 1997, p. 17). As people slowly begin to interact with each other differently, they are able to conceive of new possibilities for being together.

It is certainly not my intent to argue that all organizational employees participate in private resistance or that employees are only complicit with dominating organizational policies when under public surveillance. There are enough studies to suggest otherwise, such as Tompkins and Cheney's (1985) unobtrusive forms of identification control, Barker's (1993) concertive control in team-based organizations, or Deetz's (in press) analysis of university knowledge workers. Paradoxically, active complicity in subordination may open possibilities for resistance. For example, Ashcraft and Pacanowsky (1996) argue compellingly that because women are active in their domination, they are not passive victims in a plot of men against women. If organizational members are agents in their own domination, they can also be agents in their own resistance. When such resistance is not possible in the public organizational structure, it may be produced privately as hidden transcripts. Rather than seeing how power is constructed and can be "undone," researchers, according to Krippendorf (1995), assist in the reification of power. This leads to the research question central to this work: How do those who are seemingly powerless effectively carve out discursive spaces for influences and control?

## METHOD

### PARTICIPANTS

The focus of this study is on resistant practices of flight attendants. Over 60 flight attendants participated in the research, 9 of



whom were men and the rest women. They ranged in experience from new trainees to those with more than 26 years' seniority. The participants were randomly chosen according to the flights I was assigned to work.

I had several reasons for studying flight attendants. I was working as a flight attendant and trainer for the airline at the time and had a personal interest in flight crew interaction. In addition, flight attendants provide a wonderful opportunity for studying organizational resistance as they meet the two conditions that, when present, foster the development of hidden transcripts:

first, when it is voiced in a sequestered social site where the control, surveillance, and repression of the dominant are least able to reach, and second, when this sequestered social milieu is composed entirely of close confidants who share similar experiences of domination. (Scott, 1990, p. 120)

The majority of work a flight crew performs is on an aircraft, away from any direct supervision (supporting the first condition). Further, the flight crews are together for up to 3 days at a time—they are able to share their experiences and develop a sense of camaraderie (supporting the second condition).

Finally, domination has already been well documented in previous studies revealing how flight attendants manage their public presentation of self (Ferguson, 1984; Hochschild, 1983). As a service-oriented profession, they avoid expressing their emotions in public, offering a fake smile in place of a genuine one. Hochschild (1983) provides sound empirical research to support her claim that corporate legitimized emotion management, such as the flight attendant smile, is a form of organizational control and domination. However, she spends little time describing how flight attendants actively resist these organizational forms of emotional control.

#### PROCEDURES

Research was conducted through participant observation of flight crews at Flying World Airlines (FWA).<sup>1</sup> Taking this approach, the goal is "to arrive at an understanding of lived experience that is

both rigorous—based on systematic observation—and imaginative—based on expressive insight” (Ellis & Flaherty, 1992, p. 5). With participant observation, the researcher is immersed in the experience, collapsing the traditional separation between the subject and object of study. As with any methodology, certain choices and trade-offs are made. For example, as a working flight attendant, I was challenged to balance the tension between my participative and reflective stances—between *doing* and *thinking*. Fortunately, with the increase in popularity of qualitative methods, a number of sources offer useful guidelines for participant observation (e.g., Conquergood, 1991; Lofland & Lofland, 1984; Reinharz, 1992).

A good first step in participant observation is to “start where you are” (Lofland & Lofland, 1984). At the time of this study, I was a flight attendant and had worked in that capacity for 3 years and as a flight attendant trainer for 2 years. I was in a unique position to gain access to private, backstage interaction through participant observation. As a flight attendant, I shared the fate of those I was studying and therefore was totally immersed in the process. “Feminist ethnographers who emphasize closeness rather than distance in fieldwork relations believe that understanding based on participant observation is enhanced by total immersion in the world one is studying,” states Reinharz (1992, p. 69), who adds, “total immersion comes about when the researcher begins to share the fate of those she is studying” (p. 69).

*Data gathering.* The data included in this work were drawn from a 3-month period in which I engaged, observed, and interacted with flight crews in a variety of contexts: in flight, during layovers, during training, and in a public meeting with management. At the beginning of each encounter, flight attendants were told that I was conducting a research study on FWA.<sup>2</sup> The exact nature of the study was not explained at the outset to avoid demand characteristics, such as when employees were asked permission to observe their interactions and were assured confidentiality. Confidentiality was a serious concern of mine in conducting this research. The data include stories, actions, or reflections by employees that indicate dissatisfaction with or resistance to company policies. To assure

that confidentiality was maintained, each flight attendant was given a code name, which I used in all field notes and write-ups. After the encounters, flight attendants were told the exact nature of the study and were asked permission for inclusion. Every flight attendant I asked agreed to participate.

Although intense interviewing is usually a component of participant observation, I did not want to encourage the construction of resistant discourse that might not occur if I did not solicit it. Therefore, in an effort to remain as unobtrusive as possible, I chose not to conduct formal interviews. Instead, I worked as a flight attendant alongside the respondents. I listened carefully to conversations around me, took extensive field notes, and immediately transcribed notes into journal entries after each trip (Anderson, 1984; Lofland & Lofland, 1984). At the end of the 3-month period, I had produced more than 100 single-spaced pages of field notes and had identified 62 incidents of hidden transcripts.

Hidden transcripts were defined as social practices, including speech acts, facial expressions, and gestures, that resist management control but do so out of management's view. Some strong indicators of hidden transcripts were found in the following: anonymity (when the source of stories, rumors, or gossip remains unknown and the content is aggressive); the use of euphemisms to alter the interpretation of dominating or resistant actions; grumbling or complaining about dominant situations among peers; and more complex forms of resistant behavior such as folktales, symbolic inversions, and rituals of reversals (an exchange of the dominant and subordinate positions) such as Bakhtin's notion of carnival (Scott, 1990).

*Data analysis.* To make sense of the data, I used an emergent coding scheme to extract from and order "the chaotic flux of reality" (Lofland & Lofland, 1984, p. 133; Owen, 1984). I read and reread the transcripts looking for repetitive acts or issues. One theme that clearly emerged was gender. I did not go into the field looking for hidden transcripts that focused specifically on gender resistance. As the study continued, however, gender issues clearly dominated my data. Although a wide variety of subjects were

covered within the transcripts, virtually all of the 62 transcripts either directly or indirectly related to gender. Once I identified gender as the primary theme, I sorted the transcripts to identify thematic areas related to gender. I derived the observed hidden transcript, the public dominating practice it resists, and the gender theme it represents.

### **RESULTS AND INTERPRETATIONS: IDENTIFYING, RESISTING, AND CHANGING GENDER POLICIES**

The first stewardesses, or air hostesses as they were called, entered commercial aviation in the 1930s. There were specific requirements for who would be right for the job: One had to be female, unmarried, and under 30 years of age. Although this is no longer the case, the feminine image remains today as the defining attribute for the flight attendant role. This is evidenced by the public's unwillingness to give up the term *stewardess*, a term that has not been used in the industry since the introduction of male flight attendants more than 20 years ago. Today, passengers still expect to walk on a plane and see men in the cockpit and "girls" in the cabin. One male flight attendant in this study described a disgruntled older male passenger who asked him, "Don't you feel guilty taking away some woman's job?"

If a flight attendant is male, he is defined as having female characteristics. Feminization is a typical sense-making process found when a male works in a traditionally female (and therefore subordinate) occupation (e.g., secretary, nurse, hairdresser) (Ferguson, 1984). In fact, one flight attendant claimed that the thing he hated most about his job was that people assumed he was gay. While walking through the airport terminal to our next flight he said, "Whenever I introduce myself to the crew, I say, 'Hello, my name is Garth, and I am straight.' Or, I tell some kind of gay joke or talk about my girlfriend." Garth's introduction ritual reflects the embedded expectations of gender and sexuality in the airlines.

Though the image has changed through the years from the registered nurses in long skirts and hats in the 1940s and 1950s, to

the "Fly Me" era of the 1960s and 1970s captured in popular books such as Baker and Jones's (1968) *Coffee, Tea, or Me*, to today's professional flight attendant dressed in dark navy and white, the emphasis on the feminine construction as caretaker, mother, subordinate, and sexual object has remained throughout. West and Zimmerman (1987) explain that gender is "done" or performed in public and ultimately institutional arenas. Although no longer legal, FWA company policies and practices (both written and unwritten) reproduce and reinforce the historically feminine role. For example, hiring practices result in an average of 6 males hired to every 100 females, training facilities that were built in the 1980s are designed only to house women, and appearance guidelines require makeup and restrict weight.

But, if gender is done in a certain way, can it also be undone? West and Zimmerman (1987) answer with a tentative "yes." But the social consequences of the power and resource allocations associated with sex categories make undoing gender difficult. The flight attendants I worked with demonstrate this tension. Although publicly doing gender, privately they identify practices as constraining and find creative ways around them that, in a sense, momentarily undo the gender constructions. This happens in three ways. The first is general subversion, consisting of all behaviors, interactions, or stories that identify and/or resist traditional expectations of hierarchy or status based on gender. The second focuses specifically on resistance to restrictions placed on the freedom of movement and inspections of personal property. The third centers on resistance to the regulation of female flight attendant appearance.

#### THEME 1: RESISTING GENDER HIERARCHY AND STATUS

The first theme is resistance to gender hierarchy and status (see Table 1). The roles of flight attendant and pilot are deeply rooted in the traditional female and male roles, positioned in a hierarchy: male over female, man over girl, pilot over flight attendant. The pilot as male is in complete control. The FWA policy states that even if a pilot chooses to violate company policy, the crew must follow the pilot's directions. *His* word is law. The information given

TABLE 1: Gender Themes of Hidden Transcripts

<i>Gender Theme</i>	<i>Hidden Transcript</i>	<i>Public Dominating Practice</i>
Gender regulations of hierarchy and status.	A flight attendant pokes fun at the pilots when she asks if they need "hydrating" before takeoff.	Flight attendants are required to serve the pilots beverages before takeoff to avoid "dehydration."
Gender regulations constraining movement and space.	Flight attendant trainees break the rules and sign each other in and out of the training center.	Female flight attendants are required to spend every night in the training center and to document their whereabouts.
Gender regulations of appearance.	Flight attendants share knowledge of "high risk" areas where one has to wear high heels.	Female flight attendants are required to wear shoes with at least a 2-inch heel when off the airplane.

to the flight attendants during initial training is gender-specific language—"The captain . . . *he* is in charge; the flight attendant . . . *she* must obey."

Like secretary/boss or nurse/doctor, the relationship between flight attendants and pilots includes the former serving the latter. There are functional reasons behind these roles; however, it is when the nature of this service is less reflective of the professional roles and more reflective of the gender roles that resistance provides an appropriate avenue of protest and escape.

For example, many FWA flight attendants bring beverages and leftover food to the pilots during flight. In the past, this practice was done only as a courtesy and was therefore unpredictable due to changing flight attendant workloads (e.g., on a short flight with a meal service there may not be time for the flight attendant to check on the pilots' needs). Recently, however, an official regulation was written into the Flight Attendant Onboard Manual stating that "the lead flight attendant must assure that all pilots have sufficient beverages before taxi and during cruise to avoid dehydration." The FAA-endorsed onboard manual includes all emergency and safety-related procedures and must be carried by the flight attendants at all times. Flight attendants are deeply upset by the placement of this revision in their safety manual reinforcing an emphasis on feminine glamour and service, and trivializing the safety role of the

flight attendant. One flight attendant whispered the following in the galley during passenger boarding:

I hate flying the [lead position]. I get so sick of having to ask if the pilots need anything to drink when I'm busy trying to get my work done. But we wouldn't want them to die of dehydration now would we? Like a grown man wouldn't notice he was dehydrating. They have plenty of time to get their own drinks before takeoff.

This flight attendant does not accept her subordinate role when the nature of the subordination is not professionally driven but rather gender driven. Indeed, she privileges her position over his during passenger boarding when she is busy trying to settle passengers while he, on the other hand, has plenty of time to get his own drinks. Such grumbling in itself reflects resistance, as it identifies regulations as constraining. In this case, power is further exercised by flight attendants through their mocking interactions with the pilots.

When I ask the pilots if I can get them a drink, I always ask them, "So, do you need to be hydrated? I don't want you all to die of dehydration in the next hour and a half." And then I throw in that my father is a urologist, and perhaps they might want me to remind them to go to the bathroom so that they don't get a kidney infection, too! Usually I only have to go in there once. They get their own drinks after that.

This flight attendant is not alone in this practice. Similar practices were either observed or discussed in the galleys prior to takeoff. Several pilots also made comments that they get their own drinks because they do not want to hear about it from the flight attendants. The public discursive formations dictate that the pilots are in command and the flight attendants must serve them. However, on-line flight attendants resist the publicly enacted policy by ridiculing it to the pilots, thereby discursively shifting power. Hatch (1997) writes about the social construction of irony and humor used in management teams. She surmises that humorous discourse produces and maintains organizational ambiguity. Used this way, and as the flight attendant examples show, humor is one form of

unobtrusive power renegotiation. Through humor, resistance is shrouded in the "ambiguities of accountability" (Bell & Forbes, 1994, p. 184) and is ultimately deniable, that is, "it was just a joke."

Gender roles are not only constructed (and resisted) through flight attendant and pilot interactions but may include passenger expectations and interactions as well. While on a break during training, one flight attendant told the following story:

On a flight a few years ago, there was an entire crew [flight attendants] of men and there was a second officer [pilot] who was a woman. As passengers got on the plane they kept saying, "Where are the girls? Where are the girls?" It was really funny to watch them 'cause it just threw them off. Especially when Valerie [the pilot] would make her P.A. from the flight deck. She made a point of letting everyone know she was up front. She would say, "If anyone needs anything be sure to let one of the *gentlemen* in the back know!"

The objectively reified reality in place for the passengers was challenged during this flight. They were operating in a "world upside down" or "carnival": "In the world of carnival the awareness of the people's immortality is combined with the realization that established authority and truth are relative" (Bakhtin, 1968, p. 10). The relativity of reality as portrayed in a world upside down is uncomfortable. By drawing attention to the inverted roles, Valerie played in the upside-down world and challenged the gender "truths" attached to the flight attendant and pilot roles, and these challenges are reproduced in the retelling of the story.

Flight attendants inherit a social world where status is dictated more by gender than by professional roles. As women, their struggle is against "official definitions of identity and action imposed by the dominant field of speech and practice" (Ferguson, 1984, p. 157). However, as shown in these examples, they create a world through their own discursive practices that challenges reified gender patterns and hierarchy. Such thinking reflects a recent shift in feminist focus from female oppression to gender relations (Ashcraft & Pacanowsky, 1996; Calás & Smircich, 1992; Mumby, 1993b). Drawing on West and Zimmerman (1987), a focus on gender relations shows how individuals "'do gender' as they manage everyday interaction to reflect or contest dominant mean-



ings of gendered identity" (Ashcraft & Pacanowsky, 1996, p. 219). In their moment-to-moment interactions, flight attendants contest the naturalized meanings that position men as dominant and women as deferent. Resistance, in this case, is not a universal action, but rather a covert, localized practice. Drawing on Foucault (1977), Ferguson (1984) reminds us that

The goal of such localized resistance is not to take over and replace the dominant discourse of bureaucratic capitalism but rather to render that discourse obsolete, to reveal the partiality of its universal claims and the inadequacy of its institutional practices. (p. 156)

#### **THEME 2: RESISTING REGULATIONS OF MOVEMENT AND SPACE**

The second theme is resistance to gender regulations constraining movement and space (see Table 1). The subordination of the feminine flight attendant is further manifest in policies that strictly monitor and control how freely she can move. FWA policies that separate and monitor employees based on gender begin in training and continue on-line. For example, the architecture of the FWA initial training center reproduces traditional gender roles through the enclosure and control of groups based on gender. I was reminded of this when during my observations, I spent 2 weeks at the training center. The enclosure of groups forms a disciplinary tactic where like groups are placed together and separated from all others (Foucault, 1977, p. 141). In this respect, the female new-hire flight attendants are required to live on-site behind the locked doors of the training center. They are watched over by Momma Dot, the resident housemother. This is a nonnegotiable element of the training program, even if the new hire lives in the same city as the training, has a family there, or both. In contrast, the male new hires not only are not required but also are not allowed to stay in the training center. Instead, they reside at a hotel located 2 miles down the street (pilots are allowed to live at home or reside in local apartments during training). The men are only allowed access to the classrooms within the training center and cannot go beyond the secured doors to the bedrooms. Through this enclosure, the training program is not set up to accommodate a large number of male new

hires, reproducing the concept that the flight attendant position is female and must be watched over, taken care of, and protected.

The decoration of training spaces also indicates gender separation. The wallpaper and carpet in the training center are color coded so that flight attendants are all trained on the pink floor, whereas the pilots are trained on the blue floor. On a layover, one pilot exclaimed: "Are you kidding? I never went up to the pink floor. We would be shot on sight. The good ol' FWA convent."

As stated earlier, male flight attendants also are not allowed full access to the pink floor. The "FWA convent" (also known as "Barbie Bootcamp" throughout the company) is set up solely for women. Men are not allowed behind the locked security door even for visitation. In this way, the enclosure of these particular groups serves to reinforce hierarchical power relations. The female flight attendants are defined as girls—children in need of care and supervision. On the other hand, male flight attendants and pilots are defined as men—adults who are very capable of taking care of themselves—and are even a potential threat to the female flight attendants.

Movement is strictly monitored through a policy that requires female flight attendant trainees to sign in and out every time they leave the building. They are told that this is to ensure that in case of emergency the trainees can be located. However, two flight attendants who recently completed training remarked,

Can you believe having to sign in and out everywhere you go? They treat you like little children. . . . We were coming in about 2:30 one night and the night guard came up and said, "would y'all mind putting down 2:00 so that I don't have to write up a report? . . ." I mean what difference does it make what time we come in? It's none of their business. I couldn't believe he would have to write a report.

FWA seems concerned about where the new hires are spending their nights. Flight attendants can be observed complying with these regulations in the public realm. They sign in and out and they spend every night in the dormitory. However, as the flight attendants' continued discussion indicates, appearances can be deceiving. "We

soon learned that either you don't sign out, or you lie about the time when you sign in."

The female flight attendant trainees established their own web of surveillance that signaled when Momma Dot was in her room and the coast was clear to sneak out. Meanwhile, the male flight attendant trainees, staying at the hotel, have no requirement to document their whereabouts.

At one point, there appeared to be a break in these spatial formations that separated men from women. Training instructors were required to attend a workshop at the main training center. Because there was no initial training group in session, the dormitory was not being used; all the instructors, including three males, were registered for rooms on the pink floor. One male instructor commented, "I guess you could call me a pioneer . . . going where no man has gone before." Upon arriving at the training center with bags in hand, the male flight attendant instructor was told that he was going to have to stay at the hotel. The next day, another one of the three recounted,

God, I wasn't even allowed in the building. As I got here the security guard ran to the door, and stopped me, yelling "Who are you? What are you doing here?" Then he looked at me and said "Are you Greg, Erving or Mike?" I said, "Yes, I am Mike." So he said, "Oh, you have to stay at the hotel. You can't stay here!"

The official reasoning behind this change in arrangements is unknown. Every time the question was asked, the response was a laugh and a shrug, indicating a "What do you think?" attitude. But unofficially, the reasoning was much clearer. As one flight attendant instructor said, "Erving cannot stay here, he has a penis." Again, the use of humor serves as a discursive form of resistance that although sometimes spoken in public, is ultimately hidden due to its deniability. By referring to Erving's anatomy, or calling the FWA training center the FWA convent or the Barbie Bootcamp, the flight attendants draw attention to the gender separation, mock the power structure that created it, and in so doing discursively shift the dominant political-meaning systems.

It is clear that in the training center, flight attendants are defined as *girls* who have to be monitored and watched. However, the surveillance does not stop once the flight attendant "graduates" from the convent. For example, rumors circulated through FWA that "ghost riders" were back. Ghost riders are supervisors who fly as customers to check the quality of service. The airline had not used ghost riders for many years; however, because of cost cutting and threats of downsizing, flight attendants believed the company was using the invisible surveillance to perform a witch hunt to get rid of any employee not performing perfectly. In light of the rumors, many flight attendants participated in self-regulation and chose to reproduce organizational policies to avoid disciplinary action.

Participation in private discourse is controlled in part through the creation of a structure of unpredictable surveillance, or the panoptic gaze. "The major effect of the Panopticon [is] to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power" (Foucault, 1977, p. 200). Employees functioning under a panoptic gaze do not know when they are being watched. And, indeed, many flight attendants began paying more attention to official regulations during the witch hunts, at least in public. However, the attempt to prevent all secret interaction is "a hopelessly utopian project of eliminating any and all protected communication among [employees]" (Scott, 1990, p. 127). Behind the closed curtain in the galley, flight attendants teach each other how to spot a potential ghost rider: She is the last-minute upgrade to first class marked "involuntary" on the passenger manifest, or he is the passenger in coach sitting in the aisle with no reading material, taking notes, and asking other passengers how they like the flight.

Rumors also began circulating throughout the training center, the flight attendant lounges, and on the airplanes, about the implementation of "random bag checks." While on a break between flights, one flight attendant said, "I don't know if it is true or not, but I heard there was a flight attendant who was fired just for taking a carton of milk off the airplane." In the back galley, another flight attendant revealed, "I heard there was an entire crew based in Cincinnati fired for taking aspirin and milk off the airplane." To

which another crew member responded, "I heard they were from St. Louis."

The accuracy of these accounts matters less than the discursive impact of their circulation: "As a rumor travels it is altered in a fashion that brings it more closely into line with the hopes, fears, and worldview of those who hear it and retell it" (Scott, 1990, p. 145). The repetition of the story reproduces the public power structure, positioning flight attendants below the power of the company: "The rumor, it appears, is not only an opportunity for anonymous, protected communication, but also serves as a vehicle for anxieties and aspirations that may not be openly acknowledged by its propagators" (Scott, 1990, p. 145). The random-bag-check rumors allowed flight attendants to release their frustrations about a dominating policy implemented by the company by anonymously exaggerating the power of the company over them as mere individuals.

Although the above rumors allow flight attendants to position the company as the bad guy, they do serve to reproduce the panopticon. Bad things happen to people who steal items off the plane; people have been fired. However, the rumors also provided a context to develop resistant strategies. The following transcript took place on the shuttle bus taking the flight attendants from their hotel to the airport.

Look, you guys, I think it [the random bag checks] is just a scare tactic. They cannot legally search our bags unless they accuse you of carrying drugs. They didn't buy our bags; they are our personal property. My friend, Ann, said that if they ever approached her and wanted to search her bag, she was going to state that they could only do that if they suspected her of drugs. If they said that they did, she would say that is was against her wishes and without her permission. That way, if they can't substantiate a drug charge, you could sue them for invasion of privacy. That is how I am going to handle it.

Through this transcript, the above flight attendant resists the public organizational intrusion of private property by reminding the others that their bags are their personal property and do not belong to the company. The other two flight attendants listening to this story agree to respond in the same way as Ann, if and when

approached with a random bag search. Ann is discursively spun as a hero—someone who will stand up against the powerful.

Not surprisingly, the witch hunt only targeted flight attendants. When a flight attendant asked a pilot whether he was concerned about the random bag checks he responded, "Sure I heard about them. But they don't affect us. They are only targeting you girls. They wouldn't dare do that to us. Don't you get tired of them treating you like little kids?"

The pilot acknowledges that the company treats the flight attendants as little kids. However, it is interesting that he reproduces this construction by referring to them as "you girls." His comment reflects the reproduction of power structures that position the company over flight attendants (by the ability to search bags), the pilots over the flight attendants (male over female; i.e., "They are only targeting you girls"), and further positions the pilots over the company (i.e., "They wouldn't dare try that with us"). The construction of these power relationships is surrounded by the historical and social context that deem it acceptable to publicly own or control female property but not male property.

These transcripts reveal constraining regulations that restrict the flight attendant's freedom of movement and rights to personal space. Yet, the flight attendants shift the power relations through resistant actions (e.g., by having someone else sign them in or out of the training center and poaching items off the airplane) of which the powerful are unaware. Again, I am not trying to argue that all flight attendants participate in resistant practices. Many reproduce the bureaucratic power structures both publicly and privately. However, the active complicity of flight attendants in their public subordination makes possible the agency necessary for these situated few to renegotiate power relations in private.

### **THEME 3: RESISTING REGULATIONS OF APPEARANCE**

The third theme is resistance to appearance regulations (see Table 1). The gender distinctions are nowhere more apparent than in policies that dictate the flight attendant's "professional" appearance. The feminized flight attendant body becomes a public orga-

nizational product based on appearance regulations. The flight attendant handbook states that

Tasteful make-up, compatible with skin coloring and hair is a requirement for all female customer contact personnel. The minimum cosmetics required are: foundation or base make-up, blusher or rouge, lipstick darker than natural skin tone; eye make-up to include one or more of the following; shadow, eyeliner, mascara or natural-looking false eyelashes. (p. 23)

During initial training, female flight attendant new hires are required to attend an Estée Lauder seminar on the application of makeup. The male new hires are excused from the seminar and are given free time. While traveling on a hotel shuttle, a flight attendant complained about her experience during the makeup seminar. Because she does not like to wear a lot of makeup, she asked to be excused from the seminar. She explained,

Estée Lauder came in to "teach" us how to put on professional make-up. I hate eye make-up. I look terrible in it. I was told, "You are not a school girl anymore. You are in a profession now. Anyway, it is a requirement of your job that you wear make-up."

She was not wearing any eye makeup when I saw her. She told me she only wears "required" makeup when she goes in for her yearly appearance check.

Once a year, each flight attendant must go into his or her supervisor for an appearance evaluation. During the evaluation, the flight attendant stands in front of the supervisor for inspection. The flight attendants hold out their hands to show that their fingernails are the same length, measure no longer than 3/8th of an inch, and are painted a conservative color. The supervisor checks to make sure that hair is in regulation (tied back or shorter than shoulder length), skirt lengths are measured, and overall hygiene approved. Furthermore, flight attendants must have their shoes available for inspection and must be weighed.

Female flight attendants must have two pairs of shoes. One pair is for the concourse, and one for onboard the aircraft. According to the in-flight manual, the concourse shoe must have a "heel height

no less than 1 1/2 inches and no higher than 4 inches," and may be "worn at all times but must be worn when in the concourse or while boarding [passengers on the aircraft]" (p. 32). Women can only wear flat shoes while in-flight or onboard the aircraft.

From a feminist perspective, the requirement of high heels constrains feminine movement and power. When a woman wears high heels, she cannot take large steps and she cannot run. She is placed in a more docile, submissive position due to her physical limitations. For the flight attendant, the only public or official avenue outside of these limitations is to turn to a patriarchally structured medical field by getting a doctor's note excusing her from wearing high heels.

Again, compliance may be observed in the public discursive formations. However, when the hidden transcripts are analyzed, resistant tactics are revealed. Jane stated on one 3-day trip,

I never wear my heels when I'm not going through a base city, or especially Dallas or Atlanta. It is such a stupid policy and they bother my feet. And I'm not going to pay \$50 for an office visit every 6 months to have some damn doctor write me a note.

Many flight attendants comply with these regulations in public. They perform self-regulation in light of unpredictable surveillance (Foucault, 1977). However, they have figured out where the high risk areas are for getting caught breaking organizational rules. They then pass this information on to the other flight attendants through their hidden transcripts, limiting the power of the panoptic gaze. Because of these discursive "lookouts," Jane knows to only wear her heels when she flies through a base city where supervisors are located. When traveling through these cities, attendants remind each other to change their shoes when they get off the airplane.

Through the appearance regulations, FWA reproduces a societal construction of the feminine as a material object that can be dressed up and painted to increase its economic value.

The exchange of women is a seductive and powerful concept. It is attractive in that it places the oppression of women within social systems, rather than in biology. Moreover, it suggests that we look for



the ultimate locus of women's oppression within the traffic in women rather than within the traffic in merchandise. (Rubin, 1975, p. 175)

Women are placed within social systems as objects of power, rather than as powerful subjects. Similarly, flight attendants are constructed within the organizational social system as objects of power for the company, the pilots, and the passengers. One flight attendant remarked,

Once I was in a hotel lobby talking to these sheriffs, or something. Anyway, this guy had flown on FWA a while ago and he was complaining that his flight attendants were old and ugly. I asked him if they gave him good service. He said, "Well, yeah, but they weren't very good-looking."

For this passenger, the worth of "his" flight attendants was determined by their beauty, not their efficiency. The appearance regulations are used to increase and ensure the economic value of the flight attendants (as objects) by enhancing their attractiveness.

The reproduction of this societal construction of women is highly evident in the airline's weight policy. The written policy concerning weight restrictions reads, "An *attractive* uniform appearance is greatly dependent upon weight" (emphasis added). For FWA, attractive is defined as small and thin. Flight attendants, as female, must not take up space. Only the powerful are allowed access to space. If flight attendants exceed their maximum weight allowances, they are placed on suspension, which can result in termination if the weight is not lost.

Every Monday morning during Barbie Bootcamp, the flight attendants stand in line waiting their turn to be weighed. They are not allowed to subtract any weight for their clothing (flight attendants out of training can subtract 3 pounds for clothes). Anyone who does not meet this requirement during training is sent home. Therefore, flight attendant trainees refer to Sunday night as "Ex-lax" night. One flight attendant recalled, "I swear, I was borderline bulimic when I was in training, but then again, so was everyone else."

To publicly comply with the weight regulation, many initial trainees privately took a laxative the night before a weigh-in and

continued to take water pills (to get rid of water retention) during the week. Once flight attendants graduate from training, they are weighed once a month for the first 6 months, and then once a year after that. Although the flight attendants publicly comply with the policies by weighing in at scheduled times, they do not buy into the policy and lose size permanently; they teach each other how to beat the system in a backstage protest and lose weight temporarily through the private use of laxatives and diuretics.

In this section, I have shown how FWA attempts to control the private realm with public policies. Compliance to such policies is visible in the public realm. Compliance also is visible in the private realm, as some flight attendants embody the preferred organizational meanings. As opposed to the previous examples, in the case of appearance guidelines, compliance may be less a question of bureaucratic compliance and more a question of identity resources. For many flight attendants, the glamorous and sexualized image of the profession serves as a resource for their identity, thereby distinguishing their job from other menial service positions. As one flight attendant explained,

We are not just waitresses in the sky. We have to maintain a professional look. I like the weight restrictions. Without them I would just blow up like a balloon. Now that would look great, wouldn't it? A bunch of fat flight attendants walking down the aisles.

However, as shown above, not all flight attendants identify with this definition of professional. Through their hidden transcripts, they identify the appearance policies as constraining and expose their everyday tactics of resistance (e.g., not always changing shoes or wearing makeup).

Not only do hidden transcripts provide an avenue for the private production of alternative power relationships, they also provide the potential for public change. The next section continues the discussion of appearance and weight policies as the hidden transcripts become expressed in public discourse.

**FROM HIDDEN TRANSCRIPTS TO PUBLIC VOICE**

As the previous three themes have shown, through private means, subordinates can continually voice their opinions to one another. In doing so, they enact fantasies of reversal, gain social support, and prepare themselves for possible entrance into the public realm. It also is possible that hidden discourse functions as a way of venting—giving people the illusion of autonomy and in so doing, letting out enough steam so that the entire system does not explode (Deetz, in press). Scott (1990) addresses this issue with the following statement:

Any argument which assumes that disguised ideological dissent or aggression operates as a safety-valve to weaken "real" resistance ignores the paramount fact that such ideological dissent is virtually always expressed in practices that aim at an unobtrusive renegotiation of power relations. (p. 190)

In the case of flight attendants, concerns regarding weight and appearance checks are strongly voiced in flight attendant hidden transcripts and function as much more than a safety valve. Serving as an avenue for an alternate discourse, hidden transcripts can transcend the public discursive boundaries, allowing the public declaration of previously hidden meaning. "The first [public] declaration [of the hidden transcript] speaks for countless others, it shouts what has historically had to be whispered, controlled, choked back, stifled, and suppressed" (Scott, 1990, p. 227). Recently, such shouts were heard at a public meeting concerning the possibility of changing or even abolishing the weight guidelines.

The meeting was defined as a "fact finding" mission through which the company could determine how the flight attendants perceived the weight tables. No conclusion was drawn at the end of the meeting. However, about 1 month later, a memorandum was sent that stated,

During our discussions, we have mentioned the likelihood of legal action by a small number of Flight Attendants. Today we are

surprised and disappointed to learn this group has proceeded by filing charges of discrimination with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and we anticipate extensive media coverage.

It appears that a "small number of Flight Attendants" were able to find voice in the public realm, and thus could instigate change in organizational policy. Not only did these flight attendants' hidden transcripts transcend organizational public discursive boundaries, their resistance ultimately could enter societal public discourse through "extensive media coverage."

In response to the fear of extensive media coverage—the ultimate public declaration of the hidden transcript as it surpasses even organizational discourse—another memorandum was released.

For many years airlines have relied upon weight tables as part of a consistent and objective approach to appearance monitoring. Some airlines continue to use this approach which has been supported by the courts and accepted by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. Nevertheless, our review has led us to discontinue the use of weight table effective [now].

For the first time in the company's history, the weight standard policy was publicly challenged and ultimately changed. As a result, new organizational meaning was and continues to be produced. "An integral part of introducing this new concept," stated the memorandum, "includes your being involved in redefining an overall professional image." Though meaning was produced, organizational reality was simultaneously reproduced as indicated in the next part of the memorandum.

We will place emphasis on all components of appearance—including personal grooming—uniform condition and fit—accessories and weight when it detracts from an overall professional image.

Though the weight standard policy was abolished, appearance standards, including weight, are still in effect. Though the memorandum called for help in "redefining" (producing) an overall professional image, it ended by claiming,

The reengineering of our policy must continue to support and reinforce the professional image we enjoy throughout the world. We remain committed to the further definition of guidelines which will achieve this objective.

According to FWA, reengineering the appearance policy is fine as long as it reinforces (reproduces) the past professional image. Indeed, a renewed commitment to appearance standards was enforced by supervisors known as "the beauty police" who inspected flight attendants for hair, nail, and uniform guidelines prior to every trip. The inspections lasted only 3 months before time and cost forced them to stop.

Flight attendants filed legal actions against the airline as a group, not as a number of individuals. It is likely that as individuals, they "first found peer support for their cause in the private discursive realm." Without the combination of the public declaration of hidden transcripts, flight attendants filing legal action, and their discussion during weight standard meetings, the abolishment of weight standards at FWA would not have happened. In her review of Scott (1990), Ortner contends, "Hidden transcripts are real and they play a major role in the way in which large-scale social movements unfold" (Scott, 1990, back cover). Although the resistance to weight discrimination was by no means a "large-scale social movement," it was a start.

#### **DISCUSSION: THE PRAGMATICS OF ORGANIZATIONAL RESISTANCE**

Power structures are constructed through discursive formations—yet, as was the case at FWA, not all members have equal access to public discourse (Deetz, 1992; Foucault, 1977; Mumby, 1988; Scott, 1990). Therefore, preferred representational practices are created by the organization's powerful. The organization's powerless may choose to enact these preferred practices in the public discourse. However, they also may resist and potentially change these preferred practices in their private discourse. There-

fore, access to hidden transcripts is crucial to understand the multiple constructions of realities potentially present in an organization, as well as for changing these realities.

Based on my experience with FWA, I believe the analysis of hidden transcripts provides insight into how individuals (a) identify hidden constraints, (b) produce resistance, and (c) foster sites for change. Each element has implications for both the theory and practice of management and organization.

#### IDENTIFYING HIDDEN CONSTRAINTS

First, hidden transcripts function to identify constraints. Due to the exclusion of their voice in public discourse, employees may appear to consent to organizational practices. However, in their private talk, employees are free to identify, complain, and ridicule constraining organizational policies. At FWA, private discourse exposes discriminatory hiring practices, the surveillance of women, and the strict regulation of feminine appearance.

Depending on how restrictive employees perceive discursive constraints to be, hidden transcripts vary. Through the hidden transcripts, "The unspoken riposte, stifled anger, and bitter tongues created by relations of domination find a vehement, full-throated expression" (Scott, 1990, p. 120). These expressions identify organizational constraints that may not be apparent in the public realm due to limited access to public discourse. It is behind the galley curtain, on the bus to a layover hotel, or sitting in an airport lounge waiting for a flight to leave where flight attendants identify policies as constraining.

Tapping into these expressions identifies hidden constraints and adds to our understanding of power relations. Theories of power often explain the submission of classes (with no apparent or overt use of coercion or force on the part of the powerful) through the concept of "false consciousness" (Gramsci, 1971). But, as seen at FWA, public consent may not represent a "dominated" or "false" consciousness. Although flight attendants may present an "emotionally managed" public smile (Hochschild, 1983), they may privately bitch, grumble, and complain about it.

### PRODUCING RESISTANCE

Second, the analysis of hidden transcripts provides a means of understanding how subordinates enable themselves. Hidden transcripts are more than a substitute for the real thing, or for direct aggression—they are tactics of “unobtrusive power renegotiation” on the part of the subordinates: “A tactic insinuates itself into the other’s place, fragmentarily, without taking it over in its entirety” (de Certeau, 1984, p. xix). Although participants may not be able to own the public space, because of the domination of those that do, they may insinuate themselves within it. At FWA, we saw examples of flight attendants using humor to renegotiate the power relations—joking with pilots to the point that the pilots no longer want the flight attendants to serve them.

A similar strategy is poaching—individuals taking from the system enough to sustain themselves, without directly confronting the powerful (de Certeau, 1984). For example, despite threats of random bag checks, flight attendants often poach items such as milk, food, and alcohol from the airplane to sustain themselves while on a layover. When flight attendants were subjected to a pay cut, many reacted by taking more of these items. Soon, aspirin, cards, glasses, and china began to disappear. One flight attendant described going to a party with other FWA employees where all of the glassware, mini-bottles, and champagne had the FWA logo on them. These types of actions can add up and increasingly affect the power structure, and “under appropriate conditions, the accumulation of petty acts can, rather like snowflakes on a steep mountain-side, set off an avalanche” (Scott, 1990, p. 191).

### FOSTERING SITES FOR CHANGE

Third, the examination of an organization’s hidden transcripts provides an insight into employee-driven organizational change. The creation of hidden transcripts in itself represents organizational movement away from the preferred organizational meaning by constructing alternative meanings in the private realm. The hidden transcripts also can function to transform organizational public policy when they are entered into the public discourse. Private

interactions foster sites for organizational change by providing a means of social support and cohesion that may not be noticeable in the presence of the powerful: "The first public declaration of the hidden transcript, then, has a prehistory that explains its capacity to produce political breakthroughs" (Scott, 1990, p. 227). At FWA, legal action in public discourse resulted in the abolition of weight restrictions. A successful move into the public is likely to be emulated by peers. Now, almost every airline has lifted policies using standard weight charts. Even if upon entering the public domain, the resistant discourse fails, the courage of the attempt is noted by subordinate peers, and the stories of "bravery, social banditry, and noble sacrifice . . . become themselves part of the hidden transcript" (p. 227). In fact, the first public legal action against weight restriction failed at another airline. However, the attempt was kept alive in private conversations throughout the FWA system.

Kondo (1990) warns that public transformation is not required to constitute power renegotiation.

To indulge in nostalgic desire for "authentic resistance" might blind us to the multiple, mobile points of potential resistance moving through any regime of power. . . . (Instead), we might examine the unexpected, subtle, and paradoxical twists in actors' discursive strategies, following out the ways meanings are reappropriated and launched again in continuous struggles over meaning. (p. 225)

Future studies can extend the practical implications of studying hidden transcripts in light of organizational change. In an era of strategic reengineering, Total Quality Management, and organizational visioning and alignment, much attention has been placed on managerially driven programs of strategic change (e.g., Fombrun, 1992; Hammer & Champy, 1993; Handy, 1995; Senge, 1990). The success of such programs depends on the degree to which employees participate and align with the organizational point of view. And what of employee-driven change where employees manage to empower themselves sometimes without those in power even knowing? How do hidden transcripts resist the introduction of a



new managerial program, a change in job focus, unionization, contract employees, or corporate takeovers or mergers?<sup>3</sup>

Furthermore, this research encourages studying facets of organizational communication that assume that both private as well as public realms need to be included in organizational research. Considering the relationship between the private and public provides a window into the everyday micropolitics of organizational voice—such as those of women and minorities—that have been excluded from particular organizational discourse. Indeed, feminist forms of organizing may lessen the need for producing hidden transcripts (e.g., Bullis, 1993; Buzzanell, 1994, 1995; Calás & Smircich, 1996; Fraser, 1989; Gottfried & Weiss, 1994). Recognizing the voices spoken in private also may bring about new ideas of organizing that challenge reified patterns of a patriarchal past and may provide a better fit for today's changing environment. On the other hand, current organizational moves away from bureaucratic models of control to concertive control emerging through self-regulated teams (e.g., Barker, 1993; Deetz, in press) may limit the production of hidden transcripts.

In conclusion, I have examined discursive power relations from a critical-interpretive perspective focusing on resistance rather than domination. This is important both theoretically and practically because it recognizes that although dominant organizational meanings may be present, other meanings can be formed in subtle everyday micropractices of resistance: "Power cannot be relied on to routinely produce consent, although the tendency to equate power and authority assumes that it does" (Jermier & Clegg, 1994, p. 287; Krippendorf, 1995). Therefore, it is not so much a matter of some people having power and others not having it, but rather that power is exercised continually (by all organizational members) through discursive acts that produce, reproduce, negotiate, and resist organizational meanings; and when not possible in public, power renegotiation can be exercised in private. Such an understanding accounts for the partial, contingent quality of organizational reality. Scott (1990) points to a Jamaican slave proverb, "Play fool to catch wise." One cannot assume that people are ignorant

when relying on public discourse. As de Certeau (1984) reminds us, we must not take people for fools.

### NOTES

1. Due to the sensitive nature of this study, the airline requested confidentiality.
2. In compliance with university procedures, IRB approval was obtained before conducting this study. Because many of the statements I report are not intended to be public and could result in harm if disclosed, I asked all research participants for their permission to be included in the study. In exchange, I guaranteed them confidentiality. Names, bases, dates, and flight numbers have either been withheld or changed.
3. Ethical ramifications must be carefully considered when deciding if and to whom they might be revealed. For example, before exposing employees' private conversations and actions to management, there must be a clear understanding of what management intends to do with the information. Do they intend to eliminate the resistant actions by attempting to take away the avenues of resistance (this is a futile goal according to Scott (1990), yet a potentially harmful one for the interactants), or do they intend to stop the resistant actions by changing the system and eliminating the constraints? The usefulness of the latter would be accelerating the process by which the hidden transcripts can transform oppressive organizational policies. In all cases, if information gathered from the employees' private conversations and actions is exposed to management, there must be a strict system established to guarantee the confidentiality of the interactants.

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