Culture in Interaction[1]

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How does culture work in everyday settings? Current social research often theorizes culture as "collective representations"—vocabularies, symbols, or codes—that structure people's abilities to think and act. Missing is an account of how groups use collective representations in everyday interaction. The authors use two ethnographic cases to develop a concept of "group style," showing how implicit, culturally patterned styles of membership filter collective representations. The result is "culture in interaction," which complements research in the sociology of emotion, neoinstitutionalism, the reproduction of inequality, and other work, by showing how groups put culture to use in everyday life.

Communication is at the core of recent scholarship in the sociology of culture. Culture, this current work says, is a set of publicly shared codes or repertoires, building blocks that structure people's ability to think and to share ideas. A society's collectively held symbolic system is as binding and real as a language (see, e.g., Alexander and Seidman 1990; Alexander and Smith 1993; Bellah et al. 1985; Kane 1997; Rambo and Chan 1990; Sewell 1992; Somers 1995; Steinberg 1999; Swidler 1986; Tipton 1982; Wuthnow 1984, 1987, 1991, 1992). Earlier work (e.g., Almond and Verba 1963; Parsons and Shils 1951) treated culture as a set of inner beliefs and values that people may never express but carry around in their heads.

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Those earlier works made a conceptual leap from the social system straight into the individual's psyche and back out, with little attention to patterns of communication. The recent concepts of culture, in contrast, all draw upon something like Emile Durkheim's ([1912] 1995) understanding of the binding, structured, and structuring property of culture. For simplicity's sake, this article will refer to these newly prominent concepts of culture—different as they are—with Durkheim's term, "collective representations."

These collective representations, say the theorists, exert a strong social force. But they are polysemous; the same symbol or collective representation can take on different meanings in different contexts (e.g., Swidler 2001; Schudson 1989; Walzer 1985; Sahlins 1981; Hall 1973). As Paul Ricoeur (1974) writes, people rely on symbols to make sense of experience, but at the same time people interpret the symbols they use (Kane 1997). A fundamental task for sociological studies of culture, then, is to conceptualize how people use collective representations to make meaning together in everyday life. This article takes on that task.

In several separate ethnographic studies, we entered the field with recent cultural sociology's theories of collective representations. But we came to realize that we could not adequately understand how the groups we studied drew upon collective representations. To illustrate, we offer just one example here: in different groups of activists and volunteers (Lichterman 1996; Eliasoph 1998), the "language" of individualism made public-spirited community involvement meaningful. This poses a puzzle, if not a downright paradox, for theories of collective representations. For these theories (Bellah et al. 1985, e.g.), the dominant language of individualism makes it hard for Americans to express concern about anything beyond their own private affairs. These theories would guess that participants would have used the language of individualism to signify selfish action or withdrawal from public engagement altogether. But instead, listening to activists and volunteers associate words and actions, we found them interpreting individualist language to *mean* community involvement and to make community involvement possible.

To discover how people use collective representations to make meaning together in everyday life, we drew on an old and crucial insight shared by symbolic interactionists, cognitive sociologists, and pragmatist social philosophers. People always make meanings in specific social settings—large or small, face-to-face or virtual—and they make those meanings in relation to each other as they perceive each other. Those perceptions are the shared ground for interaction in a setting (Mead 1934, 1964; Dewey 1927; Goffman 1961; Stone 1962; McCall and Simmons 1978, esp. pp. 143–47; Snow 2001; Cicourel 1993, 1991, 1973).[2]

[2] As McCall and Simmons (1978) put it, people in a situation develop a "working

This article marries that insight to the study of collective representations. Actors make meaning with collective representations, and they do so in a way that usually complements the meaningful, shared ground for interaction. We will conceptualize this shared ground as "group style." We argue that the style filters the collective representations and the result is what we will call *culture in interaction*.

Drawing on two main ethnographic cases—a group of suburban activists and a group of bar patrons—the article shows how group style filters collective representations in ways that may depart markedly from the meanings that scholars have imputed to the representations. One cannot fully understand a group's shared culture in an everyday setting without understanding the group's style. So, while agreeing with the recent emphasis on publicly communicated, collective representations, this article views the culture concept in a more fully sociological way—by analyzing collective representations as groups communicate them in interaction.

WORKING TOWARD A CONCEPT OF GROUP STYLE

We define group style as recurrent patterns of interaction that arise from a group's shared assumptions about what constitutes good or adequate participation in the group setting. Group style is not just a neutral medium for communicating meanings that are already fully formed before their practical enactment. Group styles, like collective representations, are elements of *culture*. Groups do not create them from scratch; they are patterned and relatively durable. Neoinstitutionalist insights, discussed below, help us theorize that group styles are not idiosyncratic to particular groups but are shared across many groups.

Studies of public life have demonstrated something like multiple "styles" or "genres" of civic participation, even within the framework of broadly similar ideologies or beliefs. Michael Schudson (1998) shows that Americans have, over the centuries, practiced different genres of what appear, on paper, to be very nearly the "same" collective representations of citizenship. Different eras have held very different assumptions about what the very act of voting means, for example. Penny Edgell Becker (1999) has shown that even within the same religious denomination, church

agreement" about their social identities. This agreement serves as the "ground upon which participants may stand" as they continue their interaction (p. 146); we borrow this notion of "ground"; see also Cicourel's work on background knowledge (for instance, 1991). Studies of interaction disagree on how tenuous or changeable these "working agreements" or "definitions of the situation" may be (McCall and Simmons 1978, p. 142; Goffman 1961). Our case studies would affirm Goffman's emphasis on their rule-like quality. Threatening the "agreement" could require "repair work."

congregations maintain different models for "being a congregation." There are "family"-style congregations and "community"-style congregations, for instance. These models do not derive simply from theological doctrines. Courtney Bender (2003) shows how volunteers at a kitchen for housebound people with AIDS give each other room for political and social differences. She argues that their courteous, nonpushy style of forming a group is itself what builds group solidarity; the solidarity is not a result of a strongly shared ideology. Similarly, recent studies of media document surprisingly varied "styles" of media consumption,[3] which suggests that group styles in everyday practice are culturally patterned and meaningful in themselves (see also Fine 1987; Hart 1994, p. 8; Rambo and Chan 1990; Hall 1995).

Everyday experience makes the concept of group style intuitively plausible. When people walk into a group setting, they usually recognize the style in play. They know whether the setting calls for participants to act like upstanding citizens or iconoclasts. They know some settings call for joking irreverence, while others demand high-minded seriousness. Settings usually sustain a group style; different settings do this differently.

Insights from psychology and cognitive studies support the intuition that group styles are patterned and that participants can recognize those patterns. First, some studies show that what Erving Goffman (1959) famously called "the presentation of self" varies depending on the context (Mischel 1969; Mischel and Shoda 1995). Knowing how someone acted at lunch on Monday will not necessarily tell you how the person will act in a meeting on Monday, but it may help you predict how the person will act at lunch on Tuesday. Similarly, as Jean Lave (1988) shows, a person who cannot do a math problem abstractly on paper can easily solve the very same math problem concretely while grocery shopping; in these cases, people cannot even think the same thoughts in all contexts. We do not argue that no stable, core self exists:[4] we claim simply that to understand how groups work, we need to know how the same people might define

[3] Ron Lembo (2000), e.g., asks what meaning viewers ascribe to the activity of television-watching itself, surprisingly showing that a person might watch high-toned documentaries and boxing with the same style. The variations in the practice of TV watching do not themselves seem to depend much, if at all, on the contents of the show. Similarly, David Morley (1992), Elihu Katz and Tamar Liebes (1990), Andrea Press (1999), and others show how different audiences sustain different styles of TV watching. Katz and Liebes (1990) found, e.g., Israeli Jews from the former Soviet Union, Palestinian Israelis, and Americans in the United States, variously treated the show *Dallas* as a political statement about capitalism (the Soviet Jews), a moral statement about corrupt U.S. society (the Palestinians), or a message about the careers of the real-life actors themselves (the Americans).

[4] Mischel and Shoda's (1995) psychological data show that stable personality and variable behavior across situations are not mutually exclusive.

and experience themselves in different contexts or settings—"lunchtime," "doing math," "grocery shopping"—and not simply assume that these self-understandings are always the same. Research also suggests there are some limits to the number of settings people can recognize as needing different styles; people tend to fit new experiences into a finite number of familiar categories or "schemata" (see, e.g., D'Andrade 1995; Kahneman and Tversky 1973; Cicourel 1973; see also DiMaggio and Powell 1991; for a deft review of this large literature, see Howard [1994]).[5] Schemata categorize and distinguish between different types of people, organizations, things, or contexts.

Extending these social-psychological insights, we infer that people might also schematize group settings. The moment people enter a group, they try to cue themselves into the group style, to answer, What style is in play here? If schemata for group settings are widely shared, enduring, and meaningful, then we can call them elements of "culture." Doing so begins to build a much-needed bridge between cognitive psychology and cultural sociology (DiMaggio 1997).

To make group style easier to operationalize for research, we highlight three dimensions of group style that we found useful in organizing and sharpening our observation of culture in groups. Each dimension is an observable pattern of members' implicit understandings of participation in the group.

1. "Group boundaries" put into practice a group's assumptions about what the group's relationship (imagined and real) to the wider world should be while in the group context.
2. "Group bonds" put into practice a group's assumptions about what members' mutual responsibilities should be while in the group context.
3. "Speech norms" put into practice a group's assumptions about what appropriate speech is in the group context.

We arrived at these three dimensions by constructing categories inductively. We found, through sustained comparisons across six different cases (Lichterman 1996; Eliasoph 1998), that these three dimensions kept arising, over and over, as we tried to make sense of our groups. They allowed us to figure out how groups sustained shared grounds for participation (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Strauss 1987; Strauss and Corbin 1991). We compared these six cases with 10 other ethnographic cases (Lichterman 2002, 1999, in press; Eliasoph 1990, 2002*a*, 2002*b*) and found,

[5] Schemata, or individual personality, may limit the number of different settings that people can recognize as requiring different styles. This poses an interesting empirical question, but one beyond the scope of this article.

again and again, that the three dimensions adequately covered the definition of good or adequate participation in the groups.[6] Analyzing these three dimensions together allowed us to document the ways in which group style is not as elusive or evanescent as the word "style" might imply. However, these dimensions should not be reified; they are useful for helping the researcher notice and document patterns of interaction and meaning making that might otherwise go unnoticed.

Of course literary scholars have analyzed style at least as much as have sociologists. Kenneth Burke's influential scholarship (1945), for example, discovers a stable style of representing action across a wide range of literary, philosophical, and popular works, from Ibsen to Lenin. Discourses always identify the act, the scene, the agent, the means of agency, and the purpose of the action. The question for him, then, is how different discourses combine these elements in different ways. Burke (1945) offers crucial insights into the ways people create *stories or arguments about* action—what he calls "a grammar of motives." But to understand how collective representations become meaningful in everyday life, social researchers need to observe how *groups* coordinate themselves, not only how individuals or texts conceive of action (illuminating as that is for other purposes; see, e.g., Benoit 2000).

Social psychologists have developed many valuable concepts for studying group life. Some of these, discussed below, helped us develop the concept of group style we present here.[7] Here, we briefly introduce those

[6] The three dimensions also dovetail nicely with a trio of forms of action that have been conceived repeatedly in the sociological tradition. Emirbayer and Sheller (Emirbayer 1996; Emirbayer and Sheller 1999) identify three "contexts of action"—social-psychological, social-structural, and cultural. These build upon and revise Alexander (1988) and Parsons and Shils (1951). For ethnographic inquiry, we needed to reconstruct these definitions if we wanted to understand how people summon the "contexts of action" into relevance in everyday interaction (Cicourel 1981). To spell it out, Emirbayer and Sheller's "social-psychological context" corresponds to this article's second dimension, about group bonds; Emirbayer and Sheller's "cultural context" corresponds to our third dimension, about shared meaning of speech itself; and their "social-structural context" corresponds to our first dimension, about the group's shared understandings of its relations to the wider world.

[7] Since the aspects of interaction that mattered most in our empirical cases were patterned and durable, the frameworks most helpful to us were those that illuminate group culture, rather than fluid situations or individual "roles." The patterned styles of interaction we found are not adequately addressed in either a symbolic interactionism that emphasizes emergent norms and selves or a role theory that emphasizes relatively stable relations between roles that are seen as patterned by social structural forces. Synthesizing the two perspectives is a valuable enterprise (Stryker and Statham 1985), but addresses different questions than those that our cases raised about group culture. We found stable patterns of interaction that are instantiated in groups and, we propose, belong to a broader cultural repertoire. Neoinstitutionalist conceptualizations of organizational culture capture the stability and breadth that our cases suggest, and have particularly strongly influenced our thinking.

frameworks. After presenting the empirical cases, we will return to them and show how the "group style" concept draws on, and in turn, contributes to them.

The first dimension of group style draws upon studies of "social identity" and "symbolic boundaries." These studies show that people carry with them images of how their group relates to, and is distinct from, other groups on the horizon (see, for some excellent examples, McCall and Simmons 1978; Tajfel 1981; Farr and Moscovici 1984; Hewitt 1989; Jenkins 1996; Stets and Burke 2000; Lamont 1999, 1992; Lamont and Fournier 1992; Lamont and Thevenot 2000).

The second dimension parallels the neoinstitutionalist insight that different institutions or groups define the obligations and connections between members differently. Even organizations similarly structured "on paper" may impute different meanings to group ties. We found, as neoinstitutionalists suggest, that those definitions tend to come in "bundles" and are mostly stable over time (for some powerful examples, see DiMaggio and Powell 1991; Morrill 1995; Stevens 2001, 1996; Clemens 1997; Becker 1999).

The third dimension of group style draws on symbolic interactionism (e.g., Goffman 1979, 1961, 1959), linguistic anthropology, ethnography of communication, and related fields (Bergmann 1998; Brenneis and Macaulay 1996; Brenneis and Myers 1984; Carbaugh 1988; Fitch 1999; Gumperz 1982*b*, 1982*a*; Gumperz and Hymes 1972; Myers 1996; Philipsen 1992; Rosaldo 1973, 1982, for some examples) that analyze how groups sustain speech genres (see also Bakhtin 1988; Silverstein 1972). These genres implicitly tell members what appropriate speech is—what the very act of speaking should mean in the group. This interdisciplinary work typically comes out of departments of communication, rhetoric, and anthropology; we think that sociologists—of institutions and culture, especially—can gain important insights from it and should contribute to the dialogue.

This article does not make causal statements about group styles. It does not attempt to map out all the possible group styles in U.S. society. It does not focus on how interactional style is connected to social-structural patterns, such as class or racial inequality; we discuss that elsewhere (Eliasoph 1999, 2002*a*; Lichterman 1996, 1995). Instead, the goals here are to understand the importance of group style for theorizing collective representations—to show how group style works with collective representations to produce "culture in interaction." Group style will prove itself a worthy concept if it improves the analysis of collective representations that social researchers could carry out if they used only extant concepts in sociology (Burawoy 1998; Lakatos and Musgrave 1968).

The next section, below, reviews two prominent theories of culture,

arguing that a focus on culture in interaction might make these concepts more useful. After that, we present two empirical cases,[8] showing how group style filtered the meaningful use of collective representations in everyday settings. The following section compares the cases with each other, and compares situations *within* each case, showing how members can challenge group style within a group. Next we show how an analysis of "culture in interaction" produces questions and insights different from those offered by other major efforts at linking culture and interaction. Then we show how focusing on culture in interaction might advance lines of research in cultural resistance, symbolic boundaries, neoinstitutionalism, and linguistic anthropology. In conclusion, we suggest ways that scholars could use the idea of "culture in interaction" to study a range of settings, beyond the civic groups of the sort portrayed here. Finally, an appendix offers practical methodological suggestions for investigating culture in interaction.

WHAT DOES THE CONCEPT OF GROUP STYLE ADD TO THE STUDY OF CULTURE?

Languages, Vocabularies, Tools

Many scholars of culture focus on the "languages" or "vocabularies" through which people explain their actions (Bellah et al. 1985; Hays 1994; Hart 1992, 2001; Teske 1997; Tipton 1982; Witten 1993; Wood 1994; Wuthnow 1991, 1992). In *Habits of the Heart*, Robert Bellah and his colleagues (1985) describe the different "languages" of American moral reasoning not as a set of static, inner beliefs and values but as conventional, easily accessible words and phrases that give form and meaning to otherwise uncharted, vague, contradictory sentiments.

One of these is the language of individualism. The authors of *Habits of the Heart* argue that middle-class Americans often talk about their commitments to others in terms of "what feels good to me" or "what I can get out of it." As these writers argue, without these shared languages, communicating motives would be nearly impossible; without the communication, they argue, forming motives would be nearly impossible (see also Wuthnow 1991); form and the content are inseparable. Ann Swidler (1986) takes the focus on form farther, saying that the languages, or "repertoires," have a life of their own. They make meaning independently of consciously affirmed values or beliefs; people use cultural "repertoires" or "tools" in the ways the tools most easily allow themselves to be used. In

[8] For detailed descriptions of the groups and the methods of study in each project, see Lichterman (1998, 1996) and Eliasoph (1998).

this way, the tools *give* people the projects and the shared language for thinking and talking.[9] To take one of Swidler's examples, even though the vast majority of Americans do not live in the "standard" household of two parents plus children, we all know what the "standard" is and refer ourselves to it, even if only to distance ourselves from it (Swidler 2001). This is an important point about shared languages that is often misinterpreted. Being "shared" does not mean that a language adequately describes all Americans' experiences, or even anyone's experience, or that most Americans agree with the norms that this language implies. It means that it is the common reference point, the "standard"—even if almost no one adheres to it.

Culture scholars often derive cultural vocabularies from interview evidence (Wuthnow 1991; Hart 1992) or combinations of interview and participant-observation evidence (Bellah et al. 1985; Hart 2001; Tipton 1982). But the interview is itself also a setting (Cicourel 1981; Mishler 1986; Briggs 1991) that does not have the same properties as other everyday settings. And the interview is organized according to a researcher's own time, rather than participants' time (Bourdieu 1990; Cicourel 1981). Analysts of cultural vocabularies have not taken differences in setting explicitly into account. Implicitly, their analyses *hold the setting constant*, or take the interview setting to be a universally generalizable setting.[10] They assume a "default" setting, in other words, and so they hold the group style relatively constant too.

The connection between language and action is not airtight (Bellah et al. 1985). Americans' stripped-down moral language is a liability, the Bellah team argues, that constrains the ability to think and act. However, they are careful to say that Americans are often more socially committed than their frequently self-interested or self-expressive language makes them sound. The speakers' actions can outstrip the language; conversely, one assumes, the language can outstrip the speakers without that being simple hypocrisy. But generally, the languages constrain action. Our empirical work dives straight into this gap between the saying and the doing,

[9] Wuthnow argues, in his theoretical work, that sociologists should not attempt to ask how these vocabularies make meaning for people—he leaves the question of meaning up to "metaphysics" (1987). But his empirical work (1991, e.g.) sometimes treats meaning as a problem that sociologists can address; obviously, we prefer this latter stance.

[10] We want to emphasize here that critiquing the interview method does not mean that we have nothing to learn from it. On the contrary; our work was initially inspired by the long history of interview studies in social research. And sometimes, the interview setting is just like the settings in which people normally discuss an issue. Swidler's *Talk of Love* (2001), e.g., uses private, thoughtful interviews to mine people's ideas about something that they might talk about thoughtfully mainly in private settings.

specifying what the gap is between the "languages" and the everyday meanings and practices that do not always match the languages.

Cultural Codes

Another approach to collective representations searches for shared "binary codes" of public discourse (Alexander 2001; Alexander and Smith 1993; Kane 1997; Jacobs 1996; Battani et al. 1997). From their analysis of U.S. legislative crises over the past 200 years, Jeffrey Alexander and Philip Smith (1993; Alexander 2001) argue that a specific set of binary codes has continuously organized debate in large U.S. political forums. These implicit, binary civic codes work, the authors say, to divide good and bad. U.S. legislators designate political actors "good" by declaring them "active, not passive," "autonomous, not dependent," "rational, reasonable and realistic, not irrational and hysterical"; the legislators impute "goodness" to social relations by calling them "open, trusting, truthful and straightforward" (Alexander and Smith 1993, pp. 162–63; see also Alexander 2001). The codes are the sturdy scaffolding of public discourse upon which people build arguments to justify why a person, policy, or institution is good or bad for the country.

The authors' point is that, rather than sharing some ineffable consensus about ideas, speakers in the United States share a code. Speakers must invoke the same codes *even when they make arguments on opposite sides of a political debate*. The codes do not map onto action in any linear way, and people interpret them in surprising ways; that is, like Bellah and his colleagues, Alexander and Smith clearly say that the codes never call forth a single political position or line of argument. For example, whether arguing in favor of or against women's citizenship rights in the early years of the United States, legislators had to use the codes (Alexander 2001, p. 376). Invoking the codes is not the same as agreeing; again, this subtle point matters and is easy to misapprehend. To show how people set the code into motion, Alexander and Smith borrow the term "ad hoc–ing" from ethnomethodology. That is, people improvise; they think with the codes creatively as they formulate particular arguments.

We want to push the inspection of the enactment further. Alexander and Smith probe national and foreign policy debates conducted in Capitol forums (Congress, investigative committees) during crises or "liminal" times. The authors chose these high-pitched episodes because during such moments, they argue, the underlying codes of civil society appear especially clearly (Alexander and Smith 1993, p. 166). Thus, like scholars of cultural vocabularies, Alexander and Smith hold the *settings* and styles for their study roughly constant. These "default settings" are moments of high seriousness, "sacred" moments of collective crisis, in high govern-

mental arenas, in which powerful politicians' words must really matter. Speakers hold major national institutions and the American public in mind; a serious, engaged style of talk usually seems necessary.

Studying culture in ordinary, everyday settings requires moving the analytic spotlight beyond these formal, institutional settings and training it on a range of contexts in which high seriousness is not usually the mode. Different settings afford different group styles that can give different meanings to the same codes. In summary, these varied, Durkheimian analysts have developed their concepts to analyze serious speech, or thoughtful reflections. They assume a certain setting with a certain style, even though such assumptions are not explicitly part of their analyses. But, we argue, there is no "neutral" or "default" social position. Communication always happens in some setting, even if a virtual setting.

This point makes sense for culturally subordinate codes or languages, as well as ones that researchers claim are widely shared or dominant. Subordinate or subcultural collective representations, too, can be patterned and enduring. Ronald Jacobs (2000), for example, documents an African-American public sphere, in which journalists articulate binary codes of "good" or "bad" citizenship somewhat differently from the mainstream actors Alexander and Smith studied (similarly, see Herbst 1998). And not all Americans share the language of individual, personal dignity; some are more preoccupied with preserving social honor (Philipsen 1992; Horowitz 1983; Meyerhoff 1979). Bellah et al. (1985) illustrate that less widespread biblical and civic-republican languages of social commitment still exist alongside individualist languages. Not only are there subcultural or suppressed codes and languages, there are also simply varied ones. Wuthnow (1991) shows that American volunteers draw on diverse vocabularies of motives. Our analysis here does not require readers to accept prior claims about some language's or code's *dominance*; the point is to see how group styles filter the languages or codes in particular settings.

Whether the researcher begins with "languages," "codes," or some other concept of collective representation is unimportant for our argument. That must be an empirical question, grounded in the particular setting and framed by a theoretical and substantive agenda. Some research focuses on moral reasoning of the sort Bellah and colleagues examine, while other research highlights public debate of the sort Alexander examines. And some everyday settings may be illuminated in different ways by both sets of questions and analyses. Both ethnographic cases presented here—of the suburban activists and the bar patrons—happen to have begun with the concept of "vocabularies." But the point we are making about group style applies to the quite different analytic lens of binary civic codes, too. When rereading our data through the theory of "codes," the puzzles we encountered also returned us to the group style concept. Both in the

interest of brevity and to show the breadth of the style concept's usefulness, case 1 focuses on "vocabularies," while case 2 focuses on "codes," but either conception of collective representation would have illuminated either case.

We are using the "vocabularies" and "codes" concepts for reasons beyond their capacities to illuminate aspects of our cases. Both are prominent in recent scholarship, and both have been applied empirically and developed further by scholars other than the originators. If the concept of group style fulfills its promise of "sensitizing" (Blumer 1986) us to something we might have overlooked, it will systematically distinguish between two different enactments of the "same" vocabulary, or code, without writing off those enactments as inscrutable or ad hoc improvisation.

A musical metaphor might help illustrate the point. John Coltrane's bebop improvisation of the song "My Favorite Things" is easily recognizable both as "Coltrane" (style) and as "My Favorite Things" (language, or code). No one would ever mistake it for Julie Andrews's smooth, sweet singing of the same tune in the film *The Sound of Music*, even if the basic themes are the same. When looking for the realm of free agency, theorists often turn to interaction—Alexander and Smith point to the creative ad hoc–ing that people do, to get from the code to the enactment of the code. But after only a few notes, a music lover will easily recognize Coltrane's style. Just as Coltrane's "Favorite Things" was simply not an unpatterned, ad hoc variation, so group styles are not just loose, superficial, or ad hoc interpretations of stable, constant collective representations.

ILLUSTRATIONS

Each of our two cases begins with very brief descriptions of the groups. Then we walk readers through the puzzles we confronted when armed only with the analyses of collective representations given by previous cultural sociology. Taking note of puzzles and addressing them with further observations from the field, the research followed the logic of "grounded theory" (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Strauss 1987; Strauss and Corbin 1991; Lichterman 2002). Each case shows how the puzzles led us to the group style concept and its three dimensions. We record group members' "mistakes" or avoidances that helped cue us in on the dimensions of group style (Goffman 1961, pp. 7-81; McCall and Simmons 1978, p. 142). Brief comparisons help make the argument that group style filters the meaningful use of collective representations. In all, the cases show that collective representations and group style together produce "culture in interaction."

Case 1: Suburban Activists and Timid Affiliation

Airdale Citizens for Environmental Sanity (ACES) tried to create critical, civic engagement in a milieu that made that kind of engagement scary. The far outpost of a metropolitan area, surrounded by countryside, Airdale was a town of single-family, ranch-style homes and low-slung shopping malls with enormous parking lots. ACES members often characterized Airdale as "suburban." Taking their cue from more established urban activists, the ACES group started challenging the environmental practices at Microtech, a local military contractor. When we began our research, core members of ACES had already been involved in this activism for six years; they remained with the group through our two-year study. ACES stopped Microtech from building a toxic waste incinerator, and they monitored and publicized many other environmental issues related to Microtech. They encouraged Airdale residents to discuss those issues at town meetings and government hearings. In contrast with the urban activists whose example they followed, ACES members were more tentative and timid about going public with their cause. They practiced a style that we will describe below as "timid affiliation." But first, let us describe the collective representation that the group's style "filtered."

Investigating a Collective Representation: The Language of Expressive Individualism

ACES members frequently drew from what Bellah et al. (1985), Charles Taylor (1991, 1989), and others call the language of expressive individualism. The words, phrases, and symbols of this language posit that each individual has unique feelings and intuitions that ought to be expressed; the personal self is the ultimate reality, and expressing it is a good (Bellah et al. 1985, esp. pp. 333–34; see also Rieff 1966). Expressive individualism resonated in ACES members' talk about "personal empowerment." ACES's leader, for instance, imagined Airdalers as selves with the potential to develop, to empower themselves by finding their *personal* voice in the debate about Microtech, a voice that came from deep within the self. This was not "empowerment" in the sense of a subordinate, aggrieved, tightly bound group taking power away from powers-that-be, as in some 1960s student movement groups or community organizing campaigns (Gitlin 1987; Delgado 1986). The ACES leader never said ACES needed strength in numbers or tight organization; rather Airdalers needed to find the power "from within" to dissent from the majority opinion in Airdale. While "empowerment" in the more traditional sense depends on strong community leaders, the ACES leader liked to say that she looked forward to entire movements of self-propelled, self-empowered individuals who

would "not need any leaders." Using herself as an example, she said her activism developed out of a long process of inner searching.

Other members affirmed the expressive individualism of "empowerment," too. There was Stacey, who said she found strength "from within" to deal with Microtech by meditating. Another member, Clement, who did not speak in personal empowerment language himself, said just after a town meeting that he agreed completely with one speaker's explanation for Airdalers' seeming lack of concern about Microtech. Referring to a book popular in the peace movement (Macy 1983), the speaker said Airdalers were personally "disempowered," *psychologically* blocked from speaking their minds on mind-boggling issues. The "personal empowerment" discourse that circulated widely among urban activists found its way into Airdalers' talk.

Bellah et al. (1985) thought expressive individualist language was a liability that would constrain people's abilities to think and act in a socially minded way. Other studies of moral vocabularies also have argued that expressive individualism encourages people to see their own, unique selves as ultimately more meaningful, more real, than social responsibilities (Tipton 1982; Wuthnow 1991; Wood 1994; Hunter 2000; see also Rieff 1966). In this view, a cultural language that celebrates the good of the unique self must make it difficult for people to articulate social responsibilities.

The overriding puzzle of this case is that ACES members used expressive individualism to *affirm* social responsibility and public-spiritedness, rather than to subordinate them to self-centered expression. For instance, at a town forum on environmental hazards, the ACES leader observed that relatively few Airdalers had spoken during the open microphone period. They had not fully developed their inner selves. "We still have a lot of empowering to do," she concluded. While talking about the float that ACES entered in the annual Wild West Days parade, the leader and another member said that not everyone could be "empowered" immediately. Some Airdalers were not "ready," they said; pushing the issue would be like trying to toilet train a baby, said one. But the sight of the float might "plant a seed in people's minds," these two agreed, for later on when people were more ready to discuss Microtech reflectively.

"Empowering" Airdalers, in other words, was a long-term project of patiently coaxing people into public life, into responsible citizenship, and not simply an invitation to "do your own thing." The group agreed that it was good for Airdalers to speak out on the issues, regardless of their opinions; that is why they opened their monthly meetings to everyone—even to Microtech employees. At these meetings, the group made decisions about the campaigns and lawsuits and got updates on environmental problems at Microtech. Still, the group made time for members

to explore their own opinions. They would erupt into spontaneous discussions about the morality of risk taking at the Microtech plant, for instance, or the politics of military production. At one meeting, group members began venturing their opinions about the Cold War and its impact on American democracy. The ACES leader said these exchanges ought to happen more often because "that's what ACES exists for—to empower people." In short, this group understood public-spirited citizenship in the language of expressive individualism. Their use of this language differed from what previous research would have guessed. How can an observer understand the difference?

Group Style versus the Default Style

This article's opening insight begins our quest to make sense of the difference between the group styles we observed and the default styles implied by the theories of culture. Groups use collective representations from the larger culture in a way that usually complements the groups' meaningful, shared ground for interaction. Clearly, the language of expressive individualism mattered for meaning making in the group, because members repeatedly associated a very personal notion of empowerment with public, active citizenship. Discovering the ACES group style helped make sense of how members could use individualist language to affirm public engagement. The ACES style was very different from the group style implicit in the Bellah team's analysis of expressive individualism.

A researcher listening for the language of expressive individualism would have been struck by several puzzles in the field; addressing these puzzles ultimately speaks back to the overriding question. First, even though ACES members affirmed personal empowerment, they seemed fearful of expressing themselves at all. Talking about Airdale's environmental hazards—even at ACES meetings in the local library—felt risky to them. One early member of ACES complained, for instance, that municipal leaders had dismissed him as a political "faddist" for questioning Microtech's proposed toxic waste incinerator. Another worried that some of her friendships in town would not survive her involvement in ACES. The ACES leader's own son complained that her activism made him feel embarrassed at school. ACES members felt brave to enter their homemade float in the town's annual parade: a cardboard mock-up of a toxic waste incinerator, complete with smokestack belching a fluffy mass of orange and gray fiberglass to represent toxic fumes. Their nervousness was palpable as they stood next to the float, awaiting the start of the parade, and one member wore a "company scientist" costume and a mask so that no one would recognize her. Speaking out was perfectly legal; why was it so scary? And why would scared people use the seemingly brazen, no-holds-

barred language of self-expression? Discovering an element of group style—relations to the wider world—helped address these questions.

Group boundaries.—ACES members understood their organization as a group of local citizens, very much rooted in if ambivalent about Airdale, peering warily at Microtech. Not surprisingly, Microtech was an important, negative reference point for ACES's group identity. ACES members experienced Microtech as a looming behemoth, present wherever they turned. One member said that her petitioning sorties had made her think that "in this town, in terms of organizations, everything seems so tied up with Microtech." Another member said that when he first saw his name on a list of plaintiffs in a lawsuit over Microtech's proposed incinerator, he thought to himself, "What if they try to take my house away?" The group would muse on how Microtech sometimes "accidentally forgot" to send notices of environmental impact hearings to people in town. Microtech was not simply a competitor with ACES in the public fray; it was more like a fearsome giant against which ACES defined its group boundaries.

The group defined its own boundaries in relation to images of Airdale and of urban protestors, too. Members complained about having to fend off derogatory labels that they assumed townspeople would foist on them. Liz insisted that if only ACES could create a flyer that told Airdalers what ACES was really about, people would be less likely to think it was "some radical-leftist organization." The group leader hoped the flyer might encourage Airdalers to stop thinking of ACES members as "monsters with two heads."

Though ACES members wanted to distance themselves from negative images of ACES that they assumed many Airdalers harbored, members embraced their identity as Airdalers. They identified themselves in contrast with the urban protestors who were culturally as well as geographically distant and traveled to Airdale for annual rituals of protest and arrest. ACES members pointed out that they shopped at regular grocery stores, not the funky organic food shops that urban protestors frequented. One had a son in the 4-H club. Another played softball on a local team, and kept her opinions to herself so she would not get a reputation as an "activist." Another complained that "we are perceived as being these radical anarchists, but we are all concerned about our families" and "trying to live responsible lives." Yet another wanted to distance the group from the image of "antinuke, peace kind of people." Group members got a good laugh when their leader said the urban activists were having a "cultural experience" just to hear locals talk articulately at a public hearing. "We didn't bring any cows [to the meeting]," joked one. In short, the ACES group saw itself situated in a specific, very threatening milieu with which they also identified, albeit ambivalently.

The group's relations to the wider world were very different from what the Bellah team's analysis of expressive individualism *assumed* about group style. The Bellah et al. (1985, pp. 47, 121–38) study takes the psychotherapeutic relationship, and its close cousin, the support group, as the model setting for expressive individualist language. Much of the evidence excerpted in the Bellah et al. book derived from fascinating personal interviews. Interview settings take people out of routine group contexts and encourage them to explore issues at length; interview settings are not so unlike the setting of the archetypal therapeutic relationship. It makes sense, then, that the possibility of different settings with different styles would not enter into the analysis. But at least implicitly, Bellah and his coauthors took the style of the therapeutic setting as a default style. As for relations to the wider world, they pictured participants in these settings disconnecting themselves from most reference points (Bellah et al. 1985, pp. 136–38). This characterization is typical and telling. "Separated from family, religion, and calling as sources of authority, duty, and moral example, the self first seeks to work out its own form of action" (Bellah et al. 1985, p. 79). In the default style of the setting that Bellah and his coauthors imagine, it would not be surprising for people to use expressive individualist language in reference to limitless personal exploration.

But ACES did not try to disconnect itself altogether from surrounding standards of cultural authority or duty. On the contrary, members identified enough with the local community and its "suburban" norms of privacy (Baumgartner 1988) to be wary of speaking out. ACES used the language of personal empowerment in a way that fit, or at least did not seriously threaten, this aspect of the group style. Thus, personal empowerment did not mean "do your own thing," in a cultural vacuum. Instead, when the ACES members associated personal "empowerment" with developing opinions and voicing them, they were in effect saying, "It's *OK* for normal, local people to speak out individually." No wonder the ACES leader kept encouraging herself and other members to develop personal "empowerment"; they identified themselves with the "normal," family-oriented people of Airdale who, they imagined, would find speaking out unseemly. The culture in interaction was different from the meanings that Bellah and his coauthors ascribed to expressive individualist language. Given the group's relations to the wider world, ACES members' association of personal empowerment with public commitment makes sense.

Urban activists talked of personal empowerment, too. But the urban activists and ACES practiced different relations to the wider world, and so empowerment did not get used quite the same way in each group. At a rally against Microtech in Airdale, one urban activist intoned angrily, "We are empowering ourselves, withdrawing our consent [from Micro-

tech's operations]!" A statement like this does not convey any particular relation to communities or institutions. Empowerment, for the urban protestors like this one, got associated with standing out angrily—as she was doing while yelling into the microphone.

In contrast, when the ACES leader talked of empowerment after the town meeting or the parade, she associated it with Airdalers' quiet, personal development into more active citizens. She associated it with calmly, individually, finding one's own way *into* the thick of public engagement—not standing out individually and loudly from others. The urban protestors claimed to speak on behalf of Mother Earth, not any specific community. And rather than identifying with Airdale, they related to Airdalers as rather distant, sometimes parochial others, even though ACES members agreed with them on important issues. Identifying itself as a specifically local group, with local people's apprehension of giant Microtech, ACES carried a different sense of relation to the wider world, resulting in a somewhat different use of personal empowerment talk.

A second set of puzzles arises for a researcher listening to expressive individualism in the group. If it was so easy for individuals to speak out, why would members not find very different ways to "empower" themselves, thereby threatening the group's unity? If empowerment is personal, there is no guarantee that different individuals would find and express their inner selves in the same way. Not only did the Bellah team argue that expressive individualism would weaken public, collective effort (e.g., Bellah et al. 1985, p. 133), but social movement scholars have implied something similar. Contemporary activist groups that prize individuality can get pulled in conflicting directions (Melucci 1989; Epstein 1991). Once again, we can address the puzzle by discovering group style at work—in this case, the dimension of "group bonds."

Group bonds.—ACES assumed group bonds should give individual members a lot of leeway for different opinions and different degrees of tolerance for risky encounters. That does not mean ACES had no real bonds. Quite the contrary, group members felt obligated to accept other members' privacy and individuality *as responsible members of the Airdale community*. The group did not obligate members to express their deepest, personal values or feelings aloud, as some contemporary activist groups do (Epstein 1991; Melucci 1989). The group depended, rather, on mutual respect for whatever degree of privacy that any member wanted, as long as members were doing something for Airdale without unduly offending Airdalers.

The group bonds bid members to respect one another's private motivations without having to revere the same cultural and political traditions. So one member could speak as an "anticapitalist," while another member presented herself simply as a "good citizen," and another as a New Age

spiritualist, because the group validated all sincere expression that did not tread on other individuals' autonomy. The few times members did talk about their own motives for involvement in the group, they got a respectful hearing, but no members of the group insisted that their own beliefs become a subject of sustained conversation. Carrie briefly described her church's "church and society" group at one meeting. Stacey once said that she found Airdale's environmental issues so overwhelming that she would "meditate to release the energy" that these issues generated inside her. But neither Carrie nor Stacey invited, much less enjoined, other members of the group to talk about Christianity or New Age precepts about personal energy; they simply mentioned them. Unprompted, ACES's informal leader said that members did not "come on too strong" with their own moral or political motivations. "Carrie doesn't come on with Christianity" at meetings, and the leader herself said she had "certain spiritual commitments to peace, justice, and the environment, but I don't come on strong with them at meetings."

A few times one member threatened the style of bonding in the group, by trying to convincing members to go in his own, more vocally radical direction. Other members met his harangues with long, awkward silence. They never criticized his own stance. But they never took him up on his proposal that they articulate their own moral or political viewpoints in ideological depth. *He had threatened the shared grounds of interaction*, trying to make ideological priorities a bigger part of group life instead of respecting members' privacy. He breached the group style.

ACES members depended on one another as local people, and not just as people with the same points of view. Members respected Liz, who conducted a door-to-door petitioning campaign, even though this was not the most effective way to gain support for ACES, because Liz was daring to speak out and was doing it for Airdale. Members told each other they wanted more local residents to attend public hearings, even if they disagreed with ACES. They declared at public hearings that residents of a community had the right to participate in decisions affecting the local environment. While ACES members affirmed the opinions of the more experienced, more flamboyant, more publicized urban protestors, they did not simply merge with the urban protest groups—though they could have. They kept their distance and created their own group with its distinctive sense of local obligation. They respected each other's "conventional" lifestyles. They depended on each other to pursue the group cause in a way that would invite locals, not scare them off. Clearly, the urban protestors felt no such obligation when they went to Airdale for the purpose of getting arrested and shocking locals into a new consciousness.

ACES group bonds were different from those implicitly assumed in previous analyses of expressive individualism. Previous analyses pre-

sumed that bonds would consist in the obligation that individuals meet each others' personal needs, ideally without limits imposed by community or custom (Bellah et al. 1985, pp. 130, 134–35; Wuthnow 1994). In this default understanding of group style, one's obligations as a member of a community—even the obligation to respect external norms of privacy—plays little part. In the context of the default style, it is not surprising that expressive individualism would signify endless pursuit of authenticity, unfettered by communal bonds. But a community-disregarding pursuit like that would have little meaning and perhaps only threaten a group of people who beamed with pride when one newspaper editorial praised the group as a model of local good citizenship. Personal empowerment signified a nurturant "come to commitment at your own pace," as when the ACES leader talked about parade on-lookers who were not "ready" to discuss the issues yet. It never signified "use the group to go where you need to go."

Still another puzzle arises for scholars of expressive individualism. Why did ACES not transform into something like a support group? If the language of personal empowerment did not send members in separate directions, it might have sent them in the same direction—toward their navels. This is the fear that haunts some critics of identity politics (Jacoby 1975; Lasch 1978; Gitlin 1995). The ACES leader suggested once that group members should discuss more often their personal feelings about Microtech. At least one ACES member had come to realize that Microtech's toxic leaks might have caused a disability in one of her children; talk about personal feelings might have been more comforting than long political and legal battles with uncertain outcomes. It was striking, though, that members did not interpret empowerment as an invitation to emote or explore their deeply personal experiences. That is because they shared some assumptions about talk itself, another element of group style. As with the other two dimensions of style, this one became particularly evident when breached.

Speech norms.—ACES members related to their own speech in the group as civic-minded, deliberative individuals trying out new opinions. When invited to apply for a large grant from a foundation, ACES core members all agreed that their grant proposal should encourage ordinary Airdalers—people just like themselves—to attend public forums. Tellingly, they named their funding proposal "Speak out, Airdale!" They proposed to develop a bureau of speakers who could travel to local schools and volunteer groups and talk about the toxic threats. In ACES, polite, citizenly exchange was the appropriate genre of speech.

A disagreement between two members at one meeting illustrates the norms of speech in ACES, the value ACES placed on expressing personal opinion openly in a polite forum. John, always more outspoken than the

others, said that ACES should be blunt and tell people that Microtech managers were "killers" for allowing the company to endanger Airdale. He threatened the speech norms of the group. Margo objected that this would only polarize people. John needled Margo, reminding her that she herself detested Microtech. Margo said she would choose different words in a broader forum. Laura, the group leader, pitched in. "All the voices need to be heard. It's a tapestry. You're not wrong and your way is not the only right way." No one suggested a different resolution from Laura's, and no one proposed that ACES should sound more strident at the next public hearing. Expressing individual opinion was a good thing to do, as long as people did it civilly, in a way that did not sound judgmental of others' opinions.

With the exception of group outlier John, members very rarely spoke emotionally about Microtech at their own meetings—even when emotional outbursts could have seemed very understandable responses to circumstances. ACES discovered enough facts to establish that Microtech had severely polluted groundwater in Airdale; members thought Airdale's abnormally high rate of skin cancer could be traced to Microtech, too. Yet, like Margo, ACES members mostly followed an unspoken rule that speech should sound reasonable. Except for John, they did not say, much less yell, confident statements about Microtech's evils and their own cause's rightness, the way urban protestors did. The mother with the disabled son never sounded very angry at the prospect that Microtech's pollution may have poisoned him, and did not say what she *felt* about the topic, even when asked directly. An ex-employee of Microtech in the group bristled once that it was "ridiculous" for Microtech to test dangerous substances in the open air, but usually he sported a scientific demeanor, and said nothing about how he felt about his former employer. ACES was not like a support group, nor an impassioned committee of the self-righteous.

In the default style ascribed to expressive individualism, the meaning of speaking is to discover emotions and articulate them intensely (e.g., Bellah et al. 1985, p. 123; Wuthnow 1994). In that context, the language of personal empowerment could lead, unsurprisingly enough, to verbalizing emotion endlessly. In the context of the ACES style, members associated personal empowerment with finding the inner strength to create public issues reasonably, rather than by-passing them as some of ACES's detractors did, or laughing them off, as did a boozy man at the Wild West Days parade who asked why he should worry about Microtech when he had already "put all sorts of toxics in my body."

Summary of the Culture of Interaction

To summarize the group style of "timid affiliation,"ACES members understood themselves as rooted, if ambivalent, members of the Airdale community, not as random individuals with gripes, or outraged outsiders. They needed to respect each other as local residents who could give each other private space and not pressure anyone into engagements that might be frightening or unseemly by local standards. They wanted to treat issues reasonably, deliberatively, with an emphasis on facts over feelings.

They used the collective representation—a language of individualism in this case—in a way that complemented, or at least did not threaten, this style most of the time. In the context of the ACES group style, expressive individualism did not signify a hedonistic "do your own thing," or "sound off when you feel like it," as some scholars would guess. Instead, ACES members used the vocabulary to signify that "it's OK to speak out—let's give each other room to speak out reasonably as sincere individuals." *That was the culture in interaction*. That is how a language of individualism could keep getting used, seemingly paradoxically, to signify active public engagement.

A Comparison

Groups with a style closer to the default style may use expressive individualist language much more as previous scholarship would predict. The Bellah team's analysis of the language would have worked quite well for Planet Friends, an environmental group in the same sprawling metropolitan area as ACES. Members of Planet Friends met monthly to talk about global environmental dangers and celebrate earth spirituality. For some of their time together, they talked about their personal lives. Like others in this very loose, international network, Planet Friends said that they would best "heal" the planet by working on themselves. Therapeutic spirituality was like good "energy" that could rebalance the environment and promote peace. Bellah et al.'s description of one variant of expressive individualist language suits Planet Friends precisely. "At the core of every person is a fundamental spiritual harmony that links him or her not only to every other person but to the cosmos as a whole. . . . The self in all its pristine purity is affirmed. But somehow that self, once discovered, turns out to be at one with the universe" (Bellah et al. 1985, p. 81).

The Planet Friends' group style was much different from ACES's and much more like the "default" style delineated above. As for their relation to the wider world, Planet Friends did not identify with any locale in particular; the group's monthly meetings took place anywhere within a 60-mile radius of the researcher's home. In the group, their main reference

points were the universe as a whole and the members' own selves. The group bonded on members' mutual obligation to hear one another out, and a responsibility to respect the monthly host's plan for a group exercise. Appropriate speech was therapeutic—it was speech that would express one's feelings about oneself, about the planet or world peace. When a member suggested the group take a position on a current environmental issue, in public, conflict ensued. Another member said that going public in that way might wreck the group, threaten its status as a safe place for personal sharing. It certainly would have meant cultivating a different relation to the world, a different basis for respecting members, and a different set of expectations about speech itself. The group dropped the idea. Planet Friends did not use expressive individualist language to affirm public engagement, the way ACES did. As a group, they did not participate in demonstrations, town meetings, hearings, public education workshops, or campaigns. Yet one individual member ran for office as a Green Party candidate; another supported the Green movement; another supported a local antitoxics group. These campaigns and issues did not get discussed *in Planet Friends settings*. In those settings, with the group style in play, these kinds of political or civic discussions would have been out of bounds. While perceiving one another in the context of Planet Friends, members drew on expressive individualism in a way that was close to what previous scholarship would suggest.

The collective representation, expressive individualism, could mean different things in the context of different group styles, but the variation was hardly random. We can still recognize some of the emphasis on self and separateness that scholars of moral vocabularies find in the language. As Michael Walzer points out (1985, pp. 134-35), collective representations sustain a range of interpretations, but the interpretations are still of those collective representations, not others. In ACES, expressive individualism got associated with public engagement, but on a very *individualized* basis. ACES members never said that "empowerment" would enable them to "stand in unison" or stick together over the long haul, even though the group has lasted for nearly two decades. Empowerment was a property of individuals, not of a community as a whole. Collective representations matter; group styles do not do all the work of making meaning by themselves. But the difference in everyday interpretation made a putatively antipublic language of self-exploration into an everyday idiom of public engagement.

An Alternative Interpretation

Some analysts of culture in social movements would offer a worthwhile alternative interpretation, that the timid style had strategic value in Air-

dale.[11] Could it be that ACES self-consciously chose a style that would make suburbanites want to join the cause? If so, the group style would not be a durable element of group culture—as we have theorized—but a contingent response to external conditions, one that might change readily in the face of new opportunities to recruit members.

Timid affiliation may well have had strategic value in a town that made outspokenness scary and unseemly. But members' ordinary conversations strongly suggested that their group style was neither a temporary adaptation nor a carefully calculated strategy. They unselfconsciously upheld the privacy-oriented civic culture of Airdale, even if they also wanted to change or increase Airdalers' talk about Microtech. For instance, nearly all core ACES members spoke spontaneously and apprehensively about violating the civility norms of a placid, "family-oriented" suburb. Public speaking made them feel shy. Just after her presentation on groundwater pollution, one member blurted out that public speaking reminded her of gynecological examinations. Then there was Liz, who wore the costume and a mask in the annual parade, so that townspeople could not identify her. Others spoke in frustration at being considered "crazy" or "one of those loonies" by local residents. Carrie said she liked "exposing" her kids to activists. Members were shy about strident talk at their own meetings; some would cringe visibly when John went on one of his tirades about death-for-profit at Microtech.

Further, ACES kept its group style going even when it faced the likelihood that other group styles could help it grow and meet its goals more effectively. At a weekend workshop with ACES, an outside community organizer was surprised to hear the group had never planned a fund-raising campaign, even though members all agreed the group needed more money. Nearly all the core members also had puzzled *individually* over why active membership had not grown. But the issue became a topic for group discussion only those few times it was introduced tentatively by the group leader, and once by group gadfly John. Core members of this very participatory group had all put many hours into ACES, but they said very little during these episodes. Members practiced a relation to group life itself that made participation an individual, privately motivated, and voluntaristic if public-spirited activity. This style limited what the group could even imagine as topics for strategic consideration.

[11] See, e.g., the strategic identity perspective of Bernstein (1997) or the strategic framing perspective (McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald 1996; Snow and Benford 1988).

Case 2: Bar Patrons and Active Disaffiliation

The Buffalo Club seems to represent a classic civic space, like the Elks, the Lions, the Moose, and the other fraternal organizations named after animals. At the entrance to the smoky bar is a shelf full of literature inviting participation in various charitable programs. Eight-page pamphlets advertised the national Buffalo Club's antidrug campaign for teenagers, others described a home in the Midwest for orphaned children of Buffaloes, and there were other pamphlets for other causes as well. At least once a month, the club holds lotteries, raffles, and other fundraisers, collecting money for disease prevention, abused children, the Salvation Army, and other charities. The club sends thousands of dollars a year to several worthy causes.

Members of the Buffalo Club's country western dance team often said they wanted the place to have "a real community feel" and to be "not just a bar, but a community center, a family place." On six-lane strips between fast-food drive-throughs and gas stations, this was no down-home neighborhood bar: members commuted an hour or longer to come. Nevertheless, dance team members usually spent half the weekend and two nights a week at the club. They took pains not to treat the club as a pick-up joint and not to rely only on personal preferences when creating their community feeling at the club. Women made a point, for example, of dancing with one guy who was skinny and short and thus not their "type." An elaborate initiation ceremony required a fairly substantial outlay of funds, possibly indicating that joining requires some commitment to this community.

In short, if Robert Putnam's famous bowling leagues (1995, 2000) count as "civic," the Buffalo Club certainly fits the bill. Jean Cohen (1999) smartly argues that Putnam's categories are too flat and that we need a more textured analysis of civil society that does not treat all ties as equal. One way to distinguish between different sorts of ties is to ask if members enact the codes of civil society that Alexander and Smith (1993) describe.

We find that Buffalo Club members did use the codes. But we also find that an analysis of codes is still not enough. An observer needs to hear how the group style filters the codes. As argued above, Alexander and Smith held the setting constant. By *varying the setting* from that of the code analysts' legislative assemblies during moments of high seriousness, a listener can easily hear how different styles filter the codes differently.

Investigating a Collective Representation: The Codes of Civil Society

This case will show that, on the one hand, Buffaloes shared the cultural codes of civil society that Alexander and Smith (1993) describe. We italicize

them throughout our analysis in this case for ease of reference. Talking about their group and its members, Buffaloes placed themselves on the good side of the binary oppositions Alexander and Smith (1993) outline. That is, they considered themselves to be *active, not passive; critical, not deferential; autonomous, not dependent; open, not secretive; realistic, not distorted; trusting, not suspicious; inclusive, not exclusive; friendly, not antagonistic; truthful, not deceitful; straightforward, not calculating; honorable, not self-interested; altruistic, not greedy; egalitarian, not hierarchical; self-controlled, not wild-passionate; rational, not irrational; calm, not excitable*.

On the other hand, the way Buffaloes tried to enact the codes was to appear *irrational*, *excitable*, *wild*, and *passionate*—elements that Alexander and Smith (1993) put on the opposite, "bad" side of the democratic code. Buffaloes used the bad side to enact the good side. Speech that would have been stigmatized as *wild, irrational, excitable, passionate* in the sort of official contexts that Alexander and Smith analyzed, paradoxically, came to signify the most *truthful, open, active, autonomous, reasonable, straightforward, friendly, egalitarian* exchanges in the Buffalo Club's setting. This rude and crude style made Buffaloes seem unburdened by the pious manners and constrictions that their churchgoing relatives might prefer—relatives whom country westerners describe as "hypocrites." Such speech made it clear that speakers were not trying to impress anyone, were not fooling anyone, or being fooled by, pomp, puffery or pretension, that they accepted people for who they are. Thus, Buffaloes vied to be the "most bad" in order to be "good." How could this happen in a culture that values the "good" side of the binary opposition, in which, as Alexander and Smith argue (1993), the elements all tend to accompany each other?

Discovering "Active Disaffiliation"

Speech norms.—The first puzzle any investigator who begins with codes might confront would be to understand the constant raucous, racist, sexist, and scatological joking, and the pride speakers took in advertising their self-proclaimed stupidity. When Buffaloes did converse at the bar, it was almost always to joke about each other's supposed stupidity or sexuality (who was dancing together, what someone else was wearing, whether Chuck could wear a dress, why George did not know what a condom was, who might be wearing earrings) or to make racist and sexist jokes about blacks, women, or "Indians," or to make jokes about food, digestion, and relations with animals. It might be hard to imagine how one could use the term "democratic code" to describe Americans who chug along so enthusiastically with this sort of speech; in most Americans'

commonsense view, it would be obvious that a group that allowed such racist and sexist joking must just not be party to any "democratic code."

However, taking account of the complex historical relationship between American democracy and American racism, Alexander and Smith say that the code does *not* exclude racism. They convincingly argue that speakers in civil society must speak their racism *through* the code (and similarly with sexism; see Alexander 2001, p. 376). Alexander and Smith's counterintuitive analytic move is highly illuminating; it is a good first step in our analysis, but it does not go far enough in explaining everyday uses of the code.

While the code analysts expect to hear serious and straightforward speech, speech norms at the Buffalo Club encouraged people to say outrageous things and debunk the pieties and con games that they saw everywhere. Trying so hard to break the rules, members dwelt upon topics like race, bathrooms, sex, mean behavior toward animals, and members' stupidity. The different topics served the same interactional purpose. Participants could count on the jokes to violate very general rules that they presumed others out there obeyed. The offensive form was useful for its clarity; no one could possibly take the gross jokes seriously or assume that speakers were using childish humor to impress each other. This aversion to "good manners" was a powerful rule itself: *Do not talk seriously in the group context, and try to appear to be breaking rules*. It was impossible to miss the point here. The members' "fierce joking" (Sartre 1948) was a speech act, a way of "doing something" with words.

In the settings Alexander and Smith (1993) describe, 19th-century legislators used the code to debate and justify racist institutions. In doing so, the legislators claimed to be *realistic* and all the rest of the good side of the binary opposition. But Buffaloes never deliberated about racism, sexism, the tormenting of animals, or anything else. Serious deliberation was considered pointless grandstanding. It would have been viewed as *exclusive*, or *hierarchical*, or *antagonistic*—all items from the "bad" side of the code.

This becomes clear when we hear Buffaloes making mistakes. For example, one member tried to take a political position at the bar, but he almost instantly recognized that taking a position was the wrong thing to do. The waitress had come offering "Coors or Bud?" George, a union member, said, "Coors, that's scab beer. I'll take a Bud." No one said anything in the split second during which someone was supposed to interrupt or chime in with a teasing rejoinder, so he continued, in a self-mocking tone, "Me, Ah like Bud. Gimmee a Bud. Boood." Another member laughed at his pronunciation and said, "Bud. Sounds like Booood. Boood!"

The conversational sequence here is a powerful indicator that a speech

norm in the group had been momentarily violated. Speech at the country western club was supposed to be "unpolitical." George's interactional mistake made it clear that members of this group were not supposed to deliberate, to persuade each other of their opinions. Indeed, the next time someone mentioned Coors, while showing George an ornate belt buckle emblazoned with the Coors logo, George did not offer any negative comment. Lecturing someone about Coors's antiunion position would have been considered "getting on a high horse." Members used that phrase to describe any speech aimed at persuading. The fact that Sue often "got on her high horse," for instance, easily explained to the other women why she never had any boyfriends. George dumped a born-again Christian girlfriend when she talked too much about her newfound faith.

Thus, Buffaloes were well aware of, and even affirmed, the code of civil society. They honored it in the breach by systematically and deftly inverting it, carrying on in a way that they could be sure would be taken as *wild, irrational, hysterical*, and *excitable*. They did so in service of a greater loyalty to the code, to its demand that speakers are *honorable, realistic, critical, independent, friendly, honorable, open, egalitarian*, and the rest. In the settings that Alexander and Smith (1993) imagine as the settings of civic life, discussion and speech are the main activity. In contrast, Buffaloes considered conversation a difficult burden and did not want to be taken seriously. A clear route to that end is to invert the code that everyone knows and to tease or make jokes that are sure to offend.

Having figured this out, the observer would have to confront another puzzle. What was it that members were so eager to mock? Maybe there were some shared points of reference in their world that resonated with the jokes but eluded the researcher—a "hidden transcript" (Scott 1990) that defied oppressive, shared institutions. Maybe they had some common institutional anchors or long-standing, shared histories that made serious talk unnecessary and made the raucous jokes an implicit political critique.

Group boundaries.—The main point of group events at the Buffalo Club—the grab bags, raffles, lotteries, fashion shows—was for members to affirm their distance from convention, rules, and tradition and from ritual itself. Institutions of the wider world certainly made their presence felt at the Buffalo Club: beer companies, the U.S. military, national charities, the country music and country accoutrements industries, the bar itself. These institutions and industries supplied the beer mirrors and other wall adornments, the music, the lace and calico skirts, the expensive Tony Lama boots, the flags, the scripts for events like the Welcome Home the Troops celebration (see below), and activities like the fundraising raffles and lotteries. These institutions and industries filled the scene, serving as a backdrop for the Buffaloes' disaffiliation. The club had rituals and fundraisers and raffles for charity, yet these events did not claim devout at-

tention, but sidelong, inattentive, scornful glances. Members simultaneously ignored and depended on the conventions and rituals to take up conversational airtime. The rituals filtered collective representations through the Buffaloes' distracted, playful, convention-busting style. Members related to institutions by relying on them without wanting to acknowledge that reliance.

A patriotic "Welcome Home the Troops" celebration for the Gulf War was one typical gathering. Sponsored by a local radio station and Budweiser, the celebration was stationed in the bar parking lot. No one paid attention to the loud extravaganza. They took to it the same practical logic that they used in other gatherings, *actively, not passively* ignoring institutions that came to propagandize the Buffaloes. Participants sat at about 30 picnic tables, eating and joking. At one table, people talked about a member's new dance dress and wondered how she was going to change clothes in time to be in the dance show and asked each other to pass the ketchup and the mustard.

Frustrated at the audience's lack of attention, the announcer finally screeched, "Do you *know* how many Americans exercised our precious freedom to vote in the last presidential election?!" A rejoinder came quickly from Kay, a teenage member of the dance team whose father was also on the team. "Who *cares*? I don't *care* how many people voted in the last election. When's the music coming on?" The rejoinder was directed at the people around the table, not yelled out for all to hear and ponder. Kay's dad and the others around the table chuckled. Later that evening, no one remembered the medley about the war. When asked about it, Jody said, "What medley?" She said she must have been inside, but the researcher saw that she had been at a table right in front of a loudspeaker the whole time.

The legislators and speechmakers in the code analysts' examples looked out onto the social landscape and saw powerful institutions that they might change for the better. They imagined they might have an effect on the world, but Buffalo Club members did not share their map or their feeling of power. How do the codes filter down to a group whose members want to avoid the empty and corrupt social landscape they imagined to be surrounding them? If there are no good institutions on a group's imagined map, but only *self-interested* and dishonorable ones, then the way to maintain a sense of *honor* and stay on the "good" side of the codes is to stay as disconnected from politics as possible. This is what the Buffaloes did. So, in their relations to the wider world, country westerners did still enact the codes that Alexander and Smith (1993) describe. But once again, they rearranged and inverted them. *Active* meant actively avoiding politics; *honest* meant being honest enough to recognize that ignorance, *distortion*, and *self-interest* were the only public motives. Being *reasonable*,

realistic, and *rational* required appearing *passionate, wild* and displaying all the other emotions on the wrong side of code.

The fact that the clubs constantly held fundraisers for worthy causes may seem to challenge this interpretation. One might guess that participants treated the fundraisers as an implicit, affirming connection to institutions, without needing to verbalize it. To answer this possible objection, we need to look at how members treated the raffles and lotteries. The fundraising raffle at "Welcome Home the Troops" was typical of members' distant, issue-free, institution-scorning approach. Two members complained about how useless some of the Navy's raffle prizes were. Referring to the fluorescent pink windshield wiper blades and brown denim jackets that one said "look like UPS drivers' uniforms," one said to the other, "If I had known what the prizes were I never would have bought a ticket!" They did not treat the event as a fundraiser but as a chance to win something. That is, the referent for the act of giving money was not "the wider world" and its institutions in any active sense. Similarly, most Buffaloes never talked about the war, except as it impinged on their travel plans. They worried that they or their family members in the military might be harmed; some were very worried about the researcher, who boarded a plane that had been featured on the local news because of a bomb scare on the day the war began. They took the danger of the war very personally, but not politically (Bourdieu 1977).

The group did depend on institutional reference points in a way—they served as a backdrop for enacting an anti-institutional stance. Buffaloes viewed the social landscape as hostile; they often talked about who was trying to rip off whom and who was charging too much for what and about the bargains they had gotten. They assumed that commercial and other institutions were trying to fool them or steal from them. But they assumed that that was the institutions' job, just as it was the consumer's job to outsmart them. In other words, at least market institutions were *honest* in their *self-interestedness*. But when anyone made a speech or propagandized for a cause or a product at the club, members made a strenuous effort to avoid being fooled.

Such a distant, ironic relationship to the wider world can itself be a kind of political position. That is the point. When citizens proudly claim disaffiliation in a variety of ways, perhaps including voting for candidates who themselves claim to be disaffiliated,[12] they still might be doing so from within Alexander and Smith's binary code. Their *honesty* and *activity* filter through a group style that upended the binary codes' official meanings.

[12] Bob Dole, a 1996 presidential candidate, e.g., proudly claimed that he had not even read his party's platform.

But just stopping there, with a declaration of the "world turned upside down" theme (Hill 1972; Scott 1990), still leaves some puzzles. Plenty of oppressed peoples around the world have held world-upending rituals. Here is a good place to entertain an alternative interpretation, one that would attribute the Buffaloes' style to their class backgrounds.

Alternative interpretation.—Could we explain all of this with a class analysis? Could upholding rural, down home, egalitarian values be country westerners' method of taking a stand against urban, liberal elites (Peterson and DiMaggio 1975)—resisting the cosmopolitan, yuppie class culture that sanctimoniously and hypocritically frowns on homophobia, sexism, and racism? An analysis that began with this hypothesis would be off to a promising start, but would miss too much.

It would be very hard to consider Buffalo Club members all part of the same social class. For example, some are college graduates, while others had not finished high school. Still, many shared fairly low-status work (see below, in the discussion of emotion work), and it was clear that Buffaloes were trying to resist something, whether or not on the basis of class. Furthermore, a class analysis would not by itself help an observer distinguish the Buffaloes' style from some other, seemingly "resisting" style. The concept of group style allows a researcher to distinguish, for example, between the Buffaloes' sort of resistance and another sort that might have had more of a germ of activism. The Buffaloes' resistance had the opposite political valence from the one that "resistance" theorists imagine (de Certeau 1984; Baudrillard 1981). Even if they were rebelling against something, Buffaloes could not be "for" anything in a serious way. Resistance theorists could not say how resistance might work when the people resisting want to imagine that there simply are no institutions on the landscape.

Like Alexander and Smith (1993), resistance theorists have an implicit setting in mind. Their imagined setting is tightly constricted by nearby institutions and by a clear hierarchy, like the school and factory in Paul Willis's study of teenage boys (1981) or the peasant societies in James Scott's various studies of the "weapons of the weak" (Scott 1985, 1990). But sometimes, resistance provides a sense of togetherness so thin, all it can create is reactionary politics, not subversion of something "given." The Buffaloes tried hard not to see anything given on their social map at all, except the market—which they took as an inevitable interloper. They did want a down-home, familiar, long-standing community, but they did not want to have to create it themselves. They wanted it to be there, already made. Thus, one typical member often spoke about his relatives' farm in Idaho and the healthy, down-home lives they led. Songs and conversation often invoked nostalgia for places that neither the Buffaloes nor the researchers had ever been.

Sometimes rejecting the wider world's institutions leads to overt rebellion, sometimes hidden, secret rebellion, sometimes knowledgeable cynicism, sometimes political avoidance (Scott 1990, 1985; Willis 1981; Gaines 1992; Fiske 1993; Havel 1989). Sometimes it leads groups to formulate alternative communities and counterinstitutions, like those of urban food cooperatives or back-to-the-land hippies (Berger 1981; Case and Taylor 1979). Sometimes, disenfranchised groups unite around a cause; one could imagine a group in which all members stood solidly united in their hatred of blacks and women. Buffaloes were not firmly united about anything—except their disaffiliation.

We were surprised to find that outside the group many Buffaloes did express opinions. One Buffalo was in a union and went along with its positions (boycotts, e.g.), and another had petitioned her county for more green spaces and volunteered at a center for endangered marine mammals. Dissenting members whispered in little duos or trios to complain about the raucous or mean jokes—in the kitchen, the ladies' room, or the parking lot—never confronting the jokers. Members were not simply devoid of social awareness. They sometimes expressed their commitments when speaking to the researcher, or when outside the group context. So, our puzzles continue. Why did they never bring their concerns *into the group setting*, even when they vehemently disagreed with the conversation's direction?

Group bonds.—Members had a very powerful obligation to let each other be who they "really" were, to be authentic to one another, but to do so without needing to know much about each other. Like Alexander and Smith's (1993) legislators, they wanted actors to be *autonomous, not dependent*, *open, not secretive*, and *critical, not deferential*. They wanted groups to be *inclusive*. When imagining the setting of a legislature or high public forum, we can easily grasp the meaning of these paired oppositions. But what of a setting whose participants are not trying to persuade each other, much less a larger public audience? What of a group whose members do not claim to speak for anyone but themselves? Buffaloes wanted to avoid constraints and judgments. Their way of filtering the code asked members to accept each other for who they are, without trying to change anyone in any way at all. Filtered through the Buffalo group style, *autonomous* meant "atomistic," *open* meant "completely accepting," and *critical* meant "unwilling to mouth hypocrisies that others (especially those in power) mouth."

Members often proudly remarked on the *inclusive* nature of their club. As one proudly put it, "Everyone comes here—black, white, young, old, lawyers, mechanics, doctors, cabdrivers—everyone's invited." And indeed, in this almost all-white bar, an old black couple often danced a complex Southern folk dance in the center of the floor; a few other people

of color came from time to time as well. Further in keeping with the bar's emphasis on *inclusivity*, the dance floor was arranged to accommodate the partnerless women who danced in the center, while couples danced in a ring around the edges.

Teasing and being teased was a way of saying to each other that they were all accepted as human beings, pure and simple. A good member of the Buffalo scene was one who relished teasing, who laughed when being teased. George was probably the most beloved member of the group, and he happily endured the most teasing. In just one typical hour, we heard how his cupboards were full of Spam, how he did not know what nutrition meant, how smelly and dirty his dog was, how he did not know how to give his dog a bath, how he did not know the difference between a washing machine and a dishwasher so he put his feed hat in the dishwasher, how he could not explain to a kid who asked him what he did for a living, and more. The point of all the teasing was that we all appreciated him anyway, no matter how tacky or smelly or stupid his tastes, habits, or dog were.

This silent appreciation was obvious in many gatherings. For example, one peaceful, comfortable evening, several country westerners gathered in a cabin, passing many minutes in complete silence—only the sounds of the frogs and the breeze rattling the dry grass. No one was striving or competing or showing off. After a while, Mike plugged in a boom box and played air guitar to the loud music. The main conversation was about the dog, much of it addressed to the dog itself. Members said later that this had been a really nice night. Club members wanted and needed to accept each other and give each other space to be who they already were, without anyone having to "prove" anything.

They did not worry that their group somehow represented something beyond the immediate interaction, or that one person's behavior could reflect badly on other group members. There was nothing more important than this mutual individual respect. Behind the scenes, Jody talked to another member about her black son-in-law, saying, "It's a shame he can't come. . . . It's too bad it's like that. It shouldn't be like that." But it was like that, and since her son-in-law was not very eager to attend anyway, she did not think of it as a good thing to object to the jokes *in the group*. In a group of the sort Alexander and Smith imagine, members feel mutually responsible for upholding institutional decorum, objecting to objectionable jokes, for instance. But Jody did not imagine that the very fact of participating in the Buffalo Club should somehow reflect upon her (or anyone else) as a person.

Members respected each other's autonomy too much to drag it into group life or to criticize it in any way. People could talk outside of group settings in ways that they could not in the group. "Staying up 'til two

talking" was a sure sign of love; it happened only at the moment lovers were falling in love. Talking this way allowed one to discover the true self, hidden deep inside the potential lover, but, after that initial exploration, they considered this dialogue unnecessary. In other words, Buffaloes do not consider anything beyond the individual to be fully real; they believe that what really matters is what is inside, that the tender, flickering "real self" almost never brazenly displays itself in mere words. They shared an obligation to respect that real self instead of stifling it with decorum.

Members kept group bonds thin, on purpose. When Buffaloes stopped making the long commute to the bar, no one knew why or where they had gone. Members often did not know basic things about each other, for example, what they did for a living, where they lived, whether or not they had children, whether or not they condoned the constant racist, sexist and scatological joking that some kept up. Taken together, the style filtered the collective representations in a way that allowed members to steer clear of all the implicit norms of responsibility that most of Alexander and Smith's legislators would have taken for granted.

Summary of the Culture of Interaction

We would summarize the group style of "active disengagement" as composed of *appropriate speech* that steered clear of serious explorations of opinion and violated the pious rules that participants thought were hypocritical. The group relied on institutions of the wider world to take up conversational airtime and put on events from which they could disaffiliate. That is, members usually assumed the point was to draw *group boundaries* against institutions. Finally, they assumed they ought to respect each other as human beings pure and simple, and they wanted to give each other ample room to be themselves; that was the way the *group bonds* worked.

The three dimensions of group style—group boundaries, group bonds, and speech norms—all work together; beginning one's analysis with one or with another will be a result of the particular researcher's own confrontations with puzzles. But wherever one begins, the two cases portrayed here—in addition to other studies we have analyzed with the same framework—all suggest that the three dimensions will usually be crucial for understanding the ways that a group incorporates and filters collective representations.

In the Buffalo Club setting, members used the collective representations—the codes—in a way that complemented, or at least did not destroy, the shared ground for interaction. Members who threatened those grounds met with awkward silence or rejection. In maintaining their group style,

the Buffaloes could use ostensibly democratic codes of civil society to affirm seemingly uncivil interaction. Buffaloes revalorized "bad" terms as "good." *Antagonistic* teasing and joking signified an *egalitarian* spirit, and wild, *irrational* , or *self-interested* expression signified *honesty* and refusal to "get on a high horse." *That was the group's culture in interaction*.

Engaged Disengagement

Of course, not all recreation group participants sound like the Buffaloes. One cannot reduce the interactional style to the physical setting or the general type of group, whether volunteer, activist, recreational, or other type of civic group. To provide a brief comparison, we can look at another, smaller subgroup of Buffalo Club country-western dancers. The two "subgroups" mingled, dancing and sitting together quite often, but the group was quite large, so members fell into a pattern of usually sitting with the people with whom they felt more comfortable.

This second, small subgroup enacted a "*cynical chic*" style. They talked politics constantly, but in a way that pushed the wider world away. In their engaged disengagement, the cynics' style was somewhat closer to Alexander and Smith's (1993) default style than the majority of Buffaloes' style was. In contrast to the majority of Buffaloes, the cynics talked constantly, and rapidly, and the topic was often politics. (Individuals' level of education do not fully account for this difference here.) Being more attentive to the world and its problems than to the other Buffaloes, the cynics' effort at pushing the wider world away took more work. The effort was constant; politics could poke into the conversation at any time.

For example, a conversation about a seemingly pretty, light green landscape led to discussion of the toxic waste hidden under the hills. That, in turn, led to a conversation about eating toxic foods, and from there the topic turned to pesticide use.

> *Tim:* At least they don't use the really bad stuff they used to use—like DDT.
> *Hank:* There's a whole mess of chemicals they banned, that were around 20 years ago.
> *Maureen:* [emphatically]. Then they just send them to other countries, so they use them there. [Poking Hank, gleefully]. Hey, isn't that funny?? They ban the chemicals here, so the American companies keep selling them to other countries, and then they use them on food that they turn around and sell to us! So we get it anyway.
> *Tim:* And we end up eating it!

Other joking sessions showed that these "cynics" paid more attention to the news than did the other Buffalo Club members. But they used their

knowledge not to become *active* citizens in the sense Alexander and Smith (1993) imagine, but to push the world away.

Like the mainstream Buffaloes, cynics heard and made racist jokes. For them too, the point of the jokes was not primarily to say that blacks, Asians, and Latinos are bad. On the contrary, cynics claimed that blacks at the club laughed at the jokes. In their view, just as in other Buffalo Club members' view, the club was *inclusive* of anyone who had a *reasonable*, *open* sense of humor. This aligns them with the code, briefly. One cynic told a story about the previous weekend, saying that the band sang a song imitating rap music, "with grunts and u-u-ee-ee [monkey sounds] and words that were something about 'gotta get back, to makin' my crack, nine to five,' and all about 'your lovely big flat nose.' I noticed that the band looked around real careful before doing that number—and there were a few blacks there." When asked what the blacks there did, he responded, "I'm sure they took it as a joke. Like that black couple over there. They dance all the dances. I'm sure they don't take that stuff seriously."

Like legislators arguing against affirmative action, these cynics used the code in a more argumentative vein than the other Buffaloes, to signal that they were *inclusive*. They seemed to say, "Anyone who accepts our relation to jokes can be included, whatever color they are!" They considered themselves to be inclusive because they treat everyone the same, as long as they play by the rules, of taking all teasing as good, no matter how charged the topic of the tease is.

We seem, then, to have the same upside-down relation to the code that the mainstream Buffaloes had, but it meant something different here. Here, members did consider their actions to be "political." Like the Buffaloes' style, the cynics' style stressed *autonomy* and *inclusiveness*, but differed from the other in its constant attention to institutions; cynics' attentiveness made them have to work harder to avoid institutions, in order to be good (*honorable, truthful, realistic, sane*, etc.) citizens.

Like the mainstream Buffaloes, the cynics used the code of civil society against itself. The cynics' style of filtering the code was different from the other Buffaloes', but in both cases, speakers were faithful to the code. And both styles are probably familiar to many Americans. The mainstream country westerners' down-home style likely would be recognizable and easy to learn for many Americans precisely because, we propose, it is a cultural pattern. The cynics' more twisted style would also be easily recognizable to many Americans—especially those who are well informed about, and disgusted by, world events. The club members' twisted appropriation of the code is itself a cultural structure;[13] it is not simply

[13] For the phrase "cultural structure," see, e.g., Rambo and Chan (1990), Alexander

creative or free, but a stable group style. Both styles filtered the collective representations to create a political stance, a gesture, a posture that defined group membership.

COMPARING STYLE BETWEEN AND WITHIN CASES

Group boundaries.—Country westerners proudly disconnected themselves from most of the wider world without locating themselves in any particular place in it. They anchored the group tenuously in commercial institutions that they did not quite trust. Country westerners criticized the world without trying to change it. ACES members, on the other hand, defined themselves explicity as Airdalers, even when Airdale's milieu pained them. They represented their notion of an Airdaler's identity to Microtech, to other Airdalers, and to the urban activists.

Group bonds.—Neither group considered itself to be composed of comrades, marching in unison. Both had a more privatized sense of self, assuming that members did not all have to be the same in order for them to be together and that members should respect each other's privacy. Both ACES and country westerners assumed that political proselytizing—"getting on a high horse," as country westerners put it, or "coming on strong" as the ACES leader put it—was out of place, because the point was not to arrive at an elaborately articulated, common position. But country westerners wished that they had a different sort of group bond that was much more unified, much closer, and based on years of neighborhood togetherness and shared community. In contrast, ACES members wanted to be given space and respected as private individuals while representing themselves to each other and to Airdale as normal "members of the community."

Speech norms.—ACES members assumed that it was their duty to speak out individually about shared social issues, even if individual members did it timidly. They valued speech itself, paid attention to words, and assumed that it was important that all voices be heard, no matter how uncomfortable public speaking made them. Country westerners tried hard to avoid speaking seriously. Both groups were critical of wider political institutions, but they held their critical positions quite differently. For ACES, critique required speaking out; for country westerners, it

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and Smith (1993), or Somers (1995). This phrase conveys the idea that culture itself is structured and that it structures interaction; it signals the understanding of culture shared by the theorists named at the start of this article, and we apply it to group style. Given the more common understanding of "structure" as "social structure," the phrase is counterintuitive, so we use it little and signal the underlying idea with other terms.

meant shrugging the wider world off, momentarily, by making jokes guaranteed to offend.

Subordinate Styles within a Group

Theoretical work on organizations (DiMaggio and Powell 1991), and empirical work on church congregations (Becker 1999), along with the psychological schema theory reviewed earlier, suggest that a group will likely have a *dominant* style that members usually try to maintain. But a group may also have submerged styles. These submerged or suppressed styles may arise "backstage," as Erving Goffman would put it (1959), or members may try to change the dominant style up front.

Backstage, for example, was the country westerner who mourned to another member about her African-American son-in-law's fear of coming to the Buffalo Club. Backstage conversation often took this more serious form, but only in whispers, in groups of two or three, in the ladies' room or parking lot, away from the main stage. Anthropologist Judith Irvine (1979) argues that part of what constitutes a group is precisely how it distinguishes between formal and informal speech; following her logic, we argue that part of what constitutes a group is how it distinguished between frontstage and backstage speech.

Sometimes, members may openly challenge the dominant style, front stage. Remember the woman who kept getting on a high horse at the Buffalo. Similarly, and even more explicitly, ACES member John tried unsuccessfully to challenge the group's "timid affiliation" style several times. For the participant-observer, John's challenge made the mostly taken-for-granted group style all the more apparent. John's favorite means of challenging the group style was to get other members to talk about "capitalism," in either group meetings or informal get-togethers. Other members would greet his efforts with awkward silence and a quick switch of topics. These were signs of an inability to continue verbalizing meaning together in a group bonded on the implicit understanding that ideological motivations (a critical stance on capitalism, e.g.) were private matters. At a combined meeting and holiday party, for instance, John launched into an impromptu tirade against Microtech for producing "death for a profit." Giving an ironic twist to a format intended to make people feel comfortable in groups, John proposed that party goers in Barb's living room "go around the room and each say what he thinks about capitalism." Barb broke in to say, "Maybe we should all introduce ourselves." Once we introduced ourselves, she announced that dinner was ready. When John initiated the topic again in a private conversation by the potluck table, Barb broke in to say it was time to watch a video. An ACES ally from a metropolitan activist group, an experienced activist himself, whispered

to John at this point, "You know, capitalism really does stink." By insisting that the group debate his own ideological stance, John was challenging the group style of allowing leeway for privately held ideological motivations. The silences, frozen expressions, and quick switches of topic that greeted John's salvos at capitalism strongly suggest that group interaction, and group purpose itself, was threatened by challenges to the style.

An observer might wonder if the group devalued John's speech because of his explicit ideology—anticapitalism—and not because of his breach of the group's style. But that interpretation would not work easily. When members remarked publicly on John's ideological positions, or referred to him in confidential interviews, they always addressed his outspokenness, his zeal—his style—and *never* his anticapitalist positions. Because they knew John, they knew that he was making intentional but somewhat playful breaches. They knew he meant it, but he was not going to push the point. These were not furious provocations or just plain mistakes, and they were not just simple jokes with no message, either (Geertz 1973). To grasp the group's way of categorizing John's breaches, we had to observe what they counted as the "same" type of interaction over time (Cicourel 1993, p. 90; Billig 1999; Fitch 1999; Burawoy et al. 1991; Sanders 1999). The interactional style itself counted in the group's understanding of John; our analysis needed to recognize style more than cultural researchers usually do. The cases portrayed here begin with cultural theories; other research on culture and interaction begins with theories of social structural inequalities like class and gender, and it is to those that we now turn.

"Culture in Interaction" and the Cultural Reproduction of Inequality

Many scholars have argued that everyday interaction helps reproduce social inequality; they identify this interactional link as culture. To take two influential and persuasive examples among many, the concepts of "emotion work," from Arlie Hochschild (1983, 1979), and Pierre Bourdieu's trio of "habitus," "practice," and "field" link individual feelings, tastes, and habits to social structure. But both sociologists skip a crucial loop through everyday interaction in group settings. At the same time, they pay less attention to collective representations than we do. In this way, their projects are simultaneously less "interactional" and less "cultural," as we have defined these terms. We argue that their concepts could become even more useful for the study of inequality than they already are if they paid more attention both to collective representations and to groups' habitual styles of interacting.[14]

[14] We have separately begun pursuing that research agenda elsewhere; while analytically separable, the study of culture structures and social structures—of collective

Hochschild and Bourdieu both draw on Erving Goffman's classic work. Goffman's overlapping concepts of "footing" (1979), "game," and "role distance" (1961) all highlight how participants cue each other into "what is going on here." But Goffman either resolutely denies, or at best, leaves implicit (Snow 2001), any connection between these micro processes and larger institutions. In criticizing Goffman's myopia, Hochschild and Bourdieu are two of the many critics who take the next step, asking how social structural forces, like class or gender inequality, shape interaction.

Hochschild's (1983) study of flight attendants, for example, shows how hard they must work to fulfill one of their job requirements, the relentlessly cheery, 15-hour-long smile. "Emotion work" links everyday interaction and social structure—in this case, the imperatives of corporate profit making, in a society that often deems it "women's work" to make people feel comfortable. "Emotion rules" are the implicit moral rules people share for naming, and expressing, and attributing a moral valence to their feelings (Hochschild 1979).

To sharpen and make more systematic the *cultural* dimension of "emotion rules," we would ask how the flight attendants' emotion work draws on larger cultural structures—along with the structure of corporate labor relations. We would study the "collective representations" that informed the flight attendants—their engagement with individualism, for instance. We would also examine the flight attendants' group style of interaction more closely. Hochschild devotes little attention to flight attendants' interactions among each other in the back of the plane (but see Weinberg 1996; Cahill and Eggleston 1994). Yet there must have been some sociable means of helping each other prop those 15-hour smiles up. As the Buffaloes and ACES cases suggest, attributing anyone's lack of resistance to "the language of individualism" by itself would not offer a fine enough brush. People always encounter situational puzzles when invoking the language of individualism. Individualism could invite workers to protect their "true selves" and play along with the game at work, rather than imagine collective solutions to work-induced frustration. That is what Hochschild says happens. But it could equally plausibly lead flight attendants to talk critically in a group setting about a work situation that violates their deeply felt right to individual self-expression (Inglehart 1990; Roszak 1969; Melucci 1989). To know whether flight attendants interpreted the broad culture of individualism in either of these ways, or in some other, we would need to ask how the flight attendants' emotion work was enabled and constrained by group style. In the end, the analysis would reveal the

representations and social inequality—are *empirically* thoroughly intertwined in ways that illuminate both.

culture in interaction, deepening and specifying our understanding of the kind of emotion work that flight attendants needed to do in that setting.

To apply this enhanced analysis of emotion work to ACES, we can see that group members did emotion work to steel themselves as protestors in the suburban milieu. They *worked* at calming their fears of going public, telling themselves they really were responsible, "normal" people who cared about their families. The larger cultural context—the language of personal empowerment—influenced this emotion work, as well as the social-structural one. Microtech loomed large in the social-structural context, of course, but the company did not say to ACES members, "Sound calm and quiet if you are going to dissent." If ACES members had followed the company's own statements about dissenters, they would have empowered themselves as screaming protestors. They would have worked at sounding angry, as some of the urban protestors did. Instead, they did the emotion work consonant with the quiet version of "empowerment" they could adopt given their group style.

A study of emotion work at the Buffalo Club could benefit from attention to culture in interaction, too. Such a study might start by observing that many Buffaloes came to the club from jobs as data entry clerks, mall cashiers, maintenance personnel, and short-distance truck drivers. The researcher could say that the club's emotion rules offered a necessary antidote to their dehumanizing work lives. Here, if nowhere else, they could appreciate each other for just being human. This analysis would make sense, but it would make the emotion work seem more inevitably, causally related to inequality than it is. Members of other nonelite groups have tried to inoculate themselves against the pain of dehumanizing work differently—by complaining to each other, or rebelling, or cultivating a skill together, or trying to be just like their bosses, or turning to God and prayer and song, for some possibilities. The insults of dreary, low-status work loomed large, but the workplaces did not say to Buffaloes, "Tease each other, as the only realistic vaccination against the insults we give you all day!"

While the concept of "emotion work" is brilliantly useful, our examples show that emotional expression takes its form through culture in everyday interaction. A focus on culture in interaction would ask, first, how the given collective representations make a certain kind of emotion work necessary. Buffaloes' love of autonomy and equality, for example, required emotion work that another group might find unnecessary. Collective representations make certain emotions necessary, for preserving members' sense of humanity—in a way that that society or subgroup defines it. Second, a focus on culture in interaction would find that a group's style asks for certain ways of expressing emotion in the group.

Bourdieu's fruitful notion of practice (1990, 1984, 1977; Bourdieu and

Wacquant 1992) could, in similar ways, become even more compelling if it focused more on everyday culture as it plays out in group interaction. Bourdieu characterizes "practices" as ways of doing things, patterns of action that unfold in real-time interaction; he says that agents in different "field" positions enact different practices, shaped by different amounts of capital (1984; Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). Agents' everyday interactions usually reproduce an unequal distribution of capital, or an unequal social structure.

On first glance, Bourdieu's "practice" looks like "group style." But Bourdieu (see, esp., 1984), like Hochschild (1983), focuses on biography more than situation. For Bourdieu, to study practices is to identify mostly taken-for-granted "schemes of action" that individuals transfer from one setting to another (Bourdieu 1990, pp. 83, 92, 94). In contrast, the "group style" draws attention to properties of a group setting—which are never just the sum of their individual parts. Individual members of voluntary associations do not necessarily have matching biographies, yet they do manage to agree on how to hold beliefs and present opinions in a group setting.

Bourdieu's "practice" ultimately connects the person to a social-structural position. In his elaborate framework, practices have more or less *value*—economic, cultural, or social capital—in a field. In contrast, "group styles" have different qualities, not just different quantities. The question of what group style *means* is not entirely reducible to the question of what a style is "worth" in some form of "capital"—be it money and property, honor and refinement, or the capacity to build social networks.

In sum, both Bourdieu and Hochschild examine individuals' "structures of feeling" as they pertain to social inequality; they move quickly from the individual to the social structure, without asking enough about how participants communicate in groups together. On the face of it, the distinction seems only to be that their goals are different from ours. They link feelings and habits to *social* structures, while we, most immediately, link groups' patterns of interaction to "*culture* structures"—collective representations and group styles. Their project may seem to be more about power and politics; ours, simply "cultural." But we propose that by understanding how people make meaning together in groups, researchers understand more about power, political change, or political quiescence. Analytically, in this article, we have separated culture structures from social-structural inequality, even if empirically, inequality is almost always weighing heavily on interaction. But *after* making this analytic separation, an observer can understand class reproduction more clearly, in more detail. A study of "culture in interaction" offers a crucial complement to analyses of the reproduction of inequality in everyday group settings.

IMPLICATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Cultural, social-psychological, and organizational modes of analysis deeply inform the concepts of group style and culture in interaction. This section briefly shows how these conceptions build on and advance four lines of research: the cultural studies project of studying "resistance" social identity theory and the allied, symbolic boundaries approach; neoinstitutionalism; and linguistic anthropology.

"Resistance" in Cultural Studies

Studies of cultural "resistance" (e.g., Frith 1981; Hall 1973; Hebdige 1979; Morley 1980, 1992; Radway 1984; Fiske 1993; Lancaster 1988; Kelley 1996; Scott 1990, Willis 1981) show that audiences filter messages through differently patterned interpretive lenses. In Stuart Hall's (1973) example, a working-class union member hears on the TV news that it is in "the national interest" to end inflation, but interprets the phrase as really meaning "in the interests of the corporate ruling class."

The analysis presented here would go further, asking how this union member *communicated* his interpretation of "the national interest" in everyday group settings. When he talks about his interpretation, what *bonds* are there between participants? Does the working-class news watcher present his interpretation proudly and defiantly, demonstrating a sense of *comradely bonding* with other workers who he expects should agree? Or does he say it hopelessly and cynically, as many politically disconnected Americans do when discussing the mass media? Resistance can mean different things in different settings; when there is no sense of shared goals, and very loose bonds, as with the Buffaloes, resistance may simply reproduce and reinforce the lack of mutual obligation.

Second, we would ask where he assumes it is *appropriate to speak* about his interpretation. Does he assume that it is somehow his duty to talk about his interpretation of the news or that it is impolite to entertain that kind of conversation, or that talk does not matter? Finally, we would ask *what image of the wider world, and his relation to it*, does he have in mind when offering his interpretation of the news? Studies of resistance (Hall 1973; Morley 1980; Scott 1990; Lancaster 1988; Willis 1981; Kelley 1996) describe long-standing communities resisting clear, structural domination: Working-class listeners relating to mainstream news, peasants or slaves relating to official pronunciamentos, or African-American or working-class students relating to white, middle-class teachers. But not all modes of interpreting dominant culture are only either "resisting" or "complying with" elites or powerful institutions; they do not just say "yes" or "no," but articulate whole new meanings. Second, resistance studies show

situations in which members actively perceive oppression as coming directly from an employer, schoolteacher, or political ruler who is immediately present or to whom members can speak directly. But our studies show situations in which the source of oppression is not very clear to members. Oppression may be coming from diffuse sources, in which there is no clearly embodied oppressor against whom to rebel (Hayward 2000).

Social Identity and Symbolic Boundaries

Important insights into group style come from the focus on group identity in social identity theories (Tajfel 1982; Farr and Moscovici 1984; Hewitt 1989; Jenkins 1996; see also McCall and Simmons 1978; Melucci 1988) and the "symbolic boundary" perspective (Lamont 1999, 1992; Lamont and Fournier 1992; Lamont and Thevenot 2000). These approaches alerted us at the outset to the fact that groups draw boundaries that identify "people like us," and exclude others as different, or less worthy, in the process. For instance, upper-middle-class people draw socioeconomic, cultural, and moral boundaries between themselves and other groups (Lamont 1992); people develop musical preferences by contrasting themselves with others who have different preferences (Bryson 1996); moral entrepreneurs enforce boundaries between art and "obscenity" with specific social groups, not just society in general, in mind (Beisel 1997). People imagine their tangible, face-to-face group on a broader, less tangible social map. This "mapping" is one of the three dimensions of group style—the "group boundaries" dimension—introduced at the start and illustrated in our cases. And as Lamont argues (1992), a group's social map has many overlapping kinds of distinctions, not just class distinctions.

Focusing on group style directs us to watch how people draw boundaries in everyday life, and in particular, highlights the boundaries that people draw between different group settings. The symbolic boundaries school could find fuel for new research in the situational boundaries we describe—boundaries between backstage and frontstage, or between groups—such as ACES and their urban protestor allies—that mark the boundaries precisely by enacting different group styles, for example. We argue that individuals might draw evaluative boundaries between people differently in different settings. By following these differences from setting to setting, a researcher might better understand where and how gatekeepers—college admissions staff-persons, job recruitment personnel, talent scouts—draw the boundaries when they are at *work*, where they matter most for social inequality, even while the same gatekeepers might privately abhor the existence of those boundaries when they are at *home*. For example, it would help us understand why even the most well-mean-

ing guidance counselors might consistently steer promising minority students away from good colleges (Mehan 1978; Erickson and Schulz 1982). Lamont says that her interviewees noticed some boundaries and ignored others; she notes that the absences are as noteworthy as the presences (Lamont 1992, p. 4). We agree, adding that people can speak about some boundaries in some settings and not in others, and they can speak about boundaries differently in different settings; here, too, the silences are as noteworthy as the speech.

Neoinstitutionalism

The new institutionalism (DiMaggio and Powell 1991) emphasizes the durability and power of taken-for-granted understandings in formal institutions. Neoinstitutionalism underscores the persistence of group culture without resorting to older, widely criticized formulations of culture as shared beliefs. The concept of group style firmly upholds their idea and extends it to the analysis of less formal settings and everyday interaction. Neoinstitutionalists usually focus on large-scale rules or models that shape entire organizations, networks, or institutions (e.g., DiMaggio 1991; Becker 1999; Clemens 1997). Clearly complementing these broader studies, the concept of "group style" highlights everyday interactional routines. The same organization can host different group styles in its different group settings. Patterned or institutionalized cultures—group styles—work at a more microsociological level also.

The new institutionalism also makes the important point that the same organizational forms recur in many organizations; these forms reside in fields or institutional sectors of society, not in single, separate organizations (DiMaggio and Powell 1991, p. 14). Similarly, we hold that a group's style is not unique to that single, separate group but potentially recurs in many groups. Elsewhere we have suggested examples of different, widely dispersed groups that share something like what we now call group style (Lichterman 1999, 1996; Eliasoph 1998).

We found neoinstitutionalist scholarship particularly pertinent to the second dimension of group style ("group bonds"). Neoinstitutional scholars show how ties between members of an organization have a qualitative, not just quantitative character. As Mitchell Stevens (1996, p. 1) puts it, "Network relations are also moral relations"; groups define mutual responsibilities among members.

In these ways, the "group style" concept extends neoinstitutionalists' insights. A study of "culture in interaction" ties interactional routines to large-scale, enduring patterns of "culture" in groups. And it shows how those patterns work with widespread, collective representations. Some analysts of large-scale cultural codes have argued that the neoinstitution-

alist approach is a competing approach to culture, one that neglects the richness of symbolic meaning (Kane 1997). We argue, instead, that analyzing a group's routines actually enhances our understanding of symbolic codes and meanings they produce in everyday life.

Linguistic Anthropology

Some eye-opening studies describe societies that are so spectacularly different from the United States that their strangeness and incomprehensibility force the foreign observer to notice that interactional style itself bears meaning and is culturally patterned (Basso 1979; Brenneis and Macaulay 1996; Brenneis and Myers 1984). Without taking the participants' understandings of speech itself into account, the anthropologists would have found speech in these societies incomprehensible. But these studies collapse the "style" with the collective representations. Our concept of culture in interaction took inspiration from this work, and we borrowed from it our "speech norms" dimension of group style; but now we, in turn, add to it, by showing how important it is to distinguish between collective representations and group style.

Michelle Rosaldo's (1982, 1973) studies of public speech in the Philippines, at the advent of Western influence, provide one splendid example of such work. Rosaldo argues that the native Ilongots' traditional, flowery, indirect public speech style implicitly acknowledged their idea that no one person had a singular claim to the truth and that no one could do very much to enforce one version of the truth in a dispute between differing truth claims. When Western imperial powers overshadowed local rulers' power, the speech style became more direct and forceful. The West brought the idea that there was one universal, single truth, and that there were powerful institutions that could enforce that single truth, even if not everyone accepted it as truth. These new collective representations—new notions of truth, power, and personhood—were inseparable from the change to a more direct, brusque, conflictive, Western style of public discourse.

Similarly, Fred Myers (1991) analyzes collective representations and speech style all in one stroke. The meetings he studied, among the Pintupi of Australia, all had the same style, which made sense given their institutional and cultural structures. The Pintupis' roundabout, nonconflictual ways of carrying on group meetings revealed their deeply held ideas about self and polity—their collective representations.

In the societies Myers and Rosaldo studied, different styles inhered in different social orders with different collective representations, separated in space and time. But in a study of a complex, large-scale society, we need to distinguish between style and collective representation. In a com-

plex society, a person has access to different settings with different styles, but may carry the same collective representations to these different settings. When linguistic anthropologists shift their perspective to complex, large-scale society, they often assume that speakers must have one "home base" style, against which all others pose difficult violations of speakers' basic core selves. That is, they replicate Rosaldo and Myers' one-on-one relation between the collective representations and the style.

For one example among many, Gerry Philipsen's (1992) insightful and influential work brilliantly contrasts white working-class Chicagoans in "Teamsterville" and mainstream West Coast, middle-class Americans. Teamstervillers' patriarchal kinship and church, Philipsen argues, offered men a sense of self that Philipsen, echoing scholarship on ancient Greece, calls the "code of honor." Philipsen says that the Chicagoans had to defend their honor with violent, "strong," hyperbolic speech and by behaving in ways that his West Coasters would have found inexplicable and primitively tribal. The West Coast speakers, in turn, wanted egalitarian relations and an individualized sense of self: a "code of dignity." Their speech style valued "communication" as a panacea for any threats to individuality and equality. Philipsen says that these styles embody different deep myths and symbols, different answers to basic questions about what a person is, what a society is, and how they are linked through communication (Philipsen 1992, p. 15).

But, we argue, collective representations do not simply create styles of speaking. Speakers who share the same collective representation set them in motion differently, in different settings, through different styles. ACES, for example, placed something like the "code of dignity" at its center, yet the group carried out a community minded, activist agenda. Furthermore, a person intuitively uses different styles in different settings, to make different sorts of points (Gumperz 1982*b*, 1982*a*; Gumperz and Hymes 1972).[15] People in a diverse, complex society have to *settle upon* a footing; it is not singular and prescribed. David Halle shows, for example, that white, American workers hold different identities in different contexts—as consumers, workers, family members, or members of different ethnic and religious groups (1984). In our empirical cases, participants' implicit answers to all three questions Philipsen outlined were not clearly prescribed. Further research could show whether this may hold true for many Americans who live in relatively new suburbs like the ones portrayed here

[15] Thus, even grammar and pronunciation—such as the use of subcultural dialects (black English, accented English) and nondominant languages—vary by microcontext, as many creative field experiments have shown (see, e.g., essays on code switching collected in Gumperz and Hymes [1972], Gumperz [1982*a*, 1982*b*], Gigliolo [1972]). People know the rules of grammar and pronunciation, but do not always use them; and their code-switching varies in statistically regular patterns.

(Baumgartner 1988), rather than established urban communities like Teamsterville.

CONCLUSION

Group styles filter collective representations; the result is culture in interaction. By contrasting each of our main groups' style with those of other groups, and with the "default" style in previous cultural theories, this article has shown how groups can use the same collective representation to different meaningful ends in everyday life. The point is not that collective representations are meaningless in themselves, but that a focus on "culture in interaction" helps us understand how the same widely shared symbols, stories, vocabularies, or codes make different meanings in different settings.

This article's main agenda has been to make scholarship on culture more useful for thinking about everyday life settings. It is a friendly debate with cultural sociology that asks observers to remember what social psychologists have long argued. People always make meanings in specific social settings, in relation to each other as they perceive each other. Conversely, though, thinking about these styles as patterned, as part of a larger culture, could help interactionists understand how styles of interpersonal interaction may have a history. For example, Kenneth Cmiel's (1990) fascinating historical study of American political discourse shows that Americans demanded plain, direct, vigorous speech, as a mark of egalitarian sociability; speakers needed to distinguish themselves from their 18th-century European cousins, whom they considered florid, stuffy, and in need of fresh air. Essays like Cmiel's help us view these patterned, enduring, group styles through a cultural lens, as a dimension of culture themselves.

The study of "culture in interaction" has helped us systematically grasp some important theoretical puzzles. But it does more. It clarifies problems that confront researchers and observers of many institutions that generate and circulate collective representations: civic associations, religious organizations, schools, government, and others.

The two main empirical cases presented here portray "civil society"—the public or potentially public settings in which uncoerced participants engage in ongoing, voluntary association, outside of the immediate demands of family, work, or government (Walzer 1992; Barber 1984; Alexander 1995, p. 6; Fraser 1992; Habermas 1992; Cohen and Arato 1992). Many scholars and politicians have worried about the "tone" of American civic life, lamenting what they hear as narrowness in American public discourse (e.g., Hughes 1993; Etzioni 1996; Hunter 1994, 1991; Gitlin 1995;

MacIntyre 1981; Marty 1997; Bellah et al. 1985; Wuthnow 1998; Putnam 2000, 1995). Groups such as ACES and the Buffalo Club are just the sorts of places these observers would search for the cultivation of civic engagement and public spiritedness (Alexander 1995; Boyte and Evans 1986; Cohen and Arato 1992; Fraser 1992; Goldfarb 1980; Goodwyn 1978; Habermas 1992; 1989. Rosenzweig 1983; Ryan 1985; Tocqueville [1831] 1969). A study of culture in interaction offers a more systematic method for analyzing the "tone" of these groups. Thus, the bar patrons and the suburban activist group's styles were not just not neutral, transparent conveyors of cultural meanings. Neither were they just *pro-* or *anti*democratic. The concept of culture in interaction operationalizes an insight from students of public life such as Dewey (1927), Mead (1964), and others that meaning and practice—or "content and form"—are intertwined, creating varied kinds of openings for members to become democratic citizens.

One could investigate culture in interaction in other kinds of civic groups, as well. For example, the very act of participating in a nongovernmental organization—the Red Cross, for example—might carry different meanings in different times and places that one could not guess by knowing the organization's stated mission and institutional form. The concept of culture in interaction would give researchers a way to grasp those differences. Similarly, a history of the category of "the volunteer" over time and in different places could focus on the culture in interaction—the ways styles of group membership filter collective representations of compassion or a good society.

Examining culture in interaction helps us understand religious groups, too. For example, observers puzzle over the question of how Christianity and Islam (and other religions) can be used by terrorists and pacifists, fanatics and contemplative scholars, and casual observers alike. Previous explanations hinge on differences in interpretations of sacred texts—that is, different doctrinal standpoints, different beliefs about divine and earthly reality. Clearly, that is correct; certain branches of a religion highlight different chapters and verses of their sacred texts, and that explains many differences between members of the same religion. But we add another dimension to the question: an inspection of "culture in interaction" would ask if some of the differences between adherents of the same beliefs stem from different group styles.[16]

Culture in interaction helps us think about institutions and organizations outside the broad sphere of civil society, too. We have already outlined one way of using this analysis to investigate work settings, in con-

[16] Becker's (1999) study of different styles in religious congregations is a big step in this direction; see also Roozen, McKinney, and Carroll (1984), and Lichterman's (in press) study of faith-based volunteer groups.

junction with the emotion work concept. Schools make up another intriguing site for studying culture in interaction. Impressive and astonishing scholarship shows that schools around the globe have become more alike in some ways; school curricula have become more uniform, so that "villagers in remote regions learn about chemical reactions; members of marginalized groups who will never see a ballot box learn about their national constitutions" (Meyer et al. 1997, p. 150; Meyer, Nagel, and Snyder 1993). An inspection of culture in interaction could complement this far-reaching and important macroscopic analysis by asking how this massive uniformity plays out in everyday interaction. Habitual, unspoken group styles might filter a curriculum differently, expecting and inviting students to band together around it; to treat it as scaffolding for each student's deep personal identity, to treat the curriculum as official nonsense worth memorizing for strategic reasons but otherwise irrelevant to everyday life. But whatever the explicit curriculum is, groups have implicit, culturally rooted styles for enacting it.

Finally, we can turn the tables back onto the "default setting" that Alexander and Smith (1993) portray. We began by saying that studies of binary codes hold the setting constant, keeping it focused on governmental settings. But even governments do not always have the same relations to the wider world. Appropriate speech in different governmental bodies varies from teeth-clenching but polite disagreement in the U.S. Senate (. . . "the gentleman from Louisiana . . ."), to shouting, booing, and jeering
(in, e.g., the British House of Commons; see Merelman 1991); and bonds between legislators vary. One could study differences between state institutions, not just as formal institutional differences, and not just as differences in the "discourses of civil society" of the sort Alexander and Smith (1993) describe, but also as differences in group styles.

"Culture" becomes publicly available and shared in group settings. The meaning of culture depends in part on what it means to participate in a group setting that filters that culture. The concept of culture in interaction brings group life squarely into cultural analysis. To understand culture, we need to know how groups put it to use in everyday life.

APPENDIX

How to Observe Group Style: An Outline of Sensitizing Questions

Ethnographers rarely say how they arrived at their interpretations of taken-for-granted meanings; this outline of questions will "sensitize" (Blumer 1986) researchers to group style in everyday interaction. These are not questions that the researcher should ask research subjects; rather,

these questions should help *focus the researcher* on the kinds of interaction that reveal group style. These questions can sensitize researchers to everyday meanings that group members, taking those meanings for granted in the course of group life, might not speak about. We take the three dimensions of group style, one at a time.

Group Boundaries

The dimension of "group boundaries" puts into practice a group's assumptions about what the group's relationship (imagined and real) to the wider world should be while in the group context.

1. What references do members make to institutions, organizations, and identity categories? Do members position themselves positively or negatively in relation to these anchors? Which references do members make problematic, and which ones are just considered natural? What happens if one member identifies with, or against, a group or person that other members never mention?
2. How do actual interactions between the group and other institutions compare with those inside the group? What can members do or say in their own group meetings that they cannot do or say when they are in the presence of wider institutional authorities?
3. Does the group itself enjoy access to the public's ears? Through what fora does it get this access—through journalists' reports about the group, or face-to-face public events, word of mouth, or "alternative" media? How does the group define "the public," and how does it think the public imagines it?

Group Bonds

The dimension of "group bonds" puts into practice a group's assumptions about what members' mutual responsibilities should be while in the group context.

1. How do members define a good member? Is it one who adds a lot of individual initiative, or perhaps one who carries out tasks efficiently? What responsibilities do members assume they bear toward one another and toward potential members? When and how do members take offense at other members? How do they deal with people they perceive as "different"? Are offensive or different people seriously engaged, politely tolerated, or shunned? Who returns to meetings and who does not?

2. What do members *say* about commonalities inside the group? For instance, do they consider themselves to be members of a preconstituted community that they imagine shares something deep and natural, such as religion or race? Or do they imagine themselves to share just one goal, one interest, and say they are banding together for instrumental purposes? Or do they emphasize that the group is diverse, accepting, embracing of cultural, ethnic, racial, and class differences?
3. Do members talk in a way that implies that gathering together is a good in itself, or a distasteful necessity? Which kinds of people can or cannot join? Which kinds would be comfortable in the group, and which kinds would not?

Speech Norms

The dimension of "speech norms" puts into practice a group's assumptions about what appropriate speech is in the group context.

1. What do participants assume that the goal of speaking in the group is? Examples might include exploring a self and respecting other self-exploring individuals, affirming shared opinions, arguing in order to come to an agreement, arguing to refine ideas, arguing to win, expressing upstanding citizenship, accomplishing tasks, letting people know what side one is on or who one is, having fun, or showing off. How do these categories overlap and mutually imply one another? For example, one group might express upstanding citizenship by avoiding disagreement, while another group might express upstanding citizenship by arguing. Do people enjoy talking for its own sake? How much do they assume one *should* enjoy talking? What kinds of ideas are expressed in meetings versus in other group contexts?
2. To what kinds of speech do members pay attention? What constitutes a mistake in interaction, or inappropriate speech? How do people make sense of mistakes—do they try to decipher them, lapse into awkward silence, or rebuke the speaker?
3. How do members talk *about* what went on in group meetings, and how do members take notes, if applicable? What speech do members notice and what do they leave out? What do members consider a tangent? When describing what happened in a gathering, do members describe speech, or do they focus on other kinds of action?

Of course, researchers routinely pursue some of these questions, through

different methods of research. Part of our methodological contribution is to bring them together in the concept of *group style*.

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