From "Either-Or" to "When and How": A Context-Dependent Model of Culture in Action

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INTRODUCTION

"There is no way out of the game of culture . . ." Pierre Bourdieu

During the last half-century, competing understandings of culture and how it affects individual and collective action have rapidly risen and withered in modern social science disciplines such as sociology, anthropology, and political science (Ortner, 1984; Sewell, 1999). The concept of culture as the totality of human productive and creative output, like the folk understanding of culture as artistic production, has ceased to be a major fixture in contemporary inquiry and practice (Sewell, 1999). Three understandings of culture, however, are still frequently recognized, measured, examined, and heatedly debated in contemporary social science: culture as socially produced motivations (Vaisey, 2009) or values (Weber, 1946), culture as collectively available skills or resources for dealing with everyday life (Swidler, 1986, 2001), and culture as shared meanings which include collectively available categories, representations, and understandings (Alexander & Smith, 1993; Geertz, 1977/2000). Social-scientific theories linking culture to human action often pitch these facets as opposing and inherently incompatible perspectives of "what culture is." Even the more nuanced attempts to integrate multiple elements of culture into holistic models generally argue that one particular aspect of culture provides the most powerful link to action across different social contexts (e.g. Bourdieu, 1979/1984; Laitin, 1986; Swidler, 1986; Vaisey, 2009).

In this article, I argue that cultural motivations, resources, and meanings should not be seen as incompatible models for linking culture to action. Rather, they must be understood as fundamental, complementary, and necessarily intertwined elements of culture that operate simultaneously. Instead of arguing that one element of culture rules over others a priori and provides the definitive link to action in all circumstances, I propose a model of how and under which contexts

each element of culture most strongly affects both action and outcomes.[1] In doing so, I build on recent theoretical works which have argued that the empirical inadequacies of existing standalone models of "how culture affects action" can be explained by the failure of theorists from "competing" perspectives to fully recognize and integrate the other elements of culture (Vaisey, 2009, 2010), as well as the concrete contingencies that give them analytic power (Swidler, 2001), into previous theories. Each of the existing models capture something "real" about the relationships between culture and action. However, their inadequacies as standalone models can only be remedied by connecting cultural motivations, resources, and meanings to one another and specifying the contexts in which each matters.

This article provides a reframing and synthesis that reintegrates "competing" models of culture and re-situates them in the concrete social contexts that affect their relative influence on action and outcomes. The result is a context-dependent model of culture in action. I argue that on average, motivations have the most discernable link to action within a social strata, cultural resources provide the strongest link across strata, and meanings have the greatest direct influence when codified and sanctioned. To explicate and give preliminary substance to this model I use evidence from previous research, as well as new data from an ongoing multi-year comparative ethnographic study of health behaviors among the aged, to show how the various elements of culture are concretely linked to action in eight different social contexts.[2]

It is necessary to note upfront that this is not an article that argues for the power of culture, relative to structure or agency, as an explanatory concept in social science. Along with other theorists, I hold that "structure" (the humanly produced social contexts and configurations that enable and constrain action), "culture" (cultural motivations, resources, and meanings), and "agency" (meaningful human action) are mutually constitutive (Bourdieu, 1979/ 1984; Giddens, 1984; Sewell, 1992). Each one is dependent on the others, and together they form the fundamental and inexorably intertwined elements of the social world. I proceed under the assumption that structure, culture, and agency form the scaffolding on which history and societies are built, even though their content, form, coherence, and relative influence on action vary by context.

The intention of this article is much more modest than modeling the relationship between these conceptual behemoths. I take the above propositions as theoretical priors, which allow me to focus on and explicate the specific connections between culture and action in concrete social contexts.[3] In doing so I demonstrate that existing debates can be resolved, or at least advanced, by reintegrating the insights of early sociologists like Max Weber who observed that culture works differently in different times and places, and argued that it is the job of social scientists to understand how (Weber, 1946). My goal is to shift the focus from the either-or logic that places different understandings of culture as competing models of reality, back to a more holistic view that charts when and how each model provides insight into the operations of the social world.[4]

In order to advance this goal, I proceed as follows: In section I, I briefly discuss three common models of culture's influence on action, as well as a few of the best attempts to reconcile them. In section II, I provide a reframing and theoretical synthesis that forms the outline of a context-dependent theory of culture in action. In section III, I use empirical examples from other scholars, as well as data from my recent ethnographic work examining health behaviors among the aged, to illustrate how these mechanisms operate in various real world settings. Finally, in section IV, I provide a brief conclusion summarizing the key components and utility of a context-dependent model of culture in action for theories of the social world and future empirical research.

I. REFRAMING MODELS OF CULTURE

Culture as Inputs: Motivations, Values, and the Desired Ends of Action

In one tradition of cultural theorizing, ***culture affects human action by providing the ends people value and pursue***. In this frame, culture furnishes *intuitions* (Vaisey, 2009), *orientations* towards the world (Bourdieu, 1979/1984; Geertz, 1977/2000), or *values* (Weber, 1946). These aspects of culture, related to desired ends of action, are often grouped together under the category of *motivations* (Vaisey, 2009). Although they vary in non-trivial ways, each provides an attribution of what is worth noticing and worth pursuing in the world and more generally what is good or bad, desirable or undesirable. These attributions affect or determine how individuals act. In this frame, culture assumes "causal autonomy" by influencing "what people want" (Vaisey, 2010).

In order to build a context-dependent model of action, it is necessary to expand the scope of what is considered an attribution. For this purpose, I introduce the concept of a cultural *input* to refer to those aspects of culture that determine the valued ends of action. I do not enter this term into the already crowded vocabulary of cultural theory haphazardly. Rather, there is an essential (if subtle) distinction to maintain. The term *motivation* seemingly emphasizes the impetus to act. The term *input* is deliberately more inclusive. It refers to a wider set of attributions that point action towards particular ends on the bio-social, subconscious, and conscious levels. While the function of *inputs* may be most pronounced in determining the motivational force for specific behaviors, an *input* functions through the complete sequence of actions while still pointing towards a preferred end or outcome.[5]

Early proponents of this strand of cultural theorizing, such as Max Weber (1946) and Talcott Parsons (1937), argued that culture should be seen as coherent systems of values. More recent theorists have argued that culture should be understood in part as looser amalgams of socially inculcated moods, motivations, dispositions, or cognitive orientations that point people towards particular ends,

often without conscious reflection (Bourdieu, 1979/1984; Geertz, 1977/2000; Vaisey, 2009). Any viable theory linking culture to action requires some system of inputs in order to understand why individuals favor some paths rather than others. This is particularly important when we seek to understand the divergent choices that seemingly similar individuals make in seemingly similar circumstances with similar resources. Understanding *inputs* is also essential for understanding complex maters of "taste." Theories that place culture as a set of *inputs* provide the necessary theoretical components for making this initial link to action. On average, cultural inputs have the strongest discernable effect on action within a social strata.

Culture as Resources: Skills, Justifications, and the Capacity to Act

There is a second model of culture that has become increasingly salient during the past three decades. Proponents of this viewpoint argue that culture should not be seen only as the attitudes, beliefs, or values "in people's heads," but rather as a set of collectively available *resources* such as the skills and justifications that people deploy in their daily lives in the pursuit of various ends (Swidler, 1986, 2001). Culture here is fundamentally a form of social currency (Bourdieu, 1979/1984) or a *toolkit* (Swidler, 1986, 2001), which like other forms of wealth and privilege, is distributed unequally across different populations in stratified societies (Bourdieu, 1979/1984; Swidler, 2001). In this model ***culture affects action by enabling and constraining an individual's capacity to act and consequently determining which actions are plausible***. Lacking access to the appropriate cultural tools to achieve particular goals affects potential actions and outcomes irrespective of what people want or notice in the world. The manner in which people use cultural resources depends on their socially patterned capacities to pursue particular "strategies of action," or general ways of connecting actions together over time. In this viewpoint, culture most often "has an independent causal role because it shapes the capacities from which such strategies of action are constructed," (Swidler, 1986: 277) rather than providing orienting motivations (Geertz, 1977/2000) or values (Parsons, 1951).

Models that place culture as resources provide key advances for our attempts to theorize the link between culture and action. First, these models show how cultural meanings and actions can be strategically deployed by people even if they do not believe in them (Swidler, 1986, 2001), allowing us to set aside the empirically implausible assumption of totalizing coherent "Cultures"(e.g. Geertz, 1977/2000).[6] Second, these models show that cultural coherence can result from consistencies in the dilemmas people face, rather than from formal internal logics (Swidler, 2001). Third, this perspective also suggests the ways in which people can use organizing cultural principles to construct specific strategies of action that they pursue in response to the institutional dilemmas they face in daily life (Swidler,

2001). These contributions are key for understanding why people continuously say and do contradictory things. Finally, these models place cultural knowledge and adeptness as an individual parameter, the distribution of which is the result of, and a key element in, the reproduction of stratified social systems (Bourdieu, 1979/1984). On average cultural resources provide the strongest link to action and outcomes when looking across social strata.

Culture as Meanings: Collective Representations, the Construction, and Interpretation of Action

A third understanding of culture is often employed by the scholars that champion motivation and resource models of culture (Swidler, 2001; Vaisey, 2009), but is also occasionally treated as a model in its own right (Alexander & Smith, 1993; Durkheim, 1893/1984; Geertz, 1977/2000). According to this perspective, cultural *meanings* provide the raw symbolic materials for human action and social systems. These inter-subjective meanings, schemas, and collective representations make social and physical realities intelligible, allow groups to cohere, and undergird the actions that lead to the formation of persistent social structures (Alexander & Smith, 1993; Cohen, 1974; Durkheim, 1893/1984; DiMaggio, 1997; Eliasoph & Lichterman, 2003; Searle, 1995; Sewell, 1992; Taylor, 1985). ***In other words, meanings influence action by providing the essential background for communication, other aspects of culture, and complex human action, as well as the social structures built upon such action*** (Durkheim, 1893/1984; Sewell, 1992; Taylor, 1985). While they provide the raw material for the social inputs, toolkits, and the schemas that underlie human behavior and the social systems they form, ***meanings can also influence action more directly by determining how actors' behaviors are interpreted by others*** (Derné, 1994; Eliasoph & Lichterman, 2003; Swidler, 2001). How a behavior is understood or "read" by others, and the likely response, determines the plausibility of that behavior (Derné, 1994; Swidler, 2001). Meanings and the collective representations they form vary in levels of cohesion and abstraction as they are organized into the cognitive and linguistic frames that filter our experience of the world (Cicourel, 1973; Goffman, 1972), the general frameworks and discourses that describe action (Ferree & Merrill, 2000; Derné, 1994), and normative ideologies (Oliver & Johnston, 2000; Ferree & Merrill, 2000). On average, meanings have the greatest direct influence on action when codified and sanctioned.

The Problems with Using Motivations, Resources, and Meanings as Standalone Models of Culture

Existing standalone models that use cultural *motivations*, *resources*, or *meanings* to link culture to action suffer from significant shortcomings. The various models that fall

under the umbrella category of *motivations* are problematic. In its worst forms, conceptualizations of cultural *values* not only point people towards notions of what is worth pursuing, but place societal attributions as an immutable driving force, describe people as cultural dupes who internalize and act out scripts, and cast behavior as pre-determined rather than agentic (Swidler, 1986). Further, scholars have correctly suggested that explanations using values to link culture to action cannot explain many of the outcomes they purport to, since what people want is often epiphenomenal in explaining how they act (Lamont & Small, 2008; Swidler, 1986; Valentine, 1967). Later models of culture as a set of more cognitively focused *inputs*, many of which focus on unarticulated dispositions and orientations (e.g. Bourdieu's understanding of habitus), are often so tightly wound up with pre-existing social structures and the patterns of practical activity they organize that they lose any causal power. Culture comes to function only as a mechanism through which existing social systems reproduce themselves and the role of objective agency is elusive (Sewell, 1992). Many of these issues can be addressed by acknowledging and integrating cultural resources into our theories linking culture to action.

In response to the limitations of motivational models of culture (and specifically value oriented theories), notions of culture as *resources* and *toolkits* have risen to prominence in disciplines such as sociology and anthropology (Alexander & Smith, 1993; Gans, 1992; Ortner, 1984). However, models of cultural resources have their own shortcomings. While "cultural tools" and persistent "strategies of action" furnish ways of negotiating social settings beset with institutional dilemmas and inequalities, it is unclear when and how people's wants, desires, and motivations come to matter. In Swidler's (2001) work for instance, life experience is said to affect the desires and goals of actors, but it is unclear what roles these desires play in behavioral patterns. In the end, people seemingly pursue the strategies for which they are best equipped (Vaisey, 2008a, 2010). People can clearly make choices rather than following pre-ordained cultural scripts, which is a key theoretical advance. However, without a theory of positive and negative attributions (i.e. *inputs*), what orients actors towards one choice rather than another remains under-theorized or is reduced to an improbable behaviorist story (Vaisey, 2008a). People simply choose what they are conditioned/tooled to choose. Empirically, these models have trouble explaining why individuals, culturally equipped for multiple goals, pursue some but not others (Sánchez-Jankowski, 2008; Vaisey, 2010). Even the implementation of a "rational choice" model does not solve this shortcoming, since the idea that actors are maximizing utility is meaningless unless that utility has some social, psychological, or biological content (Laitin, 1986). These shortcomings can be remedied by bringing a system of *inputs* back into the toolkit model of culture (see also Vaisey, 2009, 2010).

Similarly, the shared meanings perspective has shortcomings as a standalone model linking culture to action. While collective meanings enable and constrain action in general and abstract ways, such as framing the realm of the conceivable, theories of culture's influence on action need other theoretical elements like *inputs*

or *toolkits* to explain a host of concrete behaviors and outcomes. Further, meanings are often cast as formal and a-situational, which misses the importance of concrete social settings and shared "group styles" that filter the interpretation and reading of meanings in interaction (Eliasoph & Lichterman, 2003). The relationship between meanings and structure (in the sociological rather than linguistic sense) needs to be fleshed out.[7] Finally, except in highly codified cases that integrate other elements of culture (e.g. the operation of institutionally backed laws), the causal power of *meanings* remains murky. These issues can be addressed by re-incorporating cultural *inputs* and *resources*, along with *meanings*, into a context-dependent model of culture in action, a task to which I return in section II of this article.

Multifaceted Models of Culture

A number of theorists have tried to integrate cultural motivations, resources, and meanings into a more holistic model of culture's influence on action (e.g. Bourdieu, 1979/1984; Geertz, 1977/2000; Laitin, 1986; Swidler, 2001; Vaisey, 2009). Still, the debates in cultural theory have largely focused on determining (either implicitly or explicitly) which single element of culture provides the *strongest* link to action. For instance, Swidler (2001) argues that *inputs*, such as values, "come into play as important guides to action," but in the link between culture and action they are causally dwarfed by the cultural resources that affect which strategies of action people can ultimately pursue. The available cultural equipment people possess is the primary determinant of how they can act in a given context. Motivations are present but are a weaker determinant of outcomes. On the other hand, Vaisey (2009) argues that a key autonomous link between culture and action resides in the "practical consciousness," which furnishes unarticulated subconscious motivations. Cultural resources matter, but are rarified as the justifications people use to explain and validate their actions. The constraining power of culture, as unequally distributed resources and practical strategies that delimit potential lines of action, is downplayed in favor of recognizing the inputs that motivate and direct action towards particular ends.[8]

In each of these cases it is not that the other elements of culture do not matter, but rather which element matters *more* for action is a relative constant. They miss some of the nuanced ways in which culture's impact on action is a function of specific social settings (Eliasoph & Lichterman, 2003) and wider socio-historical contexts (Swidler, 2001). In their 2008 exchange, Swidler and Vaisey both acknowledge that "what people want" and "what they are able to do" matter in explaining how culture links to action (Swidler, 2008; Vaisey, 2008b). However, neither offers a developed model of the contexts under which particular elements of culture might matter more for action and outcomes. Eliasoph and Lichterman's (2003) work makes key advances in linking culture and context by showing how collective meanings are conditioned on social context and filtered through shared

group styles that influence interpretations (Eliasoph & Lichterman, 2003). Still, they do not provide a theory of the types of social contexts which determine when and how particular aspects of culture form the strongest link to action.

While the multifaceted theories of culture referenced above significantly advanced longstanding debates by trying to integrate multiple understandings of culture, *they underestimate the ways cultural motivations, resources, and meanings can each have a powerful causal influence on action under specific sets of structural circumstances.* In other words, context matters for understanding how culture functions (Eliasoph & Lichterman, 2003), and for identifying when each element provides the most powerful link to action (Swidler, 2001).[9] This article provides a preliminary model of the contexts that determine when and how each element of culture matters. I argue that how culture affects action and outcomes in a particular set of circumstances is ultimately an empirical question, and the available evidence suggests that *cultural motivations, resources*, and *meanings* can all influence action and outcomes under certain conditions. This is why scholars have fruitfully used cultural *motivations* (Vaisey, 2009), *resources* (Dohan, 2003; Lareau, 2003; Swidler, 2001), and *meanings* (Derné, 1994; Laitin, 1986) to explain divergent human actions in real world settings. The next section connects these cultural elements to one another, and relates them to the contexts under which each powerfully influences action.

II. A CONTEXT-DEPENDENT MODEL OF CULTURE IN ACTION: LINKING MEANINGS, INPUTS, AND TOOLKITS

In this section, I return to the primary task of this article: to interconnect the three elements of culture in a fruitful way and suggest how and under which conditions each is most likely to have the strongest influence on action. I offer a reframing and synthesis of the facets of culture and their interrelations. I use this synthesis as the starting point for section III, where I examine how the sublevels of each element of culture operate in concrete contexts.

Reframing

I have argued that culture has three intertwined and complementary elements: motivations, resources, and meanings. These elements need to be understood as essential components of larger social systems that consist of mutually constitutive cultural elements, persistent social and institutional relations (structures), and meaningful human action (agency). Although these three elements of culture are all operative in any given set of social interactions, which element of culture is most likely to have the strongest effect on action and outcomes, and how, is a function of social context. The existing data suggest that elements of context—including but not limited to levels of social stability, inequality, and institutional involvement—affect when and how particular

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cultural elements are more likely to influence action than others. I synthesize the general relationship between cultural elements, context, and action below.

Synthesis

Shared cultural meanings provide the underlying foundation for other elements of culture. They affect action by providing the raw material necessary for communication, cultural resources, cultural inputs, and social structures. They are also instrumental in influencing the ways in which specific actions are interpreted. Cultural meanings vary in cohesion and specificity. They can be grouped into three broad levels. The first level encompasses basic categories, semantics and semiotic systems, which make signification, communication, and consequently meaningful human action possible. The second level encompasses publicly available discourses, tropes, and frames. People draw on these to understand their lives, secure outcomes, or justify behaviors. In some circumstances, when particular frameworks are deeply resonant with lived experiences, they can become internalized as a type of conscious input (a discursive input) that posits the desired ends of action. The third level encompasses the specific subset of discourses and categories that are strongly codified and institutionally backed. These limit the possible actions that people can pursue. They do so by providing the privileged frameworks through which actions are interpreted by others. Sanctions enforced by social groups and organizations reward or punish particular lines of action in light of these codes. When these frameworks form a normative and relatively coherent conglomeration of ideas, they can function as an ideology. On average, shared meanings have the strongest direct influence on action and outcomes when they are highly codified and institutionally backed, as well as in unsettled times and other circumstances where signification and representation assume heightened importance.

Cultural motivations, values, and orientations can be thought of as cultural inputs. These inputs influence action by providing the ends people value and pursue. All inputs function by directing or orienting the actions of individuals, although the distribution of these inputs is in part a function of the arrangement of social structures, contexts, and inequalities. Inputs provide attributions about aspects of the world. These attributions include things such as notions of what is good or bad, what is worth pursuing or worthless, and what is right or wrong. They direct people's attention to particular points of interest in the world and consciously or subconsciously identify preferred ends. Like meanings, inputs operate on various levels. These levels can be classified by degrees of cohesion and formal linguistic articulation. First, inputs operate on the level of evolutionarily significant bio-social drives, although these are not determinative and can be tempered or morphed by social factors. Next are largely subconscious social-psychological inputs such as motivations, intuitions, or orientations. These point people towards pursuing or noticing particular goals or courses of action, but do so without requiring much reflection. Finally, there is a smaller set of discursive inputs. These are consciously available and articulated, but are still deeply internalized notions of what is worth pursuing. While these inputs can be more easily reflected on and examined by the individuals who hold them, their use is often un-reflective. Discursive inputs come closest to approximating classical notions of values. Inputs result in part from the actor's patterned activity over the life course. Consequently they both orient and change with individual's experiences of the world. In general, cultural inputs have the strongest influence on action within a social strata, when differences in structural position and cultural resources between people or the organizations with which they interact are

small, when ideologies are widely shared within and between groups, in cases of moral dilemmas that do not allow much time for conscious reflection, and in issues of "taste."

Although cultural inputs direct people towards particular ends and points of interest in the world, material and cultural resources influence if and how they get there. Cultural resources affect action by enabling and constraining the actor's capacity to act. The cultural tools people possess consist of deployable practices, justificatory frames, and longitudinal strategies for linking actions together. People can draw on and deploy frames, even those they do not believe in, to make sense of a situation, to communicate with other actors, or to justify their actions. They typically do so in response to shared structural dilemmas (persistent and concrete social problems requiring choices to be made by actors). That is to say people in similar circumstances often contend with similar problems and consequently develop shared tools for managing them. The fact that these problems extend beyond any given individual accounts for some of the coherence in the way individuals use culture. The cultural tools people have at their disposal also affect which persistent strategies of action they can pursue in response to the structural circumstances that define their social context. Their cultural capacities, chosen strategies, and skills (like other resources deployed in interaction) affect the likelihood of securing a desired outcome from people or organizations. Cultural practices, which may cohere to greater or lesser extents around these groupings, can affect social psychological factors and meanings, leading to the inculcation of new inputs at a later time. On average, resources have the greatest influence over action across social strata, when resources in a social system are unequally distributed and inequality is high, as well as in institutional settings that differentially validate particular tools, styles, and strategies.

Institutions by definition embody certain sets of meanings and validate particular forms of cultural skills. The skills validated by institutions and organizations, as well as the particular frameworks that they codify and support, can limit the potential actions and longitudinal strategies of people. This is often the case when the skills and tools of a group of people do not line up with those of the institutions with which they are interacting. Which actions are ultimately successful, and whether or not ends are reached, depends on the interaction between people and structures. Various resources, including cultural ones, mediate this interaction. The aggregate result of these interactions forms the foundation of social structures.

These persistent social structures, and their corresponding systems of micro and macro level stratification, have a large effect on the cultural meanings, resources, and inputs available to particular individuals and groups. Cultural resources, like economic ones, are ultimately unequally distributed among subgroups in stratified societies. Likewise, different meanings are available and legitimated in different local contexts. In the end though, while social structures are durable, they can never be totalizing since they are ultimately produced and reproduced by the actions of individuals and social groups (though not all actions have equal effect).

In the next section, I discuss the sublevels of each element of culture (inputs, resources, and meanings), clarify their roles in a context-dependent model of culture in action, explain how they come to change over time, and illustrate the contexts under which each most strongly influences action. In order to make the link to real world social settings more concrete, I provide illustrations of the ways in which these mechanisms operate in eight different contexts, using examples

from both my own research on health behaviors and the empirical works of other scholars.[10]

The Influence of Cultural Inputs on Action

Any adequate theory of culture's influence on action needs to include a system of socially available inputs that orient people towards what is worth noticing and pursuing in the world. Although preferred ends need not be determinative, coherent, or easily articulated in the way the early theorists of values suggested, theories of culture need to account for which ends are seen as worthy pursuits, even after accounting for which ends people are culturally better equipped or positioned to pursue (Vaisey, 2008a). It is possible that these inputs form moral intuitions that are subconscious and difficult to articulate (Vaisey, 2009), but still influence behavior by pointing people towards some actions rather than others. Failure to account for inputs in some form results in a rational choice story with an undefined utility function, or behavioral determinism, both of which are empirically inadequate models of culture's influence on human behavior (Vaisey, 2008a).

Inputs differ from meanings and tools in that they are necessarily directional. That is to say they operate less by delimiting possible action trajectories, and more by pointing people towards desired ends. They determine "what people want" (Vaisey, 2010). Inputs can be best understood as having three levels that vary along the lines of cohesion and formal linguistic articulation. At the most basic level there are drives, some of which are likely biological. Human animals have certain predispositions to secure their survival, find food and shelter, and engage in social activity (Marx, 1932/1978). These drives are in no way determinative, and can be and often are subservient to other social factors. Still they provide bio-social inputs that influence action, even when these inputs are not gratified or are ultimately directed to other ends (Freud, 1930/ 1989).

Moving up a level in formal articulation are social-psychological inputs such as moral intuitions. Although often difficult to articulate, moral orientations toward "autonomy," "community," or "divinity" may point actors to pursue certain behaviors rather than others (Vaisey, 2009). Likewise the durable dispositions of the habitus can point people towards practical understandings of what is good or bad in art or food, as well as in life generally, even if these dispositions are taken for granted or difficult to articulate (Bourdieu, 1979/1984).

Conscious discursive inputs are generally more easily articulated by actors. Cultural orientations and models for the world (Geertz, 1977/2000) can be, and often are, believed and internalized. Swidler (2001), one of the most well known critics of the culture as inputs perspective, acknowledges that some individuals use

consciously articulated ideological frames as a central part of their decision making process. In this case, these coherent ideologies should be seen as conscious but comparatively unreflective inputs that orient people towards one course of action rather than another. They form an important conglomeration of normative understandings about the world (Ferree & Merrill, 2000; Oliver & Johnston, 2000). Discursive inputs are conscious because the actor is aware of their presence and content. They are often unreflective because they may seem uniquely true given the individual's life experiences in the material and symbolic world (Abramson & Modzelewski, 2011; Geertz, 1977/2000). Discursive inputs can include religious and political ideals as well as other metaphysical visions, such as a godless world inhabited by self-interested rational calculating individuals. In each case, ideologies form around a "commonsense" worldview that seems uniquely true. Ideology is not just a neutral frame that determines what people notice but also a normative impetus to pursue some actions rather than others (Ferree & Merrill, 2000; Oliver & Johnston, 2000; Vaisey, 2010). While operative, discursive inputs can become deeply felt motivations to action, unlike the various discourses that can be invoked ambivalently (Ferree & Merrill, 2000).

Culture in all its facets is dynamic and changes over time, since it both influences and depends upon the actions of people.[11] Each level of cultural inputs changes at different rates. The fundamental biological inputs conceivably change as the biological needs of the species change. Bio-cognitive processes that enable and direct key aspects of human interaction may evolve over time, but they are likely to do so slowly compared to other more articulated inputs (Cicourel, 2006; Tomasello, 1999). Social psychological inputs can change over shorter periods of time. As the practical activities and contexts people participate in change, it is likely that the content of their perceptions and motivations will change as well. Rather than dispositions simply determining actions, patterns of daily life can inculcate or change dispositions (Bourdieu, 1979/1984), modifying the actor's cultural-cognitive radar (Cicourel, 2011). Likewise, the combination of new patterns of life with the introduction and transposition of new cultural frameworks that may fit those patterns better can lead prevalent un-reflexive commonsense frames, discourses, and ideologies to be questioned, modified, adopted, or abandoned. While new ideologies are most likely to be deployed uncertainly at first, those that resonate with experience may eventually come to be seen as objectively true and subjectively meaningful (Geertz, 1977/2000). Under these circumstances, the modified input carries emotional weight and thus may become internalized (Ferree & Merrill, 2000). The creative use of cultural elements by people can change structures (Sewell, 1992, 1996), but in each of these cases structural changes can also affect the function and context of culture as well.

The question of when culture as a set of inputs can have the greatest influence on action is tricky, since inputs, like meanings and toolkits, are always operating on some level. In general, cultural inputs are most likely to have their strongest and most visible link to action when looking within a social strata, in cases of moral

dilemmas, and in social interactions organized by "taste." Below, I use empirical works to show when and how inputs influence action in various contexts.

CONTEXT 1: Cultural inputs can lead otherwise demographically similar individuals who occupy similar social contexts to pursue divergent courses of action. Vaisey's (2009) work provides a powerful example of the effect of divergent inputs on adolescents. He demonstrates that those with "community-oriented" motivations exhibited different behaviors with regard to issues, such as drug use, than those with "individualist-oriented" motivations even after controlling for race, gender, age, and class differences. Similarly, in his ten-year comparative ethnographic study of five poor neighborhoods, Sánchez-Jankowski (2008) shows that observable "value-orientations" have a profound effect on the actions of otherwise demographically similar individuals. While the term "value-orientation" may be off-putting to contemporary scholars of culture, Sánchez-Jankowski employs expansive observational data to show how the orientations that pointed individuals towards "maximizing security" or "maximizing excitement" produced substantial behavioral differences in a variety of settings, ranging from interactions at school to membership in gangs.[12] In each of these cases, the influence of inputs on action is amplified because structural position and consequently cultural repertoires are already partially taken into account. Examining cultural inputs, particularly within the realm of poverty and social stratification is politically out of favor in the academy, as this element of culture is often erroneously recast as blaming the victim (Vaisey, 2010). Still, the fact remains that a vast body of empirical literature demonstrates that inputs influence action (see Vaisey, 2010 for a discussion), particularly within a social strata.

CONTEXT 2: Cultural inputs affect action when choices are understood as matters of "taste" by the social group in question. Sociologists have often argued the deployment of "taste" can be used to justify and fortify social boundaries (Bourdieu, 1979/1984). This has historically been the case in movements of "moral entrepreneurship," in which elites consciously and strategically sought to classify what qualified as "high art" or "literature" in order to reinforce distinctions and protect their privileged class positions (Beisel, 1992; DiMaggio, 1982a, 1982b). Still, when taste functions as an input, it is often used much less reflexively. The choice between similarly priced Rothko ("high art") and Scarface ("popular media") posters by an undergraduate student is more likely to be conditioned by an un-reflexive aesthetic than strategic concerns and moral entrepreneurship (perhaps art history students and aspiring gangsters being the exceptions). These sorts of issues of "taste" are likely conditioned by the comparatively un-reflexive "practical consciousness" (Vaisey, 2009) or habitus (Bourdieu, 1979/1984, 1990). However, the appraisal of the object in question by others, and the corresponding consequences for social-stratification, are conditioned and reinforced through practical activity and institutional validation (Bourdieu, 1979/1984).

People often un-reflexively pursue what they like, driven by their socially patterned cultural inputs (Bourdieu, 1979/1984; Vaisey, 2009). However, social institutions such as museums, hospitals, and schools privilege and validate certain patterned preferences and tastes over others (Bourdieu, 1979/1984). The school does not equally validate the styles of the poor and middle classes (Lareau, 2003; Sánchez-Jankowski, 2008), and the workplace does not equally validate the imputed gendered characteristics of women and men (England & Folbre, 2002). Consequently, the appraisal of an individual's tastes influences the way others view and treat her or him. In my work on health behaviors, I continually find people's patterned preferences for particular types of foods, drinks, or drugs developed over the life course, play a large and often un-reflexive role in everyday behaviors. However, when these individuals interact with medical institutions such as hospitals, these choices come to signify elements of morality to the institutional representative. Certain patterns of consumption, particularly those associated with life in a subordinate social position, are seen as markers signifying a lack of willpower, a lack of concern over health, or other negative moral attributes. Consequently the representatives of the institution are less likely to provide help for those "unwilling to help themselves." (Abramson, forthcoming)[13]

CONTEXT 3: Cultural inputs have a powerful effect on action or non-action when a conscious ideology is widely shared. Often ideologies function in ways that reproduce existing social structures. When members of subordinate groups internalize the interests of the dominant group, social systems are more likely to be reproduced (Gramsci, 1971/2005; Laitin, 1986). The widespread belief in meritocracy and unfettered mobility in America obscures the persistent structured inequalities that define its social context (Abramson & Modzelewski, 2011; Fischer et al., 1996). On the other hand, when a group of people shares an ideology that runs counter to particular structures and enjoys the support and resources to affect action, ideology can provide a unifying input that allows social movements to cohere and pursue a shared goal. Armstrong (2002) shows the institutional adoption of a generalized "gay identity" was key to the emergence of homosexuals as a modern political force, at least in specific regions such as the San Francisco Bay Area. Although the adoption of a unifying identity downplayed inequalities and schisms within the movement, the unified logic was a key force associated with social change. Here conscious inputs drive action by furnishing the normative understandings that lead individuals and groups to pursue particular goals rather than others, and construct lines of action accordingly.

CONTEXT 4: Inputs influence action in cases of immediate moral dilemmas or other situations where there is little time for reflection. Choices such as whether a parent runs into a burning building to save his or her child and whether or not a soldier covers a hand grenade with his or her body to protect a squad (Blake, 1978; Riemer, 1998)

are likely governed by ingrained inputs and "practical consciousness" rather than reasoning, strategy, and discourse (Hauser et al., 2007). This is not to suggest that training and practical activity do not matter in both the production of tools and the inculcation of inputs. In fact, everyday activity is key in determining the content of inputs, as experiences influence our cognitive process and models of the world (Bourdieu, 1979/1984, 1990). However, when life, limb, or personhood is at stake and there is little time for calculative reflection, cultural inputs exert a strong influence over action. A large body of literature shows that ingrained patterns of moral cognition surmount introspection in a wide array of settings requiring immediate action (Haidt, 2001; Vaisey, 2009). Having specified the various levels of cultural inputs and having demonstrated how they can influence action, I now turn my focus to cultural resources.

The Influence of Cultural Resources on Action

Any contemporary theory of culture needs to account for the importance of cultural toolkits, repertoires, and strategies. While inputs point people towards particular ends, toolkits, repertoires, and strategies influence if and how they get there. People have differential access to various cultural skills, framing strategies, and justifications that form their repertoire of cultural resources. An individual's cultural toolkit "describes and helps constitute the personal capacities and resources the actor will use as she follows her path" (Swidler, 2001: 132). Actors can deploy these resources in their pursuit of a variety of goals, such as attempting to comprehend their lives, explain and justify a course of action they have taken, or secure a desired institutional outcome (e.g. seeing a doctor quickly in an emergency room or getting a job). Cultural resources affect actions by providing the basic material with which lines of action are constructed, organized, and chained together over time. Available resources influence what people are good at and what they can plausibly pursue. They acquire coherence because they are used to respond to a shared set of structural and institutional dilemmas (Swidler, 2001).

Like tastes, deployable cultural tools are differentially validated across different institutional settings (Bourdieu, 1979/1984; Swidler, 2001). As such, they often become key to the reproduction of stratified social systems. As institutional contexts and levels of social stability change, people collectively adapt to their new circumstances, and the tools and strategies available to actors also change (Swidler, 1986, 2001). While tools and repertoires may function differently in settled versus unsettled social settings (Swidler, 1986, 2001), on average they tend to have the greatest impact on action in highly stratified systems and in institutional settings. They are most visible when looking at behavior across a social strata. Below, I use empirical works to suggest how resources influence action in various contexts.

CONTEXT 5: Cultural toolkits and strategies have a powerful impact on action when cultural resources between groups vary, even if the groups desire the same ends or value the same things. For instance, in his comparative ethnographic study of Mexican immigrants and Chicano Americans living in poverty, Daniel Dohan (2003) looks at how various forms of cultural tools and strategies affect the way different groups interact with labor markets. Both groups reside in a milieu of material scarcity and have the same desired ends: to secure money (even if that money will be put to different uses). Still, there are marked differences in the cultural resources available to the two groups, including available strategies of self-presentation and language. These resources, combined with other forms of human capital (e.g. access to different types of bounded community networks), determine with which markets people can connect, their rate of success, and the particular strategies of action that they can pursue to accumulate income within them (e.g. overwork for low pay as a day laborer, hustling, or selling drugs) (Dohan, 2003).[14] This effect is magnified when the inequality plays out via formal institutional settings.

CONTEXT 6: Cultural skills and toolkits generally have a powerful effect on action even after accounting for cultural inputs when dealing with institutional settings. Organizations such as schools, business enterprises, hospitals, and government bureaucracies privilege particular cultural capacities, orientations, skills, framings, and communication styles over others. The form and content of the cultural tools that are privileged are typically those possessed by the dominant groups. The ability to deploy these tools and repertoires functions as a form of "cultural capital," which increases the chance of successfully interacting with these institutions (Bourdieu, 1979/1984).[15] Like tastes, cultural capital often legitimates existing structural inequalities. Cultural skills, such as the ability to score well on college admissions test, have become codified and read as objective criteria for distinction between people (Bourdieu, 1979/1984; Fischer et al., 1996). Often, the class-based criteria are pitched and understood by members of the organization and the public as measures of ability, ultimately reinforcing the illusion of meritocracy (Fischer et al., 1996). The cultural tools deployed by a person in a given context can have a powerful effect on outcomes. Lareau's (2003) work shows how the cultural mismatch between poor and working class families, and the reigning middle-class ethos embodied in the school, provides middle class children with a marked advantage in securing desired outcomes such as grades. Since their cultural capital allows them to get more out of their education as well, their cultural advantage will likely increase over the life course.

Likewise, in my ethnographic work examining the way seniors from different race and class groupings manage the health dilemmas of the aging body, I find that even when elders desire the same things (e.g. getting conventional treatment for an illness; preventing institutionalization), the repertoire of cultural skills that mediate their ability to navigate different types of institutional settings affects their

chosen lines of action. Issues such as limited language capacity, trouble dealing with bureaucracy, and difficulty interacting with care providers, often lead poor seniors to delay seeking care or going to an emergency room, even if they would be eligible for seeing a primary care physician under Medicare. Middle class seniors tend to be much more adept at navigating these institutions and are more likely to secure the desired outcome by strategically framing ailments and consciously navigating bureaucratic structures using their available cultural resources (Abramson, forthcoming). I now turn my focus to the levels of cultural meanings and the ways in which they influence action.

The Influence of Cultural Meanings on Action

Shared meanings provide the raw material for cultural inputs and toolkits. Meanings and the shared representations they form need to be understood in terms of levels of cohesion and specificity.

On the most basic level, shared meanings provide the public semantic and semiotic systems that make meaningful communication and action possible (Geertz, 1977/2000; Taylor, 1985). People need a system of signification (i.e. language) to communicate and understand each other and in order to form the complex social institutions that are simultaneously based in both ideas and collaborative action (Searle, 1995). It is impossible to have contracts, markets, marriages, or rituals without a set of shared understandings that are known to and acknowledged by the social groups involved (Durkheim, 1893/1984). Further, shared meanings provide the background material for the "commonsense" models through which individuals can comprehend the social and physical world (Geertz, 1977/2000). This is true even if all members of a society do not use these models uniformly (Swidler, 2001).

Second, in its more coherent and articulated forms, shared meanings encompass a set of shared representations which are publicly available to members of social groups as tropes, discourses, and framings. People draw on these to make sense of their world and to justify their actions to others (Collier, 1997; Derné, 1994; Swidler, 2001). Individuals vary in how they do this, often along pre-existing axes of social distinction (Swidler, 2001). These understandings can affect individuals without being believed or internalized since they come to form the cultural tools that individuals can deploy in a variety of settings to obtain a variety of ends (Swidler, 2001). Adeptly deploying the appropriate frame or discourse for a given setting (Ferree & Merrill, 2000; Oliver & Johnston, 2000; Swidler, 2001), offering the privileged understanding of an art object (Bourdieu, 1979/1984), or invoking a valued presentation style in an interaction (Goffman, 1959) are all cultural skills that can affect outcomes without demanding belief. Still, when particular frames or ideologies resonate as uniquely true and meaningful they can and do come to function as inputs that direct action towards particular ends (Abramson & Modzelewski, 2011; Geertz, 1977/2000).

In its more codified forms, shared understandings furnish the categories through which action is understood and interpreted (Collier, 1997; Derné, 1994; Foucault, 1980; Swidler, 2001). Although only a small subset of available discourses and frames are strongly codified, deviation from these codes (in behavior or framing) may carry a wide range of sanctions. They influence action by providing the dominant or normative understandings of an act or acts, which will determine how an individual's behavior will be interpreted (and perhaps responded to) by others. This phenomenon operates regardless of that individual's intent (Collier, 1997; Derné, 1994; Foucault, 1988; Swidler, 2001). Action will likely be interpreted within the dominant framework for the setting and must be justified accordingly. In instances of breaches, actors often face institutional sanctions ranging from a cold stare to incarceration (Derné, 1994).

Discourses which are shared, codified, and backed by institutional sanction, whether internalized or not, can directly affect the plausibility of certain types of action. The notions that modern people's actions reflect their desires (Collier, 1997), that men who have sex with men and women who have sex with women constitute a category called "homosexuals" (Foucault, 1980), or that people should put family before their own amorous wants (Derné, 1994), all operate as dominant models or frameworks through which people interpret the actions of others. Whether internalized by the acting person or not, both deviation from expected patterns and failure to frame actions in particular ways can lead to serious consequences (Derné, 1994; Swidler, 2001). Under these circumstances, meanings can take on a coercive force and are likely to have a strong influence on action.

As Eliasoph and Lichterman (2003) remind us, the function and interpretation of collective representations are ultimately a function of the specific social contexts in which social interaction takes place, and the associated group styles that filter meanings. Likewise, the frames that orient people towards noticing particular aspects of their world are not simply neutral amalgams of interconnected categories, but cognitive links (Cicourel, 1973) influenced by the normative understandings and shared ideologies associated with a particular setting (Ferree & Merrill, 2000, Oliver & Johnston, 2000). That is to say, while meanings provide much of the raw material necessary for cultural tools and inputs, inputs and the practical activities associated with the deployment of tools feed back into the larger system (Bourdieu, 1990).

Shared meanings and the collective representations they form change over time, but their change is rarely simultaneous with the change in structures. Each level changes at different rates. Basic semantic systems and foundational meanings change slowly, but evolve with use and disuse. This is seen in the comparatively slow, but noticeable, evolution of languages. The available discourses, tropes and frames in a given arena change faster. "New" framings can be introduced into novel settings as people transpose existing meanings from one sphere of life into

another (Sewell, 1992, 1996), often in response to new practical problems (Swidler, 2001). This can be seen in the way the logic underlying instrumental rationality (Weber, 1930/2001) or market based models of behavior (Hochschild, 2003) creep into myriad spheres of daily life. The power of codified frames and discourses, however, can change even more quickly. What is institutionally sanctioned as legitimate can change over night with the passage of a law. Generally though, the loose amalgam of shared meanings, ideas, discourses, and frames tends to last longer than the structures to which they are initially tied. When the social structures to which meanings, tropes, and codes are bound wither away, their cultural foundations tend to atrophy with disuse (Durkheim, 1895/1982). Although a key component of shared meanings is their ability to serve as the foundation for other aspects of culture and structures, they can provide a strong link to action in their own right. Below, I discuss a few contexts in which this link is pronounced, and explain how it functions.

CONTEXT 7: When meanings are highly codified and backed by institutional sanctions, they have a powerful effect on how individual actions are perceived (e.g. criminal/heroic) and on the consequential institutional or group reaction to their actions (e.g. incarceration/ accolade). Codified meanings influence action by affecting people's assessment of the probable results of their actions, and consequently the types of action people are willing to pursue. This is not to say codes are determinative, as people can choose not to abide by them, but they do so at a cost. These costs and the evaluation a person makes of them, given the available choices, influence how that person acts (Swidler, 2001).

For instance, Derné (1994) shows how the normative framework that places "family" before "romantic love" limits the way that men living in India can justify their amorous behaviors. Even when Derné's subjects believed in Western notions of love and courtship, their ability/inability to explain their actions to elders and others with material power over them limited their potential strategies for approaching dating and marriage. In such cases of high codification and institutional involvement, the inability to justify actions in accordance with the normative framework would result in concrete sanctions (Derné, 1994). In other words, how action was read and interpreted by others limited the potential courses of action available to individuals.

Likewise, in from *From Duty to Desire*, Collier (1997) shows a similar process. Based in diachronic ethnographic work conducted in the same Spanish village in the 1960's and 1980's, Collier's work shows how the shifting interpretations of the modern self constrained a host of behaviors, particularly practices around courtship and families. How individual actions were understood by others (i.e. as the result of social "duty" or internal "desires"), affected the way the villagers' behaviors were interpreted, and consequently the types of action they could justify and pursue. This dynamic operated independently of specific individuals' underlying motivations (which were much more variable).

CONTEXT 8: The specific symbols individuals deploy in their speech, clothing, and selection of symbolic products (e.g. art) in a given setting create an association between the actor and the larger systems of social categories. This effect is magnified in periods of rapid social change or instability. Since being in one category rather than another (e.g. revolutionary or loyalist) can make the difference between life and death, the shared meanings to which people attach themselves through public signification can have a powerful effect on action and outcomes (Sewell, 1996; Swidler, 2001). Wearing the colors of a losing faction during a time of social upheaval can provide a swift trip to the guillotine, a nuance that is not lost in the calculations of actors (Sewell, 1996). Irrespective of an individual's motivation for wearing a particular symbol, how that symbol is read in social contexts (e.g. the middle of a revolutionary crowd) will have an effect on outcomes.

This mechanism can operate in comparatively stable times as well. This often plays out in the evaluation of subgroup membership and status, or other realms where the category in which one is placed (and the underlying often moral implications of this category) influences potential courses of action. Here the social value of subgroups, subcultures, and their associated modes of signification and status can affect the way individuals are treated and the options available to them (Bourdieu, 1979/1984; Hebdige, 1981; Thornton, 1996). In these social sub-groupings there is often a heightened level of instability, not in the sense of widespread upheaval, but rather in the shifting social allocation of status or prestige (Abramson & Modzelewski, 2011). This mechanism operates irrespective of the specific meaning a given individual attaches to a symbol. Once again, the power of culture over action derives from the way others read the symbol (which in turn is a function of the concrete contexts and group styles that determine that reading) (Eliasoph & Lichterman, 2003; Swidler, 2001). The public display of symbols affects action by determining how actions are read and where member-ship is signified. Abramson and Modzelewski's (2011) work on the world of middle class cage-fighters shows how having the body and presentation style of a fighter, was positively associated with status-honor among cage-fighters even when their skill level was comparable. Here, how signifying elements of the body are read influences the allocation of prestige and outcomes even after accounting for the intentions, strategies, and capacities of the actor.

Table 1 below summarizes when and how various elements of culture influence action and outcomes in concrete social contexts.

IV. CONCLUSION

In this article, I have argued that there are three constituent elements of culture: *inputs*, *resources*, and *meanings*. While previous scholars have often framed these elements as opposing theories of "what culture is" and how it affects action, I have argued that they are necessarily intertwined. Each provides a necessary

Table 1. "When" and "How" Elements of Culture Link to Action

Element of Culture	Link to action (How)	Contexts Providing the Strongest Links to Action (When)
Cultural Motivations/Inputs *(e.g. intuitions, values, orientations)*	**"What people want"** Providing the ends actors value and pursue	■ **Within a social strata** ■ In issues of taste ■ When there is little time for reflection ■ When ideologies are widely shared
Cultural Resources *(e.g. toolkits, strategies, justifications)*	**"Tools for achieving ends"** Enabling and constraining the actor's capacity to act	■ **Across social strata** ■ When inequality is high ■ In organizational settings
Cultural Meanings *(e.g. understandings, categories, codes)*	**"How actions are read"** Influencing the interpretation of actions Providing the raw material for communication, other elements of culture, human action, and social structure	■ **When highly codified** ■ **When institutionally backed** ■ In unsettled times

piece of the theoretical puzzle linking culture to action but is not sufficient as a standalone answer. Although all three elements are operating at a given time, which element of culture is likely to have the strongest effect on action in a given set of circumstances is a function of social context. I charted the specific contexts in which each element of culture strongly influences action. I argued that on average, *motivations* have the most discernable link to action within a social strata, *cultural resources* provide the strongest link across strata, and *meanings* have the greatest direct influence when codified and sanctioned. I then used empirical examples drawn from eight different contexts to illustrate when and how each element of culture influences action. In doing so, I address the call for "a more systematic analysis of contexts" and how they structure culture (Swidler, 2001, p. 187).

Although un-parsimonious, the context-dependent model of culture in action I outline in this article has a number of significant advantages over current approaches. First, while it identifies a general set of relations between cultural elements, it posits that the element affecting action should be understood as a function of circumstance. This function should be based upon, and re-evaluated in light of, empirically grounded evidence rather than a priori theoretical assumptions. This focus on contingency, emphasized by Max Weber in his classic work on world religions, consistently proves its worth in empirical research. Still, it is too often neglected as social science valorizes the search for universal solutions

(e.g. a model that is dominant across all contexts) (Weber, 1946; see also Eliasoph & Lichterman, 2003; Swidler, 2001). Second, this theoretical synthesis lends well to new testable propositions, particularly in the hypothesized links between cultural elements, context, behavior, and outcomes. While the contexts and mechanisms I provide are based on existing data, they should be rigorously examined to determine their validity and generalizability. Third, this work attempts to overcome persistent theoretical dichotomies by taking some of the best previous attempts at modeling culture and fusing their most useful features into an integrated whole.

Finally, the context-dependent model of culture I espouse in this article aims to move the longstanding sociological concern with socio-historic contingency at the forefront of cultural models (Swidler, 2001; Weber, 1946). It is my contention that by doing so, we can gain insight into why researchers in numerous social science disciplines have been able to find fruitful and convincing linkages between cultural motivations, resources, meanings, and action in diverse social contexts. The resolution I offer is not meant to be a solution to philosophical problems that have been around for nearly as long as culture. Rather, it provides a different vantage point from which social scientists can more systematically examine the relationship between culture, action, and outcomes. In a field as complex and varied as cultural theory, simply changing the perspective from which we approach theoretical problems can be a significant advance. By offering an alternative to "either-or" logics, and by shifting the emphasis to "when and how," this article moves us towards this goal.

I will conclude around a point of personal "motivation." I offer the theoretical syntheses and illustrations above with the earnest hope of sharpening the social scientist's toolkit, or at the least producing constructive dialogue that will aid this goal. The ultimate purpose, however, is to help advance empirical inquiries that relate to the concerns of people, including (and perhaps especially) those who have no interest in abstract theories of social action. As Emile Durkheim poignantly noted in the preface to the *Division of Labor in Society*, "if we distinguish carefully between theoretical and practical problems it is not in order to neglect the latter category. On the contrary, it is in order to put ourselves in a position where we can better resolve them" (1893/1984: xxvi).

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NOTES

[1] I use the term "action" to indicate the volitional behaviors that individuals engage in within particular social contexts. I use the term "outcome" to refer to the end result of specific interactions with other individuals, organizations, and groups, with respect to particular sets of "intent" or "goals."

[2] I do not intend to imply that these are the sole elements of context that matter in determining the influence of culture on action and outcomes. I selected these aspects because they have appeared repeatedly in the empirical literature, and thus provide a good starting point for examining the effects of culture. A discussion of all the contextual parameters that influence culture is outside the scope of this article.

[3] I do not mean to imply that this relationship is beyond debate, simply that this debate is beyond the scope of this article.

[4] In this respect, the goal of this article is similar to that of Sewell's (1992) attempt to reconcile seemingly competing notions of "structure." My task is a related attempt to unpack, clarify, and explain the meanings, motivations, and strategies subsumed within Sewell's "schemas."

[5] Even in the most extreme rational choice models favored by economists, some aspect of human culture (e.g. the desire to accumulate wealth) provides the content of "utility" in the utility-maximization function. In this sense, culture is literally an input into the equation meant to describe human action.

[6] My point here is not to de-problematize the concepts of strategy, instrumental rationality, or maximization, which, as Weber (1930/2001) reminds us, ultimately rely upon and reflect particular cultural-historical contexts.

[7] See Sewell (1992, 1996) for a good attempt.

[8] In contrast, Bourdieu (1979/1984, 1990) addresses the power of both cultural inputs and resources. However, in the end these become so tightly bound to the structural elements of stratified societies and their reproduction, that they lose independent causal power, while obfuscating the possibilities for objective agency and social change (Sewell, 1992).

[9] In the conclusion to *Talk of Love*, Swidler (2001) correctly notes that this is one of the most important unanswered questions in cultural theory.

[10] It has been suggested that this article would benefit rhetorically from a unifying example, rather than the array of applications given in this section. While this is an appealing proposition, a unified example draws away from the fundamental focus on contingency that is at the core of this model. By employing diverse examples, I aim to show the various ways in which each aspect of culture can influence action and outcomes under different contexts.

[11] This cultural dualism mirrors Giddens' (1984) notions about the duality of structure.

[12] Sánchez-Jankowski (2008) also found that cultural toolkits had an effect on action, but this impact is more likely to be pronounced when the cultural resources between individuals vary. This work touches on a key contention of this paper, that both cultural toolkits and inputs can affect action, but the context in which each has causal influence varies.

[13] Ironically, in this instance taste as a cultural input has an element of "blaming the victim," although the mechanism is very different from that posited by those who criticize "cultural" explanations of social phenomenon. Here the perpetrator of blame is not the social-scientist who acknowledges the importance of directional cultural inputs, but the institutional actors and scholars that try to ignore its role in behavior, while simultaneously imposing their own normative assumptions about "what [all] people want."

[14] Whether similarly equipped individuals pursued the same strategy becomes an issue of inputs (see Sánchez-Jankowski, 2008).

[15] Success here includes both the securing of outcomes, such as getting a degree at a top tier university, as well as expanding the cultural toolkit for later use. "Cultural capital" facilitates this second task by allowing those who possess greater amounts of the cultural skills that line up with the institution (e.g. study skills, facility in abstracting from texts) to pick up and add more new material to their repertoire (Bourdieu, 1979/1984; Swidler, 2001).

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