Localizing Cultural Phenomena by Specifying Social Psychological Mechanisms: Introduction to the Special Issue

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Many of the *SPQ* editorial board members in attendance at our annual breakfast meeting at the 2012 ASA in Denver sported buttons that read, "Social Psychology—it's actually everywhere!" Karen Hegtvedt and Cathryn Johnson, the journal's coeditors, asked the board to ponder how best to move beyond the buttons to use *SPQ* to share the ubiquity of social psychology with a wider audience. They proposed the idea of a special issue and suggested the possibility of one that focused on the intersection of culture and social psychology. Given the popularity of a series of joint sessions between the two sections at recent meetings, the board viewed the idea as long overdue and enthusiastically supported it.

Twenty years ago, both cultural sociologists (e.g., Sewell 1992) and social psychologists (e.g., Ridgeway and Smith-Lovin 1994) argued that an adequate explanation of a social phenomenon is one that links "macro" cultural structures with the "micro" dynamics of context and interaction. Yet, driven by commitment to distinct methodologies, theoretical paradigms, and overall epistemic traditions, cultural sociology and social psychology, while vibrant in their own rights, have done little to move closer over time. Cultural sociologists have gone on to develop powerful theoretical vocabularies and analytical tools useful for examining the large-scale constitution of cultural meaning systems (Mohr and Rawlings 2012). However, it is clear that the elucidation and "measurement" of cultural phenomena without specification of the underlying mechanisms that underpin them is incomplete (Lizardo 2013). Social psychologists have continued to refine carefully assembled bodies of theory and precise investigative techniques to understand the microdynamics of interaction in both controlled and naturalistic contexts. However, these interactional, identity-based, or status-based micromechanisms must be understood as connected to the large-scale cultural patterns that they help to reproduce and generate (Ridgeway 2014).

With the endorsement of the board for the special issue, Karen and Cathy recruited us as guest editors and crafted a call for papers that invited both cultural

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sociologists and social psychologists to work toward a collective enterprise, linking cultural processes with social psychological mechanisms. We hope that this special issue is a vibrant realization of the vision of Karen, Cathy, and the editorial board, one that demonstrates that an alliance between cultural sociology and social psychology is not only desirable and feasible, but *required* for the continuing theoretical and empirical development of both fields. Cultural sociologists and social psychologists need one another more than ever before. The articles in this issue provide a powerful demonstration that integrative cultural–social psychological approaches produce both better cultural sociology and better social psychology.

Three key themes emerge from the papers in this issue. First, there is the prevalence of *identity* as a key microlevel mechanism accounting for both how large-scale cultural patterns manifest themselves in interaction and the dynamics through which these patterns are reproduced and transformed in a given setting. Second, there is the importance of *cultural resources* (e.g., tool kits, competences, and forms of capital) in allowing for the expression and negotiation of identities and the contextual construction of symbolic boundaries, especially those associated with social class. Finally, there is the centrality of *schema accessibility* as a key mechanism active in the construction of identities, categories, boundaries, and judgments of the moral and social worth of others.

Several of the papers point to identity as a key mechanism via which culture links to action in context. In this respect, robust traditions of identity theorizing in social psychology serve as a way to anchor theories of cultural production, dissemination, and status-based stratification in cultural sociology. Both Fields and Miles, for instance, build on brief (but deeply

suggestive) remarks by Swidler (2001) on the importance of identity as an "anchor" that organizes how culture manifests itself in action. Both papers help us see in new ways how some cultural elements can be thought of as controlling others.

Fields develops the link between culture and identity dynamics in his illuminating study of the Neo-Knitterz, a knitting club composed of young, professional women. He notes that while the dynamics of cultural change are a classic topic in work on the production and dissemination of culture, little is known about the interactional mechanisms that facilitate such episodes of cultural change. Fields is able to show how Neo-Knitterz use discursive, interactional, and positional strategies to challenge conventional definitions of knitting as something appropriate for older, domestic women, thus enacting social and cultural change.

In his contribution, Miles makes the ambitious claim that identity is in fact the key to providing a solution to the long-standing "problem of cultural anchoring" in cultural sociology. He proposes that chronically accessible ("core") identities play such an anchoring role. Drawing on contemporary identity theory, Miles notes that both cultural resources and more situated identity commitments are subordinated to the core identity commitments that people strive to maintain. Cultural skills and resources feed back into the types of identity that come to form part of the core self as persons become attached to those identities for which they have the resources to maintain. Miles suggests a dynamic process in which people select themselves in and out of situations and within situations select those behavioral performances that come closest to maintaining and enacting their most salient ("core") identities.

Like other recent works (e.g., Dimaggio and Markus 2010; Ridgeway 2014; Rivera

2010), several contributions to this special issue convincingly demonstrate the importance of social psychological processes to research on the dynamics of cultural stratification, social class, and status dynamics in cultural sociology. In Fields's Neo-Knitterz case, middle-class cultural resources connected to cultural consumption, taste, and capacity for discernment among different knitting styles, materials, and sites play a key role in identity and boundary work efforts. Miles's model of identity in action is a novel integration of psychological models of the role of status and resources in identity maintenance and cultural capital–based models of stratification. In two other articles, cultural resources take center stage as key interactional and situational mechanisms.

Calarco extends Swidler-inspired "cultural tool kit" models of cultural stratification to account for the activation of distinct strategies of action in context. She shows that while tool kit models predict middle-class advantage as a result of a match between class-based endowments and expectations, they fail to specify the situated mechanisms via which this conversion takes place. Drawing on the concept of "logics of action" from cognitive sociology and on the symbolic interactionist emphasis on interpretation in context ("interpretative moments"), Calarco finds that the translation of endowments into class-based advantages and disadvantages in the classroom is a process whereby ambiguous classroom situations are actively interpreted in different ways by middle- and working-class children. Middle-class children, following a logic of entitlement, see these moments as an opportunity to engage in help-seeking. Working-class children, following a logic of appeasement, interpret the same kind of situation as one of avoiding reprimand, thus reducing their interaction with teachers and leading to less favorable outcomes. In this case, logics of action link to strategies of action, thereby serving as a mechanism for class reproduction in the classroom.

Armstrong and collaborators provide another powerful demonstration of how symbolic boundaries based on class and status depend on the agentic activation of endowed class resources. They find that high-status women (largely affluent, sorority members) use *slut* to distance themselves from "trashy," lower-status women (working class, excluded from Greek culture), who in turn use the term to deride the "rich, bitchy" women. Via this process, the slut label is dissociated from sexual behavior and plays a role in both expressing and reproducing class dynamics. This results in predictable asymmetries among the women as to who can most successfully manage interactional stigmas associated with the label, with high-status women more able to dictate the contextual dynamics governing to whom, when, how, and where the label is likely to be applied. This study provides a timely demonstration of the interactional and social importance of stigmatized identities for the organization of social relations and the reproduction of status orders.

Recent cultural and cognitive sociology argues that culture is powerful in social life because it becomes internalized as highly accessible schemas: cognitive structures used for categorization and interpretation of events, objects, situations, and persons. This theme is present throughout the special issue, from the highly accessible self-concepts as hip and current displayed by the Neo-Knitterz, to Miles's core identities, to the accessible (but distinct) logics of action enacted by students in Calarco's study, to Armstrong et al.'s pervasive slut category. The two remaining contributions in the special issue are distinctive in highlighting the power of highly accessible schemas in

the generation of substantively important outcomes: the article by Hunzaker and the article by Cerulo and Ruane.

Hunzaker's contribution combines insight from social psychological work on justice and legitimacy with cognitive cultural sociology to understand the ways that inequality may be inadvertently reproduced through the perpetuation of stereotypes. Hunzaker asked respondents to read one of two vignettes detailing the experiences of a young, working-class man struggling with unemployment. One vignette had a positive outcome, the other a negative one. Using psychology's cultural transmission paradigm (e.g., Kashima 2000), Hunzaker asked respondents to retell the narrative to another participant, who then shared it with another, who passed it on to yet another. Although both vignettes included the same descriptions of the young man, when the young man suffered a negative outcome, the shared narratives were much more likely to include stereotype-consistent information as a means to explain this misfortune. The article creatively illustrates how cultural transmission, coupled with the need to think of outcomes as just, reifies stereotypes and justifies others' experiences of adversity, therefore perpetuating inequality.

Cerulo and Ruane provide an innovative analysis of the sociocognitive mechanisms that allow for a given cultural object (in this case public apologies) to be culturally resonant (Schudson 1989). The authors show that the effectiveness of public apologies depends on their sequencing structure. Particular types of sequencing make accessible certain interpretative schemas, while others block schema accessibility. Effective sequences prime the receiver to access widely established scripts of atonement, thus increasing the chances that the offender will receive forgiveness. By linking a sociocognitive theory of message reception to naturalistic real-world indices of cultural resonance, Cerulo and Ruane enhance understanding of how "culture can be powerful" in a way that could not be done by those who focus on the internal meaning structures of cultural symbols or the social cognitive mechanics of information processing alone.

In sum, the papers in this issue demonstrate the fruitfulness of linking macro and micro via an alliance of cultural sociology and social psychology. We hope that these papers, and the overwhelming response to this special issue, represent the beginning of a renewed empirical and theoretical relationship between these two fields.

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