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## QUICK READ SYNOPSIS

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### Cultural Sociology and Its Diversity

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### Culture and Organization Theory

Calvin Morrill, University of California, Irvine

#### *Background*

In this article, historical backdrop provides a context for raising several research questions relevant to culturally inflected approaches to organizations as they pertain to organizational change, boundaries, and deviance.

- Cultural arguments and questions in contemporary organization theory have increasingly focused on the *constitutive* effects of culture with respect to organizational members' inner lives, the meanings they attribute to organizational life, and the construction and maintenance of instrumental social structures.
- The author suggests that an analytic nexus between culture, power, and agency is emerging in contemporary organization theory that ultimately may yield a theory of society.

#### *The 1980s*

In the 1980s, ideas from mid-twentieth-century institutional and ethnographic studies of organizations bore fruit in two significant developments.

- First was the emergence of organizational culture frameworks that emphasized organizations as systems of meaning and symbols.
- The second fused elements of early institutionalism, symbolic interactionism, and ethnomethodology into neoinstitutional theories of organizations that highlighted the cultural-cognitive construction of organizational structures and practices.
  - In contemporary organization theory, the study of culture *in* organizations has become the study of *cultural organization*.

NOTE: In the 1980s, prominent American business magazines ran cover stories on culture as the new panacea for all that ailed American corporations.

- Best sellers, such as *In Search of Excellence* and *Theory Z*, touted the importance of “strong cultures” for organizational success in global marketplaces.
- Culture became one of the central totems of American managerial practice.

#### *Cultural Action and Rational Organization*

The gap between cultural action and rational organization has informed analytic arguments in organization theory for much of the twentieth century.

- Barnard (1938) addressed culture indirectly and rationality more subtly, yet still maintained the boundary, by defining organizations as cooperative systems in which members voluntarily commit themselves to organization goals.
- By investing organizations with a kind of morality, Barnard could argue that rational organization emerged out of individuals’ commitments to morally infused collective goals.
- The analytic distinction between culture and rationality ultimately split organizational research into two camps:
  - a larger camp investigating instrumental action; and
  - a much smaller camp concerned with the “softer” side of organizations, such as norms, symbols, and legitimacy.

#### *Rationality*

Although earlier generations of organizational researchers referred to aspects of culture, scholars did not systematically apply the term *culture* to organizations until the late 1970s and early 1980s, when they began to refer to organizations as “socially constructed systems of meaning.”

- Scholars explicitly began studying and referring to organizational culture, thus highlighting questions of meaning, worker satisfaction and commitment, and the nonrational aspects of organizations.
- Business consultants early on recognized organizational culture’s potential for molding individuals and collaborative relations in the service of management.
  - Building organizational cultures became akin to building communities and tight-knit “clans,” with their attendant images of mutual support, solidarity, and commitment.
  - The rhetoric of commitment and cooperation in applied organizational culture work evoked aspects of Barnard’s (1938) arguments about the moral dimensions of organizational membership.

#### *Conclusion*

One could argue that the study of cultural organization merely “messes things up” in organization theory.

- In each era when cultural arguments have ascended toward the throne of rationalist theorizing, the questions about organizations have become harder and the answers more complex and contingent.
- The payoff, however, is that during each of these eras, richer images and understandings of organizations have emerged than could have been produced by rationalist theorizing alone.
- Topics rarely considered, such as social inequality and deviance, have been developed.
- New takes on old topics, such as change, have emerged to help us understand both what has occurred and what is possible.
- What is emerging in cultural organization theory is not only more emphasis on agency, but also a realignment of organization theory that is bringing

together theoretical approaches to power, culture, and agency into a useful analytic nexus.

- What is needed now is a reworking of existing organization theory and research through an analytic window that can integrate the cultural, power, and agentic sides of the house.

## Culture and Inequality: Identity, Ideology, and Difference in “Postascriptive Society”

Maria Charles, University of California, Santa Barbara

### *Background*

This article first reviews the development of American scholarship on social inequalities during the past half century and the role of cultural analysis. It goes on to consider culture-related responses to three central questions in the subdiscipline. It closes with discussion of currently contentious issues and likely future developments in social inequality research.

### *Theoretical Paradigms*

Significant intellectual cleavages exist with regard to how scholars of inequality conceptualize the nature and direction of the relationship between culture and society.

- Whereas functionalists have emphasized broadly beneficial integrative effects of ideology, conflict theorists have pointed to culture’s role in obscuring and legitimizing exploitation.
- Within the conflict-theoretical tradition, a further distinction can be made between neo-Marxists, who (like the functionalists) offer a conceptualization of culture as largely derivative, and Weberian-inspired scholars, who treat culture as an independent causal force that both reflects and shapes material relations.
- Even more sharply at odds with materialist views are analyses by post-modernist scholars, who describe values, social group identities, and ideologies as primary generative forces in modern stratification systems.

### *Three Questions*

The author reviews the sociological literature with respect to three questions:

- How do persons come to occupy unequal social positions?
- How are social group distinctions generated and maintained?
- How is inequality legitimated?

### *Contested Issues*

The article closes with a brief discussion of some contentious issues in the sub-field and their intellectual fallout. These include debates about the following:

- the salience of class-based identities and the structure of economic inequality in advanced industrial societies—in particular, whether it is best conceptualized in terms of discrete group-based affiliations or continuous (“gradational”) distinctions;
- the value of social analyses that consider only unidimensional group distinctions (e.g., gender, race, or class) without attention to their mutual intersections; and
- the stability of race, class, and gender identities across time and space.

These controversies have inspired much research on the extent to which class location shapes other aspects of individuals' lives (including cultural tastes, consumption practices, attitudes, values, education, and political behavior), on the degree to which standard social group boundaries map onto observable differences in attitudes or behavior, and on the extent to which any such differences are internalized at the individual level.

NOTE: Cultural concepts and cultural processes are central in each of these debates.

#### *Conclusion*

Finally, the author asks the obvious question: what do these intellectual debates foretell about future trends in American inequality research?

- First is continuation of a movement toward fluid, contextually contingent conceptualizations of class, race, and gender.
- A second likely development is toward increasing prominence of dynamic multilevel analyses, which explore the interplay between individual, interactional, and institutional processes of stratification.

## Culture and Race/Ethnicity: Bolder, Deeper, and Broader

John D. Skrentny, University of California, San Diego

#### *Background*

From the perspective of cultural sociology, the study of race and ethnicity should be bolder, deeper, and broader.

- Cultural analysis as a strategy has lagged in researching the variation between racial/ethnic groups in socioeconomic mobility.
- More work is needed on culture and race/ethnicity regarding
  - how discrimination produces racial and ethnic meanings,
  - how ethnic and racial cultures affect interests through variations in conceptions of the meaning of life,
  - how immigrants' prior home state cultures affect immigrants and ethnics in the United States, and
  - how globalization is producing Americanization of immigrants before they even leave their homelands.

#### *Some Key Questions*

The key questions of the field today continue to come out of the American experience with racial oppression and immigration.

- American sociologists of race and ethnicity typically focus on the dynamics of racial/ethnic inequality, providing studies of income, education, discrimination, public opinion about race, and so on.
- They also concentrate on how immigrants adapt to life in the United States.
- Another strand of research focuses on how races are defined, categorized, constructed, and dominated.

#### *Avoiding Cultural Explanation*

Scholars avoid cultural explanations of racial inequality because of misconceptions that cultural explanations blame the victim; that they are deterministic, turning people into robots; and that culture does not change.

*Explaining  
Inequality  
without  
"Blaming the  
Victim"*

Scholars are finding ways to bring culture into explanations of ethnic and racial inequality without "blaming the victim," that is, without blaming low-achieving groups for their conditions.

- Prominent in the nonblaming approach is the theory of "segmented assimilation" where immigrants vary in three background factors, including human capital, family composition, and context of reception (e.g., whether a group faces significant racism or whether it receives assistance as refugees). The stress here is on how cultures are *not* brought to America but, rather, are created by or learned in structural conditions in America.
- Another approach focuses on schools, where students develop positive cultures of solidarity and distinction, creating cultural boundaries with others.
- Also, a way to use cultural analysis and avoid blaming the victim is to discuss the role of culture in ethnic group success—cultural theories are prominent to account for Asian American educational success.

*Domination  
Studies*

Although not often explicitly cultural, many sociologists examine how racism and prejudice maintain hierarchies of domination.

- In "symbolic racism" theory in public opinion studies, white Americans view black Americans as lacking in traditional values such as work ethic, individual responsibility, and ability to defer gratification.
- In "group position theory," the driving force behind white opposition to policies to benefit blacks is not a liberal ideology but perceived threats to white status.

*Social  
Construction*

Work on the construction of racial categories and identities, which may or may not have a domination component, is also strongly cultural in orientation.

- Policy makers' cultural, cognitive processes have shaped the political dynamics of inclusion in minority rights programs.

*Assimilation*

Recently, sociologists have taken the assimilation concept into new, explicitly cultural directions, conceptualizing assimilation as a process of movement across or movement of cultural boundaries.

- Individuals may cross boundaries by assimilating.

*A Global View*

Despite growing interest in transnationalism, it is more common for scholars' attention, and thus their theorizing, to begin and end at the U.S. borders.

- This is perhaps most explicit in the theory of segmented assimilation, which places great importance on "contexts of *reception*."
- Example: Typically, scholars either emphasize strategies to counteract discrimination in the United States or casually invoke Asian values on education to explain the relative success of Asian Americans.
- Another way to broaden the use of cultural analysis in the study of race and ethnicity is to consider the opposite dynamic:
  - Immigrants may be bringing distinctive national cultural patterns to the United States but also may be taking on American cultural patterns before they even arrive.
  - Because of narrow vision, studies of assimilation typically do not consider how globalization is changing "sending" states before their emigrants even depart their shores.

*Conclusion*

More and bolder efforts are needed especially in the study of inequality.

- Sociologists could fruitfully link studies of everyday discrimination to cultural sociology, utilizing insights from social constructionism.
- We can also do more to explore cultural assimilation and to understand the extensive variation in ethnic expressive cultures.
- Another way to bring culture into the study of race and ethnicity is to take a broader focus—comparative studies can yield insights, especially where we can trace ethnic or immigrant cultures in the United States to likely origins in the cultural and institutional contexts of homelands.

## Culture and Movements

Francesca Polletta, University of California, Irvine

*Background*

This article focuses on movement studies that have contributed to theorizing broader dynamics of cultural innovation and constraint.

- Activists' choice of tactics and targets is shaped, indeed limited, by prevailing cultural beliefs.
- Movements achieve significant effects as much by altering the cultural rules of the game, both within politics and outside it, as by winning formal policy reform.

NOTE: The challenge has been to award culture a substantial role without treating it as free-floating, independent of the organizational agendas and self-interested political actors through which it actually has force; without treating activists as strategic dopes or ideological dupes; and without abandoning the effort to operationalize success in terms of measurable impacts.

*Social Movements*

The sociology of culture can draw fruitful insights from the study of social movements.

- If culture much of the time reproduces existing structures, it is also used occasionally in ways that challenge and transform structures.
- A vexing problem for sociologists of culture is that people use culture practically and creatively, and yet they do so, most of the time, in ways that reproduce the status quo.

*Advances in the Study of Culture*

In recent years, movement scholars have paid increasing attention to cultural processes in mobilization.

- Still, even as they have embraced stronger models of culture, social movement theorists generally have been unwilling to abandon a belief in the power of structure in accounting for movements' emergence and the role of strategy in accounting for movements' outcomes.
- They are unwilling to treat culture as free-floating.
- They remain sure that movements, no matter how seemingly sudden, explosive, ephemeral, and evanescent, never come out of nowhere.

*Institutional Schemas*

NOTE: Culture is still treated as a tool that activists employ to recruit supporters and press their claims, but movement scholars have also begun to probe the cultural construction of the strategic. Theorizing about all phases of mobilization has adopted a view of culture as objective, rather than only subjective; as constitutive of interests, rather than only expressive of them; and as setting the terms of strategic action rather than only used strategically.

One perspective treats culture as institutional schemas. It focuses on culture less as people's formal worldviews and values than as their ideas about how the organizations and institutions in which they participate do and should work.

- A virtue of this perspective on culture is that it encourages us to think about mobilization differently: not as the result of long-standing actors with stable interests confronting new political opportunities but, rather, as familiar, routine practices.
- Treating culture as institutionalized schemas helps to get at the processes by which culture sets the terms of tactical choice.

*Culture and Contention*

Although much of the time, prevailing beliefs reproduce the status quo, at others they are turned against dominant structures.

- Structures' reproduction is never guaranteed, because of structures' dependence on cultural schemas—the multiplicity of structures and the transposability of schemas puts structures always at risk.
- Familiar schemas may also provide insight into how opposition emerges in the first place, that is, into how institutional practices formerly viewed as natural, right, unchangeable or unimportant become open to transformation.

*Culture and Strategy*

Treating culture as schemas—that is, expectations about how things do and should work—has been useful not only in capturing culture's variable power relative to structure in constituting interests but also in capturing the mechanisms by which culture constrains practical action.

- One line of investigation is into how activists struggle with the cultural schemas that are institutionalized in the spheres in which they contend: in the law and in news reporting, to name two.
- The other is into whether and how popular schemas—of protest, politics, organization, and instrumental rationality—enter into activists' own strategizing, and with what effect.

*Conclusion*

The author is struck by the fact that the sociology of culture needs the sociology of social movements.

- Movements both reflect and help to create the “unsettled times” that cultural sociologists see as crucibles for change.
- Studying the dynamics of movements' emergence has shed light on the conditions in which cultural challenge explodes structural relations, without reducing those conditions to structural voids.
- At the same time, movements often reproduce within their own operation the cultural frameworks that make protest a relatively rare event.

## Culture and Education

Mitchell L. Stevens, New York University

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*How Education Became a Metric* Through the middle of the twentieth century, U.S. sociologists of education congealed core insights of Karl Marx and Max Weber with newly available quantitative data and novel computational capacity to create a preponderant conception of education as an individual, metrical phenomenon.

- From Marx, sociologists took the notion that formal schooling legitimates preexisting social advantage.
- From Weber, they took the notion that formal schooling is its own form of status and can have independent effects on other systems of stratification.
- Large-scale quantitative data sets and newly developed computer technologies enabled sociologists to assess these notions empirically, using the amount of years of school completed by individuals as the proxy for formal schooling.
- Once the amount of school individuals complete became the proxy for education generally, education's essentially cultural character education faded into the analytic background.

*Bourdieu and the Americans* The work of French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu has influenced this tradition since the 1980s.

- Bourdieu's core insight is that hierarchies of wealth, political influence, social status, physical appearance, and culture are inherently inseparable.
- There is an inherent tension between this insight and the quantitative imperative of U.S. sociology, which proceeds through the statistical disaggregation of phenomena.
- The result of this tension is stalled theoretical and empirical development of Bourdieu's ideas in U.S. educational sociology.

*Socialization Approaches* Socialization approaches to education grow out of Emile Durkheim's early insight that education initiates newcomers into social systems and provides a unifying cultural adhesive for members of complex societies.

- In the mid-twentieth century, Talcott Parsons developed this notion into a detailed theory of formal schooling and social development under the banner of functionalism.
- By the late 1970s, socialization approaches to schooling had been widely discredited, especially among reproduction theorists, who viewed them as defenses of racial, class, gender, and cultural hierarchies in formal schooling.
- At present, the idea that socialization is a benevolent or even benign function of formal schooling enjoys few adherents in academic sociology.

*The Stanford School* An alternative legacy of Emile Durkheim's conception of education has developed since the 1970s at Stanford University, where John Meyer and his colleagues built an elaborate theory of formal schooling and modernity.

- This work holds that formal schooling is the religion of the modern secular state.

*Back to the Future*

- The primary functions of modern schools are to produce autonomous citizen-workers, to sacralize and stratify secular knowledge, and to lend legitimate primacy to the nation-state over all other organizational systems.
- Because Stanford tradition has been ambivalent about the mathematical relationships between formal schooling and socioeconomic stratification, it has remained peripheral to mainstream U.S. sociology.

Two insights from mid-twentieth century educational sociology hold promise for the future development of cultural explanations in the sociology of education.

- James Coleman's observation that formal schooling produces and reproduces consequential social networks among students is now beginning to receive systematic empirical elaboration—spurred in large part by newly available data and computational capacities that enable the formal modeling of network dynamics.
- Charles Bidwell's argument that formal schooling is primarily an organizational formation, not an individual possession, is being revived and elaborated by a new generation of cultural sociologists of education.

## Culture and Markets: How Economic Sociology Conceptualizes Culture

Peter Levin, Barnard College

*Background*

The new sociology of markets incorporates culture into analyses of economic action by treating culture as something that constitutes markets or else affects their operation—but not both.

- In these forays into domains previously reserved for economists, the concept of culture is used in distinct ways.
  - A first set of scholars conceptualize markets themselves as cultural—they are the objects to be explained, and analyses attempt to understand the conventions and institutional agreements that make markets look the way they do.
  - A second set of scholars take the approach that “markets have culture”—a complementary approach—and conceptualize culture as an independent variable in an otherwise fundamentally economic market.

NOTE: The tension between markets *as* culture and markets *having* culture reasserts the central sociological insight that economic action is contingent on culture, institutions, and social structure—that *culture matters*, despite essentialist claims going back to Adam Smith that economic markets arise naturally from individuals' intrinsic impulses to “truck and barter.”

*A Split View*

Examining the ways economic sociologists use culture also reveals a kind of split, breaking across the types of markets being studied.

- For some markets, it is the market itself that is cultural.
- Studies of financial markets, and more highly institutionalized markets for labor, services, and goods, take for granted that these commodities can and are bought and sold by actors who have interest and inclination to do so—that is, financial markets have a culture, while art markets are culture.

*Two Approaches* Conceptualizing culture as *both* complementary and constitutive may provide additional leverage for economic sociology.

- First, the author traces the ascendance of embeddedness as it emerged as an alternative perspective to economic dominance in studying markets and as a new point of engagement in the field.
- A second approach, contained in the new emphasis by science and technology studies on finance, addresses the constitutive and exogenous effects of culture by collapsing the two into the same analysis.

*Culture's Effect on Markets* When one says that less settled markets are themselves culture and more settled markets have a culture, this assumes too much stability in the underlying market categories and does not take into account the way market outcomes are affected not only by their cultural context but also by their cultural constitution.

- The use of culture in economic sociology is dichotomous, but it should be multidimensional.
- Culture's dual effect of *both* constituting economic structures *and* affecting market forces highlights the problem limitation of the dichotomy between the constitutive and complementary approaches.

*Two Uses of Culture* This article demonstrates how culture has been used in two distinctive fashions: as a constitutive element of markets and as an externalized variable that affects markets.

- Only recently have sociologists begun to move off this dichotomy, thinking not just about either complementary or constitutive approaches, but rather about both simultaneously.
- Making this dichotomy multidimensional provides productive direction for the field going forward.

*Conclusion* Two promising approaches look at both the constitution and operation of markets simultaneously, using very different theoretical tools to do so.

- The approach associated with Zelizer's connected lives addresses the mutual constitution and operation of markets.
- The social studies of finance looks at both, by collapsing the differences between culture's varied meanings.

NOTE: Understanding the relationship *between* the "markets are culture" and "markets have culture" approaches provides fruitful new directions.

## Culture and Microsociology: The Anthill and the Veldt

Gary Alan Fine and Corey D. Fields, Northwestern University

*Background* Few constructs reveal better than culture how both broad and focused analyses can productively coexist.

- Culture is both a landscape and an anthill: the microsociologist privileges entomology over geology—microcultures over national culture, selves over demography.

*Miniaturism*

- The microsociologist emphasizes performance over norms and practices over cultural logics.
  - In this, the focus is upon the doing of culture as opposed to external constraints that channel, promote, or discourage action.
- Agency is always shaped by externalities (such as norms and logics), but the creation of cultures results from choices by parties to action.

Sociological miniaturism asserts that cultural processes transcend levels of analysis in several ways.

- First, a cultural phenomenon that is observable at one level of analysis (for instance, the interpersonal) will routinely be found on other levels (for instance, the institutional or interorganizational).
- Second, the action of individual actors can be treated, at least at certain critical moments, as representing larger entities.
- Third, the authors argue that local situations and settings can be meaningfully generalized.
- Finally, sociological miniaturism allows for an understanding of microsituations as the locations where the recursive nature of culture is most visible.

NOTE: With emphasis on detailed observation of the social world, microsociological perspectives are well positioned to see culture—treated as a domain of content—as it is developed and put into action.

*Culture and Microsociology*

There are five domains of research that demonstrate how culture and microsociology are linked, although in practice there is considerable variability in each as well as much overlap.

- *Microcultures and their groups*: Perhaps the most direct connection between culture and microsociology involves the question of how cultural forms, the practices and products of culture, become linked to small groups.
- *Cognition/boundaries*: Cognition, traditionally one of the building blocks of social psychology, is socially organized, not merely idiosyncratic or biologically fixed—a recognition that has long been part of the sociology of knowledge.
  - Culture organizes thinking by providing the frames and schemas that individuals and their groups use to process and translate their environment.
- *Identity*: This encompasses “one’s sense of who one is, of one’s social location, and of how (given the first two) one is prepared to act.”
  - Identity is the means by which persons connect the self into social organization by treating and enacting their selves as the kind of individual that society demands they be.
- *Interaction/performance*: Performance suggests the centrality of cultural scripts and the intersection of actor and audience, and so links this approach into group cultures and to a sociology of thinking.
- *Emotion*: Emotion must be understood as a generated and constrained cultural system—emotion constitutes a form of labor that is required as part of being a competent and moral worker.

NOTE: The five core concepts blend into one another—all rely upon behavioral demands, dramaturgical preferences, communities of thought, and conceptualizations of personhood.

*Agency*

The contribution of a microsociological analysis is to illuminate agency in cultural analysis.

- Agency is recognized in the development, diffusion, and deployment of cultural forms and objects.
- Interactional arenas have been shaped and channeled by larger forces, but these forces are themselves created through the remarkable cloaked power of agency.
- Microsociology offers students of culture an opportunity to examine the workings of this recursive relationship.
- Although microsociological approaches offer this characteristic way of seeing the world, their usefulness to cultural scholars extends beyond the empirical.
  - By exposing the workings of culture, microsociology encourages us to theorize the connections between meaning, behavior, and structure.

*Conclusion*

The five core concepts—groups, cognition, identity, performance, and emotion—blend into one another.

- As it should be, all rely upon behavioral demands, dramaturgical preferences, communities of thought, and ideas of personhood.
- Everything is bound to everything, yet together they provide a distinctive way in which sociologists can examine how culture, across its various conceptions, has an effect and is effected.

NOTE: If one wishes to observe life in motion, just look beneath the surface where action lies. The task of the social psychological culturalist is to use the sociological microscope to reveal that bustling domain in its local glory.

## Culture and Law: Beyond a Paradigm of Cause and Effect

Abigail C. Saguy and Forrest Stuart, University of California,  
Los Angeles

*Background*

This article examines a variety of ways in which social scientists make cultural argument about the law.

- The authors explore each general strategy and its advantages and disadvantages.
- They argue that the law as culture perspective is one of the most interesting recent developments in sociolegal thought.

*Culture Shaping Law*

The first category of research takes law and legal practices as the object of interest, to be explained by cultural factors.

- Here, scholars use culture—often understood as deep-seated concerns, categories, or assumptions about how the world operates—as an independent variable to explain differences in legal practices.

*Law Shaping Culture*

- For instance, an examination of sex-offender legislation suggests that policy making is by no means motivated by some rational and objective drive to manage sex offenders but is, rather, “located in a constellation of emotional expressions of disgust, fear of contagion, and pollution avoidance.”
- Another approach draws upon differences between (national) cultures to explain different legal outcomes in different cultures.

The insight that specific categories and concepts become more culturally powerful after being institutionalized in law characterizes work that positions law as an independent variable with culture as a dependent outcome.

- In this vein, an example is a recent study that draws upon a history of legal categorization and legitimation to demonstrate that the construction of “Asian” as a social category has resulted *primarily* from a series of federal legislation and appellate decisions regarding antimiscegenation and immigration (Sohoni 2007).
- By the late nineteenth century, most statutes made distinctions between whites, blacks, and Mongolians (Chinese and Japanese).

NOTE: Legislative actions must take account of the actions of the past, as well as long-standing cultural mandates. Recognition of this reciprocity allows for a more sensitive conceptualization of law that does not ignore the human element of law makers, who must wrestle with the issue of cultural taboos and political reputation.

*Law as Culture*

Another type of research abandons the independent-dependent model entirely and instead investigates law *as* culture.

- In this model, legality is conceptualized as interpretive cultural frameworks through which individuals come to understand their lives.
- Law is “de-centered” by shifting attention away from the opinions and decisions of legislators and judges onto “everyday life” in “commonplace” locations like workplaces and communities.
- This paradigm conceptualizes culture as “vocabularies,” “repertoires,” or “toolkits” that help people shape the way that they lead their lives.

*Summary*

This article articulated three principal approaches to understanding the relationship between culture and law—culture as an independent variable, law as an independent variable, and culture *as* law.

- In the first approach, research points to particular cultural characteristics to explain important legal tendencies and rationales.
  - In one variation of this approach, research isolates cultural from non-cultural influences on legal shifts over time.
  - In a second variation, researchers examine how national *cultural* differences lead to corresponding national *legal* differences.
- By positioning law as an independent variable, researchers can examine how legal processes shape cultural schemas and practices
- Research positioning law *as* culture has reconceptualized legality as a cultural framework through which individuals interpret their lives, guiding both thought and action.

## Culture and Science/Technology: Rethinking Knowledge, Power, Materiality, and Nature

Steven Epstein, University of California, San Diego

### *Background*

This article traces and analyzes how sociologists of science and technology have performed cultural analyses, in the process contributing to our thinking about what culture is and how we might make sense of it.

- The author describes two historical periods of post-Mertonian sociology of science and technology, within which concerns with culture figure somewhat differently.
- A secondary organizing principle in this article is an analytical one—the contrast sketched by Sewell (1999) between “culture” in the singular and “cultures” in the plural.

NOTE: The article argues that the sociology of science and technology holds important lessons for sociologists of culture. Specifically, the article emphasizes the significance of its focus on science and technology as key sources of cultural authority, its crucial attention to material objects and how they come to be intertwined with social actors, and its commitment to rethinking divides between the instrumental and the expressive and between nature and culture.

### *Period 1 (Mid-1970s to Mid-1990s)*

“Culture” in the singular: studies in this period examined knowledge as a cultural product, scientific authority and credibility as cultural resources, and semiotics and networks.

“Cultures” in the plural: Sociologists of science and technology also insisted on the importance of studying scientific domains *as* cultures or subcultures in their own right, via laboratory studies, discourse analysis, and studies of visual cultures and of scientific practice.

### *Period 2 (Mid-1990s to the Present)*

“Culture” in the singular: As sociologists come to study a broader swath of the social world than that typically connoted by *science*, they have taken up studies of material culture, classification, cultural cartography, and scientific citizenship.

“Cultures” in the plural: Scholars have examined the proliferating cultures of knowledge through concepts such as epistemic cultures and civic epistemologies.

### *Cultural Analysis*

Since its inception, the sociology of science and technology has been performing cultural analysis.

- The point is neither to show how “science and technology” shape “culture” nor the reverse; rather, the goal is to reveal the mutual constitution—the coconstruction or coproduction—of what we take to be nature, culture, and society.
- As Jasanoff (2004a, 2) has expressed it, “The ways in which we know and represent the world (both nature and society) are inseparable from the ways in which we choose to live in it.”

*Conclusion*

The field of science and technology studies would benefit from more sustained engagement with work being done by cultural sociologists, and vice versa.

- Sociologists of culture would benefit from paying attention to the sociology of science and technology, not merely because this is one more domain in which cultural activity goes on, but because the insights of science and technology studies hold significance for what we imagine culture to be and how we ought to study it.
- There are several implications drawn from sociological studies of science and technology that are especially relevant to studies of culture:
  - First, if sociologists of culture are concerned with understanding cultural authority, then it seems crucial to focus on one of the key sources of such authority in the modern world.
  - Second, many theoretical discussions of culture (see, for example, Sewell 1999) appear to overlook the importance of *things*—of objects and artifacts.
  - Third, as Knorr Cetina (1999, 247) has observed, a study of the epistemic cultures of science calls attention to the place of the symbolic—of cultural meaning systems—at the very heart of the instrumental reason that we associate with modern, rational scientific activity.
  - Finally, science and technology studies poses a challenge to conventional understandings of the domain of culture itself.

NOTE: Calling into question assumptions of a pre-given divide between “nature” and “culture,” science and technology studies instead reveals the work that gets done to construct and reconstruct this divide. Given these implications, an intensification of the scholarly bridging work that is already connecting these two sociological subfields would be of considerable benefit to both.

## Culture and the Sociology of Sexuality: It's Only Natural?

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*Background*

This article locates six themes in the overlap between the sociology of culture and the sociology of sexuality, highlighting both institutionalized and discursive forms of power:

- works that develop or problematize economic sexual metaphors;
- studies of commercial sex that problematize cultural assumptions about sex, money and morality;
- explorations of the assumptions about sex at work in “nonsexual”-seeming institutions;
- considerations of sexual underpinnings of citizenship and personhood;
- analyses of mass-mediated discourses of sexual personhood; and
- critiques of sociology itself, as reproducing discursive power by neglecting to problematize certain assumptions about sexuality.

*Sexuality  
Research Today*

Today, the work of many sociologists of sexuality overlaps with the sociology of culture in examining the social construction of meaning and the concrete effects of this construction.

- Sociologists who study sex and sexuality engage the sociology of culture in three ways:
  - They bring a cultural critique to economic metaphors and ideological assumptions about sex.
  - They explore how people transmit sexual schemas (rules, scripts, patterns, etc.), how sexual culture is reproduced at the interactional level within institutions, and how it is reproduced as “cultural objects.”
  - They explore how people internalize sexual schemas such that the meanings of sex and sexuality come to seem natural and intrinsic to individuals rather than culturally produced.
- At each of the levels mentioned above, sociologists of sexuality consider how power works through culture.
- Studying sexuality, scholars often encounter and challenge deeply held assumptions that sexual arrangements, meanings, feelings and identities are universal, timeless, and natural.
- Sociologists have been exploring the levels at which sexual meanings shape and are shaped in the “public” realm of markets and citizenship.

*Social  
Interaction and  
Various  
Meanings of Sex*

One of sociologists’ key contributions to the cultural study of sexuality may be in locating how various meanings of sex and desire are anchored in face-to-face interactions and material relations in institutions.

- Sociologists in this area see institutions as the concrete locations where cultural “scripts” about sex and sexual personhood are inculcated and negotiated in everyday interactions.
- Some argue that “the multiple, intersecting axes of inequality become central not only to the social construction of sexuality, but also to the sexual construction of social life.”
- Research examining sex work focuses on the contradictions inherent in the definition of morality as it applies to modern cultural conceptions of the sex market and those of romance.

*Policies,  
Institutions,  
and Media*

Other sociological studies consider culture as it operates in macro-level policies and the assumptions that shape them.

- There appears to be an increased acceptance of sexual diversity in many societies, but some scholars question who benefits from the full rights and privileges of citizenship.
- Some question the assumption that modern definitions of sexuality and personhood are universally embraced by everyone living in a modern society.
- Some studies focus on how elite-produced discourses produce and limit people’s self-conceptions, and others treat sociology itself as one of those elite discourses.
- Many studies focus on the understandings of sex and sexuality portrayed in “cultural objects” and their potential effects on their audiences.
- Sociologists see a productive tension between the sociology of sexualities and humanities-based queer theory and posit each as contributing to our understandings of how selves are produced, and social power reproduced, in daily life.

*Conclusion*

The sociology of sexuality poses a number of interesting challenges to the sociology of culture.

- In considering sociological uses of metaphors of markets and capital to shed light on sexuality, sociologists should be careful not to lose the specificity of sexuality: desire and attractiveness, for instance, are indeed socially constructed and can be treated as a kind of capital, but we must not lose sight of how they are experienced differently from other forms of capital.
- Research on institutions reveals that unexamined assumptions about the proper places and meanings of sex can serve to reproduce or challenge social hierarchies of race, class, gender, ability, and nation.
- Studies of sexuality show how institutions define the limits of what kind of person it is possible to be, the range of possibilities for understanding and expressing one's desires, and even desires themselves.

## Culture and Popular Culture: A Case for Sociology

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*Background*

This article examines the intellectual traditions that have shaped the sociology of popular culture; traces the points of connection and difference between sociologists and other scholars studying popular culture; and argues for the continued relevance of cultural sociology for addressing key issues and concerns within the realm of "the popular," broadly conceived.

- These developments include the rise of new media/communication technologies and the increasing interdependence between popular culture and other arenas of social life.

NOTE: Popular culture sociology is both a subcategory of cultural sociology and a separate arena of inquiry taken up by other disciplines. Most cultural sociologists today would likely concur with a definition of popular culture as referring to "the beliefs and practices, and the objects through which they are organized, that are widely shared among a population."

*Analytic Approaches*

The broad paradigms sketched out here obviously are not exhaustive. The point is that there are different traditions of popular culture scholarship within cultural sociology and much diversity.

- Probably the best known strand of sociological research on popular culture is the "production of culture" perspective, which refers to the empirical study of culture-producing organizations within specific institutional contexts. Production of culture scholars suggest that mass culture is shaped more by the attributes of specific industries than by the operations of capitalism, per se.
- The constructionist/interpretivist perspective is often more micro in focus, relying on interview-based, textual, and/or ethnographic methods, and accounts for the bulk of sociological research on popular culture in recent years.

- One strand of interpretivist work might be broadly characterized as “textual analysis” in which popular culture is viewed as a commercial institution that, in producing objects and practices, also produces (and proscribes) social representations and ideas about the world, particularly as they relate to identity-formation.

*Popular Culture Research Today* Much of the new and interesting work on popular culture today is taking place outside of sociology.

- Cultural sociology might be the second largest (and fastest growing) section of the American Sociological Association.
- But only a small portion of the total research on popular culture is conducted by scholars within that domain.
- The study of popular culture is and has been, even before its institutionalization in the academy, a highly interdisciplinary endeavor.
- There is an increasing tendency toward intellectual and methodological introversion that marginalizes cultural sociology.
  - Current tensions between cultural studies and cultural sociology partly reflect this dynamic.
  - While cultural studies scholars often see sociologists as apolitical and inattentive to power relations, sociologists lament cultural studies’ lack of methodological rigor.
- Another trend is the bias toward conceptualizing popular culture as mass-mediated culture where the majority of pop culture scholarship today is tied to the media, particularly television.
- Media effects are seen in “the curatorial me,” which is defined as the capability of curating one’s own cultural experiences through savvy Internet use and new devices such as the iPod or TiVo.

*Conclusion*

In the complex cultural environment in which the production, distribution, and consumption of so much of our popular culture occurs, no one discipline has a monopoly on addressing the issues at stake, political or otherwise.

- Cultural sociologists have played a smaller role than one might expect, particularly given the important (and often interdisciplinary) analytic tools developed in the field and the applicability of these tools to studying the changes wrought by new technologies.
- Sociology itself emerged within the context of the industrial revolution to make sense of the conflicts between traditional and modernizing social forces, so cultural sociology is well equipped to make sense of the popular practices and institutions emerging in the context of the current “revolution,” both at home and abroad.
- Few other fields have more methodological and theoretical breadth, yet because so much popular culture is mediated by new technologies and because the study of new media has been most systematically institutionalized elsewhere, cultural sociologists, as a group, are not at the forefront of pop culture scholarship, either in its empirical or more theoretical guises.
- To the degree that cultural sociologists are concerned with cultural hierarchy and inequality, with the characteristics of culture-producing industries, with technological innovations and their “effects,” with issues of representation, and with the formation of individual and collective identities, they are potentially concerned with popular culture.

- Despite the movement of popular culture scholarship in recent decades from “academic backwater” to “swift intellectual river,” applying “soft” methods to “trivial” cultural phenomena (daytime talk shows, reality TV, comic books, cheerleading, etc.) may yet be risky business for sociologists, even if one attends to institutional context and even if one eschews a celebratory “resistance” model of analysis.

## Culture and the Arts: From Art Worlds to Arts-in-Action

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### *Background*

Empirically grounded work in the field of arts sociology has helped to advance understanding of the role of culture in social life via its focus on arts-in-action.

- Investigations of artistic engagement have produced concepts that illuminate a diversity of social phenomena, including processes of social change and social reproduction, the role of objects and practices as status markers, and the use of cultural objects and texts as media for constructing everything from individual identity to social movements and national heritage.
- Taking explicit cultural objects—artworks, musical pieces, poems, and museums—as a starting point, the field analyzes how these objects are mobilized in social networks, institutions, and interactions.
- This study of art and its appropriation sheds light on the very building blocks of implicit culture, the abstract features of social life that provide the framework for social action. These include the following: social conventions, taste preferences, and cultural capital/inequality.

### *New Movements— New Ideas*

Rather than focus solely on the “outside” of culture (seeing artistic objects as black boxes), new movements in the sociology of the arts are more concerned with the subjective meanings of cultural objects *as they emerge* through interaction.

- The examination of the arts in empirical situations of “action” promises to widen our understanding of how culture works by offering sociology a window into aesthetic experience and individual/group “world-building.”
- As a result, making a cultural argument in the sociology of the arts increasingly requires examining how features of artistic forms *emerge* as meaningful and consequential within interactions—the “inside” of culture.
- In other words, artistic objects are themselves active mediators of action; they are one of the many reflexive elements of coproduction marking cultural experience in any given situation.
- As the authors describe with reference to discrete work, this question draws the sociology of the arts much closer to work in philosophy, psychology, education, the sociology of science and technology, and anthropological studies of material practice.

*Key Question*

A key question among recent scholarship in the sociology of the arts concerns how groups or individuals come to “latch on” to particular aesthetic objects to connect their own situated action to wider cultural frameworks.

- Key here is the focus on how objects and interactions with objects lend themselves to or, as the authors term it, *afford* uses (or opportunities for perception and/or action; i.e., a spherical object may be easier to roll than a cube).
- The authors describe how new work in arts sociology unearths an understanding of aesthetic consciousness, the tacit bases of human and group action, cognition, and engagement with cultural forms.
- An individual’s social performance is shaped not only by her or his adherence to contextually appropriate and socially recognized codes and repertoires of action but also by her or his own emotional, aesthetic, and affective preparation for action.
- In short, the embodied engagement with artistic forms and aesthetic materials may provide tacit models for more discursive forms of action.
- This recent emphasis on materials and actions in turn permits critique of rule-based and more overtly cognitive models of agency-structure.

*Examples from the Field*

The examples in this article point to the importance of capturing aesthetic experience, not merely literary artifact.

- In highlighting the emotional basis of activism, studies show how social movements may find resources in the “exemplars” that music provides, in lyrics, melodies, or rhythms.
- Historical studies of buildings, gardens, and sites of war and surrender demonstrate that culture (even implicit culture) is a practical, material phenomenon that emerges from connections between things, meanings, and situated action.
- Studies of music and artistic therapy highlight the “causal” role of culture by highlighting instances where aesthetic media function as virtual “life support” systems, enabling forms and qualities of life that are otherwise not possible.
- The examples in this article demonstrate that culture is not a set of a priori categories that act on people and determine their cognitive processing in given situations. Rather, actors’ embodied and emotional reactions to real-time events may play a leading role in determining how, and even if, culture is integrated into action trajectories.

*How Culture Works*

Culture works because it is put to work by actors who are simultaneously constituted by what can be done, culturally, by cultural affordances. Culture is practically constructed.

- This perspective proposes a focus on a pragmatic model of arts as culture—one that also sidesteps the exclusive focus on artworks and artists in favor of seeing art-in-everything.
- At the practical level, the artwork is not indeterminate; its material properties *afford* conditions for its appropriation.
- This adoption of the notion of affordances allows cultural sociology to understand how aesthetic objects play an important role as arbiters of social relations, meaning, and action, through how they are used by individuals and groups to order daily existence.
- In this mutually mediated engagement, cultural consumers are simultaneously its producers.