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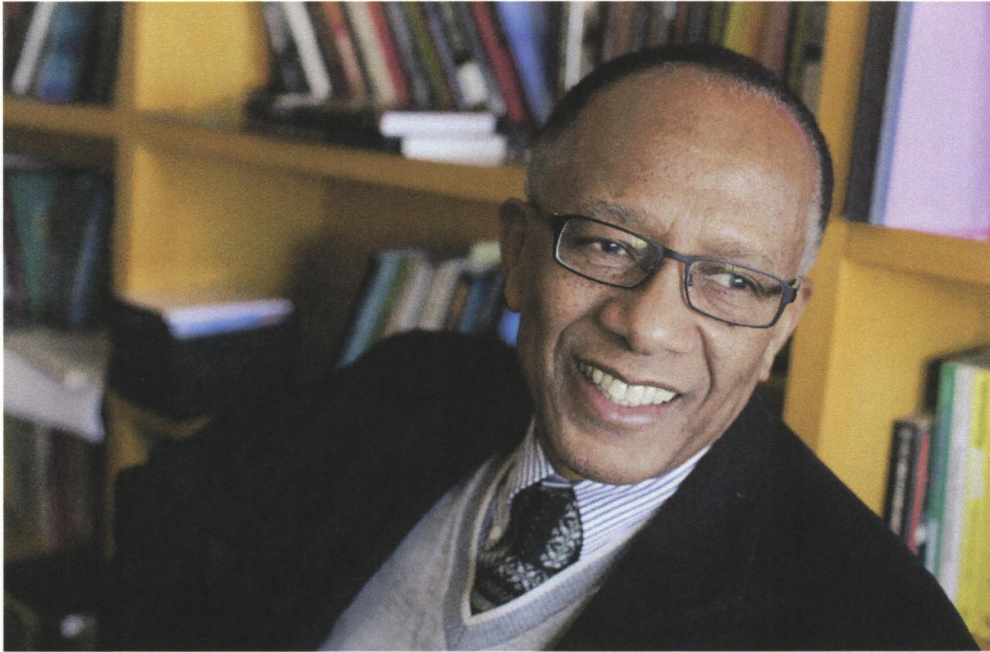
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# Making Sense of Culture

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## Keywords

beliefs, cognition, culture, meaning, norms, pragmatics, schema, values

## Abstract

I present a brief review of problems in the sociological study of culture, followed by an integrated, interdisciplinary view of culture that eschews extreme contextualism and other orthodoxies. Culture is defined as the conjugate product of two reciprocal, componential processes. The first is a dynamically stable process of collectively made, reproduced, and unevenly shared knowledge structures that are informational and meaningful, internally embodied, and externally represented and that provide predictability, coordination equilibria, continuity, and meaning in human actions and interactions. The second is a pragmatic component of culture that grounds the first, and it has its own rules of usage and a pragmatically derived structure of practical knowledge. I also offer an account of change and draw on knowledge activation theory in exploring the microdynamics of cultural practice and propose the concept of cultural configuration as a better way of studying cultural practice in highly heterogeneous modern societies where people shift between multiple, overlapping configurations.

*Power, power everywhere,  
And how the signs do shrink,  
Power, power everywhere,  
And nothing else to think.*

—Marshall Sahlins (2002), *Waiting for Foucault*, Still

*O how they cling and wrangle, some who claim  
For preacher and monk the honored name!  
For, quarreling, each to his view they cling,  
Such folk see only one side of a thing.*

—Parable of the Blind Men and the Elephant  
Udanam vi.4 (transl. F.L. Woodward, 1948,  
p. 83)

## PART 1: INTRODUCTION

### The Unsettled State of Cultural Sociology

The sociological study of culture, like its anthropological counterpart, is riddled with academic contention: tired and tortured conceptual contestations about the nature of culture itself (Sewell 2005, pp. 152–74; Sangren 2000, pp. 20–44; cf. Patterson 2007); debilitating uncertainty about the nature and centrality of meaning (Wuthnow 1987, pp. 64–65); rejections of hard-won methodological claims (Biernacki 2012); repeated and often unproductive agenda settings; sweeping dismissals and dogmatic overreaction to the errors or biases of previous traditions of scholarship (Swidler 1986; cf. Friedland & Mohr 2004b, pp. 13–17; King 2000); the untenable ditching, with the bathwater of the Parsonian past, of foundational concepts such as values and norms that strike most scholars in other disciplines as simply preposterous (Hechter & Opp 2001); political oversensitivity, especially in regard to race and inequality, entailing the endless flogging of long dead and buried horses such as “the culture of poverty” thesis (Skrentny 2008); the dogmatic rejection of causal explanations at one extreme (Geertz 1973, p. 14) and, at the other, explanatory evasiveness more generally (with the notable exception of some studies in social movement and economic sociology) (Levin 2008, Polletta 2008) or questionable claims of

uncoupled cultural autonomy and causation (Alexander 2003, pp. 11–26; cf. Friedland & Mohr 2004b, pp. 5–11; Kaufman 2004); and outright contradiction, when deployed, in the causal use of culture—bad, even racist, when used to understand the poor or minority behavior; good, and desperately grasped, when used to explain the racial IQ gap (Patterson 2001, Serpell 2000; see also Vaisey 2010).

To make matters worse, the subject is also politically fraught, both within and outside the academy, especially in our current age of identity, where leaders and activists as well as scholars challenge each other, not only on the interpretation of their cultures, but also on the very definition and meaning of culture itself (Wright 1998). Oversensitivity to identity politics and claims is another reason for one of the main failings of current studies of culture, mentioned above: the flight of the vast majority from causality or comparative generalizations for fear of being labeled racists or essentialists. Thus, even though cultural sociologists (fearful of social irrelevance) have recently begun to tiptoe their way back to a consideration of inequality, poverty, and minority problems (see, for example, Charles 2008, Small et al. 2010), it is still *de rigueur* to eschew robust causal explanations (Vaisey 2010), except for those who huddle behind the Gallic shield of Bourdieu, often at the cost of undercutting critical components of his theory (Stevens 2008, p. 104); instead, a soft and nebulous neo-Weberian *verstehen* reigns, in which the cultural sociologist is reduced to little more than a mouthpiece for his or her subjects’ understanding of their culture and behavior. And these understandings are plagued by what Bourdieu calls the “discourse of familiarity,” which often leaves unsaid precisely what is so important that it is taken for granted (Bourdieu 1977, p. 18) or is saturated with the very essentialism that these cultural sociologists condemn in each other.

Another serious problem that besets sociological studies of culture is the chronic fallacy of the blind people and the elephant, in which each insists that the part of the elephant he or she is touching constitutes its entirety. The main



reason for this error is the tendency by many of the leading practitioners to redefine the field and carve out “new” agendas (for a laudable recent exception, see Binder et al. 2008, particularly pp. 6–14). Sadly, what Wuthnow observed in the late 1980s remains largely true: “Replications fail to replicate; refutations fail to refute; replies fail to convince; and the dismissals typically dismiss too much or too little” (Wuthnow 1987, p. 7). The result is a persistent lack of consensus or rigor in defining culture, an issue that, as Small & Newman (2001) noted, “has tormented both sociologists and anthropologists for decades, and there is no reason to believe we will ever arrive at a consensus” (p. 35). Not only has this undermined the cumulative process that is essential for progress in any arena of study, but it has also undercut the reputation of cultural studies generally. Although we are repeatedly told that there has been a “cultural turn” in sociology and related disciplines going back to the 1980s (Bonnell & Hunt 1999, Friedland & Mohr 2004b, Steinmetz 1999; cf. Biernacki 2000), and indeed, the culture section of the American Sociological Association is now one of the largest, most noncultural sociologists are still wary of culture and either shun any exploration of its role in their explanatory models or go out of their way to point out its lack of importance or relevance.

A further problem is the baneful isolation of cultural sociologists from major developments in the study of culture in the nonhistorical social sciences. There have been significant borrowings from cognitive psychology thanks to the pioneering work of Cicourel (1973), DiMaggio (1997), Cerulo (2010b), Zerubavel (1997), Benford & Snow (2000), and more recent scholars [see the special issue of *Poetics* (Cerulo 2010a)]. However, these infusions have come from cognitive scientists who, notoriously, are not particularly interested in culture (Hutchins 1995, pp. 353–54). The parochialism to which I refer is the shocking neglect of work on culture in other disciplines such as anthropology (with the notable exception of Clifford Geertz), psychological and cross-cultural anthropology, evolutionary cultural studies, and even social

psychology except for the rump still in the discipline. The frustrating part of all this is that an abundance of first-rate work on culture among sociologists resides in the particular sections of the elephant they embrace (see the excellent literature reviews in Binder et al. 2008). This is especially true of the agenda setters, once they get down to the empirics of their craft. Thus, Jeffrey Alexander (2003, chapters 2–4; 2012) when not pushing his “strong program,” has written superb studies on the Holocaust and the general problems of evil and trauma. Swidler’s (1986) widely cited programmatic paper on culture has gone further than most in downplaying the causal significance of cultural knowledge structures, values, and norms in social life (Schudson 1989, p. 156), even though, as Vaisey (2009, p. 1687) points out, it rests on the flawed cognitive premise “that moral judgment would have to operate through conscious thought to be causally efficacious” (see also Vaisey 2008; for a more conciliatory critique of Swidler, see Lizardo & Strand 2010). Nonetheless, her now classic works with Bellah on American culture are arguably among the most powerful demonstrations of the role of values, ideology, and moral order in modern society (Bellah et al. 1985), and her recent study of chieftaincy in rural Malawi is a full-throttle, volte-face return to the centrality of norms, values, and stable cultural knowledge structures in explaining social processes (Swidler 2013). Similarly, Lamont’s energetic promotion of the idea of boundaries as central to cultural analysis began as a worthwhile effort to synthesize and apply previous work on the subject (Lamont & Fournier 1993). Unfortunately, the relative significance of the concept has subsequently been greatly exaggerated and its emphasis misplaced from that of Barth’s (1969) definitive (though increasingly neglected) statement as well as those of previous and later scholars (Bourdieu 1984, 1989; Douglas 1966; Durkheim 1912 [2008]; Firth 1973; Turner 1969). There is far more to culture and interaction than incessant boundary work. What Fiske (2010, p. 969) wrote of hierarchical differences holds for

all boundaries, that “they are not the only game going in social encounters. Indeed, interdependence matters more because people immediately detect others’ intentions for good or ill and live in cooperative or competitive relationships over time.” Nonetheless, Lamont (1994, 2002, 2009) has given us valuable accounts of the cultures of class, ethnicity, and academic knowledge.

### Meaning and Divisions in Cultural Sociology

I sympathize with Wuthnow’s (1987, pp. 64–65) comment that the concept of meaning may well be “more of a curse than a blessing in cultural analysis” due mainly to its elusiveness. Nonetheless, differences over the meaning of meaning lie at the heart of fundamental theoretical issues in the study of culture. There are three basic approaches to cultural sociology, and in each, meaning is treated differently.

First is what may simply be called the sociocultural approach in which the focus is on cultural knowledge structures and their uses in given social contexts. Here, meaning is used in its simplest and most commonsense form, i.e., as something that is conveyed or signified in a fairly transparent way by language that “retains its rootage in the commonsense reality of everyday life” (Berger & Luckmann 1967, pp. 38). The reigning assumption is the unabashedly modernist one that social life can be viewed as a coherent reality to people, and we can “take as data particular phenomena arising within it without further inquiring about the foundations of this reality” (Berger & Luckmann 1967, p. 19; see also pp. 43–46). Such an assumption is, of course, precisely what is rejected in post-modernist cultural analysis, but the implosion of such thinking in the neighboring disciplines of reflexive anthropology and (literary) cultural studies, along with the “tragic” cautionary case of Alvin Gouldner (Chriss 2000; Sahlins 2000, pp. 38–39; Spiro 1996), has simply reinforced the mainstream modernist view in sociology. Nearly all the classic works in American cultural sociology such as those of

Herbert Gans, W.F. Whyte, Elliott Liebow, Robert Bellah, and Daniel Bell were written in this tradition, and in spite of the high-profile “turn” to semiotics, this remains true of many, perhaps most, of the best work being produced by established and younger scholars (see the excellent edited volumes by Binder et al. 2008, Friedland & Mohr 2004a, Hall et al. 2010).

Second is the sense of meaning as subjective and intersubjective understanding. Here, meaning refers to how someone understands or makes sense of themselves and their world, regardless of its objective validity. The student of culture here reports, to the best of her ability, her interpretation of these subjective and intersubjective meanings or understandings and does not assume that any reality exists independent of such understandings. This is the *verstehen* approach to meaning, famously associated with Weber, although it preceded him, and is the foundation of interpretive sociology. Again, deep philosophical issues persist, which phenomenologists struggle with, as to what exactly is going on in the reports of cultural sociologists on what they have heard and observed (Berger & Luckmann 1967, pp. 19–46; Schutz 1967). It is arguable whether the act of interpretation, expected of most analysts, does not distort and misrepresent the understandings being conveyed, an issue that led Bourdieu to scour such studies, including phenomenological attempts to resolve the matter (Bourdieu 1977, pp. 20–22; 1989). More recently, the utility of in-depth interviewing, that methodological workhorse of this tradition of cultural research, has been seriously challenged by several younger scholars (Vaisey 2009, pp. 1688–89; Martin 2010) and its adherents dubbed “cognitive culturalists” by Pugh (2013) in her measured response to their foray (cf. Vaisey 2014).

The third broad kind of cultural sociology is that of cultural and social semiotics, the study of the language, symbols, rituals, metaphors, codes, and other signs used in communication. The emphasis is on how meaning is maintained, manipulated, made, and expressed through different signifying modes in different contexts.

Semiotic studies have three divisions. The first, which somewhat grandiosely claims to represent the cultural turn (for a push-back among historians against this so-called turn, see Cook et al. 2008, part 1), focuses mainly on historical studies and is closely allied to parallel developments in the historical profession as well as literature (Bonnell & Hunt 1999, Steinmetz 1999). It follows Geertz (1973) in seeing society as a text, the role of the cultural analyst being to read or interpret its meaning through “thick descriptions” (p. 5), or as the editors of one of the agenda-setting volumes of this “cultural turn” faithfully put it: “Henceforth, symbols, rituals, events, historical artifacts, social arrangements, and belief systems were designated as ‘texts’ to be interrogated for their semiotic structure, that is, their internal consistency as part of a system of meaning” (Bonnell & Hunt 1999, p. 3). In addition to Geertz, Foucault and other poststructuralist philosophers such as Roland Barthes, Jacques Lacan, Jacques Derrida, and Frederic Jameson strongly influence this group. Hence, language is viewed as nontransparent, and discursive strategies, as well as ideology and their role in exercising and subverting power, are favored themes. John Hall (2004, p. 110), who knows this group well, has gently reminded it of a chronic weakness, that of “succumbing to the idealism, historicism, or teleology that sometimes afflict histories of culture.”

The second subgroup of social semiotics (see Van Leeuwen 2005, Vannini 2007) differs mainly in its focus on contemporary life and its somewhat uneasy location in the symbolic interactionist tradition of sociology. Although members of this subgroup claim to trace their intellectual ancestry more to Peirce and American pragmatism, they are equally influenced by modern poststructuralist thinkers, especially M.A.K. Halliday and Roland Barthes. Their central concept, the semiotic resource, replaces that of “signs” and refers to the potential for meaning making of anything used in communication—physical expression, movement, artifacts, pictures, music, whatever—and the way they are articulated in social contexts, which may themselves have rules for how

these resources are to be used (Van Leeuwen 2005, pp. 3–4). This branch of social semiotics, though on much surer methodological footing than its better-known historical counterpart, has not won wide acceptance in cultural sociology, at least in the United States.

The third branch of social semiotics is a major subfield in cultural sociology. It originated more in the symbolic anthropology of Durkheim & Mauss (1903 [1963]), carried forward in the early semiotic work of Bourdieu (1979) and the British school of symbolic studies, most notably Mary Douglas (1966), Raymond Firth (1973), and Victor Turner (1969). The works of Ikegami (2005) on Tokugawa Japan, Berezin (1997) on the political culture of fascist Italy, and Wacquant’s (2004) carnal sociology of boxing are exemplary cases of this branch of cultural sociology. Several of my own earlier works fall in this school, though paling in comparison with those of these younger scholars (Patterson 1969 [1995]; 1978; 1982, chapters 2, 8, 11; 1991, chapters 7, 8).

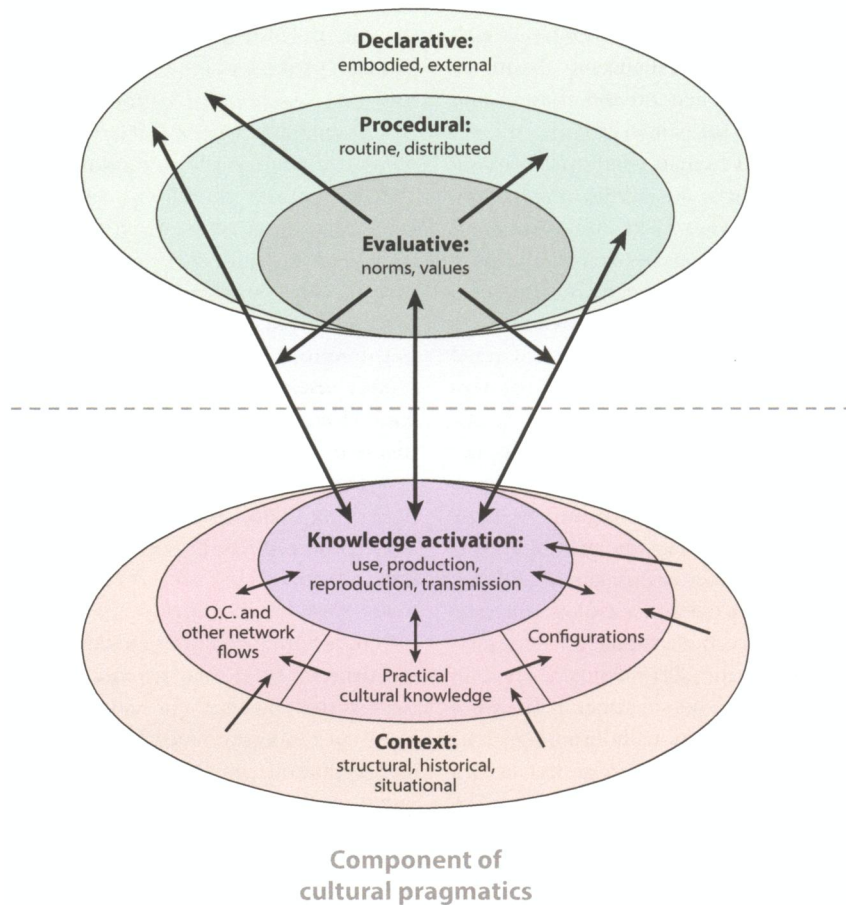
### Assumptions and Propositions

A synthetic analysis that defines both what culture is and does and the nature of the whole beast over and beyond its favored parts may be achieved—still using the parable of the blind people and the elephant—by listening carefully to each person’s account of the part of the elephant they are touching and analyzing. I do not claim to be able to see where my colleagues remain blind. Instead, my interpretation is that we are all blind in the search for truth. I have listened, and below is what I have found. Before getting to it, however, let me state a preliminary set of propositions that disclose, hopefully, my point of departure and biases and provide some orientation to what follows.

I understand culture as the conjugate product of two interconnected, componential processes (see **Figure 1**). The first is a dynamically stable process of collectively made, reproduced, and unevenly shared knowledge about the world that is both informational and meaningful. It is what Sahlins (2000, p. 286)

## Component of constituted cultural knowledge

(symbolically shared schemata)



**Figure 1**

(*top*) Norms and values are, respectively, the weighted prescriptive and affective dimensions of declarative and procedural cultural knowledge structures and practices. They mediate and stabilize the effects of their activation, though imperfectly, allowing some pragmatic changes to filter through. They are themselves changed over time by their direct application to pragmatic processes, sometimes resulting in contradictory evaluative lags. (*bottom*) Knowledge activation generates second-order practical knowledge aimed at the most effective, and socially pragmatic, ways of implementing constituted cultural knowledge, depending on contextual factors such as situation, power differences between the interacting parties, and environmental cues. Configurations are ensembles of practical and activated constituted knowledge, focused on ongoing shared goals of collectivities of varying size: professional groups, gangs, communities, clubs, organizations, movement groups, etc. O.C. (organizational culture) and other network flows refer to the pragmatic cultural processes that flow through and substantiate organizational and other network pipes, including myths and ceremonies.



calls “culture as constituted.” Its basic processes are shared schemata that are internally embodied and externally represented (Griswold 2004). They provide predictability and regularity, coordination equilibria, continuity, and meaning in human actions and interactions and meet certain core social motives such as belonging and self-enhancement without imposing undue burden on the limited and chronically “lazy” (Kahneman 2011, pp. 39–49) controlling half of human cognition (Axelrod 1984; Boyd & Richerson 1988, 2009; Chiu & Hong 2007; Fiske & Fiske 2007; Patterson 2004; Pinker 2002, pp. 63–69; Rogoff 2003; Shore 1998). At the same time, their dynamism, grounded in pragmatic usage, ensures change and adaptation to the environment. Part 2 examines the nature and dynamics of this component.

The pragmatic process constitutes the second component of culture and is considered in Part 3. However, I do not regard pragmatics as the operation of agents arbitrarily manipulating inchoate cultural resources. I build on previous work in cultural sociology, anthropology, psychology, and language use to postulate a pragmatically derived substructure of practical knowledge; this substructure provides routine ways of interactionally using the constituted cultural structures and also has its own alternate practical rules of smart behavior. The collectivity to which a set of cultural processes applies may vary considerably in size. Although it is certainly permissible to explore large cultural formations, it is more desirable to examine what I call cultural configurations, which I discuss in the final section of Part 3.

Any understanding of how culture influences behavior must be interactional. Cultural structures do not autonomously influence or act on either social structures or human actors (cf. Alexander 2003). Rather, culture always interacts with structural forces in both constraining and enabling human agency, in the process also facilitating structural and cultural changes (Patterson 2001). Furthermore, culture as causal agent is always probabilistic, never determinative, even where the prob-

ability of its influence, in conjunction with structural forces, is, on average, extremely high (Bourdieu 1977, pp. 73–78).

Finally, and contrary to a central tenet of those conventional cultural sociologists too heavily swayed by semiotics—that we endlessly engage in “meaning making” in our interactions, often contentiously (Lamont 2000, Spillman 2002)—I consider it foundational that people normally seek to harmonize their relations, to make sense of and confirm their own and others’ intentions and sentiments, through mutual adjustments in their “affectively generated actions” (Heise 2002, p. 17) and symbolic gestures, facilitated by invoking shared meanings from the cultural resources available to them. This view finds support in several research traditions such as the “common ground” experiments of communication theorists (Lyons & Kashima 2001)<sup>1</sup> and in decades of work on group dynamics (Vallacher & Nowak 2007, p. 749). Most importantly, it is supported by the work of affect control social psychologists such as David Heise (2002, p. 36), who, building on Goffman’s (1967) view of interactants sustaining an expressive order, has demonstrated that “an individual behaves not just to maintain the meaning of self, but to maintain understandings generally—humans are meaning-maintainers.” If meaning is public, as their most canonized figure, Clifford Geertz (1973, p. 12), insists, and as even Swidler (2008) has come to acknowledge, it is a mystery why so many cultural sociologists proclaim, ad nauseum, that people relentlessly engage in meaning making. Shared meanings are made and changed, as I explain below, but not in the compulsive, cognitively

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<sup>1</sup>These scholars demonstrate the tendency of communicated knowledge to converge toward shared understandings. Shared knowledge is not a simple repository but “common ground,” which each person in the chain of communication believes others possess and which they use to make sense of new information. Thus, the transmission process itself tends to filter out ambiguities and information inconsistent with established cultural beliefs and other schemata, acting as a major source of cultural reproduction. See also Patterson (2010, pp. 145–46).

exhausting manner proposed by many conventional cultural sociologists, to whom I pose this simple question: Beyond the seminar room, when last did you make a meaning in your interactions?

## **PART 2: THE NATURE AND DYNAMICS OF CULTURAL KNOWLEDGE**

### **Cultural Knowledge as Shared and Common Meaningful Information**

Cultural knowledge is, at minimum, shared meanings about the world. I follow Bohm (1989) in the view that meaning includes “significance, purpose, intention and value” and “is inseparably connected with information” (p. 43). Information entails putting form into something—to in-form—and that something is meaning. Bohm offers a more precise restatement of Gregory Bateson’s (1972) famous definition of information as “a difference that makes a difference” with the statement that “information is a difference of form that makes a difference of content, i.e., meaning” (Bohm 1989, p. 44). The meanings may be internally represented or embodied, or they may be externally represented in artifacts, signifying events and practices. They vary on a continuum from stable messages about which there is relatively little disagreement (e.g., established scientific findings) to those actively loaded with meanings, such as ideologies. Meaningful information becomes public, and cultural, when it is shared, which is to be known among a group of people. Sociologists of culture (myself included) who draw heavily on cognitive science and social psychology, with their chronic individual bias, must constantly remind themselves that if it is not shared and public it is not cultural. There are two additional ways in which meaningful information is publicly known: when it is common and when it is distributed. Distributed knowledge is embedded in human interactions and may not be consciously known; I discuss it below.

Knowledge is common when all persons in a group not only share a given form of meaningful information but knowingly know that all persons know it, *ad infinitum*. It is possible for most persons in a given community to share knowledge of something yet be unaware of the fact that it is widely known, as was the case with the Penn State assistant football coach Jerry Sandusky whose criminal violation of children was widely shared in the university town but not commonly known to be widely shared. Once the press made this common knowledge, there were major social and juridical consequences. The manipulation of common knowledge is important in indirect speech; in the sociality of polite behavior, especially intimate ones; in the use of implicature to both challenge and maintain authority relationships; and in the face-saving and face-losing of everyday interactions (Pinker 2007, pp. 418–25). Common knowledge is also important in explaining social movements and other forms of collective action: A person’s decision to join a demonstration or a revolt, for example, may depend on her knowledge of other persons’ knowledge of the intention of others to join the protest (Chwe 1999).

### **Shared Schemata and Reasonings: The Cognitive Basis of Culture**

The basis of all cultural knowledge is our capacity to categorize. Categories are the words, concepts, and classes we use to make sense of reality and are one of the most basic features of automatic cognitive processing (Kahneman 2011, pp. 168–69; Medin & Heit 1999). They are fundamental for two reasons. The first is the provision of as much possible information with the least possible cognitive effort: “[T]he perceived world comes as structured information rather than as arbitrary or unpredictable attributes” (Rosch 1978, pp. 28–30; Kahneman 2011, pp. 31–38). Second, they make us smarter by providing a ready-made way of drawing inferences, although they can also mislead and misjudge (Pinker 1997, pp. 306–13; Kahneman 2011, pp. 79–88, 167–74). Categorization,

notes Medin & Heit (1999, p. 104), is “a procedure for relating new to old...bringing relevant knowledge to bear in the service of understanding.”

Our capacity to categorize is foundational to the basic elements of cultural knowledge: schemata and mental models (see, e.g., D’Andrade & Strauss 1992; D’Andrade 1995; DiMaggio 1997; Kahneman 2011, pp. 71–78; Thompson & Fine 1999; Shore 1998; Strauss & Quinn 1997). Schemata are mental shortcuts that organize and process incoming information and perceptions in the light of previously stored knowledge structures and processes about given objects, concepts, events, and evaluations. They also retrieve knowledge structures from memory to make judgments (Brewer & Nakamura 1984). A pervasive cognitive principle involved in schematic mental representation is parsimony: They are “no more complex than necessary to attain the processing objective to which they are relevant” (Wyer 2007, p. 290), which partly explains the fallibility of human perceptions and recollections. Schemata, or expectancies as they are better called at the individual level (Gilbert 1998, p. 121), influence mainly through assimilation processing, which is the tendency of people to “see the world as their previous experience suggests the world should be rather than as it is” (Gilbert 1998, p. 121). However, they sometimes work through contrast, in which people “exaggerate the differences between what they see and what they expected to see” (Gilbert 1998, pp. 121–22). The error prone and biased nature of schematic expectancies notwithstanding, there is general agreement that “they are best conceptualized as tools for survival [that] guide behavior with great efficiency, meaning that they provide useful information rapidly and with little demand of processing resources” (Roese & Sherman 2007, p. 93; see also pp. 99–105).<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup>It is important to note that, while prominent in social psychology and almost exclusively embraced by sociologists and anthropologists, schema theory is only one model of mental representation and memory, competing with at least three others: associative networks, exemplars, and distributed rep-

Schemata are also often combined: Specific instances of schemata are united with more abstract ones to generate schema assemblages that dynamically allow for the removal or deinstantiation from memory of inappropriate schemata and their replacement or instantiation by others. These assemblages, in turn, can themselves be assembled into higher-order configurations, an idea to which I return in the final section of Part 3.

Ambiguity and redundancy abide in the meanings and uses of the terms schema and mental models. I follow Brewer (1987) in using the term schema in the restricted sense to mean “precompiled generic knowledge structures” in memory, as distinct from the view that schemata encompass all forms of knowledge. Important nonschematic forms of knowledge are mental models, which are “specific knowledge structures that are constructed to represent a new situation through the use of generic knowledge of space, time, causality, and human intentionality” (Brewer 1987, p. 189). Models are processed through natural forms of deductive reasoning about what is possible, capturing “what is common to the different ways in which the possibility might occur” (Johnson-Laird 2001; cf. Lakoff & Johnson 1980, pp. 159–84). These are our explanations or naive working theories of our world and what is happening in it that we use to understand and anticipate events or make decisions to act. Brewer (1999) has proposed that scientific theories should also be understood, psychologically, in these terms.

Mental models need not preoccupy the student of culture because, on closer scrutiny, they are either redundant or inapplicable. To the degree that such models are shared mental maps, they are prefigured and hence schemata. Original reasoning and naive theorizing by individuals—which is the main concern of researchers on mental models—is, by definition,

resentation theories. For a review, see Smith (1998), who decries the fact that researchers have not sufficiently “specified or tested detailed assumptions about the structure or content of schemas they postulate” (p. 410).

not shared and hence not applicable. Reasonings become cultural in three ways: when they are prefigured and internally represented in our shared beliefs, ideologies, narratives, metaphors, metonymies, and tropes (Denzau & North 1994, Lakoff & Johnson 1980); when they are externally represented in institutions that, as Douglas (1986) aptly puts it, “think for us”; and when they are distributed knowledge embedded in social interactions (Hutchins 1995). All three cases involve prefiguring and are adequately covered by the concept of shared schemata.

According to D’Andrade (1981, p. 181), only those schemata that make up the “socially transmitted information pool” constitute “the cultural part of cognition,” but this view has been contested as too narrow by those who see cognition itself as, in part, a socially constituted process (Hutchins 1995, p. 354; Shore 1998). Although the propensity to think in schematic terms is obviously hardwired, most of what fills the abstract slots is one’s culture or “shared stock of knowledge” (Cerulo 2010b, pp. 122–23; see also Oyserman & Markus 1993). As a sociologist, I am partial to this view, but we should be wary of extreme social constructionism, given that modern cognitive science has made it clear that not all mental reality and categorization are “deeply embedded in social reality” (Zerubavel 1997, p. 32). Studies of prelinguistic infants indicate that they are “sensitive to cause and effect, human agency, spatial relations, and other ideas that form the core of conceptual structure” and, further, that universal mental mechanisms and cultural processes undercut the blank slate, constructivist view of human nature (Pinker 2002, p. 37; 2007, p. 149; see also Konner 2007), with supporting evidence from ethnobiologists (Medin et al. 2007, pp. 623–30). There are also basic or natural domains of experience that are products of human nature arising from our bodies, interactions with the physical environment and with other people, most of which vary culturally, but a significant number of which are clearly universal (Lakoff & Johnson 1980, p. 117; 1999, pp. 56–57, 284–89).

### Domains of Cultural Knowledge Structures: Declarative, Procedural, and Evaluative

Although the shared schemata that constitute cultural knowledge structures can be classified in many ways (see Chiu & Hong 2007, D’Andrade 1995, Holland & Quinn 1987, Shore 1998), the most useful for our purposes are those among the so-called primary domains of declarative, procedural, and evaluative knowledge.

Intuitively, declarative knowledge is simply knowledge of facts and events, whereas procedural knowledge is know-how, skills, or, more technically, “the sequences of interrelated operations that transform, store, retrieve, or make inferences based on declarative knowledge” (Smith 1994, p. 100). We now know that the distinction is neurologically based: Declarative memory is implemented in the hippocampus and cerebral cortex and procedural memory in the ganglia and cerebellum (Ullman 2012). A tradition of psychological research going back to Piaget regards procedures as schemata in active, reciprocal interactions with declarative knowledge. We distinguish broadly between internal or embodied and external declarative schemata, the former referring to beliefs, ideologies, language, metaphor, and so on (Larson 1994, p. 20), the latter to artifacts, social rituals, conventions, and the more formal, structured conventions we call institutions (for more fine-grained distinctions, see Wyer 2007). However, the distinction is largely one of analytic convenience. All external knowledge must, in the final analysis, be mentally interpreted. And although there are purely internal schemata, most realize their meanings in context. To the degree that cognition is perceptual, representations are stored as sensory, literally embodied, memory states. Narratives, which are complex schemata, “exist outside the body—in our culture—and inside the body—in the very building blocks of our brain” (Lakoff 2009, p. 21; see also Ignatow 2007, pp. 119–24). Furthermore, physical objects, including our bodies, are means through which we think, by providing “the basis



for an extraordinarily wide variety of ontological metaphors, that is, ways of viewing events, activities, emotions, ideas, etc., as entities and substances” (Lakoff & Johnson 1980, pp. 25–32; 1999, chapters 2–4). And the space in which we live, both built and natural, is not only cognitively structured, categorized, and perceived by us but, in turn, deeply affects us cognitively and affectively (Harvey 2009, Bourdieu 1979). The “semiotic landscape,” however timeless our imputed construction of it, both shapes and is shaped by us (Kress & Van Leeuwen 1996, pp. 35–41).

Turning to procedural knowledge, the important point to note about it is that, unlike declarative knowledge, it can rarely be explained but has to be learned through practice. Learning to ride a bicycle, as distinct from the declarative knowledge of bicycles and the act of riding, is the classic illustration. Procedures, even if initially learned from a demonstrator/teacher, quickly become automatic and nonconscious (Hutchins 1995, p. 311). It is also the kind of knowledge normally learned not in classrooms but at home, in one’s community and personal network, and on the job, itself made possible by one’s personal network. Bourdieu’s widely acclaimed concepts of “habitus” and “cultural capital” are grounded on the principle of procedural knowledge acquisition (Bourdieu 1977, pp. 87–95; 1986, pp. 241–58; Wacquant 2006).

Procedural knowledge is of two broad types: routines or scripts and distributed knowledge. Scripts are cultural algorithms: stored knowledge of a “predetermined, stereotyped sequence of actions that defines a well-known situation” (Schank & Abelson 1977, p. 41). Like all schemata, they are predetermined memory slots for which there are default values. However, the slots refer to sequences of action, and the links between these actions are both causal and temporal. Even simple scripts are prone to misconceptions and can usually be learned only by doing (Chen 2004, p. 98). Routines can be further subdivided into two broad types: individual and divisional. Individual routines are those performed by a single person such as

learning the recipe for food preparation. Divisional procedures, or drills, are those that require alignment with others such as learning one’s role in an army parade, navigation team, or orchestra. Hutchins (1995) shows how the pelorus operators of the navigation team on a navy ship need only know what to do when certain operations occur in their environment and need have no knowledge of the entire script. They simply “do X when Y” (Hutchins 1995, pp. 199–200). Even so simple a procedure, however, has to be learned through repeated drills; one small error can ruin an entire parade, docking maneuver, or orchestral performance.

Distributed cultural knowledge, sometimes called aggregate or tacit knowledge, is knowledge in which the interaction of two or more agents’ knowledge sets yields new knowledge that is not known to them separately. This new knowledge is embedded in their information states taken together, or, more formally, the newly derived information is distributed over information states of the persons interacting. Such knowledge is often fundamental for the performance of ongoing complex human action, as Hutchins (1995, pp. 219–24) has demonstrated in his study of the navigation team on a US navy ship.

I now consider the evaluative domain of cultural knowledge structures or schemata, to which I pay special attention because they have been unwisely slighted in contemporary sociology. Fortunately, this bizarre overreaction against earlier misuses of these concepts has now been largely discredited (see, for example, Bardi & Schwartz 2003; Coleman 1990; Ensminger & Henrich 2014; Feather 1995; Hechter et al. 1993, 1999; Hechter & Opp 2001; Hitlin & Piliavin 2004; Inglehart & Welzel 2005; Lefkowitz 2003; Longest et al. 2013; Sztompka 2007).

There can be no doubt that individual persons have the freedom to depart from the values they share with other members of their group, but this in no way vitiates the well-documented claim that values, as Barth (1993, p. 44) has carefully pointed out, when viewed within the social contexts of actors, “valorize emotion, orient

choice, and propel action. . . in very significant ways” (see also Longest et al. 2013). At their most basic, values refer to the way we evaluate objects, the affective weights we attribute to objects, and whether we prefer them or not.

We follow Weber (1949, p. 111) in distinguishing between two ways in which values operate: “viewpoints of a specifically particularized character” and “ultimate and final values, in which the meaning of existence is rooted.” The distinction is roughly similar to Rokeach’s (1973) later use of the terms “terminal” and “instrumental” values and Lefkowitz’s (2003) “general” and “domain-relevant” values (pp. 145–47).

Particularized values are cognitively and sociologically similar to attitudes, except that they are shared. The consensus view in social psychology is that an attitude is “a psychological tendency that is expressed by evaluating a particular entity with some degree of favor or disfavor” (Eagly & Chaiken 1998, p. 269). The view that values differ from attitudes in that they are always favorable (Hitlin & Piliavin 2004) is incorrect. Anti-black racism in the United States, anti-Semitism in Europe, and homophobia in Jamaica are all negative, deeply ingrained values. An impressive body of scholarship (Bardi & Schwartz 2003, Feather 1995, Hitlin & Piliavin 2004, Inglehart & Baker 2000, Rokeach 1973, Vaisey & Lizardo 2010) attests to the fact that values are stable and can be extremely influential.

One reason for the untenable view that values are unimportant is the failure to take account of the distinction between espoused values and values in use or experiential values, the former referring to what people consciously and usually publicly espouse, the latter to what automatically drives their behavior (Argyris & Schön 1978, Epstein 1989). The two usually operate independently, and it is the former that is typically reported in surveys upon which sociologists too often rely.<sup>3</sup> The discrepancy be-

<sup>3</sup>As noted above, it has recently been argued that the dual-process model of cognition supports the view that answers to

tween espoused and experiential values does not necessarily mean that espoused values are hypocritical. The biconceptual brain easily inhibits the recognition of value contradiction (Lakoff 2009, pp. 70–73). Furthermore, espoused values, however hypocritical, may be consequential. The public espousal of a value may well eventually influence its use among a greater number of persons through what Meglino & Ravlin (1998, p. 384) call a “feedback loop in the value process.” If people in a formerly racist or sexist community feel compelled always to espouse the value that they are not sexist or racist, this may eventually result in a significant reduction in racist and sexist behavior, as appears to have happened in the United States over the decades following the civil rights revolution.

Value strength or salience, the weight or prioritization of particular objects, is the most important component of particularized values. Higgins (2007, p. 466) has proposed that value is “a force experience that has direction and strength.” The direction may be toward hedonic attraction or repulsion. The strength of the engagement with the value object may be independent of its hedonic valence since we may invest it with value purely from our interest without taking pleasure in it: “Strength of engagement contributes to *how* positively or *how* negatively something is experienced” (Higgins 2007, pp. 466–67). Thus, two groups may espouse liking given value objects, such as the work ethic and family, but weigh them very differently (Waters 1990, p. 134). Survey and ethnographic studies find that blacks cherish marriage as much as whites but attach very

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multiple choice survey questionnaires are a more reliable instrument for uncovering people’s deepest “gut” feelings and views, especially those likely to influence behavior (Vaisey 2009, Martin 2010). However, recent work by Fosse (2014) on a large number of national surveys on black youth and by Patterson (2014) on their cultural configurations suggests caution before fully embracing this argument. Thus, black youths overwhelmingly condemn the misogyny and violence of rap music but avidly buy and listen to it. The jury is still out on this bold claim on behalf of the survey. At the same time, I agree that the dual-process model of cognition is “unwelcome news” for cultural sociologists who rely solely on in-depth interviewing.

different motivational force to it, reflected in blacks' low rate of marriage (Edin & Kefalas 2007, Fosse 2014). Such prioritization is strongly reflected in the "metaphors we live by," as Lakoff & Johnson (1980, p. 22) point out. The most fundamental values in a culture will be coherent with the metaphorical structure of the most fundamental concepts in the culture. Thus, Trappist monks share the mainstream value that metaphorically orients virtue as spatially up, but they give it far greater priority or up-ness. Value weights and metaphorical orientations can also express opposing values: For mainstream Americans, bigger and more material possessions are positively valued and metaphorically oriented upwards; for Trappists, that upward metaphorical orientation is negatively valued, the downward orientation of smaller and less being strongly valued (Lakoff & Johnson 1980, pp. 23–24).

Ultimate values define the ideal, most abstract conception of the desirable and even what makes life worth living. We agree with Hechter et al. (1993) that ultimate values (they call these immanent values) motivate people to achieve goals and goods that are desired purely for their own sake, are independent of fungible resources, and may sometimes even reduce access to them. They are deeply internalized during the course of one's upbringing and are strongly reinforced in public life both directly and indirectly, in myths, shared narratives, tropes and sayings, and popular culture (McBride & Toburen 1996). They belong to the same semantic field as worldviews and "thick" morality, although the conceptual boundaries are very fuzzy, in spite of recent attempts at greater precision (Hitlin & Vaisey 2013, Vaisey & Lizardo 2010). Haidt (2012) has explored the moral foundations of American ultimate values, attempting to show how they account for basic divisions in political life. Values, or value schemata, of course, do change like other areas of culture, but precisely because of their normal tendency toward stability, when ultimate values change the consequences are enormous for individuals and societies (see Inglehart 1990, Inglehart & Welzel 2005). Ex-

perimental and field studies of the things people deem as taboo, for example, have compellingly demonstrated the powerful role of values in people's choices and behavior, often in direct conflict with their material interests (Fiske & Tetlock 1997, McGraw & Tetlock 2005). The world now knows from the actions of suicide terrorists that religious values, especially when allied to political ones, are so powerful that, as Atran (2006, p. 164) notes, they "motivate action independently of its prospect of success," even to the point of self-destruction.

Norms constitute the second major component of the evaluative domain. Norms are shared rules that prescribe and proscribe what we ought to do in given situations, unlike values, which express what we like or desire to do. Norms are usually shared expectations with a reference group that will reward or punish us for our conformity or failure to conform and that we expect to behave accordingly. Nearly all norms are conditional, even those with wide applicability such as the norm not to kill another person. We agree with Therborn (2002, pp. 868, 870) that they are among "the major springs of human action" and "central to any functioning social system" (see also Hechter & Opp 2001, p. xii and chapter 13; Coleman 1990). Indeed, experimental data indicate a strong bias in human cognition toward social norms (O'Gorman et al. 2008, p. 77), which are in all likelihood a coevolutionary adaptation (Ensminger & Henrich 2014, pp. 19–44).

Norms may be injunctive—prescribing what we ought or ought not to do—or observational (also called descriptive by some psychologists)—our conception of what is normal, based on the observed behavior of others (see Cialdini & Trost 1998). Neglect of this important distinction can lead to misleading interpretations of the views of observed groups. Researchers have found that an injunctive norm, when activated, influences conduct regardless of context or situation, whereas an observational/descriptive norm activation applies only to contexts where the norm is observed to apply (Cialdini & Trost 1998, p. 161). A more complicated situation is

one in which persons may hold both behavioral and injunctive norms regarding a given social behavior but with different relative strengths. Thus, inner-city youths report a norm of strong disapproval of out-of-wedlock birth and misogynistic rap songs yet are observed to practice or consume both to a considerable degree (Cohen 2012). One interpretation of the discrepancy is that they are reporting their weak injunctive norms to survey researchers while abiding by the observational norm in their actual behavior. Another interpretation is consistent with one theory of norm emergence, namely, that a behavioral regularity will, over time, require justification and “a sense of oughtness,” and thus become institutionalized as an injunctive norm (Horne 2001, p. 6; see also Fine 2001). It is also possible that people hold several injunctive norms in regard to particular behaviors, in which case the most salient, or the one with the strongest subjective salience, will be most effective. Researchers in social psychology agree that informal social norms have the greatest influence when the situation is uncertain, when the person we are interacting with is similar to us, or when it is important that we initiate or maintain a relationship we are particularly concerned about (Cialdini & Trost 1998, p. 162).

The relation of informal social norms to values is important. The two may reinforce each other. Indeed, scholars have argued that a third kind of norm, personal norms, emerge from the urge to act in a manner consistent with one’s basic values. In such cases, the source of one’s norms is neither observation of others’ behavior nor the normative expectations of others (including the threat of punishment or the inducement of reward), but rather one’s internalized values and the need to perceive oneself as a good, morally upright, and worthy person (Schwartz 1977). However, often we do not necessarily like doing the things we are obliged to do. Balestrino & Ciardi (2008) have recently argued that the timing and stability of marriage in advanced welfare states have been affected by the cognitive dissonance between perceived norms of marriage and changing values pertaining to the institution.

Informal norms are often as important as formal ones in understanding formal social institutions and their organizational structures. Organizational isomorphism, DiMaggio & Powell (1983) showed, is due in good part to the informal norms transmitted through interorganizational networks by managers with similar educational backgrounds. The informal norm of reciprocity has been shown to be vital for productive employer–employee relationships (Akerlof 1982, Robinson 1996). Indeed, the growing consensus of organizational and broader institutional studies today is that informal norms, including even those that are largely ceremonial, are the critical components of organizational functioning (Scott 2005) and the adoption of innovation-supporting behaviors (Russell 1992), although some still regard this as the “soft side” of the subject (Morrill 2008). A striking recent illustration of the power of informal norms is their role in the phenomenal rise of China as an industrial power. Nee & Opper (2012, pp. 14–32, 74–78, 259–63) have shown that it was only through the operation of informal norms that pioneering entrepreneurs were able to establish the informal economic arrangements that provided them with unsecured loans, while avoiding free rider effects and the might of an unpredictable and initially unsupportive state, and paved the way for the bottom-up “institutional foundations of China’s emergent capitalist economic order” (p. 8).

Finally, I address one serious source of confusion regarding the nature of institutions. In the view of some sociologists (Jepperson 1991, p. 144) and nearly all economists (e.g., Acemoglu & Robinson 2012, chapters 1–2; Greif 1994; Nunn 2012; Tabellini 2008), institutions are separate from culture; indeed, economists often contrast them, culture being identified with internal beliefs and values and institutions seen as sets of codified norms external to people. This is incorrect. Institutions are thoroughly cultural. They are norms or an ensemble of norms, understood in the broader sense of both the prescriptive weight (i.e., the nature and degree of approval or penalty) and



the social objects to which they are directed. More precisely, they are “first and foremost self-reinforcing, dynamically stable equilibria that arise as individuals’ norms converge and complement each other over time” (Ensminger & Henrich 2014, p. 20). They encode and store information, allowing us to routinize decisions and automatically solve recurring problems, and because of their greater formality, they reduce uncertainty and minimize the inaccuracies of informal individual and shared schemata.<sup>4</sup> In Douglas’s (1986, p. 92) view, “Institutions systematically direct individual memory and channel our perceptions into forms compatible with the relations they authorize. They fix processes that are essentially dynamic, they hide their influence, and they rouse our emotions to a standardized pitch on standardized issues. They endow themselves with rightness.” Clearly, all this encoding, storing, and channeling of perceptions, however externally represented and phenomenologically experienced as objectively real (Zucker 1977) must in the final analysis be processed in the minds of people. Less complex institutional norms, such as salutations or the etiquette of interaction in public places (Goffman 1967), are learned during socialization or by osmosis through familiarity with a taken-for-granted reality. Others, like property rights or organizational rules, must be studied prior to practice. The most complex, however, such as the ensemble of procedures for docking a warship, become familiar primarily through enactment because the norms and rules of procedure, embedded in organizational structures or elaborate routines, only emerge interactively, but these, as already

<sup>4</sup>However, we should avoid treating all culture as institutionalized schemata, as some movement theorists propose (Polletta 2008, pp. 84–86). Many cultural processes in modern societies are nonnormative and hence noninstitutional, even though recurring: In addition to disapproved, though legal, practices such as pornography, infidelity, out-of-wedlock birth, and bingeing on junk food, many areas of popular culture merely reflect values we like that are not institutionalized normative schemata or may not even be liked, possessing motivational force without hedonic valence simply because of our interest in them, such as watching the news or attending a child’s grade school play.

noted, amount to a form of social cognition or distributed intelligence (Hutchins 1995). Not recognizing the cognitive and cultural nature of institutions results in neglect of the most common reason for institutional failure—that they have not been learned or cannot be enacted even when declaratively known, the fate of post-colonial and post-Soviet democratic institutions being dramatic cases in point (Kolodko 2006, Patterson 2013).

### PART 3: CULTURAL PRAGMATICS

#### Context, Rules of Practice, and Cultural Change

The interactional or pragmatic component of culture refers to the ways people use cultural knowledge in their interactions, with such usage itself representing a kind of cultural knowledge. Following a familiar analogy, one way to interpret what is illustrated in **Figure 1** is to think of Saussure’s classic distinction between *langue* (French language) and *parole* (French speech). Like language, culture has “a dual mode of existence. It appears both in human projects and intersubjectively as a structure or system” (Sahlins 2000, p. 286) (but for a critique of the Saussurian distinction and a too literal use of it, which we take account of in what follows, see Bourdieu 1977, pp. 22–30). As with language, every individual has her own distinctive mode of interacting and behavior that varies with the intention, context, and style of communicating between actors. None of this means, however, that language does not structure as well as enable persons in their interactions, for how one manipulates is governed by pragmatic rules, and what Bruner (1990) wrote of speech acts holds for all signifying practices in human interactions: “However ambiguous or polysemous our discourse may be, we are still able to bring our meanings into the public domain and negotiate them there. That is to say, we live publicly by public meanings and by shared procedures and interpretations *and negotiation*. Interpretation, however thick it may become, must be publicly

accessible or the culture falls into disarray and its individual members with it" (Bruner 1990, p. 13; see also Pinker 2007, pp. 123–24).

Much the same holds for the two components of culture. If people are going to interact meaningfully, they must share a minimum set of knowledge structures, but of equal importance is that how they choose the cultural knowledge they need, and what they do with it, is itself learned, schematized, cultural knowledge. There are meta-cultural rules of interaction similar to the meta-linguistic rules of conversation that social linguists have long identified (see, for example, Myers 1996; Van Leeuwen 2005, pp. 248–67). What's more, as pointed out in the above discussion of distributed procedural knowledge, we may not even consciously know what the implicit, rule-bound knowledge is that we are generating, given that it emerges only from our interaction with each other.

The pragmatics of culture reflect power and status differences between individuals and affirm social identities in terms that vary not only by class but also by the major ascribed categories of gender, ethno-race, and age. Of these, gender would seem to be the one that most activates pragmatic rules, rituals, and what social psychologists term communication accommodation. In all societies, maleness, as Fiske (2010, pp. 951–53) notes, is the default gender, the presumption of dominance expressed in both verbal and nonverbal terms: "Communication may emphasize male-metaphor jargon (sports, military), patronizing speech ('girls'), or sexual innuendo and joking" (p. 951) and the view that this is both natural and morally correct. Turco (2010) has recently shown that, in the local, pragmatic cultural context of the highly lucrative leveraged-buyout (LBO) industry, knowledge of sports and the skill of co-narrating sport events, along with sexually charged trash talk, are valued cultural assets, not found in a business school curriculum, that enable post-hire black men to bond and integrate more easily than white women with the dominant "uber-aggressive" (p. 903) white male investors. This is not a case of toolkit manipulation but the workings of an element of practical LBO cul-

ture that happens to overlap with one of the declarative and procedural knowledge sets of competitive black men. And as women discover to their cost, culture at this level is as rule-bound and difficult to make chronically accessible as anything they learned in business school. Reinforcing the sports habitus is the cultural schema of the ideal worker in LBO practical culture—here "more gender-typed male than it is race-typed white" (p. 895)—which defines a cherished value in the constituted culture, motherhood, as incompatible with commitment to the occupation, further handicapping women.

Bourdieu's (1979) social semiotics based on his fieldwork among the Kabyle of Algeria offers one famous account of what happens pragmatically. People strive to reconcile their subjective interests with the dictates of the constituted cultural knowledge structures because this is the best way of validating their interests, or what Bourdieu (1977, pp. 38–42) calls their "second order officializing strategies." Whatever their private motives and intentions, they were motivated to show respect for the knowledge structures shared by the group, especially its values; indeed, the more their private deliberations depart from the norms and values of the group, the greater their ostentatious show of support for them. Thus, "[g]roups make room for the well-meaning rule-breaker who by conceding the appearances or intent of conformity, that is recognition, to rules he can neither respect nor deny, contributes to the—entirely official—survival of the rule" (Bourdieu 1977, p. 40). Recall my discussion above about the importance of espoused values. In this way, the constituted order is reproduced as people realize that any outward expression of cynicism about it would undermine the agreed upon terms that make the projects they are negotiating possible. It is as if people become hard-nosed "folk" sociologists convinced that, like God, if constituted cultural knowledge did not already exist as part of the natural order of things, they would have had to invent it, so why mess with what they already have.

Another important element of higher-order, pragmatic cultural interactions is what Eliasoph

& Lichterman (2003) call “group style,” which encompasses the “recurrent patterns of interaction that arise from a group’s shared assumptions about what constitutes good or adequate participation in the group setting” (p. 737). These “patterned and relatively durable” styles do not derive from the constitutive component of culture; rather, in everyday practice they are “culturally patterned and meaningful in themselves” (p. 738). People know that different settings require them to behave in different ways.

The pragmatic rules of interaction are also mediated by the material objects we love and use. Indeed, there are rules of use that complement our pragmatic rules of interaction. We find this even in an interaction as intimate as that of a mother relating to a child through a pram’s rattle toy: “Just as the interpretation of texts is structured not only by ‘what the text says,’ but also by contextually specific rules of interpretation, so the use of toys, too, is not only structured by their design but also by contextually specific rules of use” (Van Leeuwen 2005, pp. 83–87).

In addition to these higher-order schemata and practices about how to understand and negotiate the constituted component of cultural knowledge—“the dialectic of the official and the useful,” in another of Bourdieu’s (1977, p. 41) vivid phrases—there also exists a parallel practical cultural structure that offers an alternative framework of action that sometimes contradicts, sometimes substitutes, but most often sustains the constituted order. This is illustrated in **Figure 1** in the block labeled Practical Cultural Knowledge. Let us consider some important instances.

Freilich & Schubert (1989) explored this parallel system in their “Smart/Proper Action” analysis. Viewing culture as a guidance system, they argue that every constituted culture, with its set of rules, norms, and values that “guide proper action,” must compete with two other such systems: those of smart rules and private rules. “[S]mart rules belong to social units, such as work groups, clans, clubs, and cliques. . . . [P]rivate rules (generally called ‘habits’) belong to individuals” (Freilich &

Schubert 1989, p. 219). They use this to explain the gap between proper police action, strictly guided by modern police procedure and the rule of law, and police behavior on the street in which the police are forced to juggle between the proper rules and practical considerations. What emerges is another set of rules, a “smart,” practical cultural subset, derived from experience and the discretionary application of the proper, constituted rules. Reconciling the two is a complex matter. Nonetheless, most officers “learn to use street wisdom *and learn, simultaneously, how to appear to be operating within the law*” (Freilich & Schubert 1989, p. 220). While potentially problematic, this was nonetheless accepted by most members of the community who recognized that pursuing a smart, practical strategy, with its own rules and norms, promoted effective police work, maintained order, and ironically reinforced the legitimacy and persistence of the “proper” constituted sociocultural order (Freilich & Schubert 1989, p. 220). The outcome is not always as salutary as this; Moskoss’s (2009) superb recent study of the Baltimore police shows that “smart” pragmatics mainly benefits a cynical police force and promotes a hopeless war on drugs, to the detriment of the inner-city residents they are supposed to serve.

Biernacki (2000) has also independently theorized the pragmatic use of culture as a “component of cultural structure in [its] own right” (p. 292). Drawing on his earlier study of wool textile workers in Germany and England during the nineteenth century (Biernacki 1995) and other works, he showed how “different kinds of tacit pragmatic suppositions can center larger clusters of practices and beliefs” (Biernacki 2000, p. 306). Furthermore, these tacit pragmatic cultures change at different paces from the overarching constituted culture.

A third illustration comes from Lamont’s (2009) recent study of academic panelists who judge grant applications, among whom “customary rules” of “pragmatic fairness” emerge that standardize procedure and restrain personal biases. Note, however, that these practical rules, while providing an alternate frame to the

constituted ones, also powerfully reinforce what one panelist called the “almost sacred value(s)” of the constituted academic system: those of impartiality and openness (Lamont 2009, pp. 111, 107–58).

Finally, we consider a case in which the strong commitment to constituted norms and values may lead to practical rules of behavior that result in the opposite of what they dictate. Edin & Kefalas (2007), having documented the deep commitment of black and white working poor women to marriage and childbearing, go on to show how a different practical principle—coping with male infidelity, unemployment, and the US’s welfare state—leads these women to the pragmatic norm and behavior of single motherhood, with all its insecurities. Indeed, it is their strong belief in the sanctity of marriage that drives them to reject promises that are unlikely to be kept. This illustrates what Sahlin (2000, p. 287) calls the “dialectically interpenetrable” relation between the two components of culture. Constituted norms and values may have powerful, though unexpected, pragmatic consequences.

The pragmatic use of cultural knowledge involves not only its transmission and reproduction but also its production and change. Sometimes these come from errors that survive the “common ground” filtering of the transmission process (Lyons & Kashima 2001); sometimes, as in advanced societies, they are deliberate; at other times, they are accidental. In any society of moderate size, millions of such new productions occur every day, but, as Sperber (1996) has shown, few pass the ultimate cultural test of institutionalization. He suggests that the more evocative and memorable are the ones that survive through selective, “epidemiological” processes that filter individual creations (Sperber 1996, p. 73, chapters 4–5). However, other factors are equally important: the power of those advocating the new idea or practice; the charismatic personality of the originator (itself a form of power); its resonance with preexisting related institutions and practices; its usefulness; and just dumb luck (Stinchcombe 1968, pp. 108–12). Lakoff & Johnson (1980, pp. 159–60) also

note that although most of the metaphors of our culture that influence how we think evolved over time, many are imposed by the powerful.

More recently, network researchers (including the specialized group who work on organizational behavior) have risen to the challenge, noted by Emirbayer & Goodwin (1994) two decades ago, of incorporating cultural knowledge structures in their analyses. In moving from the structural channels of networks to a consideration of contagion, or what flows through them, Christakis & Fowler (2009) have independently advanced the epidemiological model of cultural transmission and change. Cultural knowledge, norms, and values flow through the pipes of networks, powerfully influencing behaviors such as eating, smoking, and even feeling happy, and these hyperdyadic network spreads have emergent properties, with major consequences for our understanding of the production and reproduction of cultural processes (Christakis & Fowler 2009, pp. 24–25, 116–17). They may even influence future network composition (Vaisey & Lizardo 2010).

The important recent work of Padgett & Powell (2012) makes clear that perhaps the most powerful source of cultural change may be closely allied to the pragmatic role of network channeling in organizational genesis and change. Relational flows in Renaissance Florence moved either through “strategically located persons operating in multiple domains or via biographies that work their way across domains” (Padgett & Powell 2012, pp. 1–29). With these flows were transposed knowledge structures such as double-entry bookkeeping, partnerships, and liquid current accounts, which in their new settings were refunctioned in innovative ways, spreading from credit relations among businesses across partnership systems to credit relations among import-export Florentine business at large, undergirding the dominance of Florentine companies in European international finance. Upwardly mobile marriages of successfully networked men led to a two-way transfer of knowledge structures and values in this new open elite. The men in new roles avidly incorporated the kinship and



political values of the old patriciate, whereas the latter changed from being aristocrats to republicans. Patronage, service to the state, and refined aesthetic taste were the new markers of high status. Out of this cauldron of transposition and refunctionality emerged the explosively new cultural inventions in business and the arts that we have come to call the Renaissance (Padgett & Powell 2012, pp. 115–17; chapters 5, 6). The major achievement of this pathbreaking work is to make abundantly clear the error of conceiving of any radical autonomy of either the social or the cultural, while demonstrating how the pragmatics of relational structures under the impulse of initiating human agency (in the case of Renaissance Florence, the working-class Ciompi Revolt) can transform stable knowledge structures into radical new forms, even among politically and socially conservative elites.

The double-headed arrows in **Figure 1** indicate this interactive process of making use of available knowledge, procedures, and evaluations, in the course of which they are (usually) slowly changed, but not so fast that their stability and coherence are threatened. The evaluative component not only is itself subject to this process of use and slow change but also mediates and moderates the process of activation and interactional usage.

**Figure 1** also points to another stable set of processes that emerge from the pragmatics of culture: configurations. To better understand how this works we must first briefly examine findings on the processes of knowledge activation.

### Knowledge Activation in Sociocultural Pragmatics

One of the most important recent contributions of social psychology to our understanding of how culture works is knowledge activation theory (Andersen et al. 2007, Förster & Liberman 2007, Higgins 1996). Here, I move to the most micro level of our understanding of the process (for earlier applications, see Schudson 1989, Hong et al. 1997, Kashima

2001). Knowledge activation refers to the cognitive processes involved in the retrieval and use of cultural knowledge. Four processes are involved: (a) the availability of cultural knowledge, (b) its accessibility, (c) its application to particular situations and contexts, and (d) the degree of self-regulation that people bring to bear on the other three processes. Andersen and associates (2007, p. 139) have neatly summarized this framework as follows:

First, knowledge must be available in memory if it is to guide subsequent processing, and thus availability of social knowledge is a precursor to its use and understanding knowledge acquisition is thus relevant. Second, social knowledge must be accessible. Accessibility refers to a construct's readiness to be used, commonly defined as the degree to which it can be automatically activated. Third, accessible social knowledge may or may not be applied. Applicability refers to how well social knowledge matches attended-to features of a stimulus or situation. This match, or the usability of accessible social knowledge, determines in part whether or not the knowledge is applied. Self-regulation covers a heterogeneous set of processes that affect the accessibility and application of social knowledge such as inhibition, suppression, adjustment, or enhancement. Self-regulation can thus short-circuit activation at the outset, or redirect it once it has occurred, and can also prevent application or introduce a postapplication correction.

They note that the automatic activation of knowledge is subject to a subtle shift of cues in the environment, and hence the extent to which available knowledge becomes accessible varies from one context to the next. Furthermore, accessibility may be chronic or transient. When a knowledge structure is frequently used, it becomes chronic in the sense that it is the cultural schema that most readily comes to mind in response to social or other environmental stimuli. Transient accessibility occurs in response to some recent priming that may temporarily override the more chronically accessible,

default response. This is often the result of distinctive cues in the social context, several of which may be processed at once. Knowledge activation, then, has to be seen as the product of the interaction between available knowledge, stimulus, and social context (Andersen et al. 2007, pp. 142–43; Smith 1998, pp. 408–9). A final, and original, contribution of Andersen et al. (2007) is their view that self-regulation acts as an important intervening factor in both the activation and application of cultural knowledge. A person's goal in initially activating a given cultural schema may, on reflection, change, resulting in the dis-use of the knowledge structure. This, they argue, qualifies somewhat the bifurcated, dual-processing model of cognition. In short, people are quite capable of inhibiting, replacing, and overriding activated responses, however automatic they may have become. We are not slaves to our automatic reflexes.

Three further findings are of special note. The first is chronic accessibility. A person's significant others are chronically accessible and are likely to be activated with minimum contextual cues: “[B]oth personal concerns (i.e., goals, wishes, and preoccupations) and more extensive construct use create priming effects that last longer” (Förster & Liberman 2007, pp. 217–18). Second, accessibility can alter the availability of knowledge. Repeated procedural priming and chronic accessibility can, over time, generate new associations in regard to given knowledge structures, leading to new meanings and changes in long-term memory of the knowledge in question. Finally, the effects of procedural priming are far more persistent than those from being primed conceptually. Furthermore, procedural priming is prone to processing shifts resulting in more general effects—learning how to perform in one domain often extends to other domains of cultural knowledge—that researchers call “carry-over effects” (Förster & Liberman 2007, p. 215).

### **Sociocultural Configurations (hereafter simply “Configurations”)**

A key construct in my application of the theoretical discussion above is that of configuration.

I mean by this the availability and activation by networks of persons of any ensemble of cultural knowledge and practices structured around a core set of values and norms motivated by a common set of interests, goals, or needs. Configurations vary in duration, density, complexity, and availability. They are often durable, lasting for generations, but they may be instantaneous, such as flash mobs. They vary in levels of complexity from those that meet the specialized needs of professional or informal communal groups to those of gangs, clubs and lodges, organizations, and ethnic groups. Higher-order or macro configurations are simply configurations of lower-order ones orchestrated by ultimate values. With complex macro configurations, no single individual can know all the constituent micro domains, but it is essential that all persons know, have chronically accessible, and abide by the fundamental articulating values and norms—what Shore (1998, p. 312) calls “foundational schemas”—that orchestrate the entire configuration. The construct gets us away from the totalizing view of different groups of people, each having a single, all-embracing culture or subculture. People, especially those in modern complex societies, know and have access to a variety of cultural configurations (although there tends to be a primary focal one) and, contrary to the mistaken view, are usually able to shift from one to the other, although there are special cases in which this may become problematic. It is plausible that this capacity is facilitated by configural effects in human memory.

The concept of cultural configuration is partly congruent with the dynamic constructivist approach in cultural psychology developed by Hong and colleagues (1997, 2000; Hong & Mallorie 2004), who argue that “culture is internalized in the form of a loose network of domain-specific knowledge structures” (Hong et al. 2000, p. 709) and that individuals can have several such networks, even if they contain conflicting views (see also Benet-Martinez et al. 2002). The construct is also indebted to Fine's (1979) concept of “ideocultures,” especially his recent foregrounding

of the ways in which groups' cognition, identity, performance, and emotion are integrated in practice (Fine & Fields 2008), but the construct differs in several important respects. In keeping with the bicomponential approach advocated above, the focus is as much on constituted knowledge structures as on the way they are interactively used. Furthermore, although the pragmatics of such configurations are observed microsociologically, such configurations may be available in the broader "landscape" of an entire nation, or even globally. Thus, the hip-hop configuration has long sprung from its South Bronx crucible to become nationally available to American youths of all ethnicities and classes, indeed, to global youths. It is now a vibrant ensemble of foundational cultural slots that are instantiated, on the ground—in Harlem, Chicago, Los Angeles, the *banlieues* of France, and elsewhere—in ways that, however "recontextualized," creatively reproduce certain dynamically stable aesthetic modes and signifiers: rapping, DJ-ing, MC-ing, graffiti art, breakdancing, distinctive fashions, and embodied styles, as well as "black-inflected identities" and themes such as antiracism, equality, hyper-masculinity, authenticity, and subaltern rage (Alim 2009, Drissel 2009, Patterson 2014).

The construct, finally, also resonates with Alvesson's (2002, pp. 190–91) approach to configurations, except that I extend it beyond the specific study of organizational fields. As he notes, "any specific cultural manifestation should be considered in the context of multiple cultural configurations, from local group interactions to occupational/industrial subfield orientations to macro-cultural traditions and meaning patterns." Thus, the violent "campaigning for respect" (Anderson 1999, pp. 66–106; see also Bourgois 1996, pp. 77–113) in the street cultural configuration of inner-city youths can be seen within the focal local configuration of the street culture, but it can also be interpreted in the light of the celebration of violence in the higher-order configuration of American popular culture or in light of the honorific cultural configuration that tends to emerge in situations where disconnected youths

must survive under conditions of weak or absent institutions of law and order, as existed in the "Wild West" thug culture of William H. Bonney, Billy the Kid, the US's first celebrated "gangsta" youth.

Three other concepts further illuminate this construct. First is the concept of configural availability, by which I mean the number of such configurations that are available to an individual or group of persons. This varies considerably, usually with degree of population concentration and urbanization; the more urban a region, the greater the number and intensity of available configurations (Fischer 1975, pp. 1324–28). Ikegami (2000, p. 998) acutely observes of the Japanese micro-publics she studied that it is in the movement over time from one micro-public to another that "the self-identity of a person is formulated, revised, and transformed." Thus, an inner-city youth may have available, over time and contemporaneously, several configurations such as those of the dominant mainstream culture, the dominant popular culture, the hip-hop variant of popular culture, the vernacular black culture of their proletarian parents, or the violent street culture of their neighborhood (see Patterson 2014).

Second is the concept of cultural focus. I mean by this the configuration that is most chronically accessible for a group, the default configuration that is most crucial to identity, emotional security, normal functioning, and emergencies. This idea resonates with Herskovits's old concept of the same name, recently revived in organizational theory (Herskovits 1964, p. 182; Hatch 2004, p. 199). People, however, are not permanently wedded to their focal or primary configuration. As I report above, transient accessibility, in response to recent priming in a given environment, can override chronically accessible knowledge structures and behaviors. This has been shown, experimentally, to be true of Koreans and other East Asians who engage in cultural frame switching in their relations with Americans (Hong & Mallorie 2004).

A final feature of cultural configurations concerns the role of trust and norms. Cook

& Hardin (2001) have argued that in small communities with stable membership and multiplex networks, people's interactions are strongly influenced by shared generalized norms of cooperativeness, and for this reason there is relatively little need for reciprocal trusting relationships; normative sanctions are powerful enough to keep potential nonconformists and free riders in line. However, in large urban areas with many networks of ongoing relationships, there is "a shift from reliance on normative regulation of behavior to the use of ongoing trust relationships" because the sharing of common or generalized norms cannot be fully relied on. People come to rely on others in a given network on the basis of their commitment. This is suggestive, but it needs elaboration. Norms remain important, but a shift occurs from injunctive to within-group observational and personal norms. People are trusted to the degree that they reliably behave as others do in the configured domains and interests that motivated the given network. The degree of trust in a member is measured and expressed in terms of the level of respect accorded that person, and individuals judge themselves in terms of the degree to which they meet the specific norms of the group, which are situationally internalized. The behavior of youth gangs in street configurations of urban settings is also partly explained in these terms. In the absence of formal sanctioning institutions or respect for authorities, gang members must rely on "modal trusting relationships [that] grow out of ongoing interactions that give each party an incentive to be cooperative" (Cook & Hardin 2001, pp. 327–28), or as one Milwaukee gang member explained, the only thing required of an initiate to the gang was "to prove your trust" (Hagedorn 1998, p. 91). Many acts of violence among such groups are the result of the betrayal of such trust relationships (Venkatesh 2006, pp. 371–73).

#### PART 4: CONCLUSION

In this review, I have tried to make sense of culture through an integrated and interdisci-

plinary approach that avoids the conventional orthodoxies, one-sided agendas, and intellectually paralyzing post-whatnot fads of recent decades that have bedeviled the subject. Culture emerges as a dynamically stable process from the complex interactions of two components of thought, feelings, and action: one of collectively created declarative, procedural, and evaluative knowledge structures that are unevenly shared, held in common, and distributed, among particular networks of persons; the other of practical rules for their usage, as well as contextually bounded alternate knowledge. From the interaction of the two also develops change over the long run both by epidemiologically selected individual innovations and accidents and by the transposition and refunctioning of knowledge structures through catalyzed network channels. I have also proposed that we focus on the cultural configurations of those smaller networks of people that are more typical of modern social life.

Glossing over what Padgett & Powell (2012, pp. 2–3) call their mantra—"In the short run, actors create relations; in the long run, relations create actors"—I view the pragmatic component as the arena of short-run use, reproduction, and change, in which actors create situated relations and cultural processes, while the constituted component is the stabilizing arena of long-run change in which instituted relations and cultural structures fashion, direct, enable, and constrain actors.

It is important to understand that cultural knowledge structures and practices are by no means the only ways in which we understand and experience our world. As Shore (1998, p. 315) rightly observes, "people can schematize their own models on the fly." Or we can simply do away with these abstracted shortcuts. Many of our thoughts and feelings are idiosyncratic, and "not all self-relevant content and knowledge becomes integrated into a self-schema" (Oyserman 2007, p. 438). However, even in our most contested interactions, we need the firm fulcrum of culture with which to communicate, play, struggle, and innovate together or alone. Far from denying the play of freedom



and human agency, the discipline of culture, by relieving us of the cognitive burden of inventing new solutions for every contingency, of having to make choices for every fork in our existential pathways, of having to decide anew the fundamental values that should inform our choices, and of having to make up the norms for orga-

nized living, enables us to create, in our social and individual beings, the wildest thoughts and feelings our imaginations allow and the selves we choose to actualize. The more, and the better, the collective constructions of culture work for us, the freer are we, as individuals, to be, to do, and to think as we please.

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