CULTURE IN AND OUTSIDE INSTITUTIONS

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ABSTRACT

Even as theorists of social movements have paid increasing attention to culture in mobilization processes, they have conceptualized its role in curiously circumscribed fashion. Culture is often treated as a residual category; that is, invoked to explain what structure does not explain in accounting for movements' emergence, what instrumental rationality does not explain in accounting for movement groups' choice of strategies and tactics, and what policy change does not encompass in accounting for movements' impacts. As a result, culture's role in creating structural opportunities, in defining what counts as instrumentally rational, and in determining movement impacts within the policy arena as well as outside it has gone largely untheorized. An alternative view of culture focuses on the schemas that guide, and are reproduced in, institutions. Such a perspective makes it possible to identify the conditions in which culture has independent force in shaping identities, interests, and opportunities, and to grasp culture's simultaneously enabling and constraining dimensions. Drawing on recent empirical studies, I show how this perspective can illuminate neglected dynamics of movement emergence, tactical choice, and movement impacts.

Where once social movement theorists tended to treat grievances, identities, ideologies, and the cultural dimensions of social movements as just so much

1 analytical noise, that is no longer the case. Movement theorists now agree that
2 culture matters in accounting for the emergence, trajectories, and impacts of
3 movements. However, even as they have claimed to give culture its due, they
4 have conceptualized its role in curiously circumscribed fashion. Culture is
5 often treated as a residual category; that is, invoked to explain what structure
6 does not explain in accounting for movements' emergence, what instrumental
7 rationality does not explain in accounting for movement groups' choice of
8 strategies and tactics, and what policy change does not encompass in accounting
9 for movements' impacts. As a result, culture's role in creating structural oppor-
10 tunities, in defining what counts as instrumentally rational, and in determining
11 movement impacts within the policy arena as well as outside it has gone largely
12 untheorized.
13   In this chapter, I show how a different approach to culture can do better. Such
14 an approach is distinctive not so much in how it defines culture as in where it
15 locates it. Rather than thinking about culture as residing in people's heads or in
16 society-wide symbolic frameworks, I propose that we think of culture as insti-
17 tutional schemas. Culture defines the institutional rules of the game – the models
18 that we have for how the state works and science and gender work, or, better, the
19 models that we have for *doing* politics and science and gender. Cultural schemas
20 both shape how institutions operate and are reproduced through institutions'
21 normal operation.
22   This is by no means the only way to think of culture. However, it does have
23 several virtues. One is that it allows us to get at culture's constitutive capacity, that
24 is, its role in defining the interests on behalf of which people mobilize as well as
25 the political shifts that create opportunities for already-existing collective actors.
26 But it does so without resorting to the kind of cultural fundamentalism that treats
27 interests, resources, and structures as reflections of hegemonic ideas. A second
28 virtue of this conception of culture is that it gives us better purchase on culture's
29 simultaneously enabling and constraining dimensions. Activists use culture strate-
30 gically, transposing frames from one institutional setting to another. But, as I will
31 show, institutionalized cultural frames also shape activists' calculations of what
32 counts as strategic.
33   Finally, and most central to the concerns of this volume, by highlighting the
34 institutional sources and effects of culture, this perspective can help to break the
35 hold of state-targeted movements on our theoretical models. Recognizing that
36 movements target institutions other than the state requires more than looking
37 for analogues to features of the state that shape movements' timing, forms, and
38 impacts. Instead, by conceptualizing movements generally as challenges to insti-
39 tutional authority, we can begin to identify both continuities and differences across
40

1 movements targeted to different institutions. In other words, paying more attention
2 to non-state-oriented movements may lead us to neglected but important dynamics
3 that operate also in state-oriented ones. For example, several scholars have recently
4 highlighted the role of "insiders" in the emergence of a number of movements.
5 Insiders are members both of the institutional elite that is being challenged and of
6 the challenging group. They have included, variously, prominent scientists who
7 helped open up American science to challenge (Moore, 1999); priests who did the
8 same for the Catholic Church (Katzenstein, 1998); women nurses and physicians
9 who pressured the medical establishment on behalf of women suffering from
10 postpartum depression (Taylor, 1996); gay physicians who pressed for medical
11 research on AIDS (Epstein, 1996); and educators who lobbied for Afrocentric
12 curricula (Binder, 2002). In these cases, the lines between authorities and
13 challengers were not so clear. Now, it is possible that insiders play a larger role in
14 protest targeted to institutions outside the state because in such institutions the loci
15 of power are more difficult to identify (Moore, 1999). In other words, without the
16 help of insiders, one hardly has a shot. But it is also possible that mediators play a
17 greater role in *state*-targeted protest than we have recognized. The role of federal
18 officials in helping to form the National Organization for Women suggests as
19 much (Costain, 1992; and see McAdam, Tarrow & Tilly's (2001) recent discussion
20 of "brokers").[1]

21 Thinking about movements as challenges to institutional authority also alerts us
22 to the fact that there are multiple institutions in any society. That has implications
23 for key movement processes. Authorities in one institutional sphere may lose
24 legitimacy as a result of their association with already-discredited authorities
25 in another sphere. Activists may draw on one institutional idiom to challenge
26 authorities within another institutional sphere. Movement groups may reproduce
27 some institutions even as they challenge others. Grasping these processes requires
28 a rethinking of culture as well as of movements.

29 In the rest of this paper, I suggest how such a rethinking might proceed. In
30 particular, I take issue with a set of conceptual oppositions that have limited
31 theorizing about culture in movements. Culture has often been conceptualized in
32 contrast to structure, as a realm of social life outside politics, and as an orientation
33 to action that is the opposite of a strategic one. After tracing some of the analytical
34 consequences of these oppositions, I propose an alternative approach to culture
35 and then draw on a variety of recent empirical studies to show its yields. For the
36 good news is that while movement theorizing about culture has not kept pace with
37 developments in the study of culture generally, recent empirical work on move-
38 ments has done so – and indeed, can offer insights into culture's operation much
39 more broadly.

40

CULTURE, STRUCTURE,
POLITICS, AND STRATEGY

For many movement scholars, taking culture seriously has meant paying more attention to the beliefs and values through which people experience and act on structures (Taylor & Whittier, 1992; Whittier, 2002). Culture enables groups to recognize the injustice of their situation, scholars have argued, to see political shifts as political opportunities, and to begin to envision alternatives. Absent those subjective perceptions, objective opportunities for political impact will come to naught (McAdam, 1994, 1996; McAdam, Tarrow & Tilly, 2001; Tarrow, 1998). Culture also provides persuasive resources for activists in their efforts to promote their cause to potential participants and supporters (Gamson, 1988; McAdam, McCarthy & Zald, 1996; Snow & Cress, 2000; Snow et al., 1986; Tarrow, 1998; Zald, 1996). And it shapes their choices among the strategies, tactics, and organizational forms that are available to them. Activists are principled actors as well as instrumental ones, scholars remind us, and their instrumental calculations are always tempered by their cultural commitments – to nonviolence, say, or to radical democracy (Downey, 1986; Meyer, 2002; Oliver & Johnston, 2000; Snow & Benford, 1992). Finally, paying attention to culture has meant recognizing that people may seek to change cultural practices as well as institutional policies and that, whatever activists' actual purposes, the outcomes of movements are often most visible in the arenas of culture and everyday life rather than only in institutional politics (McAdam, 1994; Rucht, 1992).

So, paying attention to culture can contribute to understanding why and how movements emerge, why they unfold in the way they do, and what kinds of impacts they have. These are significant advances. But several things are missing from this picture. One is culture's role not only in helping groups to further their political interests but also in defining the identities and interests on behalf of which they take action. When and why do certain areas of social life – race relations, say, or nuclear policy, or university curricula – suddenly become the grounds for mobilization and conflict? Why do diverse and dispersed individuals suddenly come to see themselves as an aggrieved "group"? Conceptualizing culture as the subjective perceptions that people bring to objective structures makes it difficult to answer those questions since it gives culture no place in constituting interests and identities.

Recently, some scholars have drawn attention to the state's capacity to create new social categories that then become the basis for collective action (McAdam, Tarrow & Tilly, 2001; Meyer, 2002). For example, the identity of "Hispanic" did not exist in the United States before President Richard Nixon proclaimed a National Hispanic Heritage Week in 1969 and a variety of government agencies

1 began to use the term for classification purposes. Since then, people of Latin
2 American descent living in the United States have mobilized around that identity
3 (Oboler, 1995). In his study of nineteenth century British contention, Charles
4 Tilly (1998) attributes the eclipse of local identities like spinner, neighbor, or
5 tenant of a particular landlord by broader ones such as "citizen" and "worker"
6 to the increasing salience of the national state in people's lives. Rather than
7 appeal to a powerful patron or unleash their rage directly on the object of their
8 dissatisfaction, claimsmakers increasingly made public demonstrations of their
9 numbers and commitment to bid for participation in a national polity. Accounts
10 like these are valuable in recognizing that the creation of collective actors needs
11 to be explained rather than assumed. However, state-created social categories are
12 only one source of the identities on behalf of which people mobilize.
13   A tendency to counterpoise culture to specifically *political* structures is
14 responsible for another gap in movement theorizing: a failure to recognize the
15 cultural dimensions of what count as political opportunities. So, for example, in
16 making the case for the importance of culture, Doug McAdam argues against
17 simply identifying the political opportunities that precede mobilization:

19   It is extremely hard to separate these objective shifts in political opportunities from the
20   subjective processes of social construction and collective attribution that render them mean-
     ingful . . . Given this linkage, the movement analyst has two tasks: accounting for the structural
21   factors that have objectively strengthened the challenger's hand, and analyzing the processes
22   by which the meaning and attributed significance of shifting political conditions is assessed
23   (1994, p. 39).

25 McAdam distinguishes "objective" "structural" opportunities from the "sub-
26 jective, cultural" framing of those opportunities. Culture mediates between
27 objective political opportunities and objective mobilization, on this view; it does
28 not create those opportunities. Elsewhere, McAdam elaborates: "the kinds of
29 structural changes and power shifts that are most defensibly conceived as *political*
30 opportunities should not be confused with the collective processes by which these
31 changes are interpreted and framed" (1996, p. 26; emphasis in the original; see
32 also McAdam, McCarthy & Zald, 1996, p. 8).
33   In these formulations, "cultural factors or processes" are contrasted with
34 political structures, which are given, not interpreted. The same opposition persists
35 in more recent formulations of culture's role in mobilization. For example, Nancy
36 Whittier is careful to point out that dominant meanings are "embedded in the state
37 and public policy" (2002, p. 292) rather than just existing outside them. But she
38 then goes on to distinguish "P[olitical opportunity structures], state, institutions" –
39 which she calls "structures" – from "hegemonic culture" – which she calls "mean-
40 ing" (p. 293). David Meyer calls for avoiding "false dichotomies of culture and

1   structure" and then assimilates structure to "factors exogenous to a social move-
2   ment" and culture as the "choices made within it" (2002, p. 12). McAdam himself
3   has shelved the notion of political opportunity structures in favor of "political
4   opportunity spirals" (McAdam, Tarrow & Tilly, 2001). The latter is intended to get
5   at the interactive character of political opportunities, with authorities responding
6   to insurgents' construction of their political circumstances. But the assumption
7   remains that culture comes into the picture solely in the social constructionist
8   processes through which people take advantage of opportunities for action.
9   These formulations miss the fact that objective, external political opportunities
10   *are* cultural. Political structures differ across time and place not only in their
11   formal provisions (for example, limits on the executive branch and a system of
12   checks and balances) but also in their conceptions of the proper scope and role
13   of government. Such conceptions are held by state-makers as much as by the
14   public (Goodwin, 1994). Something as ostensibly non-cultural as a state's level
15   of repression reflects not only numbers of soldiers and guns but the strength
16   of constitutional provisions for their use and traditions of military allegiance
17   (Brockett, 1995; della Porta, 1996). The changing legitimacy rules for world
18   leadership provide activists with differential opportunities to embarrass national
19   governments into a more receptive or proactive stance (Skrentny, 1998).
20   All of these represent political structures that insurgents confront; all are
21   cultural; none exist just in insurgents' heads. Together, they suggest that defining
22   opportunities as open political systems, unstable elite alignments, elite allies,
23   and the state's capacity and propensity for repression (McAdam, 1996; see
24   Tarrow's somewhat different formulation [1998]) by no means captures the range
25   of political structures and processes that facilitate insurgency. Or, better, such
26   a conceptualization fails to capture just *how* such features of a political system
27   facilitate insurgency. To ascertain the comparative role of elections in facilitating
28   insurgency, on an alternative view, we should establish whether a well-known
29   history of election-centered protest exists, memorialized in popular narratives,
30   holidays, and other political rituals (Tambiah, 1996). In comparing levels of
31   repressive capacity, we should pay attention not only to the number of guns and
32   soldiers available to the government, but also to constitutional provisions and
33   precedents (and prevailing interpretations of those provisions and precedents) for
34   its use of force (Brockett, 1995; della Porta, 1996). In assessing the effects of
35   splits among governmental elites in spurring mobilization, we should investigate
36   how those divisions map on to other divisions – ethnicity, say, religion, or region
37   – currently perceived as important (McAdam, Tarrow & Tilly, 2001).
38   The standard picture of culture in mobilization that I sketched above suffers
39   also from a tendency to treat culture as a realm of social life outside of politics.
40   This tendency is especially evident in accounts of movement impacts. Movement

1 theorists rightly point out that movements are responsible for more than changes
2 in laws, policies, and levels of formal political representation. Movements also
3 change personal relationships, cultural norms, and collective identities (Johnston
4 & Klandermans, 1995; McAdam, 1994; Rucht, 1992). But calling the former
5 "political" and the latter "cultural" discourages attention to cultural changes
6 effected within the political sphere. Movements influence the kinds of claims
7 that mainstream political actors can make, in their own interactions as well
8 as in their interactions with the public (Amenta & Young, 1999; Mueller, 1987).
9 It is easy to miss these kinds of effects when culture is viewed as operating
10 outside politics.
11   Finally, treating culture as an orientation to action that competes with a strategic
12 one – the third conceptual opposition I mentioned – underestimates culture's role in
13 shaping the very terms of strategic calculation. As I noted earlier, many sociologists
14 have rejected purely instrumentalist conceptions of strategic and tactical choice, in
15 which activists assess options based on an instrumental reading of environmental
16 opportunities and constraints. Instead, they have represented activists striving to
17 reconcile their normative commitments with their practical ones. Activists try to
18 choose strategies, tactics, organizational forms, and persuasive appeals that are
19 ideologically consistent as well as instrumentally efficacious (Benford & Snow,
20 1988; Breines, 1989; Oliver & Johnston, 2000; Staggenborg, 1989). As Gary
21 Downey (1986) put it in his study of the antinuclear Clamshell Alliance, activists
22 often style themselves not only opponents of authority but its opposites, refusing
23 to enact within their own relations the values that they repudiate. They *prefigure*
24 within their own operation the kind of society they want to bring about (Breines,
25 1989). So they may aim for consensus in decisionmaking, avoid tactics that can
26 be construed as violent in any way, reject differentials in status and authority,
27 and so on.
28   Those choices come with instrumental costs as well as benefits, and we can
29 predict some of the consequences for movement organizations' careers of juggling
30 different kinds of instrumental and ideological commitments. We can also trace
31 the historical roots of activists' ideological commitments in other movements and
32 identify continuities of framing across movements with very different agendas.
33 The problem is that in most formulations, culture – or master frames or ideologies
34 – are treated as "principles": coherent, deliberately chosen, and articulated
35 political values and theories about how the world works (Benford & Snow, 1988;
36 Oliver & Johnston, 2000). But culture also operates behind activists' backs, as
37 it were, defining what *counts* as a principle rather than a matter of practical
38 commonsense, as well as defining what is considered conceivable, feasible, and
39 appropriate. Such beliefs are often taken for granted rather than explicit, internally
40 contradictory rather than coherent, and conventional rather than "deeply held"

1 (Oliver & Johnston, 2000), but they are crucial in setting the very terms of
2 strategic calculation.
3   The concept of collective action repertoires, introduced by Charles Tilly,
4 begins to get at culture in this sense. Tilly writes, "existing repertoires incorporate
5 collectively-learned shared understandings concerning what forms of claim-
6 making are possible, desirable, risky, expensive, or probable, as well as what
7 consequences different possible forms of claim-making are likely to produce.
8 They greatly constrain the contentious claims political actors make on each other
9 and on agents of the state" (1999; see also Clemens, 1996, 1997; and Steinberg,
10 1999 for extensions of the repertoire concept). Wary of treating repertoires as
11 fixed, however, most scholars have concentrated either on the macropolitical
12 changes by which repertoires change dramatically (Tarrow, 1998; Tilly, 1995)
13 or on the dynamics by which activists are able to innovate within and beyond a
14 particular repertoire (Armstrong, 2002; Clemens, 1997). They have devoted much
15 less attention to theorizing the dynamics by which repertoires *constrain* activists'
16 ability to use organizational forms effectively. Activists are viewed as strategic
17 choice-makers rather than as exercising choice within cultural constraints (but
18 see Steinberg, 1999, for an exception).

AN ALTERNATIVE: CULTURE
AS INSTITUTIONAL SCHEMAS

24 The problem is that none of these gaps is easily filled. The risk in treating culture
25 as constitutive of people's interests is that it gives culture too much autonomy.
26 We could end up treating culture as independent of the resources and structures
27 through which it actually has force. The risk in treating culture as constraining
28 strategic action is that we begin to think of people as cultural dopes (or dupes).
29 We could end up in the epistemologically murky position of claiming "false
30 consciousness," arguing that those we study are somehow unable to see the truth of
31 the situation we observers can see. The risk in erasing the line between culture and
32 politics is that it becomes that much more difficult to identify movements' causes
33 and consequences. Can anything be dubbed a "cultural opportunity?" We need
34 a conception of culture that allows us to identify the conditions in which it has
35 independent force in creating interests, identities, and opportunities for political
36 impact. Such a conception should also allow us to discern the mechanisms by
37 which culture makes some identities salient and some tactics appropriate, rather
38 than simply locating those mechanisms in people's heads.
39   Consider, then, this alternative. We can define culture as people's shared mean-
40 ings and the vehicles through which those meanings are expressed. This is not an

uncommon definition (see e.g. Swidler, 2001; Tilly, 1999). But where we typically think of culture in terms of beliefs and ideals – as the ends of action – I propose that we focus on culture as rules or schemas for doing things, whether for giving gifts, declaring war, disagreeing with one's colleagues, interpreting scientific discoveries, or expressing one's feelings (Clemens & Cook, 1999; Giddens, 1984; Sewell, 1992). Cultural schemas operate in numerous social sites: in cognitive categories, conversational dynamics, and national narratives, to name a few. But I propose that we think of them as located in, and guiding, institutions. Institutions are routinized sets of practices around a defined purpose and accompanied by rewards for conformity and penalties for deviation (Jepperson, 1991; Swidler, 2001). (Structures, by contrast, are patterns of durable relations. The concept of structure tells us nothing more than that: where a capitalist market structure refers only to the system by which goods are exchanged; the market as a capitalist institution comprises also the justifications that are attached to the form and the normative codes that operate within it).[2]

Why some schemas or rules rather than others come to dominate an institution has to do with resources and power. However, once fully institutionalized, schemas become the stuff of common sense (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991; Zucker, 1977). One can certainly imagine other ways of doing things, and other ways of assessing things, and some people surely do. And multiple schemas may operate within the same institution, and only become perceived as inconsistent – or their inconsistency only perceived a problem – under certain circumstances (Swidler, 2001). Still, alternatives are always vulnerable to being penalized as "not the way we do things" and as inappropriate. This is as true within social movements as it is outside them. Familiar ways of doing things and seeing things shape activists' strategic possibilities. This is not because alternatives are unthinkable but because the risks of nonconformity are substantial, whether in a small group of like-minded activists or in an appearance before Congress, and the rewards are uncertain.

Yet, if institutional schemas are self-reproducing, and thus sustaining of institutions, they may also be the impetus to contention and change. Here, I want to draw attention to the simultaneously durable and mutable character of institutions (Clemens & Cook, 1999). Institutions are vulnerable to challenge from predictable locations and at predictable moments. The discrediting of old institutional schemas or the ascendance of new ones; conflicts among institutional schemas previously seen as congruent; people's ability to use schemas from one institution as standards for measuring the performance of another institution; the discrediting of one institution by its association with another – each of these developments may generate new lines of contention. In turn, contention may have its primary impact by altering institutional schemas, that is, by altering the rules of the institutional game.

1   Overall, then, this perspective on culture puts us in a better position to grasp
2   the sources of the interests and identities on behalf of which people mobilize, to
3   understand the strategic and tactical decisions that movement groups make, and to
4   assess movements' diverse impacts. I will talk briefly about the first and the third
5   – interests and impacts – and then about the second: strategies. In discussing each
6   one, I will draw on empirical analyses that have produced provocative arguments
7   with respect to both paradigmatic state-targeted movements and non-state
8   targeted ones.

MOVEMENT EMERGENCE

13   Why do movements emerge when they do? Rather than starting with challengers
14   and their interests already in existence, we can begin our analysis earlier,
15   asking why certain collective identities come to exist, certain grievances become
16   widespread, and certain issues become contentious. I mentioned a number of
17   institutional dynamics that may operate to create new stakes in mobilization,
18   none of them reducible to political opportunities as they are usually defined.
19   Let me flesh out several of them as they have operated in actual instances
20   of mobilization.
21   New stakes in contention may be created when existing institutional schemas
22   are discredited or when co-existing institutional schemas that were previously
23   viewed as consistent come to be seen as contradictory. In this respect, consider
24   the early history of the abortion reform movement in this country. As Kristin
25   Luker (1984) shows, institutionalized practices of legal abortion in the early
26   1960s were governed by two very different but rarely discussed schemas: a "strict
27   constructionist" one, in which the fetus was a full person, albeit unborn (whose
28   abortion was justified only when its survival jeopardized the life of the mother),
29   and a "broad constructionist" schema, in which the fetus was a *potential* person
30   (and appropriately aborted if indications were strong that it would be abnormal).
31   As medical advances made abortions to save the life of the mother an increasing
32   rarity, the potential for conflict between the two perspectives increased. That
33   conflict broke out into the open in 1962 when the story was publicized of a
34   woman who planned to terminate her pregnancy after discovering that her fetus
35   was likely to be deformed. Doctors adhering to a broad constructionist model
36   worried about not having legal protection for the therapeutic abortions they were
37   performing routinely. They suddenly found themselves with stakes in a movement
38   for abortion reform and they played a key role in forming one.
39   In another scenario, a new schema gains institutional purchase, creating stakes
40   in its interpretation, enforcement, and, for some, in its challenge. This scenario

1   helps to account for the 1950s homophile movement. As John D'Emilio (1983)
2   shows in his history of the movement, same-sex sex has always existed and,
3   indeed, has often been severely punished. But it was only in the mid-twentieth
4   century that it became not just a deviant, immoral, illegal *act* but a deviant
5   *identity*. A homosexual was a person whose nature – acts, feelings, personal
6   traits, even body type – was sharply distinguishable from "normal" heterosexuals.
7   That shift was propelled in part by a psychiatric model of homosexuality that
8   gained currency during and after World War II. It made possible both heightened
9   repression (one could now be fired or prosecuted as a homosexual whether or not
10 one had engaged in sex), and the creation of a homosexual collective actor.
11   Both Luker and D'Emilio seek to explain not why the state became vulnerable
12 to challenge by already-constituted groups but why certain issues, practices, and
13 identities came to be contested in the first place. Note, too, that each of these
14 studies explores the interaction of structural trends and cultural schemas without
15 reducing any one to any other. Doctors' stake in abortion reform makes sense
16 only in the context of broad changes in the organization and practice of medicine
17 *and* in the context of competing understandings of the ontological status of the
18 fetus. Psychiatrists' promotion of a view of homosexuality as a deviant identity
19 would not have led to the development of a homosexual collective actor had not
20 it intersected with long-term processes of urbanization and industrialization that
21 made newly possible the development of an autonomous personal life.
22   Even if we begin with challengers, or at least a constituency for change,
23 already in existence, paying attention to cultural processes, and specifically, to
24 the creation, competition, destabilization, and diffusion of institutional schemas
25 can better account for the conditions in which full-scale mobilization is likely.
26 Institutional schemas may specify appropriate occasions for opposition, such
27 as elections or holidays, occasions which not uncommonly escalate into more
28 serious or widespread opposition. This is closest to what goes under the heading
29 of political opportunity. However, what counts as an opportunity within one insti-
30 tution, say, elections within institutional politics, may not count as an opportunity
31 in another institution, say, religion. Rather than simply looking for analogues
32 to the political structures that supposedly create opportunities for state-targeted
33 protest – again, open political systems, unstable elite alignments, elite allies, and
34 the state's capacity and propensity for repression – we might look more generally
35 for structures and practices that are "infuse[d] with value beyond the technical
36 requirements of the task at hand," as Philip Selznick (1957, pp. 6–7) defines
37 institutionalization. The reasoning here is that such structures and practices at once
38 make the institution what it is and make it vulnerable to challenge. So, for example,
39 organized medicine's dependence both on the cutting edge of scientific advance
40 and on a system of care that is organized around the institutionalized (and less

1   than cutting edge) state of scientific knowledge might well suggest that contention
2   would emerge around that tension.
3   There is yet another possibility. As I noted earlier, institutions operate within
4   a field of institutions. Institutions are related to each other structurally in the
5   sense that there are regularized exchanges of money, people, and trust among
6   them. But institutions are also related to each other symbolically in the sense that
7   the authority of one comes from the status of its objects, methods, and members
8   relative to those of others. This means that particular institutions may become
9   vulnerable to challenge when institutions with which they are symbolically
10 associated are already under attack. In her study of radical challenges to science,
11 Kelly Moore (1999) shows that organized American science at the beginning of
12 the 1960s was flush with money, power, and prestige. However, some of those
13 very facts rendered it vulnerable to challenge. The rapid growth of organized
14 science gave newcomers a stake in change and the fact that there was little
15 centralized control made it difficult to exercise control over dissidents within
16 the ranks. Just as important, however, the fact that science's status after World
17 War II was so harnessed to its mutually supportive relationship with the federal
18 government meant that when the government came under challenge in the 1960s,
19 science was implicated too.
20   This case suggests that organizations or institutions may lose credibility by
21 something like a symbolic contagion. This is different from movement spillover:
22 it is not that challengers beget challengers but that stigmatized institutions
23 contaminate those around them. In the same vein, Steven Epstein (1996) attributes
24 the rise of an AIDS movement challenging medical researchers in part to more
25 general public skepticism about the authority of experts. Again, institutions
26 intersect culturally, that is, draw their legitimacy from, and suffer disrepute as
27 a result of, the relations they are seen as having with other institution. Those
28 relations can also be seen as ones of opposition rather than alliance. In other
29 words, people may justify challenging practices within one institutional sphere
30 by invoking standards and values from another. So, for example, Poles drew on
31 a moral idiom from Catholicism to challenge the communist regime. The striking
32 hospital workers whom Karen Brodkin Sacks (1988) studied invoked notions
33 of family, and specifically, the relations between parents and grown children, to
34 describe the acknowledgment and care they expected from hospital management.
35 A familiar associational form derived from another institutional sphere provided
36 an idiom for formulating opposition.
37   In still another dynamic, people may be able to capitalize on the relative
38 autonomy that some institutions are granted in repressive regimes, developing
39 within them insurgent ideas and networks. These are the "free spaces" that
40 scholars have seen as seedbeds for dissent, institutions like the black church for

1   the civil rights movement and literary circles for opposition to the Soviet regime.
2   What is important about such institutions, though often missed in discussions
3   of free spaces, is not that they are somehow empty of ideas but that they enjoy
4   relative freedom from the scrutiny and control of authorities (Polletta, 1999).

MOVEMENT IMPACTS

9   How should we assess movement impacts in the perspective I am describing?
10 Not only by looking for changes in laws, policies, and political representation,
11 that is, "political" changes as distinct from the "cultural" changes that take place
12 only outside politics. Nor should we stop at identifying formal policy changes
13 in non-state institutions and cultural changes outside them. In reconceptualizing
14 what and who count as authorities, movements sometimes transform the rules
15 of the institutional game in a way that goes beyond specific policy changes. For
16 instance, activists in the Catholic Church who mobilized to gain the ordination of
17 women lacked the framework of legal rights that was available to women fighting
18 sexual harassment and restricted career opportunities in the military (Katzenstein,
19 1998). As a result, feminists in the military were able to invoke rights to equal
20 opportunity to open up more military occupations to women while Catholic
21 activists never won women ordination. But Catholic women's discursive politics
22 did transform the terms of debate within the Catholic Church. Women's issues
23 – reproductive rights, for example, and women's roles in church doctrine as well
24 the church hierarchy – could no longer be kept off the agenda. Cultural changes
25 thus reshape institutional practices; as Katzenstein puts it, "conceptual changes
26 bear directly on material ones" (1998, p. 17). Mobilization gained AIDS activists
27 a formal seat at the table of AIDS research – in Gamson's (1990) sense, "accep-
28 tance" – but it also redefined what counted as scientific expertise in far-reaching
29 ways (Epstein, 1996).
30   Under what conditions, then, are movements likely to effect these kinds of
31 changes? What makes movements more or less likely to reorient the rules of
32 the game, that is, transform the ways in which science is practiced, expertise is
33 attributed, motherhood is defined, and so on? We simply do not know whether,
34 in assessing changes in non-state institutions, we should expect to see the same
35 kinds of factors that have been invoked to account for movements' impacts on
36 state policies and practices. Non-state institutions usually lack the repressive
37 means to put down dissent that the state possesses. That may mean that protest
38 aimed at disrupting business-as-usual in non-state institutions is likely to have
39 more of an effect. Another possibility is that it is easier to transform institutional
40 practices around cultural objects with lower prestige. In her comparison of

1   challenges to American public school education in the 1980s mounted by
2   Afrocentrists and creationists, Amy Binder (2002) shows that Afrocentrists
3   were more successful in winning curricular changes. This was in part because
4   they were challenging history curricula rather than higher-prestige science
5   curricula. Again, in accounting for movement impacts as well as causes we should
6   pay attention to the symbolic relations and hierarchies in which institutions
7   are embedded.

STRATEGY

12 Why do movement groups adopt the strategies, tactics, targets, organizational
13 forms, and ideological frames they do? And what consequences do those choices
14 have for movements' trajectories and impacts? The theoretical challenge, I
15 noted earlier, is to capture the ways in which culture effectively operates behind
16 activists' backs, shaping their conceptions of what is feasible, appropriate, moral,
17 and rational – but without representing activists as blind to their own interests.
18 The solution is to probe the discursive and organizational mechanisms by which
19 strategic and tactical options are ruled in and out of activists' calculations.
20   Consider, in this regard, activists' choice of organizational form. Numerous
21 scholars have drawn attention to the ideological commitments that lead activists
22 to adopt non-hierarchical, consensus-oriented organizational forms, prefiguring
23 within their own operation the radically egalitarian society they hope to bring
24 about (Breines, 1989, Downey, 1986; Polletta, 2002; Staggenborg, 1989). To call
25 such commitments "expressive," Wini Breines reminds us, is to mistakenly treat
26 them as nonpolitical. To the contrary, in experimenting with alternative forms
27 of sociability, activists are seeking to remake politics – or to remake religion,
28 science, education, and so on.
29   Still, Breines and others argue, activists' prefigurative commitments are always
30 in tension with their strategic ones (Downey, 1986; Epstein, 1992, Starr, 1979).
31 Making change outside the boundaries of the group usually requires quick
32 decisionmaking, highly coordinated action on the part of large numbers of people,
33 specialized expertise in complex policymaking processes, and the legitimacy with
34 funders and authorities that comes from adopting standard organizational forms.
35 All of these exert pressures to adopt more formalized, centralized, and hierarchical
36 structures. Some of the most interesting work on how activists wrestle with these
37 tensions has been done on feminist organizations (see among others, the essays
38 in Yancey & Ferree, 1995). Pace Michels, scholars have argued persuasively
39 that organization does not necessarily lead to oligarchy. To the contrary, feminist
40 activists have variously turned their relations with funders and authorities into

1   a site of movement challenge (Matthews, 1994) or have incorporated elements
2   of bureaucracy into their organizational structures without abandoning their
3   commitments to equality, nurturance, and mutual learning (Bordt, 1997a; Disney
4   & Gelb, 2000; Iannello, 1992).
5   Even in these works, however, there is an assumption that activists choose
6   collectivist organizational forms for ideological reasons, specifically, to sym-
7   bolize their commitments to equality and care, and that they abandon or modify
8   those forms when they come up against the demands of effective action. What that
9   misses is that, just as much as collectivist ones, bureaucratic forms *symbolize*. They
10   symbolize, variously, masculinity, power, political seriousness, and an overriding
11   concern with effective outcomes. These associations – this is the important part –
12   may be the source of such forms' appeal within the movement as well as outside
13   it. For example, the middle-class professionals who staffed the alternative health
14   clinic Sherryl Kleinman (1996) studied in the 1980s saw themselves as bearers
15   of the countercultural impulse of the 1960s. They held hands before meetings
16   and had group hugs after them, strove for consensus in all-night meetings, and
17   were critical of conventional markers of professional accomplishment. But they
18   also insisted that each meeting be recorded in "minutes that had a bureaucratic
19   look – lengthy, well-typed, with lots of headings, subheadings and underlinings"
20   (pp. 38–39). One staffer created an uproar when she submitted minutes of a
21   previous meeting in longhand and with illustrations, and staffers carefully rewrote
22   the minutes line by line. Kleinman had never seen anyone actually refer to
23   minutes from earlier meetings and there was no evidence that staffers believed
24   that imitating mainstream organizational procedures would get them more clients
25   or funding. Rather, it was necessary to their self-conception as a "serious"
26   organization. Minute-taking, in as conventional way as possible, was a sign of
27   legitimate standing. More broadly, theorizing activists' practical choices only in
28   terms of their efforts to juggle cultural and instrumental commitments makes it
29   difficult to see the ways in which culture shapes activists' very definitions of what
30   is instrumental, what is political, what is a resource, and so on. By treating culture
31   solely as a brake on instrumental calculation, the standard perspective offers no
32   analytical purchase on the source of activists' cultural commitments.
33   Thinking of culture instead as models for action and interaction directs our
34   attention to the sources of such models, as well as to why they come to dominate
35   movement fields or subfields, and how they shape activists' practical choices and
36   their chances for success.
37   Of course, as Elizabeth Clemens (1996, 1997) points out, activists are not
38   restricted to imitating the strategies and tactics of already-existing movement
39   organizations. Rather they can draw on familiar associational forms outside
40   politics. They can modify and combine models to create the kinds of hybrids that

1   are publicly viewed as "appropriate," whether for women or working class people
2   or explicitly political claimsmaking, and yet are different enough to be effective.[3]
3   So Clemens (1997) shows how women activists barred from formal politics
4   in the late nineteenth and early 20th century drew on alternative associational
5   forms such as the club, parlor meeting, and charitable society to become a
6   major force for social reform. Another example comes from a very different
7   context: Communist organizers in 1940s China recruited women mill workers
8   into "sisterhoods," in which four or five women pledged allegiance to each other
9   in a ritual ceremony. The form was one that women mill workers had long used to
10 protect themselves from abuse by employers and by neighborhood thugs; now it
11 generated the bonds of mutual trust and solidarity that made for sustained activism
12 (Honig, 1985). The black Baptist ministers who founded the Southern Christian
13 Leadership Conference organized it along the lines of the southern Baptist
14 church (Fairclough, 1985; Morris, 1984). Familiar associational forms supply the
15 normative expectations that help to recruit members, sustain their participation,
16 and provide real-life referents for values such as equality, cooperation, and care.
17   And yet familiarity also comes with dangers. The SCLC's ministerial
18 structure created persistent jockeying among SCLC officials for Dr. King's
19 favor (Fairclough, 1985). In tracing experiments in radical democracy in seven
20 movements over the last hundred years, I found that activists tended to model their
21 deliberations variously on the relations between religious fellows, teachers and
22 learners, or friends (Polletta, 2002). While each relationship supplied the mutual
23 trust and respect that made it possible for activists to deliberate with a minimum
24 of negotiation and challenge, each one also came with norms that, in predictable
25 circumstances, made consensus impossible and generated sometimes debilitating
26 organizational crises. For instance, friendship's tendency to exclusivity and its
27 aversion to difference made it difficult for 1960s activists to expand their groups
28 beyond an original core. When they tried to implement mechanisms designed
29 to equalize power, friendship's resistance to formalization impeded their efforts.
30 When newcomers joined the group or when veterans experienced disagreement as
31 betrayal, deliberation broke down. In a similar vein, Carol Conell and Kim Voss
32 (1990) show that when the Knights of Labor attempted to organize less-skilled
33 iron- and steelworkers into the sectional forms with which the Knights were
34 familiar, rather than into broad-based organizations, the Knights limited such
35 organizations' potential for growth (see also Lichterman, 1996).
36   We can also trace the processes by which some organizational templates come
37 to be seen as "appropriate for" certain activities or people. So Rebecca Bordt
38 (1997b) shows that collectivist organizational forms became normative among
39 radical feminist activists in the 1970s. The pressures exerted by funders and
40 government agencies to adopt conventional bureaucratic structures continued

1   strong but feminists setting up collectives also operated in an alternative en-
2   vironment of feminist bookstores, heath centers, foundations, and media – all
3   providing support for collectivist ideals. The result was that collectives took
4   on "a rulelike status" (p. 146); institutionalized, collectivism *became* feminism.
5   For radical black activists, I have argued (Polletta, 2002), the collectivist forms
6   described by Bordt had shifted even earlier from being seen as practical and as
7   "black" to being seen as expressive and as "white." As a result, and at a time when
8   their counterparts on the new left were eagerly abolishing national offices and
9   insisting on consensus-based decisionmaking, black activists implemented more
10 centralized and bureaucratic procedures (see Armstrong, 2002 on the emergence
11 of identity-based organizations in the gay and lesbian movement).
12   Activists rarely eschew convention entirely. As they fundraise, bring lawsuits,
13 talk to the press, and collaborate with allies, they try to capitalize on some rules
14 of the institutional games they play at the same time as they challenge others. But
15 playing by the rules may have costs, since the rules are oriented more to sustaining
16 the institution than to affording opportunities for challenge. For example, the
17 stories of individual victimization people are required to tell in courtrooms
18 may simultaneously win the movement legal victories and alienate potential
19 recruits who are unwilling to see themselves as victims (Bumiller, 1988). The
20 legal framework that military women drew on to challenge the discrimination
21 they faced limited the scope of their claims, strategies, and eventually, success
22 (Katzenstein, 1998).
23   It is hardly surprising that activists sometimes fail to anticipate the costs of
24 playing by the rules, especially since the risks in breaching the rules are substantial
25 and the gains uncertain. So the animal rights activists Julian Groves (2001) studied
26 discouraged women from serving in leadership positions because they believed
27 that women were seen by the public as prone to the kind of emotional accounts that
28 would cost the movement credibility. Activists spent little time debating whether
29 women were in fact prone to emotionalism, however, or whether emotional stories
30 rather than rational arguments were in fact bad for the movement (an assumption
31 questioned by Jasper, 1999). So their calculations were strategic but were based
32 on gendered assumptions about reason and emotion.
33   The anti-Gulf war activists observed by Stephen Hart (2001) relied on a
34 pragmatic, nuts-and-bolts style in their internal discussions, effectively ruling out
35 of order discussions of participants' personal commitments or broad ideological
36 visions. But that "constrained" discursive style served them less effectively than
37 did the "expansive" discourse characteristic of faith-based organizing groups, in
38 which participants' ethical commitments were threaded through all discussions.
39 A discourse valued for its pragmatism, ironically, proved less effective than one
40 valued for its moral depth.

1   Together, these studies elucidate the conventions that govern activists' uses
2 of cultural forms (from organizational templates to emotional performances to
3 legal categories to styles of discourse), and they trace the consequences of those
4 conventions for movement groups' capacities to effect changes. Rather than
5 treating culture as the opposite of strategy, they show the ways in which culture
6 sets the very terms of strategic action. But far from free-floating, culture is treated
7 as anchored in familiar organizational forms, dominant legal institutions, and
8 traditions of progressive politics.

CONCLUSION

13 Taking full account of culture in movements requires more than recognizing
14 people's creative capacities for interpreting political conditions, the changes
15 that movements effect outside the formal political sphere, and the cultural
16 commitments that co-exist alongside activists' instrumental ones. Our tendency
17 to define culture in contrast to structure, as a realm of social life outside politics,
18 and as an orientation to action that competes with an instrumental one has
19 made it difficult to answer some of the most important questions we ask, about
20 the sources of the interests and identities on behalf of which people mobilize,
21 the political causes and consequences of mobilization, and activists' strategic
22 choices. However, the solution is not to trade a narrowly structuralist model for a
23 cultural fundamentalism. Instead, the work I have cited draws our attention to the
24 institutional dynamics by which new interests, identities, and stakes in protest gain
25 currency; to the ways in which movements reshape the rules of the institutional
26 game; and to the institutional sources of the understandings that inform activists'
27 strategic calculations. I have highlighted especially how the symbolic hierarchies
28 in which institutions are embedded shape movements' form and impacts.
29   Much work remains to be done. We should know more than we do about
30 how and when models of collective action diffuse across institutional settings as
31 well as across movements and geographical regions (for promising work along
32 these lines, see Soule, 1999; Wood, forthcoming). We should be able to better
33 specify the conditions for cultural innovation in movement forms, strategies,
34 and tactics (see e.g. Armstrong, 2002; Polletta, 2003). We should be able to
35 assess how the diverse institutional settings in which activists operate shape their
36 tactical, emotional, and ideological repertoires (see e.g. Whittier, 2001). And we
37 should know more about the organizational, discursive, and social psychological
38 mechanisms by which familiar cultural templates set the terms of strategic action.
39 Movements both reflect and help to create the "unsettled times" that cultural
40 theorists see as crucibles for cultural change (Swidler, 1986). At the same time,

they often reproduce within their own operation the cultural frameworks that make protest a relatively rare event. In exploring the tension between challenge and accommodation, between innovation and constraint, movement theorists can contribute to our understanding of cultural processes much more broadly.

NOTES

1. At the same time, however, we should avoid treating the state as just one among the institutions that activists have challenged. More than most other institutions – science, say, or religion, or the family – the state influences the strategies, tactics, and organizational forms activists use and the impacts they have. Indeed, we need more research on the ways in which federal, state, and local laws around policing, tax status, and fundraising, for example, shape what movement groups can and cannot do (Jenkins, 1995; McCarthy, Britt & Wolfson, 1991). In analyzing non-state oriented movements, we should not lose sight of the state's powerful role in many of these movements.

2. There is a real ambiguity in how scholars have conceptualized institutions, however, captured in the question of whether we should consider a handshake an institution. For some authors, an institution is the sum total of the organizations, networks, and people that produce a culturally recognized product, say art or medicine (Friedland & Alford, 1991; Katzenstein, 1998; Moore, 1999). For others, institution is defined more as the product of institutionalization: the process by which a practice comes to be, as Philip Selznick puts it, "infused with value beyond the technical requirements of the task at hand" (1957; pp. 6–7; see also Jepperson, 1991; Swidler, 2001). So, a handshake is institutionalized in American society as a sign of goodwill and respect. In this essay, I use institution in both senses, though I refer to the former sometimes as "larger institutions" or "institutional spheres."

3. There is an interesting tension in conceptions of how groups innovate strategically. One can contrast Charles Tilly's notion of a repertoire, a limited set of routines that evolve through struggle between claimsmakers and authorities (1995; see also Steinberg, 1999, concept of a discursive repertoire), with the imitative process that new institutionalists describe.

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Uncited references

References cited in the text must appear in the reference list; conversely, each entry in the reference list must be cited in the text ... The author must make certain that each source referenced appears in both places and that the text citation and reference list entry are identical in spelling and year.

Barkan (1979), Epstein (1991), Ferree & Martin (1995), Gamson & Meyer (1996), Hays (1994), Jasper (1997), Kitschelt (1986), Mathews (1994) and Minkoff (2001).