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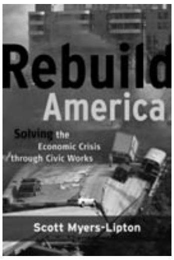

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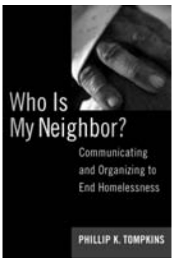

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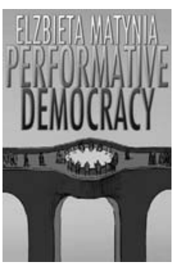

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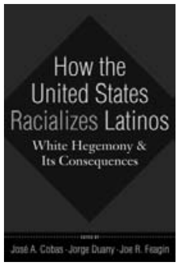

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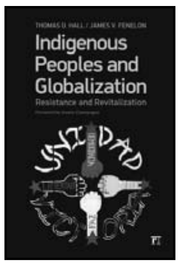

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North Central Sociological Association 2009 Ruth and John Useem Plenary Address:* Education for Democracy in Peirce, James, Dewey, and Mead

*Irving M. Zeitlin***
University of Toronto

C. Wright Mills frequently referred to the "classical tradition of sociological thinking" as the intellectual foundation of the social sciences. He recognized, however, that though the classical thinkers understood the social and political structure of whole societies quite well, they had comparatively little to say about how the actual processes by which forms of *social consciousness* emerge. He therefore recognized the urgent need for a *social psychology* grounded in sound principles. Those principles, in his judgment and in mine, were best formulated by the American pragmatists: Charles Sanders Peirce, William James, John Dewey, and George Herbert Mead.

It was Charles Sanders Peirce who founded the American philosophical movement called "pragmatism" from the Greek word *pragma*, meaning action, practice, practical. He introduced the term in his first published article titled, "How to Make Our Ideas Clear." Somewhat later, John Dewey proposed that the aim of a good democratic education is to create a questioning individual. So our primary aim is to explore the means by which we can achieve clarity in our ideas and educate ourselves and our students toward the ideal of critical and self-critical thinking. Peirce himself suggested that another appropriate name for his pragmatic approach is "critical commonsensism," so don't be surprised if the things I have to say are commonsensical.

He begins his brilliant investigation with the concept of "beliefs," which, he says, are really rules for *action*. Our beliefs are *belief-habits*. And like all habits, some have good consequences for oneself and for others, while other habits have the opposite effect. That is why our mothers urged us to learn good habits and break the bad ones. "Habit" and "consequences" are, therefore, key concepts for the pragmatists. However, long before Peirce coined the term *pragmatism,* the pragmatic approach was evident in the classical tradition of social and political thought.

Aristotle, for example, recognized that we are not born with virtues. Nature endows us with the capacity to learn the virtues and to know how to strengthen the

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virtues by means of habit. How do we become good or virtuous? There is only one way, says Aristotle. We become morally virtuous by forming the good habit of *acting* rightly. Aristotle demonstrated that we acquire and perfect the virtues by actually *practicing* them. We become just by *doing* just acts; we become temperate by doing temperate acts; brave by doing brave acts. It is by acting in dangerous situations and forming the habit either of confidence or of fear that we become courageous or cowardly. In a word, our moral virtues are formed in close correspondence with our patterns of action or conduct.

Habit, conduct, and consequences are, therefore, directly relevant to the project of becoming questioning individuals ourselves and helping our students to become clear thinkers about the human condition. As Aristotle suggests, it may be a part of our nature to ask challenging questions, as exemplified in the conduct of young children who quite naturally ask: "Why?" "How come?"

Regrettably, however, although it is characteristic of children to ask good questions and to see attempts to deceive them for what they are—as did the child who recognized that the emperor had no clothes—something soon happens in too many cases that inhibits and even squelches the child's natural impulse to ask challenging questions. By the way, "impulse," as we shall see, is another key concept for the pragmatists.

What is it that inhibits, weakens, or even represses the child's impulse to ask good questions prompted by reflection? The best term for the inhibiting factor is, I think, *ideological indoctrination*. Certain ideas as dogmas or articles of faith are inculcated, which the child is taught never to question, even though such ideas are contrary to the child's best interest and contrary to the interests of the group to which the child belongs.

Most often the inculcated ideology tends to divide the human species against itself in numerous ways, and even in numerous murderous ways—religiously, ethnically, racially, nationally, and in terms of social class. As ideological indoctrination proceeds, thinking declines and finally leaves off. So we have to ask whether and how we, as teachers and scholars, can at least partially immunize ourselves against indoctrination, which is so pervasive and powerful a factor in our lives. To address this question adequately, we have to clarify what we mean by *ideology.*

The concept of ideology may be defined on a continuum ranging all the way from *self-deceit* at one pole, to the outright and deliberate *telling of lies* at the other. Immunizing ourselves against ideological indoctrination requires *objectivity* in the sense that both Max Weber and the pragmatists demanded it from teachers and scholars. As C. Wright Mills once said, "I try to become objective, but I do not claim to be detached." Mills thus recognized that one can try to be objective without detaching oneself from morally sound righteous causes, such as defending the weak and poor against the rich and strong.

How can we adopt an objective attitude? For it *is* a matter of an attitude of a morally dutiful kind. Joan Robinson, who was John Maynard Keynes's most distinguished student, once remarked that ideology is like "breath": we are most often aware of someone else's but not our own. Our "breath" for Robinson, refers to what

Peirce calls our *belief-habits*, which we have long taken for granted to be true and which we hold steadfastly.

It follows that our first obligation as teachers and scholars is to become aware of our own "breath," for that is the only way we can hope to rid ourselves of our *bad* breath—rid ourselves, that is, of our fallacious belief-habits. Indeed, it is our moral duty to do so in our respective callings. For as Max Weber averred in his famous lecture, "Wissenschaft als Beruf," our chief responsibility is to pursue truth and knowledge.

We are not, of course, Olympian gods enthroned above it all; we are not somehow *epistemologically* privileged. Peirce insists that in principle there is no epistemological gulf between the scientist's method of knowing and that of every man and every woman in everyday life. But we can consciously and deliberately adopt an objective attitude and make it a morally dutiful *habit*. In this respect, the pragmatists are in full agreement with Max Weber.

The pragmatic method of Peirce and others includes an implicit, *moral* criterion by which to evaluate and judge beliefs, opinions, and theories. A good way to illustrate this point is with a true story about Alexis de Tocqueville, the renowned author of *Democracy in America* and *The Old Regime and the French Revolution*. Visiting America in the 1830s, and observing the racial divide and the servile condition of African Americans, he predicted in his *Democracy in America* that if ever America were to experience a violent civil war, it would certainly be the consequence of slavery.

Tocqueville later entered into a lengthy correspondence with his friend Count Arthur de Gobineau, who was hard at work on his multivolume study *Essay on the Inequality of the Human Races*. Gobineau profoundly influenced H. Stewart Chamberlain who eventually became Hitler's darling authority on Aryan and non-Aryan races. Gobineau's volumes were a reaction against the democratic-egalitarian ideals of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution—against *The Declaration of the Rights of Man* and *The Code Napoleon.*

After a debate with Gobineau that went on for years, Tocqueville apparently tired of it; and in his final letter he wrote to the following effect: Mon Cher Ami, as you know, I have consistently questioned the so-called scientific basis of your theories. But I must tell you that even if it were somehow shown that your theory is supported by the science of anthropology, *I still would reject it because I cannot think of any good that could come of it*. Hence, Tocqueville rejected Gobineau's claims on both *pragmatic* and *moral* grounds: he could not think of any good *consequences* that could follow from Gobineau's racial theory, if it were applied politically and put into practice. "Races," even as late as the 1950s, when I studied anthropology, were considered to be ontologically real.

MARX'S ANTICIPATION OF THE PRAGMATIC METHOD

As you probably know, the young Marx wrote eleven theses on Feuerbach, in which he, Marx, anticipated the essence of the pragmatic method. In thesis number two, he wrote: "The question whether *objective* truth can be attributed to human thinking is not a question of theory, but is a *practical* question. Man [i.e., humanity] must prove the truth, i.e., the reality and power, the this-sidedness of his thinking in *practice*. The dispute over the reality or nonreality of thinking that is isolated from practice is a purely *scholastic* question." And in number eight, Marx wrote: "All social life is essentially *practical*. All mysteries which lead theory to *mysticism* find their rational solution in *human practice*, and in the comprehension of this practice." And, finally, in the eleventh thesis: "The philosophers have only *interpreted* the world in various ways; [but] the point is to change it." For Marx, the eleventh thesis was not only intended as an injunction to revolutionary action but also as an epistemological principle. For it is only by acting upon the world and struggling to overcome the conditions that oppress or thwart us that we can truly comprehend those conditions and hope to change them.

BACK TO C. S. PEIRCE

Peirce, like Marx, proposed that if you and I are having a dispute and can't say what difference it would make—in terms of consequences—if you or I were right, we are wasting our time. The pragmatic method can be applied to every human endeavor. As applied to history, for example, the method would employ thought-experiments, including counterfactuals. Since Weber fully converges with Peirce and others in this respect, I shall cite Weber's well-known example, namely the Battle of Marathon—the war between Persia and Greece in which Greece was victorious. So Weber asks this counterfactual question: What if Persia had won? The political regime of Persia at the time was what Montesquieu called "Oriental or Asian despotism," a regime in which all power was concentrated in the hands of the ruler. Egypt under the pharaohs may be considered as the archetypal form of Asian despotism. The counterfactual in this example enables us to ask what the probable consequences would have been had Persia won the Battle of Marathon. For Weber, the most probable answer is that the victory of Persian despotism would have meant the destruction of Athenian democracy. In the absence of such counterfactuals, the historian is merely providing a narrative devoid of causal and consequential significance. Counterfactuals of this kind help us assess the causal weight of events and individuals. What if, for example, a brick had fallen on Napoleon's head while he was still a corporal? On Lenin's head before he reentered Russia at the Finland Station? And so on.

In order to understand Peirce and the other pragmatists adequately, we have to realize that they were profoundly influenced by the epoch-making contribution of Immanuel Kant and his repudiation of empiricism—the notion that all valid knowledge comes from sensory experience. The chief problem the empiricists faced was where do *objects of thought* come from and what is their epistemological status? When John Locke, for example, addressed the question of how we arrive at concepts like "infinity" and "eternity," he said we arrive at "infinity" by adding space to space to space, and so on; and we arrive at "eternity" by adding time, to time, to time. But, of course, one could do that till doomsday, so to speak, and still have only *finite* entities. And David Hume, the sharpest of the empiricists, in his discussion of the billiard balls, asserted that all that the naked eye sees is one ball moving and then the second ball moving which, he claimed, was a purely sensory experience. What happens next, he said, is that we add concepts from our imagination, such as cause and effect, and say that the cue-ball has caused the second ball to move (see Zeitlin 2001: 46–55).

Kant's reply to Hume—whom he nevertheless respected as the greatest of the empiricists—was that the *mind* or *imagination adds nothing* to the sensory experience. To speak that way is mechanistic and false. The mind, by its very nature, *interprets*, and *interpreting* means that we naturally employ *concepts* to understand anything at all. All precepts are naturally accompanied by concepts. In Kant's reply to Locke about *space* and *time* and how we arrive at concepts like *infinity* and *eternity,* Kant introduced his highly original theory of the a priories. Space and time are a priories; which is to say that space and time are essential elements of the categorical apparatus we call mind. The mind, by its very nature, organizes and interprets all experience in terms of space and time. It follows, according to Kant, that no human arrives at "infinity" or "eternity" by adding space to space or time to time. We arrive at such concepts by naturally *grasping* and *interpreting* them.

Kant's new theory had a revolutionary impact on philosophy, soon producing a neo-Kantian movement, which included Max Weber and his *Verstehensociologie*, his interpretive method that insisted interpretation has to be adequate at two levels: at the level of *meaning* and *motives*, and at the level of *causality*, recognizing that in humans *meanings* and *motives* are, indeed, *causes* with definite *consequences*. Hence, nothing can be understood without the right concepts. There is, then, the unavoidable mediation of concepts in all forms of attempting to know, understand, or explain anything at all. This means that there is an unavoidably *subjective* element in all forms of knowing: we cannot, therefore, know the "thing in itself" independently of mediating concepts; we can only come to know *phenomena* as we experience and interpret them. Peirce agreed with the neo-Kantians in that regard.

CONCEPTS AS ANALYTICAL TOOLS

Under the profound influence of Kant, and like Peirce's contemporary neo-Kantians such as Weber, the American pragmatists recognized that the practical significance of concepts is that they are analytical tools. All of these thinkers accepted Kant's epoch-making epistemological contribution to the effect that we cannot understand anything without the mediation of the appropriate conceptual tools. Moreover, for Peirce and others this method can be applied to love, honor, morality, and more. If it is true, as I believe it is, that most people in the world prefer life over death, health over sickness, freedom over slavery, material well-being over deprivation, it follows that all theory and practice *ought* to conduce to the preferred results.

THE ROLE OF DOUBT IN THE PRAGMATIC METHOD

How long do we hold on to our *belief-habits*? Peirce asks; his answer is that we do so only so long as they are not contradicted by experience. When that happens, *doubt* sets in. And when doubt sets in, we are forced to stop and think, to begin inquiry anew, in order to restore the flow of action toward our goal. The renewed inquiry requires clear conceptual thinking.

For Plato, the forms or ideas existed ontologically, as real subsistent entities above the gods. For Peirce as for Aristotle before him, the so-called forms were simply *universals of discourse*, general concepts not "things." The universals are, however, *real* because they have causal efficacy in our application of them. This means, as we shall see in James, Dewey, and Mead, that *mind* and *consciousness* are *real,* though we cannot locate them in our anatomy. This brings us to William James.

William James

James and the other American pragmatists recognized that concepts or *objects of thought* are consequentially *real*, though they do not exist in the ontological sense. Later, we shall see that the behaviorists, as positivist empiricists, refuse to speak of "mind," "consciousness," "will," and "autonomy" because they are *not* objects of sensory experience. But James, and others, recognized the *reality* of "mentality," defined as the pursuit of *ends* by the choice of *means*. So when we speak of "mind" in humans, it can be defined as *the presence of significant symbols in action*—just as you and I are using our minds at this moment. The brain and nervous-system are necessary preconditions of mentality, but not sufficient. The brain does not produce ideas in the way our other organs produce bile and urine. When I, as a young student, asked my dad what "mind" is, he replied "no matter," and when I asked what "matter" is, he replied "never mind." The point is that "matter" is also an *object of thought*, a concept no less abstract than "mind." When is the last time you saw "matter"?

Earlier we said that "habit" is a key pragmatic concept. What is habit? For William James it is a *learned, noninstinctual pattern formed so we can contend with reality*. Habit simplifies and makes our required actions most *efficient*—as in our daily hygiene or as in the technique required to play a musical instrument. Habit, in this sense—as in brushing our teeth or shaving—reduces the need for *conscious* attention to our acts. In contrast, *nonhabitual* action requires *consciousness, perception*, and *will* throughout—as when we play chess or try to solve a complex mathematical problem. We must, says James, make automatic and habitual, as early in life as possible, as many *useful* actions as we can, so that habitual actions become second nature or "ten times nature," in his words.

Stream of Consciousness

Stream of consciousness is the chief idea for which James is justly famous. For an understanding of this concept, we need to go back to the pre-Socratic philosopher, Heraclitus. He was the one who said one can never step into the same river twice. Why not? Because it is in a state of constant flux—which became Heraclitus's metaphor for the nature of the entire universe, in a state of constant flux. Consciousness is like Heraclitus's river: a continuous stream with no breaches, cracks, or divisions. What is it that gives the process unity? The answer is only one's self! How do we acquire a self-concept? There is only one way, and that is by internalizing the attitude of the other. The *self* is the active, creative, organizer of all consciousness, emanating from one's *will*! It is the core!

John Dewey

For Dewey, too, "consciousness" or a cognitive capacity is real! It emerged through "natural selection" owing to the enhanced adaptability it contributed to animals and humans. Dewey and Mead are best understood by knowing what they were arguing against. The first was the school called "instinctualism," according to which humans and animals are driven by an *innate biological mechanism that informs the individual how to act in a specific situation*, a definition that was provided by no less a personage than Konrad Lorenz. But Dewey explains cogently why there is no such thing as instinct in humans, and perhaps not even in certain mammalian animals. The point is that virtually everything is *learned*. We come into the world with a capacity for learning what is necessary for successful adaptation.

There was a time in the history of psychology when the list of so-called human instincts was almost endless. But under the influence of the pragmatists, it soon became clear that the notion of instinct as applied to humans was quite misleading. In Dewey's time, the view prevailed that we are impelled into action by instincts. For Dewey, however, the instinctualist doctrine was misleading even as applied to animals. Lions, when raised in captivity, grow up incapable of hunting. If they are returned to their usual natural habitat, they find themselves unable to provide for their own livelihood. Although the natural *potential* for hunting is present in the lion, he or she must undergo a definite training and acquire experience in order for the potentiality to develop effectively. Wolves, like lions, also have to *learn* how to hunt. If after being raised in captivity they are returned to the wild, they will observe caribou with only casual interest; even when they are hungry it never occurs to them that the caribou are potential prey. Dewey therefore rejects the instinctual doctrine and, like William James, proposes that the word *impulse* be used instead to refer to the biologically rooted factor that prompts certain actions in animals and humans.

To further clarify what Dewey and G. H. Mead meant by the term *impulse* we need to address the question whether there is in humans any such thing as, say, a "sexual instinct," which tells the individual how to act in a specific situation. In animals, the endocrine and generative systems of a *mature*, female mammal go through an estrous cycle, which makes copulation possible in definite periods. That is the rutting season in deer, for example, when the female is in "heat," leading to sexual excitement in the male deer.

In humans, there is no estrous cycle. There are, of course, certain neurophysiological organs and processes that make it possible for mature humans to engage in sexual activities. But no human being has the ability to perform sexually before *learning* how to do so in some social context. Dewey and Mead make a similar argument about the following presumed "instincts": self-preservation, the so-called maternal instinct, and the instinct for aggression. If there really were such instincts, there would be no suicide, mothers wouldn't abuse and even kill their children in some circumstances, and Quakers and Mennonites would be unable to become pacifists who prefer to turn the other cheek in the face of aggression. What humans *do have* are *impulses*, on which they may or may not act. Where sex, for example, is concerned, humans possess erotic impulses, which may be directed to the opposite sex, the same sex, toward animals, toward themselves (autoeroticism), and toward fetishes.

The second school against which Dewey and Mead direct their cogent criticisms is behaviorism, the movement founded by J. B. Watson, under the influence of Pavlov. The behaviorists were and are positivists and empiricists who propose that *all* learning is the product of stimulus-response conditioning. As empiricists, who believe that all valid knowledge is the result of *sensory* experience, they refuse to talk about *consciousness*, *will*, or *autonomy*. For B. F. Skinner, talking about "consciousness" or "mind" is like talking about ghosts and spirits. In his book, *Beyond Freedom and Dignity*, he says humans do not seek freedom, they merely seek to avoid *aversive* stimuli. Watson and Skinner thereby fail to recognize the active, creative side of humans and animals. When I used to walk my German Shepherd in the park, he always chased the squirrels there, but never succeeded in catching one, the reason being that the squirrel possesses *consciousness*, *will*, and *autonomy*; enough consciousness or *cognitive capacity* to recognize a potential enemy; enough *will* to want to avoid the consequences of an encounter with my dog, and enough *autonomy* to succeed in avoiding those consequences. Moreover, there is a fundamental theoretical or philosophical contradiction in the behaviorists' doctrine: if all learning is due to conditioning, as they claim, who will condition the conditioners? And in accordance with what values? And what gives them the right, as strict empiricists, to speak of *values*, which are *objects of thought*, not objects of sense?

The third school Dewey and Mead are arguing against they call idealism, as represented by Wilhelm Wundt, a well-known psychologist of the time. The "idealists" proposed that we come into the world with "mind." But, of course, that is not true. We come into the world with a capacity for the development of "mind," which can emerge in humans in only one way, and that is by means of *symbolic* communication.

Hence, the concepts of "impulse" and "habit" enable Dewey to separate himself from all three schools—the instinctualists, the behaviorists, and the idealists. This brings us more directly to G. H. Mead who extends and refines the pragmatic method.

George Herbert Mead

Mead agrees fully with his predecessors and adds several valid new insights. He deliberately employs the language of behaviorism to expose its defects. In his book, *Mind, Self and Society,* based on the lecture notes of his former students, he reminds us, as did Peirce, James, and Dewey, that there are aspects of human interaction that are mediated by little or no thought and which, therefore, resemble the interaction of animals. In

Mead's famous illustration of a dog fight, each dog's gesture is a stimulus for the other's response, which in turn becomes a new stimulus. They are engaged in what Mead calls a "conversation of gestures," though the gestures are not *significant* ones, for they carry no meaning. The dogs interact with each other by anticipating the action of the other *reflexively*. In humans, similarly, two boxers or fencers respond to each other's gestures *reflexively*, without deliberation. It appears that animals, for the most part, remain at this level of interaction: *conversation of nonsignificant gestures*. In humans, in contrast, this constitutes a relatively small proportion of our total interactions. A man can strike another without intending to do so or recoil from something before he knows why. But he can also shake his fist in anger, displaying a deliberately hostile attitude. In that case, there is an *idea* behind his gesture. When, therefore, a gesture carries with it a specific *meaning* and arouses in the other individual the same idea it arouses in the first, Mead says, "we have a significant symbol." That is what we commonly mean by "language" or communication by means of symbols. Among meaningful gestures the *vocal* ones are the most important for daily communication. A conversation of significant gestures thus requires that one *take the attitude of the other toward one's own gestures*.

It is precisely by means of significant gestures or *symbols* that *thinking* takes place. What is "thinking" if not an internal conversation like the conversations we carry on externally with others! No human being can think without symbols of one kind or another. Therefore, Mead agrees that "mind" is neither more nor less than the *presence in conduct of significant symbols*. For Mead, therefore, the "stuff" of mind is its *symbolic content* and the characteristically distinctive means of human communication is *language,* or *universals of discourse*. Language is learned not through instinct but by grasping the meanings of symbols or words that cannot be learned by means of the mechanistic behaviorist notion of stimulus and response. The parrot can only repeat. He or she cannot speak. You can't come home to your parrot and ask whether Polly wants a cracker and expect a pertinent reply such as: "No, thank you!"

Mead thus elaborates Peirce's original definition of *language as conventional and arbitrary*. Peirce had recognized that the meanings of words in any language need to be *interpreted*. Only a comparatively few words in any language are onomatopoeic; and onomatopoeic words alone could never produce a language. Peirce, therefore, presented a coherently pragmatic theory of signs and symbols, involving three elements: *a symbol*, *an object (of sense or of thought)*, *and an interpretation*. If the speaker knows how others habitually interpret a symbol, it can be used to cause a specific effect in the interpreter: for example, if I say to my guests that my wooden stairs leading from the first to the second floor have a loose plank, I want them to exercise caution in ascending and descending those stairs.

Mead now addresses directly the behaviorists' notion of stimulus-response. He brilliantly demonstrates that neither humans nor animals simply respond to stimuli. We and they *constitute* our stimuli, which means that we *select* out of the "blooming, buzzing confusion" (James' phrase) *only such objects as are relevant to our interests or needs*. Hence, we *constitute* or, in a sense, create and select the objects and stimuli of our experience.

It follows for Mead that human actions are never strictly determined by past events or causes. Our goals and expectations concerning the future are active, causal determinants of our actions. That brings us to Mead's concepts of the *I* and the *me*.

Mead brilliantly analyzes the component aspects of the *self*. The "I" is associated with spontaneity, novelty, freedom, and initiative, which means that we can never become wholly passive objects. Mead thus converges with Marx's first thesis on Feuerbach, where Marx stated that the chief defect of all materialisms, including that of Feuerbach, is that they treat human beings as if they are passive objects, thus overlooking the *active*, *creative* side, which was discovered by the philosophical idealists—such as Kant. Mead thus agrees with Marx's criticism of a rigid, one-sided determinism like behaviorism. And since Mead and his predecessors were profoundly influenced by Kant and other philosophical idealists such as Hegel, the pragmatists recognize that we are naturally *active and creative*. Where does the creativity come from? It comes from what Mead calls the "biologic I," which is the source of our *impulses*, such as the erotic impulse, and similar to Freud's libido. The "me" refers to the conventional side of the self, which guides the "biologic I" in accordance with the social rules. The "biologic I" is also parallel to Freud's "pleasure principle," the source of the fun and delight so evident both in children at play and in love-making generally.

It follows from Mead's critique of behaviorism and other one-sided determinisms that the *stage of the act* differs from the stages proposed by behaviorism. For Mead, the first stage of the act is certainly *not* an external stimulus. The first stage for Mead is the *impulse*, an *internal* factor. In animals there are only three stages: *impulse*, *perception,* and *consummation*: a hungry animal feels an impulse to find food. It is the *impulse* that impels it to act. The impulse determines what will *stand out* in the environment as a stimulus to guide the developing action. A carnivorous animal, for example, approaches the stimulus-object, clawing, biting, and downing it; finally eating it and consummating the act with the satisfaction of the original impulse. In humans, however, there is an additional stage in the social act—*manipulation*—which involves *reflection*. In humans, impulse is illuminated by reason, and action takes place in a world of *meaning*. Thus, in humans, the stages of the social act are: *impulse, perception, manipulation,* and *consummation*.

Theory and knowledge, then, from Mead's pragmatic standpoint, involve the process of active discovery that enables us to solve problems and overcome the obstacles thwarting our action. If we are able to resume acting, more or less realizing our purposes, our knowledge has proved itself adequate and practicable. This kind of knowledge, Mead maintains, is the only kind that justifies our confidence in it. We search in the past in order to better understand the present problematic world. And the only test we have of whether we understand it or not, is our ability to *change* the conditions that have stymied us. What Mead says here is equivalent to Marx's eleventh thesis on Feuerbach. The goal of theory or reflective thinking, whether in science, in everyday life or in historiography, is, therefore, *practical*. That is the heart of the American pragmatist epistemology.

More on Mead's Pragmatic Epistemology

We need to say a few more words on this subject to illustrate further Mead's brilliance. A good illustration of Mead's pragmatic epistemology pertains to the stage of *manipulation* in the human social act. The traditional philosophical dichotomy between "secondary qualities," such as color, sound, odor, and the like as "subjective," and "primary qualities," such as extension, occupation of space, motion, and so forth as "objective," is a false one for Mead. What the philosophers have called "secondary qualities" are simply the character that objects have in *distance* experience, while the "primary qualities" are the character they have in *contact* experience. Both depend on the relation of the individual to the object concerned.

Mead therefore regards John Locke's distinction between so-called primary and secondary qualities as uncritical, rightly insisting that neither is more objective than the other, since neither is independent of the active, sentient, observing, knowing individual. For Mead, however, it is pragmatically understandable why the distinction has been made: the association of *subjectivity* with *distance* experience, and *objectivity* with *contact* experience, is "natural" because we tend to test the reality of what affects us from a distance "by coming into contact with it." As we *touch* and *feel* the object, it retains its color, sound, odor, and the like. And with further handling it "crumbles," analytically speaking, until we reach its ultimate elements, particles of energy "so minute that they cannot subtend a light vibration." In that way, science creates the hypothetically ultimate elements of material reality, translating into abstract mathematical models an *assumed* contact experience in which distance experience disappears or becomes impossible. Hence, this scientific theory of nature and material reality has its experiential basis in everyday life—in the fact that the *hand* naturally breaks things up into parts that can be rolled between the thumb and finger; as when a farmer picks up a clod of earth and crumbles it to learn whether it has enough moisture for planting. It is then, at the "manipulatory" stage of the act that the crumbling by the hand suggests the concept of the "atom," a particle that cannot be split and made smaller. Perhaps that is the way Democritus originally conceived of the "atom." Mead thus stresses the uniquely human mode of practical action in which the *hand* mediates human interaction with nature and with other humans. In the evolution of the human species, Mead underscores the interdependence of practical experience mediated by the *hand*, and the emergence and development of *speech*, *consciousness*, and *self-consciousness*. "Speech and the *hand* [says Mead] go along together in the development of the social human being" (1934 [1962]:237).

Mead's recognition of the role of the *hand* was anticipated in an essay by Frederick Engels titled, "The Part Played by Labor in the Transition from Ape to Man." Engels recognized that the human being's faculties evolved "only side by side with the development of the human *hand* itself through the medium of labor." The concept of "labor" here is what the pragmatists mean by "practice"; it refers to the practical activities of the protohumans who *became* humans in the course of interacting with nature and cooperating with one another.

Hegel's Influence on the Pragmatists

It was not only Kant but also Hegel who had a profound influence on the pragmatists, most notably on Mead. Indeed, Mead consistently places the accent on the "dialectical" character of human relations. Far from being passively conditioned as in the behaviorist doctrine, humans do determine the conditions of their existence, and are not merely determined by such conditions. Marx had defended and qualified this proposition by saying that "humans make history but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past" (Marx and Engels 1951:225). It is clear, then, that just as Hegel contributed to Marx's dialectical approach, so did Hegel also contribute to the conception of the *self-other* dialectic, within all of us, as in our internal conversations where we take the attitude of others toward ourselves and become both subject and object.

Having discerned a prominent *dialectical* element in the pragmatic method, we need to give it a more definite meaning and explain how a dialectical approach might help us to avoid errors. A dialectical approach would keep us alert to the following: that an adequate comprehension of the human condition entails a twofold task; giving due attention to the processes that constrain and shape human actions; and also due attention to the active and creative efforts humans make to diminish and remove constraints, by changing practices and institutions, which are unnecessarily repressive. That is the way the pragmatists have provided us with a fruitful method by which to gain valid insights into the human condition.

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Social Smoking: An Untenable Position

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Social smokers manage the conflicting aspects of their liminal identities by negotiating complex roles of performance and exchange. Using a combination of methods, including both participant observation of cultural performances and informal interviews, to elicit lay theories and accounts of self-conscious practices, this project examines social actors, self-defined as nonsmokers (or reformed smokers), who engage in recreational tobacco use. Through in-depth interviews and observations of self-identified female social smokers, we document general characteristics of this subpopulation, sampled from a large Midwest capital and its surrounding areas. Social smokers occupy an untenable social space; as neither smokers nor nonsmokers, they use both practices and discourses about those practices to stake their claim to an untenable social position. We conclude with a theoretical discussion that compares our findings with other discourses on smoking, especially the discourse of addiction narratives. In an age of increasing awareness of the health consequences, smoking has become a culturally unavailable category producing "disconfirming realities" in which social smokers constantly renegotiate their status.

With increasing attention to health consequences, smoking in the United States has decreased in everyday practice, while, at the same time, continuing to be a means for claiming or denying a socially performed identity. Even in a climate of awareness regarding its health risks, social smoking helps negotiate complex roles of performance and exchange. In this paper, we discuss the availability and sustainability of the

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category of the “social smoker” in a world that requires a sharp distinction between the habitual and the nonsmoker (both of which require identity work). The paradox for *social* smokers is that they believe that they are nonsmokers, but they tend to find their allies among habitual smokers, those who share a similar stigmatized and regulatory discourse. In the current climate of smoking bans in public places, the alienation of smokers is exacerbated. Social smokers move in and out of passing as either habitual smokers or as nonsmokers, even as passing in one category inevitably delegitimizes their claims to membership in the other. Social smokers do not belong to a coherent or fixed category; rather, social smoking destabilizes the rigidity of the habitual smoker/nonsmoker binary.

Social smokers eventually experience a disconfirming reality. Richard Hilbert refers to this as an estrangement problem in which people lack social alliances in a society that does not recognize their experiences. Such individuals prefer “neither concealment nor disclosure” and thus remain invisible (1984:370). Social smokers, who also experience this estrangement and lack of category recognition, can suffer from a kind of hypervisibility in which olfactory and visible evidence forces them to question which version of reality is correct, or if they can sustain the reality they prefer. Hilbert argues that the alternative is not only for stigmatized individuals to pass as normal, but—more importantly—to find a means to sustain the ambiguity of a contradictory position (1984:373).

Conscious of the possibility that smoking produces real consequences for physical health and that smoking is stigmatized as a filthy habit, social smokers try to differentiate themselves from habitual smokers, and they convince themselves that they are effectively nonsmokers. Survey results representing the primary motivation for social smoking as “a dismissive attitude to the dangers of smoking” cannot account for its social dimension (Herlitz and Westholm 1996:209). Our research documents social smoking as a self-conscious performance involving elaborate, practiced, ongoing behavioral management. We argue that social smokers formulate intricate strategies that depend on reciprocity and mutual recognition to create a barely sustainable social identity associated with a stigmatized practice.

Social smokers use a variety of terms to distinguish between levels of commitment to smoking, including “antismoker,” “situational smoker,” and “stress smoker.” Smokers categorize their practice according to either the contexts in which they smoke or the quantity of cigarettes consumed. Manufacturers also determine smoking categories, such as “pack-a-day” smokers, based on the number of cigarettes in a standard pack. At the same time, social smokers attempt to regulate their smoking independently of the number of cigarettes in a pack. Our research demonstrates how the particular category of social smoker is characterized by more than the superficial self-regulatory practice of smoking fewer cigarettes or smoking in limited circumstances. Consequently, cigarettes become an available resource for a slew of things, such as a way of working out social relationships or communicating social and economic positions (Hilton 2004). This leads to a relatively unknown dimension of the sociability of smoking: social smokers’ shared understanding of the cigarette gift economy—that is, elaborate negotiations of exchange, even reciprocity, in which the decision not to purchase cigarettes helps create the self-definition of the nonsmoker who then borrows or bums cigarettes.

We explore how the contradictory and incompatible demands on social smokers' identity performance are negotiated. We investigate two broad research questions. First, what self-presentation creates alignment with nonsmokers, habitual smokers, reformed smokers, and even antismokers? Second, as the number of existing social categories for smoking diminishes, how do social smokers adjust their identities? In addressing these questions, we focus on the relationship between smoking practices and metacommentaries about those practices.

METHODS

After reviewing historical data and conducting participant observation research over a period of two years, we determined that the best means to identify and collect the performance strategies of self-identified social smokers was in-depth, semistructured interviews. We conducted seventeen interviews and ethnographic observations of women from Columbus, Ohio, and the surrounding Midwest area between the fall of 2001 and the summer of 2003, resulting in 442 single-spaced typed pages of data. To obtain as diverse a sample as possible, we recruited volunteers by posting and distributing project advertisements seeking social smokers at the local university, in an undergraduate newsletter, and in local bars. Purposive sampling was used to ensure that women who are social smokers would be included. We sampled women, based on prior research that suggests that female informants, unlike males, might be more attuned to external, social intangibles, such as holding or smelling a cigarette, or other factors that arouse the urge to smoke (Etter, Prokhorov, and Perneger 2002; Perkins et al. 2001). Interviewees were mostly young women associated with a college, following recent research indicating the prevalence of social smoking among that group (Moran, Wechsler, and Rigotti 2004). This convenience sample offered us the opportunity to study smoking decisions among people who have the resources to consider alternatives to smoking.

At the time of study, smokers comprised 27.7 percent of Ohio's population. Compared to the rest of the nation, Ohio ranked number four in smoking prevalence (CDC 2003). Consequently, the reported experiences of the participants have been conditioned by a region where the occurrence of cigarette smoking is high. Informants in the sample who had relocated to Columbus from California, Texas, and rural areas partially offset this bias. In the context of a national climate that devalued smokers, we were able to persuade participants that their interview contributions might inform this debate.

In these confidential interviews, we inquired about informants' beneficial and negative experiences with smoking. In keeping with our focus on the dynamics that inform the expression of situational identity, the introduction to each interview affirmed that we wanted to talk to social smokers about their distinctive experiences with smoking. One woman limited her smoking identity to a "closet smoker" and only four of the women had previously considered themselves habitual smokers. Though the extent of a woman's participation in social smoking ranged from five months to 40 years, most fell within a three- to eight-year window of involvement, with five years being the median. Three types of potential informants were not interviewed, based on the purposive sampling design: irrefutable nonsmokers, current daily smokers, and exclusive cannabis smokers.

Informants described a wide range of smoking practices, including people who just “looked like” smokers but did not smoke. Some of the interviewees were antismokers, claimed to be nonsmokers for the purposes of medical records, had previously considered themselves habitual smokers, and some were looking to become irrefutable nonsmokers. Despite these multiple, and, perhaps, contradictory self-labels, the respondents all shared the characteristics of nondaily smoking and a social means for self-control (as opposed to addiction).

Of the women interviewed, fifteen were between 20 and 35 years old; one was 36, and one was 60. Of the seventeen interviewees, one was Asian, one African American, and the rest were white. The participants were invited to describe their relationship status. Some literature suggests that marginalized groups are overrepresented as smokers. For instance, research on lesbian tobacco use indicates higher tobacco use among lesbian and bisexual women (Gruskin et al. 2001; Ryan et al. 2001). In our study, lesbian and bisexual women were overrepresented. Nine of the respondents were single at the time of the interview, the majority of them were heterosexual; eight of the respondents were in long-term relationships (three were married, three cohabited, two were in a lesbian partnership). Three young women identified as bisexual or “curious.” Our research might support existing arguments for the correlation between already marginal (especially lower socioeconomic) people and smoking in the U.S. However, we are less interested in whether already marginal people smoke than in how those in one category of smokers (social smokers) redefine themselves as outside the stigma. Our respondents utilize elaborate mechanisms to sustain their identities and disidentify with the stigmatized practice of smoking.

Most of the initial respondents were students. We continued interviewing to include a more diverse set of women. By the end of the interviewing process, over a third of the respondents were nonstudent informants, whose occupations and social and economic standing covered a range of professions and socioeconomic strata. At that point, we were able to include a billing clerk, caseworker, graphic designer, language instructor, nurse, pharmacy technician, and two homemakers. As noted in the literature, education tends to discourage smoking, even if it may not be “a magic shield against tobacco” use (Holtz 2000). For instance, according to Holtz (2000), between 1993 and 1997, smoking rates on college campuses increased from 22 percent to more than 28 percent. Our sample conforms to these findings. One respondent had a high school degree, four had some college education, three held a bachelor’s degree, and nine either had or were pursuing graduate or professional degrees. The well-educated respondent pool in the current study is not surprising, since the highest proportions of these emerging, hybrid smokers are usually found among those with a college education (CDC 2003; Gilpin, Cavin, and Pierce 1997; Husten et al. 1998; Lindström et al. 2002).

Interview questions were mostly open-ended; for instance, “Describe any memorable situations you’ve encountered with others pressuring you to smoke or trying to prevent you from smoking." Out of the 61 possible questions and 18 suggested probes, just over 20 percent were closed-ended; for example, "When you smoke, do you always inhale?" Interviews were recorded and took from one to four hours with the average interview approaching two hours. We asked informants to characterize their particular smoking experiences and to emphasize the distinctiveness of their personal involvement in smoking. We inquired about relationships that shaped their participation in smoking, how they perceived negative treatment and antismoking sentiments, and in what situation smoking was most likely to occur. We also explored the interviewees' perceptions of the benefits of smoking, including cultural charm, smoking aesthetics, and social advantages. The lead investigator was a social smoker at the time; interviewees might have been more guarded had the interviewer been a nonsmoker.

Using a "phenomenological brand" of interactionism (Warshay 1975:31–32), we concentrated on how social smokers interpret and experience a smoking world: "Phenomenology demands that we seek to discover the world as it is experienced by those involved in it. It is about the nature of human experience and the meaning that people attach to their experiences" (Wilson 2002:7). In Merleau-Ponty's terms, "We must not, therefore wonder whether we really perceive a world, we must instead say: the world is what we perceive" (1962: xvi). Social smoking is a self-conscious category. We are interested not only in what social smokers do, but also in how they attach meaning to their practices and in their discourse about smoking as an identity-shaping practice.

FINDINGS

Smoking as a Social Activity

Smoking has always offered possibilities for camaraderie and social interaction. "Smoke breaks" were once a feature of many U.S. workplaces. In the new antismoking climate, especially in communities dominated by a nonsmoking ethos, smoking requires a more careful presentation of self, involving several paradoxes that challenge personal integrity. One veteran social smoker commented, "I think I'm the bisexual in the smoking world. . . . Bisexuals aren't really accepted by straights or gays—they're not accepted by either niche. [Likewise,] we're not accepted as either being a smoker or nonsmoker." We describe how social smokers characterize the integrity of their practice and how it is challenged by a complex gift economy in the exchange of cigarettes and lighters. Social smoking is a mode of social interaction characterized by self-deception, face-saving, and repositioning within a culturally unavailable category.

Our interviews with self-identified social smokers confirm smoking as a social activity. The interviewees recognized that even the "real . . . 'tried and true' heavy smokers" often hype up their smoking in order to enjoy the company of others. One woman was bewildered when we asked her to try to identify any individuals with a smoking habit similar to hers. However, when she began to consider those individuals outside the imagined social smoking community, she readily acknowledged that those in her larger fellowship of bona fide smokers also tend to "increase the number of cigarettes they smoke and appear to use cigarettes in a more socially engaged manner." She elaborated that this sociability between all smokers occurs "in a way that is interactive with those around them," making smoking "a shared experience."

Among the interviewees, those who were students reported that stepping out for a cigarette provides the social intercourse that the solitary work of academic life often inhibits. One student reported that the irony of being a social smoker is that she became more conscious of how habitual smokers also employ cigarettes in order to fulfill an interpersonal need: "Regina, in my department, she'll always go around to the smokers, 'Are you going to smoke? Are *you* going to smoke?' She doesn't want to smoke by herself, even [when she's] a heavy smoker." According to a social smoker who works at a drugstore, social and habitual smokers smoke within group settings where cigarettes serve as the adhesive for "an atmosphere of conviviality." Unable to smoke in the company of nonsmokers, smokers seek each other out.

Integrity, Quantity, and the Context of Social Smoking

The findings confirm that social smokers categorize their smoking by the integrity of the performance of smoking, the quantity of cigarettes consumed, and the contexts in which they smoked. The women discussed how the positioning of a cigarette and the releasing of the ash characterizes both genuine and gendered aspects of smoking behavior. Inhaling was the most commonly noted marker of performance authenticity; all but one woman maintained that she consistently inhaled her cigarette. This is illustrated in the following scene, where we are offered a glimpse into the enormous effort that a reformed smoker, now a social smoker, makes.

> I don't like lighting a cigarette when someone else is holding the lighter, so I most often "steal" someone else's paraphernalia and light up with a deep inhalation on the cigarette held between the first two fingers of my left hand. I then blow the smoke up and away from those around me, something I do consciously to avoid irritating my nonsmoking girlfriend. Then, I move my cigarette into the hand furthest from the person I'm sitting next to, and often down to below the level of the table if I'm sitting down. I smoke using long drags and tap the cigarette on the edge of the ashtray about every two or three inhalations. I usually smoke to almost the filter, then, pass the remains of the cigarette to my boyfriend who'll finish it and then put it out.

This woman's articulate description reveals her intense effort to appear as an indifferent smoker when she is in reality struggling with her definition of herself as a smoker or nonsmoker.

Overall, the interviewees saw their smoking performance as undifferentiated from that of habitual smokers. In fact, the women were intent on not being categorized as posers. The same woman speaking above added, "I've actually asked people if I still look like a smoker, and they say, 'Yes.' A six or so year habit leaves a mark on a person." Another woman, who described others who appeared to be "posers," invariably represented herself as genuine.

The central means social smokers used to differentiate themselves from habitual smokers was restricting their consumption of cigarettes. The women we interviewed reported regulating their smoking independently of the number of cigarettes in a pack. They reported smoking two to eight times per month, consistent with the frequency of participation in some form of social engagement. They specified half a pack or somewhere between six to ten cigarettes as the uppermost limit of "smokes" consumed within three to six hours, a timeframe consistent with their alcohol use. The women were evenly divided between moderate to rapid consumption, with one woman situating herself between the two extremes. Very few noted smoking slowly, with one informant refining her categorization to "slow to moderate." The haste with which a woman smoked her cigarette was oftentimes reportedly heightened by her increased alcohol intake. Alcohol aside, the simple distribution of ten cigarettes over a three to six hour period would certainly account for these subjective ratings. A sixty-year-old suburban, competitive card player described this "binging" phenomenon as she recounted being in the designated "smoking closet" (literally, this smoking room is a converted closet), where she aggressively "puffs down" a Benson and Hedges menthol during the breaks between rounds at her weekly bridge games: "I smoke rapidly. I could never keep up that pace if I was, if I was doing it, umm, if I was doing it more frequently. If I would, you know, ten cigarettes—in three hours. That's a lot!"

The social smokers acknowledged the role changing circumstances and social contexts played in their inconsistent cigarette consumption patterns. A majority stated that their practices varied, depending on the circumstances. They acknowledged that occasionally unpredictable or situational factors contributed to some of the infrequent rises or the more common declines in their smoking patterns. One woman revealed that she regularly gave up smoking to be considerate of nonsmoking partners: "I mean sometimes I'll take six months off and then get a little crazy for two weeks." Most informants described circumstances in which they decreased consumption. Pregnancy, periods of severe asthma, returning home from college for the summer, and job duties that held them more publicly accountable were some examples of decreased use.

A Hallmark of Social Smoking: Bumming a Cigarette or a Light

In deciding not to purchase cigarettes, social smokers align themselves with nonsmokers as opposed to habitual smokers, but then they must borrow or "bum" cigarettes. This situation requires occasional cigarette purchases, not for oneself but for a group of nonpurchasing, bumming, social smokers. Not having cigarettes is a hallmark of the social smoker—thus, bumming takes on a different significance than it has for smokers generally, who also participate in the gift economy but who reciprocate more readily. One of the untenable dimensions of the social smoker is that she should not have cigarettes; she prefers to bum them, but she seldom reciprocates. She occupies a contradictory, culturally unavailable position. Social smokers are beholden to and enabled by the very others with whom they do not want to be associated.

Many informants commented on the widespread phenomenon of bumming a cigarette, which involves engaging in elaborate negotiations of exchange, even reciprocity.

According to the informants, "cadging a cigarette" not only restrains smoking involvement, but also sustains the self-identity of nonsmoker. They believe that if a pack of cigarettes seldom infiltrates their residence, there will probably be insufficient means to support routine smoking. One respondent stated, "I only bum cigarettes from others. I don't want to buy cigarettes for myself. . . . Everyone I bum cigarettes from knows that I'm not interested in getting rehooked, so it's a casual thing. And everyone asks for my girlfriend's permission first." This quote clearly illustrates that for social smokers, the intent behind bumming is both to limit smoking to public occasions and to exclude cigarettes and paraphernalia from private domains.

In his foundational research on public gifting, Marcel Mauss demonstrated how every offering is actually embedded in a larger system of reciprocity. He argued the relationship between giver and receiver is governed by the rule that the recipient should always give back more than what was received—there is no such thing as free alms ([1950] 1990). Consistent with this rule, the social smokers in this study discussed several ways in which the act of "bumming" enhanced their smoking objectives but potentially damaged their reputations. One informant insisted that with cigarettes costing "four dollars a package now," seeking and accepting them from others is an "intrusion." She asserted, "'neither a borrower nor a lender be' . . . cigarettes are expensive. . . . I feel that it's socially incorrect [to bum], but it wouldn't stop me from doing it. . . . Nor would I resent it if anybody bummed a cigarette from me." These comments of a social smoker highlight that in contrast to market exchanges, gifts tend to be given "in the context of public drama," which makes them highly susceptible to public scrutiny, or, as the respondent suggested, to a judgment of fairness (Douglas 1990:16).

Cigarettes and "lights" have long been understood as public exchange commodities. Carol Brooks Gardner (1986) discusses *exhaustible* and *renewable aid*, the first corresponding to systems of giving, and the second to systems of borrowing. According to Gardner, a match or a cigarette is an exhaustible aid and a lighter is a renewable aid.

As part of their self-characterization as nonsmokers, social smokers also referred to "bumming a light." Though the majority of respondents at one time or another had made the customary request to bum a light, more than half managed to avoid purchasing lighters altogether: over a third just procured free matches at restaurants, bars, and weddings. One woman said, "I don't know when the last time I bought a lighter was. . . . [U]sually I'll bum someone else's if I don't have one." Some respondents remarked on how nondescript lighters, without prior claimants, are also cycled swiftly among members: "I'm a lighter clipper. . . . [S]ometimes you can't help it because sometimes you have the same lighter. . . . [B]ut, if I see a lighter lying around and nobody's got dibs on it, it's mine."

"Floating" lighters are symbolic of the social smoker's reluctance to join the category of smokers. Not having a lighter is about not smoking, although of course smokers, too, can participate in the exchange of lighters on the move. Respondents chronicled movement, meaning, and image-making as relevant to the social context of their behavior. Lewis Hyde identifies the central criterion of gifts as their movement: "*the* *gift must always move*. There are other forms of property that stand still, that mark a boundary or resist momentum, but the gift keeps going" ([1979]1983:12 italics in original). One couple, both social smokers, reported the mysterious appearance of a lighter that prominently displayed a male stripper. The male striptease lighter, though appreciated as retro or kitsch, was detected as an anomaly (especially in a lesbian household) in an economy in which lighters came and went without being accounted for. Here, the lighter seemed to be one of those objects that often escapes accountability and yet belongs to the exchange economy. In this case, identity is produced through circulation of rather than attachment to objects. As Kathleen Stewart (1996), observes: "The ownerly attachment to objects that makes them seem unmoving, substantial, and discrete is only a mirage" (44). The unbroken sequence of the lighter reiterates how social smokers' seemingly insignificant improvisational acts actively bring together a smoking community—if only assembling it by the evocations brought to mind through exchanged objects. Informants' reports about the fluidity of lighter ownership illustrate an alternative to the model of reciprocity described by Mauss. That is, that reciprocity is achieved not by giving in equal or greater amounts but by a shared knowledge that what goes around, comes around—one loses lighters, one finds them.

Four Characteristics of Bumming

The interviewees displayed four smoking behaviors associated with bumming: acquiring a cigarette, resolving how to ask, status differentiations, and inventing a reciprocal community.

Acquiring a cigarette. The women often reported being offered a cigarette without having petitioned for it. These offerings frequently came as the result of a benefactor's knowledge about the informant's penchant for occasional tobacco use. Kitty said that it was common for her close friends to offer cigarettes spontaneously, but she also noted, "Even habitual smokers that are just kind of acquaintances, when they go to light up, they'll offer so you don't really have to ask." For one woman, knowing the donor determined whether she made a request or a demand: "I usually just say, 'Can I have one?' and that suffices. If it's a cigarette from my boyfriend, I don't actually ask . . . it's more of a command: 'Give me one.'" Most women described uncomfortable moments when they had not anticipated going out with less intimate compatriots, but the mood seemed appropriate for a cigarette. One young woman said:

> Occasionally, a group of friends will go to a bar after a meeting or something and I'll just kinda go to go along and they'll be like, "Well, I'm going to have a cigarette," and they'll be like, "Do you want one," and I'll be like, "Um, sure," or I'll say "No" and then I'll be like, "Uh, yeah, can I have a cigarette now? I changed my mind." Well, sometimes I feel awkward asking people like, if I'm at a bar, or party, or something, I'll be like, okay, who am I going to ask to bum a cigarette off of and how am I gonna say it?

This dilemma about whom to ask for a cigarette and how to ask for it caused the women to develop both styles of soliciting and more commonly, alternatives to conventional bumming. We can differentiate here between what Nicolas Peterson (1993) calls "demand sharing" within already existing social relationships (such as the woman telling her boyfriend to "give me one") and more subtle means for procuring a cigarette that requires added identity work.

Resolving how to ask. About one-fourth of the women had at one time or another used flirtation or misrepresentation to resolve the quandary of how to ask for a cigarette. Informant tactics often depended on the perceived audience. One woman reiterated that demands can be made of people one knows, but, "if it's a stranger, I'll be just like uh, cute and be like, oh, 'Can I bum a cigarette?' in a sweet little voice." Similarly, another respondent remarked on the social advantage that can be garnered by altering one's intonation and mannerisms for dramatic effect. "I mean the way girls ask for [cigarettes] . . . they have their little (especially if it's a guy but as a girl too), you kind of have the whole like, cock your head, like, voice raised, 'Can I have a cigarette?' Like that type of thing, it seems to kind of get girls pretty far." Another woman said that she opted for speech that was rather ingratiating as she cajoled potential gay male donors: "If I'm in a gay bar . . . I'm like, '*Honey*, can I have a cigarette?' I mean, it's very sort of gentle and friendly I think."

This form of romanticized heterosexual exchange works even for lesbians and gays, an example of some of the incongruities and complexities of smoking practices. These women were aware of their manipulative use of gendered exchange strategies, which they would otherwise criticize as politically unacceptable. Under other conditions, they might reject the assumption that they were being flirtatious. By using coquetry, they gain public control of a commodity, but at the cost of sustaining contradictory identities, which the gift economy makes visible.

Blandishment to secure a cigarette from a stranger sometimes escalates to minor deception. One woman reported feigning either being out of cigarettes or claiming that she forgot them. "When I'm with one of my smoking friends, I don't even really ask, I just take it or point to the box and I'm like, 'Do you mind?'" However, she often felt compelled to offer a rationale for coaxing cigarettes from strangers: "'I left them in my car,' or you know, 'I didn't bring any with me,' or 'I ran out,' or whatever. Like if they look at you funny, that's when I supply the excuse. And they always say, 'No, it's fine. Go ahead.' So . . . it's not that hard." As she explained, "You get free cigarettes that way and you don't have to pay for them yourself."

In Erving Goffman's terms, this woman's strategies are a means of face-saving ([1955]1967). The excuse provides a retrospective warrant for the request and restores equality in a one-down situation when people "look at you funny" (Tannen 1994). As Weiner (1976) observed, "the untenable extremes of complete autonomy from others and total dependence on others are avoided through the mechanism of exchange. Exchange allows social space to be negotiable at the same time that personal space (one's autonomy) is inviolable" (213). The problems of losing face or being one-down are compounded in the case of both bumming and smoking cigarettes. The concepts of face-saving and one-up/one-down relationships can be misleading if they are used to suggest the maintenance of existing social status. Instead, the use of flattery or excuses can create new social configurations.

Status differentiation. Mauss demonstrated how the generalized norm of reciprocity operates at the level of public domain in which givers and receivers exchange roles somewhat equally. In social smoking, the roles are sometimes more stable, as for example when one person is a fixed moocher and another a fixed provider. Eric Leifer (1988) writes, "The taking involved in giving and the giving involved in taking are deliberately entangled in every action" (873). He suggests that in small-scale economies such as social smoking, the positions of giver and taker are up for grabs; the norm of common courtesy is available to be exploited by people preying on the expectation of return for their gifts. These expectations also depend on social class, particularly on having disposable income, which begs a new stream of research to understand better the relationship between disposable income and addiction. Observant participants can manipulate the system. Our research acknowledges Leifer's suggestion that, "we need to better understand the settings that induce extreme forms of politeness" (876). Here our research on cigarette gifting provides an important corrective to current research on the moral dimension of smoking, perhaps the most misunderstood dimension. After conducting surveys about how much people smoke and when, researchers too often turn to moral explanations (the dismissal of health concerns) or the inability to quit (representing a weak will) (Berger 1998; Tuggle and Holmes [1997] 2004). Smokers know the moral arguments well, but their rehearsal of them does not indicate that they play a large role in social smoking. Instead, our research suggests that issues of morality figure more into social relationships, demonstrated by patterns of reciprocity.

Social actors begin to appraise bumming in terms of the constraint created by expense and the social opportunities available for bumming. Social smokers (and conceivably habitual smokers alike) realize that requesting a cigarette from strangers can be an imposition. One woman pointed out that "at the bars, [cigarettes are] not the cheapest thing. And I don't like approaching strangers and asking for them. Even though I would give them if somebody asked me for one, then I would give one, but I just don't like 'mooching.'" When we asked the young woman above, "What is mooching?" she plainly replied, "Going and getting cigarettes from people you don't know." In other words, a moocher imposes too much on other people's generosity by repeatedly trying to get something from them.

Most informants agreed that bumming etiquette dictated that only one cigarette from a stranger was permissible. A receptionist tried to avoid asking for cigarettes but when she did solicit, "it would be one and that would be the only time I would hit that person up for the night, and then, I would probably try to find a cigarette machine." She said she would reciprocate a single cigarette, "as long as they don't abuse it." Even social smokers who located cigarette machines or put a pack on their tab during an evening at the tavern, ultimately intending to return home without cigarettes, still endorsed the tenets set forth by the rule of one: "One's okay. I mean, I was at a bar one time and I gave the guy like ten cigarettes 'cause I didn't want the pack after that night. I was like, 'This is . . . I'm drunk. Take these out of my hand.' But, yeah, I think I should have said, 'One is acceptable; then go find somebody else to ask or something.'"

Informants recognized that gifting and borrowing cigarettes could presumably entangle two different types of social actors: habitual and social smokers. Habitual smokers by far were considered both susceptible and perhaps less at liberty to provide charity because of potential "nicotine fits." One respondent, in describing her time engaged in social smoking (generally at her favorite video bar), said she became wary of "bumming off habitual smokers." She explained that she did not "want to leave them with nothing because they might have it planned out." The informant simulated how this smoker's thoughts might be: "I have this one for before I go to bed. I'll have this one in the morning and I have this one for driving in the car on the way to work." Social smoking is less predictable; that is, social smokers do not predict their next smoke, but rather they see themselves as spontaneously responding to social occasions.

Inventing a reciprocal community. One solution designed to circumvent bumming, was to call on friends and family members to split a pack: "Usually my sister and I, or my friends and I, will buy a pack and split it, you know—so that I don't buy them that often." Another woman claimed that she and her friends anticipated their needs: "When I would go out with Matt and Candy, it would be like, 'Well, are you going to bring the cigarettes? Okay then, we don't have to stop and get any.' Like we'd be going out together and it'd be like, 'Oh, should we stop for cigarettes?'—'No, I brought some so don't worry about it.'" Calling on friends with a mutual understanding that "I'll have some of yours, but I will take a turn in providing them next time" was commonplace etiquette.

The women contrasted borrowing from friends with bumming from strangers. Vivian described a tacit code of social smokers: "I think at some point it's kosher just to buy, even if you buy for the table, it's just kosher to buy and contribute. I think there is something sort of [communal] about that, that even if you're buying to have one or two, you go ahead and buy because you buy to replace what you've bummed." Such social organization among cooperating friends with similar smoking interests was a widespread solution for effectively reducing cigarette consumption.

The community of social smokers is defined by the practice of borrowing and collectively purchasing cigarettes. Borrowing contributes to the mythology of the distinction between social smoking and habitual smoking, and sets up smoking in terms of social relations rather than in terms of health-based decision-making. Social smokers restrict their tobacco use by using social controls based on an exchange economy, rather than on medical means of regulation.

Management Strategies

Social smokers attempt to manage their cigarette consumption in part through strategies for purchasing, not purchasing, gifting, borrowing, and "mooching" cigarettes. All of the respondents self-consciously monitored having cigarettes in their possession (a behavior also confirmed in our observations). Three categories of these tactics emerged, each corresponding to patterns of gifting and borrowing and each involving performed identities: (1) self-regulation, (2) reframing, and (3) negotiating footing.

Self-regulation. In his study of the history of smoking habits, Jason Hughes (2003) argues that tobacco use has shifted from something one does to lose control, to something people characterize in terms of self-control. Overwhelmingly, the women attributed their ability to engage in limited tobacco use as the result of some form of self-regulation: "Basically, like if I don't bring cigarettes I won't want them, and then, maybe I'll only bring like maybe two. . . . [S]o there's different ways I try to regulate how much I smoke." One woman recounts using a stylized smoking accoutrement to personalize and creatively regulate her smoking. "Somebody bought me a little silver cigarette case and it used to be a ritual for me, because, it was like, you opened the case, you tapped the cigarette on the case and I would put in like maybe four, like three to five, to control my smoking." Similar to regulating the number of cigarettes kept on hand, some social smokers periodically tallied the quantity of cigarettes consumed at one time. One informant said that she, "just count[s] the cigarettes" and sets a maximum number to smoke: "if it's below this number, like, I just don't let it get below this number by the end of the week." She joked that she had become quite accustomed to smoking "a lot of stale cigarettes."

Accountability partners also helped some women achieve self-control. One informant's first year of college brought new freedoms and more frequent use of cigarettes, and, subsequently, the need to address a number of contradictions. Now, as a college junior, Colleen shared very distinctive circumstances that conditioned how she approaches her smoking. First, as a hospital worker, she recognizes that promoting health and wellness comes into conflict with her penchant for tobacco use. Likewise, Colleen's athletic peer group opposes smoking. Moreover, the respondent referred to familial predispositions to cancer; one of her older sisters at the time of the interview was coping with malignancy in her breast and her grandfather had previously been diagnosed with the disease. Finally, smokers are overrepresented in her mother's family: Colleen's grandmother and all of her aunts smoke cigarettes.

Bearing in mind Colleen's social makeup, smoking was not something that she ever wanted "to do all the time." She flatly tells her friends: "Jane, no matter what I do, don't let me smoke" or "Brooke, I'm not buying cigarettes." Unwaveringly, this respondent draws the line between habitual smoker and social smoker and asks that her close peers be involved in shaping her culpability during particular social occasions or timeframes. In short, a behavior plan aimed at a level of control and a contract with dependable supporters held respondents accountable to their self-selected guidelines and served to maintain their limited relationship with tobacco.

Reframing. Many of our respondents reframed their smoking, sometimes using incongruous frames (Trevino 2003). One woman reported: "I buy Marlboro Ultra Lights. I'm on a diet with my smoking." Typically, the word "diet" refers to efforts driven by health- and/or appearance-conscience individuals to reduce their consumption of food. Though there is evidence to suggest that women who smoke consider cigarettes to have an appetite-suppressing effect, the word "diet" in this context suggests that there is such a thing as a healthy consumption of cigarettes. It sets up an analogy between watching one's weight and abstaining from strong-tasting cigarettes. Of course, diet does not necessarily connote health—it is just as easily associated with eating disorders. Most diets are in the questionable category for health—they are a temporary way to eat. Similarly, social smoking could be a temporary way to smoke. For many of the people interviewed, social smoking is not necessarily temporary in the sense of an interim phase, but it is nonetheless contingent in that it is subject to reevaluation. Social smokers see themselves as willing to give up smoking if warranted. Social smoking involves a degree of control, and, in this sense, is similar to eating disorders or other "body projects" (Brumberg 1997). This illustrative turn of phrase creates an engaging coupling of dissimilar ideas, for if dieting is thought to result in health benefits, most would argue that smoking in any degree rarely promotes wellness. This informant followed up her slogan by stating she would never smoke Marlboro "Reds" because they "scare [her], quite frankly" and they "just feel, like heavier" from the "heavier taste of the tobacco." Thus, the flavor is too heavy for a social smoker's tastes and she perceives having offset the undesired effects of tobacco by choosing a low tar and nicotine cigarette.

Although a nurse reported that she associates social smoking with indiscriminately enjoying the pleasures of the moment (with little regard for her future), most women reported that this notion of *carpe diem* was not necessarily their approach to occasional tobacco use, or, for that matter, to day-to-day life in general. Susie said that she was not exceedingly "scared about cancer or anything" and that her optimistic predisposition plays a role in limiting smoking and counterbalancing tobacco's effects through diet and exercise:

> Some people have the attitude, well just live for today and you know it's not going to do you any good to not smoke a cigarette today 'cause you might be dead tomorrow. I'm not like that because . . . if that was the way [I thought, then] I wouldn't try to exercise or do anything else good for myself, I would just kind of give up. I guess that affect[s] my decision not to smoke all the time.

Several informants considered a lifestyle of "moderation" to stave off the ill effects of tobacco.

Finally, some women attempted to offset the negative social effects and consequences associated with smoking cigarettes in an antismoking climate by "closeting" their behavior:

> There are people who are like closet smokers—that's what I am. I don't want some people to ever find out I've smoke[d] before. . . . When I'm in my car, if I'm stopped at a light, or something, and a car pulls up, I'll put [the cigarette] down to my side and I'll start blowing 'cause the smoke will start rising and then I'll be like [respondent makes blowing sounds]. I'll blow it, so no one can see the smoke, you know, 'cause you see smoke coming up, 'cause I hide it below the window so they can't see me do it and all of the sudden, all of this smoke will start accumulating down by my leg and I'm just sitting there blowing on it [more blowing sounds] and then the light changes and I go. I speed [off] real quick and then I take a puff or whatever. Yeah, I'm very, I'll turn my air conditioner or heater off so it won't blow [the smoke]. I put an air freshener in my car. Um, I'm very sneaky about it. I'm closet.

Most informants said that they had felt the need to avert potential harassment or manage possibly "discrediting information" brought on by the scrutiny of others (Goffman 1963). Their willingness to be open about their smoking status was, in part, based on anticipated criticism; many were secretive, though they realized that even without openly acknowledging smoking, the practice was potentially perceptible. The "perceptibility" of smoking is not only marked by sight, being spotted with cigarette wafting smoke, but also by smell (Goffman 1963:48). Informants reported being personally repelled by the smell of smoke; they used elaborate routines, including designated smoking garments and products and folk remedies that remove odors lingering on their hair or clothing.

Negotiating "footing." To maintain their footing as social smokers (which variously meant nonsmoker), the women reported strategies of self-criticism and self-awareness. Goffman (1981) observed, "A change in footing implies a change in the alignment we take up to ourselves and the others present" (128). Though all the women could typically deliver "passable" impressions of either a smoker or nonsmoker, the respondents consistently reported being deliberately attentive to their cravings out of a fear of becoming addicted. Women who regularly reported being fearful also tested their doubts and ultimately implemented new cognitive-behavioral systems such as avoiding having cigarettes in their possession.

Hilbert (1984) articulated the dilemma of the culturally unavailable category as an absurd situation that defies logic, stemming from a problem of language and culture. In his ethnomethodological theory of identity, he questioned what people do in the face of a disconfirming reality, when their experiences do not adhere to the norm of cultural intelligibility. Upon reading our findings five years after our initial interview, one respondent commented that she had renegotiated her smoking status.

> I am struck by [the respondents'] silly behavior and statements. I hate seeing myself as one of them. However, I am feeling quite smug these days because I haven't smoked in months and probably won't again. If I read your paper years ago, I might have given up this behavior because I don't like this group and don't want to be one of them. So, your paper is more than research. It could be used as an antismoking device. 'Oh that we could see ourselves as others see us.' . . . I didn't like what I saw. [It's not that you made] people look silly. They made themselves look silly. How would you like to see yourself stepping into a cigarette closet especially at my age? "Silly" really isn't the word for it. Perhaps "stupid." I'm smoke-free because my blood pressure is off the charts, and the number of years I engaged in the behavior could not be ignored. I have found I like hanging with the nonsmokers, although my antisocial side liked to push the envelope. But, it really does get scary when one is near sixty-five, so best to get with the program.

In this reformed smoker's opinion, quitting smoking (or supporting smoking bans) shows her "social competence" in making the "right" choice by opting to become a nonsmoker (Hilbert 1984:372). Additionally, as Goffman points out, performances offer the option for individuals to be "taken by [their] own acts or be cynical about

[them]" (1959:19). Here, the interviewee reflects somewhat cynically on her previous practice and performance and realigns herself with outside interpretations and negative evaluations of smoking.

Positioning oneself in opposition to tobacco companies, and yet smoking, represents another, at times unsustainable, identity construction. One respondent's social smoking served to minimize the guilt she feels for supporting tobacco companies, the unpleasant physical repercussions apparent after a smoking "streak," and the expense: she had been regionally conditioned by years spent in San Francisco, where purportedly cigarettes "jumped from like three dollars to, like, five or six." Alice said that when she first began experimenting with smoking that she would scale it back until she no longer craved a cigarette or at least had stopped thinking about them: "When I first started out, I would smoke a cigarette because I would think about it too much. I was afraid I was becoming addicted. So, I would smoke a cigarette and I said the next time I could smoke would be the time I forgot about it." Another woman tested out her physiological dependence based on an act of remembrance. A young Catholic woman framed her check as an issue of discipline and packaged it in an annual maintenance program that corresponded with her act of contrition: "I tried to give up smoking for Lent every year. . . . [F]or four or six weeks . . . I would be like, 'I'm not going to smoke. . . . ' [I]t wasn't, like, because I was so religious, it was just kinda like, a see if I could do it." Renouncing smoking for the sake of personal control was an integrative cognitive-behavioral approach used to manage and maintain an individual's limited use of tobacco.

The four- to six-week hiatus, devoted to nonsmoking, was a very common way for the women to test themselves. Richelle shared that there have been times when she genuinely longed for a cigarette; in those moments, management is crucial because those physical yearnings for a cigarette signify that she has been smoking too much:

> It's that thing of you never want to be addicted and you sometimes, you'll test yourself, like, well if I can go without it for a month that doesn't make me a smoker does it. One of my friends said, "Richelle, just admit it" (because I was smoking pretty heavily). "Just admit it: you're not just a social smoker, you smoke," because she was a smoker, and I was like, I don't want to say that I'm a smoker, so I cut back.

This reining in of one's smoking was associated with being able to maintain a foothold in a nonsmoking life world, an "untenable position" (Shuman 2005:85). To illustrate further, a veteran smoker decided to engage in social smoking about a year after "quitting cold turkey." Recounting her experiences of withdrawal, she called attention to how the aggregate of the (1) "constant use of cigarettes"; (2) "nicotine habit"; and (3) "emotional investment" made her previous self-described addiction "very different from [her] smoking now." She explained that, "Now I rarely feel the urge to smoke, and it is easily overcome. I don't purchase cigarettes any longer; I don't include 'smoker' in my self-definition." By periodically giving up and routinely inhibiting smoking, the women were of the opinion that they were entitled to denounce publicly the identity label of smoker.

DISCUSSION

Historically, social smokers were considered marginal smoking figures, if they were characterized at all. Both academic and popular discussions have created a dominant narrative in which smoking is gradually disappearing among educated Western groups (who, if they smoke, know they ought to quit). Under a nonsmoking *novus ordo seculorum*, the outlying social smoking characters ought to have become even less imaginable. However, the informant tactics reported here suggest a new smoking imagery, involving elaborate social frameworks that embrace and support smoking in contradiction of the existing medical and social discourses. Further, the strategies created by social smokers are entwined with other dimensions of identity production in which individuals engage in self-regulation to avoid the stigmatized category of smoker, including overt reciprocity and under-the-radar borrowing in their acquisition of cigarettes and lighters.

The women we studied occupy an already marginalized status within a cultural context of discrimination, and they appear to have developed both an exonerating and oppositional orientation to smoking behavior and identity. They convince themselves that they occupy a social status distinct from habitual smokers, echoing Victor Turner's notion that they participate in "conflicting and concurring wills and intelligences, each relying on some convincing paradigm" (Turner 1974:14). The interviewees expressed mixed motives that led them to practices such as bumming, self-regulatory measures, accountability partners, optimistic biases, compensatory measures, fumaphobia, frequent member checks, and smoking reprieves. These processes and rituals all serve to limit smoking and to verify that an individual is still outside the limits of habitual smoking. As Turner has pointed out, in the "gap[s] between ordered worlds almost anything may happen" (1974:13). In this narrative, social smoking falls between ordered categories where behaviors that are more interesting can be observed. Our findings demonstrate the innovation of liminal beings who have found ways to participate in a highly stigmatized behavior, if only marginally.

The overdetermined categories of the smoker, quitter, and nonsmoker prevail and obscure the practice of social smoking that, as we have noted, can be described according to other categories and with other narrative rationales. Especially interesting is the revised definition that social smokers provide for "bumming" to support their antiaddiction narratives. By refusing to categorize themselves as smokers, social smokers make an implicit (and sometimes explicit) criticism of smoking. By criticizing a behavior in which they partake, they place themselves in an untenable position. Their sympathies are divided as well; they can be sympathetic with smokers and even describe smokers as "friendly people." They adopt the antismoking stigma for themselves but resist the wider critique of smokers as aberrant. By disrupting the category of habitual smoker and its affiliation with addiction and other morally reprehensible (stigmatized) behaviors, social smokers destabilize their own subjectivity.

Recognition of the *social* within the social smoker can improve our understanding of how motivations for smoking might be more complex than simple attributions to physiological addiction. Addiction is not only a medical condition but also a rhetoric, and, as such, it has produced a counterrhetoric of the smoker who believes she is not addicted and thus not a smoker. The invisibility of the practice and counter-discourse of social smoking is not surprising, but it provides a cautionary tale, reminding us to attend to the ways that dominant discourses produce that invisibility. Even if the practices of social smoking run counter to observation and to the discourse of addiction, the narratives that sustain the position of the social smoker remain a viable resource for identity production.

This study differs from previous research, most of which quantifies smoking populations and habits. Even when prior studies discuss smoking attitudes, they do not address the issues of impression management and the means by which social smokers create and sustain a subject position that is not only stigmatized and contrary to other (especially medical) discourses, but also untenable by other measures. To dismiss the category of social smoking by saying that all social smokers are smokers would miss the point. What is interesting here is how social smokers manage and sustain a culturally unavailable (stigmatized) category. Some self-defined habitual smokers practice the same behaviors our respondents reported and exhibited. However, our research suggests that self-defined social smokers differ in the fact that they self-consciously deploy particular strategies to differentiate themselves from habitual smokers. Moreover, they believe themselves to be successful in claiming and sustaining this role and do not consider either the discourses or practices they share with habitual smokers to undermine their claim.

To sustain untenable social categories, depending on the situation, individuals may pass, readjust their position, or strategically attempt to maintain ambiguous identities. The challenge is for individuals faced with a choice between a stigmatized and a culturally acceptable position. In the absence of a recognized category, individuals can create imaginary communities; in the case of social smokers these are sustained by tacit rules of reciprocity and exchange. Individuals who not only lack available categories, but who also are faced with disconfirming realities can self-consciously create seemingly unsustainable identities.

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Managing Organizational Emotions: Framing Feelings of Illegitimacy in the Radical Women's Prison Movement

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This article examines how activists manage the potentially deleterious emotions that arise in social movement organizations. Using data from a case study of an organization in the contemporary radical women's prison movement in California, I explore how feelings of illegitimacy are managed and sublimated by activists, during the course of organizational life, to sustain participation in the movement. Drawing on framing theory, I find that organizational frames serve as mechanisms that manage and focus activists' feelings, delimit movement strategies, and inspire and legitimate collective action.

In the mid-1990s a group of white women activists created a grassroots organization, referred to here as Network for Prisoners (NP), to support incarcerated women as they filed complaints against the California Department of Corrections (CDC) for inadequate and neglectful medical care. These activists set out to be "a voice and a presence," as they put it, for incarcerated women, from outside the prison walls.

To fulfill their mission, activists frequently visited incarcerated women to learn about their needs. But such visits did more than educate activists on the needs of imprisoned women: they exposed the differences in social locations and corresponding experiences between activists, who were white, socioeconomically privileged, and without prison experience, and the incarcerated women they worked with, who were of color, socioeconomically underprivileged, and confined.

These differences led activists to question how they could authentically represent the needs of incarcerated women, since the two groups came from radically different backgrounds. More to the point, the disparity in racial and class privilege posed a significant quandary for activists, because it undermined their ability to connect with women prisoners. How can one represent the needs of women in prison when one is bereft of personal experience that is so unique to prisoners of color? Activists in NP engaged in intense emotional work to understand and make sense of their differences from prisoners, the structural conditions of inequality that led to these differences,

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and the corresponding feelings of illegitimacy that derived from them. This case, therefore, raises significant and interesting questions for social movement scholars.

THE QUESTION OF LEGITIMACY

The problem of establishing legitimacy in movement organizations is not unusual. McCarthy and Zald (1977) addressed it in terms of the conflict that ensues when privileged conscience constituents (individuals from dominant groups who do not stand to benefit directly from movement success) and disempowered beneficiaries (individuals who benefit directly from movement success and who are often members of minority groups) come together in an organization (McCarthy and Zald 1977). McCarthy and Zald suggested that while tensions may erupt in organizations that bring these groups with different life experiences together, nonetheless, a movement's legitimacy is significantly compromised when there is a conspicuous absence of members from the beneficiary group it purports to represent. The issue of legitimacy comes up again in more recent research on the civil rights movement by Francesca Polletta (2002), who points out that whites in the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) came to be seen as privileged outsiders who generated resourceful media attention for the movement, but who could not truly understand the struggles that black workers—and blacks in the South more generally—experienced. Whites' credibility as activists was, therefore, diminished.

James Miller's seminal work on Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) also indicates that members of this radical student group were concerned with the ways that their racial and class privilege impacted their work with marginalized communities. SDS members readily admitted their privileged status in the Port Huron Statement, a document that expressed the intellectual and political outlook of the organization (Miller 1994). Reflecting on their relative positions of privilege in relation to the communities with whom they worked, activists began the Port Huron Statement with, "We are people of this generation, bred in at least modest comfort, housed now in universities, looking uncomfortably at the world we inherit" (Miller 1994:329). According to Miller's account, SDS members frequently engaged in dialogue about the dilemmas of being middle class when they were politically committed to working-lass issues, and questioned whether they had a right to organize black, working-class, and poor communities. Members of the Black Power movement questioned the credibility of SDS activists for their attempts to organize blacks, due to the differences in experiences with race, power, and privilege between the two groups (Miller 1994).

The notion of participatory democracy, however, somewhat ameliorated this situation. While the term was not explained in great detail in the Port Huron Statement, activists *did* enumerate that participatory democracy was governed by the aim that "the individual share in those social decisions determining the quality and direction of his life" (Miller 1994:333). SDS activists sought to unite "voiceless" citizens, but, more importantly, worked to get them to act on their own behalf, for their own empowerment. Nevertheless, these activists, as noted by Miller (1994), continued to question their ability and the legitimacy of organizing marginalized groups when most of them came from privileged backgrounds.

While racial and socioeconomic differences among participants in movements may create notions of illegitimacy among and between activists, we do not yet know much about the emotion work in which activists engage to resolve these conflicts. That is, we do not know much about how activists collectively cope with feelings, such as illegitimacy, that have the potential to derail their involvement in a movement. I suggest that activists spend a significant amount of time and energy working through the emotions that bubble to the surface of organizational work, both to understand their work and to legitimate it to themselves. Without feeling credible or justified in one's work, activists may defect from an organization, which poses the risk of bringing the organization's agenda to a halt. This article asks how activists manage or attenuate feelings of illegitimacy in order to establish positive feelings of credibility with one another. I combine theoretical insights on emotions with framing theory to show that one important way that activists "deal with" their feelings is through strategic use of frames.

EMOTIONS, FRAMING, AND CREDIBILITY

Emotions in Social Movement Organizations

Social movement scholars increasingly argue for the centrality of emotions in movement theories (Calhoun 2001; Dobbin 2001; Goodwin, Jasper and Polletta 2000; Goodwin and Pfaff 2001; Jasper 1997, 1998; Reger 2004; Taylor and Rupp 2002). Scholarship in this area is multifaceted and varied, addressing an array of topics, such as the ways in which emotions incite collective action and persuade individuals to join movements (Gould 2001; Jasper 1997, 1998; Robnett 2004), how emotions factor into movement persistence (Perry 2002) or deterioration (Klatch 2004), and the emotional impact that movements have on their members at their conclusion (Adams 2003). For example, scholars have shown that emotions are important for recruitment into movements. As formulated by James Jasper (1997, 1998), moral shocks, which are "an unexpected event or piece of information that raises such a sense of outrage in a person that she becomes inclined toward political action, whether or not she has acquaintances in the movement" (Jasper 1998:401), are frequently the first step toward movement activity. Deborah Gould's research on AIDS activism employs this concept to show that the Supreme Court ruling in *Bowers v. Hardwick* shocked lesbians and gay men into a recognition of the "life-threatening nature of state-sponsored and socially sanctioned homophobia" (2001:149), effectively propelling them into collective action.

Once a movement has formed, emotions play a key role in sustaining collective action. In Collins's words, emotions "provide the 'glue' of solidarity—and what mobilizes conflict" (Collins in Jasper 1998:415). Research shows that emotions are crucial to the formation of a collective identity, the "we-ness" of an organization (Bayard de Volo 2006; Jasper 1998). More than a cognitive boundary between "us" and "them," Jasper (1998:415) contends that collective identity is a positive affect toward other social movement activists on the basis of common membership and goals. Bayard de Volo's (2006) study on a Nicaraguan mothers' organization shows that while emotion formed the basis for the development of a collective identity, individual emotional states also benefited from collective identity, in that group life provided organizational members with therapy and affective bonds. Indeed, Taylor (1989) and Rupp and Taylor (1987) show that bonds based on friendship and love can keep individuals involved in movements and even sustain them while the movements are in abeyance.

Research shows that the same emotions that aid in a movement's formation and persistence can contribute to its decline. Goodwin, Jasper and Polletta (2001:21) note that emotions such as frustration, disgust, and hatred can "pull groups apart." Goodwin (1997) shows that emotions such as love can lead people out of public movements and back into the private sphere. Klatch (2004) extends Miller's (1994) analysis of Students for a Democratic Society to examine the factors that led to the disintegration of positive affective bonds in this organization. Klatch (2004) argues that the negative emotions that accompanied stresses within the group, such as the pressures to conform or to allow group life to become all-consuming, contributed to the organization's decline. Adams (2003) goes further to examine activists' feelings at the conclusion of movements. Using the *arpillera* movement in Chile as a research site, Adams (2003) finds that social movements have a strong emotional impact on their members, not only while the movements are going strong, but when they end. She argues that at the conclusion of a movement, actors are likely to feel disillusioned, disconnected, and abandoned for structural and cultural reasons—and because they suddenly lose a sense of agency and power.

Given the research thus far, what sort of emotional work may activists engage in to transform potentially harmful emotions, such as anger and resentment, into those that are politically productive? In her analysis of the New York City chapter of the National Organization for Women (NOW), Reger (2004) examines the ways in which personal, potentially negative emotions are redefined within an organizational context. Using the mechanism of consciousness-raising, individuals that are propelled into feminist activism vis-à-vis feelings of alienation, anger, frustration, and hopelessness transform such personal emotions into a "collectively defined sense of injustice," essentially "[creating] emotional states that can promote collective action" (Reger 2004:205, 220). In a similar vein, Whittier's (2001:235) research on emotions in the movement against child sexual abuse shows that activists' emotional *displays* are shaped by three factors: "the oppositional emotions activists construct in internal movement organizations; emotional labor in the public display of emotions; and the emotional opportunities afforded by the external context." In other words, the external contexts in which movements operate interact with their internal interpretive processes to determine which emotions are revealed, reconstructed, and presented in public contexts (Whittier 2001:249).

Drawing on Hochschild's (1983) emotion management perspective, Goodwin and Pfaff (2001) argue that activists engage in emotional labor during the course of organizational life so that a movement may persist. Emotional labor during social movements involves "channeling, transforming, legitimating, and managing one's own and others' emotions and expression of emotions in order to cultivate and nurture the social networks that are the building blocks of social movements" (Taylor and Rupp 2002:142). Goodwin and Pfaff (2001) examine the emotional labor that occurred within two high-risk movements—the U.S. and East German civil rights movements. They find that the emotion of fear, found among the participants in both movements, was mitigated through various mechanisms, such as the use of intimate support networks, mass gatherings, and the shaming of participants and opponents (2001:287–301). These mechanisms helped raise the cost of defection and to "sustain [activist] commitment in the face of repression and social isolation" (Goodwin and Pfaff 2001:287).

Few other studies have examined the emotional labor that activists must engage in to redefine feelings and to sustain commitment to a movement. This article builds upon Goodwin and Pfaff's emphasis on the strategies that activists use to foster commitment to a movement. However, it departs from their work in two key ways. First, unlike Goodwin and Pfaff's study, this article examines a case of lower-risk activism. The case at hand shows that emotions must be negotiated, managed, and even sublimated by activists not just in high-risk activism, but in lower-risk activism as well. Cases of lower-risk activism are perhaps more prevalent than cases of high-risk activism, with the results of this study being generalizable to many other movements. Second, unlike in Goodwin and Pfaff's case studies, in which external threats led to activists' experiences of fear, in this study activists' feelings are internally driven. That is, activists' own judgment and analysis of themselves in relation to their beneficiary counterparts lead to feelings of self-doubt that could prompt them to abandon the movement. These feelings do not stem from external threats or accusations but from their subjective analysis of themselves and their work.

I use framing theory to suggest that activists employ cognitive mechanisms, or organizational frames, to manage and make sense of the subjective emotions that arise during the course of movement life. Much framing research has focused on the ways in which frames are "intended to mobilize potential adherents and constituents, to garner bystander support, and to demobilize antagonists" (Benford and Snow 2000:614). This work has focused on the ways in which frames are created and maintained vis-à-vis external audiences. Few studies have attempted to examine the internal framing work that activists engage in to understand and justify their collective action. This article demonstrates that frames provide an analytical tool within an organization to understand and rationalize members' ongoing adherence to movement goals.

Framing Theory and Notions of Credibility

Collective action frames are defined as "action oriented sets of beliefs that inspire meaning and legitimate social movement activities and campaigns" (Benford 1997:416). To simplify this definition, frames function much like a window frame or a frame on a painting. Both focus lines of vision toward an object. In a social movement organization, members create a vision of society in the future to inspire them to continue their efforts. Frames serve this visionary function, and as Benford and Snow (2000) outline, frames are also developed and used to recruit new members, mobilize adherents, provide a rationale for collective action and to acquire resources.

Framing literature provides some clues as to how activists may come to justify and legitimate their own movement activity. Benford and Snow (2000) analyze the importance of establishing organizational credibility with external audiences vis-à-vis collective action frames. They emphasize that three variables determine the credibility of these action frames: frame consistency, empirical credibility, and the credibility of frame articulators (Benford and Snow 2000:619). Frame consistency refers to an organization's desire to exhibit consistency between what it says and what it does. Empirical credibility, in contrast, refers to the verifiability of movement claims to prospective audiences. Finally, the "credibility of frame articulators" refers to the idea that the greater the status and/or perceived expertise of a movement organization, the more plausible and resonant the frames with outside audiences, such as the public or the media (Benford and Snow 2000; Rafalovich 2001; Wiktorowicz 2004).

These concepts can be extended to show how the emotions that activists experience during organizational life "translate" into certain framing problems, which they then need to solve. Consider, first, frame consistency—a social movement organization's ability both to practice what it preaches and preach what it practices. To return to the opening description of NP, activists seek to be, to use their words, "a voice and a presence for the women inside, on the outside." The phrase "voice and presence for women inside" is frequently used by activists to mean that they seek to represent the needs of incarcerated women by educating the public on the conditions in women's prisons, or writing to political figures or staff to ensure that medical or other needs are met. This is believed to empower incarcerated women because their stories are communicated vis-à-vis activists to people on the outside of prison walls, making these women less invisible to some in society. Yet, the claim of being "a voice and a presence for the women inside, on the outside" is problematic for activists, as most have not struggled with the racism, poverty, and imprisonment that incarcerated women have experienced. Activists question whether their claim to be a voice for the women inside is legitimate.

Empirical credibility is also problematic for activists, who question whether they can authentically represent the needs of women in prison, especially those of color when they have not had direct experience with the process of incarceration or racialized oppression. There is, therefore, some dissonance between activists' claims that they are a "voice and a presence" for incarcerated women, when their life experiences say otherwise.

Similarly, among themselves activists work out issues relating to the credibility of frame articulators. Activists admit that while they may have more "academic" expertise on prison, they do not have expertise in terms of direct experience with the system. In fact, activists' lived experiences with racial, economic, and educational privilege contradict their ideology of social and economic egalitarianism. The fact that they have enjoyed considerable social and economic success, as a result of racial and economic inequality, contradicts activists' vision of an egalitarian society where everyone enjoys an equal distribution of wealth, resources, and power. In activists' minds, this delegitimates much of their work.

Pairing emotion literature with framing theory provides scholars with an effective way of conceptualizing the processes that movement actors must undergo to engage in collective action and to sustain the energies of the participants working toward a common goal. The empirical case under study—an organization within the radical women's prison movement—is an ideal site for the examination of such emotion work. This is certainly not the only movement in which activists feel some kind of tension. Tensions existed between beneficiaries and constituents in both the civil rights and New Left movements. Recent work on transnational movements, too, shows that beneficiaries, or "*less* materially or politically powerful activists" clashed with more powerful constituents over the trajectory and goals of collective action (Hertel 2006:3). However, the organization under study is particularly useful for analyzing emotion work because its constituents are extremely aware of and reflective upon their racial and class privilege and the feelings that arise from it, as compared to constituents found in other organizations or movements. For example, white activists in the women's prison reform movement of the nineteenth century (Freedman 1981) held class privilege over the female offenders with whom they worked, but they were not concerned with differences in such privilege, nor did they actively reflect upon it. Perhaps more important, constituents in the group under study are cognizant of the feelings that arise during the course of their activism and exert a considerable amount of organizational time and energy to understand and ameliorate them. As such, they actively and consciously engage in emotional labor to sustain their organizational efforts, making this organization ideal for the analysis of movement emotions.

In order to attain movement goals, activists must feel legitimate and credible in their work. They must, therefore, work through and reframe feelings of illegitimacy, which could logically lead to movement abandonment if activists are not convinced that they can authentically represent group goals. I maintain that the feelings that activists experience impact the types of frames that they use to understand and justify their activism. Organizational frames function as cognitive mechanisms that manage and focus activists' feelings and delimit movement strategies, which sustain participation in a movement.

DATA AND METHODS

Data for this article are derived from almost three years of fieldwork on a larger ethnographic research project on Network for Prisoners. The growing movement of which NP is a part is composed of grassroots and nonprofit organizations that are fighting for a continuum of changes in the prison system, from reform of health care conditions to complete abolition of prisons.

Description of the Organization

At the time of study NP was small, having fewer than twenty members, all female. All of the activists who were interviewed identified as white and middle class. They were educated, having gone to college and/or graduate school. Occupations of these respondents included, but were not limited to lawyer, therapist, and teacher. The activists in the group ranged in age from early twenties to midfifties. All were volunteers and were involved for various amounts of time: women in their fifties had been active in NP since the mid-1990s, while the amount of time younger women in the group had been involved ranged considerably, from one year to about five years. Women who were in their fifties had been politically active in the 1970s in various movements, such as the women's movement and radical men's prison movement. All of the activists in NP identified as prison abolitionists and claimed that they were anticapitalist, antiracist, and/or anti-imperialist. However, they simultaneously engaged in reform work, such as providing women prisoners with legal information and fighting to implement positive changes in the prison health care system. During the study activists met with fifteen prisoners. One prisoner with whom NP activists worked was white and middle class; a second was white and working class; and the remaining prisoners were African American, Latina, or First Nation, poor, and undereducated. Only one prisoner was politically radical.

Interviews, Participant Observation, and Archival Research

Because richer data are achieved using more than one research method (Lofland and Lofland 1995), this study draws from semistructured interviews, participant observation, and archival materials. I conducted a total of fifteen semistructured interviews with activists. While I requested interviews with all members of the group, a few indicated reluctance to interview with me because of a perceived vulnerability to outsiders (Lofland and Lofland 1995). Questions on the interview guide for this part of the study covered activists' backgrounds and experiences with movement activities, identification in terms of race, class, and ideology, and how activists negotiate racial privilege in a group that seeks to empower confined women of color. Table 1 lists the interview questions used for this part of the study.

Each interview lasted from one and a half to two hours. Interviews were tape recorded and immediately transcribed.

Table 1. Interview Questions

What is your age? How do you identify in terms of race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and ideology/political beliefs?
You've mentioned in meetings and informally that activists differ from prisoners in terms of race, class, education, and ideology. Can you explain this more to me? How do these differences impact the work that you do for incarcerated women, or the decision to do this work?
How do activists in the group approach and talk about their differences from prisoners as an organization?
Is there a common understanding among activists in the group about how to approach the differences between yourselves and prisoners?
Do you attempt to recruit women of color or former prisoners into the group? How?

Participant observation consisted of attending monthly meetings and events such as protests, rallies, and educational forums at local community centers and universities. Monthly meetings were especially important to gaining insight into how group members made sense of their participation and the emotions that went along with it. I also attended several prison visits, where I was able to observe activists' interactions with prisoners.

To cross-reference my data with organizational information (Lofland and Lofland 1995), I examined the group's archival material. I analyzed website material and the group's mission statement. I used the program ATLAS/ti to code and analyze interview and archival material and field notes from participant observation, looking for trends across the data that I collected. I have changed the names of all activists to respect their privacy and confidentiality (Lofland and Lofland 1995), and I do not use any identifying information about the group, aside from its location in California.

FEELINGS OF ILLEGITIMACY: CONVERSATIONS AMONG ACTIVISTS

Discussions of race were quite frequent in NP and were prompted during meetings and after visits with prisoners. Reminiscent of the consciousness-raising that occurred in organizations in the women's movement (Echols 1989; Reger 2004), activists incorporated an organizational practice of reflection at the commencement and/or conclusion of each meeting. During reflection periods, activists were able to share any of their thoughts, whether they were about group goals or personal struggles they were facing in their private lives; however, the majority of the time, participants raised the issue of race. For example, at an organizational meeting members began to close the meeting and casually talked about whiteness. Bonnie, a woman in her mid-twenties, stated:

> I just wanted to kind of share with everyone that I'm at a place now where the interrogation of my race is becoming more salient for me. The more I read about racism historically the more I question how I uphold the system. I can go through life and if I choose to ignore it, I can benefit from the system. I think white people in general do not think about how we uphold racism by accepting benefits from this system. Anyway, what I am thinking about mostly is how this affects our work with women inside. I don't know if I should be here, or how I fit into this work.

Stacy, a young activist relatively new to the group, agreed:

> It's good to hear other people talking about this, it makes me feel less isolated. I think a lot about how we are able to do this work *because* of our privilege. We have educational privileges, economic privileges, that have all come from our race. We have to be aware of our place. I do not feel like my place is to lead this movement. And sometimes I am not even sure I have any place here.

Another activist, Tanya, also stated: “I agree with you. It’s a difficult issue for me to talk about. I’m still working through all these issues, and really am not sure what my place is here. By leading this group, we’re just reproducing white privilege. Is that legit? Of course it is hard to find others to lead because they do not have the same free time to do this.”

The notion of the reproduction of racial stratification is echoed loud and clear in all three statements. The question is not race per se, but participation in a structure that uses race as a means of oppression. Tanya’s, Stacy’s, and Bonnie’s statements suggest that activists need to continually foreground their awareness of their white privilege to make sense of their participation in an organization that seeks to be a “voice” for incarcerated women, 70 percent of whom are black, Latina, Native American, or Asian (Davis 2003; Diaz-Cotto 2006; James 2005; Johnson 2003). As white women who have benefited from a racially stratified society, the activists in NP expressed much hesitancy in speaking on behalf of women of color, because the activists have not experienced racial oppression.

Such statements are reminiscent of activists’ reflections on their work within SDS in the 1960s. Miller (1994) notes that most of the activists in SDS came from privileged, professional families. Compounding their families’ privilege was the fact that many of the members attended prominent universities—such as the University of Michigan—for both undergraduate and graduate degrees. SDS activists questioned what their legitimate role was when organizing marginalized communities. They posed questions, such as “Should we have the right to impose our values and our mission on the community?” (Miller 1994:194) and frequently engaged in discussions about how to conduct activism on behalf of “voiceless citizens” (Miller 1994:176). NP activists raise similar questions and concerns. The dialogue that occurred in NP and in SDS, indicates that both organizations resist (and resisted in SDS’s case) the tendency to become paternalistic overseers of marginalized groups. It is worth noting that the questions raised about the roles of privileged activists in movements on behalf of marginalized communities are compounded by the fact that the women on whose behalf NP activists speak are confined within prisons—institutions that afford very little opportunity for their inhabitants to speak on their own behalf.

Following the analyses of radical activists of the 1960s—and in particular radical prison activists of this time period (Davis 1971)—NP’s analysis of the prison system is predicated upon racial injustice. In an interview, Sandra stated:

> Prisons are by their very nature racist. They were used as warehouses for former slaves when slavery was supposedly abolished. What happened was slavery was abolished, the Black Codes were passed in the south which criminalized things like staying out late—for blacks only—which then meant that blacks were channeled into the prison system when they violated those codes. To this day, blacks, most of them poor or working class, are disproportionately represented in prisons across the country. Latinos/Latinas are also disproportionately represented in our prisons. You cannot talk about prisons without talking about

racial discrimination, and of course economic inequality. In our opinion prisons are used to throw away certain segments of society.

Activists in NP understand the prison system to be a space of condensed and concentrated forms of oppression that originated in the historical and contemporary processes of racial and economic injustice (Lawston 2009). Prison is seen as an institution used by those in power not only to contain but to dispose of marginalized populations of people (Lawston, forthcoming).

At the same time, activists are keenly aware of the racial privileges afforded them by the very system that oppresses prisoners. This awareness provoked a profound discomfort for activists, because, willing or not, their capacity to help prisoners comes from their white privilege. Following the likes of race theorists (Almaguer 1994; Crenshaw 1995; Feagin 2000; Feagin and Vera 1995; Lipsitz 1998; Omi and Winant 1994; Roediger 1991; Saxton 1995), activists argued that this racial difference is not "essential" but is constructed by society itself, leading to different sociocultural experiences and worldviews that can impede connections between divergent groups.

As activists sat face-to-face with prisoners during visits, the disparity between them and the prisoners became dramatically poignant. The women prisoners with whom activists work are disproportionately of color and poor, undereducated, and are not politically radical, while activists are white, educated, middle class and radical. Moreover, women prisoners are subject to the rules of the prison administration, are strip-searched before visits, and must remain confined, whereas the activists are subject to prison rules for a short period of time, are not subject to strip searches, and can move back and forth between their homes and prisons relatively freely. Given these disparities, activists sometimes had heated discussions after visits.

One such conversation occurred after a prison visit among Janet, a woman who was active in the women's movement; Jackie, a young woman in her twenties; and Dawn, a woman who was active in radical movements of the 1970s. Janet mentioned that other white women in the group were questioning their role in the organization. The conversation unfolded as follows:

Janet: There is an issue that is repeatedly coming up, of some of the white women questioning their participation in the organization. They are questioning whether they should be involved in the movement because of their privilege. They don't feel they have a place in the movement because they benefit from the same system that oppresses women of color. Alexis feels that her time may be better spent doing childcare so that women of color can visit incarcerated women, rather than attending visiting sessions herself.

Jackie: I struggle with my role in the group all of the time. I don't know that I am one to represent women inside. I do not want to lead the organization—women of color need to do that.

Dawn: I struggled with my privilege years before becoming a member of this group. I think I still struggle with it, just not as much as someone younger. But that may just mean that my age has allowed me to come to terms with my privilege. I try to work with it.

Janet: I understand that racial privilege is important to analyze, but I cannot change my skin color. Racial privilege should not incapacitate activists to the point that they withdraw from the organization.

The ambivalence that many of the members reveal in this organizational space is most pronounced among younger activists, who, as Dawn suggested, are experiencing an intense period of radical politicization as they struggle to understand racial hierarchies. Activists like Dawn, who had many years of movement experience, all ambiguously said that they “worked with” their privilege. In other words, the more experienced activists in the organization maintained a continued awareness of social hierarchy while actively working to resist it; newer, younger activists felt more insecure about their place in the organization and the contradictions they felt about benefiting from a system that oppresses others. They wrestled to understand their individual potential complicity or resistance to the racial paradigm, and whether they should remain in the organization. As Miller (1994) shows, activists in SDS engaged in similar conversations, which ultimately shaped how they lived their lives; many activists lived communally, at least for a short time, and engaged in organizing as a full-time job. NP activists, however, remained in middle-class jobs, and, as I will show, used framing strategies to reconcile their racial and class privilege with their political work.

NP activists engaged in conversations about racial privilege only among themselves. They did not converse with women prisoners about their whiteness or their feelings that they were their “illegitimate representatives.” Sandra explained: “We prefer that women inside determine the trajectory of conversations. Often they have urgent medical needs, for instance, that we try to help with. I think that talking about politics would move discussions away from what it is that incarcerated women need.” Given that imprisoned women have few chances to talk to groups and individuals on the outside of prison walls, NP members deferred to them to determine discussions during visits. But the silence around racial difference, which drives the illegitimate feelings that activists in the group revealed, reinscribes privilege. Activists exercised the option to disclose or not disclose debates that are intrinsic to the organization’s work with prisoners. This consolidated power for activists, as they held information that was relevant to the relationship between the two groups, to which prisoners were not privy. This foreclosed prisoners’ abilities to participate in and contribute to a very important discussion, one that dictated the types of frames that activists used when making sense of their political work with incarcerated women.

Following Reger’s (2004) and Buechler’s (1990) analyses that organizations within the women’s movement provide social spaces for activists to explore psychological forms of oppression, this social movement organization serves as a place in which feelings are shared and discussed. The amplitude of self-doubt, illegitimacy, and discomfort poses a significant threat to the viability of the organization. These emotions have the capacity to undermine or stifle organizational efforts if activists do not feel they have a right to be in the group.

FRAMING FEELINGS OF ILLEGITIMACY

Frames operate as cognitive apparatuses that sublimate activists' emotional energy toward useful goals and objectives. Two such frames that operate as mechanisms that channel activists' energy toward a productive organizational goal and vision are "antiracism" and "deference to prisoners' authority." These frames are based upon NP's ideology of being an antiracist social justice organization. Activists allude to these frames in their mission statement, which suggests (1) that they understand their work to be connected to larger issues of discrimination, violence, and oppression, and (2) that they promote the leadership of and give voice to women prisoners, former prisoners, and their families, especially those of color. These frames were also spoken of during meetings and were used to demarcate organizational strategies to address feelings of illegitimacy.

The Antiracism Frame

In an interview Sandra explained the antiracism frame:

> Being a white organization, although we are working to fix that, means that we must challenge racist thinking, which includes thinking that does not take racial hierarchies into consideration. How can we work with prisoners and against prison if we don't think about and reflect on how it is really racism that channels people into prison in the first place? How can we work with women if we don't think about our own positions and social localities as privileged and white? It's essential to challenge the idea that race doesn't matter, that our personal social locations do not factor into how we see the world, if we are to do work that is justified.

Sandra and other activists used the term "social location" to mean one's race and class status, or overall position of privilege in, and perspective on, society. Employing an antiracism frame means challenging thinking that does not take one's position in the social hierarchy into consideration. It is the practice of activists in NP to interrogate and foreground their own privilege vis-à-vis women prisoners. This practice affirms their antiracist credentials, even as they question their right to participate.

The antiracism frame led activists to the conclusion that they had a *responsibility* to continue their work because of their privilege. After activists talked about their feelings regarding white privilege at a brief meeting, one activist stated:

> The bottom line is that if we walk away we are even more strongly exerting our privilege. Because we *can* walk away. But I feel it is really important to stay here and resist, while keeping our social positions in mind. That is the key. This is the type of stuff we need to be talking about, so that we are in the process of resisting racism. We cannot contest racial hierarchy and imprisonment if we do not stay and resist.

Sandra added: "We all have a decision to make: either remain in the organization and resist racial privilege, or leave the organization and exert that privilege."

Participatory democracy. Like the SDS activists in the Port Huron Statement who outlined their platform (Miller 1994), NP members feel strongly that they have a responsibility to remain politically active for social justice. What was extremely important to SDS and is extremely important to NP activists is participatory democracy—active participation in social and political life, and the process of contesting oppression. As outlined in the Port Huron Statement, apathy does not lend itself to social change.

These conversations reveal the process in which activists engage to manage their feelings and rationalize their place in the movement. In one sense, maintaining an ongoing awareness of their racial privilege through their conversations functions as an avowal of NP activists' commitment to racial justice. In another sense, however, this type of "with us or against us" thinking, as presented by Dawn, results in forced choices that obscure feelings of illegitimacy and force conformity. Organizational preservation trumps individual ethical or moral ambiguity.

Following scholars who have noted that emotions are important in fostering a sense of solidarity, loyalty, and responsibility in movements (Bayard de Volo 2006; Buechler 1997; Goodwin and Pfaff 2001; Jasper 1998), what emerges from feelings of and conversations about illegitimacy and this type of "with us or against us" rhetoric is a greater sense of obligation to organizational goals. Activists frame organizational work as a sort of "resistance to the racial status quo," which both raises the psychological cost of withdrawing from the organization and increases activists' loyalty and sense of responsibility to the group (Goodwin and Pfaff 2001). This process occurs as activists come to understand NP's position that the abandonment of movement goals would be a greater demonstration of the privilege they contest. More so, because NP activists have a fair degree of anxiety about their possessive investment in whiteness (Lipsitz 1998), to profit off of that possessive investment by abandoning movement goals is to betray all of the principles for which their involvement in the group stands. While this is clearly an either/or construction, abandoning the organization would mean that activists essentially play the same role in processes of oppression as the dominant culture.

In many ways, individual and organizational identities rest on this antiracist frame. Castells (1997:6) defines identity simply as "people's source of meaning and experience." Dominant groups are afforded the freedom of choice in defining their identities—of both opting in and opting out of particular categories and definitions—whereas oppressed groups are ineluctably stamped and confined by their categories of identity. Prisoners in particular are not only confined but silenced and labeled by society in ways that come to define their identity as "criminal," "pathological," "violent," "lazy," and/or "useless." NP activists are well aware that whiteness has much more flexibility of self-definition; therefore, they use the antiracist frame as a source of meaning, both individually and collectively (Castells 1997). For activists, this frame answers the question, "Who are we and what are we trying to do?" It provides activists with a shared understanding and definition of group goals and provides them with a sense of purpose. This frame and identity underwrite activists' attempts to resist social injustice.

Practices of antiracism. In order to realize their broader vision of a nonracist society, activists begin with the organization itself, by attempting to recruit women of color so that the organization is more representative of the women it seeks to represent. Helen stated: "We always reach out to get people of color involved, so it's not just white people involved in running the situations and making the decisions." Dawn expanded upon Helen's statement, stressing:

> One thing is that as an organization we try to give priority to the voices and leadership of women of color, so that it's not the people who have power and privilege and have had less experience with racism, for example, we are not the ones who end up deciding what needs to happen. So, um, so we have really made it a point to hire women of color. We are really trying to empower the actual people who have the experience.

NP activists' movement against the manifold forms of racial oppression involved the organization's hiring a woman of color, a former prisoner, as director of the group. This director has the authority to run meetings, decide what campaigns activists will pursue, and determine the overall trajectory of the organization. Although most decisions are reached by consensus, the director's word has strong weight in decision-making. Other examples include general recruitment of women of color, who are now beginning to occupy more volunteer positions in the organization and have a stronger voice in determining the direction of the group. The recruitment of women of color is a way of empowering a community that is more directly affected by incarceration; in this way, women of color are "[sharing] in those social decisions determining the quality and direction" of their lives (Miller 1994:333). But it is also a means of legitimating the organization: the more women of color in it, the more the organization is representative of the population with whom it works, the less illegitimate white activists feel.

Collective action frames are used to "inspire and legitimate" collective action, but collective action frames are also used to recruit new members and to mobilize potential adherents and constituents (Benford and Snow 2000). Efforts by social movement organizations to link their interests and interpretive frames with those of prospective constituents have been conceptualized as "frame alignment processes," which include the processes of frame bridging, frame amplification, frame extension, and frame transformation (Benford and Snow 2000:624; Snow, Rochford, Worden, and Benford 1986). Snow, Rochford, Worden, and Benford (1986:467) made the persuasive argument that frame alignment "is a necessary condition for movement participation." Frame bridging and frame amplification are particularly useful for understanding the ways in which NP activists "practice" antiracism by attempting to recruit women of color into the organization.

Frame bridging refers to the process of linking "two or more ideologically similar but unconnected frames regarding a specific issue or problem" (Snow et al. 1986:467). It is used when activists attempt to connect with and recruit groups or individuals with interests similar to their own, and it is achieved through organizational outreach and informational diffusion between interpersonal networks (Snow et al. 1986:468). Frame amplification refers to the "clarification and invigoration of an interpretive frame that bears on a particular issue, problem, or set of events" (Snow et al. 1986:469). Activists use amplification to remind potential recruits of similar interests. Particular values, such as "equality" and "liberty," or beliefs, such as "prison is unjust and racist," are highlighted by activists in order to recruit new members or gain support.

In an attempt to persuade women of color to join NP, activists bridge and amplify the antiracism frame. During an interview Sandra explained:

> We mostly do outreach at community forums, events, and on community college campuses. We may go to Earth Day and set up a table to hand out literature and information on the group, or we may go to a community college to reach out to students. We have women of color who approach the table, and because we are very dedicated to racial justice we emphasize the racialized aspects of the prison system—the injustice of women of color being disproportionately locked up in the prison system, or children of color being disproportionately affected when their mothers get sent to prison.

Helen agreed:

> It's likely that the women we try to connect with have had many experiences with racism, and given the far reach of the prison system, with over two million people locked up—who are mostly people of color—it's likely that they have connections to prison. We try to recruit them based on these interests, so they have a voice in the direction of NP. We stress the importance of fighting for racial and social justice, of working for a world without prisons, and that ordinary people need to rise up, just like they did in other movements, like abolitionism.

Both interviews and participant observation indicate that when NP activists interacted with women of color at events, activists underscored the antiracist platform of the group. They tried to connect with women of color by emphasizing what activists presumed to be similar interests in establishing an antiracist society and criminal justice system. They amplified antiracism by highlighting both values and beliefs: activists stressed the importance of social justice and the belief that prison is discriminatory and racist. Too, activists drew parallels between the efficacy of collective action against the prison system and the success of prior movements, such as slavery abolition. Because activists are often confronted by audiences who believe in a movement's assessment of a problem, but who do not share activists' beliefs that social change is possible from the "bottom up," it is important for activists in all movements to amplify beliefs about the possibility of movement success (Snow et al. 1986).

While activists have succeeded in recruiting a director and a few volunteers who are women of color, they have not been as successful in mobilizing formerly incarcerated women. What is often the case is that activists will attempt to recruit formerly incarcerated women into NP when they are at events like the ones described above; if potential recruits reveal that they have been in prison, activists attempt to get them involved in their work. However, whether activists' framing efforts are successful for recruitment depends upon a frame's degree of resonance with the current life situations and experiences of movement targets (Snow et al. 1986). Indeed, activists' attempts to bridge and amplify frames to formerly incarcerated women of color, in a way that resonates with their lives, has proven difficult. Sandra explained that "it is very difficult to get former prisoners involved in our work. Once women get out of prison, survival is just a major struggle. They need to reestablish themselves, find a job, take care of their kids and deal with things like addiction, which got them incarcerated in the first place. Activism is not a top priority." Helen agreed: "Survival is a basic struggle when women get out of prison. I think they also want to put prison behind them. Their experiences are so horrendous that it is not something they want to relive again and again."

Former prisoners possess "insider knowledge" about incarceration—and therefore seem to be ideal candidates for organizing within NP. However, this insider knowledge may be one reason NP's frames do not resonate with them: former prisoners want to put the experiences of incarceration behind them. Moreover, the formerly incarcerated women that NP seeks to recruit are "outsiders" in relation to activists, in terms of race and class. They do not have the racial and socioeconomic capital to which activists are privy and, therefore, have to struggle to reestablish themselves in society. They must contend with a social structure that, in many ways, works against them and does not guarantee their success. NP's efforts to amplify and bridge this organizational frame to former prisoners, therefore, have not been successful. But the rationale of the antiracism frame itself inspires activists to continue their struggle.

Deference to Prisoners' Authority

NP activists additionally use a "deference to prisoners' authority" frame, which like the antiracist frame, meets legitimation needs internal to the organization. Male prisoners were conceptualized as the vanguard of the radical men's prison movement in the 1960s (Cummins 1994); through deference to prisoners' authority frame, activists constructed prisoners as the "real" initiators of organizational goals. During my observations activists never explicitly told women in prison that they were the leaders of group goals. Rather, during group meetings they constructed prisoners as the leadership of the organization *among one another*. Activists simultaneously denied that they were the ones who determine the organization's trajectory. During an interview Linda stated that "I'm just a mouthpiece for women inside. I just do what they tell me. They are the leaders." Sandra concurred: "It's really our mission to take direction from women inside. They are the ones leading this."

In interviews and organizational meetings, all the activists stated that women in prison are the true leaders of the group. These statements were made despite that fact that imprisoned women could not participate in group meetings, discussions, or activities. As mentioned earlier, ironically the stated leaders of group goals—incarcerated women—were not included in conversations on racial privilege. Too, group members did not actively engage in analyses of the ways in which power ultimately resides among activists. As we have seen, activists in NP have the ability—and authority—to determine what to disclose about, and how to frame, the organization to prisoners.

The "deference to prisoners' authority" frame is a mechanism of rationalization. It supports the idea that activists do not reproduce the power structure but resist it, thereby internally justifying their work. Like the antiracism frame, the "deference to prisoners' authority" frame acts as an "encouragement mechanism" in that it manages activists' feelings of uncertainty and persuades group members to remain committed to the goals and objectives of the organization (Goodwin and Pfaff 2001:286).

The deference to prisoners' authority frame underlies attempts to take direction from incarcerated women, so that prisoners are constructed as determining the group's agenda. Activists send questionnaires to women in prison to determine what issues are most important to them. Maya explains:

> We sent prisoners a survey last year asking what they want us to focus on this year. When we got the results back visits were actually a low priority for them. They focused on legislative actions, parole, and public education. They prioritized policy work and work that would benefit the whole rather than individuals. That surprised a lot of us. We understand why they would prioritize other things, and still do [visits to prisons] but make sure we prioritize these other things too. Every once in a while we also send a survey that is more topical, like, "Give us your feedback about this."

Although not used for recruitment purposes, questionnaires are used to bridge the gap between the interests of incarcerated women and those of the organization. They are a step toward ensuring that incarcerated women have a voice in determining NP's focus, reminding women in prison that NP values advocacy work on their behalf. However, activists delimit incarcerated women's responses, because they determine the list from which incarcerated women can prioritize the issues that affect their lives. Because activists control what issues prisoners may prioritize, the hierarchy between the two groups is maintained.

To be sure, taking direction from women inside does not always work out in practice. Dawn explained:

> Health care is a good example where there has been a disjuncture between what women on the inside want and what we do. For years we focused on health care. Everyone in this area focused on health care. But it was like we were beating our heads—things would get a tiny bit better, but really, fundamentally, it would never change. So at a certain point we stopped focusing on it. But I feel like some of the women in prison would still like us to focus on it with big campaigns. So, we still do specific things for women, based on what they tell us, but larger scale campaigns have been difficult to figure out.

Despite that, activists frame prisoners as the leadership of NP; pressed, most activists reluctantly admitted that, at the end of the day, they still determine the organization's agenda. This is due partly to the fact that incarcerated women are locked up, making participation in the group extremely difficult. But perhaps more important, activists are not incarcerated, they are formally educated, and they are better informed about the structural issues that determine prison conditions. They are also plugged into a network of information and activism that better prepares them to make the organization as effective as possible. All of this puts into relief the disjuncture in privilege between predominantly white activists vis-à-vis women prisoners.

The conclusion that can be drawn from the paradox of the deference to prisoners' authority frame is that racial privilege is so insidious that it seeps into and contaminates this organization, whose raison d'être is to eradicate racist social structures. Notwithstanding, this frame accomplishes its objective of *managing* feelings of illegitimacy and sustaining the movement of the organization toward its goals and objectives. The immediate changes in society that NP's efforts engender are limited. However, this frame allows activists to perform that vision of a future society, in which women of color can be prominent leaders.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The process of framing allows activists in NP to construct meaning and work out the psychological tensions that arise from being "a voice and a presence" for prisoners, when their experiences are not representative of such women. Using the antiracism frame, activists come to the conclusion, somewhat forcefully, that to leave the movement would be an even greater exercise of privilege than remaining. This either/or thinking compels—or perhaps pressures—members to remain committed to their work. Similarly, the deference to prisoners' authority frame leads activists to the conclusion that prisoners are the leadership of the organization. Together, these rationalizations become a foundation for organizational attempts to become more "representative" of incarcerated women.

The organizational moves to mobilize those more representative of, and to take direction from, imprisoned women speak to the ways in which activists move out of the discursive realm and more concretely manage feelings that potentially could derail their activism. Attempts to mobilize women of color and former prisoners through frame alignment, and efforts to take direction from prisoners, first promote frame consistency (Benford and Snow 2000). Activists claim to be a "voice and a presence for women inside, on the outside." By hiring a woman who is more representative of women prisoners, recruiting volunteers who are women of color, and sending questionnaires to women inside so that their concerns can be prioritized, activists appear to move closer to better representing the needs of incarcerated women. These steps establish some level of frame consistency between activists' claim that they are a voice for incarcerated women and activists' actions to become more representative of those women. Similarly, empirical credibility is internally heightened. The group claims to be a voice for women inside, and this claim can begin to be "empirically" verified by looking at the changes in the composition of the group, as well as the questionnaires that activists send to prisoners. Finally, the credibility of frame articulators increases for activists. While they perhaps cannot increase their expertise on racism or incarceration based on direct experience, white activists recruit women who have experiences with such issues. They also take direction from the women most affected by incarceration, so that they can more clearly identify imprisoned women as leaders.

While NP's organizational frames and practices inspire and legitimate activists' collective action, power hierarchies between constituents and beneficiaries remain somewhat entrenched. The silence that activists maintain about their whiteness during visits to prisoners and their creation of surveys that delimit prisoner responses, reinscribes privilege. As I have argued, these practices maintain the hierarchy between the two groups even as activists try to move away from it. Organizational frames do not erase power hierarchies but direct activists' emotional energy toward their goals and objectives in order to maintain their participation in the organization.

This article makes important contributions to resource mobilization theory, framing theory, and the scholarship on emotions. Scholars like McCarthy and Zald (1977) have long recognized that tensions exist between the constituents and beneficiaries of a movement, and they raised questions as to the legitimacy of movements that incorporate few representatives of the groups that they purport to represent. However, little has been done to research how such tensions are ameliorated. I have argued that the tensions that constituents feel, which emanate from their racial and class privilege, are negotiated through framing processes, which serve to "inspire and legitimate" their collective action. The feelings of illegitimacy and self-doubt that NP activists experienced are unique in that they were generated by constituents themselves: outside observers, or even the group's beneficiaries, did not accuse activists of illegitimacy. It would be worthwhile for further research to examine the ways in which beneficiaries and constituents *work together* to negotiate the differences in privilege and corresponding feelings of illegitimacy that many activists encounter.

This article also makes some important contributions to the body of literature on social movements and emotions. In order for a movement to survive and flourish, activists must develop strategies to continually manage and even sublimate feelings that could quite possibly consume them to the point that they abandon it. However, I argue that different emotions carry different *levels* of risk for movement abandonment. Emotions based on love and friendship between movement actors may help sustain movement activity (Rupp and Taylor 1987; Taylor 1989), and carry with them low risk for movement abandonment. In comparison, feelings of anger, hate, and illegitimacy carry with them a much higher risk for movement decline. Participation in the organization under study carries with it a high risk for abandonment: activists feel inauthentic and therefore consider leaving the group. In cases in which activists experience emotions that carry with them high risk for movement abandonment, I argue that it is essential for them to engage in emotional labor that will sustain their collective action, if their goals are to be realized.

The emotional work in which activists engaged in the empirical case presented resulted in the creation of organizational frames that legitimated activists' work. While framing theory has historically examined the ways in which frames are used to mobilize external audiences, I have shown that frames are not used just to "inspire and legitimate" collective action for external audiences, but for internal audiences as well. I suggest that activists must legitimate their collective action to one another before facing external audiences like bystander publics, as they must have a strong understanding and justification for their work. Frames serve as mechanisms for the sublimation of emotions that may detract from movement activity. They provide a sense of collective purpose—even identity—that unites and encourages activists in the face of self-doubt. Moreover, the feelings that activists experience influence the types of frames that they use during the course of their activism. In NP, the dominant feelings that were revealed were illegitimacy and self-doubt; activists had to create frames that in some way legitimated their work so that they felt better about engaging in it. In cases in which organizations experience other dominant emotions that carry with them high risk for movement abandonment (such as anger), studying framing processes has the potential to teach scholars much about activists' rationale for remaining committed to a movement or deserting it.

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Transiting Social Worlds: Accounts of Formerly Married Lesbians

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The research presented in this article focuses on understanding the lives of women who transit from heterosexual marriage to lesbian identity. The authors explore the social and interpersonal contexts in which lesbians enter, exist in, and exit heterosexual marital relationships. Substantive information for this study is derived from interviews conducted with women who identify as lesbian and have in the past been heterosexually married. The interviews focus on transitions in lifestyle and identity and the influence of (ex-)spouses, children, parents, friends, and lovers in various contexts and phases of transition. An important element of this research is the illumination of the ways in which women navigate and experience the straight and lesbian social worlds. The life histories of formerly married lesbians highlight the limits of current cultural definitions of social and sexual categories for these women. This research shows the need for greater awareness, understanding, and acceptance of the variances in women's sexual lives by researchers, media, and the public.

The French film *Entre Nous* (Kurys 1983) tells the story of two married women who allow their newly forged friendship to transport them emotionally and physically to places of unexpected strength and desire. Part of the film's magic is that the story is told from a daughter's perspective. While this is an intimate view that shows the deep love and attachment between two women, it is a child's gaze. The use of a naïve perspective intentionally creates ambiguity for the viewer concerning the sexual nature of the women's relationship. In the end, the power of the film, and, indeed, its transportability across decades, is that it captures and discloses the intensely private struggle and public invisibility of two women as they exit heterosexual marriages and become life partners. For us, the film serves as a starting point for understanding the real life upheaval and transformation that occurs for untold numbers of women who

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experience same-gender desire while being married to a man. It also serves as a corrective for naïve ideas about sexual orientation and demonstrates that life for these women is constituted through participation in countervailing social worlds. Just as the child's gaze as narrative device cloaks dimensions of their sexual relationship within the camera's frame, in like fashion, heteronormative culture works to obscure same-gender relationships within the social frame.

MARRIED LESBIANS

This research illuminates the complex social and interpersonal experiences of formerly married lesbians and demonstrates the limits of current cultural definitions of relational and sexual categories for women. Our starting point is the recognition that women, including those who identify as lesbian or who eventually come to identify themselves as lesbian, first and foremost are socialized into heterosexual social worlds and learn, often firsthand, that difference is stigmatized (Gramick 1984; Rich 1980; Stein 1997). Empirical and theoretical work in this area has clearly argued that heterosexual cultural definitions are so taken for granted and rigidly framed that they constitute what has been called the "heterosexual imperative" (Menasche 1999). Consequently, gay men and lesbian women are so enmeshed in heteronormative social life that it is an ongoing struggle to construct a personal or social identity as gay or lesbian. Many gay men and lesbian women report that during their teens and early adulthood, before they began to understand their sexual preferences were not heterosexual, they felt confused, different, shamed, ambivalent, or under pressure to deny what they were experiencing (Bridges and Croteau 1994; Strickland 1995). Thus, they felt compelled to participate in heterosexual relationships; for a large number, this meant full participation in the form of marriage and family (Remez 2000). As Rich (1980), Rowe (2005), and Wittig (1992) have discussed in their respective works, heteronormativity is invisible to heterosexual society and functions as social control that discourages and punishes women for creating relationships of sexual belonging with women.

Reasons for Marriage

Given the power of nonconscious heterosexual ideology, it should not be surprising to sociologists that the majority of previously married bisexual or lesbian women report that they married because they desired marriage (Bridges and Croteau 1994; Strickland 1995).[1] Some women who found themselves simultaneously married and experiencing same-gender desire or relationships did not always identify as lesbian, and did not experience or even recognize same-gender desire (Dixon 1985; Rothblum 2000; Saghir and Robins 1973). In fact, many report that they hid or delayed acting upon their sexual desires (Day and Schoenrade 1997; Garnets and Peplau 2000; Peplau and Garnets 2000; Rust 1992).

Research has found that more lesbians than gay men report being previously heterosexually married (Buntzly 1993; Strickland 1995). This may be partially explained by the social artifact that women typically marry younger than men. By marrying at younger ages, women may be less likely than men to have had time to establish their sexual identities and were perhaps not even aware of their same-gender preference prior to marriage (Bridges and Croteau 1994; Strickland 1995). Findings from Strickland (1995) indicated that at least half of the formerly married lesbians in her study had no idea of their same-gender desire until after they were married. These women also reported that they experienced stress, feelings of isolation, and emotional despondency once they acknowledged experiencing sexual desire for women. It has also been suggested that girls' socialization into heteronormative culture places primary emphasis on family and children and works to suppress sexual expression, while emphasizing nonsexual closeness and intimacy. These pressures may also account for why many formerly married lesbians report that they did not recognize or understand their same-gender attraction and desire earlier in the life course (Rich 1980).

For those who were consciously aware of their same-gender desire in youth and young adulthood, the most common experience recounted was dating boys despite being uncomfortable, and many suggested that they did so as a way of fitting in or hiding their difference. As some research has shown, for many young women, drinking heavily or abusing drugs was all they could do to get through evenings out with friends in whom they could not confide (Hughes 2003; Strickland 1995; Strock 1998). Many married but eventually disclosed their sexual feelings for women. Research has indicated that once they have identified their sexuality, younger women seem to experience less difficulty coming out to their spouses, even when they have children, whereas those with longer marriages have a harder time making the decision to tell their husbands and children (Strickland 1995).

In addition to heterosexual socialization, economic factors related to the gendered nature of social life contribute to the high incidence of marriage among lesbians. In the contemporary context, the extension of employment and educational opportunities for women, combined with broadening cultural definitions of sexuality, have enabled increasing numbers of women to construct independent identities and lifestyles beyond heterosexually bound motherhood, marriage, and sexuality (Dunne 2000; Giddens 1992). However, despite such economic gains, socioeconomic conditions continue to create structural constraints that render nonmarried women vulnerable to poverty and dependent on men for financial survival. Thus, normative pressures to marry and stay married are supported through economic and structural constraints placed on women.

As would be expected, embracing lesbian status while in a heterosexual marriage creates a problem of great magnitude with few viable solutions: seeking a divorce or redefining the marriage, keeping silent, or denying desire. Many women who find themselves embracing lesbian or same-gender relationships do seek divorce. But, for some, divorce seems impossible, and they either closet their feelings and needs or attempt to redefine the marriage as one worth preserving. Redefinition is difficult business for couples but is sometimes achieved (if only temporarily) when women decide either not to participate in extramarital affairs or are able to convince spouses that any extramarital relationship would be secondary to the marital relationship and would not constitute a serious challenge to the marriage. Even with redefinition, in most cases these marriages collapse under the pressures of serious problems that result from the denial of such basic parts of oneself or the conflicts that emerge from extramarital relationships (Buntzly 1993; Strock 1998).

Conceptualizing Sexual Orientation

It is difficult to talk about sexual orientation without capitulating to normative and mostly binary vocabularies of gender and sexuality (e.g., homosexual/heterosexual, male/female). Therefore, we adopt a definitional framework closely aligned with that of Rothblum (2000) and Rowe (2005), who assert that sexual orientation is a multidimensional phenomenon that is socially and interactionally constituted. We see sexual orientation as minimally including dimensions of behavior, identity, and emotion.[2] Moreover, because sexual orientation is a socially constituted practice, it is malleable and arises within the "collective conditions out of which our agency, experience, and consciousness emerge" (Rowe 2005:15). As Rothblum (2000) stresses, much of the research on sexual orientation has defined and measured this complex human phenomenon along a single dimension with two opposing and mutually exclusive categories—operationalized by asking whether a respondent is in a sexual relationship with a man or a woman. In contrast, our work approaches the understanding of sexual orientation as negotiated, performative, and variable across the situation and the life-course (Butler 1990; Peplau and Garnets 2000; Rothblum 2000:196; West and Zimmerman 1987). For example, one can experience same-gender desire or attraction and also consider oneself to be heterosexual (just as one can identify as heterosexual without having to think about sexual identity at all, because heterosexuality does not have to be accounted for in heteronormative contexts). Moreover, a self-identified heterosexual might later come to understand same-gender desire as a vital part of herself and begin to self-identify as bisexual or lesbian, with or without acting on that desire (Rust 1992). As sociologists have argued, when a person develops a sense of gendered selfhood they do so through interaction with others in shared "communities of understanding" about what gender "is" and "means" (Garfinkel 1967:181-2). Gender is managed and negotiated in everyday interactions against the backdrop of taken-for-granted cultural definitions and practices. Viewed in this way, gender is seen as a practical accomplishment (Brickell 2003; West and Zimmerman 1987). Similarly, sexual orientation is an ongoing, practical accomplishment, negotiated, and achieved through social interaction. Thus, rather than thinking about sexual orientation in terms of "being" lesbian or heterosexual or bisexual or not, it is more valid to envision people as "doing" and negotiating sexual orientation within specific interactional contexts and with reference to cultural definitions of gender and sexuality.

How can research account for this diversity and complexity in understanding the real lives of women? As Rothblum (2000) convincingly suggests, the best way to contribute to the understanding of sexual orientation is through the use of qualitative approaches and open-ended methods. One way of accomplishing this is through the study of self-narratives. Such an approach situates the self as a social construction (Holstein and Gubrium 2000b: xi). From a constructionist perspective, the self is continually developing, negotiated within complex interactional frameworks, and communicated through self-narration. In this way, the self and sexuality are not seen as fixed but rather as actively constructed and reconstructed. Through autobiographical narratives, people tell the stories that connect selective parts of life, interpret who they are and are not, for particular needs and with an eye to specific circumstances (Holstein and Gubrium 2000a). Consequently, studying autobiographical narratives renders a special set of understandings for the researcher and the audience. These understandings reflect agency, change, relationships with particular others, and interpretive understandings of the storyteller's lifeworlds. As Denzin (1989) asserts, self-narratives reveal how identity categories are practically consequential for the narrator. Thus, they express salient aspects of identity and address the concerns about the relationships that constitute everyday life.

SCOPE AND METHODS OF INQUIRY

While there is a substantial literature that has attempted to understand the nature of the coming out process for lesbians, only a handful of studies address this life transition for women previously involved in heterosexual relationships or marriages (Bell and Weinberg 1978; Bridges and Croteau 1994; Charbonneau and Lander 1991; Coleman 1985 and 1989; Dixon 1985; Ettorre 1980; Faderman 1991; Falco 1991; Gramick 1984; Green and Clunis 1989; Ross 1971; Strock 1998; van der Geest 1993; Wyers 1987). Most of the early research in this vein was conducted from therapeutic or psychological counseling perspectives or was exploratory and employed survey methodology. These early efforts resulted in a useful body of developmental, therapeutic, and descriptive knowledge (Coleman 1985 and 1989; Falco 1991; Green and Clunis 1989; Wyers 1987). Subsequent work, primarily qualitative, is responsible for positing the *plasticity hypothesis* of sexual behavior and mainly focuses on the coming out process and sexual identity formation (Bell and Weinberg 1978; Bridges and Croteau 1994; Coleman 1985 and 1989; Dixon 1985; Gramick 1984; Green and Clunis 1989; Kitsinger and Wilkinson 1995). That research attempts to add to the literature by focusing on women's understandings of their own lives as they move from heterosexual marriage to identifying as a lesbian. This work will provide sociological understanding and framing of the social and interpersonal contexts in which lesbians entered, lived within, or exited marital relationships. The descriptive and substantive information for this study is derived from interviews conducted with women who identify as lesbian, most of whom are currently open with their lesbian identity but some of whom remain closed within specific social contexts. We focus on the experiences of lesbians who were formerly in heterosexual/marital relationships and rely primarily on information gathered from lengthy in-person (N = 36) and telephone interviews (N = 3). Three key informants were identified through the course of natural interaction with friends and acquaintances. Additional respondents were identified via snowball sampling, in which each informant identified additional potential informants.

The interviews were conducted using an open approach with unstructured and semistructured questions. This approach to interviewing provides more flexibility for the interviewer, allows respondents to be more expressive, and increases the likelihood that respondents will share thoughts and attitudes relating to their own definitions of the situation. The interviews began by asking respondents general questions about (1) their transitions in lifestyle and identity, (2) the influence and reactions of (ex-)spouses, children, parents, friends, and lovers in various points of transition, and (3) how marriages and family relationships were influenced by transitions. The respondents were asked to elaborate on issues that were identified from the general questions. While specific information on politics of identity and the process of coming out as lesbian was certainly disclosed by respondents in the interviews, this was not the primary goal of the interviews. Rather, we were interested in the personal histories and autobiographical accounts women provided regarding their lives and relationships, especially regarding how they navigated and experienced the straight and lesbian social worlds.

This work is also informed by personal experiences and informal observations at local gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgender support group meetings. However, because support group disclosures occur under terms of strict confidentiality, data are not reported from these meetings. Additionally, this research draws on information from Internet blogs, discussion boards, and chat rooms, although we did not participate directly in online conversations or blogs. When blog or online discussion participants converse in public spaces, doing so reveals personal information about gay/lesbian experience. And, while marital status and other lifestyle information are not always explicitly stated in these discussions, a large number of women who participate in these online forums could be identified as formerly married lesbians. Online content paralleled the life transition, family, and sexual orientation issues being raised by many of our respondents. Although not reported here, observations from support group meetings and Internet forums strongly suggest convergent validity of our interview findings, as well as being useful in gauging the salience of the issues and themes that emerged in the interviews.

At the time of the interviews all of the women in the study self-identified as lesbian and reported being formerly married to a man (N = 39). Not surprisingly, 26 of these women were mothers (67 percent) and the number of children per household ranged from one to four. While all self-identified as lesbian, some of the women in our study were not publicly open with their lesbian identity, but agreed to be interviewed under conditions of confidentiality. Our respondents were exceptionally candid about their feelings, experiences, conflicts, and actions, and the interviews brought into relief the limits of commonly held definitions of social and sexual categories for understanding the complexity of life for married and formerly married lesbians.

GETTING INTO AND OUT OF HETEROSEXUAL MARRIAGE

The narratives told by respondents in this study strongly suggest that the reasons women with same-gender preferences decide to marry in the first place play a large part in why they remain in their marriages, sometimes for many years, before finally exiting. Wanting to be loved and approved of and to be cared for and feel safe are certainly primary considerations for marrying. It is also evident from our interviews that married lesbians remain in marriages, even unsatisfying ones, for the same sorts of reasons as discontented heterosexual women. They stay because they value relationships with others, want stability for their children and themselves, and, in many cases, they care about the welfare of the spouse, even when the marital relationship severely limits their freedom to pursue their desires.

Leaving the Marriage

Married lesbians face several quandaries exiting a heterosexual marriage: being closeted versus coming out, preserving and maintaining their lesbian and familial relationships, receiving support or being rejected for being lesbian, and reconciling two life worlds. Coming out as lesbians or reconceptualizing their marriages may drastically alter the balance that has long supported their families and other relationships. When recounting decisions about leaving heterosexual marriage, the women in this study echoed what some researchers (Calhoun 1997; Coleman 1985 and 1989; Green and Clunis 1989; Kitsinger and Winkinson 1995) have suggested, that married lesbians are doubly marginalized in that they live two separate and often equally estranged lives. As the four passages from interviews reveal, the road to lesbian identity was fraught with secrecy, repression, and conflict:

> I have three children . . . realized I was lesbian at 16, had sex with a girl at 16. I got married . . . continued to have affairs with women . . . divorced after 12 years of marriage. . . . It was a lot of stress for both of us. At first my husband did not know I was still having sex with women. When we got married he knew I had relationships with other women but assumed I had stopped. . . . He found out I was and we handled it for a while but it was just too emotionally abusive for both of us. . . . There were no hard feelings. . . . We were both relieved.

> As I look back, I realize that I wanted women all along, but could not believe it. I tried to hide my feelings, but after two children and a divorce, I am where I am meant to be.

> I have been in a relationship for 5 years. . . . I am open about my preference. I cannot deny who I am. . . . I was always in conflict with the heterosexual lifestyle.

> Looking back on it I have been struggling with my sexuality since I was 13 or 14. . . . I tried to avoid it as much as possible . . . the subject was taboo. I was married at 18 even though I knew I was attracted to women. I was married for 3 years when I had a relationship with a woman. . . . She was my first girlfriend.

Most women we talked with acknowledged in various ways that leading a double life was inherently destabilizing. For respondents who felt this way, marriages were deemed unstable because their personal identity as lesbian created the need to move outside of the marriage, while they were simultaneously afraid or unwilling to give up the heterosexual lifestyle for fear of estrangement from their conjugal family and friends and over economic concerns. As one of our respondents described, she and her lesbian partner were both formerly married, and she and her husband tried to stay married even after he knew of her partner. For her, the marriage was manageable initially because of a supportive husband and her not having a serious extramarital relationship, but pressures to exit the marriage increased when she became more deeply involved with a woman: "I was married at 20. . . . We were married for 10 years. . . . It became more of a struggle to remain in a heterosexual relationship than to be in one with a woman. . . . We actually tried to stay married, but emotionally it was just too much."

Generally, for all of the formerly married lesbians we interviewed, heterosexual life was a challenge, and the fear of rejection and loss were constant emotional drivers as they navigated heterosexual and lesbian social worlds simultaneously.

Guilt and Fear of Loss

Some women are unable to embrace or even acknowledge to themselves a lesbian identity, even though they have and continue to participate in same-gender relationships. For these women keeping their same-gender desires closeted during marriage makes sense. Of the 39 respondents 32 indicated that they kept their preferences secret out of fear of rejection from family or friends. Indeed, many revealed that fear of rejection was one of the major reasons for keeping sexual identity secret before, during, and, in some cases, after marriage. For several, this fear was the motivation to marry in the first place, and for others it was the primary reason given for staying married. Many of the respondents (29) who were closed about their same-gender desires and relationships during their marriages reported that they experienced much guilt and fear from keeping this secret, and some felt they had lived a double life. Specifically, they expressed guilt over secrecy, and several considered their same-gender relationships while they were married as cheating, but felt they had no other choice at the time but to stay married. The difficulty of understanding and adjusting to feelings of same-gender desire while married is illustrated by a respondent who chose, temporarily, not to leave or act on her desire: "When I was pregnant with my first child I was looking at a woman and I got excited. At first I thought that it was my hormones and not that I was a lesbian. I could not do that to my husband and unborn child. So I just didn't think about it."

All 26 of the respondents with children were primarily concerned about how coming out or leaving the marriage would impact their children. Most felt that their children would suffer from the revelation and the actions that would necessarily follow. Some expressed fear of losing their children through custody battles and family conflicts. Others reported that they also feared losing what they considered to be their family—the relationship of coparent with husbands and the relationships they all shared together as a whole. Some women respected their husbands immensely—as a parent and provider. It is not surprising then, that some chose to stay married for a period of time for the benefit of children and for the love of husbands and family life.

In the last decade, there has been a move in the theoretical and conceptual literature toward reframing women's sexual orientation as part of broader relational orientation. Within this view, women are seen as defining and enacting family more expansively than do men, and in ways that often include relationships with friends, coworkers, and relatives (Felmlee and Sprecher 2000). Although erotic desire and sexual intimacy are important motivators for behavior, familial relationships are a high priority in making life decisions (Peplau and Garnets 2000; Rust 1992). Thus, divorcing a husband disrupts more than just immediate familial relationships; it disrupts and threatens a broader web of connections that are a vital source of meaning and emotional support.

Family and Friends

Fear of parental rejection created a major impasse for several women who talked about their fear of rejection by and conflict with their own parents as a huge part of not being open about being lesbian. One respondent who had known about her same-gender desires before marriage, but married because she desired acceptance by her family, revealed, "I had a homosexual experience in college and realized I would not be accepted in my family if I came out." Another married at a fairly young age because she experienced the dual forces of heteronormativity and bigotry: "I got married at 23 years of age because I thought that it was the thing to do. My family always voiced their opinion about gays, so I know that was not an option." Two of our respondents told of decades of internal conflict and not disclosing their sexual preference to their brothers and sisters, until their parents had passed away. Another, a devoutly religious woman who is now guardedly open to her family, feared her father's reaction so much that she did not come out to her mother, brother, and sister until her father had died. She was resolute in saying, "I believe in heaven and hell and so after he died I figured now [her father] knew, one way or the other." Most of the women interviewed (82 percent) continue to feel they still cannot come out to some members of their family or certain friends.

The majority of women in our study had a rough time in the transition from heterosexual to lesbian identity. Even when their own families were supportive of their decision and are now more a part of their lives, some of their friends have not been so supportive. One participant with no children stated: "The hardest part of my coming out process was when my best friend of 12 years turned her back on me when I told her that I was a lesbian. She said that I was not normal and that she could no longer be my friend. I wept for days, and soon realized that I would be able to find a new best friend as I made my way into my new life."

For women with children, it is exceptionally distressing when their children do not accept them or are reluctant to have fully engaged relationships with them after they come out. As one mother painfully demonstrates, sometimes children are not supportive and in some cases severely limit contact with their mothers: "My children are all girls, two are supportive . . . the oldest has not accepted my lifestyle and refuses to stay with me. My husband has custody of the oldest and I have the two youngest." Another reveals a somewhat common pattern of children coming to accept their mother's lesbian status after reaching adulthood. This respondent reports in a matter of fact way: "I realized when I was married that my sexual preference was lesbian . . . that's the reason we got divorced. . . . My children stayed with my husband. . . . They are more accepting of me now that they are adults." Research has shown that lesbians continue to be stigmatized in divorce cases and are often not given custody of children after the divorce; thus, their preteen children are not allowed freely to associate with them (Patterson 2005). This trend has led to much anxiety and fear of custody loss among married lesbians and lesbian couples. Many of the respondents reported fear and anxiety concerning the possible loss of custody and or separation from their children. Our findings show that, in fact, three of our respondents had lost custody of their children after divorce and attributed this loss to their lesbian status and unsupportive ex-husbands and family.

Husbands' Acceptance and Rejection

Husbands' reactions to the revelation or realization that they are married to lesbians are critical for wives' well-being after the marriage and also can negatively or positively influence relationships lesbians have with their children after divorce. In our interviews, women reported that some of the husbands were initially accepting of their wives being lesbian or in sexual relationships with a woman. For the majority of these marriages, however, serious problems arose. As two women reported, becoming involved in extramarital lesbian relationships created too much pressure for the marriage to continue: "My husband knew I was lesbian . . . [and] this went on for 3 to 4 years. . . . We got divorced because I met a woman I wanted to start a relationship with." In most marriages the revelation of lesbian identity does break up the marriage, but for some the end of the marriage is not the end of the supportive bonds between the husband and wife. The vast majority of respondents (85 percent) revealed information about ex-husbands that indicated some form of supportive behavior. Some ex-husbands lend strong support while others support less actively by not obstructing the divorce or relationships with children and family. As one of our respondents illustrates, her ex-husband lends strong active support through friendship and shared responsibility of their child: "[I] realized I was a lesbian at 26 and the first person I discussed it with was my husband and my mother. My husband is very supportive—we are great friends; we have one child; we have joint custody. I have been in a permanent lesbian relationship for 8 years." Another respondent was exceptionally proud of her former husband's behavior during and after the divorce. There is no doubt that she sees his support reinforcing her relationship with her son. She is open about what happened after the divorce, stating:

> My parents and his parents disowned me when we divorced. We were honest with people about why we were divorcing. I felt that was the most fair thing for him and my son. We also wanted my son to always know. My husband became a social worker while we were married and so he knew about how important honesty and owning the truth is. . . . There was even a time when my in-laws

> were threatening to try and block me from seeing my son and my husband did some serious talking to them and I think that is why they backed off.

And for a few husbands, the end of the marriage appears to have created no problems at all. Rather, it was an opportunity to move on with their lives and make the best of the situation. As one formerly married woman says of her marriage ending: "We married. . . . I became openly gay and we got divorced. . . . I kept the kids . . . he got a young girlfriend . . . and everybody is happy. . . . My lover lives with me; my kids are okay with it." Similarly, another couple divorced, but they continue to work together and manage life the best they can. Her feelings of live-and-let-live with her ex-husband are evident in her comments about life and work:

> We love our kids. . . . My ex tries to do the male boss thing every once in a while but we are okay. . . . He has his problems and I have mine and we have some together. . . . I have adjusted to this life, I have . . . for a long time it was hell. . . . I have many of the same problems as blended families, step-families, ex-spouses and grandparents and mothers whose children live with their fathers . . . with the additional baggage of being a lesbian. . . . [laughs] It is sort of a mess I suppose, but I am okay with it. During my marriage I became gay. We tried to make a go of it for a while. But what was the point? We got divorced. We share the kids. We are in business together in a number of ventures; one we started during our marriage, the second we started after our divorce . . . the others are small things. . . . He is a good business partner. . . . We make great business partners . . . but lousy companions.

Likewise, a respondent talks of her fondness for her ex-husband and credits him with much care and assistance over the life-course. She reports feeling fortunate to have met and married him. She says of her ex-husband:

> He really did like me and always said he would love me. He meant it and I guess I did too because he is one of my oldest friends. He moved away over a decade ago, but we keep in touch all the time through email and at holidays when he comes home to visit his mom and dad—who hate me. . . . It is awesome that I got so lucky with that man. He saved my life. He and my son didn't want me to end up dead and so they intervened and I went into rehab but then became involved, really heavily involved.

In contrast, for many women in our study, the transition out of marriage was and continues to be conflictual because of ex-husbands and other family members. Six of the respondents disclosed information about unsupportive ex-husbands. Among these women the level of nonsupport by an ex-husband varies greatly. This variation is reflected in what two of our respondents had to say about ex-husbands and family: "My ex-husband and I do not get along . . . [and] he has never accepted this well. . . . We are always arguing about the kids. . . . I have both of them. It's just me and the children." Another says: "He did not know I was a lesbian during the marriage but the emotional distance between us caused conflicts. . . . Finally I told him I was a lesbian.

. . . It was real bad, screaming, pushing. . . . He made everything worse. . . . He threatened me with all kinds of legal crap. . . . We are not friends, but we are civil to one another because of our children . . . and his parents hate me."

For women who have children with ex-husbands, the struggle continues many years beyond the divorce. While many couples who divorce experience this type of lingering conflict, the anxiety and fear is compounded by the socially dangerous fact that she is a lesbian, and this status, in most cases, renders her with more to lose than her former spouse. In the past, one respondent's husband had threatened to "out" her at her place of employment (though he had not yet done so). As she put it, "He is an albatross around my neck, and because of the kids, I will never be free of him. . . . I dread all school events and holidays, because it always ends up being about damage control." This ex-husband's behavior is harmful and threatening and shows the ongoing nature of the pain and struggle she is enduring many years after the divorce.

NAVIGATING SOCIAL WORLDS

For the married lesbian the benefits of marriage often outweighed the potential gain of coming out, especially given that married lesbians are often criticized and feel rejected by the lesbian community for their unwillingness to give up heterosexual privilege (Stein 1997). For some women, the lesbian community offers little support for currently married lesbians and when they leave marriages, many never-married lesbians are slow to believe that women who have been married are "really" lesbian (Strock 1998). When a woman makes the decision to leave a heterosexual marriage she risks being stigmatized by both straights and lesbians: either they were "really" lesbians all along but were repressing or denying it (Stein 1997), or they are "not really" lesbians now and are faking it (Bergler 1954; Charbonneau and Lander 1991; Stein 1997). Research on the patterns of lesbian identity by Fingerhut, Peplau, and Ghavami (2005) discusses specific patterns of organizing personal and social identity that arise from the combinations of involvement in straight and gay worlds. While these worlds are often separate in the lived experience, identification with the dominant culture does not preclude identification with the minority culture, and vice versa. The intersection of the two worlds results in four possible affiliation patterns: (1) assimilated (low in lesbian affiliation and high in heterosexual affiliation); (2) lesbian-identified or separated (high in lesbian affiliation and low in heterosexual affiliation); (3) integrated (high in both), and (4) marginalized (low in both). Although these four categories are heuristic devices and cannot capture the nuanced differences among individuals, they do provide a way to describe social affiliation across the mainstream and lesbian communities.

Mainstream Assimilation and Marginalization

The women we interviewed primarily fit with the assimilation (77 percent) and marginalization (23 percent) patterns of affiliation. It must be noted that when Peplau and Garnets (2000) refer to identity and affiliation patterns, they are referring to social identity and are concerned with the circumstances and conditions under which people identify with a particular group or not. In this vein, the social environment plays a crucial role in the production and formation of social identity. When social environments are hostile to difference, strong adherence to lesbian social identity would create significant challenges. As symbolic interactionists have noted, people control presentations of self for many reasons; among these are fear of negative evaluation, emotional and economic well-being, desire for privacy, social acceptability, and fear of physical harm (Goffman 1963). Thus, the wish to distance oneself from lesbian social identity, at least in these contexts, is understandable. But, for lesbians who desire a partial or a completely integrated life, facing resistant social environments is an everyday reality (Fingerhut, Peplau, and Ghavami 2005).

Those who fit the assimilation pattern of lesbian identity deemphasize their sexual orientation as a basis for personal identity, preferring to be treated more holistically as an individual rather than labeled a member of a group. These women, as one would expect, emphasize the nonsexual aspects of their identity rather than their lesbian status as being more important in determining who they are. As such, formerly married lesbians who have lived predominantly in the heterosexual world, even after they exit marriages, may be infrequent visitors to the lesbian community. This infrequency allows for continued social and psychological distance from the lesbian label and normative frameworks of the lesbian community. Many lesbians who spend much of their lives in heterosexual social contexts report that this distance helps them stay grounded in the world in which they feel most comfortable (Green and Clunis 1989). When our respondents talked about participation in and the degree to which they are part of a lesbian community, those who had been entrenched in the heterosexual world often revealed that they continued to be reluctant or ambivalent about the politics of lesbian identity and full participation in lesbian subcultures. The assimilation pattern is illustrated by this respondent discussing her feelings about her participation in lesbian culture: "I don't participate in the culture. So people who know me know and others can just guess. I don't wear a sign and I neither participate nor defend lesbian culture."

Two other respondents go into more detail showing that both deemphasize lesbian status and emphasize other social identity markers. The first respondent is frequently involved in passing as heterosexual, while the second is working toward having a more inclusive identity. They are in long-term same-gender relationships and are both highly integrated into and pass in the straight world: "Lesbian is not what I describe myself as being. I have been with my partner for 10 years . . . had two other relationships with women before this one. . . . I pass in the straight world so to speak, so most people don't know I am gay and that's the way I want it." Another adds: "We hang around with more straight couples than gay couples because we don't have to talk about the same stuff all the time. We get tired of . . . talking gay politics . . . even as a little girl, I have always been a bookworm and hung out with just a few people at the time—and for me my church friends and AA friends, some of them are gay and lesbian, but our friendships—it's more about having things in common than being lesbian, gay or whatever."

Assimilation as a pattern is also about the conditions under which women must survive, for example, in work and school environments. When respondents discussed work, it was clear that many of them felt their occupations restricted their ability to be open about being lesbian. As a result of pressure to "appear" straight at work, social affiliations with lesbians that might spill over into work become problematic. One respondent, who is an attorney, stated that she has always maintained a "straight image." She said that people in her office were supportive after her divorce, but she knows that if her employers knew that she was a lesbian, she would be "judged differently to say the least." Her children live with her husband and do not know she is a lesbian. Her affiliative pattern appears to be a combination of assimilation and marginalization, not because she desires this pattern of affiliation, but because her work constrains her openness. As Goffman (1959: 29) reminds us in his work on identity, "fronts" are important for managing impressions and are projected for others. One of the nine respondents who fit the marginalized category reported she did not participate much in either the heterosexual or lesbian social worlds. She states, "It's just me and the children. . . . I never thought about living with someone because of the crap I would get from my family . . . and my ex-spouse."

None of the women in our study completely fit the "separatist" category of affiliation. This pattern does appear to have some connection to ideas and thoughts many of the women in our study expressed. There is a tiresomeness and anger that arises from feeling forced to live an alienated life—this can create an intense reaction against the heterosexual social world. For these women, being a lesbian is so central to their personal and social identity that they seek to separate themselves, to the extent possible, from heterosexual communities (Fingerhut, Peplau, and Ghavami 2005). One respondent expressed such feelings of alienation and hostility:

> Sometimes I just find myself pissed at all males, even close friends of my partner. I want my whole world to be lesbian. I just want to be around other lesbians. My partner has a close straight male friend who comes over, and sometimes I act like a dyke. . . . I don't even talk to him. . . . Then I realize that I have a son and this same man has taken my son with his children to go places. . . . He is a great role model for the straight world. I feel bad and drift back into the real world. My partner and I once had split up because of this.

As the interview excerpts indicated, we do find within our interviews that feelings, attitudes, social context, and relational pressure interact to produce variations in patterns of affiliation, and when women talk about affiliation, they do so in ways that react against or defend to some extent normative definitions of togetherness and family. The women we interviewed articulate themselves within standpoints that are deeply connected to heteronormative arrangements of power—in both general and local ways. As in the passage above, the respondent is communicating and responding to heteronormative interpretations of what men and women "do" in families, that men are necessary models for boys. Additionally, her narrative tells of the binary categories of social life, straight and gay, where the gay world isn't the "real" world. In her narrative, she identifies the ongoing struggle, her emotional responses, negative self-evaluation, and compulsory embeddedness in the straight world that results from her status and role of "mother." Her negotiations between these two worlds are disruptive to her relationships and make her feel "bad." Extrapolating from the interviews and from the conclusions of West and Zimmerman's work on power and doing gender (1987), it is clear that "doing sexual orientation" is also "doing power" (33). The respondent's preference notwithstanding, having a lesbian-only social world is not possible. As Feigenbaum (2007) argues, judgments are not anomalies in interpersonal relations; rather, they are tangible expressions of power.

Passing in the Straight World

There has been considerable attention given to the social phenomenon of passing (Goffman 1963; Inness 1997). Regardless of whether the respondents interviewed for this study had trouble with the label of lesbian or were partially or wholly open as lesbians, they have all passed as heterosexual in significant and profound ways as a consequence of being formerly heterosexually married. The nature and extent to which they continue to pass as heterosexual after exiting heterosexual marriage is variable. It has been wisely argued by Inness (1997:158) that all lesbians pass, whether they want to or not. Passing is an unavoidable part of life for gays and lesbians. To think naively that one might avoid passing ignores the fact that lesbians, even those committed and actively involved in lesbian subculture, must and do relate to the larger heterosexual society daily. Correspondingly, we find that passing as straight is ubiquitous among the women we interviewed. As expected, in most contexts passing is unintentional and outside of one's control or awareness, but in some instances it is intentional, purposeful action. Whether passing is intentional or not, it takes many forms and fulfills many functions (Inness 1997:160). In our interviews, some of the reasons given for both types of passing have much to do with realistic fears of rejection, loss, time, ostracism, financial hardships, and safety. Two of our respondents illustrate experiences of passing: "If we are out in public together in places it . . . is just easier to let people think what they want. I don't have time to correct the thinking of every person I meet and why should I have to? . . . We look at each other like here we go again and we do the eye-roll thing when they aren't looking our way." A second explains: "She won't let any of her work friends come to our house because she thinks that if they knew they would think she was a bad person. . . . Some of them know, but they don't know, but if word got around, it might make things bad at work."

The Power of Motherhood

Our interviews showed that for lesbians who are mothers, stepmothers, grandmothers, and so on, passing becomes wrapped up in the power of motherhood as signifying heterosexual culture. Motherhood reflects more than just the presence of having a child; it is also connected to a broader level of meaning. Motherhood is a major symbol of heteronormativity in which specific gender meaning—women as relational to men—is announced by way of this status. Thus, the presence of mother status insinuates social relational information into the social frame, whether that information is accurate or not.

Motherhood is a powerful master status that covers or obscures lesbian identity in public spheres.

As Arlene Stein (1997:131) has said, "Lesbians have always been mothers." It is impossible to know the number of lesbians who are mothers, but some have projected that as many as 30 percent may have children. This would indicate that there are millions of lesbian mothers in the United States (Bridges and Croteau 1994; Charbonneau and Lander 1991; Croteau and Hedstrom 1993; Hughes 2003; Wyers 1987). Stein (1997) reports that lesbians with children who desired to be open in public spheres found themselves having constantly to convince heterosexuals that they indeed were mothers and were not heterosexual. In fact, motherhood often presents another kind of dual struggle for lesbians. If they want to be open, then in social contexts where mother status is apparent, they have to come out, over and over again to people who assume motherhood is a costatus of heterosexuality (Park 2007). And unless lesbian status is asserted or announced in the public sphere, lesbian mothers are unintentionally passing. Moreover, when asserting motherhood and lesbianism as dual aspects of her identity, it is most often motherhood that becomes the dominant social identifier and is the reported preferred "master status." This preference might have to do with the emotional and social payoffs of being a mother. However, it might also have much to do with the power of this status to move lesbians toward the center and away from the marginality that comes from lesbian status. This is seen when a respondent lists her statuses and prioritizes them: "I am a mother first, executive, then daughter, sister . . . lesbian is not what I describe myself as being."

Motherhood is this respondent's primary and preferred source of personal identity. This was true for all but one of the women with children in this study. Motherhood is a vital source of meaning and personal identity and, at many points, for example, when children are young, motherhood was seen as more important than sexual orientation. One respondent demonstrates the primacy of motherhood, "Being a mom is the most important part of my life and anybody who knows me knows that about me, it's my kids first, always." This is consistent with the work by Stryker (2002) indicating that a specific social identity may be more salient or given higher priority than others when positive meaning is derived from affiliation. For women with children, the emphasis on and role demands of motherhood are everpresent and the priority of this identity over other identities is a cultural given (Rich 1980). Motherhood is one of the roles most responsible for the "deadly elasticity of heterosexual presumption" that perpetually reclosets even the most openly queer person (Sedgwick 1990:46). Bonnie Mann (2007:151) offers an eloquent description of how lesbian motherhood is experienced:

> The smiles from complete strangers on the street, the interest, the approbation. This more than anything: the postures of welcome. I did inhabit a different body, strolling down the San Francisco sidewalk with kids (ages two, four, and five) hanging on to hands and pockets, a different social body. I'd stepped through some invisible door . . . being seen as someone who is welcome and worthy. It was the experience of being intelligible to the heterosexual world, of

> giving content to the dominant sign "mother." . . . But as time went on, I felt less and less intelligible to myself. It was as if my life split and doubled.

CONCLUSION

As Holstein and Gubrium (2000a) point out, self-construction relies on narration of the self and orients to the broader cultural narratives and controls of group membership. Further, autobiographical narratives are told from and influenced by "standpoints" of interpretation. These standpoints reflect both cultural positions of meaning and arrangements of power (Bourdieu 1991) and reveal our relationships to social categories that are connected to personal and social identities. There is considerable and relevant criticism of the notion of narrative coherence, arguing that narratives as stories of the self are audience and context driven and that they tend to essentialize and homogenize (Holstein and Gubrium 2000a). We hold that these criticisms can be true while also arguing that there is validity to the claim that narrative practice has coherence. As Denzin argues (1989), people convey social life through talk and to the extent that stories must make sense, this talk must be coherent. Moreover, to the extent that one's own life must appear coherent to oneself, essentialized and homogenized self-narratives might nevertheless be accurate reflections of how individuals conceive of their life experiences. Nevertheless, these criticisms remind us that the coherence of our respondent's stories correspond to larger ideologies and relational patterns, while they also are occasional—that is, contingent on such things as the context of the storytelling, the audience, and intentions. Taking this perspective, self-narration can be seen as one of the spaces in which personal and social identity occur. Thus, we argue that in autobiographical narratives, respondents are both "doing" and conveying sexual orientation—by locating themselves relative to partners, children, friends, and ex-husbands and by indicating points of resistance and conformity to social situations and definitions.

Formerly married lesbians illustrate the complexities of sexual orientation and social identity. As the women we interviewed boldly illustrate, the precepts of a patriarchal society present many women with difficulty in relinquishing or avoiding heterosexuality, even when they know it is not working for them. The category of "heterosexually married lesbian" creates a cognitive (cultural) dissonance for most people even though this is not a rare category among lesbians. The reality of women's sexual and relational lives, as evidenced in this work, forces critical examination of the standard criteria for inclusion and belonging in social institutions (Dunne 2000). Further, our research substantiates what some contemporary scholars have said: women's sexual identity, and, consequently their sexual behavior, are shaped by countervailing cultural, social, situational, and interactional influences (Baumeister 2000; Peplau and Garnets 2000; Rust 1992). For many women, personal relationships exert pressures requiring continued navigation across straight and lesbian social worlds—in seamless fashion on a daily basis. This situation is exemplified by accounts from lesbians we interviewed who have children and share custody with caring and responsible former husbands. Yes, sexuality is a social psychological process that is critically connected to sexual desire, but not constituted solely by desire. For the women in our study, the emphasis is on the social and the process is conflicted. Nowhere is this more obvious than with respondents who knew or suspected that they felt same-gender desire but simultaneously felt social pressure, feelings of love for, and the desire to marry a man. Moreover, while the politics of sexual identity are ever present for lesbians, the dualistic definitions so common in public and subcultural discourses—is she "in or out," "real or curious," "a resident or a tourist," and so on—are woefully inadequate for defining the reality of social and sexual life for formerly married lesbians.

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NOTES

1. Strock (1998: xxii) illustrates four patterns among formerly married lesbians who realized or revived their sexual desire for women. The first consists of women who, as young girls, sensed a difference between themselves and their peers but did not have the knowledge or language to describe these differences. The second group includes those who identify their same-gender desire and understand lesbianism early in life. They view being lesbian as deviant and accommodate into the mainstream by dating and marrying men. The third group includes women with same-gender desire, who are aware of lesbianism as a social category, who do not deny their sexual preferences for women. This category also includes those women who don't characterize themselves as lesbian, but do experience same-gender desire and relationships. The fourth group includes women who are completely heterosexual until they fall in love with a woman.

2. Personal identity is viewed as a person's sense of self, built up over time and seen as an internal sense of knowing oneself or as having self-meaning (Stryker 2002). Self-meanings are connected to roles and, through roles, to positions in organized social relationships. Through the interplay among self-meaning, social relationships, and cultural meanings, people form social identities. Social identity requires that a person be assigned a positional designation by others and that the person accept or internalize the designation, thereby identifying with the designation. The stability of social identities is tied to social relationships, networks, and situations. Consequently, social identity changes with movements across social networks or social spaces

and situations, for example, aging, marriage or divorce, or having children, and movement influences the commitment to and salience of social identities.

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"Oh, No, I'm Not Infertile": Culture, Support Groups, and the Infertile Identity

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Using in-depth interviews with forty subfecund women, I explore how subfecundity affects a woman's sense of self. I examine the role that culture plays in the content of our identities, particularly in disrupted lives. I examine the role that culture, in particular the culture within a support group, plays in the content of infertile identities. I examine how some women come to see themselves as infertile while others do not, and how the women come to think about infertility in relation to the self. I employ theories of cultural sociology and identity to provide a framework for explaining the ways in which subfecund women draw on the cultures of support groups in reconstructing their selves in the face of subfecundity.

Difficulty conceiving a child often has a profound impact on the women who experience it. In the dominant North American culture the motherhood mandate is quite powerful. A woman's choice to have children takes place within a framework that already includes reproduction and motherhood as a woman's biological destiny (Imeson and McMurray 1996; Kozolanka 1989). When women are confronted with difficulty in conceiving or carrying a pregnancy to a live birth, the "normal" and "expected" progression of their lives is disrupted (Daly 1988).

In this article I address how women come to understand and explain the disruption to the self that difficulty conceiving and carrying a pregnancy to a live birth causes. Specifically, I examine the role that culture, in particular the culture within a support group, plays in the content of infertile identities. I examine how some women come to see themselves as infertile, while others do not and how the women come to think about infertility in relation to the self. I employ theories of cultural sociology and identity to provide a framework to explain the ways in which subfecund women draw on the cultures of subfecundity support groups in reconstructing their selves in the face of subfecundity. The women in this study have varying connections to infertility cultures, which have their own ideologies concerning infertility. I explore how a

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woman's connections to these cultures influence both whether subfecund women develop a sense of self as infertile and the processes involved in that transition.

CULTURE AND INFERTILE IDENTITIES

For the purposes of this paper, I distinguish between subfecundity and infertility. "Subfecundity" refers to the physical state of having difficulty conceiving and/or carrying a pregnancy to a live birth. "Infertility" refers to the identity associated with that physical state.[1] All of the women who participated in this study were subfecund, but not all of the women saw themselves as infertile.[2] Previous researchers have made similar distinctions as research has indicated that the subfecund often resist the label of infertile, because it suggests a level of finality they are uncomfortable with (Andrews, Abbey, and Halman 1991) or because it connotes something negative, that their bodies are somehow bad (Becker 2000).

Subfecund women face many inexorably linked ideologies in Western culture, including pronatalism, womanhood, and motherhood. Women often face a great deal of pressure to become mothers. It is generally assumed that women will become mothers; in fact, womanhood is often equated with motherhood (Gillespie 2003; Hays 1996; Ireland 1993). Although women have greater opportunities than ever before to seek life goals outside of motherhood, most women still see motherhood as an important part of their lives (Sandelowski 1993). Motherhood is seen in society as women's purpose in life, as mandatory for adult women (Jordan and Revenson 1999; Kirkley 2000; Parry 2005; Russo 1976). Conversely, women who do not become mothers are often viewed as deviant (Miall 1986; Parry 2005; Russo 1976).

While more and more women are choosing to remain childfree, this study is not about those women. The voluntarily childless woman, or even the woman who finds herself infertile but chooses not to pursue motherhood will presumably have very different experiences from those presented here. This article is about women who desire to be mothers but have experienced difficulty in reaching that goal and have pursued medical treatment to achieve motherhood.

These linked ideologies of pronatalism, womanhood, and motherhood have a profound impact on subfecund women who have difficulty meeting the expectation that they will become mothers. Although not all women wish to become mothers (Gillespie 2003), the subfecund women in this study did. Women who have difficulty meeting this goal often report that they experience a profound sense of loss and do not feel like "real women" (Abbey, Andrews, and Halman 1991; Becker 2000; Greil 1991; Miall 1986; Parry 2005). It is not surprising then that many of them turn to the medical community to help them achieve the goal of motherhood. These women face months, and many times years, of costly and invasive infertility procedures that may or may not eventually lead to a viable pregnancy and birth.[3] Although subfecundity used to be seen as in the purview of the gods, like other aspects of reproduction, it has now become largely medicalized (Greil 1991). The medical model has become the dominant cognitive framework the infertile use to interpret their experience. Women often collaborate in the medicalization process because of their own needs and motives (Reissman 1998). Because women are raised in a society that values motherhood as women's primary role, they participate in medicalizing infertility in order to live up to those cultural standards.

Previous research on subfecundity has demonstrated that subfecundity is not a "concrete, objective, definitive trait or state of being" (Scritchfield 1989: 132); rather, it is far more nebulous, and its definition is shifting and socially constructed (Greil, Leitko, and Porter 1988; Miall 1994). Research on subfecundity has not, however, addressed the issue of how women draw on the varying ideologies concerning subfecundity to reshape the self and why some women come to think of themselves as infertile, while others do not. Nor has this literature examined the variation among women who do see themselves as infertile in terms of what infertility or subfecundity really means to them. In fact, previous research has found that many subfecund women do not accept the identity of infertile, but see their difficulties conceiving as a temporary stage that they will pass through (Greil 1991; Ruggerio and Loftus 2000; Solomon 1989). They maintain hope, sometimes against all odds, that they will leave subfecundity behind and become a biological mother.

Symbolic interactionism argues that the self is developed and maintained through social interaction, and social interaction is essential to the normal development of the self (Mead 1934). The social self is developed through one's ability to learn to see oneself through the eyes of others or to take the role of others (Cooley 1902; Mead 1934). Thus, the self is profoundly social.

Grounded in the symbolic interactionist perspective, identity theory also postulates that the self emerges from the interaction of the individual with others in the external environment (see, for instance, Stryker 1962; Stryker and Burke 2000; Stryker and Vryan 2003). The networks one interacts with will have an impact on the self. At the same time, we are all involved in multiple networks simultaneously (Stryker 1962; Stryker 1980). Some networks have greater impact on us than others. Identity theory explains this as a result of commitment. Interactional commitment refers to the number of relationships associated with a particular identity, and affective commitment refers to the emotional attachment attributed to the relationships associated with the identity. The greater the interactional and affective commitment to the network, the greater impact on the self. Stryker's identity theory conceptualizes the self as made up of multiple identities arranged in a hierarchy based on one's commitment to a particular network.

Subfecundity constitutes a period of destabilizing the self for these women who seek motherhood: according to identity theory, the self is stable when the individual's patterns of social interaction are stable over time, and when life events alter these patterns of interaction, the self is open to change. Subfecund women have a number of identities that are important to them. Some of these identities include woman, wife, and daughter. These women are embedded in networks to which they have strong interactional and affective commitments, and in which they are expected to become mothers—for instance, their parents expect them to produce grandchildren, their siblings expect them to produce nieces and nephews, and their husbands expect them to produce children. Because they are committed to those networks and because those identities are important to them, pursuing motherhood also becomes very important.

Identity control theory (see, for instance, Burke 1991; Burke 2006; Stryker and Burke 2000) concerns the consequences of discrepancies in the self. Identity control theory postulates that for every identity an individual has there are a set of standards that correspond with that identity (Cast and Burke 2002). These standards provide meaning to the individual about that identity. Individuals receive input from society on their identities through such things as reflected appraisals or social comparisons (Burke 1991; Burke 2004; Granberg 2006). Congruence between the standard and the social input creates self-verification: one is meeting the expectations of that identity. A mismatch between the standard and the social input produces emotional distress (Burke 1991; Burke 2004; Granberg 2006). To alleviate this distress, identity control theory argues that the individual will modify his or her behavior in order to alter the social input. Behavioral modifications continue until social input matches the internal standards for the identity (Burke 1991). Individuals act in such a way as to minimize or get rid of any such discrepancy. Identity control theory might postulate that the identity of "woman" has, as one of its standards, becoming a mother. But the infertile woman is failing to meet that standard, and she is receiving external feedback that she is failing. She has two options: change the identity standard and accept that she is infertile; or, change her behavior with the intent of changing the standard. She still wants children; to attempt to rectify this she pursues infertility treatments.

But how does the environment affect this comparison process between the input and the standard? Identity theory can help us answer this question by focusing on commitments. By integrating identity theory and identity control theory, we can show how support groups and the commitments within those support groups can influence how one changes or accepts the infertile identity.

Yet identity theory and identity control theory alone do not do a good job of explaining why it is that some women take on the identity of infertile, while others do not. To explain this, one needs to incorporate a cultural model into the analysis. Snow (2001) argues that understanding the self requires understanding the interactional contexts in which the self is embedded. In order to understand how women experience subfecundity, and experience their selves in subfecundity, we have to explore the social context of that subfecundity. Before a woman can take on an infertile identity, before she can incorporate societal beliefs about subfecundity, there have to be societal beliefs about subfecundity, about motherhood, and about womanhood. Stryker and Vryan (2003) write, "Since self reflects society, selves incorporate the characteristics of society" (24). Markus, Mullally, and Kityama (1997) argue that all selves are culturally specific selves and emerge as individuals learn and engage culture. Cultural perceptions of subfecundity, motherhood, and womanhood will impact the subfecund woman's sense of self.

Culture provides the publicly available symbols through which people experience and express meaning (Keesing 1974; Swidler 2001; Wuthnow 1987). Swidler (1986 and 2001) describes our cultural repertoire as a sort of toolkit, where one can pull out various aspects of culture at different times to frame or provide meaning to a particular situation. Swidler views culture as fragmented and sometimes contradictory. This view highlights the complexity of culture. Individuals have a variety of cultural tools upon which they can draw; some tools will fit better than others in any given situation. Swidler also points out that we need culture in order to become the types of people that we are. Our culture provides us with possibilities for what we can become.

According to Swidler, culture is utilized differently in settled and unsettled lives. In settled lives it is more difficult to parse out what is uniquely cultural, since culture and life experience are so tightly woven together. Culture becomes more visible in unsettled lives because the cultural work done by the individual is more active, and there is tension between the new patterns and the old patterns of action. Women with subfecundity are living unsettled lives; their old, taken-for-granted ways of being are called into question. They can no longer assume that motherhood will be a part of their future. Because of this, we should be able to see how women with subfecundity are utilizing culture in order to make sense of their experience with subfecundity.

In order to understand how women experience subfecundity, we must understand the cultural meanings of subfecundity and how subfecund women use their various cultural tools to make sense of their subfecundity and to find meaning in that experience. Swidler argues that culture is most engaged when the self is changing and also when one is in "an active community of discourse that both permits and forces its members to articulate wider meanings" (2001:69). It is precisely these communities of discourse that I address here. Different communities have different discourses or ideologies concerning subfecundity. Swidler defines ideology as "an articulated, self-conscious belief and ritual system, aspiring to offer a unified answer to problems of social action" (2001:96). Ideologies are tied to social groups, and members of social groups use them to define themselves and make sense of their lives.

Taking a cultural approach and using identity theories are not mutually exclusive, however, and in fact, can work together to explain the process of taking on an infertile identity. By focusing on networks of interaction and the cultures or ideologies within those networks, we can combine the theories to better understand the experience of subfecundity. There is no one way to experience subfecundity, and one's experience with subfecundity depends on one's social groups and the ideologies of those groups.

Although there are many groups from which women with subfecundity can draw to make sense of their experiences, I focus on just one set of such groups: support groups. Symbolic interactionism holds that individuals' behaviors and attitudes are influenced and shaped by the groups to which they belong (Mead 1934). As an individual joins a group, he or she takes on the language and culture of the group as a point of reference to help interpret the world around them. Various groups have different ideologies concerning infertility. When women become involved in these groups, they take on the ideologies of those groups. These groups then provide frames, to use Goffman's (1974) terminology, for understanding experience.

In Western culture there are a myriad of ways that one can think about subfecundity: as a curse from God, as sterility, as a temporary condition (Miall 1994). The medical establishment usually defines subfecundity or infertility as occurring when:

(1) a woman (or couple) fails to achieve a pregnancy over any one-year period of regular sexual activity without the use of any contraception; or (2) as the repeated inability to carry a pregnancy to a live birth (Aronson 2000).[4] However, this is not necessarily the common understanding of the term. Dictionaries define infertility as the state of being infertile, unproductive, or barren. The common understanding of subfecundity, which equates it with sterility, is not the same as the medical understanding, which is more fluid. These different ways of thinking about subfecundity highlight different ideologies. This is similar to the argument made above by Swidler that our societies provide us with the possibilities of what we can become. We learn particular ways of being through the ideologies of possible ways of being.

Subfecund women have a number of different possible ideologies concerning subfecundity that they can draw upon. These ideologies are tied to different groups with which a woman can interact. A woman's interactions within these communities will thus impact how or whether she comes to see herself as an infertile woman. If she has a strong connection to a particular group, and that group has an intensive commitment to one kind of identity meanings, she is likely to incorporate that group's ideology concerning subfecundity into her sense of self. In this article I explore the ways in which subfecund women draw on support groups they become involved in and how this influences how the women come to think about their subfecundity and whether or not they take on the identity of "infertile."

I chose to analyze support groups for several reasons. First, previous research has demonstrated how the support group can influence how individuals process information and interpret their situations (Francis 1997; Irvine 1999; Thoits 1996). Second, this previous research has also demonstrated that support groups often have a pronounced and intentional ideology. This makes the influence of a group's ideology on the individual's sense of self easier to study than say, families, another important group that will influence subfecund women's experiences, but for which there will be vastly varying ideologies across families and often only one infertile woman per family. By focusing on women in different types of support groups for subfecundity I examine one set of communities that provides resources for women making sense of their subfecundity and making sense of their selves in light of their subfecundity.[5]

DATA AND METHODS

My analysis comes from in-depth interviews with 40 subfecund women in five Midwestern states who had sought medical treatment for subfecundity. These women were recruited from five infertility clinics (11) and six support groups for either subfecundity or conditions that often cause subfecundity (29). The support groups took several forms: in person, online, and e-mail list serves. I recruited women by leaving flyers in the waiting rooms of the clinics, contacting the heads of the support groups, and having them pass out flyers or send an e-mail to their members asking for particpipants. The advertisements asked for women who were having difficulty getting pregnant or maintaining a pregnancy. Women interested in participating then contacted me and we set up an interview. All interviews were conducted in 2003. Most interviews were conducted in the women's homes; several interviews were conducted in restaurants, and several in private rooms in public buildings such as libraries. The interviews typically lasted from 60 to 90 minutes. All interviews were tape recorded and transcribed verbatim.

The interview began with the women completing a background information sheet with questions concerning demographics on herself and her partner (if she had a partner), her level of distress, and her attitudes on the role of women in society. The interview itself consisted of questions on a wide variety of subfecundity related topics, including questions concerning her diagnosis and treatment, her feelings about her treatments and interactions with medical personnel, her feelings about subfecundity and motherhood, her relationships and interactions with others including involvement in support groups, how she felt that she had changed because of this experience, how subfecundity had affected her sex life and the ways she thinks about her body, and how she anticipates her future.

All of the women were white. The average age of the women was 33.8 years; the youngest woman was 25 and the oldest 46. Social class was determined based primarily on occupation, with some consideration of education and income of the woman and her partner, using Erikson and Goldthorpe's (1992) scheme.[6] Using this scheme, there are 13 women (32.5%) in the upper middle class, 12 women (30%) in the middle class, and 15 women (37.5%) in the lower middle or working class. All of the women were married to men with the exception of two: one lived with her boyfriend and one was recently divorced. All of the women that participated in this study had subfecundity problems themselves. Some of these women were also married to men with subfecundity problems, but all women had issues that made it difficult for them to conceive or carry a child to a live birth.

All of the women in this study had sought medical treatment for their subfecundity. The length of time they had dealt with subfecundity ranged from one and a half to ten years; the average length of time was a little over five years. Of the 40 women I interviewed, 28 were currently in treatment for subfecundity. The remaining 12 were no longer seeking treatment; three had children conceived through in vitro fertilization (IVF), two had adopted children, one had a child through surrogacy, three were pursuing adoption, one stopped treatment because she became divorced, one because it was too expensive, and one because she had had enough. Twenty-six of the 40 women had no children in the home.

To analyze the data I used a primarily inductive approach whereby patterns and recurring themes emerged from the data through open coding, which I refined by multiple passes through the data; finally, I used axial coding to examine themes across the data and to look for relationships among codes found in the open coding, including causes, consequences, context, and I examined the way the codes group together (Neuman 2003; Strauss and Corbin 1990). Axial coding is typically associated with grounded theory, and, although this research was inductive, it was not traditional grounded theory. I was guided by principles within social psychology, since I was interested in how subfecundity impacts sense of self. I was looking for issues of identity in relation to infertility. I used the qualitative software package Atlas.ti to help organize the coding process.

RESULTS

The women in this study, like most people, were engaged in a number of networks simultaneously. Some of those networks had a greater impact than others in influencing whether and how the subfecund woman took on the identity of infertile. In this section I focus on their connections, or lack thereof, with networks concerning subfecundity and how this influences the infertile self. These networks often had unique ideologies surrounding subfecundity/infertility. Beyond the larger Midwestern, American culture, these women draw on the groups in which they are involved, in particular, local subfecundity support groups. The women in this study can be roughly divided into three groups. The first group finds themselves with little or no contact with a subfecundity support group, the second is involved with a secular subfecundity support group, and the third is involved in a fundamentalist Christian subfecundity support group. By becoming involved in these groups, the women begin to make sense of their subfecundity by drawing on the different ideologies, or group cultures. A woman's access to these groups influences both how she perceives subfecundity and also whether she takes on infertility itself as an identity.

All of the women in this study viewed subfecundity as a medical issue at the time of the interview. This is, undoubtedly, due to the recruitment method. I was specifically seeking out women who had pursued medical treatment for their subfecundity. But the nature of subfecundity as a medical issue varied. Some women came to see subfecundity as a medical problem that could be solved and overcome, much like an acute, temporary medical issue such as appendicitis. Other women came to see subfecundity as a permanent condition, something that lasted even after a resolution of their subfecundity, be it a successful pregnancy, an adoption, or the decision to quit seeking parenthood and remain childfree. To this group of women, subfecundity was more like a disease that one could possibly manage but never fully leave behind, much like diabetes. Women developed these interpretations of subfecundity based on their involvement with subfecundity communities and that community's ideologies concerning subfecundity. Their view of subfecundity and their involvement within subfecundity communities had an effect on whether or not they came to see themselves as infertile at all.

Isolates

It was primarily the isolates, the women with little or no contact with a subfecundity community, who viewed subfecundity as a temporary condition. These women spoke of subfecundity as something that would be overcome, and they would move on with their lives. Lynn [all the names are pseudonyms] describes how, after talking with her doctor, she came to see her severe fibroids as something that could be overcome. They were causing her subfecundity and had caused her to have a difficult miscarriage that landed her in the emergency room:

> The first time I ever heard anything was in the emergency room when I was already pretty much in this state of—I don't know what you'd call it. I was in shock and, ya know, terrified. And, then on top of all that, he says the word, he says fibroid tumors, and my first thought was oh my God what the, I'm gonna have tumors? So you know. I have cancer! I said what are those? And he explained, he said they're noncancerous, ya know, benign growths on your uterus, basically, so. And then that's, I mean that was my reaction. I was, it scared me at first I thought it was something life threatening, and then once I actually got to talk to my doctor and after everything was settled down a little bit, um, I was able to understand it, and it, I just basically wanted to go and do what I had to do to get rid of them.

Lynn draws on the medical personnel's perception of what is happening in her body to make sense of the experience herself. She talks about fibroids, and therefore her subfecundity, as something that can be overcome with medical intervention. Later in the interview Lynn told me: "I'm not infertile. Because I don't like to think of myself as infertile, I just, you know I'm thinking I'm having trouble. But infertile sounds so final. You know?" This clearly shows her reluctance to take on infertility as an identity. Another isolate, Hillary, a woman who later miscarried, explained to me how she felt once she achieved a pregnancy: "It was kind of scary in a way when I got pregnant. Because it's like, oh my gosh I'm not—I'm not infertile anymore. I'm out of that group. Now what am I now? I'm just a normal pregnant person."

These women are largely isolated from others who are subfecund. Their main construction of subfecundity typically came from the medical community, which often defines subfecundity in terms of a temporary medical condition that can be treated. Although Anna was not an isolate at the time of the interview, she describes her first encounters with the medical community below, when she was still isolated from other subfecund women.

> I should have seen the writing on the wall, I just didn't know enough at the time. Because they kept telling us, you're not an infertility patient. You just need help getting pregnant. But now I look back on this and with everything that I've learned since, I'm like, oh what a fool . . . didn't go to group meetings. . . . I don't know why at the time. I think because I still thought, we're really not infertile.

Anna's doctor does not define Anna as subfecund at all. She is the mother of three children, two conceived through IVF. These women were isolated from other infertile women and, therefore, appear to interact only with the medical establishment in relationship to their infertility. These isolated women then come to define their subfecundity in terms of a temporary medical condition; this translates into their not taking infertility on as an identity. Why incorporate infertility into your sense of self when it is something that will be overcome? Because of this, they do not see themselves as infertile.

Secular Support Groups

I interviewed women from two secular in-person support groups. Both groups were local branches of the national infertility/subfecundity support group Resolve. Resolve has over fifty local chapters throughout the United States. The two local chapters, which I call Linden and Springville, were in separate states, approximately 250 miles from each other. Resolve, as a national organization, has a distinct culture or ideology, and each of these two local chapters had a distinct culture separate from the other. Resolve has a website and also produces printed materials for distribution nationally. These materials demonstrate the ideology about subfecundity and infertility that comes from the organization, providing individuals with a distinct message about subfecundity/infertility. For instance, on their website, Resolve defines infertility as "a *disease* or *condition of the reproductive system* often diagnosed after a couple has one year of unprotected, well-timed intercourse or if the woman suffers from multiple miscarriages" (emphasis added). Resolve explicitly defines subfecundity/infertility as a disease, and, therefore, as a lasting condition.

Polly, one of the leaders from the Linden support group, provides another example of the national organization's ideology. She had kept a journal during her time dealing with subfecundity in which she had written down quotations that she found inspirational or comforting. She read one that she had found in the materials she received from her local Resolve support group from the national organization:

> Here is the one that is in the Resolve pamphlet. . . . I think it really speaks to most of the people that you've probably spoken with. . . . [reading from journal] "My infertility resides in my heart as an old friend, I do not hear from it for weeks at a time, and then a moment, a thought, a baby announcement, or some such thing, and I will feel the tug. Maybe even shed a few tears. And I think there is my old friend, that will always be a part of me." By B. Menning. . . . I'd written it down in there because I thought it was such a good quote.

By including this quote in one of their pamphlets, Resolve endorses the idea that subfecundity/infertility is something that will remain with a woman indefinitely. The women in Resolve appear to draw on this construction of subfecundity. Polly is a good example of this. She has twin boys conceived through in vitro fertilization. Although Polly has two children, she is active in her local Resolve chapter and serves as one of the group leaders, further suggesting that even after a resolution, Polly sees herself as still infertile.

The organizational-level culture advocating for subfecundity as a permanent condition has filtered through to the support-group level. This was true of both Resolve support groups, but especially true of the Linden group. The women in Resolve were more likely to define subfecundity/infertility as a permanent condition themselves. Margot, also a leader of the Linden support group, explains how she thinks about infertility:

> It took me a long time to be able to talk about being infertile, because it was embarrassing at first. And I was shameful or whatever. But somewhere along the line I got over that and I thought, and I kind of compare it to having diabetes.

> If you have diabetes, you take insulin. And if you have infertility problems, you get medical help or whatever the case may be to get help for it. And somewhere along the line I just, you know, I realized that it was a medical condition. It wasn't something that I had done wrong or anything like that. But, you know, I use the comparison of diabetes a lot. Because it's something that you can do something about it in some cases. But in some cases, you can't. And, you know, it's a medical condition. But it's also a condition of the heart too. Because infertility is something that you don't ever, you're never cured of it. You don't ever get over it. Even if you are able to have a child or adopt or whatever, it still is something about your body that you can't control.

Margot's conceptualization of infertility clearly reflects the vocabulary and framing of infertility that dominate her support group. Margot too has had a resolution; she has a son conceived through in vitro fertilization. Yet even after this resolution Margot describes infertility as something from which one is never cured: it is a permanent condition, both of the body and of the mind.

Lucy, another member of the Linden chapter, explains how infertility has become an integral part of her identity:

> I think either way that this works out, I'll probably—I'll probably be involved with Resolve, and, you know, speak up about infertility for a long time. Because it's, you know, it's become part of my identity I guess. . . . I've embraced different things along the way. And this is one I think that's a keeper. Because it's kind of one of those things that affects you down to the core. . . . You know this is something that really affects you pretty deeply.

The women in the Springville chapter of Resolve were slightly less likely to take on infertility as an identity. Although they were also exposed to the organizational-level culture of Resolve and had the same access to Resolve resources as the Linden chapter, their local chapter had a slightly different ideology about subfecundity/infertility. The Springville chapter had disbanded shortly before I began to conduct interviews. The reason given for the disbanding was that the women who were most actively involved in the group had had a resolution of some sort and moved on: one had adopted, one had chosen to remain childfree, and one had given birth to a child conceived through IVF. This highlights the major difference between the Linden group and the Springville group. The Linden group had a number of women, such as Polly and Margot, quoted above, who were regulars at the Linden Resolve meetings even though they had had a resolution and were no longer themselves trying to achieve a pregnancy. This was not true of the Springville group. Polly, from the Linden group, explained:

> That's why I got involved in Resolve. Because by the time we got here we had resolved our issue. But we didn't have a Resolve [where we lived before], and that is one of the reasons that I went ahead and got involved in it here, because I feel like it really helps people going through. . . . But I think most of the people who are going through it don't have the time to support each other, they're kind of sponging support off of others, which is why people like Elizabeth and Margot

> [other infertile women who have achieved a pregnancy], and, you know, to some extent, why I . . . am involved in this group, so that we can, you know, hopefully help people.

The Linden support group had a strong culture of women who had a positive resolution to subfecundity. These were women who had borne or adopted a child and had remained in the group. They continued to participate in order to lend support to those women who were still attempting to achieve motherhood. Approximately one-fourth to one-third of the women who regularly attended the Linden Resolve meetings were women who had had some sort of resolution already with their subfecundity. The leaders of the group, including Polly and Margot, quoted above, were also all women who had had a resolution. They demonstrated, through their continued involvement, how infertility was a permanent part of oneself, even after a resolution. This ideology about the permanence of subfecundity was reflected in the quotes above from the women in the Linden group, both those who had had a resolution, such as Polly and Margot, and those who had not, like Lucy.

This ideology on the permanence of subfecundity among the Linden group is in contrast to the Springville group. The ideology concerning subfecundity in the Springville group did not contain this same notion of permanence. Julia, from the Springville group, explained to me how she stopped going to Resolve once she achieved her pregnancy: "You know, but I was telling people at support group—No, I wasn't going to the support—once I got pregnant, I didn't go. Just to be respectful of them." Unlike those in the Linden group, once Julia got pregnant, she felt compelled to stop going to the support group in order to be sensitive to the women in the group who were still trying to achieve a pregnancy. This is different from the women in the Linden group who continued to attend meetings even after achieving a pregnancy or giving birth. Shelly, also of the Springville group and one of the group's leaders before they disbanded, describes how, in the beginning especially, she felt as though her participating in the support group would be short, because she expected that she would soon become pregnant and then she would leave the group. She is drawing on the group ideology that subfecundity is more of a temporary condition.

> I discovered Resolve . . . when we moved back here. . . . I did a little searching on the web and that's how I found out about Resolve. But in the beginning I thought, I'm not going to need it, because it's not going to take me that long to get pregnant—there's nothing really wrong with me. And then when I started seeing the reproductive endocrinologist and started realizing, well maybe there really is something really wrong with me, I called Resolve and . . . found out there was this support group that was just starting here in town. And I went to that. And I didn't want to get very involved with it. But I went to a couple of meetings. [I said to] someone that used to be a contact person, I said, "I'm not going to be here long."

Because of this difference in ideology, the women in the Springville group were slightly less likely to talk about subfecundity in terms of a permanent condition and also slightly less likely to take on the infertile identity. Although these women did tend to see themselves as infertile, they did not have the strong ideology that led even women who had had a resolution to identify themselves as infertile. As stated above, the Linden group had a strong contingent in their group who had had some sort of resolution, and yet were still active in Resolve and still actively claimed the infertile identity. Because of these women's active involvement in the group, the Linden group's ideology had evolved so that subfecundity was considered a permanent condition. The Springville group had a less defined ideology concerning subfecundity, but their belief was evident: once one achieved a pregnancy, or came to another resolution, it was time to leave the group, suggesting subfecundity did not seem as permanent to them as it did to the Linden group.

Although both groups are a part of the same large national organization, they do not have the same ideologies. Both groups draw from the ideology of the national group in their local chapters, but each had a different local ideology. The Linden group placed more emphasis on the permanence of subfecundity, which translated to their members being more likely to take on infertility as part of their identity. The Springville group placed less emphasis on the permanence of subfecundity, and their members were less likely to see infertility as a lasting part of their identities.

Fundamentalist Christian Support Group

The group of women most likely to take on infertility as an identity were the women involved in a fundamentalist Christian support group. This group, which I will call Paul's Hope, was an in-person support group affiliated with a fundamentalist Christian seminary. This group of women had perhaps the most clearly defined ideology concerning subfecundity of the groups of women that I interviewed. Donna started Paul's Hope, and here she explains why she did:

> I felt like God was calling me to start this support group. . . . I think a lot of Christian people have really bad ideas about infertility. Like why it happens . . . that it's a punishment from God in some sense. And that if you're, you know, if you have enough faith, that God will give you a baby, or if you pray hard enough, or if, you know, whatever. And all that is so bad and so harmful to the infertile woman. And it's not true. And I mean on top of it, it's bad theology. It's not what the Bible teaches. And so I kind of feel like if Ed [her husband] and I—we followed God's call to ministry, then we need to help churches and people understand. And me as an infertile woman, I feel like that's what God's calling—it's not what I would have asked to be called to do, but I feel like it's my niche.

Donna demonstrates the main theme in the ideology among these women. They talk about subfecundity in terms of God's will—God has a plan for them. Although they do not like being subfecund, they are better able to deal with it by thinking of it in terms of divine intervention. God has a larger plan for these women, and subfecundity is a part of that. Therefore, if they accept God's sovereignty, then they must also accept their subfecundity. Donna describes how God is using subfecundity in her life beyond the starting of the support group:

> I think God has used it in my life to grow compassion in me for other people in different circumstances. . . . It has definitely changed me as a person. I mean the main thing I hope that it's grown in me is compassion for other people in other circumstances. Because the Bible talks about how God is the God of all compassion and comfort. And that his comfort flows over into our lives through circumstances like infertility so that that comfort that he gives to us can flow over into other people's lives regardless of their circumstance. . . . I hope that he's done that in me. I hope that he's contending to do that in me. . . . I hope I'm more compassionate and merciful because of my infertility.

For Donna and the other women in Paul's Hope, subfecundity has a purpose. God is using her subfecundity for some greater good; there is a higher meaning behind her experience.

Donna actively quotes the Bible and refers to the Bible's teachings in order to make sense of her subfecundity. She draws on her fundamentalist Christian culture or ideology to process subfecundity. The women in Paul's Hope do this together. Donna actively uses the Bible to make sense of her experience:

> There's a proverb in the Bible that talks about four things that are never satisfied. . . . And the four things are: the earth for water . . . fire for something to consume . . . the grave for dead . . . and the barren womb. . . . So God says that there are four things that are never satisfied. And one thing is the barren womb. And so if God, who created us, who knows me so intimately, because he created us, says in his word, that the barren womb is never satisfied, then it's not ever going to be satisfied. So you just don't ever really get over it, I don't think. You get better, but you don't get over it. And, you know, that's fine too. Because, you know, Paul talks about in his letter, his thorn in the flesh, but he talks about this trial that he had that he asked God to take away from him. And God says, no I'm not going to take it away from you. But instead I'll give you my grace. I'm going to give you the strength to deal with it. And so I kind of feel like that is how it is for me. No I'm not going to take your barrenness away from you, but I'm going to give you the strength to deal with it. And I'm going to make you into a different person through it. So I kind of feel like, you know, that my infertility is like what Paul calls his thorn in the flesh. His thing that he got that never went away. I mean I think that's what it is for me. And so by God's grace, I'll learn to deal with that as I go.

Because God has specifically said in the Bible that the "barren womb" is never satisfied, Donna expects that she will never feel satisfied but that God will give her the strength to deal with it.

Donna was by far the most self-reflective and talkative interviewee of the Paul's Hope group. Since Donna is the founder and the leader of this group, she probably sets the tone and has a profound influence on the group ideology; we still must use some caution in overgeneralizing from her interview. While the other women in the group seem to reflect the same ideas as Donna, it is not possible to be sure, because they were not as talkative during their interviews. Gretchen and Emily, also in Paul's Hope, explain subfecundity in the same terms, however: it is God's will and ultimately God has a plan that they may not understand but must accept. Gretchen explains:

> I came to the revelation . . . that I'm not in control and God is. I'm not. Because I think in the back of my mind I wanted to believe that I was in control. Because I'm somewhat of a controlling person. And I like to have things planned out. But I realized, hey, I'm not in control. You know, I'm not in control of my body. And only God is. And I just, you know that was a revelation. Hey, I can't control having a baby. I can't—it's of God. It's not of me. I can't make it happen. . . . Ultimately God has a plan for me or a purpose. And I may not understand it at the time, but I think he's going to work it out. So I just have to trust him.

Emily's explanation is similar:

> Like I just felt like for some reason like God was going to use infertility in my life to really strengthen my faith and really depend on him. And like he has. . . . It's really helped give me humility. And just to realize that the situation is really out of my hands. Like there is, I mean like there's got to be something sovereign. You know, like, and just with my faith, like it's just—you know, I can't be humanly controlled. If the Lord closes your womb, he closes it. And if he opens it, he opens it.

These women were able to embrace infertility as an identity because they felt it was God's will that they be subfecund in the first place; as such, it has a purpose and can be accepted as a part of the self.

Another interesting aspect of the women in Paul's Hope that possibly played into the ideology the group formed around infertility/subfecundity was that all of these women were lower middle or working class. Because subfecundity treatments are extremely expensive and rarely covered by insurance, those who cannot pay out of pocket often find that treatments are beyond their reach. This too would play into how the ideology of subfecundity is formed in the group. For most of these women, subfecundity is likely to be permanent. If they wish to become mothers their only option is adoption, which can also be very expensive. They, therefore, turned to the Bible to help them make sense of that. So while their group ideology may stem from the economic realities the women face, they turn to the Bible to help them process and make sense of that reality.[7]

Emily discusses how the Bible talks about adoption, and how that has affected her way of thinking about the possibility of adopting:

> The more that my husband and I have thought and prayed about adoption, the more we feel—and our theology and our spirituality play a lot in this too. Because we believe that God adopts children into his kingdom. Like we are children of God if we believe in him. And like I feel like—like if I wholeheartedly believe that and put my faith in that and look around and say, okay, well God adopts children from every race, ethnicity, tribe and nation into his kingdom,

> then, you know, then that's what we as believers should do as well. . . . And the Bible talks about caring for the widows and orphans. Like that's what we should be about. So, anyway. I mean it is—I'd love to have a biological child. But, like I think I'm just—have come past that point where it's okay for me to move on towards adoption. Like that's just kind of been cut off. And if it happens, like, that's great. But it's not all encompassing.

Emily demonstrates how she uses the Bible to help her make sense of the economic realities of her life—that infertility treatments are not an option for her, but adoption is. Both Donna and Gretchen voiced similar comments about how God views adoption, suggesting this was something they had discussed as a group. For instance, Donna says, "Because we're Christians and because in the Bible, we believe God invented adoption. He talks about how he adopted us in his family. We believe that adoption is very strongly part of our Christian faith. So we're very big proponents of that."

There were other women in the study who were fundamentalist Christians who were not affiliated with Paul's Hope. Some talked about subfecundity in roughly the same ways. For instance Brenda, a fundamentalist Christian and largely isolated from any subfecundity communities, also talks about subfecundity in terms of God's will:

> It's, it's hard, it's a hard thing. It's really tested me in my faith. And it's one of the things that I just decided you know, I had a lot of questions, but I might not know the answers, and I, I really trust God's goodness and his sovereignty that he does know what he's doing. So. It's not for me to decide. I have, I have judgmental opinions about it, but it's not my decision. Not my place to make that decision.

Brenda draws on her larger cultural meanings or ideologies derived from her religion, but she does not have a local fundamentalist Christian support group to help her process these ideas and make sense of them. She herself must draw the connections between her faith and her experience, while the women in Paul's Hope have created a group culture where they process information together and make sense of their situation by using their faith together. While the women involved in Paul's Hope used some of the same terminology as Brenda, they had come to terms with their subfecundity more than Brenda had.

We can see this difference more clearly by contrasting the following passages first from Donna and then from Renée:

> Some moments when I'm not thinking clearly, it has made myself not like myself. Because I thought, you know, I've thought wrongly that because I believe God knows all things, that he knows that I would be a bad parent. And so that's why he's prevented me from having children. Although I know that's wrong. I know that's not true. But in really low moments, it has caused me to think of myself as, you know, some sort of really wicked person that, you know, would do something terrible to a child. And that's why God, you know, God is sparing me and the child from that. But that's just infertility craziness is all that is.

> And that's why it's so frustrating, because I just—I know we'd be good parents. And everybody that we know, knows that we'll be good parents. [crying] And so that's what's so frustrating. And my mom says well, when God thinks it's time. Well what if he never thinks it's time? [crying] This is what *I* want but maybe not what He wants, and it's hard for me to—understand that. [crying] Steve [her husband], Steve gets it, but I, I still have trouble with it.

Because of her experience with Paul's Hope, Donna is able to dismiss these negative thoughts as "infertility craziness." Renée, on the other hand, has not had the benefit of processing this in a group setting with women also going through subfecundity who actively utilize a fundamentalist Christian ideology about subfecundity. She becomes much more bogged down in negative thoughts.

This sense that it is God's will can work both for or against the fundamentalist Christian woman. She can become bogged down in the frustration and inability to understand God's reasoning, as Renée seems to be, or she can move on and accept that there is a higher purpose for her subfecundity, as Donna has.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The evidence in this article suggests how individuals draw on the ideologies within their support groups to make sense of their experiences and how this can affect the content of their identities. All of the women in this study had strong affective and interactional commitments to individuals who expected them to become mothers. One of the behavioral expectations of being a daughter, daughter-in-law, sister, friend, or wife is often to become a mother. As both identity theory and identity control theory might predict, to meet this behavioral expectation, women often feel compelled to pursue medical treatment for subfecundity. However, not all of the women come to see themselves as infertile. The taking on of the infertile identity is associated with other communities and the ideologies attached to those communities. Women begin to make sense of their subfecundity by drawing on different ideologies: groups sustain identities. Using identity theory and identity control theory together suggests how having a strong connection to these other communities will influence the taking on of the infertile identity. Women in support groups have an intensive commitment to one kind of identity meaning because of their involvement with that group. The isolates, however, who appear to deal only with the medical community in relation to their infertility, do not have these commitments. The isolates then have to negotiate a difficult situation with little help. The identity standard for infertility was different for these two groups of women. The isolates saw infertility as temporary, whereas the women in the support groups more often saw infertility as a permanent condition. This article demonstrates how group culture helps create and sustain identity.

Most of the women in this study come to define their subfecundity in terms of a medical condition through their interactions with the medical community. Some define the medical condition as either temporary or permanent. The women who are most engaged in a subfecundity community come to see subfecundity as a permanent condition. Those women who have less contact with a subfecundity community are more likely to define it as a temporary phase. This orientation toward the permanence of subfecundity has an impact on the self. The women who come to define subfecundity as a permanent condition are more likely to accept infertility as an identity, while those women who see subfecundity as temporary are less likely to do so. The cultural ideology from which they draw shapes whether or not and how infertility is incorporated as part of the self. Two communities in particular appear to facilitate taking on infertility as an identity: Resolve and the fundamentalist Christian support group. Both have a more or less stated ideology that subfecundity is permanent.

The research presented here supports previous research that support groups can influence identities, such as that done by Francis (1997) where she showed how support group leaders intentionally refine identities in order to manage the emotions of group members, or that done by Irvine (1999) that demonstrated how support group members use narratives and stories within the support groups to help shape their identities. Much of the previous research on support groups has been ethnographic, while the research presented here is from in-depth interviews. An interesting future study would be to conduct ethnographic research on infertility support groups to examine how these processes take place.

It is not possible with this data to prove causation. We do not know with certainty that the women joined groups that had particular ideologies because they meshed with their already existing ideologies. Because I do not have longitudinal data, I cannot know which came first, but the data that I have suggest that women joined groups and then came to draw on the group ideology, which influenced how they came to think of themselves. We can see this in the cases where the women talk about their experiences before and after becoming involved in a subfecundity community. It is possible that some of the women sought out support groups specifically to mesh with their existing ideologies, but the more likely scenario is that the women were influenced by the ideologies of the groups they joined. For most women dealing with subfecundity, there are few options in terms of support groups. A subfecund woman is lucky if she has one such support group within her community. It is unlikely that she could shop around until she found a group that already meshed with her ideas about subfecundity. This was the case for the women in this study. Most came from communities where there was either only one support group or none. The exception was that the Linden Resolve chapter and Paul's Hope were located within the same large metropolitan area.

What is interesting and somewhat surprising in these data is that there appears to be no relationship between length of time dealing with subfecundity and likelihood of belonging to a support group. We might expect that women would be isolates who were just starting along the path of their infertility journey and that women who belonged to the support groups had been dealing with infertility for much longer. But this does not appear to be the case. There appeared to be no pattern in the women I interviewed in terms of length of time dealing with subfecundity and likelihood of joining a support group.

There does appear to be a relationship between belonging to a support group and having undergone the most advanced reproductive technologies such as in vitro fertilization. This was particularly true of the women who were involved with Resolve.[8] Future research could pursue whether undergoing IVF makes one more likely to join a support group or whether joining a support group makes one more likely to undergo IVF. It would be important to explore the extent to which involvement in support groups for infertility affects one's choices of behavior as well as how it affects one's sense of self and understanding of subfecundity. I explore this some, but a more thorough exploration of how group ideologies affect behavior would be an important and interesting study.

This article demonstrates the usefulness of using identity theory and identity control theory together while also incorporating a cultural framework. Using these theories together gets us further than does using them apart. How do the groups in which a woman becomes involved shape her identities and her identity salience hierarchy? We can use identity theory to get us to almost the same point by arguing that some of the women developed affective and interactional commitment within infertility communities, and this explains why, for those women "infertile" is in their salience hierarchies. But as I demonstrate, it is more complicated than that. Not all of the women actively involved in subfecundity communities took on the infertile identity in the same ways. Take, for instance, the examples of the two Resolve groups, or contrast them with the fundamentalist Christian support group. The groups' cultures and ideologies varied across the groups, and so did the women's thoughts about subfecundity and their willingness to take on infertile as an identity. This reinforces Swidler's claim that we need culture in order to be the kinds of people that we are, and that culture provides us with the possibilities of what we may become. As mentioned earlier, Swidler states that culture is most engaged when the self is changing and when the self is engaged in an active community of discourse. By examining the subfecundity support groups that these women become involved in, we can get a more nuanced understanding of this process and how it operates differently for women in different groups. Whether or not infertility is incorporated as an identity, as part of the self, and how an individual comes to think of subfecundity/infertility depends on the cultural scripts or ideologies from which women draw. Without the right cultural ideology, it is not possible for women to be "infertile."

The women in this study chose to become mothers. There have long been women in Western society who have chosen not to become mothers, for instance, women who renounce the secular roles of motherhood and wifehood to enter religious orders. There are ever increasing numbers of women who choose to remain childfree. For these women the experience of childlessness will be quite different. Women who choose to remain childfree have made different decisions in relation to identity and roles. For the voluntarily childless, the linked ideologies of pronatalism, womanhood, and motherhood will have very different meanings and potentially less influence on the sense of self.

All of the women in this study were exposed to the linked ideologies of pronatalism, womanhood, and motherhood by being involved in the larger culture. Yet we find differences among women in terms of how they process their experience with infertility. What became important in distinguishing between the nuances of who sees herself as infertile and who does not, and who sees subfecundity as a permanent condition and who does not, were their connections to the group cultures and ideologies of infertility support groups. These cultural ideologies develop through the communities the women interact with. When women join these groups, they begin to take on the group culture and ideology to make sense of their infertility. By drawing on the ideologies of their support groups, these women learn to make sense of the disruption to the self that their subfecundity has caused. By focusing on networks of interaction and infertility support groups, symbolic interactionist theories of self and culture provide useful insights into how individuals make sense of illness or another medical crisis and the disruptions they can cause.

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NOTES

1. This becomes somewhat confusing because the participants themselves do not use the terms this way, often using infertility to refer both to physical and psychological states.
2. Some social science literature on subfecundity or infertility has gotten around this issue by using the terminology "involuntarily childless" as was suggested by Mathews and Mathews (1986). This terminology is misleading in this article, however, because many of the women in this study did have children. Some had adopted and some of them were experiencing secondary infertility, which occurs when a woman or couple has one biological child but has difficulty in conceiving and carrying to term another.
3. Not all women who can be defined as subfecund seek medical treatment. For some, the cost, which can be extremely high and often is not covered by insurance, prevents them from seeking treatment. For others, for whom motherhood is not particularly salient, subfecundity is less of an issue. It is those subfecund women for whom motherhood is highly salient that are most likely to seek medical interventions for the difficulties conceiving or carrying a child to a live birth. This paper is about such women.
4. This definition itself is somewhat arbitrary. Becker (2000) suggests a more meaningful definition might be when one realizes conception is not taking place and seeks help.
5. It is important to point out that because of the type of data I have for this paper that the data reflect the ideologies of their groups, but do not provide us with direct evidence of those ideologies separate from how the women report them.
6. Information on how women were classified into social classes available from the author upon request.
7. Although Resolve has a reputation for being an organization of upper-middle-class women, this was not the case with the group of women I interviewed from the two Resolve groups. Although there were perhaps a disproportionate number of upper-middle-class women, there was greater diversity in terms of social class among the Resolve women than there was among

the Paul's Hope women. Therefore social class did not appear to play a large role in how the ideology of infertility formed in those two groups.

8. This may be, as mentioned before, that the women in the other support group, Paul's Hope, were all lower middle or working class. They may have been interested in pursuing in vitro fertilization, but did not have the financial means to do so. Although there are some religious organizations that prohibit the use of more advanced reproductive technologies, the women in Paul's Hope embraced them; they just often did not have the financial capability of actually using many of them.

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Format and Length: All copy (including cover page, abstract, text, notes, and references) must be typed, double-spaced on 8-1/2-inch by 11-inch white opaque paper. Left and right margins must be at least 1 inch; top and bottom margins must be at least 1-1/2 inches. (Bold and italic characters should be noted if not apparent in the text.) Papers should be a maximum of 35 pages, including text, notes, references, tables, and figures or illustrations. The title page, abstract, text, notes (if any), references, tables, figures, and illustrations appear, in that order, in separate sections as described below.

1. *Title Page*: Include the full title, the name(s) of author(s), and the institutional affiliation of each author, and a running head. Use an asterisk (*) to add a footnote to the title to identify the author, with full address, to whom communications about the article should be sent. In the same footnote, provide acknowledgments, credits, grant numbers, and other pertinent information about the article.
2. *Abstract*: Place on a separate page, following the title page, headed by the article

title and omitting author identification. The abstract should be in italics.

3. *Text*: Begin text on a new page headed by the title. Omit author identification.
   a. *Headings and subheadings* in the text organize the content. Generally, three levels of headings are sufficient for an article. Heading styles are shown below (refer to the *ASA Style Guide* or an ASA publication for additional examples).

THIS IS A LEVEL 1 HEADING

Level 1 headings are left justified (or centered) on the page, in capital letters, in type size two points larger than your text.

This Is a Level 2 Heading

Level 2 headings are flush left, in italic capital/lowercase (all words capitalized except prepositions, articles, and coordinating conjunctions).

This is a level 3 heading. Level 3 headings are indented, run in to the paragraph following them, and end with a period. Capitalize only the first letter and proper nouns.

   b. *References in the text* must be listed in the references section, and all references listed in the references section must be cited in the text. Cite the last name(s) of the authors and year of publication. Include page references whenever you think that information is necessary. References in text must be listed consistently either in chronological or alphabetical order. Subsequent citations of the same source are cited in the same way as the first, with the exception of a reference with three or more authors (see the example below). Some examples are listed below (refer to recent issues of *Sociological Focus*, the *ASA Style Guide*, or ASA publications for other examples):

   - If author's name is in the text, follow it with the year of publication in parentheses: Fishbein (1975).
   - If author's name is not in the text, enclose last name and year of publication in parentheses: (Benedict 1938).
   - Page citation follows year of publication: Antonovski (1979:142) or (Antonovski 1979:142).
   - Give both names of joint authors (Jessor and Jessor 1977); for three authors, list all three last names in the first citation (Jessor, Chase, and Donovan 1980) and in subsequent citations use "et al." (Jessor et al. 1980). For citations with four or more authors, always use the first author's last name followed by "et al."
   - For institutional authorship, supply minimum identification from the beginning of the complete citation: (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1990:216).
   - Separate references in a series with semicolons: (Yamaguchi and Kandel 1984; Johnston 1985; Thompson 1989).

- For unpublished materials: Robin and Robin (forthcoming) or White (unpublished) or Johnston (personal communication).

c. *Notes in the text* should be numbered consecutively throughout the article with superscript Arabic numerals. If a note is referred to again later in the text, use a parenthetical insertion "(see note 3)."
d. *Equations* in the text must be typed. Important equations should be identified by consecutive Arabic numerals in parentheses to the right of the equation. Expressions should be aligned and subscripts and superscript clearly marked. Use notes in the margin to clarify symbols.
e. *Notes* are not required in an article; when possible incorporate the information into the text.
f. *Statistical terms*: All statistical terms, such as t, n, R^2, SD, are italicized.

4. *Notes*: If notes cannot be avoided, list the notes in a section titled "Notes" directly following the text. Begin each note with the Arabic numeral with which it is keyed in the text, e.g., "1. This is the first note." *Sociological Focus* does not use footnotes.
5. *References*: All references in the text must be listed in the reference section; all references in the reference section must be cited in the text. **Authors are responsible for ensuring that publication information for each reference is complete and correct.** Listed below are guidelines and examples for citations in your reference list (see recent issues of *Sociological Focus*, the *ASA Style Guide*, or ASA publications for further examples):

- List the references alphabetically by the first author's last name.
- The author's last name should be inverted. In the case of multiple authors, only the first author's name should be inverted. (e.g., Dryfoos, Joy D., David J. Hawkins, Denise M. Lishner, and Matthew O. Howard). Use first and last names of all authors, unless only initials are given on the cited publication. List all authors in the references: the use of *et al.* is not permitted in the reference section.
- If your reference list includes more than one item by the same author, list them in order of the year of publication. For listing more than one work by the same author(s) within the same year, distinguish them (in alphabetical order by title of article) by adding the letters *a, b, c,* etc., to the year (or to forthcoming, unpublished, etc.).
- If the material listed has been accepted for publication but has not yet been published, use "forthcoming" in place of the date and give the journal or publisher.

Books Dryfoos, Joy D. 1991. *Adolescents at Risk*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Periodicals Johnson, Robert H. and Howard B. Kaplan. 1990. "Stability of Psychological Symptoms: Drug Use Consequences and

Intervening Processes." *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 31:277–298.

Robin, Stanley S. and Eric O. Johnson. Forthcoming. "Early Onset Drug Use and the Gateway Phenomenon." *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 33:157–166.

Yamaguchi, Kazuo and Denise Kandel. 1984a. "Patterns of Drug Use from Adolescence to Young Adulthood: II. Consequences of Progression." *American Journal of Public Health* 74:668–672.

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E-References Roberts, Les, Pascal Ngoy, Colleen Mone, Charles Lubula, Luc Mwezse, Mariana Zantop, and Michael Despines. 2003. "Mortality in the Democratic Republic of the Congo: Results from a Nationwide Survey." International Rescue Committee. Retrieved November 23, 2004 (http://intranet.theirc.org/docs/drc_mortality_iii_full.pdf).

Collections Greenspan, Stanley L. 1986. "Research Strategies to Identify Developmental Vulnerabilities for Drug Abuse." Pp. 136–154 in *Etiology of Drug Abuse: Implications for Prevention*, edited by Carly L. Jones and Robert J. Battjes. Washington, DC: National Institute on Drug Abuse Series. NIDA Research Monograph 56.

6. *Tables*: Number tables consecutively as referenced in the text, and place each on a separate sheet at the end of the paper. Avoid the use of lines between rows in tables. Insert a note in the text indicating the approximate placement of each table, e.g., "[Table 3 about here]." Each table must have a descriptive title and headings for all rows and columns (avoid abbreviations). Gather footnotes to tables at the bottom of the respective tables as "Note(s)" and designate each note as *a, b, c,* etc., with corresponding designations within and at the bottom of the tables. Asterisks indicate statistical significance (*$p < .05$; **$p < .01$; etc.). All tables should include easily interpreted titles and labels and contain the minimum amount of formatting necessary. Authors are responsible for removing any superfluous lines, boxes, or other formatting prior to publication.
7. *Figures and illustrations* should be numbered in the same way as tables; place each on a separate sheet at the end of the paper. Insert a note in the text indicating the approximate placement of each, e.g., "[Figure 3 about here]." Figures and illustrations submitted with the final draft must be camera-ready, executed in black ink on white paper or vellum; artistic standards must be observed in the production of figures and illustrations.