

From Culture to Claimsmaking

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Abstract

Conceptual approaches to claimsmaking often feature the overarching symbolic templates of political culture or else the strategic actor of the social movement framing approach. Both approaches have value, but neither shows adequately how cultural context influences claimsmaking in everyday situations. To better understand cultural context and situated claimsmaking together, we retheorize the concept of *discursive field*, showing how such a field is sustained through interaction. Claimsmakers craft claims from basic symbolic categories, in line with the appropriate style for a scene of interaction. *Scene style* induces external and internal boundaries to a discursive field, making some claims illegitimate and others inappropriate or else subordinate in a given scene. Conceptualizing how culture works in a discursive field helps us better understand what claimsmakers can say, how, and where. We illustrate the theoretical reconstruction with an ethnographic and archival study of different settings of a housing advocacy campaign.

Keywords

political culture, claimsmaking, discursive field, scene style, interaction

CULTURE AND ACTION IN CLAIMSMAKING: A PUZZLE

Public problems do not simply reflect objective social realities. They emerge through the verbal work that claimsmakers do to turn conditions into problems (Blee 2012; Dewey 1927; Gusfield 1981). Sociologists agree that a broader cultural context influences this work. Accounting for cultural context while maintaining room for the socially situated action of claiming, however, remains a theoretical puzzle that we need to solve in order to understand how claimsmaking happens. On the one hand, scholars studying “political culture” in legislative conflicts, social movements, or national celebrations have shown how claimants draw on broadly shared symbolic templates and craft claims about equal opportunity, workers’ rights, or national identity (Spillman 1997; Steensland 2006; Steinberg 1999; Zubrzycki

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2001). Those studies, however, involve relatively little theorizing about how claimants get from broad symbolic templates to claimsmaking in particular settings. On the other hand, scholars of framing in social movements start with the notion of active claimsmakers: Actors craft claims strategically, aiming to target audiences effectively. Those studies have given relatively limited theoretical attention to broader cultural contexts that shape what claimants can claim (cf. see Williams 1995). The emphasis is on the actor's strategic use of culture (Snow 2004, 2008; Snow and Benford 1988; see also Polletta and Ho 2006). In short, two major lines of inquiry into claimsmaking both end up separating context and situated action.

This article proposes a framework that combines cultural context and situated action systematically. We begin with the notion of *discursive field*, which social movement scholars (Polletta and Ho 2006; Snow 2004, 2008; Williams 1995, 2004) as well as political culture researchers agree is a powerful conceptual tool for understanding the cultural context of claimsmaking. Drawing illustrations from a multimethod study of affordable housing advocacy, we reconstruct this concept (Burawoy 1998). Put simply, we conceive a discursive field in motion, in everyday claimsmaking. By theorizing claimsmaking as a socially situated interaction, our framework can clarify how claimants in public contests get from cultural templates in general to specific claims. The conceptual innovation addresses empirical puzzles. In the case at hand, the framework helps us understand why housing advocates in a U.S. city avoided or devalued quality-of-life language even though the city officials that they appealed to invoked such terms. The framework helps us understand why for these advocates, the most legitimate claims not only invoked a cultural language of fair opportunity but also inflected that language in particular, patterned ways.

Our reconstruction makes three analytic moves. First, we use interactionist and allied writings to reconceive a discursive field as a set of sites in which claimants craft claims from shared symbolic categories of the field. Second, we apply to claimsmaking the insight that situated interaction proceeds through interactors' implicit "working agreements" about how to coordinate their interaction. We conceptualize those working agreements as *style*, elaborating conceptually and then showing empirically how interactors instantiate a style in different scenes of interaction. Third, we analyze three ways that style shapes claimsmaking—by inducing claimants to distinguish *illegitimate* from *legitimate* symbolic categories, *appropriate* from *inappropriate* claims, and *subordinate* from more *salient* claims. In all, we show how style is a mechanism (Gross 2009; Lichterman and Reed 2015) that contributes to bounding and differentiating a discursive field and diminishes the value or prominence of some categories along the way.

Our reconstruction is informed by ethnographic and archival research on housing advocacy in Los Angeles. We compare claimsmaking in different settings of a campaign against residential displacement orchestrated by ISLA (Inquilinos del Sur de Los Angeles/Tenants of South Los Angeles), a community-based coalition that pursued housing and health issues in low-income, plurality Latinx neighborhoods of the city. We focus intently on ISLA's contestation over a proposed luxury residential complex. We found a combination of continuities and variation in claimsmaking across settings of ISLA's work that would seem random or negligible to observers focused on overarching discourses or cultural structures.

Our reconstruction expands the "cultural interactionist" approach (Eliasoph and Lichterman 2003). It conceptualizes in detail how a style of interaction becomes established in a setting; we are not aware of other studies doing this. Beyond observing different group or scene styles as previous studies have,¹ we also show how these interact with symbolic categories. In all, cultural interactionism helped us discover patterns of interaction and changes in those patterns inside and across settings. These patterns clearly mattered to actors who worked at maintaining or changing them at different points. Our approach

to claimsmaking yields a better account of culture and action than others that tend to treat culture as a function of whole, preexisting groups or strategic individuals. Approaches featuring collective identity or symbolic boundaries, for example, would neglect empirical patterns we found or else require adjunct concepts to grasp them. In the spirit of intradisciplinary dialogue, the concluding discussion promotes the value of conceptual specificity and pluralism in research on claimsmaking.

A DISCURSIVE FIELD OF CLAIMSMAKING

Claims

One might analyze a field of discourse on films, food, or other topics (e.g., Snow 2008). We analyze discursive fields of claimsmaking. *Claims* are demands, criticisms, or declarative statements that actors make in relation to public debate (Koopmans and Statham 1999). Claimsmaking involves imagining some wider society, addressing an imagined public audience, present or not, that should care about the problem that the claims address (Lichterman and Eliasoph 2014:810–12). We studied advocates' internal meetings as well as strategic messaging for broader audiences because both matter for constructing problems (Mische 2008; Polletta and Ho 2006; Williams 2004).

Following interactionist approaches (Blumer 1969; Duyvendak and Fillieule 2014:306), we focus on claims about a *problem*. The scale of both problem and analysis may vary; the analyst discovers a field by finding sustained relations of attention and competition over a stake (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992; Fligstein and McAdam 2012). We do not predefine a discursive field in terms of a single "issue," such as housing or health, because use of these tags is itself a product of interaction.

Apprehending Culture and Interaction Together in a Discursive Field

Discursive field denotes different things. Sometimes it describes the sum total of discourses circulating about a topic (Bail 2008; Snow 2008). We instead follow Wuthnow's (1989) expansive treatment and Spillman's (1995) widely cited statement (see Bail 2008; Snow 2008; Steinberg 1999), which understand discursive field as an enabling and constraining cultural context—not a sum of discourses. A discursive field consists of cultural work with "fundamental categories" that set "limits of discussion," like cultural building blocks actors use for meaning making (Spillman 1995:140; Wuthnow 1989:13). Claimants perceive these categories in interaction by way of a "fuzzy" rather than lockstep logic (Bourdieu 1985). This means that other categories occasionally move through the loose boundaries that claimants' interactions enforce, as we theorize and demonstrate in the following.

Our notion of discursive field, like *culture* in much contemporary cultural sociology, is a *dimension of analysis*. It helps us see relatively autonomous symbolic patterns and meaningful practices with their own influence on speech and action. Two guiding insights of this "relative autonomy" approach matter here. First, actors make claims by working with preexisting symbolic categories that they do not make up wholly from scratch. Second, claims are not completely determined by or immediately reflective of actors' social-structural interests or organizations' social positions (Alexander and Smith 1993; Kane 1997; Sewell 1992). This is important to note because some conceptualizations of field trace culture ultimately to social positions (e.g., Bourdieu 1993; Fligstein and McAdam 2012). Our theoretical starting point comports with our central question regarding the cultural context for claims.

Accounts of discursive fields have drawn largely from archival evidence. Indisputably valuable, they cannot show directly how actors get from culture in general to claimsmaking in everyday settings. Implicit theoretical assumptions necessarily fill the gap. Some studies infer that a mechanism such as group interest helps claimants get from culture to specific claims. In Steinberg's (1999) study of nineteenth-century British labor contention, for example, cotton-spinners' fight for fair working conditions was structured by a powerful discourse of "value" that comported with factory proprietors' more than workers' interests. Spinners unwittingly crafted their own claims from that discourse. In a more Weberian vein, sharply divided political interests created a polarized discursive field in the debate over the post-Soviet Polish constitution (Zubrzycki 2001). Other studies imply a process of socialization to a field's symbolic templates (Spillman 1997, 2012), and variation comes with "ad-hoc'ing" from that discourse (Alexander and Smith 1993). Yet, our findings are hard to explain simply as ad hoc use of symbolic templates because the variations we observed were patterned and became predictable, although claimants did not talk about them. Even if one argues that political or economic interests ultimately motivated the variation (e.g., Evans 1997), claimsmakers must also have shared a facility for discerning different settings that group interests alone would not supply.

Bringing culture and action together by way of the social movement framing approach would constrain the inquiry in other ways. Given extensive reviews elsewhere (Benford and Snow 2000; Snow et al. 2014), a brief overview suffices. In social movement research, a frame typically is a package of messages that actors hope will resonate with a targeted audience (Snow and Benford 1988; Williams and Benford 2000:129). First grounded in symbolic interactionism (Snow 2008; Snow et al. 1986:467; Snow et al. 2014), the approach has combined interactionist presuppositions with an "instrumentalist" view of self-consciously "agentic" advocates (Fligstein and McAdam 2012; Snow 2004:385; Snow and Benford 1988:29; Snow et al. 2014), who wield symbols like pliable media. "Skilled" strategic actors use a keen capacity for "reading people and environments" to "frame issues and mobilize others" (Fligstein and McAdam 2012:7). Certainly, advocates can be strategic (Jasper 2006), but strategic intent and skill alone would not easily explain why advocates in this study often used the same appeals before powerbrokers and in informal activist meetings or why they sometimes passed up seemingly strategic alternatives. It will help to consider culture and actor as being more intertwined than either discursive field or framing studies tend to picture them.

A Starting Point for Reconstruction

In a discursive field, by definition, claimsmakers speak in discourse they might not speak outside the field. How does this regularity emerge in interaction? Spillman's (1995) statement is a good starting point because it provides more of a role for interaction than other prominent writings. Although creative and strategic action is possible (Spillman 1995:140), basic symbolic categories are "presupposed in interaction" (p. 141). Making claims outside the terms of those categories would risk interpersonal strangeness (Spillman 1995:141). The argument invokes Goffman's (1983) notion of "felicity's condition," which obtains when actors share baseline understandings about how the world works, enabling them to negotiate competently the interaction at hand. There is a role for the interactor, but the emphasis still remains on the cultural power of the legitimate symbolic categories of the field. Interaction matters because it serves to reproduce the dominance of such categories on pain of otherwise sounding weird or crazy.

Yet, from an interactionist point of view, claimants do not interact in a field or culture in general. They interact in specific settings, real or virtual, that often carry their own expectations (Eliasoph 1998; Goffman 1961, 1974; Gusfield 1981). Situated communication depends on more than felicity's condition alone,² then, and does more than reproduce given symbolic categories. Our reconstruction of the discursive field concept starts by focusing more intently on claimsmaking as a kind of interaction in particular settings.

CLAIMSMAKING AS SITUATED INTERACTION

From Claims to Claimsmaking

To understand how a discursive field generates in interaction, we first need to focus on the *action* itself—claimsmaking, not only claims and actors. We start with a theory of meaningful action available from John Dewey and other American pragmatists.³ These writers share the idea that action is neither wholly predictable nor random. People act individually and collectively in response to problems in living—the signal problem in our case being the challenge of articulating claims. Actors mount a variety of meaningful responses to problems (e.g., Dewey 1958:58), from customary habit to highly reflective deliberation and planning (Dewey 1922; see Emirbayer and Mische 1998). Like other actors, claimsmakers are not simply “reacting” to each other. They are constantly interpreting, acting, and reinterpreting so that goal-oriented activity that we would summarize at a distance as “fighting for more affordable housing” could mean different things to actors located in different lines of ongoing action (Dewey 1939). Thus, research needs to be sensitive to the different rhythms of coordination—not simply goals in general (Dewey 1939, 1958:98, 124).

Our pragmatist approach is similar to that of Blee's close-up research on incipient activist groups. Following Blee, we shift from the usual focus on groups toward a focus on “sequences of action and interpretation” (Blee 2012:14). We, too, hold that activists' “subtle processes of collective interpretation” establish “which possibilities can be considered and which should be sidelined” (Blee 2013:656). In Blee's account, these processes produce “discursive rules,” norms that influence interaction (Elder-Vass 2011) but are not simply guaranteed and must be continually enforced through explicit or subtle sanctions (Blee 2013:659–60). Our framework holds, similarly, that situationally shared understandings shape individual interactors yet may be contested by them.

Yet, our approach differs in important ways. We studied an interorganizational coalition whose partners had collaborated previously. As Blee would note, partners shared some relatively well-established understandings. Blee (2013:656–57), in contrast, studied small, fledgling activist groups, with a special interest in their emergence. The study showed that emergent, discursive rules set in motion a path-dependent process that influenced activists' tactical choices, narrowing options down the line (Blee 2013:664–65), although unpredictable contingencies could still redirect the path. In that way, later group tactics and outcomes resulted from an accumulation of causes along the “path” (Blee 2012:35). In contrast, our analysis highlights how patterned understandings about *interaction itself* “sideline” or privilege claims in that setting about a variety of shared concerns. Even at one point on its “path,” an organization may host different sets of understandings about interaction itself in different settings. These induce different claims about problems or about who to work with and how. We conceive these understandings about interaction as *style* and treat style as an important causal influence on claimsmaking in the following. We identify the interactional cues that establish or change style in a particular setting. Either approach to discursive patterns can be worthwhile depending on one's questions; the concluding discussion returns to this point.

Our approach bids us to look more closely at understandings that undergird interaction and then to specify the role of setting.

Working Agreements

For symbolic interactionists, pragmatist thinkers, and cognitive sociologists (Cicourel 1973; Dewey 1927; Goffman 1961; McCall and Simmons 1978; Mead 1934), interaction proceeds on the basis of certain shared social perceptions. Interaction depends not only on actors correctly guessing how each other experiences the world—felicity's condition—but also on perceptions of who each other are socially. This is especially important for studies of collective action because claimsmaking is, at least implicitly, intergroup speech. Claimsmakers represent something bigger than themselves to an imagined if not present wider audience (Blee 2012:55; Lichterman and Eliasoph 2014:812). They make themselves into “social objects” that others as well as they themselves perceive and evaluate (Schwalbe and Mason-Schrock 1996; see also Tajfel and Turner 1986). Social movement scholars similarly observe that advocates carry social identities and that different ones are both cued by and constitutive of different social situations (Brewer and Silver 2000; Stryker 2000).

Following McCall and Simmons (1978), we say that advocates develop a “working agreement” about their social identities in order to keep interacting and making sense to each other in some situation. The working agreement is the “ground upon which participants may stand” (p. 146); it embeds participants in a distinct setting of interaction. The same participants may use the same symbolic categories to make different meanings in settings grounded in different social perceptions of fellow participants. This would result in different claims—even about the same basic topic. These social perceptions or working agreements are not endlessly varied or random. They are patterned; they are aspects of culture (Alexander 2003:24).

PATTERNED INTERACTION: STYLE

A growing body of research conceives of those working agreements as styles of interaction. Goffman's (1974:288–90) brief discussion of style is instructive: Style is a “property of activity.” Furthermore, a style of interaction may change by setting or situation; it is not intrinsic to a person or group. Style has been conceptualized as a set of mostly taken-for-granted shared expectations about how to coordinate interaction in a collectivity (Eliasoph and Lichterman 2003). Interactional style has several dimensions: One dimension encompasses people's collective, implicit sense of “who we are” in relation to the wider world—their sense of boundaries on a shared social *map*. The other encompasses “what kinds of mutual responsibility bond us to one another”—or *bonds* (Eliasoph and Lichterman 2003:739; Lichterman 2012; Lichterman and Eliasoph 2014). Styles of interaction are patterns. Some have been found repeatedly in public life (see Note 1), including the two featured in the following, and those are thus part of a cultural repertoire. They become familiar to new participants rather than being made up from scratch, gathering by gathering. Most participants pick up readily that depending on the cues, “we” are professionals dedicated to strategizing or “we” are loyal members of an oppressed community fighting oppression, for example. Each of these is a style with a distinct map and sense of bonds. The same people may enact different styles in different situations. Interactors perceive and enact style fuzzily by comparing roughly similar patterns of interaction, not by mechanically following a strict rule (Taylor 1993).

The map idea builds on the concept of symbolic boundaries (Eliasoph and Lichterman 2003:741), so why not just use the latter, well-established notion? *Map* makes a distinct contribution. A capacious concept, *symbolic boundaries* result from judgments usually attributed to groups or social categories (Lamont and Molnár 2002) whether the judgments are developed collectively (Rivera 2015) or else understood as the acts of similarly positioned individuals (Lamont 1992). Style is a different pattern: Following Goffman and the Deweyan perspective sketched previously, we conceive style as a characteristic of situated, ongoing action rather than a group or social category. Furthermore, style denotes a combined pattern of boundary drawing and bonding. The symbolic boundaries concept by itself would not illuminate fully these recurrent patterns and would need an accompanying, adjunct concept to complete that work.

The “Setting” for Style: Scene, Group, or Physical Space?

Now we can specify what we referred to, for introductory purposes, as setting or situation. Although style might characterize either individual or collective activity (Goffman 1974:289), commonly and especially in *Frame Analysis*, Goffman focused on collective activity in very local terms. He focused on “scene,” meaning a “strip of activity” in which participants are sharing a sense of “what is going on here” (Goffman 1974:8–10). In that spirit, researchers have conceived of *scene style*, a distinct way of coordinating activity in a scene. Highlighting scene rather than the more general setting accommodated researchers’ observation that complex organizations like coalitions host multiple ongoing, routinized strips of action—scenes—and that each may be styled a different way (Lichterman and Eliasoph 2014). ISLA advocates enacted two identifiable scene styles, each carrying different practical consequences. Appropriate interactors learned to switch between them, keeping one dominant.

The earlier, less specific concept of group style emerged from observations of simple, face-to-face “groups” that did not have different compartments with different styles of interaction (Eliasoph and Lichterman 2003). They had only one scene. The research was not sensitive to potential differences between scenes that would go with a more complex organization. The less specific concept of group style meanwhile has informed other studies (Braunstein, Fulton, and Wood 2014; Mische 2008; Talpin 2006; de Vaan, Vedres, and Stark 2015) and been embraced when data comport better with it than the more granular focus on scenes (Carlsen, Toubøl, and Ralund 2020). Adopting Goffman’s perspective, it is possible to preserve the originating insights on style while accommodating diverse research projects. *Group style* can describe a typical or dominant patterning of interaction in one collectivity analyzed without finer, internal distinctions, but neither group style nor scene style is a fundamental property of an already existing group of people.

In sum, whether located in a group or analyzed scene by scene, style is a characteristic of interaction itself. To study style is to use a conceptual lens that sees how forms of interaction create different kinds of groups or scenes. This helps explain why group style or scene style are not simply duplications for the well-known concept *collective identity*. There is a glancing similarity. Like map, collective identity can be seen as relational (Melucci 1989) and based on a defining group boundary (Taylor and Whittier 1992). Like bonds, collective identity has been defined in terms of emotional and cognitive connection to a community or a category (Polletta and Jasper 2001). The difference is that style attunes us to the *performance* of identity. The style concept helps us assess the relative importance or lack of importance of identity to a collectivity. Collective identity bids us recognize that in general, groups accomplish shared boundaries and connections. The style concept, in contrast, enables us to

distinguish between collective identity and “the way in which *collectivity* is performed through the coordination of situations,” as put by Luhtakallio and Tavory (2018:153–54, emphasis added). Performances may or may not highlight identity in the sense of strong camaraderie or divisions between “we” and “they.” It depends on the style. The style concept can distinguish these differences empirically, whereas collective identity is a less precise conceptual tool (Fominaya 2010). One of the scene styles in the following coordinates actors around a sharply drawn identity of “the community,” whereas the other does not construct a strongly demarcated or tightly bonded identity. The differences matter; each style leads to different acceptable claims and different notions of who can be an ally or adversary.

Finally, there is the question of how, if at all, style relates to setting in the physical sense. Again, Goffman offers a helpful start: Performing a style depends on “materials” or “resources,” which likely outlast the performance (Goffman 1974:291–92). Those may include the physical aspects of a setting and the individuals there too. Citizen activists hesitate to speak before city officials seated on a raised dais but feel more empowered to express themselves when seated for horizontal communication with those officials (Doerr 2018). At the same time, resources can come to mean different things in different social situations (Sewell 1992) and may be more or less salient altogether. Participants may display their cognizance of their physical environment while acting in line with a familiar style, prompted by the orchestrators of the current strip of action: For example, Catholic worshippers cross themselves upon settling in a church pew but may act as participants in a community organizing meeting that leaders have cued as “faith-based,” not specifically Catholic (Lichterman 2012:30). Physical setting may send meaningful signals without determining the style of action in that setting.

Instantiating Style: Episoding Conventions

Now we can ask how actors recognize and adopt a style in a scene. Based on previous lines of research, Eliasoph and Lichterman (2003:738; see also Lichterman and Eliasoph 2014:813–14) say that upon entering a setting of interaction, people ordinarily recognize quickly the style in play. There is more to say. Housing advocates’ meetings, like many public meetings, usually began with what Goffman called “opening remarks.” Punctuating, setting off the ensuing line of interaction from what transpired before, opening remarks invite a “working agreement” in a scene through clues to what the proper assumptions about interaction should be (Goffman 1974:8–10, 257). Goffman implied what we draw out explicitly: Leading speakers or orchestrators prime participants for a particular style without necessarily controlling ensuing interaction, as we see in the following. In ISLA, that priming often happened in go-arounds of introductions (as instructed by facilitators), or icebreakers. Goffman called these little introductory rituals “episoding conventions.”

In Goffman’s terms, episoding conventions “bracket” previous or adjacent lines of action that are styled differently. Some brackets will set off a long “run,” like the nightly performance of a theater show, that will encompass repeated episodes of the same style of action (see Goffman 1974:254, 261). That kind of bracketing started the run of an entire housing advocacy initiative, which included the Manchester campaign that we focus on. Whether long or short, the lines of action under study might alternate between two equally important scenes, each with a different style, or else one scene “superimposed” onto another longer running scene (Lichterman and Eliasoph 2014). That is why Goffman’s (1974:82, 156–57) metaphor of “lamination” will be useful also. As we will see in the following, one scene style may be “laminated” onto the usual or prior one (see Goffman 1974:251–65), each with its own brackets. Participants may puzzle or clash over which set of brackets to mind most.

Orchestrators set the scene but are not all-powerful interaction leaders. Once a run has started, other participants may recognize that an orchestrator has fallen out of line and decline to follow suit (Lichterman 2012:28). Occasionally, participants may refuse to play along with a run or intentionally subvert obvious brackets. That can transform participants' future lines of action fundamentally (Lichterman 2005:180–92) or else gravely threaten their willingness to work together (Lichterman forthcoming). In short, styled action follows from cues but is not tightly guaranteed. Now we can see how it produces a discursive field.

HOW STYLE SOLIDIFIES A DISCURSIVE FIELD

Field analysts say a field has emerged when actors are orienting to one another, competing or collaborating over a common stake (Bourdieu 1985), a common enterprise (DiMaggio and Powell 1983), or a shared constitutive logic (Armstrong 2002). Claimsmakers in a discursive field compete and collaborate over the shared stake of articulating a social problem. With such varying usage, the discursive field concept is a challenge to reconstruct. Therefore, we reviewed diverse works of field scholarship and inferred three important field characteristics that we could use to make discursive field a more interaction-sensitive concept.⁴

Bounding a Discursive Field: Illegitimate Claims

First, field analysts say fields develop boundaries between what is legitimate and illegitimate (Bourdieu 1985; Emirbayer and Johnson 2008; Wacquant 1989). For discursive fields, we conceive how claimants avoid entire symbolic categories, in effect constructing external boundaries that make those categories illegitimate. Newer participants learn which symbolic categories are legitimate from attending to claims, noticing sanctions and reinforcements (Blee 2013:660–61; Goffman 1961); or as field theorist Martin (2003:31) put it, fields have semiotic effects on participants. We infer claimants' perception that some symbolic categories are illegitimate by comparing how claimants talk across different scenes (see also Blee 2013:663) inside and outside of claimmaking contexts, avoiding claims in some contexts.

Early work in cultural interactionism discovered this process. Eliasoph (1998) observed that when chatting privately with an interviewer, members of a citizen group could criticize lax environmental regulation at military and industrial sites, but in front of the media, critique evaporated, and they said they were just “moms” who cared. Eliasoph named this discovery political *evaporation*. We consider it a subset of a more general process in play when people implicitly judge some symbolic categories to be beyond the bounds of public claimmaking scenes even if they use them in private conversation. Scenarios in the following illustrate how scene style induces the shift.

Internal Boundaries in a Discursive Field: Inappropriate Claims

Second, although scholarship often highlights unequally powerful positions inside fields (e.g., Bourdieu 1984; Fligstein and McAdam 2012), the differentiation need not be only vertical (Martin 2003:34). For example, in the discursive field of U.S. national identity, speakers highlight one or another element of a national cultural repertoire more, depending partly on where they are speaking (Spillman 1997:93). Spillman's (1997:125) study found that regionally or institutionally peripheral claimsmakers—local community celebrants of the American bicentennial, for example—symbolized Americanness by claims about the country's physical environment more than did federal agencies at the cultural center (see also Shils 1975). Thinking in a similar spirit about a far more compact discursive field, we

conceive how a discursive field may maintain rough internal boundaries between scenes. Claimants avoid using legitimate symbolic categories in inappropriate ways or are sanctioned or “corrected” for doing so, depending on the scene. We show that scene style can induce claimants to deem some claims inappropriate because they do not comport well with the style for the scene at hand.

Relative Salience of Symbolic Categories: Subordinate Claims

Third, field analysts often argue fields maintain some kind of hierarchy. Fields make some practices dominant or hegemonic (Bourdieu 1985; Steinberg 1999). Scholars of discursive fields point toward a hierarchy of salience. They find that some discourses have higher “stature” than others, even apart from claimants’ social structural position (Williams 2004), and “cannot be bargained or traded as can capital” because their uses are very context-dependent (Williams 1995:128). Similarly, some themes in a discursive field are “recessive,” as when Australians’ national identity discourse features Australia’s founding moment relatively rarely compared to other themes (Spillman 1997).

We propose that scene style can induce advocates to make some claims subordinate, or less salient than others. Recall that scene style entails a shared social map that separates “those like us” from “those unlike us.” Claimants may devalue or make systematically less salient some categories that they associate uncomfortably closely with “those unlike us,” a competing or conflicting “they” that is either physically present or imagined as an audience. A similar logic of difference operated in debates over a post-Soviet Polish constitution (Zubrzycki 2001). Claimants downplayed appeals to civic universalism because previously communists made appeals that way. Similarly, progressive religious activists sometimes avoid “sounding religious” because that is how fundamentalists sound (Lichterman 2005; Lichterman and Williams 2017). To clarify, we do not argue that we can strictly determine the ways claimants valorize symbolic categories solely by knowing what scene style they are performing. We second Spillman’s (1995:141) observation: Discursive fields are sites for “all sorts of creative cultural work.” Scene style works as a fuzzy, cultural parameter, not a strict program. Advocates enact it with some leeway for variation.

In summary, this reconstruction of discursive field maintains the relative autonomy that Wuthnow, Spillman, and others (e.g., Alexander and Smith 1993; Kane 1997) attribute to culture while conceiving discursive field as an ongoing product of interaction. The field’s actor is cultivated in symbolic categories and embedded in varied social scenes performed in different styles. Styled interaction emplaces several basic features plausibly common to many discursive fields. Next, we describe the empirical study.

CASES AND METHODS

A Local Campaign against an Upscale Residential Development

To illustrate our approach, we use a case of housing advocacy spearheaded by the ISLA coalition introduced previously, which sought intervention from city government. Within its broader initiative against tenant displacement, ISLA ran an intensive, specific campaign advocating alternative building plans for the Manchester, a high-rent apartment complex whose construction would require demolishing part of a hospital site. ISLA organized residents and local advocates to demand that the City Planning Commission (CPC) withhold approval until the developer would agree to alter building plans, offer affordable units, and underwrite a community medical clinic.

Navigating Methods and Evidence

Our arguments emerge from archival and ethnographic evidence. ISLA's managing organization provided access to electronic and paper records of the campaign. These artifacts captured many varieties of public claimsmaking, such as fact sheets, letters to city officials, as well as internal documents like drafts of memos.⁵ We accessed the publicly available audio for the three CPC hearings that addressed the Manchester development. We focus on claims by civic actors: nonstate representatives who may be arguing as members or allies of the campaign or who may be arguing as private citizens, interested groups, or business sector representatives in opposition.

We coded all of these documents⁶ and public speaking moments to identify the symbolic categories they invoked. Informed by previous studies (Brown-Saracino 2009; Čapek and Gilderbloom 1992; Mele 2000), we hypothesized that advocates might treat affordable housing as a problem of fair distribution of opportunity (FDO) or quality of life (QOL). However, we constructed the analysis so we could test rather than simply assume that those two were the master symbolic categories in the campaign. First, we coded for presence of either FDO or QOL appeals.⁷ FDO describes lack of opportunities for a particular resource or unfairly unequal access relative to other groups. QOL describes when conditions impact people's abilities to live physically, culturally, or environmentally sustainable lives. We also noted patterned combinations of those two kinds of appeals inductively. We coded whether both categories were independently important or if one was subordinate and less salient relative to the other. Supplemental analyses coded any claims that did not communicate one of the two big categories just mentioned; such claims play analytically significant roles. Given space limitations, we present numerical tallies of categories only for claims made at the CPC hearings, but we do compare those claims with typical claims in internal coalition meetings.

One author conducted participant observation in strategy sessions, general member meetings, public rallies, city government meetings, and informal settings. The researcher first introduced his goals as a mostly observing, sometimes volunteering participant to ISLA staff, then to a large meeting of the coalition. Following well-established practice, field notes began with "jottings" in all settings researched, later expanded to complete notes (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 2011). We drew from heuristics in the existing literature to code field notes for style.⁸ We cannot have studied all possible interaction scenes or scene styles of the campaign. Still, our evidence and comparisons substantiate the empirical plausibility of our theoretical argument, showing how it can grasp empirical phenomena that would elude current understandings of claimsmaking.

We navigated the two kinds of data toward a theoretical argument through a comparative, theoretically driven version of analytic induction (Katz 2001; Lichterman and Reed 2015). We compared coded documents from CPC hearings and coalition meetings with field note data on style and claims. We launched tentative hypotheses on how symbolic categories and scene styles related. We used successive comparisons between scenes of the campaign and comparisons with scenes outside the Manchester campaign to refine hypotheses about style and claimsmaking in coalition and CPC settings. An ongoing search for disconfirming incidents (Katz 2015) and stable patterns (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Strauss and Corbin 1998) helped us reject, establish, and refine arguments about how scene style shapes claims and sets external and internal boundaries to a discursive field.

SYMBOLIC CATEGORIES OF CLAIMS ABOUT AN URBAN DEVELOPMENT

ISLA had monitored the Manchester development for over two years, in concert with a larger, antidisplacement effort, when its threat to a local hospital became suddenly imminent. “[It] came out of nowhere, and we *had* to fight it,” as one staff person described. ISLA staff quickly developed a specific Manchester campaign, drawing both allies and rhetorical appeals, especially appeals to FDO, from the larger effort (Lichterman forthcoming). Within a few months, ISLA won a revised plan for the Manchester, including reduced-rent apartments and a low-cost medical clinic inside the development.

During the brief campaign, the vast majority of ISLA participants crafted housing claims from the categories of FDO and QOL, primarily the former. The central claim about housing, heard at public CPC hearings and internal ISLA meetings alike, was that the Manchester would adversely affect neighborhood residents’ housing opportunities. For instance, at one of the earliest discussions, ISLA staff said the upscale development was planned for an area already lacking in affordable housing and experiencing rising rents. Talking points prepared for CPC hearings included the claim that the luxury apartments would not be affordable to many South LA residents given that “1 in 4 households is ‘severely rent-burdened’ (over 50% of income goes to housing/utilities).” QOL as an independently important claim was present but relatively rare in our findings. One example is a phrase from a letter prepared by ISLA staff for tenants to mail to the CPC: “[W]e are concerned about . . . the increased unhealthy air quality in the area that would result from the proposed project.”

Comparative evidence indicates the two symbolic categories shaped claims of both opponents and proponents of the Manchester. First, the categories were not simply an artifact of one particular issue. ISLA speakers discussed the Manchester’s health consequences as well as housing impacts. These health claims were also crafted with a predominant emphasis on FDO, with QOL present but less salient. Meeting notes and flyers frequently mentioned that building the Manchester on a hospital site would result in lost services in a locale “severely underserved medically.” Others stressed that “there are 28% fewer healthcare facilities here than the rest of the county,” before adding, “[b]ecause we have inadequate primary care, we suffer from higher rates of diabetes, hypertension, and HIV/AIDS.” Local residents may have experienced inadequate health care privately in varied ways, but the public wording of these claims positioned physical quality of life as a consequence of the distribution of health care opportunities: “*because* [emphasis added] we have inadequate primary care.”

Second, these two categories animated the claims of both uncritical ISLA supporters as well as ISLA-allied skeptics. Some wary, core ISLA participants and allies asked if any agreement with the developer would provide enough housing opportunity and clinic access to low-income residents. At the last CPC hearing, a prominent housing advocate publicly challenged ISLA’s acquiescence to a revised Manchester plan, stressing FDO: “The city has overdeveloped luxury housing by *any* measure. . . . We will keep coming back . . . until low-income communities are treated equitably and fairly.”

Third, the vast majority of pro-Manchester speakers’ claims also articulated either FDO or QOL claims. These speakers included the real estate company’s representatives, business association allies, supportive local residents, and contractors and construction workers. Many of these claimants underscored the project’s capacity to provide employment opportunities during a recession. The development team stressed their plan to fill jobs with local (typically lower-income) residents. Less frequently, speakers’ FDO claims touted the much needed tax revenue that new, ground-floor businesses would generate or the developer’s

commitment to rent 5 percent of units below market rate. A common QOL argument was that the project would enhance shoppers' and commuters' experience of the neighborhood and entice car commuters onto a nearby transit line.

The following sections show how this shared discursive field took shape. Comparisons between coalition settings, official or quasi-official public meetings, and very briefly, informal conversation and settings beyond the campaign show a discursive field generating in interaction.

SCENE STYLE SHAPING CLAIMS: INSIDE COALITION SPACES

Bracketing a Long Episode for a Community of Identity

The dominant scene style in the Manchester campaign was what recent research calls a "community of identity" (Lichterman and Eliasoph 2014). In scenes with this style, participants assume they should interact as members of a distinct community, loyally bound to protect it against outside forces that threaten to diminish or dismember it. Participants maintain relatively high boundaries (Weare, Lichterman, and Esparza 2014) on their map, collaborating selectively rather than imagining an indefinitely expanding circle of constituents. Organizations or populations beyond the community, on this map, either are in solidarity with or else threaten the community. Group bonds require participants to identify closely with the community and maintain tight solidarity over a long haul rather than coordinate for relatively short-term gains. At coalition meetings and CPC hearings as well, ISLA participants acted as a low-income, Latinx-affirming community of color, defending against greedy property owners, newcomers who might gentrify the community, and ineffective governmental agents predisposed to favor property over the community.

In line with the Deweyan emphasis on unfolding, meaningful action, our analysis begins with ISLA's larger initiative against displacement referred to earlier. The Manchester development was one of seven foci of that larger campaign. It became an autonomous focus of contestation with the developer and the city. Although following substantial parts of the larger antidisplacement campaign, the researcher was able to follow the Manchester contestation from beginning to end, making it especially suitable for an intensive analysis.

Episoding conventions at the first meeting of ISLA's larger antidisplacement initiative signaled that this would be new action to resist threats, in the style of a community of identity. The all-day session took place in the dusty meeting room of an archive that held papers and periodicals documenting struggles of earlier eras. In advance of campaign planning discussions, several episoding conventions told us how we should identify ourselves, against whom, and how we should relate to each other: They signaled the style. A series of short presentations, alternating in Spanish and English and titled "what's happened to our neighborhoods," bracketed the start of the meeting. This signaled that "we" were, or should identify with, Spanish-speaking and perhaps Latinx people imperiled by outside threats. Presenters described being evicted to make room for higher rent-paying tenants. One narrated a slide show of a neighborhood recently turned over to housing mostly white students who could pay more rent than previous largely Latinx tenants. He said "new people have always been welcome. Students certainly are welcome in the neighborhood but not welcome to take over the neighborhood." A facilitator then asked us all to play along with an exercise to help us get to know each other. Introductory exercises like these—icebreakers—are a conventional way to bracket meeting time and break down individual reticence to engage in the scene. This one, a game of "musical chairs" played to a salsa dance tune, sent yet more signals of who "we" should *be*. Each time the music stopped, participants raced to chairs, each affixed with a print-out describing a local tenant's displacement. Symbolically, we

would *become* the imperiled, largely Latinx community. After two interludes, we all took seats and introduced ourselves.

Introductions bore a remarkable uniformity as participants affirmed and allied themselves with a community of identity. That included the roughly half of the 50 attendees who were unlikely to have identified as low-income Latinx tenants. Regardless of what they thought privately or said in other settings, they were acting in the style signaled at the outset. They repeatedly expressed a wish to decrease their social distance from and potential harm to what episoding conventions had already marked out as “the community”:

Mabel, a white grad student with purple hair, told us she identified with her “Latino,” nonstudent neighbors and that it wasn’t a good experience to just be around “people 18 to 20 for four years.”

The self-identified white, non-Spanish-speaking staff person from an ISLA organization said, “I live in Balboa Heights [a newer residential complex] and that development could not have happened without displacing many people and it’s a great example of what NOT to do.” He said he wanted to do something to change that.

A very young college student said that he was afraid that the presenter’s slideshow was going to show *his* house because he probably displaced people who used to live there. So he figured he needed to take the responsibility to do something.

These examples are meant simply to illustrate the style in play. It is possible that these participants were acting and presenting themselves in the same way before the episoding conventions we heard; it is possible too that they habitually identified themselves similarly in other group settings regardless of episoding conventions. We use other scenarios, in the following, as evidence of those conventions working and being worked with in interaction.

In succeeding anti-displacement campaign meetings and events that concerned the Manchester development, opening remarks—an episoding convention—often highlighted a long-standing, authentic community poised against threats. For example, at one of the first general meetings that described the Manchester development, the facilitator’s opening remarks mentioned a new volunteer, not a regular ISLA participant, who participated in ISLA’s recent door-to-door survey of the community and was surprised to learn there’s “a community that’s been here, thriving here a long time.” Next came an opening ritual, common at ISLA events, in which participants took turns standing up, saying their names and their number of years lived in the neighborhood; no one claimed fewer than 15. Meetings mainly for staff and representatives from the newly expanding ISLA coalition started with simpler episoding conventions but similarly highlighted an enduring community poised against threats. At one of these, the facilitator introduced the Manchester campaign with a solidarity-building slide show counterposing the community to the developer.

Meetings, in short, often used episoding conventions that signaled who we were in relation to the wider world and what tied us together—setting the style for interaction. As the following sections illustrate, this style shaped participants’ ways of turning the symbolic categories of FDO and QOL into claims.

Typical Claims

Claims about the Manchester consistently articulated FDO in terms of fairness for a self-identified collectivity resisting injustices and indignities. A typical claim printed on

handouts for coalition participants stated: “The luxury apartments would not be affordable to us because [our area], which is mostly African American and Latino, has the lowest socio-economic status in LA County.” Meeting records show that participants at ISLA’s first, internal discussion of the Manchester expressed similar claims: The development would “dramatically accelerate *displacement* [emphasis in original]” and have “serious effects on the health of low-income communities.” These claims were not simply about FDO for Angelenos or people in general but for a systematically disadvantaged, imperiled community.

Scene style helps explain why advocates often used justice-oriented FDO arguments for health or urban development concerns that easily could be experienced as QOL issues too. When individuals worked together as ISLA activists addressing a problem, they shared a collective self-understanding as a boundary-protecting community fighting externally imposed injustices. This was their “working agreement” about social identities (McCall and Simmons 1978). Making community-specific claims against unjust external incursions, whether about housing or health, was the appropriate way to perform social identity in scenes cued for that style; later on, we see that on occasion, scenes were cued for a different style less centered on an authentic, solidary community. The master symbolic category of FDO, “filtered” through style (Eliasoph and Lichterman 2003), became “more justice for a subjugated community.” Although rarer, QOL, too, was filtered through the style. In ISLA internal meetings, the most common QOL claims promoted the cultural distinctiveness of the community and its history of struggle, shared qualities that needed preserving and affirming.

External Bounding of a Discursive Field: Illegitimate Claims

An entire symbolic category may challenge the scene style that claimsmakers prefer. A claim crafted from that category can be recognized as illegitimate (by participants as well as researchers) when interaction surrounding the claim indicates it was an interactional mistake and “should not have happened” (Katz 2015) in a claimmaking scene. In this case, we discovered that the category of compassion, present early in ISLA’s public claimmaking, largely dropped out of public claimmaking scenes—although caring comments occasionally emerged outside of such scenes.

At the daylong kick-off for the anti-displacement effort, pictured before, a featured speaker plaintively expressed to the assembly her strong ties to her neighborhood. “I had to move because there’s no affordable housing. . . . I am in Pleasant Valley, but *this* [neighborhood] is my home . . . my parents live here.” She broke down crying in front of us, and an ISLA leader gave her a tissue. In this public moment, she sounded less like ISLA’s “proud members of the community” who announced themselves in ritual introductions and more like a supplicant appealing to compassion.

During the Manchester campaign, this kind of appeal became extremely rare if not absent. Occasionally in private chat after meetings, the ethnographer heard staff or members express fellow feeling for people displaced or fearing displacement from their neighborhood but not in meeting or public event scenes where claimmaking happens. We infer there was an emerging discursive field that was “evaporating” compassion claims from legitimacy; later on, analysis of the very few such claims articulated at CPC meetings bolsters our argument. Compassion could make sense privately but would strain the implicit working agreement about claimants’ social identity if they came off as weakened supplicants seeking compassion rather than empowered resisters demanding fairness. It would take further research to ascertain that scene styles among pro-developer claimsmakers similarly delegitimated

compassion discourse, but evidence here is sufficient to demonstrate that scene style can induce claimsmakers to exclude a symbolic category from their claims.

Comparison with scenes beyond the Manchester campaign further strengthens the argument. During a one-to-one conversation at an ISLA-sponsored street fair, a longtime coalition leader invited the researcher to get more involved, saying sadly about the fairgoers, “they’re *so* poor.” The researcher never heard the leader talk this way in claimmaking scenes of the coalition. Another core participant in the ISLA coalition similarly seemed to partition her comments depending on the scene. At meetings of her own coalition, where religious representatives focused on public education about homelessness and housing, she frequently invoked compassion as well as fairness as a rationale for action. Congregations needed to care more: “If every church, mosque and synagogue takes a homeless family,” she would say, homelessness would disappear. When this member spoke at ISLA campaign meetings, she did not use this language but advocated housing opportunities for the community and affirmed the community’s valor.

On exactly one observed occasion, a different symbolic category emerged—that of social structural transformation beyond FDO. The boundaries of a discursive field, as we noted before, are fuzzy and not absolute. At a general meeting with hortatory opening remarks about preserving the community, two residents said that ISLA advocates ought to stop local property owners from selling to outside developers and enlist the neighborhood’s city council member to regulate property sales. In response, a facilitator appealed to fairness rather than fundamental social structural change: “We don’t have control over property owners . . . they get great offers that they can’t turn down.” Then another ISLA activist treated the residents’ claim as illegitimate; he changed the subject altogether, which did not reemerge. Speaking as a participant in a community of identity, the facilitator then urged a “focus on the connections that we share as a community.” We infer, then, that appeals to the category of social structural change were illegitimate in this discursive field, although not beyond the imagination of ISLA advocates in other contexts. Privately, over bagels, one leader gamely imagined outing big property developers as “liars” and said developers and college administrators were “the same—it’s these elites.”

By definition, a community of identity coordinates itself to defend the community. Demanding fairness for a tightly bound community is not the same as challenging the position of “elites” and altering capitalist property relations that extend far beyond the community. Such change would not defend so much as completely transform the community, making defensiveness irrelevant.

In sum, interaction coordinated by notions of who we are in relation to others and how we are obligated to each other—style—jells and sustains a discursive field. Style makes some big, symbolic categories off limits and others less salient. However, as we noted earlier, actors do not simply occupy a field driven by general cultural templates. They interact in scenes, where styled interaction turns legitimate categories into appropriate claims. Scenes with different styles in effect produce internal boundaries of a discursive field, as we show next.

Internal Bounding of a Discursive Field: Inappropriate Claims for the Scene

Three examples will illustrate the internal field boundaries of appropriateness. First, the repair of an unintended breach shows the influence of ISLA participants’ most typical scene style on sympathetic claims from outside ISLA scenes. In their own office, pro-bono attorneys crafted a letter to the CPC on ISLA’s behalf. Working within the same discursive field, the attorneys’ draft appealed to FDO, saying that the Manchester would “exacerbate the

ongoing displacement of affordable housing.” It proposed “a community health center” to replace services lost to the hospital demolition. In general terms, the letter sounded commensurate with ISLA’s concerns.

Yet in one noteworthy area, the letter elicited revisions by a campaign staffer. To address housing, the attorney’s initial draft proposed a solution that would “meet the needs of those currently working in the area or at risk of displacement.” The staffer revised this language so that the final document demanded that affordable housing construction should be “determined largely by the needs of those currently *living* in the area [emphasis ours] and at risk of displacement, or working in the area yet unable to afford housing close to their place of employment.” In short, the final draft changed the attorney’s language to emphasize a self-identified, residential community’s needs. The staffer’s revision prioritized community residents ahead of those employed in the area. The revision added that the community already suffered high asthma rates and other health injustices—again highlighting current residents over workers in the area. The revision also deleted a reference to legal statutes that incentivize affordable housing development, replacing it with the claim that a severe shortage of low-income housing (not statutes incentivizing developers) should compel an alternative building plan. It is not at all obvious that the community-centered phrasing would be more strategic for officials responsible to the whole city and familiar with legalese. It did, however, comport more closely with a community of identity demanding justice.

Appropriateness is just as important but more complicated when meeting orchestrators laminate one scene style onto another. Doing so, they implicitly expect participants to keep track of which style is appropriate for which part of a meeting. This second illustration suggests the power of episodizing conventions, which may end up posing a challenge even to the orchestrator who uses them.

Now and then at meetings of ISLA’s larger anti-displacement campaign, advocates briefly suggested making agreements with a developer. They suggested enticing new coalition members with an attractive agreement, not immediately through loyalty to the community. This would be a different way of coordinating interaction; the conversation never lasted long. However, at several meetings of the Manchester campaign, a leader opened with episodizing conventions that invited participants to collaborate in this different style, as a short-term *community of interest*.⁹ In a community of interest, actors coordinate around an issue or limited set of concerns, aiming to attract an array of participants who can share the concern rather than giving voice to a self-identified, distinct community imperiled by invasive outsiders. Coordinating themselves this way, advocates pressured the Manchester developer to offer quotas of guaranteed jobs, subsidized apartments, and a health clinic in exchange for going ahead with development plans. Staff signaled *at the same time* that participants should continue seeing themselves on the longer-term trajectory of a community of identity beyond the campaign. To make appropriate claims, participants needed to know how to pivot between the two nimbly (see Lichterman and Eliasoph 2014:833–36). They would have to preserve the underlying style while including actors who identified with issues more than with the long-term community. Claimants might attend to one set of signals, not the other, and one participant did just that.

At a strategy meeting one month before a CPC hearing, leader Raimunda bracketed the session by asking us to introduce ourselves with a response to the question “What makes you care about the Manchester project?” Even an ISLA staffer, who spoke first, responded in a way that invoked an (personal) interest rather than the ritual affirmation of “we, the community.” “I care because I live just down the street,” she said. Then, an attendee affiliated with an electricians’ union said he cared because the developer “has never used union-wage labor . . . we’ve picketed his building sites.” Strikingly, *we* was not the community but

electrical workers interested in union wages. A local student said it was “not in students’ interest” to build another high-end development. Raimunda summarized the dozen responses in terms of interests in issues, not commitment to the community.

After the introductions, another staff member created a more familiar bracket for the meeting, beginning his slide presentation by announcing “this is a struggle about preserving community resources.” Succeeding slides sardonically positioned the developer on the other side of the community’s boundary. Participants might take up either Raimunda’s or the staffer’s bracketing signals about the appropriate style. The ensuing conversation and tension suggested that participants were supposed to heed both, welcoming a conversation about health care, employment, or student housing interests while tying those interests firmly to the community.

One labor advocate, Frank, implicitly heeded only the first signal, which emplaced the laminated style, the community of interest. Raimunda’s reaction to Frank revealed that she was assuming appropriateness depended on juggling styles, not just choosing one. Raimunda asked Frank, who directed a job-training center, how many people he could turn out for the next CPC hearing. He said, “I can’t. What’s in it for them? There’s no motivation.” Raimunda then asked him if his workers could come to support “the alternative vision” she had just sketched, of jobs and health care for the community. Frank replied, “They can support the alternative vision, but I don’t . . . bring [workers] to shut down a project.” This was a claim about interests—the ones that had made the coalition a worthwhile engagement for Frank; his claim was not “I bring workers to support the community,” as Raimunda’s question invited. Raimunda later asked if Frank would speak on the developer’s poor record of local hiring—an interest of Frank’s. Now he agreed but balked at wearing the large, identity-announcing oppositional sticker that Raimunda said ISLA allies would sport.

When leaders signal a scene style, the ensuing action unfolds to a logic that leaders do not necessarily control every step of the way. Raimunda had opened room for participants at the meeting to relate to ISLA as a community of interest. Frank evidently took that beyond the limits she assumed to be in play for the community of identity underlying the laminated, interest-based togetherness, as Goffman would put it. The conflict would not be so readily explained as an ideological clash. Frank whispered mischievously to the researcher that it would be great if local college students protested the Manchester, touted by the developer as housing for them. He was not necessarily a fan of the Manchester but rather, engaged a different style, temporarily greenlit by an ISLA leader.

The reverse lamination happened at a final campaign meeting. In the opening ritual, residents each recounted their connection to the community of identity. Then two orchestrators coaxed wary participants into a community of interest with the developer as partner to get their approval for a potential deal. As one resident said, “turning around” after fighting the developer (their dominant style) was hard. They voted support for the deal—on the basis of interest in affordable units and the clinic. They agreed with more enthusiasm to bring t-shirts announcing “proud member of this community” to the last CPC hearing just in case the deal fell through, after which they would struggle and not bargain. The community of identity would live on.

In sum, style not only bounds a discursive field externally, delegitimizing some categories, but also differentiates it internally. In the first example, a staff member made a well-intended professional ally’s claims comport better with the ongoing style inside ISLA: defending a group of low-income, plurality Latinx community residents, not just people who spend time in the neighborhood. At the strategy meeting and final campaign meeting, leaders signaled two styles and expected participants would follow each appropriately on cue but sometimes found themselves needing to accede to a style they set in motion. Rather than a

resource that leaders can fully control in order to induce claims, style is a collective agreement leaders can't always switch at will, inducing claims they can't always control.

SCENE STYLE SHAPING CLAIMS: IN PUBLIC FORUMS

Maintaining a Community of Identity at City Hall

ISLA staff worked at framing claims (Snow and Benford 1988) for CPC hearings within the parameters of their dominant scene style. At a strategy session just before the most crucial hearing, they reported back from meetings with a sympathetic planning commissioner who suggested that the coalition get commissioners' approval for one good speaker to take six minutes and "make a really excellent case." Typically, speakers in a long line each delivered two-minute statements. ISLA executive leader Raimunda's response was highly instructive:

We do want a variety of speakers to represent different parts of the coalition . . . and one or two community members to make it real . . . somebody who needs health care, somebody who needs a job. . . . We do want to have residents—it's very important—none of *us* [emphasis hers] can represent close to them.

The commissioner's well-intended strategic advice to limit the number of speakers was less important than having enough speakers to include ones who could authentically represent the community. Raimunda wanted to be strategic by portraying the breadth of the coalition while also imagining a community of identity speaking in the official forum. At the CPC hearing, a long line of ISLA participants including local residents each gave two-minute testimonies. Inside and outside the ornate, high-ceilinged city hall chamber, ISLA advocates maintained the community of identity conversationally. As Goffman would have it, the city hall hearing offered the physical and human "resources" for this scene style, as the following observations illustrate.

Before the hearing began, 20 men wearing DayGlo orange shirts with mottos such as "[Manchester developer] provides jobs" congregated outside. One said the men had come from firms that work on the Manchester developer's projects. Researcher: "Did you come for free?" Answer: "We're being paid." A coalition organizer told the researcher in a lowered, conspiratorial tone, "We've been talking to some of the ones picketing outside . . . they don't know why they're here." She and another ISLA leader said that they seemed to be day laborers. Although almost all would likely have been identified by fellow Angelenos as Latino, the Latinx-affirming ISLA leaders did not try making common cause with them. In style terms, it makes sense: They were on the developer's side, not the community's.

Research on citizen participation in governmental hearings often emphasizes the power of governmental agents. They set the discussion agenda (Adams 2004:44; Farkas 2013; Levine 2017). Their "home turf" is a physical setting designed, whether intentionally or not, to instantiate a hierarchy of governing agents on top and intimidated citizen petitioners and audience below, literally as well as figuratively (Cheng 2019; Doerr 2018). Our observations do not dispute those findings or insights. Rather, we point out that those important physical conditions do not necessarily determine the style of interaction that unfolds.

At this and other CPC hearings, ISLA advocates and allies performed the sharp boundaries and team solidarity of a community of identity. They scoped out the opposition and reported back to each other. During the hearings as well as before and after, they maintained a conversational patten reminding them that they were a resistant community battling

invasive outsiders, even if faced by six commissioners on a large, raised wooden dais. At this CPC hearing, the researcher heard the former director of ISLA's most central organization whisper tart comments about developer-allied speakers and admiring comments about ISLA claimants. After both an ISLA ally and Raimunda offered public comment, the former director affirmed each of their testimonies—"She's scary!," the director acclaimed. Furthermore, an ISLA staffer implied to the researcher that the friendliness of one of the developer's employees could be a trap. The theatrically imposing chamber, timed speaking slots, and huge video monitor did not keep ISLA participants from enacting their dominant style.

Typical, Illegitimate, and Subordinate Claims at City Hall

Claims at the three CPC hearings, like those in ISLA-sponsored settings, were overwhelmingly FDO or QOL. Out of 57 claims made by ISLA or ISLA-allied speakers, 45 appealed to one of the two categories, another 4 combined both. Among developer and allied speakers, the proportion of QOL, FDO, or a combination was 39 out of a total of 42 claims. At the most pivotal hearing, described just previously, ISLA supporters' FDO claims repeatedly decried a development that would not benefit or "be affordable to local residents," as one put it, and/or would exacerbate the paucity of medical service in an underserved area. Developer-allied speakers' FDO claims emphasized the increased opportunities—new jobs and "community-serving retail" spaces—that the developer's investment would make possible. Their QOL claims emphasized the Manchester's boost to pedestrian life and its proximity to non-automobile transit options.

Strikingly, only one City Hall claim by ISLA speakers, including local residents, made a pitch for compassion, and only three by developer-allied speakers did so. The character of the speakers, on each side, strengthens the argument that these claims invoked an *illegitimate* category. The three developer-allied compassion claims came from construction workers. One said his were tough circumstances and he needed the job. Another said "it will help me and my pals." On the ISLA side, the sole compassion claim came from a local parent distressed that without the clinic, her disabled child would have a long commute to pediatric services. We infer that compassion claims nearly evaporated before entering the discursive field around the Manchester. They were like interactional mistakes, committed by people (i.e., construction workers and a parent) who had spent too little time to become cultivated to the field's conventional range of discourse.

A comparative tally of FDO and QOL claims at CPC hearings is valuable in light of our argument that some categories become subordinate through a logic of association with outsiders. Although ISLA participants made more claims overall at CPC hearings than did pro-Manchester speakers, 14 out of the total of 17 independent QOL claims made by anyone *were made on behalf of the Manchester developer*. Only 3 of 57 ISLA claims articulated QOL alone and not FDO too. There is no obvious strategic reason for ISLA speakers to avoid QOL claims, especially given that city officials' own public deliberations after the testimonies invoked QOL claims frequently. Why not try using the QOL language that officials invoked, and why not try counterframing pro-Manchester QOL claims? It certainly was possible: Some written testimony submitted by attorneys supporting ISLA did use QOL appeals as well as FDO, but they made these (written) claims as public interest allies, not directly as the community.

We propose that hearing QOL claims coming disproportionately from outsider-opponents could induce many ISLA advocates to sustain this working agreement in public hearings: "People like *us* do not emphasize QOL." This logic associates QOL appeals with actors that are mapped as distant from and antagonistic to the community. Over time, QOL claims may develop a social reputation that shapes future claimsmaking.

Subordinate Claimsmaking: A Semiofficial Public Forum

We argue that ISLA advocates subordinated QOL claims by associating them mainly with other people. At one meeting, for example, ISLA advocates identified QOL arguments for pedestrian-friendly, “pretty” neighborhoods with city planners—actors across the community’s stiff boundary. Facilitator Ethan said that when asked to envision an ideal city, many ISLA members wanted the kind of neighborhood planners promoted; casually, he added that this is “not a mystery.” Yet, Ethan and others satirized planners’ QOL language for “leaving out the people who are not there”; Ethan asked who can afford such neighborhoods. Participants associated QOL claims with diminishing opportunity for the community. We follow this dynamic more closely at a public forum.

Late in the Manchester campaign, several long-time ISLA members attended a forum on improving a boulevard near the Manchester. Partnering with a state agency, urban redesign experts introduced plans to make the thoroughfare safer, less car dependent, and more bicycle and transit accessible. In opening remarks, the first speaker, chosen by forum planners, described her “ideal Sunday” on the boulevard—a bicycle ride and stop for brunch. This primed participants to take boulevard redevelopment as a QOL issue for the public in general. ISLA participants, as a community of identity, challenged this interactional bracket.

Participants adjourned to tables equipped with street maps that included new developments. They would use emoticon thumbtacks to “like” (smiley face) or “dislike” (sad face) what they saw on the maps. Sitting together, the ISLA contingent “liked” only on a mall built by a nonprofit ally of ISLA and a largely minority-student school near the Manchester—outposts of the community. From their table, Hortencia reported:

We have a lot of sad-faces on ours. Most of us are community residents. We ask who will benefit from redevelopment. We need housing for people to enjoy living on the boulevard. [We also want] safer crosswalks, accessibility . . . clean streets, trees, all the things that you [want too], but also . . . to integrate the needs of . . . so many long-term communities.

The boulevard was these participants’ community, not a temporary destination for unspecified Angelenos; in style terms, Hortencia posed a different map. Design experts had invited attendees to enjoy the boulevard’s quality of life. At Hortencia’s table, QOL goods that benefit the public in general were worthwhile but unremarkable. The bigger issue was that redevelopment, if treated as a general QOL good, would not benefit the community.

In sum, as styled interaction crystallizes a discursive field, some categories of claim become illegitimate while others become less salient, downgraded though not illegitimate, through a logic of association with outsiders. The “creative work” Spillman (1995:140) saw inside discursive fields happens through these patterns of interaction. We observed these patterns in official settings such as City Hall as well as ISLA-sponsored activist settings.

CONCLUSION: PRECISION AND PLURALISM IN THE STUDY OF CLAIMSMAKING

Previous efforts to theorize culture in claimsmaking have highlighted an overarching discursive field with little attention to interaction or else have attended relatively little to cultural context. We reconstruct the discursive field concept to show more precisely how discursive fields work. Styled interaction maintains a discursive field that privileges some symbolic

categories of claim while making others illegitimate or subordinate and makes different inflections of categories appropriate for different scenes.

Contributions of the discursive field and scene style concepts do not obviate the contributions of others. For instance, Manchester campaign leaders actively framed talking points for CPC authorities, and future research might compare framing in this campaign with that in similar but less successful ones. By attending to cultural contexts, though, we also learn what advocates can imagine as a strategic framing to begin with. We learn why they might sidestep an insider's strategic advice, revise official letters counterintuitively, or downplay the rhetoric that municipal decision-makers themselves use routinely. Scholars of collective identity may want to ask why an identity as the community was continually compelling for ISLA actors. Are there personal or collective stories that make it a strong basis of collective action for people like them (e.g., Ewick and Steinberg 2019)? The value of these questions does not diminish the value of knowing that occasionally ISLA participants disattended to or concertedly compartmentalized the community identity. The influence of physical setting on features of interaction is indeed interesting; occasionally even a seasoned speaker's voice shook nervously when addressing officials at city hearings. At the same time, physical setting does not necessarily sidetrack the style that actors are accustomed to elsewhere. Insights on how incipient activist groups narrow tactical options and insights about how scene-specific understandings shape claims in more established groups are all valuable.

Different communities of sociological inquiry give us a variety of compelling questions to ask about cultural processes including claimsmaking (Jacobs and Spillman 2005). Although some critics may fear that the multiplicity of culture concepts in sociology invites incoherence (Smith 2016), we propose that multiple culture concepts increase precision and illuminate important patterns. Incoherence, rather, would result from expecting one culture concept to do too much.

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NOTES

1. See for example, Braunstein, Fulton, and Wood (2014); Eliasoph (2011); Lichterman (2005, 2012); Lichterman and Eliasoph (2014); Luhtakallio (2012); Mische (2008); Talpin (2006); Yukich and Braunstein (2014).
2. Felicity's condition points to a general, "cognitive" understanding of the social world (Goffman 1983:28–30, 51), the knowledge that a theater ticket-taker is not like a psychotherapist, for example.
3. See especially Dewey (1922, 1927, 1939), Addams (1902), Peirce (1992a, 1992b), and Joas (1996). "Pragmatism" is a loose constellation of orienting postulates, intellectual problems, and discussions concerning action, meaning, and knowledge claims, not a unified theory or single method. We lean on John Dewey's contributions.
4. In the logic of theoretical reconstruction (Burawoy 1998), ethnographic findings rarely if ever suffice to reject a theoretical framework or initiate one from scratch. They can initiate substantial theoretical improvement. Sometimes the "framework" itself must be synthesized from disparate works (Lichterman and Reed 2015).
5. We received 327 documents from ISLA.

6. These probably do not represent the campaign exhaustively, but campaign staff remarked that no other comprehensive source existed.
7. Both authors coded, achieving 92 percent intercoder reliability.
8. See the guide in Eliasoph and Lichterman (2003:784–86). For indicators of different scene styles, see Lichterman and Eliasoph (2014:815–17).
9. For description of this style with supporting studies, see Lichterman and Eliasoph (2014:842–44).

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