INTRODUCTION

The relationship between power and institutions is an intimate one. Institutions exist to the extent that they are powerful – the extent to which they affect the behaviors, beliefs and opportunities of individuals, groups, organizations and societies. Institutions are enduring patterns of social practice (Hughes, 1936), but they are more than that: institutions are those patterns of practice for which ‘departures from the pattern are counteracted in a regulated fashion, by repetitively activated, socially constructed, controls – that is by some set of rewards and sanctions’ (Jepperson, 1991: 145). Thus, power, in the form of repetitively activated controls, is what differentiates institutions from other social constructions (Phillips, Lawrence & Hardy, 2004). The relationship between power and institutions is also bi-directional. A significant stream of research has documented the processes through which actors, individual and collective, affect the institutional contexts within which they work (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). This brings agency and interests directly into the relationship between power and institutions (DiMaggio, 1988), and has been examined primarily under the rubric of institutional entrepreneurship (see Chapter 7 in this volume for an overview of this literature), and increasingly also in terms of the role of social movements in institutional change (see Chapter 27 in this volume).

The relationship between power and institutions was ignored in early neo-institutional theory but has been addressed in more recent institutional studies of organization. The first wave of neo-institutional research in the late 1970s and 1980s focused primarily on institutions as myths and ceremony (Meyer & Rowan, 1977), and in so doing tended to avoid language that would associate institutions and power. The research in this period concentrated significantly on demonstrating that enduring organizational structures and practices were often the result of institutional processes, and especially mimetic processes whereby organizations adopted practices based on a need for legitimacy or to avoid uncertainty, rather than some ‘rational’ search for efficiency or effectiveness (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Hinings &
Greenwood, 1988; Tolbert & Zucker, 1983). More recent work on institutions has moved away from the focus on demonstrating the, usually isomorphic, effects of institutions to exploring the roles of conflict, politics and agency in the evolution of organizational fields. This includes work that examines the political effects of competing institutional logics (Thornton, 2002; Thornton & Ocasio, 1999), the role of institutional arrangements in creating political opportunities and mediating the influence of political actors (Amenta & Halfmann, 2000; Amenta & Zylan, 1991; Bartley & Schneiberg, 2002), the intersection of social movements and institutional change (Lounsbury, 2001; Lounsbury, Ventresca & Hirsch, 2003), and the role of institutional entrepreneurs in creating and transforming institutional conditions (DiMaggio, 1988; Garud, Jain & Kumaraswamy, 2002; Maguire, Hardy & Lawrence, 2004).

These recent streams of research point to the importance of considering power and politics when examining institutions and institutional change. They demonstrate that incorporating power is critical to understanding how institutions operate in society and their relationship to organizations. Drawing principally on case studies of organizational fields or instances of social policy, this work has provided significant insights with respect to the dynamics of institutional politics (Bartley & Schneiberg, 2002; Stryker, 1994, 2000) and the institutional strategies associated with different kinds of actors or different contexts (Greenwood & Suddaby, 2006; Lawrence, 1999; Maguire et al., 2004). Missing in this work, however, is a systematic, theoretical consideration of the relationship between power and institutions.

In this chapter, I begin to address this issue by developing an organizing framework for understanding the multi-dimensional relationship between power and institutions, and exploring some of the implications of that framework. I argue that the relationship between power and institutions has three dimensions — institutional control, institutional agency, and institutional resistance — each of which describes an aspect of how institutions and actors relate to each other in terms of power relations. Institutional control involves the effects of institutions on actors’ beliefs and behavior; institutional agency describes the work of actors to create, transform and disrupt institutions; and, institutional resistance represents the attempts of actors to impose limits on institutional control and institutional agency. Although each of these dimensions has been the subject of significant study, either within the institutional literature or, in the case of institutional resistance, outside that literature, there has been little recognition either of the fundamental role of power in each case, or in their status as elements of an interlocking system of institutional politics.

I develop and explore this framework in four steps. First, I outline the notion of institutional politics and each of its three dimensions. The second and third sections examine institutional control and institutional agency, respectively. In each of those sections, I first discuss relevant institutional research, and then turn to forms of power that might underpin each dimension — discipline and domination in the case of institutional control, and influence and force in the case of institutional agency. I conclude each of those sections with a discussion of resistance. I argue that the dynamics of institutional resistance depend on the form of power to which it is a reaction, and so embed my discussion of institutional resistance within the sections on institutional agency and institutional control, rather than treating it separately. I conclude the paper with an exploration of a set of issues that emerge from the framework and point to some future directions for research on power, organizations and institutions.

**THE POLITICS OF INSTITUTIONS**

**Overview**

Holm’s (1995) study of institutional change in Norwegian fisheries highlights the potential
analytical power of adopting an explicitly political stance on institutions and institutional change, as well as suggesting the contours of what a political perspective on institutions might look like. Holm's (1995: 398) analysis explains the 'rise and fall of a specific institutional form, the mandated sales organization (MSO), in Norwegian fisheries', focusing on the 'interconnection between the practical and political levels of action', and the 'interaction of practices, interests, and ideas'. This work highlights the power of a number of institutions and a range of political/institutional strategies. I draw on it here to illustrate the theoretical framework for connecting power and institutions that I develop in the rest of the chapter.

The central institutional battle (Hoffman, 1999) in Holm's (1995) story is between the fishers and the fish merchants of Norway. Holm's (1995: 404) first example of institutional change in this battle provides a clear example of the relationship between power and institutions:

The fishermen's common interest lay in restricting the supply of herring, which would bring better prices. As long as they acted individually, this option was not available. To solve their dilemma, the fishermen had to set up a rule system that allowed them to market their herring collectively. ... If we simply assume that the fishermen in this situation were rational and acted individually, we cannot account for the fact that [the rule system] was established and successfully organized the herring trade for two years without legal protection. To explain this, we must look into the pattern of interaction among the fishermen. The herring fishery in question was largely concentrated both in time and geographically, and the fishermen largely came from the same area, had the same social background, and operated the same type of technology.

The rule system enacted by the fishermen is a classic example of an institution – a set of practices, for which compliance is enforced through social and cultural mechanisms, in this case implicitly through mechanisms of surveillance and shaming that are made possible by dense patterns of interaction and common cultural backgrounds (Douglas, 1973). This institution effected a set of power relations, directly between the rules and the fishermen, and indirectly between the fishermen and the fish merchants who now faced a powerful, organized collective actor, rather than a set of relatively weak, unorganized individual fishermen.

In further describing this example, Holm (1995:405) points to a second type of relationship between power and institutions.

A rule making all fishermen sell their catch through the organization, enforced by police and the legal apparatus of the Norwegian state, would immediately solve the free-rider problem. Mobilizing the state's power behind the fishermen's institutional project in this way was not a simple matter, however. It would require, first, that the fishermen's problem could be made so important that it warranted a place on the political agenda; second, that the fishermen's solution would survive through the various stages of the decision-making process; and third, that the required number of votes be cast in their favor.

Thus, the system of rules that would bind the fishermen together and unite them against the fish merchants did not just appear, but required significant, complex forms of institutional work (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). In order to institutionalize the rule in law, the fishermen would need to engage in discursive strategies intended to frame the problem as important, as well as building and leveraging relationships with governmental actors who could shepherd the project through the bureaucracy. Thus, as much as institutions are connected to power through their impact on the beliefs and behaviors of actors, they are also connected to power through the strategies of actors that are intended to transform institutional arrangements through political means.

The contours of power and institutions in Holm's (1995) study illustrate the theoretical framework that guides the exploration of power and institutions in the rest of this chapter. These contours represent what I refer to as the 'institutional politics' of a situation. The concept of institutional politics, I argue,
has three dimensions which need to be taken into account in order to understand how and why institutional arenas are shaped and changed in the way they are (see Figure 6.1). Each of these dimensions describes a role that power plays in shaping the relationship between institutions and actors. I describe the first role of power as ‘institutional control’, and illustrate it with the solid-line arrow pointing from ‘Institutions’ to ‘Actors’ in Figure 6.1. Institutional control describes the impact of institutions on the behaviors and beliefs of individual and organizational actors. In research that has highlighted this role, power is present but usually appears only indirectly, observable primarily through the compliance of organizational actors to institutional rules and norms (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Tolbert & Zucker, 1983).

The second role of power is ‘institutional agency’, represented in Figure 6.1 by the solid-line arrow pointing from Actors to Institutions. Institutional agency is conceived of here as the work of individual and collective actors to create, transform, and disrupt institutions. Research that has highlighted this role has made power explicit, highlighting the connection between power and agency, and the influence of actors on institutional arrangements (DiMaggio, 1988; Greenwood et al., 2002; Maguire et al., 2004; Greenwood & Suddaby, 2006).

The third, and least well-understood role of power with respect to institutions is what I refer to as ‘institutional resistance’ – the work of actors to impose limits on both institutional agency and institutional control. Although this role of power was highlighted by Oliver (1991), its dynamics have been relatively neglected in most institutional studies of organization. The interplay of these three roles in an organizational field can be described as the ‘institutional politics’ of a situation.

**Power and institutional politics**

Before exploring each dimension of institutional politics in the rest of this section,
I want to first provide an overview of the approach I take to power in this chapter, and the specific terminology I adopt. The study of power has long been a central element of organization studies, with a large and long-standing literature on what leads to individuals, groups and organizations gaining power relative to others (Bachrach & Lawler, 1980; Brass, 1984; Clegg & Dunkerly, 1984; Hickson, Hinings, Schneck & Pennings, 1972; Jermier, Knights & Nord, 1994; Mintzberg, 1983; Pfeffer, 1981; Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978). The variety of approaches and theories has meant that the concept of power has been defined in a wide range of ways. In this chapter, I adopt the view that power is a property of relationships such that the beliefs or behaviors of an actor are affected by another actor or system. Thus, power is a relational phenomenon, rather than a commodity (Clegg, 1989; Courpasson & Phillips, 2006; Foucault, 1977): it is understood here as an effect of social relations, rather than something an actor can ‘have’, ‘hold’ or ‘keep in reserve’. So, when I talk about power in this chapter, I do not refer to a capacity for effect, but rather the aspect of relationships in which there is an effect.

This definition of power leads to a distinction between two basic modes in which power operates and which corresponds in large part to the dimensions of institutional politics described above. The first mode of power is ‘episodic’, which refers to relatively discrete, strategic acts of mobilization initiated by self-interested actors (Clegg, 1989; Courpasson & Phillips, 2006; Foucault, 1977): it is understood here as an effect of social relations, rather than something an actor can ‘have’, ‘hold’ or ‘keep in reserve’. As illustrated in Figure 6.1, I argue that institutional agency is underpinned by episodic forms of power. Institutional agency requires actors to mobilize resources, engage in institutional contests over meanings and practices, develop, support or attack forms of discourse and practice – all involving discrete, strategic acts of mobilization. In this chapter, I explore two forms of episodic power that I argue are fundamental to institutional agency – influence and force. I further argue that institutional control is associated with systemic forms of power. As discussed above, Jepperson (1991) argues that institutions are associated with automatic forms of regulation that enforce compliance, without involving episodes of action on the part of interested actors. Regulations, norms and taken-for-granted understandings have their roots, of course, in self-interested behavior, but once established and associated with sets of social, cultural or cognitive ‘stakes’ (Bourdieu, 1993), institutional control operates as if significantly independent of any particular agent, or at least independent of the interests of such an agent. In examining the relationship between institutional control and systemic forms of power, I concentrate here on two such forms – discipline and domination.

INSTITUTIONAL CONTROL

The concept of institutional control parallels the classic sociological notion of ‘social
control’, which ‘referred to the capacity of a society to regulate itself according to desired principles and values’ (Janowitz, 1975: 82). Working from an institutional perspective, our concern is not with the ability of societies to regulate themselves, but with the ways in which institutions organize, encourage and diminish particular forms of thought and action in organizational fields. Thus, there are two important conceptual shifts in moving from a focus on social control to institutional control. First, consistent with the more general shift in discussions of power (Clegg et al., 2006), institutional control is not understood as a capacity but as a relational effect of institutions on actors. The second shift is toward an understanding of social systems as fragmented, contested arenas in which coherent sets of ‘desired principles and values’, are less likely than are competing and conflicting principles and values enacted in discourse and action (Dyck & Schroeder, 2005; Hoffman, 1999).

In order to clarify the nature and scope of institutional control, we can contrast it with resource dependence as a basis for inter-organizational control. Drawing on exchange theory (Emerson, 1962), Pfeffer and Salancik (1978) argue that the critical determinant of power among organizations is the control of the flow of resources, such as money, physical resources, capital, and human resources. Institutional theories also recognize the importance of resource flows as a control mechanism (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; W. R. Scott, 2001), but resource dependence theory is not a theory of institutional control: theories of institutional control focus on those aspects of a field which regulate behavior on an ongoing basis, and set ‘the rules of the game’ (Holm, 1995; Lawrence, 1999), including coercive and resource-based forms of control, but also including many other forms of control, such as social and professional norms, and taken-for-granted assumptions about the world. Resource dependence arguments also go beyond institutional concerns, dealing with any actor-to-actor relationship shaped by mutual resource interdependence, whether it is an institutional phenomenon or an ad hoc, momentary negotiation (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978). Thus, institutional and resource dependence theories constitute overlapping domains of concern rather than competing explanations; both approaches deal with resource-based institutional control, but each also includes other non-overlapping areas of interest.

Studies of institutional control

Early neo-institutional writing on organizations, beginning with Meyer and Rowan’s (1977), and DiMaggio and Powell’s (1983) classic pieces, focused significantly on institutional control, but left out an explicit consideration of power. Meyer and Rowan’s (1977) discussion of ‘formal structure as myth and ceremony’ provided a powerful set of images for understanding the nature of institutional control. Meyer and Rowan’s (1977) central argument was that ‘organizations are driven to incorporate the practices and procedures defined by prevailing rationalized concepts of organizational work and institutionalized in society’ (Meyer & Rowan, 1977: 340). Most critical to how research on institutional control developed is their idea that organizational environments are constituted by powerful myths that are ‘highly institutional, and thus in some measure beyond the discretion of any individual participant or organization’ (Meyer & Rowan, 1977: 344). DiMaggio and Powell’s (1983) examination of institutional isomorphism and collective rationality extended the focus on compliance with powerful institutions, which led both to compliance and the homogenization of organizational fields. DiMaggio and Powell’s (1983) three sources of institutional control – mimetic, normative, coercive – have become a taken-for-granted feature of institutional theories of organization. Each of these describes a class of mechanisms which regulate the behavior of actors in a field through social and cultural systems rather than
through enforcement by a self-interested actor.

The first stream of empirical research that emerged out of these theoretical discussions focused on the diffusion of innovation within fields, and also largely ignored the role of power (Baron, Dobbin & Jennings, 1986; Leblebici, Salancik, Copay & King, 1991; Mezias & Scarselletta, 1994; Slack & Hinings, 1994; Strang & Soule, 1998; Tolbert & Zucker, 1983; Westphal, Gulati & Shortell, 1997). This work demonstrated that the adoption of innovations depends significantly on the influence of social and cultural systems which reduce uncertainty and provide legitimacy and other resources to adopting organizations. The classic institutional argument regarding the diffusion of innovation has been that, as new practices are adopted for technical reasons by leading organizations, the practices gain legitimacy which spurs adoption by other organizations, which avoid cognitive uncertainty and normative sanction by mimicking the early adopters (Tolbert & Zucker, 1983).

A second stream of work has brought power more directly into institutional discussions, examining the relationship between institutions and control in organizations and inter-organizational networks. This work connects institutional research to the work of Foucault and Bourdieu, through its focus on cultural and social systems that effect institutional control within and across organizations (Covaleski et al., 1998; Oakes, Townley & Cooper, 1998; Lawrence et al., 2001; Townley, 1997; Townley, 2002). Oakes et al. (1998), for instance, draw on the work of Bourdieu to examine business planning as a mechanism of institutional control in a government department. Central to their findings is the idea that the effectiveness of institutional control comes from ‘both redirecting work and changing the identity of producers’; in their case, business plans are described as a ‘pedagogic practice that can fundamentally change organizational identities’ (Oakes et al., 1998: 257). Consistent with other work in this stream of research, Oakes et al. (1998) argue that the most effective forms of power with respect to maintaining institutional control are those which are associated with little or no visible conflict (Covaleski et al., 1998; Lawrence et al., 2001; Townley, 1997).

**Power and institutional control**

Looking across the theoretical and empirical writing on institutional control, it is clear that much of this work has left out any explicit consideration of power. There is, however, an image of power that is consistent with, though often implicit in, this work. Both the earlier institutional discussions of control which largely ignored power and the more recent work that brings it in directly are consistent with a conception of power as vested in social and cultural systems, rather than in individual actors. This approach to power is consistent with recent work in the sociology of power that describes it as ‘systemic’ – power that works through routine, ongoing practices to advantage particular groups without those groups necessarily establishing or maintaining those practices (Clegg, 1989; Foucault, 1977; Laclau & Mouffe, 1985). These forms of power tend to work in an ongoing, prosaic fashion that are often not apparent as forms of power (Covaleski et al., 1998; Townley, 1993). Understanding power as potentially systemic is not intended to attribute ‘will’ or ‘agency’ to systems (social or technological), but rather to break any simple association between agency and power (Clegg, 1989; Foucault, 1977). From an institutional perspective, it seems important to embrace a definition of power that recognizes the power of the courts, professional associations, language, and social customs, as well as the actors that occupy roles within these structures and who enact these routines. Indeed, a cornerstone of an institutional perspective is the idea that actors are subject to forms of power that are disconnected from the interests and actions of specific others (Meyer & Rowan, 1977).
When considering systemic forms of power, it is useful to differentiate between two major forms, one of which has received attention in the institutional literature, and one which has largely been ignored. The concept of power that is most closely connected to studies of institutional control is Foucault’s (1977) notion of discipline; although not explicitly evoked in most institutional research, the idea of power exercised through mundane practices that revolve significantly around the constitution of identity is core to much, and especially recent, writing on institutional control (Oakes et al., 1998; Thornton & Ocasio, 1999). Discipline as a form of power involves an ongoing, systemic engagement with the target of power, and relies on the agency of that target to have an effect (Clegg, 1989; Covaleski et al., 1998; Jacques, 1995; Knights & Wilmott, 1989). Discipline works through the micro-techniques, practices and procedures of everyday life (Sewell, 1998; Sewell & Wilkinson, 1992; Townley, 1993), and consequently is often overlooked as a form of power in organizations. An aspect of discipline that is critical for its role as a basis for institutional control is its capacity to provide a basis for agency through the formation of identity (Knights & Wilmott, 1989). Discipline is concerned with shaping the actual formation of the subject, such that: ‘subjects come to recognize themselves as discrete and autonomous individuals whose sense of a clear identity is sustained through participation in social practices which are a condition and consequence of the exercise of power’ (Knights & Wilmott, 1989: 538).

Thus, disciplinary practices involve a form of power that can be understood as positive in its provision of identity and motivation to organizational actors (Foucault, 1984).

A wonderful example of discipline as a basis for institutional control comes from its use in the Ford Motor Company in the early 20th century, as recounted in Stephen Meyer III’s (1981), *The Five Dollar Day*. Although Henry Ford ran the Ford Motor Company and was responsible for many of its effects, he was particularly aware of the need to embed power in institutions which could control the behavior of employees (and others) without direct episodes of managerial agency. The Ford Motor Company’s use of discipline as a means of institutional control stemmed from the problems it was facing with respect to its employees that were created in part by the assembly line technology. In 1914, the company’s annual turnover rate was 416 percent and daily absenteeism ran between 10 percent and 20 percent. In response, Ford established another corporate institution, when it launched the ‘Five Dollar Day’ – a profit-sharing plan that would apply to 90 percent of its workforce, a plan so out of the ordinary that the *Wall Street Journal* accused Ford of promoting socialism. A central aspect of the program was the set of conditions that dictated who was eligible to benefit from it. Ford would only provide the profit sharing to those it deemed to be living a moral life, including ‘every male employee over 22 years of age who leads a clean, sober and industrious life, and who can prove he has thrifty habits’, and ‘[a]ll women employed by the company who are deserving and who have some relatives solely dependent upon them for support’.

Alongside these rules, Ford established a Sociological Department, which investigated the home lives of Ford workers in order to ascertain eligibility, and actively intervened with training and advice intended to lift standards of morality and living conditions. The Sociological Department focused particularly on Ford’s newly immigrated workers, who, as Henry Ford expressed, ‘must be taught American ways, the English language, and the right way to live’. To that end, compulsory courses at the Ford English School included, ‘industry and efficiency’, ‘thrift and economy’, ‘domestic relations’, and ‘community relations’.

Although disciplinary power is an important and pervasive mechanism underpinning institutions, other important forms of systemic power have been largely overlooked in institutional studies of organization.
In particular, institutional research has tended to ignore systemic power that works by altering the range of options available to actors – a form of power I describe as domination (Lawrence et al., 2001). This form of power can be embedded in a wide variety of social systems including material technologies (Noble, 1984; Shaiken, 1984), information systems, and actuarial practices (Simon, 1988). In the context of institutional control, systems of domination often take the form of physical and social technologies that provide the context for action. The physical layouts of office building, factories and universities, for example, institutionalize particular patterns of interaction among workers, and are often overlooked as political mechanisms (Brown, Lawrence & Robinson, 2005). Winner’s (1986) examination of the politics of artifacts examines numerous instances of this, with the most famous being the many overpasses on Long Island, New York, which are so low that they do not permit 12-foot high public buses to use the parkways over which those overpasses go. Winner (1986: 23) argues that this effect is not happenstance, but rather that it was an intentional control strategy of Robert Moses, the chief architect of New York public works from the 1920s to the 1970s. Winner argues that Moses specified the overpasses in this way because: ‘Poor people and blacks, who normally used public transit were kept off the roads because the twelve-foot tall buses could not handle the overpasses’ and were consequently limited in their access to ‘Jones Beach, Moses’ widely acclaimed public park’ (Winner, 1986: 23).

A more subtle form of institutional control through domination is that which is embedded in systems that restrict the effects of action, rather than restrict action itself, as illustrated by a wide range of actuarial practices. Actuarial practices involve the use of statistics to represent the characteristics of a population, including the use of standardized tests of intelligence, aptitude or personality, the construction of probability tables reflecting life expectancies and other life chances, and the definition of demographic categories (Simon, 1988). While these familiar practices seem relatively banal and benign, they represent a significant shift in the production and structuring of power relations in societies:

Through the lens of representations thrown off by these practices, individuals, once understood as moral or rational actors, are increasingly understood as locations in actuarial tables of variations. This shift from moral agent to actuarial subject marks a change in the way power is exercised on individuals by the state and other large organizations. Where power once sought to manipulate the choice of rational actors, it now seeks to predict behavior and situate subjects according to the risks they pose. (Simon, 1988: 772)

Thus, actuarial practices involve a form of restrictive institutional control in which the lives of individuals are transformed, not through their own actions, but through their placement in a social order abstracted from their lived experiences.

Although discipline and domination both work though routine practices and systems, there is a critical difference between the two. Whereas disciplinary practices involve ‘knowing’ the individual through regimes of surveillance and training (Foucault, 1977; Townley, 1993), systems of domination work by ‘knowing’ the population. Disciplinary mechanisms of surveillance, normalization and examination all work to construct an image of the ‘normal’ subject in any defined social space, move actors toward uniformity and punish deviants. In contrast, systems of domination ‘map out the distribution and arrange strategies to maximize efficiency of the population as it stands’ (Simon, 1988). While the disciplinary practices replaced techniques of coercion and intimidation that were less precise and engendered overt conflict (Clegg, 1989; Foucault, 1977), systems of domination draw on our knowledge of populations to extend this process even further, constructing even more precise systems of institutional control which engender even less overt conflict.
**Resisting institutional control**

Studies of resistance in the social sciences are not rare. They tend, however, to focus on either resistance to broad, societal norms and values (Kirsch, 2000), or on resistance to managerial control in organizations (Jermier, Knights & Nord, 1994). Much less studied is the resistance of individuals and organizations to field-level rules, norms, and beliefs. In this chapter, I adopt Barbalet's (1985: 531) position, that 'resistance imposes limits on power. Indeed, it is through its limitations on power that resistance contributes to the outcome of power relations'. Thus, institutional resistance is understood as the work of actors to impose limits on institutional control and institutional agency.

The first prominent recognition of institutional resistance is in Oliver's (1991) discussion of the wide range of potential responses to institutional pressures in which actors might engage: 'organizational responses [to institutional pressures] will vary from conforming to resistant, from impotent to influential, and from habitual to opportunistic' (Oliver, 1991: 151). Oliver argues that actors potentially respond to institutional pressures with five basic strategies that range from the most passive to the most active: 'acquiesce', 'compromise', 'avoid', 'defy', and 'manipulate'. All but the end points of this set involve attempting to impose limits on institutional control and thus constitute forms of institutional resistance. Despite Oliver's (1991) clear and influential statement regarding the importance of institutional resistance, it has remained the most neglected aspect of institutional politics. The 'acquiesce' strategy has been the dominant response described in studies of institutional control (e.g., Hinings & Greenwood, 1988; Tolbert & Zucker, 1983); and the 'manipulate' strategy has been the focus of research on institutional agency (e.g. DiMaggio, 1988; Garud et al., 2002; Maguire et al., 2004). There is, however, a relative dearth of research on the 'middle ground' strategies of 'compromise', 'avoid' and 'defy'. In the remainder of this section, I explore this middle ground first in relation to the potential for institutional resistance to discipline and then to domination.

**Resisting discipline**

Just as different forms of institutional control are associated with distinct dynamics and effects, they are also associated with different forms of resistance. When looking at resistance to discipline as a form of institutional control, space for potential resistance strategies is opened up by two key requirements of discipline: enclosure and surveillance. A key aspect of disciplinary systems is that they are 'inward' looking: discipline works through routine practices and structures that shape the choices of actors by establishing boundaries of appropriate and inappropriate behavior, but only for actors who understand themselves as members of the community, society or field within which those norms apply (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Douglas, 1986). In the Ford example, the Sociological Department developed powerful systems and routines that shaped the identities and actions of Ford employees, but for the most part it only affected Ford employees (and perhaps their families), and in fact only those who were both eligible for and desirous of the Five Dollar Day. So, to the extent that Ford employees were professionally mobile (based on skills or family connections), they would have been able to avoid or deny the control of the Five Dollar Day and its associated disciplining systems.

A second requirement of discipline is continuous surveillance or members' perceptions of continuous surveillance (Barker, 1993; Sewell, 1998). The range of forms and intensities of surveillance associated with institutions is wide, but consistent across the range is the potential for noncompliance to be registered by systems which will automatically punish, shame, embarrass, or penalize. In describing the role of surveillance in the historical development of discipline, Foucault (1977: 175) argues that, as large factories developed, it became 'a decisive
economic operator both as an internal part of the production machinery and as a specific mechanism in the disciplinary power. The importance of surveillance in effecting institutional control has only become more important and more effective since the industrial revolution described by Foucault. As Sewell (1988: 401) argues,

New technology has enabled the erection of a surveillance superstructure throughout society that unobtrusively influences almost all aspects of daily life, especially work life. ... The impact of this surveillance, especially its ability to instill a profound sense of self-discipline and self-control in many social settings, is so subtle that it often goes unnoticed.

Sewell's argument notwithstanding, surveillance cannot be taken for granted in systems of institutional control. It must be effected in some manner, and to the degree that actors can avoid or ignore it, institutional control will be undermined. An example of this dynamic and the potential for institutional resistance it raises comes from Fox-Wolfgramm, Boal and Hunt's (1998) examination of the reaction of two West Texas banks with distinct strategic orientations (one defender, one prospector) to new regulation, which demanded the banks not 'discriminate against any so-called red-lined areas considered high risk in terms of loan repayment' (Fox-Wolfgramm et al., 1998: 91). Both banks resisted the institutional pressure associated with the new law, but in different ways and seemingly with distinct motivations. Fox-Wolfgramm et al. (1998) argue that the defender bank initially engaged in 'identity resistance' - an attempt to ignore the new regulation, operating on a 'business as usual' basis, because of a lack of congruence between the regulation and the bank's current and envisioned identity and image. The bank resisted by adopting a strategy of 'minimal technical compliance', so that 'the bank complied with the letter of the law', spending 'minimal time and effort' (Fox-Wolfgramm et al., 1998: 104). Although the bank then moved some way toward accepting and implementing the new regulations, it reverted to old routines once it had passed the regulatory inspection associated with the new laws. The prospector bank also initially resisted the new regulation, again minimally complying with the letter of the law, and largely carrying on with business as usual. The motivation for this resistance, however, differed significantly from that of the defender bank: in the case of the prospector bank, it 'seemed to resist change because top management believed that the bank was already fulfilling institutional expectations consistent with its "first to lead the way" identity and thus did not think change was needed' (Fox-Wolfgramm et al., 1998: 117). The prospector bank's approach to the legislation changed significantly, however, when it failed a formal test of its compliance: 'management interpreted the examination performance as an indication of identity and image incongruence ... [and] responded by internalizing the changes needed to pass the test and incorporating these into [the bank's] ideology, strategy and other organizational and issue aspects of its "community leadership" so as to be isomorphic with institutional forces' (Fox-Wolfgramm et al., 1998: 120).

The resistance of the banks described by Fox-Wolfgramm et al. (1998) illustrates the limits of surveillance in many institutional systems, and especially those which are highly distributed and involve large numbers of actors. In this case, managers in both banks were able to simply avoid making any substantive changes in their operations for significant time periods with no significant repercussions, largely because the processes through which compliance was monitored occurred only periodically and with substantial prior warning.

**Resisting domination**

Resistance to domination has distinctly different dynamics than does resistance to discipline. These differences stem from the differential effects of discipline and domination on actors, and particularly groups of actors. When systems of domination are
The potential for actors to resist, at least directly, may be significantly reduced in comparison to disciplinary systems. Taking actuarial practices as an example illustrates this dynamic. The most central technique in the development of actuarial practices is the classification of the individual within a population based on some set of relevant variables. The relevance of these variables is dependent, however, on the task at hand, rather than on any phenomenological significance for the individuals so classified. The same is true for physical and technological infrastructures, which effect power relations based on 'objective' characteristics of populations, which may or may not connect to their lived experiences. Simon (1988: 744) argues that this aspect of actuarial practices has significant consequences for our politics and our identities: ‘By placing people in groups that have no experienced meaning for their members, and therefore lack the capacity to realize common goals or purposes, ... [people] may be stripped of a certain quality of belongingness to others that has long played a role in our culture’. These classifications provide little basis for political action, and even potentially work to usurp the political foundations of existing groups. Lawrence and Robinson (In press) argue that an important effect of this dynamic is the potential to provoke more significant, destructive resistance, because in contrast to discipline, it can ‘entail a greater loss of autonomy, pose more serious threats to organizational members’ identities, and may be perceived as less procedurally just.’ Because direct, assertive resistance is problematic in reaction to systems of domination, Lawrence and Robinson (2007) argue that domination will be associated with relatively severe, ‘deviant’ forms of resistance directed at organizations or society as a whole, what Robinson and Bennett (1995) refer to as ‘property deviance’:

The distinctive quality of property deviance is that it involves what might be described as very harmful behavior directed at the organization as a whole. This type of deviance includes such behaviors as theft from the organization, insubordination, intentional mistakes, sabotaging machinery or equipment, whereby the employee seeks to cause harm to the organization and/or its property.

Institutional resistance to systems of domination, thus, present a paradox – although the ability of actors to compromise, avoid, and defy institutional control based on domination may be less than it is under systems of discipline, the resistance that actors engage in is likely to be more severe, and potentially more destructive. It may be difficult to avoid the effects of overpass heights, but it is possible to vandalize overpasses and buses. This dynamic is an unexplored one in institutional studies of organization, but could be a major issue when trying to understand the effects and side-effects of forms of institutional control that might seem benign to the designers and implementers of those systems.

**INSTITUTIONAL AGENCY**

The second role of power in institutional theory is ‘institutional agency’ – the work of actors to create, transform, or disrupt institutions. Power and agency have been tied tightly to each other in organization theory, and more generally in the social sciences (Giddens, 1976, 1984). The capacity of individual and collective actors to attempt to realize their own interests was centrally important to the ‘old institutionalism’ (see Washington, Boal and Davis, Chapter 30 in this volume), and has re-emerged as an important focus for institutional research, particularly with respect to institutional entrepreneurship and social movements. Significant findings in this literature include the importance of relational and discursive strategies in effecting institutional change (Garud et al., 2002; Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006; Maguire et al., 2004; Suddaby & Greenwood, 2006), the impact of field development (Greenwood & Suddaby, 2006; Lawrence & Phillips, 2004; Maguire et al.,
2004; Munir & Phillips, 2005), the role of actors' identities in effecting their institutional strategies (Fligstein, 1997; Greenwood et al., 2002; Hensmans, 2003), and the processes through which practices move across space and time (Boxenbaum & Battilana, 2005; Czarniawska & Joerges, 1996). Research on both institutional entrepreneurship and social movements is reviewed in other chapters in this volume (see Chapters 7 and 27, respectively), and so I briefly summarize the broad contours of this work and then focus on the role of power in institutional agency.

**Studies of institutional agency - institutional entrepreneurship and social movements**

The concept of institutional entrepreneurship (DiMaggio, 1988; Eisenstadt, 1980) describes the process through which new institutions are created when ‘organized actors with sufficient resources (institutional entrepreneurs) see in them an opportunity to realize interests that they value highly’ (DiMaggio, 1988: 14). Power in this stream of research is tied to the ability of actors to create new institutions, through the mobilization of resources. This work has examined the processes and practices associated with the creation of practices (Boxenbaum, 2006; Lawrence, 1999; Munir & Phillips, 2005), technologies (Aldrich & Fiol, 1994; Hargadon & Douglas, 2001; Leblebici, Salancik, Copay & King, 1991), and forms of organizing (Greenwood, Suddaby & Hinings, 2002; Suddaby & Greenwood, 2005) that go against the institutional norms or rules within which they are embedded. Research on institutional entrepreneurship has shown that actors effect institutional agency in a broad set of ways, including technical and market leadership, lobbying for regulatory change and discursive action (Fligstein, 1997; Garud, Jain & Kumaraswamy, 2002; Hoffman, 1999; Maguire et al., 2004).

Research on social movements has many similarities to the work on institutional entrepreneurship, particularly in their shared focus on the role of agents in effecting changes in institutional arrangements, and a tendency to examine this role through the deep analysis of individual cases of institutional agency. What separates the two literatures, however, is their understandings of the form and the roots of that agency (Schneiberg & Lounsbury, Chapter 27 this volume). Whereas institutional agency focuses significantly on the traits, strategies and positions of individual actors (Battilana, 2006; Maguire et al., 2004), social movements research highlights the role of collective action motivated by structural inequalities (Clemens, 1993; McAdam, 1988). The strategies that each literature highlights differ in ways that reflect their emphasis on individual versus collective action. While institutional entrepreneurship research highlights strategies focused specifically on institutional rules (Garud et al., 2001; Greenwood & Suddaby, 2006; Lawrence, 1999; Maguire et al., 2004), research on social movements focuses on strategies aimed at fostering and leveraging collective action, such as framing (Snow & Benford, 1988; Snow, Rochford, Worden & Benford, 1986) and resource mobilization (Jenkins, 1983; McCarthy & Zald, 1977).

What is common across studies of institutional entrepreneurship and social movements is a concern for how interested actors work to affect the institutions and fields that provide the institutional context within which they operate. More clearly than in the case of institutional control, the study of institutional agency is the study of a set of political processes and practices in which power in many forms is necessarily and obviously implicated.

**Power and institutional agency**

Most research and writing on institutional agency is explicitly political in its accounts
of how actors create, transform and disrupt institutions (Beckert, 1999; DiMaggio, 1988; Hensmans, 2003). The dominant image of power in this work is as an ‘episodic’ phenomenon, constituted in relatively discrete, strategic acts of mobilization initiated by self-interested actors (Clegg, 1989). Research on institutional entrepreneurship and social movements both describe actors mobilizing resources, engaging in institutional contests over meanings and practices, developing, supporting or attacking forms of discourse and practice – all practices involving discrete, strategic acts of mobilization. Similar to institutional control, however, research on institutional agency has maintained a relatively narrow focus with respect to forms of power, in this case focusing primarily on influence.

Influence is typically described as the ability of one actor to persuade another actor to do something they would not otherwise do (Clegg, 1989; French & Raven, 1959; Lukes, 1974). It potentially involves a wide range of tactics, including moral suasion, negotiation, rational persuasion, ingratiation, and exchange (Clegg, 1989; Lawrence et al., 2001; Maslyn, Farmer & Fedor, 1996). The literatures on institutional entrepreneurship and social movements provide numerous examples of influence as a basis for institutional agency. Fligstein’s (1997: 398) essay on the importance of social skills in institutional entrepreneurship, for example, positions influence as central to institutional entrepreneurship, which, as a form of ‘skilled social action’, ‘revolves around finding and maintaining a collective identity of a set of social groups and the effort to shape and meet the interests of those groups’. Fligstein goes on to articulate a list of tactics available to ‘strategic actors’, most of which are examples of either influence or establishing conditions under which influence is possible: ‘agenda setting’, ‘framing action’, ‘wheeling and annealing’, ‘brokering’, ‘asking for more, settling for less’, ‘maintaining goallessness and selflessness’, ‘maintaining ambiguity’, ‘aggregating interests’, ‘trying five things to get one’, ‘convincing people one holds more cards than one does’, ‘making others think they are in control’, and ‘networking to outliers’.

Fligstein (1997: 403) goes on to argue that the use of these influence tactics will depend significantly on how ‘organized’ the fields are in which they operate. He argues that:

When fields are less organized, their tactics are to bring together disparate groups in a large number of ways. As a frame begins to cohere to organize the field, they act to propagate that frame and the social order it implies. Once in place, skilled strategic actors defend a status quo by deftly manipulating accepted meanings and making sure that the ‘goods’ are being delivered to those who dominate the organizational field. Under situations of crisis, actors committed to the status quo will continue to try to use dominant understandings to structure action as long as they can. Skilled strategic actors in challenger groups will offer new cultural frames and rules to reorganize the field.

Studies of institutional entrepreneurship (e.g., Garud et al., 2002; Maguire et al., 2004) have demonstrated the importance of influence tactics similar to, or a subset of, those delineated by Fligstein (1997). Moreover, the issue of field development has become an important theme in examining different forms of institutional agency and the question of what kinds of actors will engage in such action (Greenwood & Suddaby, 2006; Lawrence & Phillips, 2004; Maguire et al., 2004).

The study of institutional agency has maintained a relatively narrow focus in terms of the forms of power it examines, particularly overlooking the use of force, which works by directly overcoming another actor’s intentions or behavior (French & Raven, 1959; Lukes, 1974). The legitimate use of physical force is generally restricted by communities and societies to specific agencies, such as prisons, psychiatric hospitals, the military and police forces. Other organizations, however, also use what might be described as ‘bureaucratic force’ on a regular basis: corporations fire employees; bars forcibly remove disruptive patrons; schools confiscate contraband substances; universities expel poorly
performing students; and editors reject the submissions of aspiring authors.

The use of force, and especially of physical force, is perhaps the most under-examined aspect of institutional politics in the organizational literature. Although explicit physical force may be relatively rare in many of the institutional settings we study, this may be more of a reflection of the constrained empirical focus we have adopted in organization studies than the relative importance of force in creating, maintaining and disrupting institutions. If we consider institutional change from an historical perspective, it is clear that force has been a critically important means by which states and state institutions have been created, maintained and disrupted (Mann, 1993), and not only in the past (Mann, 2003). In a broad array of institutional arenas, including healthcare, education, and more obviously policing and the prison system, the use of force by the state or state-sanctioned agencies maintains many contemporary institutions.

The use of force as a basis for institutional agency is associated both with attempts to disrupt institutionalized practices and with attempts to maintain institutions. Disrupting institutions through force is most vividly associated with protests in which protestors attempt to shut down some kind of institutionalized activity by making it impossible for it to proceed. Perhaps the most famous recent example of the use of force to both disrupt and maintain institutional arrangements was in the ‘Battle of Seattle’ that occurred around the 1999 World Trade Organization (WTO) meetings in Seattle, Washington. On November 30, 1999, Seattle was meant to host the WTO talks that would involve, representatives from the Western industrialized countries, including a visit from then President Clinton, the Asian industrialized countries, and, for the first time, developing countries in the South. In response to these meetings, tens of thousands of protestors, representing a diverse set of interests including labour, the environment, the arts, and anti-poverty groups, converged on Seattle. The protestors were effectively organized into two main factions. The first, and largest group was the ‘paraders’, who were organized primarily by the AFL-CIO, and whose intention was to mount a large march to draw attention to their concerns. The second group, the Direct Action Network (DAN), was an alliance of groups including the Rainforest Action Network, Art & Revolution, and the Ruckus Society, whose aim was to ‘shut down the WTO’. The main strategy of the DAN was to take over key intersections, making it impossible for delegates to reach the convention centre where the WTO talks were to be held. Early in the morning on the first day of the talks, groups of protestors locked themselves together with bicycle locks or tubes, covering their linked arms to prevent police from removing them individually. By 8 a.m., most of the key intersections had been seized by the protestors, now reinforced by their second wave.

The next three days saw a range of force and influence tactics used by protestors and law enforcement agencies. By 10 a.m. on the first morning, police were using tear gas, and then later rubber and wooden bullets, pepper spray, and mass arrests to try to disperse the protestors. For their part, protestors relied primarily on non-violent, passive forms of resistance, using their numbers to overwhelm police. From the protestors’ perspective, however, their key use of force was in terms of their effect not on police agencies, but on the WTO and its delegates: at 1 p.m. on the first day, the WTO cancelled its opening ceremonies, and ultimately cancelled the talks completely. The strategy of the DAN protestors in this respect was to make it impossible for the WTO to proceed, in particular by controlling Seattle streets and thus forcing WTO delegates to stay at their hotels rather than proceed to the convention centre.

**Resisting institutional agency**

Resistance to institutional agency involves reaching compromises with institutional
agents, avoiding their gaze or their ability to punish non-compliance, or defying their aims. Although its basic nature is similar to resistance to institutional control, the flux and uncertainty that is tied to institutional agency opens up more room for resistance, and more potential for creativity in effecting forms of resistance. Dirsmith, Heian and Covaleski (1997) provide a detailed description of resistance to institutional agency in their study of forms of control in the Big Six accounting firms. This study focused on the attempt by large, professional accounting firms to shift internal power relations by importing a legitimated form of formal organizational practice, Management by objectives (MBO) ... in the hope of legitimating the actual application of control to the firm's professional cadre' (Dirsmith et al., 1997: 20). Dirsmith et al. (1997: 20) argue that the use of MBO as a tool is important because it represents a 'familiar, abstract, objective, proceduralized, client-sanctioned form of control' and thus challenges traditional, professional autonomy based on a discourse of 'business focus' and 'meritocracy'. Institutional resistance, in this case, emerged from the professionals in the firms who recognized MBO as a political tool, rather than a neutral technology. Interestingly, resistance did not involve direct refusal, but rather an indirect subversion of the aims and effects of MBO through the use of mentor relationships:

mentors recognized MBO for the political as opposed to instrumental practice it was, and transformed it into a means for advocating for their protégés, by enabling them to game the formal system, as in partnership proposal orchestration to display the 'right numbers'. (Dirsmith et al., 1997: 21)

This study highlights the need for both resources and skills in effecting institutional resistance. The mentors who helped their protégés game the MBO system had access to the information necessary to know when and how to manipulate the MBO system, and held senior enough positions in their firms that their subversions would likely go unpunished.

In the remainder of this section, I explore the issue of resistance to institutional agency, focusing first on institutional resistance to influence and then on institutional resistance to force. As with institutional resistance in response to institutional control, the different forms of power that might underpin institutional agency engender different possibilities for resistance, and different resistance strategies.

Resisting influence

The potential for resistance to institutional agency based on influence stems significantly from the uncertainty and complexity of attempts to create or transform institutional arrangements. Attempts to create, maintain or disrupt institutions through influence are fraught with unintended consequences. These stem from the often indirect nature of institutional agency, as actors affect institutions by, for instance, working through third parties such as the state or professional bodies (Orssatto, den Hond & Clegg, 2002; Russo, 2001), or developing (or delegitimating) vocabularies of action and belief which are only effective to the extent that they are picked up and adopted by others (Angus, 1993; Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). Unintended consequences also result from the intersection of multiple organizational fields and sets of institutional arrangements (Phillips et al., 2004).

Dirsmith et al.'s (1997) study of resistance to the implementation of MBO in accounting firms illustrates these dynamics. First, the MBO system that senior management attempted to implement in the accounting firms provides a good example of a complex, multi-party system in which the sponsors of the innovation are significantly dependent on a range of other parties if it is to be successfully implemented and institutionalized. Such situations invite the possibility of resistance from others who perceive these new systems as not serving their interests. In this case, resistance came significantly from
professionals in the firm who saw the introduction of MBO as an opportunity to advance their own interests and resist the aims of the system sponsors. The resistance evidenced in this case also hinged on the interaction of MBO with an existing institution – mentoring – in the firms. The institutionalized positions and practices associated with mentoring provided both the motivation and the means for actors to compromise the newly implemented MBO system: the mentoring process provided a set of interests to actors that were in conflict with the MBO system, and became the tool through which professionals gamed the new system. I describe this as an example of institutional resistance, rather than institutional agency, because it seems that the accountants who were gaming the system were not so much attempting to either create or disrupt an organizational institution, as compromise and avoid its effects on themselves and those who they supported through mentorship programs.

More generally, the reliance of institutional agency on third parties and its situation within overlapping fields and institutions provides the foundation for a range of strategies for institutional resistance. The problems of surveillance associated with reliance on third parties opens up space for avoidance by institutional actors. Influence depends on the ability of one actor to observe the degree of compliance of another (Pfeffer, 1981; Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978), and so working through the state or other third-party to effect institutional change or maintain a set of institutional arrangements may necessitate developing some complex scheme for surveillance. The involvement of third parties also invites the possibility of co-optation where targeted actors are able to influence the actions of the third-parties and thus undermine institutional agency. Social movement organizations, for instance, often attempt to transform institutional arrangements by influencing the state, which might in turn enact new legislation or enforce existing laws and rules (Benford & Snow, 2000). These attempts, however, can lead to resistance on the part of targeted actors, and result in framing contests in which each party attempts to convince the state agencies of the greater legitimacy of their own claims. A range of institutional resistance strategies is also connected to the webs of organizational fields and institutions within which institutional agency occurs. These webs provide space for targeted actors to reposition themselves when institutional pressures change.

Resisting force
While institutional agency based on influence engenders resistance because of its attendant uncertainty and complexity, I argue that the use of force as a basis for institutional agency has its own distinctive effects on institutional resistance. The nature of institutional resistance to force as a basis for institutional agency stems from the reaction that force can tend to engender in its targets. The use of force treats the targets of power as 'objects' in the sense that the exercise of power is not dependent on the agency or potential agency of targets (Lawrence et al., 2001; J. Scott, 2001). Unlike influence, the use of force does not shape the will of the target, but rather achieves its ends despite that will. Such forms of power, I argue, tend to lead to greater resistance on the part of targets, because they 'entail a greater loss of autonomy, pose more serious threats to [actors'] identities, and may be perceived as less procedurally just' (Lawrence & Robinson, 2007). Moreover, unlike systems of domination, which also treat targets as objects, the episodic nature of force means that it is easily associated with specific agents, at whom the resistance will likely be directed. This is because targets of force tend to aim their resistance at the perceived source of the harms that they perceive themselves as suffering (Berkowitz, 1993; O'Leary-Kelly, Griffin & Glew, 1996). The resistance that the use of force tends to engender may limit its potential as an effective tool for institutional agency, both
because targeted actors will attempt to compromise, avoid or defy the aims associated with its use, and, even when direct resistance is difficult, they will tend to quickly revert to previous behaviors (Lawrence et al., 2001).

STUDYING POWER AND INSTITUTIONS

The framework I have described here suggests that the institutional politics of an organizational field can be conceived of in terms of an interplay of these three concepts. In the sections above, I have attempted to provide a set of ideas from the literatures on power which could inform a more political analysis of institutions and organizations, focusing particularly on the forms of systemic and episodic power that might underpin institutional control and institutional agency, and on the dynamics of institutional resistance to each of these forms of power. In this last section of the chapter, I explore five research issues that emerge from a consideration of institutional control, agency and resistance. The first three focus on making power explicit in institutional analysis, incorporating resistance, and attending to overlooked forms of power including domination and force. The last two issues focus on extending the scope of research on institutional politics to include sets of actors that are currently missing.

1. Making power explicit

The first direction that I suggest emerges from the discussion above is to make power a more explicit element in institutional writing and research. I believe this would have immediate consequences for the study of institutional control and agency. For the study of institutional control, I believe that the explicit incorporation of power as a central concept could help re-energize an area that has fallen into relative disregard. Although the controlling effects of institutions was the dominant concern in the early years of neo-institutional writing (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Meyer & Rowan, 1977), attention to control has shifted significantly toward a focus on the limits of control that emerge from the existence of competing logics and overlapping organizational fields (Rao, Monin & Durand, 2003; Thornton & Ocasio, 1999). This shift suggests to me a certain complacency with respect to institutional scholars’ understanding of institutional control – it is as if we understand how institutions control organizational actors and so have let go of that question to a significant degree. The work of scholars such as Foucault and Winner (and many others) on discipline, domination and other forms of systemic power suggests otherwise; it suggests that the problem of institutional control is far more complex than current institutional theories can address, and that many of the important details of how institutional control occurs remain to be worked out. A starting point for such work would be the development of empirically grounded analyses of how discipline and domination support institutions, how specific instances of those forms of power work in different contexts, and the overall limits of their effectiveness.

Making power more explicit in studies of institutional agency would, I argue, also provide significant analytical benefits. Specifically, I suggest that attending more closely to power in institutional agency and especially bringing in existing literatures on influence and force could contribute significantly to the development of generalizable, context spanning theory. Studies of institutional agency have tended to describe the strategies of institutional agents with idiosyncratic, study-specific sets of labels (e.g., Garud et al., 2002; Greenwood et al., 2002; Hensmans, 2003; Lawrence, 1999; Maguire et al., 2004), which make comparisons of the dynamics and effects of institutional agency problematic. Incorporating the language of influence and force could provide a foundation
for comparing and contrasting institutional agency in a range of settings.

2. Broadening our conception of power: attending to domination and force

The second issue that I suggest could provide a significant direction for research on institutional politics is the broadening of traditional conceptions of power that have been relied upon in the study of institutional control and agency. Research to date has focused almost exclusively on forms of power that work by affecting the process through which actors perceive and react to the costs and benefits of various courses of action, by framing those costs and benefits, by affecting how those calculations are carried out, or by shifting the impacts of various actions such that, for instance, noncompliance with institutionalized practices carries with it some significant cognitive, social or economic costs. Largely missing from this analysis are systems of domination and episodes of force that directly overcome the intentions of actors rather than trying to affect those intentions.

The lack of attention to domination and force might arguably be connected to a view of institutions as primarily cognitive or discursive phenomena (Lawrence & Phillips, 2004; Phillips et al., 2004), which might suggest that social practices held in place by physical or technological systems are not ‘real institutions’ (see Phillips and Malhotra, Chapter 29 in this volume, for a cogent presentation of this perspective). Such an argument, however, overlooks the distinctions between institutions, the mechanisms which underpin those institutions, and the streams of action which create them. Phillips et al. (2004: 638) argue that institutions are best understood as ‘social constructions constructed through discourse’ that are associated with ‘self-regulating socially constructed mechanisms that enforce their application’. Thus far institutional research has maintained a relatively restricted understanding of what those socially constructed mechanisms might involve, with a distinct focus on ‘social’ systems that rely on normative and regulative mechanisms to maintain compliance. I argue that our analysis of those socially constructed institutional mechanisms needs to expand to include the built environment including mechanical and technological systems. Such systems, whether built from concrete or silicon, are often a critical element in the institutionalization of social practice. Moreover, I argue that episodes of force are at least as important in understanding institutional creation and transformation as the more subtle influence processes which have dominated research on institutional entrepreneurship.

Fully incorporating domination and force into our research on institutions and organizations may require an expansion of both our conceptual frameworks and our research methods. Where unwanted physical force has been examined in organization studies, for instance, it has largely been understood as deviant violence (O’Leary-Kelly et al., 1996). While a deviance perspective highlights acts of violence in organizations that are clearly important and problematic, it also overlooks a range of phenomena that are core to understanding force as a foundation for institutions (Arendt, 1970; Harries-Jenkins & van Doorn, 1976; Hearn, 1994), including ‘violent’ tactics such as forced injection of medication or physical restraints in a medical facility, incarceration and capital punishment in the penal system, corporal punishment in the school system, and acts of war by nations in conflict. Moreover, attending to domination and force as bases of institutional control and agency may also be facilitated by several methodological shifts. Documenting the role of these forms of power may depend on shifting away from actors’ own accounts of how institutions are supported or were created, since domination and force may be understood by those involved as less socially desirable than other forms of power. Understanding the institutional role of domination may also require detailed analyses and
presentation of the physical and technological environment in ways that would be unusual for an institutional study. Rather than rely exclusively on interview quotations, for instance, the presentation of data might include diagrams of physical layouts, representations of information systems, and summaries of actuarial categories.

3. Getting real: incorporating institutional resistance

A second issue for future research on power and institutions concerns the role of resistance in our theories and descriptions of empirical situations. I have argued that resistance is a relatively neglected phenomenon in institutional studies of organization. Studies of institutional control have tended to focus on the homogeneity of organizational responses to institutional pressures, and the consequent tendency for isomorphism in organizational fields. Studies of institutional agency have highlighted the success of individuals and organizations in their attempts to transform institutional arrangements. In neither of these traditions has sufficient attention been paid to those actors who are able somehow to compromise, avoid or defy systems of institutional control or episodes of interested agency. It seems to me that both deficiencies may result from a perceived need on the part of institutional scholars to demonstrate that the institutional phenomena they are examining are ‘real’ – that institutions do control actors’ beliefs and behaviors, or that agents really are capable of creating or transforming institutions. Highlighting the limits of institutional control and agency may have been understood as potentially weakening those arguments.

In contrast, I argue that the time has come for institutional scholars to adopt a more balanced approach to their descriptions of institutional phenomena, demonstrating both institutional control and the ability of actors to escape that control, and documenting strategies for institutional agency as well as the ways in which other individuals and organizations push back or deflect the impacts of those strategies. That an institution does not completely control all of the actors it touches does not make it less institutional. Attending to resistance brings in the multiplicity of institutions and institutional logics that operate in any field. Regulative frameworks often overlap in their jurisdictions and conflict in their prescriptions. Moral orders overlap and contradict one another, often providing room for actors to ‘choose’ the moral communities within which they will operate. Even taken-for-granted beliefs are not usually taken for granted by everyone, since multiple, competing sources of meaning usually co-exist in fields.

Incorporating resistance could, therefore, be part of an important next step in the evolution of institutional studies of organization. One thread in the evolution of institutional theory, at least since Meyer and Rowan’s (1977) classic statement, has been an increasing attention to the complexity of institutional phenomena (W. R. Scott, 2001). Taking resistance into account could advance this process significantly, and promote studies that incorporate the wide variety of actors’ responses to institutions, as well as the conditions that make this variety possible – the competing logics, overlapping fields, and intermediated institutional pressures which provide the opportunity for actors to compromise, avoid and defy institutional control and institutional agency.

4. Where are the janitors and mechanics in institutional theory? Attending to the institutional work of maintaining institutions

A third issue for future research involves a set of actors who are largely missing from studies of institutional control. Perhaps the most distinctive and fundamental element of an institutional approach to understanding organizations and organizational life is an
understanding of behavior and belief as conditioned by enduring structures, practices, rules, beliefs and norms. Institutionalized social elements are largely understood as robust, enduring phenomena which provide the context for action - the background against which local politics, negotiations, and choice occur. What is missing from this image is a recognition of the work done by actors in order to maintain institutions as such (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). Zucker (1988) argues that a key issue in understanding institutions is that even in highly institutionalized arenas, entropy is a natural tendency that needs to be overcome. W. R. Scott (2001: 110) argues that ‘most institutional scholars accord little attention to the issue of institutional persistence’. The perspective taken by these authors suggests that even though systemic power may underpin institutions, it does not do so without the ongoing aid of a variety of interested actors. This is not to revert to a rational actor model of institutional control, where elites design and manage social institutions. Instead, I think it points to the importance of bringing into institutional analysis the legions of non-elite actors whose work, and sometimes purpose, it is to maintain social and organizational institutions – the institutional janitors and mechanics who deal with the mess and breakdowns of institutional mechanisms that occur as an everyday occurrence.

This omission is hinted at by recent work on competing institutional logics and institutions as mediating political factors (Thornton & Ocasio, 1999; Bartley & Schneiberg, 2002) that suggests our traditional image of institutional control may be overly optimistic with respect to its ability to endure without significant work, on the part of institutional actors (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006; Scott, 2001) – who these actors are and what they do, however, is currently not examined in the institutional literature. This issue is critical for understanding the connection between power and institutions in two ways. First, an understanding of institutional control that is missing this perspective provides an unrealistic account of its politics. Descriptions of institutional control without a recognition of the institutional work of maintaining institutions suggest an overly stable and deterministic image of organizational fields – systems of institutional control would appear to effect stable patterns of behavior and belief unless they were challenged either by institutional entrepreneurs or by competing institutions. Incorporating the institutional work of maintaining institutions points to the inherent instability of institutional control mechanisms: systems of discipline and domination have the ability to significantly control the behavior and beliefs of actors, but only to the extent that they are maintained over time. The second problem of overlooking the institutional work of maintaining institutions is that it excludes from institutional analyses the institutional roles of the non-elite actors who do not occupy positions from which they might create or challenge institutions, but whose work is essential to maintaining institutional order. Lawrence and Suddaby (2006) suggest six categories of institutional work aimed at maintaining institutions: enabling work that involves the creating of supportive rules; policing so that compliance is ensured; deterring through the establishment of coercive barriers; valorizing and demonizing; creating and sustaining institutional myths; and embedding the normative foundations of an institution into actors’ routine practices. These practices depend on the active involvement of non-elite actors who do much more than simply enact institutional control mechanisms – they creatively and reflexively work to support institutions and the mechanisms that underpin them.

5. Institutional side effects: where are the homeless in our studies?

The final issue I suggest as a future research direction again concerns a second set of actors who are missing in traditional studies of institutions and organizations. All institutions
affect the distribution of power, resources and risk in the organizational fields they structure (Bourdieu, 1993; Clegg, 1989; Douglas & Wildavsky, 1983). This is a central tenet of this chapter, and is consistent with much of the research on institutional entrepreneurship and social movements that has informed the study of institutional agency. Studies of institutional control have also moved toward recognizing the power effects of competing logics and institutional change (Amenta & Halfmann, 2000, 1991; Bartley & Schneiberg, 2002; Stryker, 2002; Thornton & Ocasio, 1999). What none of these studies account for in any detail, however, are the 'side effects' of institutions – the impacts of institutionalized practices and structures on the myriad actors who are neither party to their creation nor are contemplated in their design. While it is clear, for instance, that the institutions that emerge out of occupational contests (e.g., between medical doctors and midwives) have a direct impact on the practitioners of those occupations, there are a host of other actors, such as patients and their families, other medical practitioners, nurses, public health officers, and health policy makers who are also affected but whose interests are less well-attended institutional research. Similarly, research on the work of HIV/AIDS activists and advocates has documented the significant impacts on the power of doctors, pharmaceutical companies and HIV/AIDS community groups (Maguire et al., 2004). Missing in this analysis, however, is the impact on HIV+ individuals who were largely left out of this process, such as intravenous drug users, as well as its impact on other individuals living with other diseases. This example points to the heterogeneous nature of institutional side-effects. Although intravenous drug users were largely sidelined in the institutional contests around HIV/AIDS treatments, they later gained significant discursive resources in their attempts to construct drug addiction as health, rather than a criminal, issue. Similarly, members of other disease groups benefited from the lessons learned in the HIV/AIDS arena, and from the templates for action and collaboration that the HIV/AIDS community forged in their struggles for rapid access to new treatments and alternative experimental designs. Others, however, seem to have fared less well in this institutional battle. People living with HIV/AIDS in the developing world, for instance, continue to suffer without the political resources to effect institutional change that the community had access to in the North. Moreover, research and treatment dollars are a scarce resource which shifted significantly toward work on HIV/AIDS potentially incurring significant costs to advancement in other disease areas.

Attending to the 'homeless' in institutional research would require a much widened lens in our research designs and data collection and analysis strategies, and could be facilitated by drawing across boundaries on work focused on issues of gender, race, age, and class. Research designs that would be sensitive to the effects of institutions on marginalized actors would need to ask broader questions than how did particular institutions emerge and how do they control specific groups; instead, they would need to seek out the consequences of institutions more broadly in a society, following the traces of institutional impact outwards, as well as 'inverting' the process by taking on perspectives well outside of the assumed fields of influence to try to see the institutions from the margins. Data collection and analysis in such a process would need to be flexible enough to capture unexpected sets of findings and follow them through to their natural conclusions, a process that might be difficult in tightly designed qualitative or quantitative studies. Attending to and understanding the side-effects of institutions might demand a long and deep engagement in a field, not only observing a population of organizations, but also connecting with the individuals, groups and communities affected by those organizations.
CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I explored the intersection of power, institutions and organizations. I have argued that this can usefully be done by articulating the contours of institutional politics – the interplay of institutional control, agency and resistance in organizational fields. Institutional control represents the impact of institutions on the behaviors and beliefs of actors. Institutional agency involves the work of actors to create, transform, maintain and disrupt institutions. Institutional resistance describes the work of actors to compromise, avoid or defy systems of institutional control and episodes of institutional agency. Together, these describe the forms of power in play in organizational fields; their interaction significantly determines the evolution of institutions, networks and subject positions that structure the experiences and opportunities of actors.

There are, of course, other ways in which the dynamics of power in organizational fields could be described and analyzed. As I mentioned in the introduction, a great deal of work has been done connecting institutions and power in feminist, critical, post-structuralist and post-colonial traditions. Each of these approaches provides a distinctive, valuable language for understanding the interplay of institutions and organizations. In this chapter, I have attempted to develop a way of looking at this relationship that fits more closely with traditional concerns of institutional scholars, but, in so doing, have obviously replicated many of the existing boundaries and blinders of institutional research. The framework developed here, however, need not be limited to addressing narrowly defined institutional concerns. Understanding institutional control, agency and resistance could provide a useful foundation for examining issues of inequality, discrimination or oppression in organizational fields. This limitation notwithstanding, the framework developed in this chapter has potentially important implications for institutional studies of organization. In particular, it could provide a useful tool for helping to re-integrate relatively isolated streams of institutional research.

At this point in the history of institutional theory, we are seeing the development of increasingly isolated streams of inquiry. Studies of institutional control have evolved toward more sophisticated, quantitative methods drawing significantly on ecological analytical techniques. In contrast, paradigmatic studies of institutional agency tend to be longitudinal, qualitative case studies. Institutional resistance has tended to be examined primarily as a side issue, with little systematic theoretical attention or methodological development, at least within the mainstream of institutional theory. Along with these differences in focus and method has come a fragmenting of the community of scholars engaged in institutional work. Although this may be a ‘natural’ turn in the evolution of a scholarly area, it also presents problems in terms of the development of institutional research which might address complex social problems that require understandings of control and agency, as well as resistance. Bringing power into institutional analyses might provide the potential for a more integrated, coherent approach to understanding the institutional dynamics of organizational fields. More specifically, examining an organizational field in terms of the three dimensions of institutional politics – control, agency and resistance – could illuminate a richer and more complex set of institutional dynamics than has tended to be the case in traditional institutional studies, which focus on only one of those elements. Giving equal weight to institutional control, agency and resistance will help to show both the interplay of these dimensions, and the limits of each.

NOTES

1 A relational understanding of power is in part an attempt to avoid the distraction of a physical
metaphor for social power, as established by French and Raven's (1959) distinction between power (capacity) and influence (the use of that capacity). This distinction provides a problematic foundation for discussions of power and institutions, since discussions of power easily become conflated with resources or other sources of power, and the forms of power become narrowed to those which occur through influence.

2 Although the concept of domination has a long and varied history in the social sciences, and has been used in a wide variety of ways (Arendt, 1958; Habermas, 1972; Marx, 1906), I use it here to describe a general category of forms of power. While the term has been used in reference to ‘false consciousness’ (Jermier, 1985; Marx, 1906), ‘manipulation’ (Clegg, 1975; Lukes, 1974), the overwhelming use of power, I use it simply to describe forms of power that support institutional control through systems that restrict the range of options available to actors (Lawrence et al., 2001).

3 Data for this example taken from de Armond (2000), and archived coverage from the Seattle Times (http://seattletimes.nwsource.com/wto) and the Seattle Post-Intelligencer (http://seattlepi.nwsource.com/wto).

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