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CULTS

See Religious Organizations; Religious Orientations; Religious Movements.

CULTURE

To produce a definition of culture, one can examine the concept in the abstract, that is, explore the concept theoretically from a variety of standpoints and then justify the definition that emerges through deductive logic. Or one can explore how the concept is used in practice, that is, describe how sociologists, both individually and collectively, define culture in the research process and analyze how they inductively construct a shared definition. This essay takes the latter collective-inductive approach to defining culture. Such an approach is inherently sociological and does not presume to produce an independent definition for the field, rather it seeks to document how successful participants in the field have been in producing a shared definition for themselves. To produce such a "working" definition of culture, one starts by examining the social science roots that have helped determine the current status of the sociology of culture.

The focus on culture in sociology has flourished over the past twenty years, as evidenced by the fact that the Culture Section in the American Sociological Association has become one of the largest and is still one of the fastest-growing sections in the discipline. The growth of interest in culture is also nicely documented by the number of survey review articles and books written during this period (e.g., Denzin 1996; Crane 1994, 1992; Hall and Neitz 1993; Munch and Smelser 1992; Peterson 1990, 1989, 1979; Alexander and Seidman 1990; Wuthnow and Witten 1988; Blau 1988; Mukerji and Schudson 1986). As is clear from the reviews, interest in cultural analysis has grown significantly. The focus on culture in all spheres of research has increased tremendously; and culture is now readily accepted as a level of explanation in its own right. Even in traditionally materialist-oriented research arenas, such as stratification and Marxist studies, cultural activities and interests are not treated as subordinate to economic explanations in current research (e.g., Halle 1994; Nelson and Grossberg 1988; Bourdieu 1984; Williams 1981, 1977). Cultural studies and analysis have become one of the most fertile areas in sociology.

The rapid growth in the focus on culture and cultural explanation has produced some definitional boundary problems. The term *culture* has been

used in contemporary sociological research to describe everything from elite artistic activities (Becker 1982) to the values, styles, and ideology of day-to-day conduct (Swidler 1986). Along with art and everyday conduct, included among the “mixed bag” of research that takes place under the auspices of the sociology of culture is work in science (Latour 1987; Star 1989), religion (Neitz 1987), law (Katz 1988), media (Schudson 1978; Gitlin 1985; Tuchman 1978), popular culture (Peterson 1997; Weinstein 1991; Chambers 1986), and work organization (Fine 1996; Lincoln and Kalleberg 1990).

With such an extensive variety in the empirical focus of research in culture, the question for many participants in the field is how to translate this eclecticism into a coherent research field. This goal has not yet been reached, but while a coherent concept of culture is still evolving and the boundaries of the current field of sociology of culture are still fluid and expanding, it is possible to explore how different types of researchers in the social sciences, both currently and historically, have approached the concept of culture. In this inventory process, a better understanding of the concept of culture will emerge, that is, what different researchers believe the concept of culture includes, what the concept excludes, and how the distinction between categories has been made. This essay will provide a historical overview of the two major debates on the appropriate focus and limitations of the definition of culture, and then turn to the contemporary social context in an effort to clarify the issues underlying the current concept of culture.

THE CULTURE–SOCIAL STRUCTURE DEBATE

From the turn of the century until the 1950s, the definition of culture was embroiled in a dialogue that sought to distinguish the concepts of culture and social structure. This distinction was a major bone of contention among social scientists, most noticeably among anthropologists divided between the cultural and social traditions of anthropology. Researchers in the cultural or ethnological tradition, such as Franz Boas (1896/1940), Bronislaw Malinowski (1927, 1931), Margaret Mead (1928, 1935), Alfred Kroeber (1923/1948, 1952), and Ruth Benedict (1934) believed culture was the central concept in social science. “Culturalists”

maintained that culture is primary in guiding all patterns of behavior, including who interacts with whom, and should therefore be given priority in theories about the organization of society. This position was countered by researchers in the structural tradition, such as A.R. Radcliffe-Brown ([1952] 1961) and E. E. Evans-Pritchard (1937, 1940) from the British school of social anthropology, and Claude Levi-Strauss ([1953] 1963) in French structuralism. “Structuralists” contended that social structure was the primary focus of social science and should be given priority in theories about society because social structure (e.g., kinship) determines patterns of social interaction and thought. Both schools had influential and large numbers of adherents.

The culturalists took a holistic approach to the concept of culture. Stemming from Edward Tylor’s classic definition, culture was “. . . that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society” ([1871] 1924, p.1). This definition leaves little out, but the orientation of the late nineteenth century intended the concept of culture to be as inclusive as possible. Culture is what distinguishes man as a species from other species. Therefore culture consists of all that is produced by human collectivities, that is, all of social life. The focus here stems from the “nature” vs. “nurture” disputes common during this period. Anything that differentiates man’s accomplishments from biological and evolutionary origins was relevant to the concept of culture. That includes religion as well as kinship structures, language as well as nation-states.

Following Boas, the study of culture was used to examine different types of society. All societies have cultures, and variations in cultural patterns helped further the argument that culture, not nature, played the most significant role in governing human behavior. In addition, the cultural variances observed in different societies helped break down the nineteenth-century anthropological notion of “the psychic unity of mankind, the unity of human history, and the unity of culture” (Singer 1968, p. 527). The pluralistic and relativistic approaches to culture that followed emphasized a more limited, localized conception. Culture was what produced a distinctive identity for a society,

socializing members for greater internal homogeneity and identifying outsiders. Culture is thus treated as differentiating concept, providing recognition factors for internal cohesion and external discrimination.

Although this tradition of ethnographic research on culture tended to be internal and localized, what is termed an “emic” approach in cognitive anthropology (Goodenough 1956), by the 1940s there emerged a strong desire among many anthropologists to develop a comparative “etic” approach to culture, that is, construct a generalized theory of cultural patterns. In the comparison of hundreds of ethnographies written in this period, A.L. Kroeber and Clyde Kluckhohn sought to build such a general definition of culture. They wrote,

Culture consists of patterns, explicit and implicit, of and for behavior acquired and transmitted by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievement of human groups, including their embodiments in artifacts; the essential core of culture consists of traditional (i.e., historically derived and selected) ideas and especially their attached values; culture systems may, on the one hand, be considered as products of action, on the other as conditioning elements of further action ([1952] 1963, p. 181).

Milton Singer (1968) characterized this “pattern theory” definition as a condensation of what most American anthropologists in the 1940s and 1950s called culture. It includes behavior, cultural objects, and cognitive predispositions as part of the concept, thus emphasizing that culture is both a product of social action and a process that guides future action. The pattern theory stated simply that behavior follows a relatively stable routine, from the simplest levels of custom in dress and diet to more complex levels of organization in political, economic, and religious life. The persistence of specific patterns is variable in different arenas and different societies, but larger configurations tend to be more stable, changing incrementally unless redirected by external forces. In addition, the theory emphasized that the culture from any given society can be formally described, that is, it can be placed in formal categories representing different spheres of social life to facilitate comparison between societies. As such, universal patterns of culture can be constructed.

In comparison, anthropological structuralists in this period conceive of culture less comprehensively. The structuralists’ concept of culture is made distinct through emphasis on a new concept of social structure. Largely through the efforts of Radcliffe-Brown, a theory emerged that argues social structure is more appropriately represented by a network or system of social relations than a set of norms. The structuralist argument is intended to clarify how actors in a society actively produce and are socially produced by their cultural context. By distinguishing the actors and interaction in a social system from the behavioral norms, structuralists seek to establish a referent for social structure that is analytically independent of the culture and artifacts produced in that system. The production of culture is thus grounded clearly in an international framework. Norms of interaction are also produced by interacting participants, but the question of causal primacy between culture and social structure can be considered separately. The initial effort here is simply not to reify the origins of culture.

The exact relationship of culture and social structure, however, becomes the central issue of the structuralist/culturalist debate. For example, how to identify the boundaries of a society one is researching is problematic when the society is not an isolate. Structuralists tend to give social relations, that is, the extent of a network, priority in identifying boundaries, while culturalists focus on the extent of particular types of cultural knowledge or practices. Since both elements are obviously operating interdependently, the efforts to disentangle these concepts make little headway. The arguments to establish causal priority for one concept vis-à-vis the other settle into a fairly predictable exchange. Structuralists base their priority claims on the fact that the interaction of actors in a society is empirically preliminary to the development and application of cultural elements. Culturalists respond that interaction itself is at least partially cultural phenomenon, and that in most complex societies cultural patterns have been well established prior to ongoing social relationships.

By the late 1950s, the concept of culture was becoming increasingly important to sociologists. To help resolve the now tired debate over cultural and structural foci and precedence, A.L. Kroeber and Talcott Parsons published a report in the

American Sociological Review titled "The Concepts of Culture and Social System" (1958), which seeks to establish some ground rules for differentiating the two concepts. At least for sociologists, many of whom identify explicitly with the structural-functional theories of the anthropological structuralists, acknowledgement of a separate social system component that delimits the scope of culture is not difficult. More difficult is ascertaining where the appropriate limits for the concept of culture lie within this domain. Kroeber and Parsons suggest restricting the usage of culture to, "transmitted and created content and patterns of values, ideas, and other symbolic-meaningful systems as factors in the shaping of human behavior and the artifacts produced behavior" (1958, p. 583). This definition emphasized the predispositional aspect of a cultural referent, limiting the scope of culture to a cognitive perspective, and concentrates on a carefully worded description of "symbolic-meaningful systems" as the appropriate referent for culture. While no longer the omnibus conception of a traditional, Tylor-derived approach, this type of cultural analysis is still potentially applicable to any realm of social activity.

THE HIGH-MASS CULTURE DEBATE

In the 1950s and early 1960s, the concept of culture became enmeshed in a new debate that like the previously documented dialogue has both influential and significant numbers of participants on each side of the dispute. Sociologists, however, are more central to the discussion, pitting those who support a broadly conceived, anthropological interpretation of culture that places both commonplace and elite activities in the same category, against a humanities oriented conception of culture that equates the identification of cultural activity with a value statement. This debate attempts to do two things: to classify different types of cultural activity, and to distinguish a purely descriptive approach to the concept of culture from an axiological approach that defines culture through an evaluative process.

That an axiological approach to culture can be considered legitimate by a "scientific" enterprise is perhaps surprising to contemporary sociologists entrenched in the positivistic interpretation of science, yet a central issue for many sociologists in

this period was how and whether to approach questions of moral values. For example, the critical theorist Leo Lowenthal (1950) characterized this period of social science as "applied ascetism" and stated that the moral or aesthetic evaluation of cultural products and activities is not only sociologically possible, but also should be a useful tool in the sociological analysis of cultural differentiation.

These evaluative questions certainly play a part in the analysis of "mass culture," a term that the critic Dwight McDonald explains is used to identify articles of culture that are produced for mass consumption, "like chewing gum" (McDonald 1953, p. 59). A number of commentators, including both sociologists and humanists, observe the growth of mass culture production in the post-World War II United States with a mixture of distaste and alarm. The concern of McDonald and critics like him is the decline of intrinsic value in cultural artifacts, a decline in quality that stems from, or is at least attributed to, a combination of economic and social factors associated with the growth of capitalism. For example, mass culture critics argue that the unchecked growth of capitalism in the production and distribution phases of culture industries leads to a "massification" of consumption patterns. Formerly localized, highly differentiated, and competitive markets become dominated by a single corporate actor who merges different sectors of the consumer landscape and monopolizes production resources and distribution outlets. Within these giant culture industry organizations the demand for greater efficiency and the vertical integration of production lead to a bureaucratically focused standardization of output. Both processes function to stamp out cultural differences and create greater homogeneity in moral and aesthetic values, all at the lowest common denominator.

Regardless of the causes of the mass culture phenomena, the critics of mass culture believe it to be a potentially revolutionary force that will transform the values of society. One critic states that "mass culture is a dynamic, revolutionary force, breaking down the old barriers of class, tradition, taste, and dissolving all cultural distinctions. It mixes and scrambles everything together, producing what might be called homogenized culture. . . It thus destroys all values, since value judgements imply discrimination" (McDonald 1953, p. 62).

In launching this attack, mass culture opponents see themselves as the saviors of a “true” or “high” culture (e.g., McDonald, Greenberg, Berelson, and Howe; see Rosenberg and White 1957). They argue that the consumption of mass culture undermines the very existence of legitimate high culture, that is, the elite arts and folk cultures. Without the ability to differentiate between increasingly blurred lines of cultural production, the average consumer turns toward mass culture due to its immediate accessibility. Further, simply through its creation, mass culture devalues elite art and folk cultures by borrowing the themes and devices of different cultural traditions and converting them into mechanical, formulaic systems (Greenberg 1946). Thus critics of mass culture argue that it is critical for the health of society to discriminate between types of culture.

Defenders of mass culture, or at least those who feel the attack on mass culture is too extreme, respond that mass culture critics seek to limit the production and appreciation of culture to an elitist minority. They contend that the elitist criticism of culture is ethnocentric and that not only is mass, popular, or public culture more diverse than given credit for (e.g., Lang 1957; Kracuer 1949), but also the benefits of mass cultural participation far outweigh the limitations of a mass media distribution system (White 1956; Seldes 1957). Post-World War II America experienced an economic boom that sent its citizens searching for a variety of new cultural outlets. The increase in cultural participation certainly included what some critics might call “vulgar” activities, but it also included a tremendous increase in audiences for the arts across the board. Essentially mass culture defenders assert that the argument over the legitimacy of mass culture comes down to a matter of ideology, one that positions the elitist minority against the growing democratization of culture.

To extricate themselves from this axiological conundrum, many sociologists of culture retreated from a morally evaluative stance to a normative one. As presented by Gertrude Jaeger and Philip Selznick (1964), the normative sociological approach to culture, while still evaluative, seeks to combine anthropological and humanist conceptions of culture through a diagnostic analysis of cultural experience. The emphasis here is on elaborating the nature of “symbolically meaningful” experience, the same focus for culture that Kroeber

and Parsons (1958) take in their differentiation of culture and social system. To do this, Jaeger and Selznick adopt a pragmatist perspective (Dewey 1958) that accords symbolic status to cultural objects or events through a social signification process. Interacting individuals create symbols through the communication of meaningful experience, using both denotative and connotative processes. By creating symbols, interacting individuals create culture. Thus the definition of culture becomes: “Culture consists of everything that is produced by, and is capable of sustaining, shared symbolic experience” (Jaeger and Selznick 1964, p. 663). In establishing this sociological definition of culture emphasizing the shared symbolic experience, Jaeger and Selznick also seek to maintain a humanist-oriented capability to distinguish between high and mass culture without marginalizing the focus on high culture. Following Dewey, they argue that the experience of art takes place on a continuum of cultural experience that differs in intensity from ordinary symbolic activities, but has essentially the same basis for the appreciation of meaning. Art or high culture is simply a more “effective” symbol, combining “economy of statement with richness of expression” (Jaeger and Selznick 1964, p. 664). As such, art, like all culture, is identified through the normative evaluation of experience.

In sum, the high culture-mass culture debate shifted the focus on the concept of culture from a question of appropriate scope to a question of appropriate values. From a functionalist point of view, the health of a society’s culture is not simply an issue of what type of values are advocated, but of how culture serves a moral and integrative function. Yet the mass culture critique was often unable to distinguish the cultural values of elite intellectuals from the effect of these values on society. To escape from this ethnocentric quagmire, contemporary sociologists have generally turned away from an evaluative position toward culture.

THE CONTEMPORARY APPROACH TO CULTURE: MAPPING THE TERRAIN

As mentioned at the beginning of this essay, the contemporary approach to culture is quite eclectic. Despite the elaborate historical lineage of the concept, there is no current, widely accepted, composite resolution for the definition of culture.

Instead, culture is still currently defined through an extensive variety of perspectives, sanctioning a broad, historically validated range of options. While the omnibus definition from the cultural anthropology tradition has been generally relegated to introductory texts, and the elitist attack on mass culture has been largely replaced by an antiethnocentric, relativist position open to a wide spectrum of symbolic arenas and perspectives, many of the elements of these old debates still appear in new cultural analyses.

For example, as categorized by Richard Peterson introducing a review of new studies in cultural analysis at the beginning of the 1990s, culture tends to be used two ways in sociological research; as a “code of conduct embedded in or constitutive of social life,” and as symbolic products of group activity” (Peterson 1990, p. 498). The first perspective is clearly indebted to the traditional cultural anthropology approach and indeed is used to analyze and characterize social units ranging from whole societies (e.g., Cerulo 1995; Bellah et al. 1985) to specific subcultures (e.g., Hebdige 1990, 1979; Willis 1977). Empirical applications using this perspective are also made to geographically dispersed social worlds that organize collective activities (e.g., Lofland 1993 on the peace movement; Fine 1987 on Little League baseball; Latour and Woolgar 1979 on scientific research in biology; Trawick 1988 on scientific research in physics). The second perspective takes the more concrete course of treating culture as specific socially constructed symbols and emphasizes the production and meaning of these specific forms of cultural expression. Most examples of this latter form of cultural research are conducted in substantive arenas collectively known as the “production of culture” (Peterson 1979; Crane 1992), however, the range of empirical focus for this perspective is considerable and includes research in such areas as the moral discourse on the abortion issue (Luker 1984), the politics and aesthetics of artistic evaluation and reception (DeNora 1995; Lang and Lang 1990; Griswold 1986), and the motivational and ideological context of organizational, professional, and work cultures (e.g., Fine 1996; Martin 1992; Katz 1999; Fantasia 1988; Harper 1987; Burawoy 1979).

From the array of activities mentioned above, it is clear that the contemporary concept of culture

in sociology does not exclude any particular empirical forms of activity, except perhaps through an emphasis on shared or collective practices, thus discounting purely individual foci. Since all collective social practices are potentially symbolic and therefore culturally expressive, any collective activity can be reasonably studied under the rubric of the sociology of culture. This “open borders” philosophy has at times made it difficult for participants in the sociology of culture to establish any kind of nomothetic perspective for cultural theory. The vast differentiation and sheer complexity of the expression of culture in various forms of social life resists ready categorization. Instead, participants in the sociology of culture have usually opted for the preliminary step of surveying and mapping the terrain of research in the sociology of culture with the goal of helping to define emerging theoretical perspectives in the field. Two particularly informative efforts are the contributions of John Hall and Mary Jo Neitz (1993) and Diana Crane (1992, 1994).

In *Culture: Sociological Perspectives* (1993), Hall and Neitz provide an excellent overview of the substantive and theoretical directions in which research in the sociology of culture has proliferated. They identify five “analytic frames” (p. 17) through which researchers can focus on particular aspects of culture and that emphasize associated processes of inquiry. The first frame is a focus on “institutional structures”: that is, research on culture specifically linked with social institutions and such issues as the construction of social and personal identity and conventional or moral conduct (e.g., Bellah et al. 1985; Gilligan 1982; Warner 1988). In the second analytic frame, Hall and Neitz describe “cultural history” and the influence of past cultural practices on the present. Research in this area includes a focus on the significance of rituals (e.g., Douglas 1973; Goffman 1968, 1971; Neitz 1987), the effects of rationalization on social processes and cultural consumption (e.g., Foucault 1965; Mukerji 1983; Born 1995), and the creation of mass culture (e.g., Ewen 1976; Schudson 1984). In the third analytic frame, Hall and Neitz focus on “the production and distribution of culture” with a special emphasis on stratification and power issues. Research in this area includes work on the socioeconomic differentiation of cultural strata (e.g., Gans 1974; Bourdieu 1984; Lamont 1992), gender and ethnic cultural differentiation and

their effect on inequality (e.g., Radway 1984; Lamont and Fournier 1992), and the production of culture (e.g., Becker 1982; Gilmore 1987; Hirsch 1972; Coser, Kadushin, and Powell 1982; Faulkner 1983; Crane 1987). The fourth analytic frame, "audience effects," looks at how cultural objects affect the people who consume them and the precise patterns of shared meaning and interpretive ideology that provide a compatible environment for the popular and critical success of particular cultural forms (e.g., Wuthnow 1987; Baxandall 1985; Long 1985). Finally the fifth analytic frame, "meaning and social action," refers to how actors in varied mainstream and subcultural settings use culture to guide behavior and establish social identity. In a range of ethnic, political, and ideological contexts, participants use visible expressive symbols and styles to assert cultural difference and communicate the social and personal significance of cultural objects (e.g., Rushing 1988; Ginsberg 1990; Schwartz 1991; Fine 1987).

These frames serve different purposes. For the nonsociologist or for sociologists from outside the field of culture, they provide a guide to current cultural research and a reasonably accurate descriptive picture of research segmentation within the field. For the sociologist of culture, however, these frames represent not only a "division of labor in sociohistorical inquiry, in the sense that any particular frame seems to generate boundaries. . . (within in the field), as Hall and Neitz claim (1993, p. 19), but a strategy to bring analytic coherence to a field that has experienced remarkable growth and empirical diffusion over a relatively short period. As such, in the future these frames may emerge through collective activity as problem areas within the field of culture that will guide empirical and methodological tendencies within particular research communities and influence theoretical interaction, that is, co-citation among researchers. The precise impact in the field, however, still remains to be seen.

A somewhat different mapping, primarily in terms of theoretical emphasis, is offered by Diana Crane in her book *The Production of Culture* (1992) and through her efforts as editor of *The Sociology of Culture: Emerging Theoretical Perspectives* (1994). Like Hall and Neitz, Crane seeks to help codify research segmentation in the field of culture, but she does not try to accomplish this daunting task simply by producing a comprehensive survey of

current research in the field. Instead, she attempts to give the reader a guide to theoretical issues in the sociology of culture, particularly the place of the concept of culture in the discipline of sociology as a whole, and how the centrality of culture as a variable in mainstream sociological models will determine the significance of future research in the field.

To start, Crane argues that culture has traditionally been regarded as "peripheral" to mainstream concerns in American sociology because of its relationship to classical theory (i.e., Marx, Weber, Durkheim). In comparison to the emphasis by these theorists on social structure, organization, and market forces, cultural elements have been consistently treated as secondary in their impact on peoples' behavior and attitudes, particularly surrounding significant life issues (e.g., economic considerations). One reason for this secondary status may be the difficulty classical and mainstream theorists have in conceptualizing and documenting everyday cultural practices. Crane states, "To American and some British structuralists, culture as a concept lacks a suitably rigorous definition" (Crane 1994, p. 2). And from Archer (1988, p. 1), "the notion of culture remains inordinately vague. . . In every way, 'culture' is the poor relation of 'structure.'" Thus culture, approached as the values, norms, beliefs, and attitudes of a population or subgroup, is treated as "an implicit feature of social life. . ." (Wuthnow and Witten 1988, p. 50-51), difficult to put one's finger on, and therefore difficult to document through specific empirical referents.

But Crane argues that culture in contemporary society is much more than implicit features. She states, "Culture today is expressed and negotiated almost entirely through culture as explicit social constructions or products, in other words, through *recorded culture*, culture that is recorded either in print, film, artifacts or, most recently, electronic media" (Crane 1994, p. 2). Further, contemporary sociologists of culture have tended to focus on this "recorded culture" as the principal empirical referent through which various types of contemporary culture are expressed and thus can easily be explored. Not surprisingly then, the primary direction through which the new sociology of culture has proliferated is in areas like art, science, popular culture, religion, media, technology, and other social worlds where recorded

forms of culture are readily accessible. These culture subfields have become the central substantive foci through which the field as a whole has undertaken to build theoretical coherence.

At the same time outside the boundaries of the field of culture per se, it is also clear from recent research in the 1990s that the concept of culture has gained significant relevance in many mainstream areas of the discipline that have traditionally been dominated by macrostructuralist approaches. For example, in both Ewa Morawska and Willfried Spohn's (1994), and Mabel Berezin's (1994) contributions to Crane's *The Sociology of Culture: Emerging Theoretical Perspectives*, the impact of cultural forces are discussed in a variety of macroinstitutional contexts. Morawska and Spohn's focus on examples from the historical perspective includes research on the effect of ideology in the macrostructural analysis of revolution and social change (e.g., Sewell 1985; Skocpol 1985; Goldstone 1991), issues of working-class consciousness and capitalist development (e.g., Aminzade 1981; Calhoun 1982), and the articulation of new forms of religious and ideological doctrines in a social-institutional context (e.g., Wuthnow 1989; Zaret 1985). Berezin's chapter examines the relationship of culture and politics in macromodels of political development and state formation (e.g., Greenfeld 1992; Mitchell 1991). Additional examples in organizational or economic contexts (e.g., Dobbin 1994; Granovetter 1985) only further emphasize the point, that the expanding application of cultural analysis to mainstream models means that for many sociologists, culture is more an explanatory perspective than a substantive area of study. As such, future limitations on the explanatory potential of cultural analysis in sociology will likely be conceptual, not empirical, and the above research suggests a broadly fertile spectrum of empirical possibilities.

Finally, a significant elaboration of the explanatory potential of cultural analysis has taken place in a field organized largely outside the discipline of sociology. "Cultural studies," identifying a loosely connected, interdisciplinary network of scholars from a wide spectrum of perspectives, including the humanities, the social sciences, the arts, and various status-specific programs (e.g., ethnic studies, feminist studies, gay and lesbian studies), has produced a tremendous number of

new kinds of cultural analyses that have implications for the sociology of culture. The approach to cultural analysis, however, is often radically different, both empirically and theoretically, than that conventionally used by sociologists. Cultural studies approaches range from a cultural text-based analysis that interprets meaning and sources of social influence directly from cultural objects (e.g., Hooks 1994; Giroux 1992; see Fiske 1994), to complex interpretative decodings of narratives around issues such as identity politics (e.g., Trinh 1989; Hall 1992) and postcolonial repression and resistance (e.g., Appadurai 1990; Grossberg et al. 1992). As a consequence, the history and emerging relationship of cultural studies to sociology is rather piecemeal. Indeed, Norman Denzin (1996) characterizes the potential association to be one of "colonization"; that is, "the attempt to locate and place cultural studies on the boundaries and margins of academic, cultural sociology" (Denzin 1996, p. XV). Others see the possibility of more reciprocal exchange with the possibility of a "revitalization" for sociological cultural perspectives (Seidman 1996). Whichever way the relationship develops, it is clear that efforts to rethink the concept of culture, the impact of cultural values, and approaches to cultural analysis that take place outside of sociology and even outside of academia will have an invigorating effect on the sociological conceptualization of culture. These battles (i.e., "culture wars") already have had important consequences for policy and resource allocation in education (e.g., Nolan 1996; Hunter 1991). There is no reason to think that sociology will or should be immune to these external influences.

In sum, there is a new appreciation of the salience of culture as an explanatory perspective in contemporary sociological research. Whether it involves the convention-setting influence of art worlds, the moral authority of organizational cultures, or the facilitation of class privileges through habitus, the concept of culture is used to explain behavior and social structure from a distinct and powerful perspective. The future elaboration of this perspective in sociology looks very promising.

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