

Identity Politics and Critical Pedagogy

By Hank Bromley

Among the most important contributions of the various Marxist theorists of education to our understanding of the place of schools in contemporary society has been their forceful demonstration of the political nature of education. Beyond the significant differences among these writers, all stress the importance of seeing actors within educational institutions as situated within larger social conflicts, conflicts which both shape and are shaped by events within schools. All insist that claims of education's neutrality with respect to social conflict are false; such claims serve to obscure schooling's role in struggles over control of cultural and material resources. This insight into the political import of classroom life has not, however, been readily translated into a mass movement for progressive transformation of the schools. Analyses based primarily on Marxist theory have not proven effective at galvanizing large numbers of Americans, most of whom appear not to regard such theory as an apt explanation of their own experiences. Clearly something is missing.

Many scholars are seeking ways to revitalize the theory.¹ In addition to the tactical problem of existing theory's weakness as an organizing tool, growing frustration with the difficulty of integrating the personal and the academic spurs the search of some writers — including myself — for enhancements or even alternatives. We wish not to feel as though our academic lives consist of studying phenomena "out there" which have nothing to do with the problems we face in our own lives, as though those problems are "merely personal." In short, the theory that insists on situating educational actors in their political setting fails to so situate its own authors. This lacuna suggests what it may be that is missing from Marxist theory, what lies behind both the tactical ineffectiveness and the personal (but not "merely") frustration of academics: analysis centers on disembodied, abstract forces, while the lived experience of individual actors is marginalized — or, at best, treated as the incidental vehicle through which abstract, structural forces are expressed. This failure to address the *subjective* reality of oppression may account for the refusal of "the masses" to adopt the tenets of a theory which purports to explain their experiences — a theory which, moreover, is largely written so as to be accessible only to persons with graduate training.²

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1. One influential critique of the state of Marxist theory is Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (London: Verso, 1985). While they start with a different set of questions, their analysis foreshadows many of the claims I will be making here. Laclau and Mouffe see a crisis in socialism brought about by an insistence on the working class being the primary agent of change and its struggle the primary locus of social transformation. They propose a radical "unfixity," rendering the meaning of any one struggle dependent on its interconnections with other struggles, on the discursive structure it is a part of, and rendering the collective will not a performed natural consequence of the unitary march of History, but rather a laborious construction via articulation of dissimilar agents and interests into a contingent and limited hegemonic formation, subject to subversion by competing formations. Emphasizing the contradictions and multiple strands present in any one individual, they portray identity itself as precarious and politically negotiable.

2. There are, of course, other reasons for the minimal affinity of the American working class for Marxism. I do not, for instance, mean to downplay the impact of explicit efforts by the Right to obstruct such a linkage.

Henry Giroux, in his *Theory and Resistance in Education* (South Hadley, Mass.: Bergin &

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The experiences of those subject to sexual and racial oppression are especially absent. It might therefore be wise to consult feminist and Afro-American writers for ideas on creating theory encompassing subjectivity. Marxist writings on education simply lack a theory of the formation of consciousness — a serious flaw, given that formation of consciousness is largely what schools are about. Any theory that attempts to catalyze movement for social change but ignores the question of how individuals come to feel commitment and to act on it is in trouble.

This is not to say I believe social theory should be exclusively individualistic and psychological. What we need is theory which *links* the individual and social. Poststructuralism is (or, being cognizant of the multiplicity of ideas which go by that name, poststructuralisms are) an attempt to do just that, treating language as the link between the two; it portrays available modes of discourse as constitutive of human subjectivity and powerfully constraining human action. But, as discussed below, poststructuralism tends toward the apolitical. It often loses Marxism's focus on situating local individuals and events in larger conflicts.

"Identity politics" is one loosely defined school of thought which tries to use poststructuralist insights on the nature of subjectivity without losing the political commitment of Marxism. It is an attempt to find for collective action a basis which doesn't marginalize lived experience, especially that of oppressed peoples, a basis which doesn't abstract away the complexity and contradictions embedded in human subjectivity.

This essay investigates what identity politics may have to contribute to the reformulation of Marxist theories of education, through considering how it would theorize one example of classroom phenomena: the practice of explicitly critical pedagogy. After describing what identity politics is, I compare it to several Marxist perspectives that have been applied to schooling and, finally, delve into the literature describing one branch of critical educational practice and try to establish that identity politics constitutes a viable framework for understanding such practice.

PART 1: WHAT IS IDENTITY POLITICS?

This section summarizes a perspective outlined and developed in three articles: Minnie Bruce Pratt's autobiographical essay placing her current experiences residing in a black neighborhood of Washington, D.C., in the context of her Southern upbringing; Biddy Martin and Chandra Mohanty's analysis of Pratt's essay; and Teresa de Lauretis's introduction to the collection containing Martin and Mohanty's piece.³ Pratt's essay was chosen as an exemplar because it explicitly discusses the development of her own subjectivity — the process by which she attached meaning to her experiences on both ends of exploitative relations — and depicts the politicization of one individual. The de Lauretis and Martin and Mohanty essays draw out the theoretical basis and implications of Pratt's narrative.

The version of identity politics represented in these articles connects analysis of material conditions and of individual subjectivities, linking the societal and the personal,

Garvey, 1983), notes Wilhelm Reich's dismay at socialism's inability to mobilize the working class — and Fascism's success. Reich placed the blame on socialism's lack of a "political psychology" which would enable engaging the masses at an emotional level (p. 244, in footnote 1 to p. 28). His appraisal of the Nazi victory — by default — over socialism in this regard applies well to the contemporary New Right, and his effort to address the psychic needs for solidarity and community by enlisting Freudian theory in service of Marxism parallels my (non-Freudian) effort to build a politics of everyday life on the concept "home" later in this essay.

In the remainder of his chapter 1, Giroux traces Reich's influence on the Frankfurt School and suggests some implications of their work for critical pedagogy.

3. Minnie Bruce Pratt, "Identity: Skin Blood Heart," in *Yours in Struggle*, ed. Elly Bulkin et al. (New York: Long Haul Press, 1984); Biddy Martin and Chandra Talpade Mohanty, "Feminist Politics: What's Home Got to Do with It?"; and Teresa de Lauretis, "Feminist Studies/Critical Studies: Issues, Terms, and Contexts," both in *Feminist Studies/Critical Studies*, ed. Teresa de Lauretis (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986).

through a focus on the concept of home, explored below. It portrays the social universe as dynamic and fluid, resistant to being stuffed into static descriptive structures. And, crucially, identity itself is included in this emphasis on complexity and pluralism, rather than being seen as a simple product of structural factors. Identity politics is thus unusual in that it considers personal identity both fluid and a legitimate starting point for investigations of oppressive social relations. Individual experience, marginalized by other critical approaches, is invited back in and even centered. But identity politics differs from apolitical psychologizing of the social world in that analysis does not end with experience: it continues by contextualizing experience, relating it to structural factors.

Home in Identity Politics

Feminist writers have long been concerned with "home" in two senses, which we might label the physical home and the ideological home: one is a location, a dwelling for the family and basis for the pernicious division of the world into public and private, with women relegated to the private domain of the family home; the second is a metaphoric home, the secure sense of place provided by a community of like-thinking compatriots. "Home" in identity politics is a combination of these two uses, generalized to include any sort of belonging which provides security.

Home, in both senses, has been inadequately treated by Marxists. Most neglect, on the one hand, the oppressive aspects of gender relations as concretized within the family, considering the paid workplace the only important social arena and waged labor the only important social relationship;⁴ and, on the other hand, ignore — in their theoretical writing, at least — the communal-based affective elements of political action.

Pratt acknowledges, as do Martin and Mohanty, the desire for a comfortable home, in both the physical and ideological senses. They claim, however, that a secure feeling of being at home is necessarily founded on repression: it depends on suppressing awareness of the differences among people, on refusing to see who is excluded from the home. However expansive and inclusive a home may feel from within, membership is inevitably contingent on characteristics only a restricted set of people possess. The use of the term "repression," then, refers here to both the barring of certain people and the stifling of one's own knowledge of them.

Pratt writes of her discovery of the violence, the direct and literal exclusion of others, entailed by the establishment of her own childhood home:

Ida B. Wells' records show that Black men were lynched in my home county, and one in my home town, for allegedly raping white women. . . . I gathered family letters and documents. They told me . . . that on both the maternal and paternal sides of my family, we had owned slaves . . . that what place and money my family had got by the mid-nineteenth century, we had stolen from the work and lives of others; and that the very ground the crops grew in was stolen: I saw the government form that bountied 160 acres to my great-grandfather Williams for fighting the Seminoles in the Creek Wars, driving them from their homes.⁵

Her cognizance of the history continues to interfere with her efforts to locate herself comfortably, to find a home:

I think how I just want to feel at home, where people know me; instead I remember, when I meet Mr. Boone [the janitor at her apartment building], that home was a place of forced subservience and I know that my wish is that of

4. Even when the family home is taken seriously by Marxists (for a characteristic treatment see Wally Secombe, "The Housewife and Her Labour under Capitalism," *New Left Review*, no. 83 [January-February 1973]), the topic remains how family activities support capitalism (e.g., through the reproduction of labor power), and the prescription for change is for all persons to embrace the class struggle. Such analyses are silent on how family activities support patriarchy.

5. Pratt, "Identity: Skin Blood Heart," 34.

an adult wanting to stay a child: to be known by others, but to know nothing, to feel no responsibility.⁶

Initially, the ideological home of feminism would seem to offer a community, and derivatively an identity, not dependent on exploitation — one, in fact, explicitly opposed to exploitation. But feminism cannot provide a unitary, all-encompassing home, because the appearance of such would depend on denial of the existence of differences among women with respect to color, class, and sexual orientation. One attempt to salvage the effort is to posit, in response to this difficulty, a number of separate and individually coherent homes within feminism, based on sexual, ethnic, and racial divisions, and leave intact a notion of white identity, thereby reaching for "unity through incorporation . . . adding on difference without leaving the comfort of home."⁷ But admitting that something is missing from white, middle-class feminism, and offering to add it, is not sufficient. The "premise that Western feminist discourse is inadequate or irrelevant to women of color or Third World women . . . [implicitly assumes] that the terms of a totalizing feminist discourse are adequate to the task of articulating the situation of white women in the West,"⁸ and they are not. Individuals are no more free of internal conflict and contradiction than are groups. Marginalizing differences within the individual, assuming that "white, middle class, heterosexual woman" is a meaningful and sufficient categorization, is no better than marginalizing differences among individuals by assuming "woman" is meaningful and sufficient.

Before investigating what is meant by "differences within the individual," let me pause briefly to consider the similarity between identity politics and poststructuralism.

Is This Poststructuralism?

I have been presenting a perspective which criticizes a widespread failure within feminism to challenge the assumption of a unified, coherent subject. What has been said thus far resembles the "charges of totalization that come from the ranks of anti-humanist intellectuals . . . [who attack] humanist beliefs in 'man' and Absolute Knowledge wherever they appear."⁹ But such critiques are typically also unqualifiedly relativistic, insisting on "indeterminacy" and disputing the existence of a legitimate basis for collective action on large-scale political projects. The insistence on indeterminacy denies the critic's own situatedness. S/he does have an institutional home and is implicated in actual historical and social relations. Obscuring the home and refusing the implicatedness is an attempt to disconnect oneself from one's personal history; appearing to do so is a privilege, deriving from the very connections whose existence is denied.

With identity politics, in contrast, while the coherence of any single position, any home, is shown to be problematic, there is an insistence on the responsibility nonetheless to take positions, to be *in* the world; in short, to acknowledge one's home, however unstable, as opposed to deconstructing it from a putatively uninvolved vantage point. The boundaries are confused, but rather than take refuge in the futility of drawing distinctions, the attempt must be made, in full knowledge of its inevitable shortcomings. Pratt's personal narrative forces her to situate herself in the social — a regular consequence of reliance on narrative, to which we will return later — and her commitment to growth and change forces her to confront the illusory coherence of her position in the social, thus exposing the bases of her own privilege. She recognizes her own institutional home, as well as the exclusion and repression on which its apparent security and coherence are based.

Personal Identity

What's true of external homes, physical and ideological, also applies to individual identity: a stable one depends on repressing differences. As discussed above, a stable

6. *Ibid.*, 12.

7. Martin and Mohanty, "Feminist Politics," 193.

8. *Ibid.*

9. *Ibid.*

home presupposes denying access to people who are different; a stable personal identity presupposes denying "differences within the individual." Let us now return to considering just what is meant by that phrase.

The conventional view assumes a unitary identity, discovered by delving within, gradually stripping away layers of deceit, and eventually arriving at a pure self, uncontaminated by outside influence. Identity politics offers a relational alternative, emphasizing fluidity and interconnectedness. Far from being an outside contaminant, the connections are central to who one is, and as they change, one's identity also changes. The conventional view of a fixed identity, meaningfully considered in isolation from others, is said to be a false notion "secured by terror."¹⁰ Fear prohibits its relinquishment: fear of one's status being uncertain and contradictory, fear of having a mutable identity, fear of recognizing one's part in exploitative relations. These same fears also impede the relinquishment of a stable but repressive home, as one's home is a crucial component of one's identity.

Identity politics rejects the image of self-consciousness being a private journey, an internal search culminating in the discovery of one's true identity. The directionality of this image is totally reversed: rather than self-consciousness being a given entity which is used to disclose identity, consciousness — of everything, including of the self — becomes a product of identity, of who one is and what one's experiences have been. Identity here is roughly synonymous with personal history; if we also think of a person's politics as synonymous with his/her consciousness, then in saying one's personal history is the starting point of one's consciousness we have said *one's identity is the starting point of one's politics*.

But self-consciousness is not a simple product of personal history alone — the history must be given meaning via some discourse (possibly one involving commitment and struggle) selected from those available in the culture. And the resulting consciousness is itself only the beginning of the process of coming to know how the subject is "en-gendered" (and raced and classed and embedded in other axes of oppression) by social conditions.

De Lauretis uses as an example her own consciousness of being white. That aspect of her self-consciousness derives from certain of her experiences: before moving to the United States, she *had no consciousness* of being white. Once here that changed. And what her whiteness means to her depends on which of the available discourses of race she adopts. The experience of living in a race-divided society, and certain ways of interpreting those experiences, thus combine to produce a consciousness of herself she previously did not have. Then with that consciousness she collaboratively constructs new understandings of the operations of racism.

This approach is wide-ranging, boldly joining the cultural with the material, and the personal with the social. To summarize, material conditions give rise to one's personal history (or identity) which, when interpreted through some culturally specific mode of discourse, leads to a particular form of (self-)consciousness. The consciousness, in turn, enables an individual understanding of the role material conditions have had in forming one's identity. A few final points need to be made about this model. First, one's history can be multiply stranded and contradictory: consider a black woman who experiences the social world as primarily race-oppressive while dealing with white women, and as primarily gender-oppressive while dealing with black men. One may also be engaged in multiple and contradictory discourses. As a consequence, then, of consciousness' dependence on history (identity) and interpretation (discourse), one's consciousness may also be multiple and contradictory (hence "differences within the individual"). Second, an individual's consciousness is no more fixed than are modes of discourse, which evolve over time. Finally, what discourse is available is itself an object of collective struggle, with implications for who we are and how we perceive the conditions we face.

10. *Ibid.*, 197.

The Process of Change

Pratt's narrative is a graphic account of her political growth and accompanying personal change. The process begins with her becoming aware of the violence that has been done in the name of protecting her as a Southern white woman, aware of the repression that sustained her comfortable home (an awareness whose pedagogical utility we will return to in part 4). The awareness led to a severe split within herself:

I did not feel that my new understanding simply moved me into a place where I joined others to struggle *with* them against common injustices. Because I was implicated in the doing of some of these injustices, and I held myself, and my people, responsible, what my expanded understanding meant was that I felt in a struggle with myself, *against* myself. This breaking through did not feel like liberation but like destruction.¹¹

The self-destruction was transformed into a basis for action through the adoption of a political discourse, one which found additional causes for the wrongs committed beyond personal failings. Once politicized, the situation was seen as one about which something could be done and self-hatred replaced with a struggle to change. This resolution of the internal breach is, however, far from final. As discussed earlier, the political perspective cannot provide an entirely comfortable new home, a lasting freedom from strife. The struggle to change will be a continuing effort.

Discourse, then, a phenomenon in the realm of culture, has concrete effects in the material world through the political action it makes possible. A personal history, by itself, lacks power to bring about change, until it is embedded in social relations, linked to wider processes by a political discourse. (Pratt, for example, was self-destructive when she had recognized the repression but not yet adopted a political discourse.) On the other hand, an analysis of social relations, by itself, is also ineffective until given emotional reality through being instantiated on an individual level, until grounded in one's own personal history. Abstract analysis alone lacks two necessities for promoting involvement in political action.

First, personal experience is the best source of impetus to change. Pratt asks how we come to want to be different from what we have been. "Sometimes folks ask how I got started, and I must admit that I did not begin by reasoning out the gains: this came later and helped me keep going." She traces her politicization to her love for, and sexual involvement with, a particular woman: "... this love led me directly, but by a complicated way, to work against racism and anti-Semitism."¹² Second, abstract analysis cannot provide — as stories of real people, awareness of a tradition of struggle, can — the crucial assistance of instructional example. As Pratt began her activism, she "had few skills and little knowledge of how to act for justice and liberation. I had no knowledge of any woman like me who had resisted and attempted to transform our home in preceding generations; I had no knowledge of other instances of struggle, whose example might have strengthened and inspired me in mine."¹³ Social analyses and the realm of the personal are thus mutually dependent, with personal histories relied on to evoke both interest in and capacity for individual change and political discourse relied on to contextualize those histories in — and enable transformation of — social relations.

PART 2: MY OWN HOME

Having just argued that one's ideological and institutional homes influence one's apprehension of the world,¹⁴ it seems incumbent on me to provide some information

11. Pratt, "Identity: Skin Blood Heart," 35-36.

12. *Ibid.*, 19.

13. *Ibid.*, 29.

14. In the language of the previous section, those homes influence *identity* (personal history) and the availability of particular *discourses*, which together generate *consciousness* (apprehension of the world).

on my own background and how that may affect what I see in identity politics.¹⁵ One way to characterize my home is to say I am a heterosexual white male, from a middle-class Jewish family, with a largely technical education. But those names by themselves are empty categories. Their relevance is carried by the social practices they imply. If my consciousness — and consequently my manner of making sense of the world — depends on the experiences I've had and the discourse through which I interpret them, I need to ask what experiences have stemmed from those attributes and what modes of discourse they've made available.

That set of characteristics contributed to the early establishment of an expectation of receiving a good deal of schooling, of whatever sort I chose. I quickly came to assume most doors would be open to me, and indeed a career in computer science unfolded, seemingly by itself, promising material comfort, intellectual stimulation, and pleasant, relaxed working conditions. It also, however, promised an internal confrontation with my political convictions, for while acquiring my technical training I had also adopted much from the oppositional discourses existing within the same institutions.

My efforts are now predominantly directed toward undermining the sources of some of the privileges I have enjoyed. This situation naturally entails conflict. I need to justify — to myself and others — having given up some genuinely desirable benefits. But single-minded vilification of technocratic male dominance would leave no room for acknowledgment that I did accept those benefits for several years and in fact continue to support myself partly through their residual effects. The result is confusion over my personal role in these matters, lack of well-defined direction, and some paralysis: the first version of this essay was late by nearly eight months.

Pratt had conflicting reactions to the responsibility of her own people for the repression that sustained her home. She found a resolution in politicizing the situation, in seeing it in systemic terms and allying herself with a collective effort to change those terms. Similarly, the resolution to my conflict is to be found in politicizing my situation, in identifying factors responsible for the perpetuation of technocratic forms of oppression and striving to transform them. Of course, there are many dynamics involved, and consequently many candidates for where to focus my attention. I expect my work to have its theoretical center in feminism.

That may seem an odd choice for a man to make, particularly as I am aware of the necessity of doing my own work, of not living vicariously through the struggles of other people. But I believe I have much to gain from the elimination of male dominance. It is painful to live in a world split so pervasively that even the most intimate relationships are invaded by the fallout of systematically inflicted violence. I feel robbed every time I walk down a dark street and a woman eyes me as a potential rapist; I am violated, not by the woman, whose sensible caution is well-justified, but by those men who have raped and by the forms of consciousness which promote their actions and necessitate her suspicion. I feel violated when I must tell a single mother living in my housing co-op, raising her two children on what she receives for night work on an assembly line, her skin raw from the bleach in her company-provided uniform, who asks about my part-time job working with computers, that I set my own hours, am unsupervised, and paid twice her wage — and that my employer considers me underpaid, as well. I feel

15. While an autobiographical approach is unconventional in academic writing, the practice can perhaps be justified by reference to academic debates on the nature and role of ideology. Göran Therborn, for instance, asserts in *The Ideology of Power and the Power of Ideology* (London: Verso, 1980), that (a) perspectives drawn from everyday experience are legitimate and are improperly conceptualized as distortions of "real" knowledge; (b) ideologies are not filters interposed between the subject and the world, but are constitutive of who the subject is; and (c) ideologies aren't generated out of unconstrained imagination, but can be traced to preexisting ideologies, incrementally changed in accordance with the material conditions of people's lives. I read these assertions as supporting the relevance of considering how my perspective on the issues discussed in this essay is formed by my experiences and the preexisting discourses available for interpreting them. (I do, however, deviate from Therborn's commitment to the primary importance of experiences of the forces and relations of production.)

violated when I am expected to perceive and treat women primarily as (hetero)sexual beings. And I feel most intimately violated on those occasions when I do exactly that.

Like other feminist writers, I am unsure what means of expression suit my material. This essay is itself an experiment in form, borrowing from the efforts of the very writers who are its subject to recuperate the personal. I find the arcane, impersonal style of most academic writing problematic for several reasons. It is exclusive, reserving accessibility for a small coterie of cognoscenti. People with much at stake in the matters discussed are denied readership and consequently any role in evaluating the ideas presented. Second, the standard style alienates the writer from the product of his/her own labor. The injunction to keep it "objective," free of personal circumstances and thus generally applicable, devastates the link between the writer's work and his/her life. I am struggling to incorporate my life into my work, but it's awkward, it clashes with my training and my seemingly instinctual ways of perceiving the world. The result is most likely an awkward essay. Unlike Pratt's life story, which permeates and vitalizes her entire narrative, mine is confined to this section. Ideally, it would be integrated throughout; I don't yet know how to do that. Ungainly as the insertion of this section may be, it is nonetheless important: while recognizing the limits of what I can currently pull off, I must still do what I can, however incomplete.

What implications does my history, as related here, have for the rest of the essay? What does it say about how the essay should be read? It is clear that while engaged in examining identity politics, I will also be looking for something to explain and support the choices I have made; some point of view in which my own trajectory is sensible, my former involvements understandable, and my shift away from them justified. I will be hoping to find direction, some means of moving ahead. I will be seeking to ameliorate the havoc inflicted on personal relationships by social forces. In so doing, I am likely to see something different in the writings I inspect than would another reader.

PART 3: IDENTITY POLITICS AND CRITICAL EDUCATIONAL THEORY

In this section I compare identity politics with other attempts to theorize schooling in a critical framework. The intent here is not to develop an exhaustive analysis leading to some overall assessment of the value of the various approaches. I aim rather simply to indicate where some of the major differences are, so as to provide a context for the following section, dealing with educational practice. Each approach would select different features of a given situation as the most relevant, and before delving into detailed questions of pedagogical technique in part 4, I want to suggest how analyses of these particular examples drawing on identity politics will differ from ones based on alternative theoretical positions.

Three schools of thought are considered: orthodox Marxism, as represented by Bowles and Gintis; cultural Marxism, as represented by Paul Willis; and the "parallelist" position advocated by Michael Apple.¹⁶ For Bowles and Gintis, class provides one's fundamental location in social conflict, and economic matters drive events in other arenas. Willis's work is still focused on class; the economy, however, is somewhat decentered. Institutions like schools have "relative autonomy" from the economy, and the realm of culture acquires some causative role, albeit in class-linked forms. Apple contends that class, race, and gender are equally irreducible to one another. Further, the economy, culture, and the state are all potentially independent arenas of contestation. In practice, events in one will affect what happens in the others, but there is no predetermined order of precedence.¹⁷

In its criticism of totalizing notions of "woman," identity politics emphasizes the

16. Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis, *Schooling in Capitalist America* (New York: Basic Books, 1976); Paul Willis, *Learning to Labour* (Farnborough, England: Saxon House, 1977); Michael W. Apple, *Ideology and Curriculum* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979), and *Education and Power* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982).

17. There is nonetheless a tendency in his thought to accord the economy a primary role "in times of crisis."

differences existing within groups commonly perceived as sharing interests (e.g., those of race and class when speaking of women). And in its criticism of unexamined categories like "white, middle-class woman," it emphasizes the inability of such descriptions to convey the multiple and contradictory ways personal experience is organized. Or, one might say, it emphasizes the differences existing within individuals. How do the three other approaches treat the matter of differences within groups and within individuals?

Bowles and Gintis ignore both. For them, the primary groups are classes, and they say nothing about failure of subgroups' interests to coincide. Nor do they say much about contradictory aspects of individual experience; on the contrary, they concentrate on "correspondence" between aspects of experience. Willis elaborates one of these two kinds of difference and not the other. He portrays his young men as wrapped up in competing processes of "differentiation" and "integration"; each individual is eventually incorporated into a confining role within the capitalist mode of production, but not before an internal battle between tendencies to distance oneself from the dominant culture and to accommodate oneself to it, a battle whose outcome is by no means predetermined. Willis's view of groups, on the other hand, is fairly monolithic. Society is divided into two classes, and while he mentions race and gender divisions, they do not appear to have substantial impact on the primary class dynamic. Apple's parallelism is in one sense the mirror image of Willis's approach. He recognizes the fundamental differences that can rend through conventionally accepted groups but attends less than Willis to ambiguities within individuals. His acknowledgment of the multiple categories of gender, race, and class, while undermining a monolithic view of class and creating a plurality of positions, still assumes each of those positions is well defined and distinct. They interact in a simple, additive manner, without the unruly, cross-cutting effects described by writers like Pratt.¹⁸

On the matter of differences within groups, then, Apple is closest to the identity politics approach, while Bowles and Gintis and Willis apply a less elaborated notion of the constitution of groups. They consequently offer a more formalized, abstracted description of social life. The richer account provided by Apple and identity politics does, however, have its cost. The complexities it raises complicate any attempt to supply a theoretical basis for collective action. It is easier to see how the more straightforwardly defined collectivities assumed by the other authors would act together in defense of their shared interests. Deconstructing "us and them" notions of class, despite the potentially greater fidelity to lived experience, can confound theoretical support for a unity of interests.

Identity politics goes even further in this regard than does Apple. Why limit ourselves, it asks, to class, race, and gender? Other attributes (e.g., sexual preference, religion, ethnicity) are just as likely to serve as a basis for subjective identity and for the lived experience of oppression. And our theories must touch that lived experience if they are to support collective action. The point is not that all oppressions are equally consequential, but that there is slippage: one cannot a priori choose one set as always of more import. Too much slippage (in either textual or political analysis) leaves us a chaotic collection of unrelated narratives, with no overall project. But neither is it safe

18. The simplistic additiveness of "double (and triple) oppressions" is more pronounced in the work of writers drawing on Apple than in his own which (excepting his early *Ideology and Curriculum*) and emphasizes contradictions among the dynamics of gender, race, and class. By "contradictory" he means that they are independent dynamics and therefore can and sometimes do work against each other. But another kind of interaction among dynamics, stressed in identity politics, is still missing from his account: the implication of each in the very construction of the others. Being "black," for instance, means something different for men than for women. The racial category cannot even be defined in isolation from gender considerations. For Apple, while the influences of the different dynamics may conflict, each category is meaningful on its own. His work with Cameron McCarthy, however, and McCarthy's own work, moves toward a view of the intersection of the various dynamics as being more problematic, fraught with tensions and discontinuities. See my comments on this "nonsynchronous" position at the end of this section.

to ban slippage — that way leads inevitably to becoming petrified in dead rhetoric, cut off from the many meanings oppression has for the oppressed.

As for differences within individuals, Willis is closest to the identity politics approach, while Apple, and Bowles and Gintis again, presume a relatively uncomplicated internal world or at least don't attend to its complications. Michèle Barrett remarks on the value of decomposing the individual subject in her survey of various uses of the term "difference" in feminist discourse: "One of the major achievements of [one approach to difference] has been to criticize and deconstruct the 'unified subject,' whose appearance of universality disguised a constitution structured specifically around the subjectivity characteristic of the white, bourgeois man."¹⁹ But she also notes the cost, the burden of which, as with the elaboration of differences within groups, falls on the project of theorizing political action: "The assumption that the deconstructed and fragmented subject of contemporary theory is politically progressive, let alone politically powerful, remains unproven."²⁰

Another area of contrast between identity politics and the other traditions is the manner of expression chosen for communicating ideas. All three of the authors prefer a distant, professorial stance, commenting on the action from afar. Although the researchers' interests and preferences are not concealed (distinguishing this committed scholarship from mainstream varieties), an attempt is nonetheless made to quarantine their personal histories of involvement in the situations analyzed. They spurn the myth of objectivity but also recoil from the appearance of subjectivity. Writers in identity politics, on the other hand, opt for speaking in their own voices and take pains to bring their personal histories directly into the analysis, considering as well the impact of those histories on what they perceive. This theorizing of one's own experience completely inverts conventional objectivity, which holds that one is least qualified to examine oneself. Along with this change in stance comes a tolerance for uncertainty, which is to some extent shared by Willis and Apple in the areas each elaborates most (individual responses to hegemonic culture for Willis and focal dynamic for Apple).

One technique heavily emphasized in this communicative style is narrative. Usage of narrative structure compels rich inclusion of details on the concrete level and hence engagement with the multiple and contradictory aspects of lived experience. Willis's ethnographic approach, as a somewhat formalized version of narrative, enjoys a diluted form of these benefits. Other approaches can drift into unanchored abstraction, as McCarthy and Apple recognize: "[The parallelist model] is often too general and loses congruency and specificity when applied to the actual operation of race, class and gender in the institutional settings."²¹ It might benefit from an infusion of narrative; stories of real people would bring into relief the complexity of everyday life.

The approaches under consideration vary widely in their views of culture and ideology. Bowles and Gintis would hold that prevailing ideologies are functional for and shaped by capitalism. Willis allows more autonomy to the cultural realm, with no guarantee that phenomena there will serve capitalism. He still, however, expects people's eventual beliefs to reflect primarily their class position. Apple, along with writers in identity politics, asserts that race and gender dynamics (and others, for identity politics) are as instrumental in the formation of consciousness as are class dynamics. Further, both would say, one cannot simply "read off" from a cultural artifact the position, in however many dimensions, of its author. Making sense of it requires considering the historical specificities contextualizing its creation.

Where identity politics diverges from Apple's view is in its shift of emphasis from

19. Michèle Barrett, "Some Different Meanings of the Concept of 'Difference': Feminist Theory and the Concept of Ideology" (unpublished paper), 12.

20. Ibid., 12. For an argument in the affirmative, though one whose claims are difficult to characterize precisely, see Patti Lather, "Educational Research and Practice in a Postmodern Era" (paper presented at the Ninth Conference on Curriculum Theory and Classroom Practice, 1987).

21. Cameron McCarthy and Michael W. Apple, "Race, Class, and Gender in American Educational Research: Towards a Nonsynchronous Parallelist Position," in *Class, Race, and Gender in American Education*, ed. Lois Weis (Albany: SUNY Press, 1988), 24.

the encoding processes embodied in the production of culture to the decoding processes involved in individual digestion of culture.²² In addition, while other theorists might call the interpretations resulting from this digestion "false consciousness" (i.e., incorrect ideas, instilled in people, which are detrimental to their own best interests), identity politics finds the notion of false consciousness itself to be objectionable. That notion assumes the existence of a true consciousness outside all ideology, accessible perhaps to a few leisured theorists. The representational lenses people see their lives through are legitimate responses to the conditions they face, to be taken as seriously as those through which theorists see. And it so happens that for many of the marginalized, their racial and gender identity is at the center of what they experience.

Overall, it seems identity politics is a theory of change, while Bowles and Gintis, Willis, and the early Apple present theories of the status quo. They offer sophisticated explanations of the workings of the current social formation and of its mechanisms for self-perpetuation. On an intellectual level, the analyses can no doubt be useful tools for those engaged in transformative action. The image they provide, however, is a pessimistic one, suggesting a nearly indestructible system of oppression.²³ This is less true of Apple's recent work, in which patriarchal capitalism is seen as without inherent stability and needing to be continually reestablished through struggles whose outcome is uncertain. It remains true, however, that in his account the self-definitions of the various parties to the struggle are stable and well-defined. In identity politics, the apparent stability of self-definitions is considered an illusion and a barrier to real change. People are seen as locked into falsely atomistic views of themselves by fear of acknowledging the uncertain and contradictory nature of their identities. Identity politics introduces an image of a world prone to transformation, whose stability is preserved only through intimidation, a tenuous stability secured by terror.

Of these perspectives, Apple's position appears most compatible with identity politics because of his commitment to multiple, equally irreducible dynamics; his thinking on culture; and his recognition of the difficulties the parallelist model has run into. There are, of course, major disparities as well, including a residual assumption of universalism manifested in relative inattention to the complexity of decoding culture at the receiving end; the insistence on well-defined and distinct categories of gender, race, and class, and the exclusion of other forms of oppression. Cameron McCarthy has moved toward resolving these disparities in his call for a cultural politics of nonsynchrony. He identifies his project as

... stak[ing] out a field within contemporary neo-Marxist debates on culture, education, and economy in order to discuss the politics of "non-synchrony." By non-synchrony, I mean Hicks' (1981) contention that "individuals (or groups), in their relation to their economic and political system, do not share similar consciousness of that system or similar needs within it at the same point in time" (p. 221). I argue that the differential experiences and struggles of women, racial minorities, and third world people must be centrally integrated into neo-Marxist theories and strategies for education, cultural production, and social

22. In *Teachers and Texts* (New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986), Apple does examine teachers' decoding of the history of their profession, but teachers are still treated as a homogenous group, and their responses are seen as conditioned by external, structural factors.

23. In his article "Cultural Production Is Different from Cultural Reproduction Is Different from Social Reproduction Is Different from Reproduction," *Interchange* 12, no. 2/3 (1981), Willis depicts the theory underlying his ethnography *Learning to Labour* as one in which the cultural productions of the oppressed needn't necessarily reinforce the status quo. But, even though his theoretical framework allows the logical possibility of subordinate culture undermining social reproduction, nothing in *Learning to Labour* shows how that possibility might be realized. Willis certainly attributes more kinds of self-direction to the working class than Bowles and Gintis do, but the result remains much the same, with what he calls "limitations" eventually turning working-class cultural initiatives to reproductive ends.

change if these theories and strategies are to attain viability among the oppressed.²⁴

I am not certain whether McCarthy's project is best thought of as an extension of Apple's work or a challenge to it, but in any case it seems a viable synthesis of elements of that work into identity politics.

PART 4: IDENTITY POLITICS AND CRITICAL EDUCATIONAL PRACTICE

Having roughly located identity politics with respect to other approaches, I now wish to establish that it is a theory compatible with what critical educators have observed about their own practice, a theory which can be used to weave a coherent story through the literature. As the previous section has suggested, other traditions would theorize the same occurrences differently. I have not set myself the task of thoroughly investigating how their theorizations of this material would vary. What has been said already indicates what that investigation might disclose, but my goal here is narrower: simply to demonstrate that identity politics is a suitable and worthwhile explanation of some substantial collection of observations on critical educational practice. I have accordingly selected a body of literature which may facilitate that demonstration: writings on feminist pedagogy.

Personal Histories and Homes

Identity politics shares with critical educators a focus on personal experience. Earlier, while outlining what identity politics is, I argued that attention to life histories — one's own and those of one's predecessors in struggle — is a critical source of both incentive for and capacity to engage in political action toward change. Revolutionary pedagogy, feminist and otherwise, amply illustrates the practical counterpart of this theoretical commitment. Just as Freire locates the origin of *conscientização* in students' own experiences of oppression,²⁵ practitioners of feminist pedagogy also start with their students' own lives. Adrienne Rich found such a focus on her students' lives essential, both when teaching urban blacks at City College of New York and when teaching women at Douglass College, between which she found striking parallels. Here are questions she asked herself in the former situation, concerning racism:

What has been the student's experience of education in the inadequate, often abusively racist public school system, which rewards passivity and treats a questioning attitude or independent mind as a behavior problem? What has been her or his experience in a society that consistently undermines the selfhood of the poor and the non-white? How can such a student gain that sense of self which is necessary for active participation in education? What does all this mean for us as teachers?

And here are the corresponding questions for the latter situation, concerning sexism:

What has been the student's experience of education in schools which reward female passivity, indoctrinate girls and boys in stereotypic sex roles, and do not take the female mind seriously? How does a woman gain a sense of her self in a system — in this case patriarchal capitalism — which devalues work done by women, denies the importance and uniqueness of female experience,

24. Cameron McCarthy, "Marxist Theories of Education and the Challenge of a Cultural Politics of Non-synchrony" (unpublished paper), 1-2. The Hicks reference is to her "Cultural Marxism: Non-synchrony and Feminist Practice," in *Women and Revolution*, ed. Lydia Sargent (Boston: South End Press, 1981).

25. Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Continuum, 1970).

and is physically violent toward women? What does this mean for a woman teacher?²⁶

In feminist classrooms, personal experience is considered a legitimate authority to cite.²⁷ Its inclusion yields a number of observed pedagogical benefits: when incorporated into the classroom, students' lives bring in powerful affective elements, greatly enhancing motivation; reflecting on students' situations (and those of their teachers as well) can untangle otherwise inexplicable classroom interactions;²⁸ their lives can provide an effective point of entry into the subject matter;²⁹ and similarities in experience can serve as a foundation for building common understandings of the material.³⁰ To contribute fully to critical consciousness, and to be consistent with my preceding summary of identity politics, these common understandings must be linked, via a political discourse, to a larger-scale structural view. Theory is necessary, for strategic planning purposes at least, if not others, but theory must emerge out of examining personal experience.³¹

Other forms of narrative, besides analysis of students' own experiences, can also cultivate a common grounding and be politicizing. Life histories of other people,³² for instance, and dramatic pieces enacting the conflicts implicit in our lives,³³ are both potentially as valuable.

The role of the teacher is not immune from this shift to the contingent and personal. Instructors have their own perspectives, too, and the traditional proscription on subjectivity only creates an illusion of impartiality. Openly acknowledging the subjectivity which is present in any case is not surrendering authority — it is replacing a fragile, false authority with a more honest and therefore robust authority based on serious engagement with both the issues and the students. Catherine Portuges writes of her film classes:

In the more traditional pedagogy . . . the lecturer situates herself or himself *vis-à-vis* the film text in a distanced, "neutral" fashion. . . I had begun, however hesitantly, to speak with my own voice. In abandoning the perhaps illusory neutrality of the traditional pedagogical situation, instead of losing what may in fact have been a tenuous "grip," I came to acquire a new confidence and authority alongside my students.³⁴

A corollary of the emphasis on personal histories of classroom actors is a cessation of the search for single right answers. The feminist classroom instead attempts to embrace the multiple understandings of the various participants. Historically, the change in outlook coincided with, and was presumably stimulated by, the new heterogeneity of college students in the 60s and 70s, as working-class, minority, female, and older students were not satisfied with the old single answers.³⁵ Instructors have had to

26. Adrienne Rich, "Taking Women Students Seriously," in *Gendered Subjects*, ed. Margo Culley and Catherine Portuges (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985), 22-23 (first published in Adrienne Rich, *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence* [New York: W. W. Norton, 1979]).

27. Nancy Jo Hoffman, "Breaking Silences: Life in the Feminist Classroom," in *Gendered Subjects*, 150.

28. Margo Culley et al., "The Politics of Nurture," in *Gendered Subjects*, 12-13 and 16-17.

29. Diedrick Snoek, "A Male Feminist in a Women's College Classroom," in *Gendered Subjects*, 137-38.

30. Hoffman, "Breaking Silences," 150.

31. Charlotte Bunch, "Not by Degrees: Feminist Theory and Education," in *Learning Our Way: Essays in Feminist Education*, ed. Charlotte Bunch and Sandra Pollack (Trumansburg, N.Y.: The Crossing Press, 1983), 249.

32. Snoek, "A Male Feminist in a Women's College Classroom," 139.

33. Helene Keyssar, "Staging the Feminist Classroom: A Theoretical Model," in *Gendered Subjects*.

34. Catherine Portuges, "The Spectacle of Gender: Cinema and Psyche," in *Gendered Subjects*, 193.

35. Margo Culley and Catherine Portuges, "Introduction," in *Gendered Subjects*, 3.

acknowledge not only the subjectivity particularity of their own perspectives, but also the exclusion presupposed by those perspectives. Renouncing fraudulent claims to a monopoly on the truth is educationally productive: "Without a mantle of authority around me for protection against my own uncertainty, the prior aura of classroom competition dissolved and disappeared."³⁶

The identity politics conception of "home" aptly describes the instructor's situation. Certainty and security may be (and had been) found in possession of a putatively universal truth. But in fact, that truth was far from universal — it was tied to instructors' social locations (i.e., in the academy), and furthermore it rested on a repression of other points of view. Achieving a broader unity requires acknowledging as much and relinquishing the security of home. Fear of leaving home hinders making the move.

The same metaphor is applicable to students and appears repeatedly in accounts of critical educational practice. Instructors must circumvent students' adherence to a comfortable and familiar home and challenge them, despite their fears, into recognizing its limitations and exclusions.³⁷ John Schilb, in teaching a women's studies class at Denison College, had difficulty getting his students to take seriously the issue of lesbianism, until he

... required them to write an analysis of the upcoming weekend at Denison from a homosexual student's point of view. Not surprisingly, the assignment initially elicited a high degree of tension, which I tried to alleviate with the promise of richer understanding. ... [Afterwards] they exchanged dozens of stories about how the community expresses fears of homosexuality, through loud jokes and whispered accusations. ... The assignment helped them locate their own sexual insecurities in the context of rampant social coercion, whatever their preferences might actually happen to be. By recording the language of others, composing their own written discourse, and speaking about the whole process as a group, privileged students did manage to connect problems of their particular lives to those of the blatantly tormented.³⁸

Similar techniques are used in workshops on racism for white women. First comes enabling them to perceive the racism embedded in their practices and attitudes, then helping them move "from guilty awareness to positive action"³⁹ through adoption of a political discourse of change. Theater classes can also be thought of in these terms. Helene Keyssar describes the confusion and struggle inherent in staging a feminist play, as all the participants come to recognize the necessity of surrendering their own comfortable preconceptions in order to achieve unity in the performance. Linda Christian-Smith's analysis of adolescent romance novels also stresses notions of home and the fostering of a terrorized attachment to it, based on doubt about one's capacity to survive outside it.⁴⁰ Nearly all the novels she studied equated the security of a physical home with that promised by romantic relationships, and most promoted a pursuit of romance based on an analogous fear of being left without a secure emotional "home."⁴¹ That fear is effective persuasion to rely on romance for emotional sustenance, even when the promised security fails to materialize, as is often the case in novels from what Christian-Smith labels Period II (1963-1979). For black female characters, the false appeal of romance is reinforced by the prospect of evading mistreatment by white men.

36. Robert J. Bezucha, "Feminist Pedagogy as a Subversive Activity," in *Gendered Subjects*, 90.

37. Comments along these lines, with respect to teaching women writers, can be found in Sue Dove Gambill, "The Women's Writer's Center: An Interview with the Directors," in *Learning Our Way*, 206-7.

38. John Schilb, "Pedagogy of the Oppressors?," in *Gendered Subjects*, 262-63.

39. Marilyn Murphy, "Califia Community," in *Learning Our Way*, 151.

40. Linda Christian-Smith (formerly Christian), "Becoming a Woman through Romance" (Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1984), 93-96, 103.

41. *Ibid.*, chap. 4, esp. 139, 154-55.

On the surface, romance contains the possibility of an escape from harsh waged labor into the tranquility of the home. It also offers protection from sexual exploitation by white men. On a deeper level, romance paves the way for further immiseration through the added responsibility of family obligations in the form of supporting children on meager wages that may require them to work outside of their homes. Within their own romances, women of color are subjected to oppressions generated from the specific structure of romance that is often concealed under the guise of the need for solidarity in the face of the massive oppression that peoples of color collectively experience.⁴²

One tactic often used to raise students' awareness of their unacknowledged ideological homes is to examine and reinterpret their pasts. Pratt's essay offers a prototype of this approach; in reflecting on her relationship to her father, "she reconstructs it by uncovering knowledges, not only the knowledge of those Others who were made invisible to her as a child but also the suppressed knowledge of her own family background."⁴³ Another of Schilb's class assignments followed the same pattern: "They had to consider what it meant to be black or white or male or female at their high school, choosing a category to which they did *not* belong. They would thereby be reviewing their personal backgrounds, yet in an unfamiliar light, one that encompassed people whose orientation they had not shared."⁴⁴ In both cases, learning to perceive past events from new perspectives, those of people whom they had — perhaps unwittingly — excluded, compels students to *become* aware of the exclusion and its effects.

Another example of reconstructing the past (though without the element of adopting the outsider's perspective) is found in Terry Wolverton's description of her antiracist consciousness-raising group for white women. They discussed their sexual fears of black men — about which they felt considerable guilt — and in assessing their collective experiences discovered how their fears had been cultivated and manipulated by others, particularly parents, apparently in order to inculcate support for racism and to "terrorize [them] into accepting the 'protection' of white men." Having discerned the outlines of an attitudinal home and having reinterpreted it through a politicizing discourse, they were able to move past the guilt and fear and resume their "fight against violence against women without falling into complicity with racism."⁴⁵

The "past" being reconstructed need not be a personal one. In Portuges's film class, reexamination of the shared cultural heritage of classic American films proved fruitful. Students discovered about a treasured portion of their cultural inheritance "that those revered movies were not only laden with unrealistic and unfavorable portraits of female characters, but also contained and embodied innumerable instances of misogyny, in plot and theme, or masked within costumes, lighting, editing and tone."⁴⁶

All these examples of establishing consciousness of a home, whether through reconstructing the past or through other means, share a common set of features — features which match the identity politics conception of home. First, the very existence of the home may be obscured. It must be demonstrated that a given perspective is not universal, that one has ideological affiliations. A second shared feature is that the home will be based on a repressive exclusion of others' perspectives. Finally, commitment to it will be secured through fear of being — in some sense which varies with the kind of home — on one's own, stripped of institutional support: "For us as teachers, revealing ourselves as human beings is especially frightening and perilous, for it means we divest ourselves of what little institutional protection and power we possess [as women], making us doubly vulnerable."⁴⁷ Achieving some unity beyond the initial home

42. *Ibid.*, 285.

43. Martin and Mohanty, "Feminist Politics," 200.

44. Schilb, "Pedagogy of the Oppressors?" 261.

45. Terry Wolverton, "Unlearning Complicity, Remembering Resistance: White Women's Anti-Racism Education," in *Learning Our Way*, 195.

46. Portuges, "The Spectacle of Gender: Cinema and Psyche," 187.

47. Culley et al., "The Politics of Nurture," 19.

requires moving past the guilt (over the nature of the home) and fear (of leaving it); viewing the home through a politicizing discourse can do just that, replacing guilt and fear with a commitment to bring about change: "Our admitted histories and contexts, when subjected to examination, can alter the form and content of how we learn and teach" (emphasis added).⁴⁸

Difference, Identity, and Ideology

We saw earlier that identity politics objects to totalization, insisting rather that the inadequacy of overly general groupings be recognized. Differences, for example, among women of various classes, races, ethnicities, and sexual preferences are sometimes neglected in sweeping statements about "women." Christian-Smith found that the adolescent romance novels do exactly that.⁴⁹ They present a monolithic image of ideal femininity, without regard for differences of class and race. The image, in fact, is drawn from petty-bourgeois consumptive and cultural patterns and imposed as an ideal on everyone. It is not, of course, in keeping with the realities of working-class life, for instance the necessity of waged labor for both partners in a marriage. The presented ideal similarly overlooks factors specific to the experiences of nonwhite girls: "Femininity as a culturally constructed message system does not contain the same sets of meanings for all girls. The common experiences of oppression of Indians and Blacks combine to establish a community of interests between males and females which disguises concerns unique to females."⁵⁰ We have already seen one example of this dynamic: a desire to avoid exploitation by white men obscures for black female characters the oppression they will experience within marriage as *women*.

A second kind of difference stressed in identity politics is that occurring within individuals, resulting from the multiple and contradictory strands of personal experience. One striking example of this difference within is the bodily alienation evident in the novels Christian-Smith studied.⁵¹ The "code of beautification" embedded in the novels holds that the typical girl's physical appearance is initially deficient and needs painstaking alteration (via cosmetics, hair styling, clothing selection, etc.) in order to attract a male partner. In executing this transformation, a female must take on a dual role, viewing her body from a male perspective as well as her own, as Sandra Bartky has observed:

Knowing that she is to be subjected to the cold appraisal of the male connoisseur and that her life prospects may depend on how she is seen, a woman learns to appraise herself first. The sexual objectification of women produces a duality in feminine consciousness. The gaze of the Other is internalized so that I myself become at once seer and seen, appraiser and the thing appraised.⁵²

A gap thus opens between her direct occupancy of her body and a once-removed, objectifying assessment of its appeal: "On the one hand, I *am* it and am scarcely allowed to be anything else; on the other hand, I must exist perpetually at a distance from my physical self, fixed at this distance in a permanent posture of disapproval."⁵³

Christian-Smith argues that such intra-individual dynamics contribute to social forms of control.⁵⁴ To the extent a reader absorbs the ideology embodied by the novels (and in Christian-Smith's analysis, her doing so is not a given) she will seek self-affirmation in the realms of romance and the family; events there will determine her self-esteem. But a larger social structure containing those spheres mandates male

authority within them. So construction of individual identity has political implications: to the degree that their identities are affixed to romance and family, women become subject to male control over their well-being.

While Christian-Smith's view of identity construction highlights personal experience and emotional factors, it does not psychologize identity. Rather than looking exclusively at the internal life, the analysis links it to structural factors through an emphasis on the relationality of identity. Adolescent girls' beautification practices are not meaningful by themselves. Their meaning resides in the anticipated male reaction; in the relations to be established with boys (and later men); in male dominance expressed in romance and the family. "Self-confirmation takes place *within a relationship* that heavily favors male power and authority" (emphasis added).⁵⁵ Christian-Smith also applies a relational view of identity to the intersection of gender and race.⁵⁶ Who a girl is, the contours of her life, her options and the implications of her choices, all depend on her membership in a racial group or, more accurately, on that group's relations with other groups.

We have now seen concrete examples of what is meant by the claim, outlined in the first section of this essay, that consciousness is a combined product of one's personal history and of the modes of discourse selected to interpret that material history. Individual subjectivities are of political import, and, in Christian-Smith's phrasing, ideologies "participate in the constitution of the individual as subject."⁵⁷

CONCLUSION

Our theories of critical pedagogy should be grounded in what has been learned from successful practice. The critical educators discussed above have found the following to be crucial: personal histories (of student, of instructors, of historical actors) must be explicitly introduced into the classroom for their explanatory, motivational, and integrating power; these histories must be related to systemic factors; multiple understandings of any given situation must be admitted, implying subversion of self-proclaimed monopolies on legitimacy which exclude the perspectives of oppressed peoples; finally, the internally conflicted nature of supposedly unitary groups — and individuals — must be acknowledged and examined. The concerns of identity politics closely match the concerns of radical practitioners; other theoretical approaches neglect them. The neglect has been devastating for the Marxist project in American education. For political action centered on transforming the schools to take place, the rhetoric of recruitment must resonate with people's experiences. The political discourse must link individual experiences and the structural conditions targeted for eradication.

Identity politics offers a valuable perspective on the complex tangle of the ideological and the material confronting the critical educator; one which, through its focus on the construction of identity, contributes considerably to meeting the challenge of fashioning a coherent theoretical account of the developments in educational practice recounted here. As remarked upon in part 3, that perspective's strengths carry with them some difficulties not encountered by other approaches. It remains to be seen how those can be addressed within the identity politics paradigm, but we do have a promising beginning and already much accomplished. Ignoring the contribution would be unwise. And — recalling Cameron McCarthy's warning of the imperative need to integrate the differential experiences of women, minorities, and third-world people into critical theories and strategies for change — dangerous, as well.

55. *Ibid.*, 211.

56. *Ibid.*, 275-86.

57. *Ibid.*, 5.

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48. *Ibid.*

49. Christian-Smith, "Becoming a Woman through Romance," chap. 7.

50. *Ibid.*, 284.

51. *Ibid.*, chap. 5, esp. 169, 173, 177, 181-82, 210-11.

52. Sandra Bartky, "Narcissism, Femininity and Alienation," *Social Theory and Practice* 8, no. 2 (Summer 1982): 134.

53. *Ibid.*, 136.

54. Christian-Smith, "Becoming a Woman through Romance," 405.