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At the Feet of the Master: Three Stages in the Appropriation of Okinawan Karate Into Anglo-American Culture

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First “discovered” by Anglo-Americans following the Second World War, karate has undergone a series of changes in the way in which it is presented and taught in the United States and Australia. In the 1990s, the publication of key secret texts, the establishment of a large body of historical information, the rapidly growing acceptance of traditional Chinese medicine, acupuncture, and the establishment of second- and third-generation dojos and instructors in Euro-American cultures have contributed to the demystification of karate and a lessening need for attachments to the people and culture of Okinawa. With these new representations of karate, the art is being remade as a set of Western knowledge and practices. These changes in the representation of karate trace a trajectory that transforms the pragmatic and spiritual characteristics of karate first into a marker of Asianess, then into a myth of origins, and finally into a set of historical and semiscientific practices.

Introduction

I shall discuss karate as an object of knowledge (see Knorr-Cetina, 1997), that is, as a set of beliefs and practices that are never grasped in their totality and that generate more knowledge and more practices. Karate is not a thing. As a set of practices, it exists within a framework of ideas, knowledges, beliefs, and practices drawn from the cultures in which it appears. Particularly, I seek to explore how this set of practices was introduced into America and other Western countries and to understand what beliefs were integral to this appearance in the various forms they now occupy. I suggest that, although ideas and beliefs as commodities may easily be transferred between cultures, such is not the case with more complicated formations. The case of karatedo’s spread from Okinawan culture to that of Anglo-European suggests that the transfer of an

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object of knowledge from one culture to another requires a certain depth of related ideas to which I shall refer as a texture of knowledge.

Throughout its history in Anglo-European settings, the representation of karatedo and its place in Western culture—that is, the uses to which it has been put—has depended on the way in which karatedo was contextualized and framed within other, preexisting sets of beliefs and practices. The general acceptance of karate in the West has followed a trajectory that reveals the evolution of these beliefs and practices, these cultural textures. Karate exists as rule-bound sport, as commodity, as a representation of Asia, and in other forms, all in addition to being a set of cultural practices and beliefs.

Integral to this exploration are the questions of how karate is understood and represented in the West and what the relationships are between Western practices and the cultures from which karate originated. Karate is a creole of practices that were combined together on the island of Okinawa. Originally referred to as te (hand), karate combined indigenous fighting techniques with knowledge and practices from China, Japan, and possibly from Thailand, the Philippines, and other countries in the area. However, the major influence was Chinese. Although a tributary state of the Chinese empire, Okinawa conducted extensive trade with and transshipping of trade to China, thus providing the island with extensive contact with China and with other cultures. A part of the Chinese empire’s system of rule was to send emissaries and advisers to all parts of the empire (Boorstein, 1983), and Chinese emissaries to Okinawa taught, among other things, martial arts. In addition, numerous Okinawans traveled to China, often staying for extended periods of time and, on rare occasions, even teaching in China.

After the unification of the three kingdoms of Okinawa under King Sho Hanshi in 1492, Sho Shin-O banned the stockpiling of weaponry by individuals or households in 1507. This contributed to the practice of unarmed combat but also stimulated interest in the development of fighting techniques using common implements, especially those associated with the largest primary industry, agriculture (Draeger & Smith, 1981, pp. 58-59). An ongoing cross fertilization of martial arts styles and weapons techniques with both Japan and China was heightened with the invasion of Okinawa by the Satsuma clan from Japan in 1609. In the following centuries of occupation, karate developed with cross fertilization from China, Japan, and other cultures. Caught in the middle of the turbulent history of Sino-Japanese relationships, invaded during the Japanese civil wars and in 1945 by the Allied Forces, Okinawa has been constantly transformed and its cultural practices threatened by the waves of different cultures that washed over the island. Thus, from its inception, karate was never a single thing but an evolving set of practices linked to local knowledge as well as prevailing cultural beliefs. It was, as well, actively evolving in many directions and idiolects or styles.
Transmission of Karate

The primary ways in which karate was taught was through face-to-face instruction, often after a lengthy apprenticeship, and this technique of teaching continues today, although now books, videotapes, and Internet resources augment the one-on-one approach. Few formal texts of techniques exist, and the best records of karate prior to the 20th century are to be found in oral histories and in the kata that emerged from leading masters of the period, although often having roots extending back into Chinese martial arts. Kata, as a sort of kinesthetic record, preserve concepts and principles in ritualized form. Consequentially, karate was most often associated with a single master, often the originator of a style or a variation of style. To learn a particular style or system, one had to find the master or one of his students. Occasionally, books might be written, but this phenomenon is much more popular in this century than in preceding ones. One old record that does exist was a book, hand copied by students, called Bubishi. This work is discussed in more detail below.

Following the Meiji Restoration in Japan (1868), several major figures in karate were determined to introduce karate across Okinawa via the public education system. Yabu, Kentsu; Funakoshi, Gichin; and others persuaded the Japanese government through demonstrations that this would provide a good physical fitness regime such as would produce citizens fit enough to be soldiers. Although not adopted by the Japanese until 1927, the system was approved for use in Okinawa. At this time, numerous techniques and teachings of karate were systematically removed from the bunkai (explanation) of kata and from the kihon waza (basic techniques) (McCarthy, 1995, pp. 52-55). The system was reduced to punches, blocks, kicks, and weapons, while advanced techniques were considered unsuitable for school children or the general public. This “deskilled” karate became the public face of the art and was the style that was generally taught to Euro-Americans after 1945.

When karate was introduced into Japan, it underwent several changes. It became highly stylized, adopted a standard uniform, and developed sporting aspects for tournament competition. The name was changed from characters meaning “Chinahand” to characters meaning “empty hand.” Japanese antagonisms toward China required that these foreign references be systematically effaced. Through these changes, karate as object of knowledge could fit fairly closely with the tradition of Japanese martial arts, the bujutsu, and so gain acceptance. Looking back at this brief history, one can see that Japanese culture developed karate to fit the specific cultural beliefs and practices that positioned karate within Japanese traditions of budo (combative arts). The cross fertilization that produced the forms of karate were made possible by cultural similarities that provided a “depth of texture” into which karate could be woven.

The malleability of the cultural forms of martial arts was enhanced by a tradition of secrecy, which had long been a part of the martial arts. Although inti-
mately connected with and developing out of traditions of Zen (Cha’an) and traditional Chinese medicine (TCM), the applications of this knowledge, developed through the centuries, were often carefully concealed from all but initiates in the arts. The lengthy period of civil wars in Okinawa prior to unification, the Japanese invasion of Okinawa, and the outlawing of karate activities all contributed to this hiding of the practices. Some aspects of karate were encoded in the Odori dance forms of Okinawa to hide them from the untrained, and the use of common implements as weapons (Ekku, bo, sai, nunchaku, tuifa) also developed as a means of furthering training while hiding the purpose of the activity (Alexander, 1991, pp. 2-3, 11). Thus, karate has a long history of inventing imaginary forms for itself to present to outsiders, and these imaginary forms often have been mistaken for the practice itself. This mistake continues into the present day. Having no well-defined public face, the arts could be reformed and represented as a different set of practices with relative ease.

The First Stage of Representation:
Discovery and Mythologizing: 1920s to 1970s

Said (1979, 1993) and others (Chaudhuri, 1991) have noted how the use of the idea of “Asia” among Anglo-Americans has tended to conflate the numerous peoples and cultures of a broad region of the world into a uniform ethnic and cultural mass. Although I use the terms in this article, my use simply acknowledges the difficulty of finding alternative expressions. As Derek Massarella (1996) observed, “‘Asia’ and ‘Europe’ are easy to deconstruct but difficult to replace” (p. 139). The cultural blending of diverse peoples and practices has also occurred in representations of the martial arts with wushu (Chinese martial arts), karate, judo, and other forms collapsed into a homogenous, imaginary block. In this form, the martial arts have been able to function as signifiers of all that Asia was in the imagination of the beholders. The secret traditions of martial artists and the fabulous stories circulating within martial arts circles proved helpful in feeding the popular imagination with beliefs about the practices in general as secret, highly advanced, deadly, and possessing the ability to make the practitioner virtually invulnerable to physical harm. These paralleled beliefs about Asia in general as mysterious, inscrutable, violent, and with links to unpleasant, illegal, or immoral activities. Many of these ideas had their roots in early Portuguese, Dutch, and English writings from the 16th and 17th centuries and continued to be expressed through the Vietnam War era, revealing the durability of ignorance and stereotyping (see especially Massarella, 1996).

At the moment of its discovery by the West, karate was, in a sense, frozen as a cultural moment, much as rainforests or “primitive” tribes become relatively fixed signifiers in the instance of their discovery (see Baudrillard, 1983). The complexity of the thing becomes lost in its representation that exists in ready-
made relationships within systems of signification and discourses. Once acquired in the West, karate was removed from the cultural systems that created and defined it and was transplanted into new meaning systems. As an object of knowledge in Japan and Okinawa, karate wove together aspects of a complex history, but as a signifier in the West, karate became a marker of difference that was already filled with meaning. Rather than heuristically extending outward into other knowledge, many early Western representations of karate limited the meaning to the area already defined by ideas of “Asianess” and the Other.

The early, simplistic view of martial arts in general ensured that their appearance as cultural markers in Anglo-American cinema would perpetuate commonly held beliefs. Few Westerners had direct experience of martial arts, and the common knowledge of it derived from mass media representations in film and books and later in television. The martial arts that first appeared in American cinema were in films of the 1930s, although they became much more common after the 1960s. *The Hatchet Man* (1932) depicted parts of Chinese Tong wars in San Francisco, whereas other films might occasionally show judo techniques. In general, martial arts in mainstream American, English, and Australian cinema showed only parodies of the practices, lifted out of all cultural and historical contexts. Throws from judo appeared now and then, but wushu, *jujitsu* (unarmed combat techniques from the samurai tradition), karate, and other traditional martial arts were largely unknown as coherent sets of practices outside of their geographical areas and cultural traditions.

The genre of spy films allowed for more techniques to appear on screen, although these were completely out of context of the larger practices. The uncertain allegiance of Asian nations in the East-West cold war allowed an ease in the continued representation of all things Asian as politically and morally suspect. In 1964, the James Bond film *You Only Live Twice* alleged to show aspects of Japanese culture as well as some martial arts techniques. However, these were only used as window dressing to highlight the “exotic” element of the setting and to drive the plot. The most prominent representations of martial arts in this film were of evil ninja assassins. Television shows such as *I Spy* and *The Man From UNCLE* also caricatured the martial arts with dramatic throws and techniques, nearly always in the hands of Anglo-Americans. Within this genre, Bruce Lee made his appearance on American television as Kato in the *Green Hornet* in 1967.

Although films from China and especially Japan that depicted the martial arts were available, these generally showed in America, Australia, and other Anglo cultures in art-house cinemas. Thus, films such as Kurasawa’s *Seven Samurai* (1954) and *Yojimbo* (1961) might be known to small segments of non-Asian societies, but the context in which these appeared, in particular, as a subgenre of Japanese cinema dealing with historical themes, limited their reception. This ghettoization of Japanese cinema into “highbrow” culture helped maintain the perception of the martial arts as something exotic, other, and distant in time, space, and culture. At the same time, these art-house films
depicted violence with such a level of graphic detail and dramatic tension that they were the vehicles for Caucasian copies: *The Magnificent Seven, A Fistful of Dollars*, and so on. Martial arts and other Asian films could appear in mass media only as translations into more familiar genres, such as westerns. Discourses that operated within Asian cultures had no place in the subject positioning of Western audiences. Lacking these supporting discourses, representations of Asian cultures could be read only thinly, and Western ideas would be introduced to provide the depth of discursive texture necessary to give audiences subjective points of entry into the filmic stories.

The 1970s saw the beginnings of attempts to represent some parts of Asia in sympathetic ways. Asian actors begin to appear more in cinema rather than being represented by Caucasians. Although the use of blackface to represent African Americans had disappeared with vaudeville, Asians were still fair game through the 1960s (but see Dower, 1996). The first Asian to regularly perform martial arts on Anglo-American screens was Bruce Lee, who was a regular on the television show *Longstreet*. Lee played the personal trainer of the blind detective protagonist. With his first major picture outside of Hong Kong, *Enter the Dragon* (1973), Lee brought something of wushu to the awareness of many. However, the television show *Kung Fu*, although featuring some Asian actors to portray major characters, still used an American actor as the central character. These early popular representations were followed by a flurry of films that moved martial arts from the domain of Eastern, exotic, and somewhat mystical practices to a more mainstream position as action/adventure vehicles generally featuring Anglo-American protagonists.

The 1970s marked as well a proliferation of martial arts representations onto Western television and movie screens as the fancy fighting techniques achieved a new level of commodification. The dreadful film of Mr. Peace Through Violence, *Billy Jack*, appeared in 1971; the television movie *Kung Fu* with David Carradine appeared in 1972, with the series following soon after. Transparent morality tales in most respects, these and other films were vehicles for the protagonists to display martial arts prowess on the screen and capitalize in lucrative ways on otherwise largely unrewarding activities. Chuck Norris and Bill “Superfoot” Wallace were two Westerners who cashed in their abilities in the competition circuit, becoming minor stars within this subgenre of film.

Almost all these action martial arts feature films featured “Asian” martial artists as well, but, reflecting the uncertain cultural and moral position of Asia, their roles were often ambiguous. Asians personified both the ancient moral order that was believed to underpin the martial arts and that served as the source of the Anglo hero’s moral superiority, and they represented evil as profound training perverted by greed, ambition, or anger at a childhood defeat from the hero. The ambiguity of the representation of Asians in these films grants us a key insight. Relationships between the Western hero and the Eastern characters show in miniature the lines of power in the ideology of these films. Thus, in showing the Westerner who has acquired the secret knowledge
from the master and who then surpasses either the master or other students or both, these films maintain the ideological belief in the physical, social, and moral superiority of Westerners over Asians.

In addition, these films mark a transition into the second stage of appropriation: the acquisition of the Asian practices while still using Asia as the moral and historical underpinning of that practice. Cain, in *Kung Fu*, suffers a dizzying number of flashbacks to his training at the Shao-Lin monastery. Chuck Norris in *The Octagon* recalls his training under a Japanese master. In *The Mechanic*, with Charles Bronson, the karate master is shown defeating his Western student, revealing again the dominance of the Asian secret of martial arts. The implied premise in many of these representations is that there is some secret possessed by the masters in Asia. The idea of a secret knowledge draws on a set of signifiers of Asia that operate as binary oppositions to signifiers of Euro-American culture. These films suggest that the secret knowledge of Asia is knowable but only by a handful of carefully selected Westerners: those positioned through the narrative as having been selected early in life for the receipt of this special boon. The origins of these Western associations of magic with “the Orient” are ancient and obscure. No doubt the mythical construction of the “mysterious East” was fostered considerably through the translations of esoteric texts of Tibetan Buddhism and other sources in the 19th century. The history of the Western mapping of the world vacillates between the doubtful search for Prester John’s Kingdom and the macabre certainty of finding beasts, cannibals, and other horrors.

**Stage 2: Marital Arts as Practices in the West (1946-1980)**

Developing in parallel with the mass media construction of martial arts, a grounded form of knowledge appeared that brought the martial arts into the domain of lived experience and personal history for many living in the Anglo-American cultures. This second stage of appropriation appears in the American culture when the first-known karate dojo in the United States was opened in 1946 by Robert Trias. Within a few years, numerous soldiers, particularly from the United States, who comprised the bulk of the Allied Forces occupying Japan and Okinawa, were returning home and starting dojos. By the 1970s, many schools as well as national and international organizations promoting karate appeared.

However, what was promoted was by and large “sport” karate, the karate that was taught in high schools in Okinawa. Changes to the art, first developed by the Okinawan, “Professor” Funakoshi Gichin, such as standardized uniforms and grading systems as well as the introduction of rule-bound combat (*jyu-kumite*), created a set of practices that were sufficiently close to boxing and to Euro-American hierarchies of knowledge and skill to allow the art to be widely accepted and practiced. These gave the art a fit with mainstream West-
ern discourses sufficient to allow its acceptance and growth. During this middle period, the cultural texture of karate was supplied by its practitioners’ ability to draw on Western discourses, such as boxing and the military. Thus, karate could be recognized as a fighting art, similar to boxing, while being deconstructive of boxing as something abnormal to the traditional mythologies of Western martial arts. Its abnormality was encoded in its use of kicks (considered unethical in boxing, although allowed in the French fighting system, Savate), its highly structured training systems, the philosophy it embodied, and the occultism that it intimated. The philosophic and esoteric practices of martial arts were generally not learned in the short time that Westerners spent among Asian cultures. Thus, what grew in the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, and in other Western cultures was arguably not karate, at least not in the Okinawan sense, but the idea of karate as Westerners imagined it. Asian discourses of history, culture, and practice that created martial arts and defined its practice had not yet gained widespread recognition in the West.

The acceptance of martial arts in the West has been fostered by the emergence of numerous magazines catering to the emerging field, and these range from the very good to the purely exploitative. One feature of most, however, is the conflation of practice with the mass media idea of karate. Thus, a recent issue of Blitz Magazine featured a story about Jean-Claude Van Damme, a recent star of martial arts action films. Reviews of films and interviews with the stars appear side by side with articles on training and history. Often, training articles focus on, or borrow from, body-building practices, and magazines focused on body building are often advertised in karate magazines and are sometimes sold together as sets. This blurring of boundaries between karate and other physical activities as well as the blurring of the boundaries between lived experience and mass media forms suggest that the cultural texture of karate that was present in the Eastern Pacific countries and that made karate as a set of practices does not exist in the West or has been supplanted by another set of practices, that is, sport. The culture of sport as a dominant and traditional Anglo-American cultural practice supplies the texture into which karate is commonly woven. This is easily seen in magazine articles with titles such as “Karate or Kung Fu: Who Has the Fastest Kick?” Another manifestation of these changes may be observed in the rise of “ultimate” or no-holds-barred tournament competitions that regularly pack stadiums and appear on video or subscription television.

The acceptance of karate in America, Europe, and Australia was manifested in the development of large tournaments and competitions and the growth in the number and size of karate schools. Empires and corporations of karate schools spread rapidly and largely took the place of the *ryu* structures’ that framed the traditional martial arts lineages in Japan and Okinawa. In addition, a large number of new styles and schools appeared, much more in the sport tradition than following the passing on of a lineage of teaching. People with expe-
rience in one or more martial art opened schools generally emphasizing either self-defense or tournament competition.

As the original *bunkai* (explanations) of kata and much of the esoteric philosophy of karate had been long removed from the arts, little was taught of the underlying sciences of ch’i, meridian striking, healing, and the health-enhancing aspects of improving the flow of intrinsic body energy through specific postures and movements. These knowledges remained a part of the mythic fabric of the arts, hinted at but rarely discussed. From a Western perspective, they remained either untrue or a part of the Eastern tradition to which the West in general had not yet been given access.

It was during this middle period as well that significant attempts at serious Anglo-American scholarship into the martial arts took place. The 1960s and 1970s saw the publication of many works by persons associated with the martial arts in situ for some time. Among them, Donn Draeger, Robert W. Smith, and E. J. Harrison contributed much to a Western historical understanding of Asian martial arts and introduced aspects of wushu and other forms to many persons. However, despite the publication in Japanese of works by Okinawan and Japanese martial artists, little of this was read outside of select circles, and much of this literature is only now being translated into English. Karate at this time had not yet been textualized within a body of literature generally accessible to the West.

**Stage 3: Appropriation and De-mythologizing: 1980s to the Present**

The contemporary understanding of karate is undergoing a fundamental change among many Anglo-Americans. Now, there are second- and third-generation instructors living in the West who have the benefits both of having studied in the countries of origin and of living and practicing a great distance away. With the deaths of legendary founding fathers of karate, the styles and organizations tend to disintegrate as senior students vie for the position of grand patriarch of the style. This mimicking of a Confucian hierarchy does little to disguise the naked egoism and greed that are arguably often the motivation. The master served as a sign of genuineness and legitimacy, so long as he lived, but with his death, an endless series of simulations, each masquerading as the authentic and real (Baudrillard, 1983). Regardless of the truth of their assertions, people could claim that they had studied more or longer than others or that they had some special tie to the *honbo* (central school). The signifier of the master, and hence of a link to the Asian tradition, could be broken either by the master’s death and the absence of a successor or by the creation of a rival structure, such as a corporation or organization to replace the original school with another social structure. When this severing of the practice from its origins takes place, the sign of legitimacy changes. Martial arts then becomes
reduced to those key representations that are granted legitimacy by the organization. The organization establishes ranking, certification, and the allocation of all forms of deference.

Once the sign of legitimacy is acquired, karate itself can be transformed into a commodity and its method of diffusion sold through franchises, complete with door-knocking proselytes and incentive programs for recruitment. The new sign of legitimacy, commonly underpinned by a claim to direct lineage to one or another master or school, is reinforced with displays of trophies won in competitions, with the McDonaldesque reference to the number of schools or students in the organization, or by any of the other methods used to sell hamburgers, cars, or deodorant.

The success of karate as a business and as a commodity gives rise to another order of appropriations. Karate, being property of tangible value, must be policed and authority maintained. The following exchange, published on a Website, is revealing:

In a radio talk show on Feb 7, 1995, Dr. Aiello asks Harold Long “...I understand that recently Anj Uezu [an Okinawan and head of an international karate organization] was promoted to tenth dan by letter of endorsement by many of the major Sensei [teachers] in this country. ... How did this come about or do you know anything about it?" Now this is one of the best parts, Harold Long replies, "I don't know anything about it except for rumor, but I would like to make a comment about it. Let me talk about the senior leadership of Isshin-ryu in this country. I don't care who these people think they are or what authority they have, they can have any petition they want. If they have not conferred with Don Nagle, Harold Long, Joe Buckholtz, Toby Cooling, or J.C. Burris, then who in the world do they think they are to run around with a petition to promote someone in a foreign country to tenth dan?" (Advincula, 1998)

In this interview, the late Harold Long is complaining that an Okinawan has been promoted to the most senior rank in the Isshin-ryu style without the approval of a handful of Americans. Clearly, he believed that karate exists independently of its cultural supports; that it exists now, most completely in its American, institutional version; and Okinawa is dismissed as a foreign country. Similarly, a senior dan grade in another style once told me in great seriousness that “in a few years the Okinawans will be coming here (Australia) to learn from us.” The implication is that Australia now has the genuine practice of karate, whereas what exists on the island of Okinawa is somehow second rate or degenerate. This tendency to legitimate national styles of karate by claiming “authenticity” while denigrating current “foreign” practices is not unique to Okinawan karate but appears in other martial arts in relation to other countries as well.

Similarly, this appropriation of karate appears around the reintroduction of tuite (grappling with pressure points) and kyushu jitsu (vital point striking). Draeger and Smith (1981) observed that “this art, largely lost in the present era, is totally unknown outside of China” (p. 51). Yet, one encounters with growing
frequency an incorporation of these techniques into karate and other martial arts. To some extent, these seem to draw on the magical mythologies about martial arts powers. Techniques of vital point striking are sometimes heralded as the secrets of the masters, and with their incorporation into contemporary karate, the claim is being made that there are now no secrets that the West does not possess about these practices. The West can almost dispense with Asia as the appropriation is nearly complete. Regardless of whether these techniques were known or widely practiced on Okinawa, and there is some question about this, their incorporation into contemporary karate signals a contextualization of karate that can only take place in relationship to a growing body of literature on TCM.

The publication of many texts and the spread of the knowledge of ch’i meridians and TCM have contributed greatly to changes in understanding of the techniques of martial arts. In particular, the spread of knowledge about these practices and their establishment into institutional forms created another aspect of the depth of texture needed for martial arts to be understood in a new context. They contributed the explanations that allowed martial arts in general and karate in particular to become accepted as “normal” practices. Rorty (1982) defined normality as “accepting without question the stage-setting in the language which gives demonstration (scientific or ostensive) its legitimacy” (p. 106). In other words, the deep or occult philosophy of martial arts required a degree of explanation and elaboration that was not forthcoming within the field itself. Rather, other, more literate, areas in Anglo-European culture, such as medicine, first had to make the revolutionary statements that could underpin and support other sets of practices, such as karate. Only when acupuncture exists as a recognized practice can books such as Dim Mak: Death Point Striking (Montague, 1993) appear almost mainstream.

Here again, the context of the original object of knowledge is lost. Knowledge of ch’i was embedded in a holistic understanding of health and TCM. Application of this knowledge to attacking was derived from an understanding of how to apply it to healing. An understanding of healing through these techniques derived from a view of the universe grounded in the interplay of esoteric forces. Outside of the context of this philosophy, the striking of key meridian points becomes a technical exercise rather like the pushing of buttons. The claim to these knowledges again serves to legitimate the practitioner as one possessing the authentic or true knowledge. These claims then become signifiers capable of adding value to the commodity of the martial art.

The Discovery of the Supporting Discourses of Martial Arts

Marital arts are first and foremost kinesthetic practices taught by example and not readily transmitted in written or pictorial form. Writing is a poor
descriptor of physical motion, and pictures cannot convey how one gets from one point to another. As an oral and physical tradition, karate was strongly time binding (see Carey 1989; Innis, 1951/1984; Ong, 1982) and linked to the generally conservative cultures in which it developed. This characteristic of karate was strengthened by strong ties with various indigenous philosophies and with cultures that generally venerate the past and especially one’s ancestors and teachers. It is this time-binding aspect of karate that perhaps has contributed to its strange development in the West where a spatially biased culture is more dominant. For any new development to be seen as normal in Anglo-European culture, a strong support by texts, mass media, and other dominant media forms must present and define the practice as normal, providing the necessary cultural background to enable the practices to stand on their own, without explanation. Once this step had occurred, the final stage of karate’s appropriation as a normal Western practice could take place.

This latest, although certainly not final, stage of appropriation is marked by the appearance of a key text, recently translated into English, known as Bubishi. In the 1990s, two English translations of this text have appeared, one by George Alexander (1993) and the other by Patrick McCarthy (1995). These translations introduce to the English-speaking audience for often the first time a sense of the traditions and culture that comprised Okinawan karate on the island. Originally a Chinese work, it appeared in some form in Okinawa at some time in the 18th or 19th centuries. It was a secret text, hand copied by students from their masters’ versions. The Bubishi details striking points based on the TCM meridian system and outlines some basic technique on defense and training. It contains as well recipes for TCM remedies for various injuries and illnesses as well as for the preparation of tonics. The Bubishi also provides advice on fighting philosophy and on the proper attitude toward living.

Many details of the martial arts are only alluded to in this work, and the Bubishi serves more as an aide memoires than as a definitive text. It is an eclectic book, apparently being added to over the centuries and for the most part is best read as a collection of aphorisms for meditation and study rather than as a how-to text. As a translation and edited work, this text is problematic in terms of the politics and prejudices of the translators. As such, Bubishi stands neither among the histories of Smith, Draeger, and others nor among the introductory texts and how-to literature that emerged in the 30 years following the Second World War. It is difficult to know how this work in translation is read and understood by persons from cultures quite different from those that gave it birth. Bubishi is referred to as “the Bible of Karate” (the subtitle of McCarthy’s translation), and this phrasing suggests the central place that the tenets of this work held for some Okinawan and Chinese practitioners. However, what is the place of this work in the West? More important, why is this text being translated and published now in the English-speaking world?

I suggest that this text appears now because so many of the associated principles of martial arts have gained a degree of acceptability in the West that the text
itself is supported and made both acceptable and credible by them. Practices that as recently as 20 years ago were dismissed (or accepted!) as occultism have become commonplace in the West. Acupuncture and TCM are widely recognized and practiced and are even covered in some medical plans. Tai Chi, perhaps the most occult of the martial arts, is widely recognized and practiced, although often in the form of an exercise. Buddhism, Zen, and other philosophical and religious beliefs, if not widely understood, are at least passively recognized by Anglo-Europeans. Since the 1970s, yoga, particularly hatha yoga, has been widely taught in the Western cultures for more than 30 years, introducing many of the concepts of imagining, strength through relaxation, and the idea of ch'i or intrinsic energy to the culture. As each of these fields and its related discourses spread into Anglo-European culture, it provided support to other related systems of belief and practice.

Just as the movies created the cultural forms of martial arts for many years, and just as sport provided another set of discourses that positioned karate for Euro-American cultures, now another level of understanding formulated around TCM is emerging, and karate can be seen in terms of this new texturing. Karate itself is thus changed, and these changes are hotly contested within the chat lines, publications, and dojos associated with traditional schools.

Conclusion

How has it come to be that karate is moving into a new status: that of being a taken-for-granted part of Western culture, as ubiquitous and conventional as Asian food? What was once a part of the texture of Asianess has now become a part of the texture of Westernness. Karate has an acceptance, credibility, and believability that are underpinned first by the constructions of it in relation to existing Western practices and ideas about Asia and later in relation to Western understandings and appropriations of TCM. The depth of cultural texture that allows karate to have a public face in Anglo-American cultures determines how karate will be seen and practiced.

Commodities and tools as well as specific techniques transfer readily across cultural boundaries. However, knowledges and practices often do not transfer, and when they do it is often at the expense of a considerable part of their integrity as objects of knowledge within their cultures of origin. The introduction and acceptance of karate in the West could only take place after the beliefs that underpin and support traditional karate had come into prominence and common acquaintance. I take the term objects of knowledge from Knorr-Cetina (1997) who, following Rheinberger, described objects of knowledge as being "processes and projections rather than definitive things. Observation and enquiry reveal them by increasing rather than reducing their complexity. . . . Objects of knowledge seem to have the capacity to unfold indefinitely" (p. 12). The unfolding of which Knorr-Cetina wrote is the extension of thought, enquiry, and experience into knowledges and practices that are
related to, or that arise from, or that support the understanding of the object of knowledge itself. My contention is that objects of knowledge cannot exist without this support that I have called “a depth of texture.” The case at hand shows how a texture of Asian-Pacific cultures was transmitted bit by bit until a sufficient depth of texture was created to allow for karate to become an object of knowledge within Western cultures.

Objects of knowledge can only exist while there are supporting knowledges and discourses into which thought can extend. So long as karate and the other martial arts function as signifiers, they cannot be objects of knowledge. “After many years of training in a martial art, one must eventually ask the age-old question, “Is that all there is?” (Montague, 1993, p. 108). Lacking the knowledges and discourses that created and framed the martial arts, people in the West must import or invent other discourses to make martial arts more than either simply practices or signifiers. Karate emerged as one of the individual signifiers operating around the Western discourses of Asia. Now, many Asian discourses appear in Western translations: TCM, meridians, acupuncture, ch’i, ki, prana, and so forth. Within the Western societies, Karate and the other Asian martial arts are no longer Other but neither are they Asian. Rather, Western cultures have incorporated significant depths of Asian discourses into their own cultural systems. The West has woven new cultural textures to position the martial arts in ways that fit closely with other practices, such as capitalism, sport, and the cult of the individual. In time, we may see these newly incorporated discourses introduce subtle changes to Western culture in unimagined ways. Cultural appropriation is always a process of cross fertilization.

Notes

1. The author has been active in Okinawan martial arts for more than 10 years and holds the grade of Ni Dan (second-degree black belt in Isshin-Ryu karatedo and kobudo).

2. Patrick McCarthy (1995, pp. 44, ff) has argued that the popularly held belief that karate developed as a peasant activity is untenable. Much evidence points to the incorporation of karate into mainstream Okinawan institutions such as the royal court, the police, and various official military organizations.

3. Kata are ritualized movements, battles against imaginary enemies. Although resembling dance, they contain highly compacted lessons in movement, technique, and breathing and help to teach the correct mental attitude to students.

4. I am presenting the names with the family name first, followed by the given name, as is customary in Okinawan and Japanese cultures.

5. I do not mention here the enormous film industry in Hong Kong that has long produced generally low-budget action films about wushu. These films were not widely shown in Western cultures, although the films remain very popular in Hong Kong. One history of these may be found in Tasker (1993).
6. The parallels between karatedo in the West and traditional Western ideas of the military are striking and deserve far more attention than I can give here. The acceptance of the uniform, the decorating of the uniform (gi) with patches showing affiliation, the decoration of the belt showing rank, and a very thoroughgoing adaptation of martial discipline all combine to suggest a military discourse as providing some significant degree of the depth of texture to the martial arts. Also, not to be overlooked is the degree to which military personnel were responsible for the transmission of martial arts to America, England, and Australia.

7. The word ryu in Japanese denotes a way or path. Different styles or schools of martial arts were delineated by the philosophy and specific practices taught by the founders of a ryu and their successors. The concept connotes much more than a style, though, suggesting a core philosophy and approach to the art. Control of a ryu was passed down either through blood relations or through formal designation of an heir and successor to head the ryu. Lacking this succession, some ryu die out.

References


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Pierre Bourdieu, Religion, and Cultural Production

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Recent years have seen increased emphasis on the autonomy of human agency in creating meaning in everyday life. The institutional bias in sociology, however, and its concomitant emphasis on social reproduction rather than change favors hierarchical approaches to cultural production. This is apparent in the theorizing even of sociologists such as Pierre Bourdieu who emphasize the cultural dynamism of religion and other meaning systems. This article critiques the mechanistic underpinnings of Bourdieu’s perspective on religious production and his categorical differentiation between religious producers and consumers. Using data gathered from American Catholics, the author shows that interpretive autonomy allows them to recast the official discourse of the church hierarchy in ways that advance alternative interpretations. Interpretive autonomy is grounded in the Catholic tradition or habitus and is reflexively used by Catholics both to maintain the vibrancy of the church and expand the possibilities for institutional change.

An important contribution of cultural studies has been to enhance awareness of the significance of ordinary, everyday lived practices in the production of meaning. The early empirical work of the Birmingham School (e.g., Hall & Jefferson, 1976) demonstrated that the production of meaning is multilayered and diffuse. Contrary to a top-down analysis of cultural production that privileges production as the determining influence on the “reception” of meaning, several studies show that the content of any symbolic production (e.g., soap operas, romance novels, news accounts) is open to multiple interpretations and uses. These interpretations, moreover, can be quite autonomous of the “objective” content inscribed at the official point of production (see, for example, Hall, 1973; Hall & Jefferson, 1976; Press, 1991; Radway, 1994). Interpretive activity is thus an active, creative process that is socially, historically, and locally contextualized. In this view, as Dorothy Smith (1990) observed, all “texts are indexical” because their “meaning is not fully contained in them but completed in the setting of their reading” (p. 197). In making sense of the meanings packaged by a producer, the interpreter creates new meanings. Accordingly, the reception or interpretation of meaning is itself part of the meaning production.
process (Thompson, 1990, pp. 316-317). Yet, this is an aspect of cultural produc-
tion that is often marginalized by sociologists who, because of their interest
in mechanisms of social reproduction (e.g., Bourdieu, 1984), tend to give short
shift to the dynamic and open-ended nature of the production/consumption
process itself.

Recognition of the relative fluidity of interpretive/cultural production illu-
iminates aspects of social life that otherwise may appear somewhat enigmatic.
One such puzzle is presented by the continuing significance of religious partic-
pation for many Americans in this time of late- or postmodernity. Observers of
a postmaterialist cultural shift see traditional religious symbols losing their rel-
evancc outside of their original setting (e.g., Inglehart, 1990, p. 179). Yet, it is
evident that whereas in some contexts, religion serves culturally defensive pur-
poses (cf. Bauman, 1997, pp. 182-185; Castells, 1997), in other situations,
religion is used as an emancipatory resource in the creation of more
participative structures (Dillon, 1999). Even though sociologists see religion as
a symbolic system (e.g., Berger, 1967; Bourdieu, 1991a, 1991b, 1998) and
increasingly pay attention to its interpretive and cultural dimensions (e.g.,
Dillon, 1999; Kniss, 1997; Wuthnow, 1992), the insights derived from cul-
tural studies research have not been applied extensively to contemporary forms
of religion. There is still a tendency to treat religion as if it were not, in fact, a
cultural process. In other words, there is a reluctance to recognize that doctrinal
production occurs in multiple interpretive sites, and as such, the meanings and
lived practices of religion may be relatively independent of official church dis-
courses or of the meanings imputed to them by distant observers.

The privileging of content or representation (and especially of official sym-
chronic texts/discourses) over how that same symbolic content is understood in
daily practices mirrors a broader tension in cultural studies between analyses of
texts or symbolic codes themselves (e.g., Barthes, 1972; Baudrillard, 1988) and
approaches that seek to understand how individuals and groups use such cul-
tural schemas in everyday life. It also reflects a bias in sociology toward a struc-
tural, institutional approach to the production of ideology that underplays the
relative autonomy and cultural agency of ordinary people. Thus, for example,
in the case of the Catholic Church, the church hierarchy is seen as the producer
of ideology, whereas the laity are seen as “more acted on than they are actors”
(Burns, 1992, p. 29). Such top-down approaches to ideological production
understate the ways in which people actively construct meaning in their every-
day practices and how these new or reinterpreted cultural schemas may foster
social change.

This article offers a perspective on cultural production that emphasizes the
communally reflexive nature of interpretive activity. In doing so, I critique
Bourdieu’s analysis of religious production and specifically his representation
of contemporary Catholicism. Notwithstanding the many insights Bourdieu
provides for the understanding of social life, his analysis of religion is under-
pinned by a categorical, top-down model of cultural production, and one that
rests on and is reproduced by, what he calls, collective misrecognition (e.g., Bourdieu, 1998, p. 95). I argue that although misrecognition may indeed be essential to the practical mastery of daily life (Calhoun, 2000, p. 711), the “game” of religion/Catholicism is not as mechanistic as Bourdieu suggested. The discontinuities within the objective tradition and the interpretive diversity of Catholicism in everyday life point to how allegedly taken for granted or “doxic” practices may, in fact, disrupt collective misrecognition. Greater awareness of the subjective ways in which misrecognition is collectively subverted illuminates a more culturally driven analysis of institutional processes. In this view, reinterpreted scripts and cognitive schemas can play a significant role, independent of objective structural conditions (e.g., the hierarchical authority structure of the church) but not unrelated to them, in effecting social action, institutional reproduction, and change.

Specifically, this article shows how the doctrinal autonomy of American Catholics allows them to reinterpret or collectively recognize the official discourse of the church hierarchy excluding women from being priests. They do so in ways that advance alternative interpretations favoring a more egalitarian church. Interpretive autonomy is grounded in the Catholic tradition, or what might be called the Catholic habitus, and, intertwined with Catholics’ prereflexive immersion in the lived tradition, is reflexively used by them both to maintain the vibrancy of the tradition and expand the possibilities for institutional change.

**Symbolic Production and Collective Misrecognition**

Bourdieu saw the process of collective misrecognition as key to maintaining social relations. Based on his early study of Algerian society, Bourdieu (1962) has argued that gift exchange, for example, is a negotiated social practice whose rules are grounded in a shared implicit understanding of the meanings conveyed by giving and receiving (pp. 103-107). Although gift exchange can foster solidarity among equals, more interesting for Bourdieu is the way in which such exchange maintains a particular set of hierarchical social relations.

The successful reproduction of inequality is predicated on the fact that, as Bourdieu (1998) has argued, “practices always have double truths, which are difficult to hold together” (p. 95). Hence, a gift exchange could simply (or objectively) be a disinterested gift exchange or it could be an act of credit. This ambiguity enables relationships to continue over time. Consequently, it is critical that the logic underlying the gift exchange relation not be exposed because to do so would precipitate a breakdown in communal cohesiveness. An explication of what the gift “really” is would violate the terms of the relationship and the logic of honor (or exploitation) governing it. There is thus necessarily a taboo against making things explicit, a silent collusion between the participants about the “truth” of the exchange (p. 96).
The continuing viability of social relations is made possible, according to Bourdieu (1998), through self-deception or self-mystification. This self-deception is not an idiosyncratic, psychological state but is socially institutionalized. It is “sustained by a collective self-deception, a veritable collective misrecognition inscribed in objective structures (the logic of honor which governs all exchanges—of words, of women, of murders etc.) and in mental structures, excluding the possibility of thinking or acting otherwise” (p. 95).

Like gift exchange, religion is a symbolic system that is simultaneously “structured and structuring” (Bourdieu, 1991a, p. 2). Bourdieu (1991a) saw religion as having its own relatively autonomous field, and he emphasized the fluidity and dynamism of what composes its structure and content. He stressed the plurality of meanings in and functions of religion and emphasized the importance of its contextual understanding (p. 19). Bourdieu argued for a relational analysis of the religious, as of other fields. He observed that what passes for religious beliefs and practices in any given context can be quite different from the original content of the message and it can be completely understood only in reference to the complete structure of the relations of production, reproduction, circulation, and appropriation of the message and to the history of this structure. (p. 18)

But despite this deep sensitivity to the relational dynamism of religion, Bourdieu nevertheless embraced a categorical view of the production of religious capital. He saw the interpretive process in strongly dichotomous terms, as one between “producers” (specialists) and “consumers” (laity). In Bourdieu’s framework, “religious specialists,” or church officials, are the “exclusive holders of the specific competence necessary for the production and reproduction of a deliberately organized corpus of secret (and therefore rare) knowledge,” and he contrasted these specialists with the laity who are objectively “dispossessed of religious capital” (1991a, p. 9). For Bourdieu, the authentic religious producers are the official institutional specialists who “consciously” reinterpret religion, as opposed to the “dispossessed” consumers/laity, who can merely “demand” but not “supply” religious meanings and goods.

Bourdieu’s hierarchical distinction between religious specialists and the dispossessed laity is a tightly structured model of structuring that seems more foreclosed than one might expect from Bourdieu’s general emphasis on the relational nature of cultural production. The clarity of the boundaries of Bourdieu’s categories derives from his economistic approach to religious production. Bourdieu (1991a) argued that religious capital depends, at a given moment in time, on the state of the structure of objective relations between religious demand (i.e., the religious interests of various groups or classes of laity) and religious supply (i.e., religious services, whether orthodox or heretical) that the various claimants are brought to produce. (p. 22)
In Bourdieu's (1991a) religious field, laypeople are confined to the position of consumers of religious goods and services, cultural commodities that are produced by either priests or, at times, prophets (p. 23). In short, “the relationship of seller to buyer” is the “objective truth of any relationship between religious specialists and laypeople” (p. 25). Thus, in the market for religious goods, the laity are “consumers endowed with the minimum religious competence (religious habitus) necessary to demonstrate the specific need for [the church’s] products” (pp. 23-24). The superiority in the competence of specialists over laity is further underscored by Bourdieu’s explication of the laity’s “practical mastery” of religious capital deriving from a “prereflexive” mode in contrast to the “knowledgeable mastery” deliberately and systematically achieved by institutionally mandated specialists (p. 10).

For Bourdieu (1998), the relevance of the religious enterprise is equated with and reduced to its objective economic worth. He argued, for example, that to measure the church’s influence one should conduct a “census of positions whose raison d’être is the Church’s existence and Christian belief,” an accounting that would include all those who directly or indirectly rely on the church to make a living (p. 125). Using this method, according to Bourdieu, “everything seems to indicate that we are moving toward a Church without a faithful whose strength . . . rests on the ensemble of posts or jobs it holds” (p. 125). In this logic, it is “Catholic” jobs which are the primary condition of [the church’s] perpetuation” (p. 126) and not the evidence demonstrating that many people continue to invest in the tradition and find relevant meanings that are quite independent in many cases of the “religious capital” produced by church officials.

**Euphemization**

The inequality between religious specialists and the dispossessed laity is maintained by the ability of church officials to make the laity “misrecognize the arbitrariness” of the church hierarchy’s power. The laity, moreover, recognize the legitimacy of their dispossession “from the mere fact that they misrecognize it as such” (Bourdieu, 1991a, p. 9). As Bourdieu argued, much of the institutional apparatus and discourse of the church is structured to convince the laity that they need special qualifications or special grace to allow them access to the religious capital monopolized by church officials. Bourdieu incisively pointed out that the “word games” that accompany church practices are an integral part of the church’s symbolic economy (1991a, p. 9; 1998, p. 114). Church officials use language that inoculates the church from acknowledgment of the “real” truth of the logic of its practices. As such, “religious institutions work permanently, both practically and symbolically, to euphemize social relations, including relations of exploitation” (1998, p. 116).

Bourdieu (1998) presented excerpts from statements by French bishops to illustrate their euphemistic language. He pointed, for example, to the French
bishops’ denial of the church’s economic interests, as in statements such as “we are not societies, uh . . . quite like the others: we produce nothing and we sell nothing [laughter], right?” (p. 114). Bourdieu argued that these negations should not be seen as duplicitous or hypocritical but as a necessary strategy assuring the “coexistence of opposites” insofar as the church as an institution caters to a religious faithful who are simultaneously, in economic terms, its clientele (p. 121). In general, therefore, the “religious game” demands that laypeople misrecognize and tacitly accept the denials and double-truths articulated by church officials (p. 113).

The Catholic Priesthood and Symbolic Violence

The euphemization that Bourdieu saw as central to masking the inequality in social relations is well illustrated by the Vatican’s discourse on women’s exclusion from the priesthood. In recent times, there has been public controversy in the church over the issue of women’s ordination. The Vatican rejects the idea of women priests and bases its opposition primarily in the fact that because Christ did not choose women as apostles, this demonstrated his will and intention to exclude women from the priesthood. Vatican arguments maintain that because the institutional blueprint that was configured by Christ’s example (in not choosing women apostles) is beyond its interpretive authority, it is prevented from ordaining women even if it wanted to do so (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith [CDF], 1977, pp. 519, 521).

In the Vatican’s construction, although it does not have authority to change the church’s teaching on women priests, it does have the authority to demand Catholics’ adherence to its teaching on the issue. As reaffirmed by Pope John Paul II (1994), “I declare that the church has no authority whatsoever to confer priestly ordination on women and that this judgment is to be definitively held by all the church’s faithful” (p. 51). The Vatican thus simultaneously denies and asserts its authority. This is one of the double truths that inhere in its practices. Although maintaining that its interpretive autonomy is constrained by scripture and tradition, the church hierarchy nonetheless finds legitimacy within those constraints to assert the primacy of its own interpretive power and the authority to demarcate what is mutable and immutable in the Catholic doctrinal tradition.

At the same time as church officials mask the Vatican’s autonomous role in maintaining women’s inequality in the church, they also, following Bourdieu’s language, mask the inequality that they perpetuate by transfiguring it into something else. Central to this process of mystification is the church hierarchy’s euphemization of what the priesthood “really” is. The Vatican (CDF, 1995) argued that the priesthood
is a service and not a position of privilege or human power over others. Whoever, man or woman, conceives of the priesthood in terms of personal affirmation, as a goal or point of departure in a career of human success, is profoundly mistaken, for the true meaning of Christian priesthood . . . can only be found in the sacrifice of one’s own being in union with Christ, in service of the brethren. (p. 404)

The church hierarchy’s conceptualization of the priesthood as being constituted by an economy of sacrifice, what Bourdieu (1998, p. 112) called the “economy of the offering,” allows church officials to present themselves as being disinterested in privilege and power. In this view, to be a priest, bishop, cardinal, or pope is to answer the call of a vocation; it is not the pursuit of a career but the sacrificing of an (alternative) career. But although the priesthood is posited as a disinterested service whose hierarchical structure is “totally ordered” to “the holiness of the faithful” (John Paul II, 1994, p. 51), its exclusion of women works both symbolically and in practice to express and reproduce the church’s male, hierarchical authority structure.

Church officials reject the claim, however, that the ban on women priests is a form of inequality or discrimination. Its gender reasoning once again highlights “the coexistence of opposites” that characterizes the church’s practices. On one hand, the Vatican emphasizes the equality of men and women and in various public statements has condemned the “sin of sexism” (John Paul II, 1995, p. 140). The pope affirmed women’s presence in economics and politics as making an “indispensable contribution” to the growth of a more humane culture (John Paul II, 1995, p. 139). At the same time, women are prohibited from making a contribution to the church as priests. The Vatican does not see this as an institutional contradiction. The apparent contradiction gets resolved, the Vatican argued, by understanding the distinct “sacramental economy” of the church. In this framing,

it must not be forgotten that the priesthood does not form part of the rights of the individual, but stems from the economy of the mystery of Christ and the church. The priestly office cannot become the goal of social advancement . . . it is of another order. (CDF, 1977, p. 523)

In this line of reasoning, because the priesthood is of a different order, the social expectations that apply in other domains are irrelevant. In the sacramental economy, the notion of gender role equality is misguided, and the rationale for excluding women from being priests is, according to the Vatican, not to be seen as an arbitrary institutional imposition. The Vatican’s gender reasoning is intertwined with its understanding of priesthood, and both are grounded in a symbolic economy whose rules of signification and interpretation allow the Vatican to deny that it discriminates against women and deny the possibility of a more egalitarian church. In sum, official church discourse on women’s ordination supports Bourdieu’s analysis of the logic of repression, contradiction,
and denial that characterizes the economy of symbolic goods. Recourse to euphemization enables the church hierarchy to maintain double truths that seek to reproduce both its power as the primary interpreter of the Catholic tradition and the exclusivity of a male, hierarchical structure.

The Laity and Collective Recognition

But just because church officials mask the logic underlying official church practices, this does not necessarily mean that the laity misrecognize the truth behind the church hierarchy’s stance on a given issue. The process of misrecognition is less stable than Bourdieu assumed. It is open to disruption, in part because of the discontinuities contained within a given cultural or institutional habitus. Bourdieu, in fact, recognized this possibility. In his recent work (1998), he stated,

Because the economy of symbolic goods is based on belief, the principle of its reproduction or crisis is found in the reproduction or crisis of belief. . . . But the rupture cannot result from a simple awakening of consciousness; the transformation of dispositions cannot occur without a prior or concomitant transformation of the objective structures of which they are the product and which they can survive. (p. 122)

Bourdieu, however, did not apply this insight in his analysis of the symbolic economy. He did not acknowledge, for example, how a disposition toward collective recognition might become inscribed into objective structures and how, in turn, such dispositions may disrupt the process of collective misrecognition that he saw as being so critical to maintaining the status quo.

In the case of Catholicism, the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) can be seen as an instance of partial transformation in the church’s structure and doxa. It set in place changes that were both in continuity with and major departures from the church’s historical practices (cf. O’Malley, 1989). Of particular relevance to the focus of this article, Vatican II can be seen as instigating (or reinstigating) a decentering of interpretive authority in the church (see Dillon, 1999, pp. 45-53; Seidler & Meyer, 1989). Building on the church’s long-standing theological affirmation of the coupling of “faith and reason,” Vatican II underscored the importance of doctrinal and institutional reflexivity to the reproduction of Catholicism. It also emphasized respect for communal agency and interpretive equality within the church in contrast to the privileging of the unilateral authority of church officials. The church articulated the obligation of all Catholics (clerical and lay) to take an informed and reasoned responsibility for the identity and direction of the church and to recognize, rather than misrecognize, the logic underlying the inequitarian practices of the church (and of other institutions). It rejected the “split consciousness” (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 97) that reproduces tacit collusion and instead emphasized
the importance of opening up and questioning the logic underlying church practices.

The objective doctrinal and institutional changes achieved at Vatican II contributed to a transformation in Catholics’ understanding of Catholicism and of its possibilities (cf. D’Antonio, Davidson, Hoge, & Wallace, 1989; Greeley, 1985; Seidler & Meyer, 1989). One effect of Vatican II was to blur the distinction that Bourdieu (1991a, p. 10) invoked between the laity’s prereflexive practical mastery and the knowledgeable mastery of specialists in the production of religious capital. Evidence for this can be variously found in Catholics’ attitudinal and behavioral rejection of official church teaching on select matters that they perceive as being relatively peripheral to their religious identity (e.g., birth control).

It is also apparent in the emergence of a range of prochange movements within the church focused on eliminating institutional barriers (e.g., the ban on women’s ordination) that prevent the church from being as inclusive as its doctrine may allow. One such group is the Women’s Ordination Conference (WOC), an American-based, international, grassroots organization that, since its founding in 1975, has argued for the ordination of women in the Catholic Church. Although the Vatican maintains that the church’s sacramental-sign economy is derived from the “mystery of Christ,” and as such is immutable and beyond its control, WOC members, and the majority of American and European Catholics, take a different view.

Doctrinal Reflexivity in Practice

WOC members’ contestation and reinterpretation of official church doctrine suggests a more complex relation between euphemization and misrecognition than is argued by Bourdieu. As Catholics who choose to stay within the church, WOC members assume the authority to reinterpret Catholic theology rather than either colluding in accepting the givenness of official logic or abandoning the church as hopelessly patriarchal. They take core doctrinal tenets and use them to argue for interpretations that challenge those presented by church officials. Whereas official church arguments defend the exclusivity of a male-only priesthood by pointing to the single act of Jesus in choosing only men as apostles, WOC members focus on the social dimensions and relational meanings of Christ’s life as a whole. For them, as this section will illustrate, accounts of Christ’s life—as affirmed in liturgical rituals of Catholic socialization—lead to an alternative theological interpretation that illuminates an inclusive rather than a discriminatory Jesus.

The findings presented here are based on narratives derived from responses to open-ended questions from a structured, self-administered questionnaire I sent to a representative random sample of ordinary WOC members (N = 214; for further details, see Dillon, 1999, pp. 168-169, 262-263). The vast majority
of the respondents (88%) used doctrinal/theological reasoning in arguing against the Vatican’s position on ordination. Many of these linked their view favoring women priests to the activism personified by Christ on behalf of equality and justice. The following were expressed by these WOC respondents:

Basically I experience Jesus in the New Testament as being with the causes—standing with all who are on the journey for truth. I believe in equality and justice and I hope for the dawning of the day when both women and married priests experience fullness within Catholicism.

To me, being a Catholic means to participate in the Church established by Jesus. Jesus always seemed to espouse the dignity of humankind. To realize that dignity, all people need to be afforded the opportunity to follow their calling, to utilize their individual gifts and talents given to them by their creator. To deny that dignity to half of humankind does not fulfill the example set by Jesus to be Catholic.

If we take to heart Jesus’s words about equality, we must be willing to look at institutions and our individual lives and be willing to live accordingly.

Other WOC members highlighted the universalism as opposed to the male-ness of Christ’s humanity to challenge the male iconic significance that is attached to Jesus in official church statements. In arguing for change, these respondents pointed to the symbolic-theological implications that flow from the church hierarchy’s exclusion of women from the sacramental imaging of Christ:

If the most important thing about Christ is maleness, are women saved? The Vatican’s Christology is warmed-over misogynistic-androcentric daydreaming.

If Christianity teaches that all are redeemed in Jesus Christ then it is a contradiction to exclude women in the full ministry. It is a denial of redemption. Either Jesus is savior of all or what we believe is false.

Many other WOC members invoked scriptural and/or Vatican II references to equality. As argued by these respondents, a church that claims to be universal and inclusive of all humanity undermines its foundational ethics by institutionalizing what respondents regard as arbitrary, gender-based boundaries of exclusion. Some interviewees explicitly framed women’s ordination as an issue of institutional credibility for a church grounded in Christ-embodied ethics of justice and equality. These respondents emphasized that current church practices excluding women from the priesthood were a deviation from the redemptive narrative of Christ’s life and from the ethics that are central to the church’s identity. One middle-aged man summarized the views of many of his WOC peers when he stated,

Equality, fairness, even-handedness—all are values that the Catholic Church has and does espouse. These are good mature values—human, humane, and person-enhancing. Preaching equality and practicing it in actuality must go together, or else it’s just words.
Other WOC participants variously echoed this stance, stating the following:

Catholicism is important to me because it has provided the framework in which I could exercise my belief in God and in the life and work of Jesus. I need the Church to show the way to live justly. I wish it would begin with following more closely the message of Jesus.

We have to accord human rights and equality to all if we are truly Christian. Patriarchy, domination of any one, discrimination of all kinds are all irreconcilable with Christianity. If Catholics are truly followers of Christ, we can’t do it.

In addition to the various doctrinal arguments offered in favor of women priests, many WOC respondents (33%) also explicitly framed women’s exclusion from ordination as a manifestation of institutional power. These Catholics challenged the structural and interpretive authority assumed by the church hierarchy in interpreting Catholic doctrine. For them, the Vatican’s stance on ordination is understood as the product of a historically and politically situated church hierarchy seeking to reproduce the exclusivity of the priesthood. One woman stated,

To be a Catholic in full participation is to be a man today. Women are absent in image of God, in representation of priesthood, and from power—all going back to historical development.

Another argued,

I believe the real issue is power—priests, bishops, cardinals, and Pope John Paul. The growing fear of women began after Vatican II when women became knowledgeable about the Council documents, and some priests had not even read them, much less taught them.

Discussion

The data presented above highlight the fact that Catholics challenge the euphemization of church officials in defending women’s exclusion from the priesthood. WOC members reject the double reasoning of the church hierarchy and present an alternative interpretation of the meanings that they see inscribed in Catholic theology. As the above quotations illustrated, Catholics who argue for women’s ordination demonstrate a remarkable mastery of the tradition derived from both their prereflexive immersion in and reflexive engagement with doctrine. Contrary to Bourdieu’s clear-cut distinction between the practical mastery of the laity and the knowledgeable mastery of church specialists/officials, in practice, doctrinal/symbolic mastery is more diffuse. Although lay Catholics do not have the institutional legitimacy of formal authority that is conferred on church officials, many nonetheless use doctrine, the specialized language of the church, to counterargue against the reasoning.
employed by church officials. In short, the pope and the bishops do not have a monopoly on the church's symbolic resources; the laity, too, have access to doctrinal knowledge and the fund of Catholic capital.

Catholics' reflexive use of doctrine enables them to see through the power-based, this-worldly interests of the church hierarchy and not to misrecognize but to recognize the church's teaching on ordination as an arbitrary monopolization of power. It is, moreover, participation in the Catholic tradition (habitus) that contributes to empowering Catholics to challenge the doctrines and practices put forward by the church hierarchy. Their immersion in the routines, narratives, and dispositions of Catholicism provides Catholics with the interpretive authority and symbolic resources to make official church teaching a site of what Steven Seidman (1994) would call “contested knowledge.”

**Doctrinal Knowledge and Strategic Postmodernism**

It is the appropriation of the freedom to contest doctrinal (and other) knowledge that perhaps best exemplifies the impact of a late- or postmodern sensibility on religion. In today's culture of identity and lifestyle choices (cf. Giddens, 1991), people who choose to remain actively involved in a religious tradition do so in terms that make reasonable sense to them. They use their everyday, lived knowledge of Catholicism to determine what truths from the multifaceted tradition are relevant to their particular life contexts. The inconsistencies between doctrine and practices that Catholics perceive in the church push them to challenge the narrative that is offered as the rationale for maintaining inequality. Their firsthand knowledge of the church supports their efforts to reconstruct rather than reproduce the church's inegalitarian structures. For these Catholics, therefore, involvement in religion is not the outcome of a quest for an “indubitably supreme authority” as has been argued by Bauman (1997, p. 184) with respect to “fundamentalists.” It derives rather from their authoritative use of doctrine to make sense of everyday life and to advance the realization of modernity's promise (cf. Giddens, 1991) of equality, justice, and participation.

If postmodernity is, as Craig Calhoun suggested (1995, p. 108), “the era of the sign,” it might seem that the symbolic manipulation and reinterpretation engaged in by members of the WOC and by other Catholics typify them as postmodern. In producing new “signs” or new interpretations, respondents destabilize the universalizing, grand narrative (cf. Lyotard, 1984) of Catholic identity promulgated in official church teaching. The interpretive work conducted by these Catholics highlights a broader pattern in American society whereby, as Steven Seidman (1994) observed, foundational claims (to God, to history, etc.) lack public authority and moral credibility because they are now
seen as “masking particular interests” (p. 191). Thus, as demonstrated here, WOC members uncover alternative doctrinal interpretations and highlight the power-based implications of the official discourse. The new interpretations put forward by these Catholics, however, derive their potential persuasiveness in large part from the fact that they maintain continuity with the Catholic doctrinal tradition.

Whereas the postmodern ethos rejects universalizing arguments and calls for the construction of new interpretive stances derived from an array of fragmented and contradictory sources (cf. Rosenau, 1992, pp. 6-8), Catholics who advocate change carve an emancipatory framework from within Catholicism. They take seriously the tradition’s emphasis on the coupling of faith and reason and seek to make the church’s institutional practices meaningful and reasonable in light of contemporary values (e.g., equality, justice). Their reflexive critique of the Catholic tradition enables them to remain Catholic without abandoning their quest for pluralism and equality. Accordingly, their emancipatory project may be more accurately thought of as representing a strategic postmodernism. As elaborated by Charles Lemert (1997), strategic postmodernism is more cautious than a radical postmodernism because rather than rejecting modernity, it is “engaged in the process of rewriting the history of modernity” (p. 47). The Catholics discussed here are recovering from the tradition of the doctrinal resources that enable them to reconstruct a more egalitarian, participative, and just church.

The game of Catholicism, therefore, is more complicated than might be assumed from Bourdieu’s account of the production of religious capital. Depending on the issue and the context, there are times when the “unnamed” is made explicit by those whom Bourdieu would expect should remain silent. Thus, WOC members and other Catholics reject the symbolic violence that church officials perpetuate in excluding women from ordination. They refuse to perceive the church hierarchy’s reasoning through the categories of perception that are encouraged by their objectively subordinate position relative to the hierarchy. Rather than colluding in collective misrecognition, they instead unveil the logic they believe church officials are masking.

Cultural Contestation and Social Cohesiveness

As it is played out in everyday life, Catholics’ collective recognition of the reasoning of church officials does not threaten the cohesiveness or viability of the Catholic community. One of Bourdieu’s concerns is with how solidarity is maintained in the face of conflict and relational struggles (cf. Swartz, 1997, p. 48). But although Bourdieu emphasized the relationality that is involved in social reproduction, he also showed a somewhat mechanistic and narrow view of how social solidarity is reproduced. In the context of gift exchange, Bourdieu
(1998) argued that failure to abide by the taboo of making things explicit would “destroy the exchange” (p. 96), whereas in institutional processes more generally, “rendering explicit brings about a destructive alteration” (p. 113).

Institutional and cultural processes, however, are more resilient and open ended than Bourdieu assumed. Everyday life is replete with instances in which people negotiate multiple, often conflicting, identities (Calhoun, 1995; De Certeau, 1984) without undermining the flow of social relationships. One of the underlying reasons for this is that the process of collective recognition/misrecognition is never total but is partial and selective (see also Calhoun, 2000, p. 710). In the case of this study’s Catholics, we see a reflexive critique of how church practices deviate from Christ-derived ethics of equality. We do not see a critique that extends to explicit questioning of the credibility of belief in Christ or indeed to a questioning of the relevance of the church’s tradition per se. These are people for whom the Catholic habitus is an objective and subjectively experienced sociocultural given. Collective recognition, therefore, is invariably limited, and, as Bourdieu has emphasized, tacit misrecognition facilitates the relative smoothness of daily routines and sustains their plausibility (see also Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Similarly, I am not suggesting that all Catholics take on the reflexive doctrinal disposition illustrated here. Many Catholics, no doubt, remain Catholic because they misrecognize various aspects of church teaching that challenge some of their own political values and daily practices.

But precisely because collective misrecognition is so effective in daily life, it is important to acknowledge that instances of collective recognition do not disrupt communal solidarity. The interrogation and destabilization of important cultural symbols do not necessarily discredit the larger tradition from which those symbols derive (but see Schwartz, 1996, for a contrary perspective). As the research reported here shows, the disposition to inquire into the Catholic tradition and recover new meanings from within it simultaneously revitalizes the tradition by demonstrating the possibilities for its contemporary relevance.

Cultural meanings are actively produced by ordinary people as part of their everyday reality and are not confined to, or determined by, cultural specialists. In this view, religious practices, similar to other everyday practices, have to be understood not simply in terms of their origins or “what produces them” (De Certeau, 1984, p. 58) but also in terms of the cultural resources they offer different people in everyday life (cf. Denzin, 1996, p. xvi). Contrary to the dichotomy postulated by Bourdieu between producers and consumers, the interpretation of doctrine should be seen as religious/ideological production in its own right. As an interpretive process, cultural production is diffuse and differentiated and allows for a greater range of practical possibilities than that deterministically connoted by outcomes of either reproduction or destruction of social relations.

As Bourdieu (1991b) argued, symbolic power does not derive from words alone but from “belief in the legitimacy of words and of those who utter them”
(p. 170). In the Catholic Church, many lay Catholics contest both the structural and the substantive legitimacy of the church hierarchy to have the last word on, for example, women’s ordination. Yet, because Bourdieu embraced a hierarchical model of religious authority, he failed to recognize how the laity can exert symbolic power as autonomous religious producers through their reflexive engagement with the church’s tradition. From a structural perspective, therefore, the laity contribute to the structuring of the culture of Catholicism and to its objective fund of religious capital. It is for this reason, in part, that Catholicism continues to have authority and meaning for the majority of Catholics who nonetheless reject the interpretive authority of church officials (cf. Dillon, 1999).

Because participation in a religious tradition is a voluntary and interpretive activity, believers enjoy an autonomy of meaning construction that is beyond the control of church officials. Models of the religious-symbolic economy that favor a categorical division between producers and consumers (e.g., Bourdieu, 1991a; Finke & Stark, 1992) and/or that focus on top-down structural determinants of ideological/doctrinal production (e.g., Burns, 1992) do not accommodate the fact that there are multiple micro producers and multiple sites of doctrinal production. In the perspective advanced in this article, the church is not just an objective structure, but it is also a “community of interpretation” (Schussler Fiorenza, 1992) wherein interpretive authority is diffuse. Thus, following Michel Foucault (1978, pp. 93-96), power is all around rather than located in one site of religious production (e.g., the Vatican). Accordingly, what gets accepted as credible doxa, and who has the authority to define doctrine, is much more open to variation than is the case in contexts wherein interpretive authority is unilateral and noncontestable.

Conclusion

Bourdieu is seen by some sociologists (e.g., Lash, 1989, pp. 250-254) as a theorist who opens up the understanding of postmodern culture due to his emphasis on the blurring of boundaries and the indeterminacy of identity (apparent, according to Lash, in Homo Academicus). This, however, is not the framework evident in Bourdieu’s analysis of religion. Although Vatican II, as I have argued, blurred the boundaries of interpretive authority in the Catholic Church and opened up the content of Catholic identity, Bourdieu’s analysis of Catholicism operates with a mechanistic, pre-Vatican II categorical model in which church officials as producers supply religious meaning to a dispossessed laity. What is ultimately surprising about Bourdieu’s analysis of religion is his inattention to its interpretive pluralism and to the fact that meaning is uncertain because, as De Certeau (1997, p. 129) has pointed out, “common signifiers are referred to and used quite differently” (see also Hall, 1973). Although Bourdieu sees religion as a symbolic system, he ignores the diversity of meanings people inject into religious discourses, experiences, and participation.
Bourdieu's perspective on religion thus hovers rather close to the French structuralism he rejected precisely because of its tendency to privilege the observer's over the subjects' eyes (cf. Fowler, 1997, pp. 2-3).

Although Bourdieu's accentuation of the economic logic underlying church practices is not without merit, the totalizing, economistic frame he clamped on religious production offers a one-sided and monolithic model of the religious symbolic economy, a view that contrasts with his more dynamic representation (e.g., Distinction) of lifestyle practices more generally. One of Bourdieu's many contributions has been to demonstrate the cultural differentiation within class groups, for example, and show how this differentiation reproduces specific lifestyles and cultural habits. What is absent from Bourdieu's analysis of the religious economy is a similar sensitivity to the differentiated ways in which social contexts mediate and affect religious production. This omission, in turn, is exacerbated by Bourdieu's elitist view of religious capital as being the prerogative of religious specialists/church officials. Importantly, Bourdieu's structural perspective alerts us to how everyday mechanisms (e.g., discursive styles) reproduce institutional and cultural inequalities. But in emphasizing reproduction, Bourdieu glossed over the possibilities for cultural contestation and the new meanings and new institutional practices that may emerge in the production process. Models of production that do not take account of reproduction may seem sociologically naïve. But models of reproduction that ignore the subjective meanings that get injected into specific discourses and practices risk reifying and rigidifying the practices they seek to explain. Although a focus on social reproduction is necessary to illuminate historical and institutional continuities, the meaning production process itself should be recognized for its everyday ambiguities and possibilities.

Notes

1. The euphemization of the church's institutional practices is not a phenomenon confined to France whose long history of anticlericalism might be seen as a cultural factor necessitating such language. A similar use of negation characterizes bishops' public discourse in societies as culturally diverse as Ireland and America (see, for example, Dillon, 1993, pp. 95-96).

2. In my reading, the position advanced by Bourdieu (1981) here indicates a view that is much more open to institutional change than that in his garment metaphor: "Objectified, institutional history only becomes enacted and active if . . . like a garment or a house, [it] finds someone who finds an interest in it, feels sufficiently at home in it to take it on" (p. 309). What is left unsaid in this passage is that social actors can refashion an institution's identity. Institutions, like garments, can be unraveled and resewn; they can be remodeled without being destroyed.

3. Other Catholics similarly contest official church teaching and reinterpret doctrine in ways that show the validity of their particular interpretations of Catholicism.
Participants in Dignity, an association of gay and lesbian Catholics, enact a reinterpreted, inclusive Catholicism that validates being, for example, gay and Catholic through a changed Mass liturgy (see Dillon, 1999, pp. 115-163).

References


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“How Could a Mother . . . ?”
Matricide and Text-Mediated Relations of Family Discourse

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On September 3, 1998, Khoua Her, a 24-year-old Hmong refugee living in St. Paul, Minnesota, killed all six of her young children and attempted suicide. On the surface the worst case of matricide in United States history, a careful reading of the numerous press-generated reports reveals that for years, Her struggled against the ravages of poverty to keep her family together. Referencing the Standard North American Family (SNAF) narrative of mothering, press coverage of this horror story seeks to address the question, “How could a mother do this to her own children when the children are so innocent?” The author argues that a deep reading of the press-generated story surfaces evidence that, having exhausted all resources for keeping her family together, Her gave up. The article concludes that SNAF transforms evidence of Her’s mothering work into proof that she was a “bad mother.”

On September 3, 1998, Khoua Her, a 24-year-old Hmong refugee living in St. Paul, Minnesota, dialed 911 and reported she had attempted suicide. Court records indicate that Her then said, “Well, I killed the kids. I don’t know why I killed them” (“Police Find Victims,” 1998). Responding to the emergency call, paramedics found Her lying semiconscious just inside the apartment, an extension cord around her neck. Throughout the home, Her’s six children, ages 5, 6, 7, 8, almost 10, and 11, lay dead by strangulation, pieces of black cloth wrapped around their necks. Her was arrested and charged with six counts of homicide. When evidence of premeditation was discovered, the charges were upgraded to first-degree murder. Her pled guilty to six counts of homicide and was sentenced to 33 years in prison.

This story produces shock, horror, and disbelief. How could a mother kill her own children? Was she insane? Did she gradually lose control until in a fit of rage she destroyed her family? That a woman could kill all of her children contradicts culturally supported beliefs about motherhood. In the Standard North American Family (SNAF) narrative (Smith, 1999), the woman works in the...
background where she devotes her energy to her husband, children, and household. A good wife does her work quietly, remaining in the background of the family narrative. When poverty makes the work of mothering visible, the ruling relations of the SNAF narrative redirect this challenge by assigning responsibility for this failure to the woman whose work has become visible.

This study examines the press adaptation of Her's mothering work to the cultural SNAF narrative. I argue that a deep reading of the press-generated story that Her was a woman whose growing rage culminated in six cases of murder surfaces evidence that, having exhausted all resources for keeping her family together, Her gave up. I will demonstrate that the events of Her's life were taken up and retold by local and national newspapers to “restore order and coherence” (Karp, 1996) to the SNAF mothering narrative by ignoring the structural constraints of poverty and reconstructing the deaths as the result of escalating maternal violence. I conclude that the evidence supporting the argument that Her failed as a mother—the work of caring for children, managing the household, and doing the emotional work required to sustain “group life” (DeVault, 1992)—supports the perspective that Her's decision to kill her children may be evidence that she was committed to being their mother.

Method

A disruptive reading (Flax, 1990) of the media coverage of an archetypal bad mother who kills her children reveals how discrepancies between “normative prescriptions and everyday practices” (Flax, 1990, p. 3) focus attention on the individual while they minimize interest in external factors of class. Smith (1999) argued, “The materiality of the text is key to investigating the ruling relations as the local and ongoing concerting of people’s activities” (p. 80). For Bell (1994), “At the heart of the foundational metaphysics of Western thought is the locentric assumption of the binary opposition of masculine and feminine, the masculine being the privileged site and the feminine the disprivileged” (p. 3). Within the category of the feminine are located the good and the bad mother, in which the bad mother functions as the “other” to the good. A reverse reading of the press coverage is undertaken to merge the logical opposition of the good and the bad mother (Irigaray, 1989).

A myriad of journalists interviewed family, friends, government officials, professionals, and experts to explain how Her could have killed her own children. Numerous articles in the local press examining Her’s life provide a rich text in which to locate not only that which is privileged as representing the truth of the events but also that which is nearly overlooked. A guiding tenet of the press assumes that the text presents the facts in an irrefutable fashion, having produced a neutral representation of a concrete reality (Udick, 1994). Calling into question the process of journalistic representation in her study of the press coverage of the women’s Greenham protest against nuclear weapons, Young (1990) found that the media created a myth of the camp by depicting
evidence of strength, rationality, determination, and political acuity as indicators of deviance.

Reading the text for the presence of beliefs and values that were in flux, Young (1990) discovered absences and blind spots revealing how the “institutional, social and cultural context can subdue certain potentials of meaning, as one version is elevated and safeguarded at the expense of dialogic, multilogic diversity” (p. 162). The press reconstructed each action that contradicted the prevailing notions of the frail, dependent “good” woman into evidence that the protesters were abnormal, deviant, bad women.

As with the newspaper coverage of the Greenham protesters, the press representation of Her’s life locates her work as wife, mother, and homemaker within the family narrative, leading the reader to conclude that Her either declined as a mother or never was fit for the task. Anecdotal evidenced supplied by family, neighbors, and friends and official reports of the police and social services are judged against the SNAF code, disconnecting Her from the cultural, economic context of her life. Although it is Her’s arrest, charge, trial, and punishment for the deaths of the children that bring her national attention, it is the work of mothering that is examined to answer the question, “How could a mother . . . ?” Durkheim (1984) argued that to determine the definition of a crime, one must examine the actions leading to the punishment. In this case, the actions identified by the press to be important are those associated with the roles of wife, mother, and household manager.

Cultural narratives are accounts that resolve instances of social instability (Stacey, 1997). This linear narrative structure foregrounds some issues and backgrounds others, organizing events into a temporal sequence with a causative effect and a satisfying conclusion (Stacey, 1997, p. 4). There is in the telling of a story a search for order, reason, and predictability. Through texts and technology, the social relations of the mothering discourse coordinate and organize the activities of people in their daily lives. SNAF social relations govern families across time and space through text-mediated discourses.

The narrative account of deaths of Her’s six children read as a horror story about what can go wrong in a family, a tragedy occurring at the hands of the children’s own mother. A deep reading of the press-generated account of what went wrong in this case produces not only evidence that Her was committed to keeping her family together but insights into how the ruling relations of the SNAF narrative transform evidence of the realities of the work of mothering into support for belief in the bad mother.

**The Story**

The story of Her’s role in the deaths of her children appeared in major newspapers across the nation. Reports carried by a dozen of the most widely read newspapers in the nation described the deaths of the children and the mother’s
survival as “the worst case of filicide in the nation’s history” (Jeter, 1998). Although several journalists raised the number of children killed to be grounds for giving this story extensive coverage, it is Her’s work of mothering prior to the children’s deaths that captures the attention of the press, responsible for the preservation of cultural values (Young, 1990).

Press coverage of Her’s children’s deaths references the SNAF-defined mother role. A story of a woman’s inadequacy as a wife, mother, and homemaker attributes the deaths of six children to escalating maternal violence. Renewal of the community’s avowed commitment to children in vigils and funeral services supports intensification of efforts to test, identify, label, and monitor women at risk for harming their children, protecting other children from a similar fate. Although their deaths cannot be redressed, similar tragedies may be prevented.

Early reports of the deaths express shock and horror that a mother could kill her children. The Houston Chronicle story of the “horrific event” read, “A mother of six, living in poverty and estranged from her husband, called 911 on Thursday night, police said, and made a shocking statement: She had killed her children” (“Mother, 24, Accused,” 1998). Washington Post journalist Jon Jeter (1998) wrote, “How dark a mother’s heart, how hopeless and empty her soul, that she would strangle each of her children, leaving their bodies scattered throughout the family’s three-bedroom split-level apartment?”

Experts, advocates, friends, family, and government officials recounted stories depicting Her as an incompetent mother who, rebelling against the roles of wife and mother, neglected, abused, and murdered her children. Although some national authorities noted that the circumstances of Her’s life make her a pitiable figure, all agreed that Her gradually declined as a mother, succumbing either to insanity or the “evil inside her” (Ashe & Cahn, 1994). Analysis of the content of the press articles identifies four concerns of those commenting on the deaths: Her’s commitment to the “natural” roles of wife, mother, and homemaker and prospects for preventing other children’s deaths at the hands of their mothers.

**Marital Infidelity**

Evidence that Her is responsible for the decline of her family is found in stories and reports of her treatment of her husband, Tou Hang. Two issues are raised in the press-generated narrative of Her’s role as a wife: domestic disputes and marital infidelity. Her’s “rebellious” actions against marriage are discussed by family and friends.

A bitter portrait emerged from her in-laws, Saturday of a woman who supposedly cared little for the chores of motherhood, who fought with her husband and ran
away from home several times, and who remains an enigma to those closest to
her. (Suzukamo, 1998a)

Both Her’s father and mother-in-law depicted her as a difficult child who
sought fulfillment in an early marriage and gradually reneged on her commit-
tment to her husband and children (Suzukamo, 1998a). While living in a refu-
gee camp in Bon Vinai, Thailand, 12-year-old Her married Hang, a 17-year-
old martial arts instructor. The circumstances of Her’s marriage are in dispute.
A friend of Her’s reported that Her claimed the marriage was arranged (Johnson,
1998). In contradiction, Her’s mother-in-law, Pang Yang, claimed that Her
pursued marriage to Hang. Yang claimed that the marriage began as a happy
relationship that gradually declined as Her’s commitment to her role as wife
weakened. Yang faulted Her for her Western dress, stating, “She always dressed
nice like she’s single. Since the marriage, she has been an evil daughter-in-law”
(Suzukamo, 1998a).

Vee Her, a cousin by marriage, observed that Her “used to be a ‘normal’ wife
who took her kids to school and prepared meals for her family” (Monsour,
Guthrey, & Chanco, 1998). More recently, Her was acting like a “runaway
teen-ager” traveling to Michigan with a man to visit her mother, while leaving
her husband and the children behind. Depicted as being lazy and irresponsible,
Her’s failure as a wife is compounded by evidence of domestic violence. Official
police reports describe Her as “a very troubled and angry young woman who
would run away from home as well as allegedly threaten those she knew with a
shotgun” (Monsour et al., 1998).

Complaints of assaults, threats with weapons, attempted break-ins, custody
disputes, and threats of suicide brought the police to the family’s apartment 14
to 16 times during the 18 months preceding the children’s deaths (Monsour
et al., 1998). Details of years of domestic strife obtained from official docu-
ments reveal that Her threatened Hang on several of the occasions that brought
officers to their apartment. Once, she brandished a knife and twice a gun.
Twice the district attorney’s office attempted to file orders of protection for Her
against her estranged husband. As there were conflicting stories regarding who
was threatening whom—Hang claimed that he was defending himself against
her, and the children appeared to be safe and unharmed, so the police dismissed
the case. Hang was reported by the police to have twice visited Her at the fac-
tory where she worked on the line, threatening to commit suicide.

Following the deaths, both Hang and his family denied that he ever abused
his wife. They claimed it was Her who threatened Hang (Suzukamo, 1998a).
Her’s role in the domestic disputes preceding the departure of Hang from the
home links the deaths of the children with years of increasing violence. Hang’s
role in the violence was dismissed both by the police as well as Hang’s family.
Her’s active participation in these domestic disputes, whether offensive, defen-
sive, or both, supports the perspective that she became increasingly violent over
time.
Her’s age and the circumstances of her marriage are overlooked in the press reconstruction of the events leading to the children’s deaths. There is no discussion by the experts of the role immigration to the United States played as Her lived between two cultures. Her visit with her mother is treated as evidence that she wanted to abandon the family, while information of her return and renewed commitment to keeping all of the children with her was not. Finally, Her’s participation in the domestic disputes that brought police to their home is scrutinized, whereas details of Hang’s role are excluded from this discussion of how a mother could kill her own children.

Child Neglect

The SNAF narrative shapes the stories told by all of the informants into an argument that Her was a bad mother, the “other” to the good. Her’s mother-in-law reported that when at 13 years of age Her gave birth to her first child, she had difficulty relating to the baby. Years later, Her separated from Hang, leaving the children with him to visit her mother in Michigan. Neighbor Christopher Yang recalls,

“When she came back, she called the police and said she wanted to divide the kids equally. When she came back, she went to court to keep the father away from the kids. She took the kids back and promised to be a good mother. But she never took care of the kids. (Morrison & Moore, 1998)”

Press reports reveal that married young, Her turned to her mother-in-law for help with her first baby. Struggling throughout her married life with the demands of holding together a family of six children, following an extended visit with her mother, Her renewed her resolve that all of the children would remain with her. That Her returned from her mother’s home and resumed the role of primary caretaker means nothing given that she killed the children.

Neighbors offered specific reports supporting the belief that Her never was a good mother. Quoted extensively in several articles, Yang described Hang as staying at home to care for the children while Her worked (Gardner & Moore, 1998). Yang observed that after Hang left, Her would sometimes leave the apartment without taking the children (“Mother, 24, Accused,” 1998). They were seen playing without their mother (Taus, 1998). “Her did not seem to supervise the children closely,” Yang observed, “letting them walk alone in the street” (Taus, 1998). To Yang, this was evidence that Her was “someone who was not really taking care of her kids” (“Killing of 6 Kids,” 1998). Journalist Jeter (1998) reported, “The young mother’s children hardly ever left the apartment to play, and when they did, they looked dirty and uncared for.”

Agreeing with Yang were neighbors who observed that the children, who had seemed happy and normal, stopped playing outside when their father
moved out of the apartment. Although the shared belief was that Hang’s presence accounted for the children’s well-being, his departure was not associated with having gravely compromised Her’s ability to keep the family together. However, like Her’s in-laws, in the wake of the deaths, neighbors were persuaded that fault for the demise of the family rested with Her.

Neighborhood children reported that prior to the deaths, Her had killed the family pets. When Her’s 8-year-old daughter caught head lice, Her shaved the children’s heads, and “Her got rid of the beloved family pets (a turtle and a pigeon)” (Monsour et al., 1998). Her’s efforts to eliminate the household infestation was presented as further evidence that she was becoming increasingly violent. Although family members and neighbors attempted to make sense of the deaths by implying that she neglected her children, social service professionals involved with the family during the year preceding the deaths admitted to having found no evidence of child abuse.

Her’s repeated calls for intervention in domestic disputes made over the previous 18 months placed the family under investigation by social services. Calling the deaths of the children “a terrible example of domestic violence” (“Killing of 6 Kids,” 1998), St. Paul police chief William Finney reported that a social worker was involved with the family but “there was never any indication the children were in danger” (Taus, 1998). In defense of the social services department, Social Services Director Thomas Fashingbauer stated that he “didn’t know of any child abuse report that we’ve ever received on this family” (Morrison & Moore, 1998). Press reports observed repeatedly, and with concern, that there was no record of child abuse. Nor did anyone among family and friends claim that Her physically abused the children—a crucial issue given the effort to establish the deaths to be the culmination of escalating domestic violence.

It is in the telling of events leading to the deaths that the work Her did to keep the children with her surfaces as proof that she never was a good mother. Although no credence is given to the possible impact of early childbearing and multiple births on Her’s ability to care for the children, the observed emotional status and physical appearance of the children, including the time they spent playing outside (without adult supervision) support an argument that neglect led to abuse culminating in homicidal violence. Brief mention by two experts of the possibility that this was Her’s last act to protect her family is dismissed.

Although family claims that Her neglected her maternal responsibilities provide no evidence that she abused the children, the press shaped evidence that Her faced extreme emotional, financial, and physical barriers to well-being, if not survival, into proof that she abused the children. Agreement among observers that Her was a bad mother is based not on evidence that she ever physically harmed the children but rather on evidence that poverty limits a woman’s ability to meet the standard for good mothering set by the SNAF narrative. Although much is said to prove that Her was a “poor” mother, little is
said about her impoverished circumstances that constantly threatened to break up the family.

**Poverty**

The socioeconomic context in which Her struggled to keep her children with her is missing from the stories told by family, neighbors, and government officials. Although the SNAF narrative portrays the father as provider for and protector of the family, no questions are raised concerning Hang’s role in the financial support of the family given the absence of information that he provided monetary assistance. Hang had left the family 6 months before the deaths of the children. Until that time, with the occasional help of the children’s father, his parents, social services, and jobs in production and as a translator, Her had managed to keep the family together. When Hang left, the precarious financial state of the family intensified.

It was not until 1 week following the deaths, and in a single newspaper account, that evidence of Her’s financial circumstances was reported in the press. Assistant Ramsey County Public Defender Bruce Wenger claimed that Her had lost the car given to her by friends because she could not afford to register or insure it, did not have enough money to feed the children, and faced eviction from the apartment (Suzukamo & Vang, 1998).

Press coverage included no discussion of the limited role Hang played in the lives of his family, even as full blame for family difficulties was attributed to Her. Neighbors praised Hang’s association with the children’s daily physical care while overlooking Her’s work to keep the family together. Hang’s commitment to the Western “fatherly” responsibilities of wage earning to support the family was never addressed in the newspaper accounts—neither by family, friends, government bureaucrats, professionals, nor by expert social scientists. Instead, Hang’s occasional assumption of the work of mothering was treated as proof that Her was irresponsible as a mother.

The same texts that depict Her as a bad mother overlook evidence that Hang’s commitment to family was limited. In a police record of a domestic dispute, Her called the police for help finding the children, fearing that Hang had abducted them. Hang was found at the home of his girlfriend (Monsour et al., 1998). This was the only time that Hang’s personal life was mentioned in the newspaper coverage.

When Hang took care of the children, the work of mothering was seen as a positive contribution to the family’s well-being. The press never treated this as an indication of just how little Hang did to support the family. Furthermore, when Her’s inability to meet all of the children’s needs came to the fore, her work of mothering became evidence of maternal failure. By contrast, the husband and father of the six dead children was lauded by family and friends for his
occasional efforts to see to the feeding and clothing of the children (the only positive reference to the work of mothering in the stories) and ignored by experts who overlook Hang’s part in the family’s financial crisis.

When a father lives apart from the mother and children, a substitute adult-in-residence can offer assistance with child care, protection from external threat, and financial assistance. These indictments of Her’s mothering never address the ages of the children, their ability to and the necessity that they care for each other, and the difficulty of keeping six young children clean and pressed. For women raising children alone on limited incomes, there are few options for dealing with both occasional and regular needs for multiple “supporting caregivers” (Czapanskiy, 1999).

Aside from Her’s attorney, the only voices to address the family’s financial problems were national experts contacted for comments on the deaths. Child welfare and family violence expert Professor Richard Gelles of the University of Pennsylvania observed,

By apparently trying to kill herself as well, Her should be viewed at least to some small degree as a victim . . . . This might well be a case of a woman saying, “I can’t protect you, but I can’t leave you behind.” (Taus, 1998)

Dao Yang, the world’s first Hmong Ph.D., explained that Her may have been trying to protect the children: “Her and her husband were separated, and she may have feared that if she died and he remarried, his new wife would not love and care for her children the way she could have” (Suzukamo, 1998a).

In line with Yang’s assessment, Kenneth Klein, child psychologist at Regions Hospital in St. Paul, suggested that Her’s steps to kill the children may have been her final act as a mother, removing the children from a life that she could no longer bear to live (McMenamin, 1998). Although both Yang and Klein proposed an alternative explanation to the escalating violence theory, Klein hastened to avoid the possibility that Her rationally decided to kill the children, stating, “Of course, she doesn’t really have the right to make that choice for them.”

Gelles, noting that Her “apparently” tried to commit suicide, allowed for the prospect that Her was depressed by her life. Yang suggested that in her suicidal attempt, Her took into account the needs of the children and concluded that, given her inability to continue the work of mothering, she could not leave them behind. Klein acknowledged Her’s economic reality and proceeded to dismiss its relevance via a moral, ethical framework applied only to Her and not to the larger community. Although Her may have wished to die, she had no right to end her children’s lives. However, no one admits that if she suffered from struggling to make ends meet, the children also suffered from the violence of poverty (Cleeton, 1994; Fineman, 1995a; Kotlowitz, 1991; Kozol, 1988).

Searching to explain how a mother could become a monster, the SNAF-referenced press narrative treats Her’s actions to hold her family together as evi-
dence of maternal failure. Observers described a child murderer, not the gradual succumbing of a girl-turned-wife-turned-mother to a struggle against poverty, violence, hunger, homelessness, and cultural isolation. No one acknowledged the work of caring for six children or the overwhelming despair. Whereas Hang was credited by the neighbors with caring for the children when Her was at work, official reports that he harassed Her at work, threatened to kill Her and any boyfriend, as well as threatened and then attempted suicide on two occasions generated no discussion of Hang’s role in the events leading to the deaths (Taus, 1998).

Among the acquaintances of Her and Hang interviewed by the press, only one described Her as a good mother. Countering the tidal wave of criticism of the young mother, Her’s friend Mai Xiong claimed that Her loved the children but regretted marrying too young and was “depressed over the amount of responsibility she had” (Johnson, 1998).

When she killed the children, Her forced the issue of the realities of the work of mothering in harsh cultural and economic circumstances onto an un receptive audience. More than 30 stories were published in St. Paul in an effort to “make sense” of the children’s deaths at their mother’s hands. Having extricated the deaths from the socioeconomic context of poverty to confirm that Her was the villain and to punish her for her treachery, the tragic narrative requires that the lesson of the bad mother be applied on behalf of protecting similarly vulnerable children from a comparable fate. Programs to identify, test, and watch women at risk for maternal weakness or failure offer hope for a better future.

Prevention

Lest the Her children’s deaths imply that society is not committed to the well-being of every child, evidence of the community’s resolve to prevent similar losses in the future brings the tragedy to resolution in two stages: (a) mourners reconfirm the community’s love for and commitment to children (Adil, 1998), and (b) programs to prevent maternally inflicted child harm in the future are discussed. The press narrative included coverage of services at which the innocence of the children was repeatedly invoked. A vigil to honor Her’s children was held outside the apartment on the Sunday evening following their deaths. “They gathered not to place blame but to honor six children, slain four days ago apparently by their 24-year old mother” (Moore, 1998). “I hope this raises awareness in the Hmong community and other communities that it is immoral to kill children,” said Mai Hang, a mourner at the vigil (Suzukamo, 1998b).

Concerned for the loss of Hmong cultural values, Kou Yang, friend of the children’s father, stated, “It happened this time, but will not happen again. I want to tell Hmong women to learn a lesson from this: Don’t kill their kids anymore” (Adil, 1998). Kayoing Hang, a community organizer who addressed the
mourners, stated, “Let it be a call for the Hmong men and women to discuss what’s going on in our families” (Suzukamo, 1998b). Also speaking at the event, community leader Tou Ger Xiong urged the mourners to go home and hug their children.

Although journalist Moore (1998) claimed the vigil for the children celebrated their lives without pointing fingers, the messages collected from officials and mourners quietly and effectively indicted and found guilty the woman who, for want of resources, gave up on the work of mothering. At the vigil, Sandra Irving, neighbor and mother of four calling the dead children “six little angels,” stated, “There ain’t no bad kids. Before you do this throw them (the children) out of the house” (Monsour et al., 1998). Irving implied that just because Her wanted to die, she did not have to take her “innocent” children with her.

At the funeral services, Hang mourned the deaths of his children, joining the chorus of voices expressing their love for the dead. Completing the portrayal of Her as a bad mother is Hang’s avowal delivered by an interpreter: “I want to tell everyone that it is not I . . . who does not love my children” (“Mother, 24, Accused,” 1998). A mourner attending the funeral service said, “Why did your mother have to be a dog, a heartless dog that will be fated to wander endlessly through valleys, ravines, and desert for her cruelty?” (Vang, 1998). “A group of Hmong men sitting in the back seats (at the funeral service) said they faulted American culture for giving too many rights to women” (Vang, 1998). Prior to their deaths, these children held center stage for no one outside their extended family. By focusing on the innocence of the children, this horror story erases the violence that permeated the lives of the family. The children’s deaths readily serve as evidence that Her did not love them, that she failed to protect them, that she selfishly sought to unburden herself by killing them. Avenging the children’s deaths required the punishment of their mother and prevention of other mothers from taking similar actions.

The narrative rewriting of Her’s story requires that the tragic ending of the children’s lives be avenged. As the children’s lives cannot be restored, the search for triumph over tragedy looks to the interest of other children. The narrative focused on child abuse, even though this case provided no evidence of child abuse. The resolution of this tale requires that all children of mothers like Her, mothers facing the daily barriers to survival imposed by poverty, be protected from their mothers. The discourse of mothering connects Her’s actions with the actions of other mothers, as local experts report on the implementation of a screening program to identify women at risk for harming their children. Her’s challenge to the SNAF narrative is converted into evidence of the inability of some mothers to care for their children, requiring that those mothers be identified and pursued.

A report prepared by the local county citizen advisory panel (McMenamin, 1998) described a pilot project to identify families requiring assistance from child protection:
Every woman in the county would be screened at the time of her child’s birth to
determine whether she is at risk of harming her child. Those with high risks
would be offered help in dealing with those extra burdens and stresses. 7

In an interview with journalist McMenamin (1998), Social Services Director
Fashingbauer expressed concern with the cost of implementing the experimental
screening program. In response, Patrick Coyne, director of the county’s social ser-
VICES, said,

Granted, it’s avant-garde, it’s new, it’s never been tested, but we’re testing it here.
It’s been tested in Hawaii. And we’ve seen if we don’t engage (at-risk families)
early on, they’re barely making it by the time they come to the county for public
housing or welfare assistance. We deal with them from upstairs and it’s too late.
The kids have already been abused. The families are already disintegrating. And
we’re playing catch up. (McMenamin, 1998)

According to the director, family instability results from personal inadequacy.
Through early identification of mental illness or pathology, a mother could be
saved and child harm avoided. A process of testing, labeling, surveillance, regu-
lation, and punishment where necessary is implemented (Foucault, 1977). It is
expected that such programs would save money in the criminal justice system,
public assistance payments, and special education services. 8

There is a need, according to Director Fashingbauer, for the

whole community to be aware and involved in the protection of our chil-
dren . . . a combination of parents, family, friends, church, culture and govern-
ment . . . I think we do know and we knew before that any type of protection of
children is not the responsibility of government alone. (Morrison & Moore,
1998)

This call for community involvement implies surveillance and monitoring of
mothers on behalf of reporting them to the authorities, as exemplified by the
observations made about Her by the mother-in-law, neighbors, and neighbor-
hood children.

Despite formal assessment of the family by Social Services, there is no evi-
dence that Her physically abused her children. The aim of the home visitation
program is to identify mothers and babies who are likely to need help.
Screening all mothers at childbirth for indicators of potential abuse and neglect
extends direct government surveillance into every mother’s life. Identifying
women who are at risk extends current efforts to identify mothers at risk for
poor birth outcomes (women who are young, poor, urban, minority, single,
mothers for the first time, mothers of one-plus children, mothers who work,
mothers on welfare; Cleeton, 1994) to all women who are poor. The risk factors
for poor birth outcomes can be readily applied to child abuse and neglect.
Discussion

In this case, the SNAF code assumes the form of a rhetorical question, “How could a mother do this to her own children when the children are so innocent?” (Kearney, Murphy, & Rosenbaum, 1994). Juxtaposing the bad mother with her cherubic children, Her’s rational defense of her family from the tyranny of the market (Bourdieu & Accardo, 1999) is transformed into evidence that Her neglected and abused her husband and was irresponsible toward her children. Evidence of the work of mothering justifies development and installation of instruments of surveillance (Foucault, 1977) leading to the arrest, prosecution, and punishment of bad mothers.10

The mothering discourse of the full-time, husband-supported wife and mother wrenches Her’s mothering work from its socioeconomic context, revealing the “lines of social organization” (Smith, 1999). Her wage-earning work outside the home receives scant attention, overlooked this evidence of poverty-based stress. Here, the intersection of class, gender, and race discourses structures the process by which the question of how Her could kill her own children abnegates societal responsibility for children and their mothers. Farmer, Connors, and Simmons (1996), in their sociohistorical analysis of the AIDS pandemic, asked, “by what mechanisms, precisely, do social forces (such as poverty, sexism and other forms of discrimination) become embodied as personal risk?” (p. 24). In a society that makes a mother wholly responsible for the well-being of her children (Fineman, 1995a), cultural patterns of communication focusing on personal responsibility (Eliasoph & Lichterman, 1999) transform evidence of the work of mothering into maternal culpability. The “crossover of multiple discourses” (Fineman, 1991) shapes the event such that it supports rather than challenges the ideology of the good mother.

Her’s life circumstances—poverty, emotional distress, domestic violence, primary responsibility for raising children—mirror those identified by Alder and Baker (1997) to be associated with filicide/suicide, not escalating violence. These variables reflect the state of need of women caring for their children alone.11 Treating Her’s situation as a case of child abuse ignores, erases, or transforms aspects distinguishing filicide/suicides from unintended deaths caused by escalating violence: the careful planning of the deaths, Her’s age at marriage and the ages of the children at their deaths, and evidence that Her was a good mother.

Evidence that Her cared for the children becomes proof that she did not love her children, whereas stories of Her’s husband’s occasional efforts to dress the children for school established him to be extraordinary in his commitment to fatherhood. Her’s work to care for, as well as support, six children is never raised in the investigation, even as Hang’s occasional work to take care of the children is celebrated. There is no discussion of the work—neither domestic nor paid—done by Her to keep the family together. Evidence that Her replaced Hang’s help with the children by taking in a boyfriend—forced sex work to protect her...
children from the ravages of poverty—proved her lack of moral fiber. Whether or not Her was a good mother—only one person attests to Her’s love for the children—no one produces evidence that she physically abused them. Police records of Her’s calls for protection from Hang are supplanted by evidence that Her threatened Hang. The lack of evidence that Her physically harmed the children is backgrounded by stories of Her’s irresponsibility and immorality, a story that “fits” the data (Luker, 1996).

Culturally, the ideology of motherhood is under siege (Seidman, 1991), and this horror story affords an opportunity to reaffirm a national commitment to the nuclear family. Building a case against Her as a mother supports renewed commitment to social policies requiring women to marry and remain with the fathers of their children. For those who do not, surveillance, arrest, and punishment are necessary to protect their children.

As the social structure of family is in transition, the stability of the SNAF discourse requires and enforces silence around the everyday/every night activities of mothering (Smith, 1999). When examples of child neglect, endangerment, or harm raise the issue of the class assumptions of the discourse, mothers emerge as protagonists (Smith, 1999). The narrative resolves the crisis of child harm by transforming evidence of limited resources into proof of escalating maternal neglect and abuse. Discussing the realities of mothering cannot be undertaken without risking the arrest, prosecution, and punishment of women willing to speak because the information gleaned from the lives of women who mother is readily transformed into evidence supporting the claim that only bad mothers harm their children.

Although a surface reading of the texts suggests that Her went to prison because she killed her children, Erikson (1966) observed that unusual acts afford the opportunity to reinforce culturally approved definitions of social behavior:

Like an article of common law, boundaries remain a meaningful point of reference only so long as they are repeatedly tested by persons on the fringes of the group and repeatedly defended by persons chosen to represent the group’s inner morality. Each time the community moves to censure some act of deviation, then, and convenes a formal ceremony to deal with the responsible offender, it sharpens the authority of the violated norm and restates where the boundaries of the group are located. (p. 13)

The investigative framework of the press coverage of the deaths, conducted ostensibly to determine how this tragedy occurred and what can be done to prevent its recurrence, defends society’s commitment to the ideology of the good mother.

Her broke the code of maternal silence, no longer able to shoulder the burden of the work of mothering. Her’s crime is her failure to be middle class. Her punishment is to be branded a bad mother. Belief in the incompatibility of motherhood and murder is restored (Irigaray, 1989; Scheper-Hughes, 1992).
Hatred for Her is transformed into fear for the well-being of all children raised by single mothers (Guillaumin, 1995). Her’s failure as a mother shifts attention away from society’s obvious neglect of impoverished children, and of equal or greater significance, from its abnegation of responsibility for mothers.

Conclusion

The SNAF mother ideal is treated as though it is universal and ahistorical, omitting consideration of the societal variables shaping both the definition of motherhood as well as its actual realization. The approaches to dealing with abuse and neglect by mothers of their children offered by professionals and laity alike focus on explaining how a mother could kill her own children while ignoring the structural barriers to a woman and her children’s survival.

The belief that mothers do not harm their children functions as a conservative force channeling even contradictory evidence into support for the patriarchal ideology of the good mother. The surviving belief in the bad mother is supported by the collective silence of all women regarding the work of mothering. Women who do the work of mothering collude with government installation of surveillance programs to identify potentially bad mothers on behalf of protecting their children from neglect and harm.

It is in this context that the scholarly work of listening to and recording the voices of women (Ashe, 1995; Ashe & Cahn, 1993; Beker, 1990; Naffine, 1996; Swigart, 1999) is conducted. Collins (1991) observed that acknowledgment of the identity, legitimacy, and viability of women (Pronger, 1990) begins with a reverence for concrete experience and the use of dialogue in assessing knowledge claims. Reflecting on the debilitating impact of silencing on the vitality of black women, hooks (1993) wrote,

> Collective unmasking remains an important act of resistance. If it is a mark of our oppression that as black people we cannot be dedicated to truth in our lives, without putting ourselves at risk, then it is a mark of our resistance, our commitment to liberation, when we claim the right to speak the truth of our reality, anyway. (p. 27)

Much of feminist work has sought to centralize women’s experience on behalf of challenging masculinist ideology (MacKinnon, 1991). Her’s story threatens to unseat belief in the good mother (Collins, 1991; Davis, 1981; Smith-Rosenberg, 1985). If woman is to be de-essentialized, challenging the social construction of gender, the scholarly and political work of centralizing women’s experience must expand beyond such issues as equal pay, the domestic division of labor, and civil rights to include the daily work of raising children, described by Swigart (1999) as “giving without getting.”
Notes

1. Although the press coverage limits knowledge of the content of the interviews to that which is actually printed, these texts were treated as indicators of the beliefs and values determining what comments were to be included in the coverage. What is missing from the investigation has either been stated but omitted from the text by reporters or editors or was never raised at all.

2. In 1980, women concerned with the destruction of the earth were exploring the connections between feminism and nonviolence. In November of 1980 and 1981, the Women’s Pentagon Actions brought hundreds of women together to challenge patriarchy and militarism. These women found ways to use direct action to put pressure on the military establishment and to show positive examples of life-affirming ways to live together. This movement spawned women’s peace camps at military bases around the world from Greenham Common, England, to Puget Sound Peace Camp in Washington State (History, 1999).

3. As employable skills among Hmong are limited (Koltyk, 1998), it is not unusual for a father to care for the children while the mother works.

4. Hmong immigrants bring few employable skills, coming from a human-labor-based agrarian society. Jobs are found in agriculture, light manufacturing, and electronic assembly—all requiring minimal English skills (Koltyk, 1998). Therefore, Hmong rely on relatives for assistance in times of need, seeking aid primarily from within the family.

5. The prospect for a life lived within the boundaries of marital monogamy is available to few women in the global village. Those living in poverty must rely on some form of sex work for survival, including marriage at an early age (Cleeton, 1994; Farmer et al., 1996; Rawlings, 1998).

6. Women raising children in poverty have two sources for assistance: family, including sexual intimates as defined in modern U.S. culture (Fineman, 1995a), and the government. As the government has never offered single women a living wage, women raising children alone must subsidize the subsidies (Gordon, 1994). As poor women must rely on men for financial assistance, they do sex work in exchange for child care, housing, and, sometimes, protection from other men (Cleeton, 1994).

7. For a look at fairy tales addressing the problem of the stepmother who assumes the work of the mother who dies young, see Warner (1996).

8. Such legislation is readily passed when linked with and limited to the receipt of Medicaid-funded health care, in this case, prenatal care. Extension of similar surveillance practices to women with private health care insurance is more difficult (Cleeton, 1994).

9. In 1998, the U.S. association of governors supported the nationwide trend in monitoring women for risk indicators of child neglect and abuse. Concerned about rising education and prison costs and driven by recent research findings on the continuing development of the brain from birth through age 3 years, Vermont’s Governor Howard Dean stated, “half the problem in our school system is dealing with kids who can’t learn
because they were damaged during the ages of zero to three” (Whitmore, 1998). The governors’ policies are supported by research that states that fetal damage during gestation and/or the absence of appropriate stimulation during infancy lead to learning deficits that do not fully respond to remedial programs. In addition to improving early childhood experience through home visitation programs, the governors expect to reduce the prison population by reducing abuse in the home. According to Governor Dean,

The whole point is to reduce the prison population 20 years from now and reduce other social programs in the meantime. Our child abuse rate for kids ages zero to six is down by over 50 percent in the last five years because of our “Success by Six” program. Kids who are abused have a much higher rate of abusing other kids and adults as they grow older.

10. Mandatory drug screens have been instituted by the New York State Department of Social Services for women receiving Medicaid-funded prenatal care. Women receiving prenatal care through private insurance are not screened for use of illegal drugs (Cleeton, 1994).

11. hooks (1993) noted the role of race- and class-related stress in women’s lives.

12. Fineman (1995b) observed that all disagreement about motherhood is primarily located within the dominant ideology of the good/bad mother, revealing the elasticity of patriarchy.

13. The resurgence of biological determinism in the late-20th century reinforces surviving beliefs that women are genetically structured to assume full responsibility for the care and socialization of children (essentialized motherhood). Mothers whose children suffer harm are deviant women who could not naturally meet their children’s needs.

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Fragments of Death: Configurations of My Mother

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This article is a story about the author’s experiences dealing with her mother who had manic depression for a large part of her life. In the story, the author attempts to have the reader understand the difficulties of dealing with a mentally ill parent; the feelings of guilt, frustration, and fear; as well as the deep sense of loss after her death.

Childhood Memories

Inside, I see doctors and nurses, writing frantically on paper and talking while the patients wander in a stupor. I wonder if everyone is like my mother. Do they have families that visit them? Do they have children? My mother is crying, slowly walking toward the window. She reaches her hand out, placing her hand up to mine, leaving smudgy imprints on the long windows that separate us. I just want her to hold me and tell me everything is going to be ok. Confused and frustrated, I take my father’s hand and walk to the parking lot. I just don’t understand why I can’t go inside to see my mother.

During her early 30s, my mother was diagnosed as having manic depression. It is a typical Friday afternoon, and as I sit in front of the television watching Sesame Street, my father is sitting on our old green plaid couch, beer in hand, watching John Wayne movies. My mother is yelling incoherently. I hear kitchen cabinets slamming, dishes being broken. My mother reaches in the drawer for a long sharp knife, swinging it madly at my father. My father yells, “¡Cálmate!” [Calm down!] “¡Te voy a matar!” [I am going to kill you!], my mother yells back as she chases him around the couch. Every time this happens, I cringe and want to hide. No, actually, I don’t want to exist—I don’t want to live in this world, but there’s nowhere to go—this is my life, my reality that I strive to escape. I close my eyes, crouch down in the corner, and bury my head between my knees, hoping that it all goes away—but it doesn’t. This is my reality. For fear of what I may see, I keep my eyes closed, listening to the all-too-familiar sounds. My father yelling at my brother to help him control my mother, the sound of a shirt ripping, house and walls shaking as my mother falls to the ground, scuffling. . . . There is silence.
The silence is like the dead silence of the long hot summer in Texas, when my mother would fall in the state of depression and sleep through most of the day. I would come home from school, sit down next to my mother, and read. She would sleep all afternoon, periodically turning from one side to another. “Mami, despéritable, andale, despéritable, ya mero llega papi” [Mother, get up, father’s almost home]. I hand her a glass of water to help her wake up, before my father gets home, expecting dinner. The doorbell rings; she looks through the curtains, sees it is Sra. Garcia, rummages around for her shoes, fixes her hair, in an attempt to look presentable. After all, any little detail can provide wonderful material for our small town of 1,200 to gossip about.

It is our first winter in Michigan, and I long for those hot summer days in Texas. It is the first time I have seen snow. I sit at the windowsill, looking at the snow that covers the wet grass, wondering what the frigid northern winds will feel like in the dead set of winter. I imagine myself to be a little girl in a Christmas card. I’m making a snowman with a red sled next to me, bundled up with hat, scarf, and winter boots. In the background, there’s a big two-story house with a white picket fence, dim lights in a few of the windows. Slowly, I pack the snow together, trying to make the head as round as possible. “¡Vete!” [Get out of here!], my mother yells. My father wrestles her to the ground, attempting to control her, but she manages to free herself, locking herself in the bathroom. My father knocks on the door repeatedly but fails to get her to open up. An hour passes. The television set is on, my sister is doing her homework; my father is meticulously shining his work shoes. My mother rushes out of the bathroom. In her right hand, she holds a piece of wood with an nail tacked onto it, the lock that my father made to keep the bathroom door from swinging open. She lunges at my father’s arm, drawing blood. It takes three orderlies to put her in a straitjacket.

**Signs of Illness**

Even though I know she needs professional help, part of me believes that I can help her. I am the one that she is closest to. I am the one to help her. It has been months since she has been to the hospital, and the signs of her manic depression are showing up again.

It’s Christmas and we’re sitting around the tree, opening presents. As my nephew David frantically opens up every box with his name on it, my mother opens up her gifts, with an annoying look on her face. “¡Feliz Navidad! Mami!” my mother looks at her gifts, as if to wonder why it is I even bothered to buy her the crystal butterfly jewelry box. I can still see her look, in the picture, me reaching to her, kissing her, feigning the look of happiness, as she looks irritated, sad, angry, and tired . . . yes tired of living her life. As if she is wondering what the use of life is. Why do we live? The last few months of her life, she’d often say, “Ya me quiero morir” [I just want to die]. I hated to hear those words.
I wanted to shake her and yell at her that she couldn't just give up on life that easily. I wanted to yell at her because she had 9 sons and daughters and 21 nieces and nephews that deeply cared for her. I wanted to ask her what the hell happened? But . . . She couldn't comprehend what I was saying.

As a young woman, she raised nine children while being at my father's beck and call, a true indication of a strong woman. I hated to see her cater to him—making dinner whenever he demanded it. It was never a request; there was never a "por favor" or a "gracias"—only the constant yelling that came along with being drunk for most of his life, tossing the pan full of refried beans against the wall, yelling about how they were just not hot enough for him. She suddenly became negligent because she just couldn't heat his food to his liking. What may have been the cause of her illness? I know that traumatic experiences in people’s lives may contribute to manic depression. I remember my mother telling me that she married her first husband at age 15, her husband who beat her because she couldn't find the matches to light the kerosene lamp. She was pregnant at the time and decided to give my sister up for adoption. She left her first husband only to eventually marry her third husband (my father), who continued to physically abuse her. My tío [uncle] Felipe used to stop by the house drunk, ranting and raving about my aunt being useless, beating her on the way out the door. As a child, I used to daydream that one day my uncle would stop by the house by himself and that I could easily attack him from behind, killing him, so that my aunt wouldn't have to go through the same thing my mother did. It was easier for me to hate my uncle who did the exact same things as my father. To this day, I try not to think about my father because thinking about him brings forth the countless memories of him abusing my mother.

Everything is suddenly becoming a nuisance to her: my nephew not wanting a piece of birthday cake, the mailman at the door, having to take her medication. The lines on her face are changing; her expression is different, very tense and angry. She has stopped sleeping. A million thoughts swirl in my mind: "Did she take her medication tonight? Did she make her doctor’s appointment? Is she eating right? When will she be hospitalized again?" Our roles become reversed: I the parent, she the child. My role is to be there for her when she needs me the most. I have to make certain she takes care of herself because without her, I will have nothing. So, I work hard to ensure her health. "¿Te has tomado las píldoras?" [Are you taking your medication?] "¡Y deja eso!" [Just leave that alone, will you?] I hand her the colorful pills; she walks away, angry that she has to take them. I can see her now, she is in the kitchen, rummaging through the pots and pans, repeatedly wiping down the counters and rewashing clean dishes. She’s yelling at me, "Ya estoy cansada de esas píldoras! Toda la pinche vida he tomado esas píldoras! Ya, estoy cansada. . . . Toda mi vida, ‘Tómame estas píldoras, y tu insulina.’ ¡Si tú no me chingues, el doctor me chinga! Ya no las quiero!" [I’m sick and tired of being dependent on these stupid pills! All of my life, I’ve heard ‘Take these pills! Make sure you take your insulin!’ If you don’t screw me over, then the doctor screws me! I don’t want to take
them!], throwing the colorful pills at me. Slowly I pick them up, separate them, and put them in their vials. “¿Cuándo se va a acabar?” [When in the hell does it all end?] I don’t have an answer for her.

At times, she sits in the dark and talks to herself, turning to one side and saying, “¡Callate! Están durmiendo!” [Be quiet! They’re sleeping!], slowly placing one finger up to her pursed lips, “Shhhhhhh.” She continues talking away as if someone is sitting directly next to her, responding in fragmented sentences. I’m exhausted, so I go to bed. Out of a dream, I awaken to clanging noises in the kitchen and loud laughter. I look over at my clock and it is 4:00 a.m.; she’s still up. In the kitchen, she is rewashing clean pots and pans and slamming cabinet doors. “Son las cuatro de la mañana, vas a dormir?” [It’s 4:00 a.m., aren’t you going to sleep?] She responds, “Dormir? No! Esta cocina está mugrosa, no sé como puedes vivir así! Anda, Dalia, ayúdame!” [Sleep, No! This kitchen is a pigsty. I don’t know how you can live here. Hurry up, help me!] I stick my hands in the soapy water and wipe off the clean counter, making certain to clean every part of the counter—the top, the side, the wall next to the counter. “¡Eso no vale para nada!” [That’s absolutely no good!] Being exhausted, I had forgotten to add bleach to the soapy water. As I add the bleach to the sudsy water, I can feel her staring at me, making certain I don’t forget the bleach. Forgetting about the small paper cut on my pinky, I dip my hand in—it stings. I can’t let the paper cut get in my way of cleaning this already clean kitchen. I can’t give her another excuse to yell. She begins to take out all of the pans out of the cabinets, instructing me to clean the inside of the cabinets as well. It doesn’t matter to her whether it is already clean; she thinks that the cabinets are dirty, so they must be cleaned. Next is the floor. I get on my knees to scrub, with my mother pointing here and there, reminding me that she’s there, making certain it’s done right. My knees begin to ache, and I have sharp shooting pains in my back from hunching over, and my hands are pink and wrinkly from sticking my hands in the hot, soapy water. I know she has to be admitted into the hospital, but I know she will not willingly go. I manage to talk her into going in to “get a check-up.” Tomorrow will be another long day.

First, there is the paperwork, filling out sheet after sheet of questions: name, weight, type of health insurance. Waiting . . . waiting . . . Next is talking to the doctors, explaining to them that she has been repeatedly admitted for her manic depression, and yes she is also diabetic. The entire process usually takes approximately 12 or 13 hours. Waiting . . . waiting . . . . Sitting in the lobby, observing, waiting, seeing the solemn faces on people waiting to hear about their loved ones. “It could be worse, much worse,” I keep telling myself. Trying not to think about the long night that’s ahead of me, I watch television, hoping to escape into Oprah’s world, until I’m interrupted by a doctor. “Dalia, we don’t have an interpreter, would you mind interpreting for us?” I walk into the room where my mother is sitting in her mauve dress and her favorite costume jewelry. She has her matching necklace on, pink gaudy stones, the exact pink of her dress. She is convinced she is healthy, even though she cannot remember the
year or time of day. It’s ok, I tell her. I assure her that they’re just going to ask her a few questions. The doctor asks, “Juana, can you tell us what year it is?” “¿Qué chingao’ quiere este?” [What the hell does this one want?] She begins to laugh, putting her hand up to her mouth like a little schoolgirl. “Mami, el doctor quiere saber el año” [Mom, the doctor wants to know what year it is]. “¿Mande?” [What?] “El año, quiere saber el año” [The year, he wants to know the year]. “¿Pués, cuál año?” [Well, what year?] The doctor asks, “Can you tell me who the president of the United States is?” Not knowing if this is a very good question, I hesitate to ask my mother. My mother, a native Spanish speaker, who over the years has picked up English words here and there, may know who the president is, but I’m not so sure. “El presidente . . . es el Reagan, ese pinche cabrón!” [The president is that Reagan, that son of a bitch!] Well . . . she couldn’t remember the year, nor the correct president, but President Reagan certainly made a lasting impression on her. “O.K., that’s all we need for now,” says the doctor.

I go back to the lobby to wait. I can hear her screaming down the hallway; there’s a loud crash in the room, and I can hear the doctors and nurses yelling, “Get her down! Get her down!” I cringe, hoping that they don’t hurt her. A nurse makes a mad dash into the room, then another and another. They struggle to control her. “¡Chinga tu madre!” [Fuck you!], she yells. “Pinche cabrón!” [You son of a bitch!] NO!! “¡No me voy a hechar en la cama!” [I am not getting on that bed! Don’t you fucking touch me! I’ll kill you!]

Slowly, I walk into the room, afraid to see her, afraid she’ll yell at me for talking her into going to the hospital. She’s on a hospital bed, hands and feet tied with thick leather restraints. Her hands are dry, cracked from the cold winter months. Her red nail polish is chipped, and I notice her mother’s day ring is gone. She’s squirming and yelling at the top of her lungs, “¡Quítame de aquí! ¡Ustedes están locos! Yo quiero ver a mi familia!” [Get me the hell outta here! You people are crazy! I wanna see my family!] “Dalia! Chingao! ¿Porqué me traiste aquí? Y como me puedes hacer esto? Me tienen amarrada como un animal, como podías a dejarlas hacer esto? ¡Después de todo lo que he hecho para ti!” [God damn it! Why did you bring me here and how in the hell could you do this to me? They have me tied up like an animal! How could you let them tie me up like this? After all I’ve done for you, how could you?], she yells as her voice becomes hoarse from hours of yelling. She feels betrayed. I lied to her; I told her that the doctors would run a routine checkup on her and afterward she’d return home. “How could you let them tie me up like this?” . . . What else was I supposed to do? I hate to see her like this, but I know she needs help.

A Visit to the Hospital

To the left is the waiting room of concerned family members; to the right are the craft activity rooms. The patients are working with ceramics today. I see my
mother’s shaky hands, as she places the wooden jewelry box with blue ceramic flowers on my lap, “Para ti” [For you]. Her glazed eyes make me uncomfortable. It is almost as if she doesn’t see me; she’s somewhere else. Strands of gray hair hang over her eyes, with her hospital nightgown on, bruised arms and legs. As she looks my way, I can’t seem to recognize her. It’s like looking at another person . . . a lifeless person with no vitality, no reaction. Her spirit is gone, zapped away by lithiums and tegretols. I take her hand and hold it in mine. She sits and stares blankly at the wall as if I’m not there. I try to talk to her, tell her about school, work, home; she mumbles something in response and continues staring at the wall.

I hate to see her like this, but I am glad she no longer has to go to the city hospital, which was the only hospital in the area that had the facilities to treat mentally ill patients. My memories of that hospital are few, but I do remember hesitantly walking through a long hall in the basement. Every other light was out, forming strange shadows on the dingy walls. The basement certainly didn’t feel or look anything like the upstairs of the hospital. Nurses and doctors were nowhere to be found. There was no antiseptic smell. Instead, there was only a vile smell of urine that waved through the still air. My sister had warned me about the conditions in the hospital. During her last visit, she had actually seen one of the patients sitting in a corner playing with her feces. When confronting one of the staff members, she was told, “We just don’t have the staff to deal with all of the patients.”

Death

After being admitted for her manic depression, the doctors found that my mother indeed had gangrene, and we were told she would have to get a toe amputated. My mother developed a toxin as a result of being allergic to the anesthesia and was forced to withstand the pain of having her toe open to drain the toxins out of her body. It hurt to see her—any movement she made worsened the pain and food was the last thing on her mind. She was not eating, and the doctors were worried. Every day we would visit, with no indication of her condition improving. Finally, the doctors were able to stitch her toe back up, and she began eating, gaining her strength back. According to the hospital staff, she would be coming home in 2 weeks—2 weeks, good. Usually, she’s in for at least a month.

The phone rings. It’s 5:00 a.m., and all I can think is, “Who in the hell could be calling right now?” “You should really come to the hospital, your mother isn’t doing very well.” I bang on my sister’s bedroom door, no sound. She has worked third shift and usually locks her door, so I’m not surprised she’s not responding. BANG! BANG! BANG! Still no response. “That was the hospital, they want us to come down, Mami isn’t doing well!” BANG! BANG! BANG! “Open the goddamn door!” I keep banging until my hand hurts. What the hell
is wrong with her? Why doesn’t she just open the damn door? Great, what am I supposed to do? I’ll let her sleep for a few minutes, then I’ll bang again. I sit on the couch, eventually dozing off. The phone rings, “We’ve lost your mother.” I instantly hang the phone up and run to my sister’s bedroom. With both hands, I pound on the door as hard as I can. I begin to kick the door with my bare feet. I bang and kick so hard that our family picture falls off the wall, and I can’t seem to stop yelling, “Open the fucking door, she’s gone, you idiot! She’s gone!” I want to blame myself for her death, for not taking her in any sooner for her diabetes, for not being able to be there for her day and night to make certain that she took her medication, for falling asleep, for not banging on the door hard enough to awaken my sister, for not being there for her right before she died. I know, it probably wouldn’t have made a difference; they were probably performing code blue, or code red, or whatever on her, but I’m still convinced that I could’ve done something, if anything to try to be there for her one last time before she died.

Silence is how we choose to deal with my mother’s death. I don’t share my feelings of desperation as a young sibling with my other siblings because I assume they have their own lives to live. I know that it’s not that they don’t care, but more like circumstances that can’t be helped. Most of my brothers and sisters live out of state. Nevertheless, I can’t help but to be angry with them. My sister Ofelia who hadn’t seen my mother since she moved out at the age of 16 can’t make her way up to the coffin. Good, I think. You should feel guilty for not making an attempt to visit your mother. I never share with them the anger I feel toward them because, well, what good would it do? I feel lonely, lost, frustrated, confused, and I want to give up on life. My tía [aunt] Lupe once told me, “It’s for the best, she’s now in heaven.” How can a death be “for the best!??” I wanted to yell. Now in heaven? Ok, like I hadn’t doubted religion enough. Besides the fact that as a kid, I could do nothing but question my own religion, “Oh, yeah, well if there’s a God, then why is there so much damn suffering in the world? And why are some people so damn poor?” I would ask my older sister. Now in heaven, yeah . . . whatever. All I could do was doubt the God that thought “it was for the best” for my mother to die. What a stupid thing to say to me! I’ve certainly heard it all before. We avoid talking about death in so many different ways. By phrasing death differently, we try to distance ourselves from the reality of death. “She has passed away, or I lost my mother,” I often respond to strangers who often ask me, “Where are your parents from?” We answer with these words in hopes of not being so confrontational about death. We avoid talking about it, what death means to us: how we’ve lost family members and close friends and how we’re affected by death in many ways.

It has been 8 years since her death, and I still find myself falling into the trap of believing all of the ideas we construct about death. As I sit in my therapist’s office, he says, “These things take time.” Yes . . . I think, time, that’s what I need. Sure. . . . But it’s been a long time . . . perhaps I should just not be feeling upset because I have had time to deal with this—as if one day I am going to stop
remembering and everything will be fine. Time ... I think, yes—everyone tells me that I just need more time.

It has been 3 months since her death, and I long to fill that feeling of emptiness inside, wondering if it will ever go away. “How are you doing Dolly?” my sister Marta asks. “Ok,” I respond, knowing that it’s not true. “Life goes on,” I tell myself. I go through the motions of life. I attend class, work, and occasionally get together with friends. I can’t seem to help but wonder what the significance of what I do everyday is. “You should be proud of what you’ve accomplished. You’re the first one to not have gotten married at such a young age, and you’re finishing your college degree,” my sister says. So what? Really, what does it matter if I’m finishing my college degree? There are so many more important things in life besides school, like life itself.

“I’m fine,” I tell everyone, repeating it over and over again, hoping that if I say it often enough, I can convince myself. But the truth is that most mornings I can barely get out of bed. And when I do, every single thing I do takes so much energy. It’s 2:00 p.m., and I still can’t seem to make it out of bed. I don’t want to face the world today. I don’t want to feel the pain anymore. I don’t want to live my life anymore. I cover myself from head to toe with blankets and pillows, making certain to leave an open space to breathe. If I sleep, I can’t feel the pain anymore. As my tears roll down my face and onto my pillow, I begin dreaming. It’s raining out, and I’m on my way home—except home isn’t really home. It’s a house I’ve never seen before. As I approach the house, I realize it’s more like a log cabin, and the faster the rain pours down, the faster I trudge through the mud, hoping to make it home before I get caught in the middle of a thunderstorm. As I get to the door, I reach into my pocket for my keys and stop when I see something moving inside. As the raindrops roll down the windowpane of the door, I can see my mother sitting. It’s hard to see clearly what she’s doing, so I squint—she’s just sitting; she seems to be happy. I’m so happy to see her and can’t wait to open the door. I fumble with my keys and suddenly, I awaken out of my dream, and she’s gone—I awaken to my neighbor’s loud music next door. I don’t want to wake up, I want that moment, that dream to last forever. Hopelessly, I try to fall back asleep but can’t. I HAVE to get up and at least try to do one thing today.

There are plenty of errands I can run today. Slowly, I get dressed and run out to the car. It’s freezing out, and I soon realize that I don’t have both of my mittens. I just had both of them in my hands! I don’t know what I did with my other mitten; where the hell is my damn mitten? I search under the car seat, the back seat, outside of the car. I see something dark sticking out of the snow. Excited, I start digging through the snow with my bare hands, but I soon realize that it’s an old dead leaf. I start sobbing, just wanting to find my mitten but can’t. Everything gets me upset. I no longer feel like myself, I am in a dream state, struggling to pretend that I feel ok, knowing damn well that I’m not. When people speak to me, what they say is coherent but their words are slow, their voices distant. I feel like I’m in a movie with no sound.
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Building the Clinton Legacy Through Frame Alignment

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This article examines Clinton’s rhetorical strategy for creating a legacy in light of the imminent end of his second and final term as president. By examining Clinton’s public discourse from 1997 to 1999, with special attention to the period from September 1998 to June 1999, this article argues that Clinton used the frame of his race initiative to centripetally incorporate varied events and policies to redefine and bolster his legacy in the aftermath of scandal and political polarity. Specifically, President Clinton, with an eye on the legacy of the president and the identity of the Democratic Party, gathered the war in Kosovo and the shootings in Littleton, Colorado, along with their attendant disparate policies into one rhetorical frame, thereby supplying a conception of what Clinton’s 6 years as president had been about, a vision and mission for America, and an identity for the Democratic party distinct from the Republicans.

Throughout 1998 and into 1999, President Bill Clinton was in the midst of, what Murray Edelman (1988) has termed, a political spectacle—a drama “comprised of effective and ineffective leaders managing the effort to cope with distressing problems and to defend the polity against external and internal enemies” (p. 120). The discovery and investigation of President Bill Clinton’s affair with Monica Lewinsky, wrapped in the cloaks of moral disdain and political bipartisanship, was hurdling toward an impeachment trial. In his second and final term as president, Clinton was faced with questions from reporters about what, if anything, he had accomplished as president. Had his loss of moral authority rendered him ineffective in foreign affairs? What legacy would he leave behind? Had the value of any achievement been obliterated by the Lewinsky scandal? Would he only go down in history as a liar? The media speculated about what effect “Clinton fatigue” would have on Vice President Al Gore’s chances for the presidency, Hillary Clinton’s run for the Senate, and on the Democratic Party as a whole.

Such spectacles impinge on private lives—not only of those directly involved in the spectacle but also of the spectators who become visually and emotionally entwined through the ongoing media event. Fundamentally, the

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myriad public selves were asking not only of President Clinton but also of themselves, first, “Who is Bill Clinton?” and, second, “Should an immoral person be president?” Does Bill Clinton have a single or mono-identity—that of a philanderer? And, if so, how important is that to the role of president? We now know that Clinton was not the first president to frolic amorously in the White House (and he probably will not be the last), so for some the more theoretical question concerning the appropriate relationship between private and public issues, between personal morality and public affairs, became the issue in this spectacle. As both a target of the spectacle and a player in it, Clinton could and did perform a reflexive interpretative role in answering these questions.

This article explores how Clinton’s public discourse during the spectacle abstracted shared meanings from current foreign and domestic issues to create a presidential legacy and vision for the country in light of his diminishing image and the imminent end of his second and final term as president. By examining Clinton’s public speeches from 1997 to 1999, with special attention to the period from September 1998 to June 1999 (the period of the end of the president’s race initiative through the war in Kosovo), I provide an analysis of the creation of meaning developed incrementally in Clinton’s public discourse, all of which is in the form of press conferences, speeches, and question-and-answer sessions found in the *Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents* (hereinafter referred to as *WCPD*).

I argue that Clinton’s framing of the race initiative, which lasted 18 months from June 1997 to September 1998, modifies in such a way to centripetally incorporate various events and policies. Together, these form a unifying master frame that essentially ignores the Lewinsky spectacle and simultaneously redefines and bolsters his questionable legacy in the aftermath of scandal and political polarity. Specifically, toward the end of 1998 and through mid-1999, Clinton’s discourse gathered the war in Kosovo and the shootings in Littleton, Colorado, along with their attendant disparate policies (such as hate crime legislation and gun control), into one rhetorical frame of “overcoming the fear of difference,” thereby supplying a conception of what Clinton’s 6 years as president had been about, a vision and mission for America, and an identity for the Democratic Party distinct from the Republicans.

The Rhetorical Presidency

In general, the role of the president in the signifying process has increased over the 20th century. According to Ceaser, Thurow, Tulis, and Bessette (1981) and Tulis (1987), we are living in the age of the rhetorical presidency, as popular rhetoric on the part of the president, once infrequently employed, now serves as a principle tool in governing. Indeed, at times speaking is a substitute for governing, as reflected in political scientist Mary Stuckey’s (1991) retitling of the presidency as “interpreter-in-chief.” Acknowledging the president’s per-
suasive powers and relative ease of access to media, Edelman (1988) has concluded that political language has become political reality.

More specifically, the role of the rhetorical president is twofold. First, the president helps people make sense—in ways that serve presidential interests, of course—of events occurring within the nation or of events occurring outside the nation that require deliberation about the nation’s position and role in regard to those events. The ways in which a president frames such events inevitably imply or suggest an identity for the nation and/or for the political party she or he hopes will lead the nation. The identity or image that leaders frequently seek to bestow on the nation is one of virtue (Anderson, 1983; Browne, 1991). The virtuous nature of the nation, which must be revised over time to accommodate new historical circumstances (Slotkin, 1992), often depends on the collaboration of the people to be fulfilled (Browne, 1991). Hence, the president often implores the nation to join him in a virtuous mission, which, one can easily infer, may fail if the nation rejects such an invitation (Coles, 1998).

Second, as Kenneth Burke (1969, p. 391) pointed out, the president, faced with a multitude of piecemeal situations, must find some unitary principle from which all his major policies consistently radiate. What, then, might have appeared to the public as small, disorganized battles on various unrelated fronts appears instead as a coherent controlled agenda. This principle, at minimum, must give the appearance of substance to the presidential legacy, but when well employed, such a principle becomes a hallmark of presidential leadership.

In 1999, President Bill Clinton abstracted a common meaning from the war in Kosovo and his domestic race initiative that could, first, tie various issues together in a meaningful whole and, second, resonate with an interpretative framework with which the American public was already familiar. I argue that a combination of several interpretive tools cooperated to align apparently disparate events into a comprehensive whole, producing an interpretive schema that in the short term made certain actions or policies appear as logical moral imperatives for a nation striving toward virtue. In the long term, each new policy became part of a larger, overarching vision, a vision that Clinton claimed had been the crux of his agenda since the beginning of his presidency, perhaps since his boyhood. In so doing, Clinton paints an alternative legacy for himself, offers the Democratic Party (and future presidential candidate Al Gore) a saving identity, and asks the American people to prefigure a new American community.

Framing, Interpretation, and Identity

In social psychology literature, “framing” is related to a rejuvenated concern with cultural issues. Derived from bodies of literature in phenomenological sociology and cognitive psychology, framing is, in its basic form, interpretation— a process of construing or imposing meaning from or on a given phe-
nomenon. According to sociologist Alfred Schutz (1970), humans gain knowledge about the world by structuring their experiences into mental systems of relevances (levels of interest and priority) and typifications, that is, classifications. Over time, these mental processes result in a “stock of knowledge” that serves as a “scheme of interpretation” of one’s past and present experiences, enables one to anticipate future experiences, and becomes “sedimented” with each new incorporated experience (Schutz, 1970, p. 74). Although this process may sound clear and concrete, it is anything but. Schutz (1970) emphasized that these stocks of knowledge are surrounded by “zones of various gradations of vagueness, obscurity, and ambiguity” (p. 74).

Building on the work of Schutz (1970) and others, Erving Goffman (1974, pp. 11-12) suggested that situations are defined according to principles of organization, which he terms “frames.” These frameworks allow the user to locate, perceive, identify, and label an infinite number of occurrences even when the user is unaware of the frameworks’ existence. In so doing, they render what would be seen as meaningless into something meaningful (Goffman, 1974, p. 21).

These ideas correlate with theories of information processing found in cognitive psychology literature and research, which suggest that making sense of the world requires scanning and selecting from one’s experience, giving meaning to the incoming information by processing it through cognitive schema, and storing the information for future use (Holstein, 1985, Mandler, 1979, Neisser, 1976, Taylor & Crocker, 1981). Such mental processing occurs in each individual, but because humans live in a social world with other individuals, they also occur between and among individuals. While each individual can and does structure and frame his or her experience, so also can she or he aid others in the process. No one can experience everything directly. We experience much of the world’s phenomena through others’ reports. We develop images and meanings about the things we have never directly experienced by allowing others (through “expert” accounts or ordinary gossip, for instance) to mediate or frame those images and meanings for us.

Hence, for every given experience or event, numerous interpretations, or “multiple realities,” may abound (Goffman, 1974; Schutz, 1962). People often express considerable confusion about what and why something has happened or perceive experiences very differently from one another. This human need for order is akin to Kenneth Burke’s (1965) concept of piety, which he defines as loyalty to a symbolic past that imbues a person with a “sense of what properly goes with what” and creates a desire to fit experiences together into a unified whole (p. 74). Framing helps to reduce or eliminate the plethora of interpretations and instead, by proffering one master frame or interpretation, creates congruity where once there was chaos. Fulfilling that need must often precede one’s ability to act or to advocate an act with confidence.
Interestingly, Burke (1965) also likened interpretation to psychoanalytic therapy, a type of secular conversion that effects a cure by providing the patient with a new perspective and terminology that replace the patient’s “painful terminology of motives.” According to Burke, this transformation changes the entire nature of [the patient’s] problem, rephrasing it in a form for which there is a solution. . . . So we need not be surprised to find evidence that, in the secular rebirth engineered by the psychoanalytic seer, the processes of recovery from one’s effective disorders are closely interwoven with a shifting of one’s intellectualist convictions, one’s terminology of cause, purpose, and prophecy. (p. 125)

However, framing is often more than just giving any meaning or a new meaning to an event. According to Diani and Eyerman (1992), a frame is a form of categorization whose aim is to transfer meaning from what is known to what is new or, as Allen, O’ Loughlin, Jasperson, and Sullivan (1994) stated, a “process of placing information into a context of preconscious symbolism. The unconscious or preconscious references stimulate conscious judgments that might not have occurred if information had been framed . . . differently” (p. 267). For Snow and Benford (1988), the extent to which the frames strike a chord within dominant cultural beliefs—that is, the degree of cultural resonance attained by the frame—is positively correlated with success in attracting adherents. For instance, in the study of social movements (where most of the frame alignment literature is situated), Snow, Rochford, Worden, and Benford (1986) proposed that social movements must bring their politicized interpretations of events (i.e., their frames) into alignment with the preexisting frames of potential recruits. In other words, some of the activities, goals, and ideology of the social movement organization must be congruent with the individual’s interests, values, or beliefs before his or her participation will occur. The authors give the example of the civil rights movement, whose activity and demands were placed in the context of inalienable rights and other liberal political concepts that had long defined and given legitimacy to (i.e., resonated with) the American polity. Such framing helped some observers not only to understand but more important to passively accept, and perhaps actively support, activity to which they previously may not have been exposed or to which they might have been adverse.

Frame alignment is not only concerned with aligning the meanings of the event with the meanings already in the minds of the audience, creating cultural resonance, but also with aligning the meanings of several, apparently unrelated, events to each other. In real life, no event occurs in a vacuum. Life is an accumulation of one event on another, although some are more salient than others. On occasion, it appears at least rhetorically necessary to reveal or create interpretative connections among apparently disparate events. In this discur-
sive situation, frame alignment acts much like a pool rack that gathers the individually dispersed balls into a single coherent triangle.

Last, although most of the sociological literature on framing has emphasized its resource-building benefits (i.e., the effects on recruitment and/or public support primarily), framing activity also inherently involves identity construction. Most of the literature to date has focused on framing’s role in the collective identity of social movements (Benford, 1993; Coles, 1999; Coy & Woehrle, 1996; Hunt, Benford, & Snow, 1994). However, I will argue here that it applies just as well to the collective identity of a political party or a nation and, more important, to individual identity building.

The close association between collective identity and framing lies in the way adherents of the frame think about themselves and by how shared experiences are interpreted (Johnston, Larana, & Gusfield, 1994). When people organize themselves around a common identity (such as that of a social movement, political party, or nation), they may act as social laboratories, advocating and perhaps testing new ways of life, prefiguring new forms of community (Carroll, 1992).

Moreover, although frame alignment can successfully make meaningful connections among various events and policies—enough to enable the public to make sense of the plethora of political happenings, act in accordance with those shared understandings, and develop a group identity—alone it may not be sufficient to build an individual’s presidential legacy. A legacy must have a sense of history—a sense of being passed down from one generation to another; it must have a biography.

The growing literature on the concept of “biographing” stems from the social constructionist approach and suggests that, similar to framing, biographing is the management of consistency and continuity of life experiences (Gubrium, Holstein, & Buckholdt, 1994). As such, producing an integrated and meaningful interpretive biographical framework requires ongoing interpretation and reinterpretation of the events in one’s life. The practice and form of the interpretation are influenced, although not determined, by the social context and representational resources at hand.

Biographing involves consideration of one’s past for some purpose, highlighting the defining aspects of one’s past in such a way to frame and organize one’s character and actions into a story that makes sense in light of the present. This comports well with establishing a legacy, a story of what one’s life and actions have been all about and, hence, of what one can bequest to his or her successor.

Bill Clinton’s discourse, during the period addressed, ties numerous events and policies together under one umbrella of meaning, which helps the public understand those events. But Clinton does not stop there; he takes that meaning and locates its roots not only in the past 6 years of his presidency but also in the early days of boyhood in the South. By doing so, he offers an alternative
interpretation of his life and life work to the public and future presidential historians.

The Rhetorical Situation

Any rhetorical strategy is only consciously planned to a limited extent. Rhetorical form and content is frequently constrained by events beyond the control of the speaker, and rhetoric must, if success is its goal, adapt to and accommodate these events. Moreover, the essence of any frame is necessarily a simplification of a complex issue. To be successful, it cannot be ridiculously simple, and it must, as mentioned before, resonate with a sufficiently broad constituency.

The race issue has been salient in America throughout the country's history, no less today than during the peak of the civil rights movement or during slavery. Race issues have adapted to include racial-ethnic groups other than the original Native Americans, African Americans, and European Americans. Legal reforms since the 1960s, controversial in themselves, reduced some disparities among the races but left the most fundamental disparities (e.g., defacto residential and school segregation), especially among Native and African Americans, untouched. Discomfort, resentment, and anger are frequently near the surface when issues of race are discussed. Race issues resonate across America, but in this case, Clinton was aided even more by the occurrence of several incidents that make a race-related frame reverberate with the American public.

In June 1997, when the political scene was relatively quiet, Clinton had formed the President's Advisory Board on Race and charged the board with delineating the disparities among the races, initiating dialogue on race issues around the country, and locating examples of Americans working cooperatively to make progress on race relations. This 18-month project came to be called "the race initiative." Toward the end of the initiative in June 1998, the saliency of unresolved race issues in this country was made painfully undeniable when James Byrd, a Black Texan, was dragged to his death by three White men.

About the time that the race initiative was coming to an ignominious end, the Bosnian situation likewise had simmered down without American military action, but it left many feeling that the United States had not done enough to prevent the numerous massacres. By the end of 1998, the Serbian government had turned its ethnic-cleansing policy from the Muslims in Bosnia to the Albanian Muslims in Kosovo. As the conflict in Kosovo heated up, it appeared that it would be a repeat of Bosnia in similarly bloody proportions. At the same time, it presented an opportunity for NATO to consolidate its power in Europe. Eventually, by February of 1999, when the results of negotiations between Slobodan Milosevic and the Kosovar Liberation Army in Rambouillet, France, suited neither NATO nor the Clinton administration, an undeclared war was nearing.
So, for most of 1997 and 1998, the race initiative was treated primarily as a domestic policy, whereas the Bosnian and Kosovar conflicts generally rolled along a separate foreign policy track. During the 15-month race initiative, on occasion and in passing, Clinton mentioned several ethnic conflicts around the globe as examples of racial tension, but his focus clearly was on domestic unity and domestic policies, such as housing discrimination, economic opportunities, educational reforms, and small business loans. Similarly, although the term *ethnic cleansing* is used on occasion to describe the conflict in Kosovo (as it was in the Bosnian conflict), the conflict is much more frequently referred to as a “humanitarian catastrophe” or as a disaster threatening the stability of the region and an impediment to the goal of a united Europe. The two policy areas—the race initiative and Kosovo—were not linked together in any elaborated way until the president’s personal and political interests were directly challenged.

On September 16, 1998, at a news conference with Czech President Havel, a journalist inquired of President Clinton,

> Your initiative on race finishes this month, and your Press Secretary yesterday agreed that the race initiative isn’t flying because of your current problems and it was bogged down in the muck and mire [referring to the Lewinsky affair]. Do you regret that your personal problems affected your potential legacy on race and that it may just, at best, be a band-aid approach to racism in America? (*WCPD*, 1998, No. 38, p. 1807)

Put on the defensive, Clinton at first answered the question from the expected domestic policy perspective. He pointed out that legislation that would reduce the backlog of cases before the Equal Opportunity Commission and enforce antidiscrimination laws is currently before Congress. He mentioned that the administration is trying to create affirmative economic and educational opportunities in distressed inner-city and rural areas. But then, unexpectedly, he broadened the frame of reference to include a foreign policy element:

> But I expect this [concern with bettering race relations] to be a central part of the work I do in the next two years. I expect this to be a central part of the work I do for the rest of my life. I think in the 21st century—when you go back to World War II, and you think about the part of the Nazi experience that was directed against the Jews, and you look all the way through the ensuing years, all the way to the end of this century, down to what we’ve seen in Rwanda, the Middle East, Northern Ireland, Bosnia, Kosovo, you name it, it will be incumbent upon the United States to be a force for tolerance and racial reconciliation for the foreseeable future. (*WCPD*, 1998, No. 38, p. 1808)

In that reply, the two policy tracks intersected. The failed race initiative collided with the need both for a peace rhetoric and for a redefinition of his life work. Clinton, probably unwittingly at the time, began to interweave these and
eventually other events (the murder of Matthew Shepard, which occurred in October 1998, and later the shooting in Littleton, Colorado, which occurred in April 1999) to produce a rhetorical tapestry that makes sense of the upcoming intervention in Kosovo and simultaneously establishes a legacy for himself, a mission for the people, and an identity for the Democrats. This encompassing rhetorical frame is most complete when his audience is composed of Democratic Party officials and members from around the country. A series of such meetings coincided with and, hence, helped shape these other rhetorical events in the spring of 1999 as the party prepared for the upcoming 2000 elections. Moreover, the fact that these events all occurred near the turn of the millennium adds a sense of historical import and urgency.

The Frame of “Difference”: A Psychological Problem With a Community Solution

Because any particular life event is usually the result or manifestation of numerous, complicated factors, framing frequently necessitates a simplification or abstraction of meaning. The framer becomes involved in a process of abstracting certain qualities, supposedly the essence of the event (often informed by the special interests of the framer), from the given historical complexities (Burke, 1965, p. 107) of the event. Locating the essence or unitary principle of an event or events is a dynamic process, which underscores the importance of analyzing a period of discourse rather than one particular piece of rhetoric. Recognition and development of the principle occur over a period of time. The form of the principle may be influenced not only by the framer’s own interests but by other signifying events that occur and by the perceived needs of the audience to which the rhetoric will be directed. This can be seen in Clinton’s recharacterization of the race initiative over a period of a few months.

According to Carcasson and Rice’s (1999, p. 258) analysis of Clinton’s rhetoric on the 18-month race initiative, Clinton portrayed racial inequality as caused mostly by income inequality and gave short shrift to discrimination and bigotry as causative factors. However, the murders of James Byrd (occurring near the end of the initiative) and Matthew Shepard (occurring after the initiative had officially ended) and the imminent war in Kosovo redirected Clinton’s rhetoric toward other causative concerns. After those events, Clinton’s discourse focused more on the psychological determinant of racism and broadened racism to include ethnicity, sexual orientation, and religion—in other words, “difference.”

Playing the role of Burke’s psychoanalyst, Clinton first clearly diagnosed America’s difficulties with difference as a psychological, pathological, even demonic problem. In a February 25, 1999, interview with Janet L. Cohen of the Armed Forces Television Network, Clinton established the fear of difference as a widespread but abnormal condition. He stated,
That psychological problem is at the bottom of a lot of this racial and ethnic hatred around the world. A lot of these groups themselves are deprived of opportunity. They’ve had economic adversity, had all kinds of diversity [sic], and a lot of them, frankly, are taught as groups that what gives meaning to their lives is that they’re not a member of this other group; at least they’ve got somebody to look down on. (WCPD, 1999, No. 9, p. 359)

Embedding racial conflict within a psychological approach implies that this fear of difference and its discriminatory outcomes are mostly an individual problem, manifested in those who have low self-esteem, have suffered economically, or have not been reared correctly. This insinuates that only a few bad apples are guilty of such behavior, and every individual is left to decide whether he or she is one of them. Simultaneously, Clinton still avoids discussion of systemic discrimination that is, perhaps unintentionally, built into the routines of various societal institutions or that is practiced among the wealthy or middle classes.

Overcoming this psychosis, the phobia of difference, became Clinton’s master frame and unitary principle through the first half of 1999, which encompassed both the war in Kosovo and a series of Democratic National Committee meetings in preparation for upcoming elections. Other policies and missions then emanated from this unitary principle.

Clinton’s rhetoric situates this global racial conundrum in the urgency of the coming 21st century and juxtaposes this fear of difference as a threat to progressive technological advances such as genetic engineering and the Internet and the prosperous world that could come from globalization. Clinton described this juxtaposition at the award ceremony for the National Teacher of the Year in April 1999:

It is truly ironic that here we stand on the verge of a new century and a new millennium—where education is more important than ever before, because we have this explosion in technology, drawing us closer to different people of different cultures, and our own country is becoming more diverse—we can imagine a future that is more prosperous and more peaceful and more interconnected, in a very human way, than ever before . . . and now we’ve found that that future was threatened by the oldest demon of human society, which is our fear of people who are different from us. (WCPD, 1999, No. 16, p. 677)

To be consistent with the laws of physics, it would have been more accurate for Clinton to say that there has been an implosion in technology, as an explosion would hardly draw people together. In fact, a number of scholars (see Northcott, 1999) have charged that technology has indeed contributed to an atomization of American society. However, Clinton’s discourse overlooks those ideas and the fact that the vast majority of the world’s people lack access to technology or the Internet. Instead, Clinton incorporates language that describes technology (particularly the Internet) as forces of integration battling against the disintegrating forces posed by the world’s obsession with difference.
Pitting modern technology against the fear of difference creates a prophetic dualistic scheme in which technology represents goodness, progress, and promise, and the American obsession with difference represents evil, regression to the primitive, and a threat to the future. On occasion, Clinton portrays technology as a neutral phenomenon that can be used for good or evil, the latter being more likely when it is co-opted by people who follow their primitive urges and use the Internet to make terrorist bombs or racist Web sites. But more frequently, Clinton exonerates technology by repeating that ethnic groups around the world, particularly in Kosovo, are not fighting over the distribution of technology resources but over those old demons of difference. Painting this picture of a demonic psychosis gives the public a clear picture of the target problem, but Clinton must offer a positive alternative, a solution, for this frame to lead to proactive adherence rather than mere despair.

When Clinton had discussed race in the 15 months (June 1997-September 1998) that the Advisory Board on Race existed, he repeatedly reminded his audiences that by the middle of the 21st century, there would be no majority race in America. Expressing the fears of a few others before him (most notably Schlesinger, 1992), Clinton indicated that he was determined that rather than becoming many Americas, separate, unequal, and isolated, America should be one, united. Although Americans should appreciate, even celebrate, their differences, they more importantly should identify the common values that unite them. As a remedy to the fear of difference, he offered the "celebration of difference" but insisted that such a celebration be conducted within the more important embrace of commonalities as Americans. In fact, one of the duties of the race advisory board was to identify those American commonalities. However, by the start of the war in Kosovo in March 1999, the initiative had formally ended without success in that endeavor. So, Clinton used the same idea but widened the focus from American commonalities to universal commonalities.

Unfortunately, the only characteristic that Clinton could identify as commonly held throughout the world was that we are all humans. Hence, "our common humanity" and the undelineated "what we have in common is more important than what divides us" became the sloganistic refrains of the 2-month war.

However, by the middle of March 1999, Clinton offered more than just slogans to his audience. He invited them, particularly his Democratic listeners, into an elaborated description of community:

We believe in a profound way in the idea of community—not some sappy, purely altruistic idea, but that we ourselves cannot have the lives we want unless we give our brothers and sisters round his country, and like-minded people all around the world the same opportunity. (WCPD, 1999, No. 12, p. 487)

With all of our increasing diversity in America, I wanted an America that really reaffirmed the idea of community, of belonging; the idea that none of us can pursue our individual destinies as fully on our own as we can when we want our neighbors to do well, too; and that there is some concrete benefit to the idea
of community that goes beyond just feeling good about living in a country where you’re not discriminated against because of some condition or predisposition or anything else that has nothing to do with the law and nothing to do with how your neighbors live their lives; and that what we have in common is more important than what divides us. (WCPD, 1999, No. 12, pp. 491-492)

Clinton’s focus on community resonates with a growing perception that America’s cultural bent toward individualism has all but obliterated any sense of community (see Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 1985, 1991; Cowan, 1993; Etzioni, 1993; Jason, 1997; Lyon, 1989; Meyrowitz, 1985; and Shaffer & Anundsen, 1993, just some of the writings addressing this concern). However, Clinton’s concept suggested too that Americans simultaneously can have their individualism and community. Although he debased the idea of altruism as “sappy,” he proffered the pursuit of self-interest as the incentive for each individual to seek her or his neighbor’s well-being.

Noteworthy here are Mary Rousseau’s (1991) writings on community. Analyzing Aristotle’s musings on community, Rousseau (1991, p. 30) argued that community needs to be based on altruism (though not the sappy kind). Merely acknowledging our common human nature, which Aristotle also offered as a basis for community, is insufficient to produce altruism. Rousseau contended that the concept of common humanity produces a false universalism that fails to accommodate the particularities of individuals, which is necessary for true altruism. “A common humanity,” Rousseau wrote,

is a fine basis for civic equality, for granting the same human dignity and human rights to all members of the human species. It can be the basis for a certain sympathy by which we wish certain elements of human well-being to all of mankind. . . . We would then not discriminate in the bad sense, treating people differently on the basis of sex, color or age. . . . But with such a universal sympathy, we would lose a more important and valuable kind of discrimination. . . . We would not be able to recognize differences, and to treat different people differently, when it was appropriate to do so. In other words, if a common human nature is the only basis for one person’s identification of another as his other self, then the friendship becomes abstract instead of real. (p. 30)

By failing to offer specific commonalities while trying to downplay Americans’ differences, Clinton’s rhetorical community offers platitudes rather than pragmatic ideas for implementation.

**Aligning Disparate Events**

Frame alignment, the gathering in of unrelated events or policies into one master frame, can be done indirectly or directly. Indirectly, alignment is accomplished by merely transitioning from one topic to another or intermingling topics in any given speech. For instance, Clinton often stated that he “is
now going to say a few words about Kosovo,” but his next three paragraphs would be about difference and hate crimes. In a couple of speeches, Clinton even relied on cognitive information-processing theory to make the connection. Sounding more like an academician than a politician, Clinton explained that the human tendency to devise mental categories that aid in comprehending human phenomena should be seen only as a tool and not in itself the truth. To think in such categorical terms, he suggested, only sets up false choices between domestic policy and foreign policy and false divisions among people.\textsuperscript{19}

For the most part, Clinton’s framing relies on this indirect approach. Speaking to a Democratic National Committee meeting in Washington in March 1999, 2 days before U.S. air strikes on Serbia began, he aligned support for his policy in Kosovo with support for the now-defunct race initiative and its attendant policies.

That’s [the world being obsessed with holding others down] why I think it’s important that we continue the President’s Initiative on Race, which we’re doing; why I think it’s important that we pass the employment nondiscrimination act and the hate crimes law that I put before the Congress; why I think it’s important we stand up against ethnic cleansing. (\textit{WCPD}, 1999, No. 12, p. 505)

The subtle confluence of issues ties them together into one related framework, in which support for one policy implies support for another, and the critique of ethnic cleansing implies the critique of American ethnic divisions.

But occasionally, the president overtly and directly makes the connections for people, often transitioning from one topic to an apparently unrelated topic by asking, “What does this have to do with that?” For instance, speaking in April 1999 at a Majority 2000 luncheon in Dearborn, Michigan, Clinton discussed social security, education, and other domestic policies and then said, “I want to tell you how this business in Kosovo fits with all the other things. . . .”\textsuperscript{20}

Eventually, in remarks at a reception in New York City, Clinton suggested that the three remaining challenges of building the global society of the 21st century are developing a financial system, guarding the environment, and going “to the heart in country after country after country of this dark compulsion people have to hate and fight and kill each other because of their religious, their racial, their cultural, or their other differences” (\textit{WCPD}, 1998, No. 42, p. 2038). In other words, Clinton had taken his failing race initiative abroad, where fighting racial discrimination is less constrained by the need for persuasive dialogue and slow-moving congressional legislation but rather where one can fight the fear of difference with bombs and bullets.

But Kosovo was not the only event that became aligned with the race initiative. On October 10, 1998, Matthew Shepard, a gay college student in Laramie, Wyoming, was brutally beaten to death. Clinton remarked to the public:
One thing must remain clear: Hate and prejudice are not American values. I hope that... Americans will once again search their hearts and do what they can to reduce their own fear and anxiety and anger at people who are different. *(WCPD, 1998, No. 42, p. 2032)*

Two days after the Shepard murder, Clinton spoke at a reception for the Democratic gubernatorial candidate of New York, where he described New York as a city with remarkable diversity where all kinds of people have the chance to live out their dreams. However, Clinton pointed out, such is not the case all over the world. In Kosovo, in the Middle East, and other places around the world, people are held back or crushed because others are “so animated by fear and their compulsive need to look down on others that whole nations are kept from becoming what they ought to be” *(WCPD, 1998, No. 42, p. 2037)*. Lest Americans think they have already overcome this universal human condition, Clinton alluded to Matthew Shepard and reminded the country that “America cannot do good in the world unless America is good at home” *(WCPD, 1998, No. 42, p. 2038)*.

Then, on April 20, 1999, a multiple shooting at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado, grabbed the attention of Americans across the country. Initially, the shooting was portrayed within the old frame of school violence and its attendant policies of gun control and media regulation. However, soon some news reports indicated that the students who did the shooting had been teased and ostracized by some of their peers because of their lack of athletic prowess and the way they dressed. In turn, the victims became perpetrators by finding someone to target because of his differences (one of the 12 students killed was an African American boy). Hence, by May 14 through May 16, 1999, in another series of speeches to Democratic National Committee luncheons and dinners, Clinton aligned Littleton with Kosovo, the James Byrd and Matthew Shepard cases, and the policies of the Hate Crimes Act, Brady Bill (gun control) modifications, the Employment Nondiscrimination Act, and Timothy McVeigh’s bombing of the federal building in Oklahoma. The frame of difference was bursting at the seams.*22*

**Effects of Clinton’s Frame Alignment**

Three main effects arise from this frame alignment process. First, focusing on one frame inevitably leads people to overlook alternatives at numerous political levels. Although I do not mean to imply that this was Clinton’s intention, going to war does shift the public focus from his personal morality. It reminds the public that Clinton is busy fulfilling his important presidential duties, which extend far beyond the activities that take place in his office. It also implies that, even with personal weaknesses, one can effectively perform stately tasks.
Second, acting on the various policies related to each large issue becomes both a moral imperative in the process of overcoming racism. At a March 30, 1999, electronics industry dinner, after describing how the psychological fear of difference manifested itself in the Balkans, talking about the deaths of James Byrd and Matthew Shepard, and reiterating the slogans of “celebrating our differences” and “our common humanity,” Clinton concluded, “So I ask all of you tonight to support what the United States and our 18 other NATO allies are trying to do in the Balkans” (*WCPD*, 1999, No. 13, p. 540). Likewise, in an April 6, 1999, speech on the proposed Hate Crimes Prevention Act, Clinton reviewed the psychology exhibited in Kosovo and concluded that this is why passage of the hate crimes bill is so important (*WCPD*, 1999, No. 14, p. 587-590).

Clinton’s discourse also uses America’s existing racial diversity as a reason to support the military campaign in Kosovo. First, Clinton defined the war’s supporters as a diverse group of people. For instance, he defined NATO as a coalition of diverse nations, representing 780 million people of various religions, ethnicities, and races (*WCPD*, 1999, No. 17, p. 710). Beginning in the May 1999 series of speeches to Democratic National Committees, Clinton reiterated a story about a Native American group’s visit to the White House. They and the president sat in a circle on the White House floor together, and one of the young American Indians stated how proud he would be to serve in Kosovo to prevent a genocide similar to that which occurred to Native Americans in the United States. In another speech to New York’s Democratic National Committee, Clinton added that even American Jews were for the war in Kosovo, the implication being that because those being ethnically cleansed in Kosovo were Muslims, Jewish support might not normally be forthcoming (*WCPD*, 1999, No. 20, p. 943). At a Sons of Italy dinner on May 22, Clinton told a story of a Polish soldier in Kosovo and delineated the types of support the country of Italy is giving to the war effort (*WCPD*, 1999, No. 21, p. 970). Speaking on Memorial Day, Clinton reminded the audience at Arlington National Cemetery “how fitting it is that we are standing against ethnic cleansing with our wonderful myriad, rainbow, multiethnic military” (*WCPD*, 1999, No. 22, p. 1008). This diversity of support lends credibility to U.S. policy. If people from all these various backgrounds and varied interests support the war, how could any American not?

Last but not least, Clinton’s master frame provides a vision for the American people, an identity for the Democratic Party as it begins to form its platform and recruit its various candidates for the upcoming national elections, and a legacy for himself. All three of these radiate from the unifying vision Clinton concocts of the future American community, where no one can succeed unless his or her neighbors also succeed.

In presenting the victory of community over the fear of difference, Clinton asks the American people to envision a new form of American society. Clinton’s
vision offers Americans an escape from a year of events that viscerally remind Americans that they are far from perfect. It offers them a new lens by which to view themselves not as passive victims of this psychological demon that appears to have plagued human history but as change agents, or secular exorcists, in overcoming this battle between the forces of progress and integration and the forces of regression and disintegration. In the sense that Clinton presents this vision not as a portrait of how America currently is but rather as what it could be in the 21st century, Clinton is also offering the country a mission. For instance, after talking about Kosovo to the audience at the White House's Seventh Millenium Evening, Clinton charged the audience with building a community that can withstand the warped side of human nature. He said,

Our challenge now, and the world's, is to harmonize diversity and integration, to build a richly textured fabric of civilization that will make the most of God's various gifts, and that will resist those who would tear that fabric apart by appealing to the dark recesses that often seem to lurk in even the strongest souls. (WCPD, 1999, No. 15, p. 633)

More specifically tying that challenge to specific policies, Clinton stated,

If we want America to do good around the world, we have to be good at home, first. Second, if we want to lead the world for peace and freedom, we've got to stand up against ethnic cleansing and mass killing. That's what Kosovo is about.25 America must set a model for the world. How Americans respond to both Littleton and Kosovo will say a lot about what kind of country we have for years to come. (WCPD, 1999, No. 20, p. 911)

This vision is offered as well to the Democratic Party as the basis of their platform, as the collective identity that distinguishes them from the Republican Party.

But the reason I'm here tonight, since I'm not running for anything anymore, is that I know that the reason we were able to follow good policies and do good things is that we started out with a vision and ideas that have now been embraced by my party, by the Democratic Party. And they make a difference. And they are different. They're different from what we were doing before, and they're certainly different—as you can tell if you just pick up the paper in the morning—from what the other party believes in Washington. (WCPD, 1999, No. 20, p. 926)26

And last, this bundle of ideas about what America and the world should look like becomes Clinton's personal legacy. His discourse establishes this vision not only as something he hopes to pass on to America, but through biographing, Clinton implies that these ideas have been building throughout his life. First, Clinton makes certain it is understood by the public and party members that this vision was there since he first ran for president in 1991-1992. This vision is what his first 6 years had been founded on, and it has effectively changed the face of the country.
When I came to California in 1991 and early ’92, this was a very different place in a different country. People were divided and confused and drifting and frustrated. And I believed very strongly it was because we had no overriding vision for our future, no strategy to achieve it, no way, therefore, of pulling the American people together and getting us pointed in the right direction. And that’s really why I got in the race for President. . . . And the work of the last six years has largely been our combined efforts to take these ideas and that vision and hammer them into specific proposals. It’s what animates our efforts today. (WCPD, 1999, No. 20, pp. 910-911)

One would expect that a president would have this unified vision of what his administration and term(s) in office have been about, but on occasion, Clinton took the audience further back than the past 6 years. Often, in one-on-one interviews, Clinton referred to his boyhood and explained that growing up in the South with a single mother and grandparents and with interracial interactions all worked together to create this man with this particular vision. One of the first times he did this during this period was in an interview with Janet L. Cohen of the Armed Forces Television Network in February 1999. After discussing military pay and recruitment issues and Kosovo, Cohen asked the president why he has championed the rights of the underdog. Clinton replied,

My mother was widowed when I was born, and she was off studying to be a nurse. My grandparents raised me until I was 4. My grandmother worked, as well as my grandfather; my grandmother was a nurse. So I had always been around women who had to work to make a contribution to their family’s welfare. And so I think from early childhood I always was particularly sensitive to any kind of discrimination against women or just denial of opportunity. And I was always sort of rooting for them because of my mother and my grandmother.

And on the race thing, I think it was because of my grandfather and the fact that when I was a child he had a little grocery store in a predominantly black area of this little town we lived in. Most of the customers were black. And most of what I learned about people and human nature and treating everyone the same and also discrimination, I learned as a little boy just listening and watching and observing and being taught.

So, in a funny way, most . . . white southerners were at a disadvantage in dealing with the civil rights revolution because they were raised with more explicit racial prejudice. But some of us were actually at an advantage because we had more human contact with African-Americans before others did, and if we were lucky enough to have parents or grandparents that taught us differently, I think it made a difference. (WCPD, 1999, No. 9, p. 359)

Coming at a time when his moral character and legacy was under question (refer to Note 1), Clinton in a sense acted as his own psychotherapist and took the opportunity to reinterpret himself. Although many were psychoanalyzing Clinton’s past to answer the question “Why is he a philanderer?” Clinton selected certain experiences and memories (and ignored others) of his administration and childhood that together offered himself and the public an alternative definition of his persona and life work.
In light of the facts that the Clinton administration produced the first budget surplus (estimated to be about $5.5 trillion over the next 5 years) in recent years and that the country is currently experiencing the longest economic boom in the 20th century, Clinton technically had other legacy options to offer the public. However, balanced budgets lack the moral impetus on which to construct a biography or build support for additional policies.

On the other hand, Clinton's portrait of America as a diverse community in which each individual's success is only possible or of value when it is contingent on another's success certainly poses a moral mission to a country long struggling with the tension between the individual's right to the pursuit of happiness and the community implied in a democracy of the people. The brother's keeper story, or the “he ain't heavy, he's my brother” theme, has been embedded in the mythology that America was a land welcoming the overburdened. Yet, the more diverse the country has become and the more income inequality has increased (Johnston, 1999) over the past three decades, the more difficult it has become to spell out exactly and pragmatically what those values would entail in terms of public policy. Clinton charged the American public and the Democratic Party with somehow finding a way to take every American along on the ride into the 21st century and suggested a number of policies that would supposedly aid in achieving that end (i.e., gun control, hate crimes, fighting against ethnic cleansing, etc.).

In the short term, and pragmatically speaking, such a framework got him through the war in Kosovo with little American dissent (the fact that he refused to use ground troops in Kosovo probably did not hurt either). Taking the race initiative abroad by stopping ethnic cleansing in the Balkans appeared easier to do and more morally urgent than solving racism here at home. Also, his spurt of speeches to Democratic Party members apparently persuaded more people to donate to the party (Seelye, 1999). However, in terms of the specific pieces of legislation that were piggybacked onto this framework, outcomes were mixed. Congress failed to pass the tighter gun control act, leaving the gun show loophole open, and the federal Hate Crimes Act, which would add sexual orientation, sex, and disability to hate crimes laws.

Moreover, it is dubious whether the American public adopted the mission for the long term or whether it believes the Democratic Party has such a distinct identity from the Republican Party. In recent years, declining voter turnout and the growing interest in third-party politics seem to indicate a feeling that the Democratic and Republican Parties appear as two sides of the same coin. Indeed, it is somewhat ironic that Clinton, who earned a reputation for bringing the Democratic Party closer to the political center by co-opting a number of Republican issues, such as crime, a balanced budget, and welfare reform (McManus, 1998), is the same person offering the Democratic Party a distinguishing identity. More likely, Clinton's discourse left the dramaturgical presi-
dency intact, leaving Washington insiders fascinated with the blow-by-blow account of partisan and personal ambition but leaving the public wondering if either party has any interest in the public good.

On a more intangible level, Clinton’s rhetoric tapped into several longstanding cultural conflicts as well. These so-called culture wars frequently occur between the extreme ends of the two political parties. According to James Hunter (1999), these battles have largely, though not entirely, been fought over public issues concerned with private matters, such as abortion or homosexuality. However, underlying these battles over specific issues is a more important “war for the nation’s soul” (presidential candidate Pat Buchanan, quoted in Williams, 1999) or “struggle over who will shape the nation’s identity” (Hunter, 1999, p. 18).

In large part, Clinton’s rhetoric attempted to accommodate, or find a compromise between (or pejoratively speaking, attempted to ride the fence on), both sides of the debates. Perhaps in a desire to please as many factions as he could, or in keeping with the American optimism that one can have it all, Clinton’s discourse essentially chose both individualism and community, both pluralism and monoculturalism.

In addition, the timing of Clinton’s frame alignment came when his personal morality was under question. His sexual fidelity and lying had become the focus not only of conservatives who pursued impeachment but also—through seemingly unending hours of broadcasted grand jury videotapes and online viewing of the graphic independent counsel’s report—of the country, which then entered a debate over the role of personal morality in the political context. In practical terms, pulling disparate but pressing and salient issues together into one frame helped overshadow the repercussions of the Lewinsky scandal. Clinton’s discourse resisted the portrayal of himself and his administration as one of dalliance. Instead, the reframed discourse reflexively redefined Clinton by conferring seriousness and depth of character to himself. His concern with race and community in America became the main staple of his identity, embedded there through early childhood experiences. Hence, the incidents of sexual promiscuity became not his primary identity but rather detours from his essential character. Measure of the success of the newly constructed identity might be found in the fact that Clinton’s job approval rating remained above 60% for most of this period (Berke, 1999a; McManus, 1998; Nagourney & Kagay, 1998).

Moreover, by shifting the limelight from these personal, though no longer private, concerns to the issue of overcoming difference and building community, Clinton refocused the discourse from, for lack of a better term, “micro morality” to “macro morality.” Clinton’s discourse and actions shifted the question from the simple and polarized “Should an immoral person be president?” (a question designed to fit the needs of poll takers) to a more complicated “To what extent does it matter if an immoral person is president?” By going to war and refocusing the discourse away from his personal morality to
presidential issues, Clinton was essentially saying, “Regardless of whether I should be president, I am president, and I am doing the work of a president. Let’s talk about this work instead.” This refocusing suggests that in the bigger picture, racism, hate, poverty, and education, for instance, are also moral matters deserving more attention than any one individual’s morality. Clinton’s rhetoric about race and community, about leaving no one behind as we enter the 21st century, reminded the public that, in the process of erasing the false dichotomy between the personal and the political, issues of the common good are often diminished in a spectacle-oriented media culture, where frequently the adversarial human interest story, albeit here a presidential one, becomes the focal point, while history, social structure, and inequalities are elided (Edelman, 1988). To some extent, Clinton’s rhetoric may have been effective in this regard, as the majority of the public, according to most surveys, did not think his personal morality was sufficient justification for a political impeachment.

On the other hand, this is not to say that Clinton’s discourse on race and war was intended to or succeeded in enlightening the public on the historical or structural aspects of these issues. Indeed, Clinton’s focus on the psychological aspect of difference meant other reasons for conflict (domestic or foreign)—economics, politics, Western intervention, debt, and so forth—were ignored. Blame is focused on a warped human nature, not on structural elements. Bringing Kosovo into this psychological explanation implies that if one crazed individual—Milosevic (the human interest angle)—could be removed from power, the ethnic problems would be resolved. The psychological focus also assures Americans that racism is not only an American problem but is practiced around the world, perhaps to a greater degree. Americans can then feel better about themselves, put the domestic race initiative behind them, and focus for the time being on helping others who suffer from racism worse than theirs.

In sum, this study outlines the ways frame alignment processes can serve a variety of ends at one time. Here, they worked to build (or at least attempted to build) support for a variety of originally unconnected issues, which is the use that scholars usually attribute to frame alignment. But here also, frame alignment created a sense of mission and identity for a party and a nation and helped to construct a legacy for an outgoing president. In addition, I posed biographing, a social constructionist concept more commonly used in ethnographic studies of client-therapist discourse, as a frame alignment process that can be used in political discourse. This raises a number of questions for further research. Presidential public discourse generally presents few opportunities for most presidents to elaborate on their personal lives or childhood experiences; presidents normally refrain from personalizing public proclamations, speeches to Congress, declarations of war, and so forth. To what extent can biographing add to or subtract from the credibility of advocated policies or of the advocate? Can biographing, or frame alignment in general, in some para-
doxical fashion effectively maintain the curiosity of the public through human interest but simultaneously focus the public on issues of social and common good? Because Clinton used biographing mostly in one-on-one interviews or in speeches to party members, the “appropriateness” of the context of biographing may very much determine its effectiveness. How much control can a public figure exert over his or her self-definition through the use of frame alignment processes? And to what extent can presidents or any public figure discursively determine how his or her legacy will be recorded in future historical texts?

This also brings us to a weakness in many rhetorical or discursive analyses and present here as well: Most such studies, if they measure the efficacy of rhetoric at all, do so by asking whether the discourse comported with established rhetorical devices and strategies rather than by measuring the effect of the rhetoric on the audience. To be sure, such measurements are difficult to ascertain in the real world where controlled experimental contexts cannot be created. Nevertheless, study of the impact and/or effectiveness of this particular framing performance would be enhanced by further long-term analyses of Democratic Party rhetoric to identify substantive changes that may be due to Clinton’s discourse or by qualitative studies of local initiatives (such as community race dialogues or grassroots projects designed to enhance community relations) to determine their frequency and motivation. As to Clinton’s legacy, the next glut of history textbooks and presidential biographies may be more telling, as the interpretative frameworks they offer of the Clinton presidency may have more long-term force in shaping the Clinton legacy than anything Clinton himself may have said.

Notes

1. For instance, on January 21, 1998, Jim Lehrer asked Clinton on the PBS News Hour, “What should the American people think about their President right now? You’re going into . . . the last 3 years of your administration: you got all this controversy today” (Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents [WCPD], 1998, No. 41, p. 113). On September 2, 1998, at a press conference with Russian President Boris Yeltsin, aUPI reporter asked, “Speaking of the challenges that we face as a nation . . . has the reaction since your admission of a relationship with Ms. Lewinsky . . . given you any cause for concern that you may not be as effective as you should be in leading the country?” (WCPD, 1998, No. 36, p. 1691). On September 16, during a press conference with President Havel of Czechoslovakia, a reporter prodded, “What do you say to people who have said that you have lost all the moral authority to lead this Nation or to conduct foreign affairs?” (WCPD, 1998, No. 38, p. 1805). In a March 19, 1999, news conference, a reporter asked Clinton whether his legacy will be about lying (WCPD, 1999, No. 12, p. 479). And in a question-and-answer session with newspaper editors on April 15, 1999, a reporter inquired, “As you near the end of your second term in office and
deal with such issues as the Balkans, what legacy do you believe you are leaving to the American public?" (WCPD, 1999, No. 15, p. 652).

2. For instance, "The Man Who Won’t Say Why," an editorial in The Economist (May 22, 1999, p. 33) argued that Americans will yearn for a new president with some degree of reserve after Clinton. And "New York’s Musical Chairs," an editorial in the May 29, 1999, issue of The Economist, argued that Hilary was too identified with what could increasingly be a "sleazy-looking lame-duck administration" (p. 30). See also Berke (1999a). Later in the year, see Berke (1999b) and Kohut (1999).

3. By using the term disparate, I do not intend to imply here that race relations in America and in the Balkans have no commonalities. Indeed, many of the same social, economic, and psychological factors are probably present in both situations. Moreover, at times race relations in one country can affect race relations in another. Frame alignment can often serve the purpose of educating people as to the real intersections of various superficially unrelated issues. However, the point here is that in this situation, Clinton’s race initiative had not aspired to making those types of connections previously. It had focused only on domestic issues, and then only on race (not difference), until the war in Kosovo and the need for a Democratic Party identity and a legacy became salient.


5. See Goldzwig (1999). The articles in this special issue address various rhetorical strategies in regard to civil rights since World War I.


7. Clinton sometimes listed various global ethnic conflicts, such as those in India, Northern Ireland, Rwanda, the Middle East, Russia, Bosnia, and Kosovo. See, for instance, "Opening Remarks in a Roundtable Discussion on Race in Akron, Ohio" (WCPD, Vol. 33, No. 49, pp. 1957-1959); "Remarks to the 75th Annual Convention of the American Federation of Teachers in New Orleans, Louisiana" (WCPD, 1998, No. 30, pp. 1432-1439); and "Remarks to President’s Advisory Board on Race" (WCPD, 1998, No. 39, pp. 1834-1838).

8. This frame was not eliminated but was moved to a peripheral position, particularly in the speeches to the Democratic audiences. In his speeches specifically related to Kosovo, Clinton frequently continued to define Kosovo less in its ethnic framework and more in its humanitarian and regional framework. In addition, as the conflict in Kosovo built during fall 1998 and Clinton was forced to discuss the conflict more frequently, he often apologized whenever he had to mention it within a nonrelated speech, again suggesting that Clinton originally did not see Kosovo as linked to other issues. For instance, on October 6, 1998, during remarks to the annual meeting of the IMF and World Bank, he said, "Before I begin my remarks, I hope you will permit me to say a few words about another issue of real concern to the international community . . . the subject of Kosovo" (WCPD, 1998, No. 41, p. 1983). In his remarks on health maintenance organizations later in the day, he said, “Since this is the only time I’ll have to talk to the press for the next several hours, I hope you will indulge me for a moment while I make a few comments about the present situation in Kosovo” (WCPD, 1998, No. 41, p. 2008).


11. See, for instance, “Remarks at a Democratic National Committee Dinner” (WCPD, 1999, No. 12, p. 511); “Remarks at the Seventh Millennium Evening at the White House” (WCPD, 1999, No. 15, p. 632); and “Remarks at a Question-and-Answer Session With the American Society of Newspaper Editors in San Francisco, California” (WCPD, No. 15, p. 646).

12. Prophetic dualism is a rhetorical strategy that essentially divides the world into two camps—one good, the other evil. The division allows for no neutrality or compromise, only total victory. For a more elaborate discussion of prophetic dualism, see the work of Winder (1984).


14. See Carcasson and Rice (1999), who argued that the race initiative was a failure in a number of ways. Although Clinton (1996) had mentioned in his book Between Hope and History support of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution as ideals that Americans have in common, that theme was rarely mentioned in his public rhetoric during this period.

15. Although I do not imply that this was Clinton’s intention, universal commonalities are more progressive than American commonalities if viewed from a Marxist perspective. Nationalism, in one sense just a higher form of tribalism, still pits one country against another.

16. See, for instance, “Remarks at the National Governors’ Association Meeting” (WCPD, 1999, No. 8, pp. 282-283); “Remarks at a Democratic National Committee Dinner” (WCPD, 1999, No. 12, p. 502); “Remarks at a Democratic National Commit-
17. These descriptions occurred most frequently in a series of speeches at Democratic National Committee luncheons and dinners, which began in March 1999 (WCPD, 1999, Nos. 11 and 12), just a few days before the United States begins air strikes in Serbia. However, the bulk of them occurred in May 1999 (WCPD, 1999, Nos. 19 and 20), during the peak of the war.

18. Clinton himself is aware of the need for his rhetoric to resonate with the public. He stated specifically that the Democratic Party needs to take a message to the people that “resonates with them.” See “Remarks at a Democratic National Committee Reception” (WCPD, 1999, No. 12, p. 485); “Remarks at a Democratic National Committee Dinner in Portola Valley, California” (WCPD, 1999, No. 20, p. 903).


21. These are all located in WCPD (1999, No. 20).

22. In early May 1999, Clinton tried to incorporate the tornadoes in Oklahoma into his framework, but he failed to find an element of difference or diversity with which to make the connection. It is incorporated only in his May 7, 1999, speeches that took place in Texas.

23. This is apparently a common technique in war rhetoric, as it was also used by Bush in his prowlar discourse in the Persian Gulf War. He frequently identified the allied coalition as composed of nations of various races, ethnicities, religions, forms of government, and so forth (see Coles, 1998).

24. See “Remarks at a Democratic National Committee Luncheon in Seattle, Washington” (WCPD, 1999, No. 20, p. 900); “Remarks at a Congressional and Senate Campaign Committees Dinner in Beverly Hills, California” (WCPD, 1999, No. 20, p. 915); “Remarks at a Democratic National Committee Dinner in Las Vegas” (WCPD, 1999, No. 20, p. 928); “Remarks at a Democratic National Committee Luncheon in New York City” (WCPD, 1999, No. 20, p. 943); and “Remarks at the Sons of Italy Foundation Dinner” (WCPD, 1999, No. 21, p. 970).

26. Similarly, see “Remarks at a Democratic National Committee Dinner” (WCPD, 1999, No. 12, p. 505); “Remarks at a Democratic National Committee Dinner in Austin” (WCPD, 1999, No. 19, p. 847); and “Remarks at a Democratic National Committee Reception in Las Vegas, Nevada” (WCPD, 1999, No. 20, p. 923).

27. Similarly, see “Remarks at the Legislative Convention of the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees” (WCPD, 1999, No. 12, pp. 491-492); “Remarks at a Democratic National Committee Luncheon in Houston, Texas” (WCPD, 1999, No. 19, p. 841); “Remarks at a Democratic National Committee Luncheon in Seattle, Washington” (WCPD, 1999, No. 20, p. 897); “Remarks at a Democratic National Committee Dinner in Portola Valley, California” (WCPD, 1999, No. 20, p. 903); “Remarks at a Democratic National Committee Luncheon in San Diego, California” (WCPD, 1999, No. 20, p. 916); “Remarks at a Democratic National Committee Reception in Las Vegas, Nevada” (WCPD, 1999, No. 20, p. 923); “Remarks at a Democratic National Committee Luncheon in New York City” (WCPD, 1999, No. 20, p. 944); and “Remarks at the White House Community Empowerment Conference in Edinburg, Texas” (WCPD, 1999, No. 21, p. 986).

28. That quote is Clinton’s most extensive example of biographing from his boyhood, but he repeated abridged versions in an “Interview With Dan Rather of CBS News” (WCPD, 1999, No. 13, p. 553); “Remarks on the Proposed Hate Crimes Prevention Act” (WCPD, 1999, No. 14, p. 588); and in “Remarks at the Majority 2000 Luncheon in Dearborn, Michigan” (WCPD, 1999, No. 15, p. 661).


30. Some felt he could claim the environment as a legacy as well because Clinton’s administration had fought for protection of Florida’s Everglades, Utah’s red rock, and California’s redwood forest. See the New York Times editorial, “A Forest Legacy?” (October 18, 1999, at http:\\www.nytimes.com). Also, an article (Deans, 1999) in the Wisconsin State Journal suggested that Clinton’s legacy was his work toward building a global economy (written during the Seattle protests over the World Trade Organization, it was not, however, framed as a positive legacy).

31. See also Stabile (1995), whose study of the television program Roseanne argued that conceptualizing cultural change as a battle between conservative/recuperative or progressive/resistant ideologies limits understanding of economic factors that may play a more important role in determining the apparent cultural modifications.

32. According to polls, close to 60% did not think Clinton should be impeached. However, a similar percentage thought that if he were impeached, he should just resign. See “Relying on Polls Could Be a Dangerous Strategy for Clinton to Follow” (Boston Globe, December 16, 1998; accessed online at http:\\www.jsonline.com).

33. For instance, in Madison, Wisconsin, several small groups of individuals began meeting to discuss race relations due to the president’s focus on race. Another Madison organization, Madison Urban Ministries, began a campaign of lawn signs that read “Let Your Light Shine. Fight Racism.” Although the “success” of such groups would be difficult to define and measure, they nevertheless were a response to Clinton’s rhetoric. The
publication *Pathways to One America in the 21st Century: Promising Practices for Racial Reconciliation*, written by the President’s Advisory Board on Race (and accessed online through http://www.whitehouse.gov) reviews some local efforts in regard to race issues started during the initiative, but a systematic study that looked at community-building initiatives as well would be helpful. The two sets of grassroots initiatives (race dialogues and community-building initiatives) may or may not intersect. Some have argued that the past era of close-knit communities that Americans hanker for existed because they were racially homogenous and exclusive communities, building their closeness on keeping others out. See Shaffer and Anundsen (1993) for instance.

**References**


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The Semiautomatic Weapon as Text

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You call me a thing,
even though I contain all that makes you feel human
Am I just an object to you?
A thing to be used when needed
used and put down
until needed again?

Touch me, fondle me, but hear me out
I speak bullets
I glisten and pop,
and no mere words can match me

Can words taste bitterness?
Can words make thunder and lightning and smoke?
Can words make things dead?

I am your obsession,
your gunpowder passion
your cross-hairs vision

You say you never want to be without me
You call me “freedom”
“peacemaker”
“private property”

I am all these things
and much more

I am the key that unlocks the door
between life and death

I am fire-power
You and I together are Nietzsche:
Take me in your arms
feel my power
Squeeze me and make me explode!
I will fight for you
I may make you recoil:
    the steel is willing but the flesh is weak
Pull my trigger
    Am I real?
When I kill killers
    Am I real?
When I rip through walls and cars
    in cold-blood rage,
    and tear out organs
    like so many beating Aztec hearts
    am I real?
    As real as you?

In Pursuit of the Good Life: High School Students’ Constructions of Morality and the Implications for Educational Leadership

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In this interpretative study, the authors analyze the construction of three moral values in the context of inner-city high schools experiencing widespread poverty and racism. These values are trust, respect, and care. The authors demonstrate how the processes of social and discursive construction of morality differentially influence lived moral experiences for African American high school students from similar socioeconomic backgrounds. Differences are largely explained by the articulation of a strong African American tradition (racial-ethnic pride) in the magnet school, “City High.” By contrast, a profound lack of trust and respect for this tradition seems to hinder student voice and the pursuit of “moral equality” and access to quality public schooling in the comparative school, “Neighborhood High.”

Both the ethical philosophers and the tragic poets, then,
Understood themselves to be engaging in forms of educational
And communicative activity, in what the Greeks called
*Psuchagogia* (leading of the soul), in which methodological
And formal choices on the part of the teacher or writer were bound to
Be very important for the eventual result: not just because
Of their instrumental role in communication, but also
Because of the values and judgments they themselves expressed
And their role in the adequate stating of a view.

—M. C. Nussbaum (1990, p. 17)

The question of ethics in the practice of educational leadership has gained prominence recently (see Beck, 1994; Beck & Murphy, 1994; Foster, 1986; Starratt, 1991, 1994; also see Burns, 1999; Noddings, 1984, 1992, 1999). However, not much attention has been paid to the connections between educa-
tional leadership and school administration, in particular, to the academic needs of ethnic minority students. This article attempts to fill this gap in the scholarly literature.

Before doing so, we would like to briefly speculate why we believe that the gap in the literature exists in the first place. First, leadership practice appears to adhere to the ideological belief in educational equality, despite the consistent findings of academic inequality for large numbers of poor minority students, especially in inner-city public schools. Thus, contextually defining leadership processes for particular kinds of students (poor students of color) seems to run counter to the idea that all students’ needs must be cared for equally. “Segregated” leadership studies, that is, those designed to privilege the voices of ethnic minority students such as African Americans or Latinos, however methodologically objective, will necessarily leave majority students out of the sample. This appears problematic on ideological grounds alone.

Second, there appears to be a great deal of controversy specifying exactly which academic school programs actually benefit poor students of color (see Lubove, 2000). The attendant study of actual leadership practices and school processes academically favorable to urban student achievement, especially at the high school levels where the curriculum is more differentiated and social problems more pronounced, may be looked askance because of these controversies. To be sure, there exists an abundance of studies, especially on African American high school students (see Bergin & Cooks, 2000; Hemmings, 1996; Mirón & Lauria, 1998), that demonstrate how the everyday social practices of public schools indirectly stem from school administration. These studies appear to universally find that by meeting, and honoring nonacademic needs and achievements (resilience), educational leadership may serve an ethical purpose: the building of an academic school community and a value on empowering local communities, for example, neighborhood residents. Prerequisite to this ethical building of school communities is the value placed on incorporating student voice. We believe that student voice, articulated both from a research perspective as well as a political discourse linked to community empowerment (see Sassen, 2000, pp. ix-x), needs to be more fully integrated into the study of educational leadership. Furthermore, we believe that the reasons themselves are fundamentally “moral,” that is, they articulate our moral values as researchers. By incorporating the voices of poor students of color, we can better understand their academic and social needs. Second, the possibilities for reconstructing public high schools in the inner city are increased when we listen to students—and prudently act on this knowledge to further academic equity and excellence (Mirón, 1997). This study begins with these principles in mind.
Beginning in Place

A Dialogue With Empirical Evidence

We borrow from Michael P. Smith’s (1983) phrase, “a dialogue with empirical evidence” to underline the postmodern opposition to fixed and total social “realities.” Our own dialogue with evidence emphasizes (a) empirical data as starting points for actively and continuously “beginning again” (Foucault, 1992) rather than a search for externally derived criteria, (b) equitable intersubjectivities rather than subject-other binary relationships, and (c) a normative (political) commitment to actively challenge dominant and privileged voices rather than providing a purely descriptive social analysis. Thus, the social and philosophical issues surrounding moral-ethical leadership, although not reducible to empirical answers or solutions, point toward the multiple moral paths individuals take as they struggle with interpersonal relationships and needs inside and out of specific social contexts (e.g., urban public high schools).

In offering a diagnosis of social reality of what is actually happening inside of inner-city public schools, our research design describes students’ perceptions of “inescapable” facts pertaining to the social and material conditions found within public inner-city high schools, their neighborhoods, and society at large. Through student voices, we looked toward new possibilities for socially reconstructing alternative futures, not only by reporting what students described as “sometimes,” “if,” and “supposed to be” futures but also by imagining unforeseen possibilities and their consequences.

Within all of the possibilities, however, we accept the empirical findings as students presented them to the interviewers—in other words, that which emerges as potentially immoral as well as moral. Inside of schools’ social dynamics are “signs of danger,” that is, those possibilities/contingencies that can make things worse. Further adding to these tensions is a world view of not predicting or guaranteeing any categorical set of answers to the question of morality in educational leadership. We oppose settling educational and moral issues on categorical terms without abandoning the pursuit of education or its connections to moral practices. Such is the unstable and ill-definable postmodern condition, a condition that Jacques Derrida suggests is what makes enterprises such as education possible (see Biesta, 1998b, 2001). Hence, our beginning again.

Critique on Research Methods and Data Collection

As we conduct this empirical phase relating educational leadership and moral leadership to the needs of African American students, we are continu-
ously engaged in our own critiquing of the conduct on research methods and the qualitative data before us. Here, we simply want to observe that the conduct of research methods and data interpretations themselves potentially can be used to further marginalize those others being talked about here. The formal (re)presentation of knowledge is itself a political process, and thus we assert a moral activity (see Nussbaum, 1990). In more traditional studies, methods sections contain an acknowledgement of limitations. Here, we acknowledge that neither the methods of data collection nor analyses were empowering, participatory, interactive, or activist (Gitlin, 1994) with respect to participants; on the contrary, the student voices were recorded descriptively, that is, uncritically, whether the statements were profound or shallow or their presentation intelligible/interpretable or not. Furthermore, we acknowledge that these interviews may leave the experiences of others “invisible” (Laing, 1967, p. 19). That is, we do not experience the experiences of the students. Rather, we side with Laing (1967), who wrote that we should seek to understand their experiences “always in relation to someone or something other than self” (p. 25).

In hopes of furthering a more critical methodological approach, we interject de novo, in this secondary analysis, questions, probes, elaborations on elliptical statements to which we can have no immediate or direct student responses. We cannot say why such critical interventions were absent in the original analysis. Perhaps there may be a felt need on the part of adults to stabilize ideas and social dynamics and to accept partial truths as fixed realities (i.e., entities). Or, more bluntly, the interviewers may have lacked the knowledge and skills of critical interviewing. Both are suppositions that may have negative implications for demonstrating moral leadership.

As such, listening to student voices has not become an acquired educational skill either in educational research or in leadership practice in public schools. Yet, student voices are the “constitutive other” in their institutional relationships with teachers, administrators, and other students. They offer a “frame” to the “constitutive outside” (Biesta, 1998b). By listening to student voices, school administrators and classroom teachers may be encouraged to reinterpret, and perhaps ultimately to challenge, the existing social structures and processes of public schooling. Doing so may also inevitably unsettle the social privileges embedded in public schools, even those located in poor urban centers. Through engagement in student voices, educators may be instructed in ways to morally link school practices to students’ own conceptions (constructions) of morality. Alternatively, the original student interviews may illustrate the difficulty for educators, however experienced and empathetic, to overcome the logical fallacy of accepting the representations of social phenomena (e.g., racial differences, societal values, teacher/administrative caring) as somehow naturally signifying the existence of “truth” (see Torres, Mirón, & Inda, 1999). As a result, educational leaders intent on pursing dynamic, open communication processes often appear to unintentionally and prematurely halt such affirmative school processes. These structuration processes in public schools (see
Giddens, 1984) may reduce students to objects, thereby limiting the possibilities of the reconstruction of lived morality for both students and adult educators.

**Data Analysis Procedures**

The specific data analysis procedures used here to demonstrate the possibilities of socially reconstructing morality in urban public schooling begin with an initial iterative analysis of student assertions that emerge as patterns and themes. These we define as the apparently inescapable facts inside of two prototypical urban public high schools. Embedded in the interview data are multiple responses ranging from challenge to accommodation and to public schooling (see Mirón & Lauria, 1998). This (rather descriptive) analysis is followed by more critically oriented reinterpretations, ranging from the student participants themselves, in terms of transitional phrases from “what is” to “what can be,” not only within their school settings but also as connections to wider societal process values.

As part of a larger original study (Lauria, Mirón, & Dashner, 1994), 24 student interviews were conducted on site at both “Neighborhood High School” and “City High School.” The only restrictive criterion used in selecting the students was that they had all passed their grade level promotion examinations. This provided the interviewers with a justification for discussing connections between public schooling and the high school students’ perceived futures. In this secondary analysis presented below, we eliminated one of the interviewees who was not African American. After reading her responses, it was clear that her second language, English (her first language was Vietnamese), proficiency was inadequate to elaborate on her monosyllabic responses. The other 23 interviewees were all African American. City High School was 100% African American, whereas Neighborhood High School was 90% African American.

The original transcripts from the 23 students were read and recoded. The specific questions ranged from a description of school life, importance of grades, career goals, relevance of curriculum, behaving in different classrooms and at home, relationships with teachers and administrators, dislikes of student, school business partnerships, the values of society, to, last, students’ values. From these original interview transcripts (approximately 500 pages), two working documents were newly created: “Analysis: City” and “Analysis: Neighborhood.” As the data analyses continued, common themes emerged connecting student responses across these two high school contexts. The individual differences within each case (Neighborhood High and City High) as well as critical patterns illustrated the inherent tensions within (and between) each
high school setting. It is from these tensions, which may simultaneously affirm and deny the social realities of school experiences, that students themselves articulated alternative ideas about public schooling. In the individual adult-student interviews, not all of the students could reveal their lives in context inside of City and Neighborhood High Schools. Even among the most cooperative students, they appeared to strategically choose what to say to the adult interviewers. For example, they appeared careful to distinguish their school from their home-lived everyday experiences. For many of the students we interviewed from both high schools, the issues involved more than simply the lack of trust. In particular, we seek to indicate how these 23 African American students from two differentially organized public high schools in similar socioeconomic circumstances related trust to two other moral values: respect and care. In the students’ critiques of their perceived school social realities, researchers can hear dependent children’s pleas for the adults nearest them, teachers and administrators, to act differently in accordance to their notions of perceived morality, such as social justice, racial equality, and academic equity. Their everyday lives reflect how adults treat them in and out of school. To these student recounts, we believe that educators ought not to react defensively; rather, educators ought to listen and learn how to create more opportunities for students (and reciprocally themselves) to academically and socially succeed on their own terms.

Thus, we argue that merely asking research questions and then listening to answers represent only the beginnings in a continuing process of understanding student school life. We need to begin again. Not surprisingly, we heard the statement that “You’re the first person ever came back and asked students how do they feel… They’ll (i.e., teachers and administrators) bring us in the auditorium and tell us how they feel, but they never ask how we feel.” It is out of their everyday public school experiences that students categorize others and continuously make moral judgements. As we will indicate, this is evident in all of their talk. Their perceived morality in school emerges from direct social interactions with other students, teachers, administrators, parents, neighbors, and so forth, not from abstract and universal moral principles. Their morality is empirical; that is precisely why data analyses are so important. At the same time, their morality is not without ideals grounded in real-life experiences with others, linked to a future of better educational opportunities and enhanced social interactions. Our intent here is to first describe those aspects of the contextual worlds revealed to us by students in the two urban settings. Although the initial descriptions highlight two very different social constructions, we hope to show that students’ social and discursive constructions of morality in these two high schools share points in common as well.
The Context of Morality

Structuring Morality

In this study, we present two distinct, but closely related, contexts of morality in inner-city schools. We first offer the social organization of the school, including the curriculum, presence of schoolwide assemblies, and incorporation of student voice. The second includes the “structural” limitations (see Hays, 1994) on morality. We focus here on the internal processes of structuration (Giddens, 1984), wherein the students we interviewed have dynamic, that is, pragmatically intersubjective, social relations as one of the authors has theorized (Biesta, 1994). These central intersubjective relations obviously center in daily contact with principals, teachers, and students. Moreover, they appear to be shaped by the consistent ideological beliefs of the two high schools as well (racial equality). As we mentioned above, the school as social organization both provides a context for the multiple meanings of morality and, in turn, is influenced by the high school students’ constructions of morality. In the analysis that follows, the differential influence of each school in structuring morality is striking. We infer that the leadership in each school, that is, the principal’s strategic choice of “process values” (Maxcy, 1991), largely accounts for the starkly contrasting student perceptions of moral equality (see also Boydston, 1991).

We will attempt to demonstrate that three closely related moral values capture the students’ expressions of morality—specifically, their perceptions of moral equality. These are trust, respect, and care. Our research goal is to establish the analytical interconnections among these three moral values. Our argument in this regard is that in these two inner-city public high schools, trust with classroom teachers is the prevailing value that appears to give rise to respect and care. With trust from their teachers, African American students can mutually respect one another as students—and as African Americans. Furthermore, the presence of both trust and respect means that these adolescents, and young adults, can empathize with other students and their families in a social relation of caring. This finding is consistent with the literature on moral development—morality proceeds in “stages”—yet significantly departs from this literature: Moral development here is best understood relationally as a set of interactions among African American high school students around these three values. Morality is not a “thing” that is acquired in discrete stages but rather may be conceptualized as a processual social relation.

At Neighborhood High, students reported a varying degree of discontent with substantial dimensions of everyday school life (see Mirón, 1996). These included the curriculum, classroom activities, teacher expectations, and cultural activities and school clubs. For example, teachers appeared to hold higher academic expectations (see Mirón, 1997) for Asian American and White stu-
African American males at Neighborhood High passively resisted the stereotyping of themselves as academic underachievers (see Everhart, 1983; McLaren, 1997). Generally speaking, at Neighborhood High, classroom level and schoolwide activities tended to organize for students a perception of moral inequality. What we mean is that the school, through teachers’ social practices (see Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977) and administrative policies, appeared to shut down student voice. Thus, the moral values of respect, trust, and care were experienced in terms of perceived social injustices. We will see below that the inverse perception seemed to hold true for the students at City High (see Anfara & Mirón, 1996).

**Discursively Structured Social Space**

Our macro theoretical aim is to “get inside” of the concept of habitus (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). Bourdieu’s rich notion of cultural capital, as it meets important analytical categories of social class and social space, we believe is highly relevant to our study. Swartz (1997) is worth quoting at length on this score:

As an alternative, Bourdieu advocates a “relational” or “structuralist” mode of thinking, which he identifies as fundamental to all scientific thought. This approach to the study of social life “identifies the real not with substances but with relationships” (ibid.). These are “invisible relationships” to the uninitiated eye, “because they are obscured by the realities of ordinary sense-experience.” They must be constructed by science as “a space of positions external to one another and defined by their relative distance to one another.” (p. 61)

In the analysis that follows, we see evidence of two distinct categories of social space: public space and private space in the school building. We postulate, moreover, that teacher discourse and ideological belief—professionalism—provides a kind of moral hegemony that both privileges teachers as well as fosters terrain for student resistance. Put differently, teachers’ discourse practices (see Tannock, 1999) become what we theoretically imagine as “organizationally truncated.” That is, teachers use of the ideology of professionalism means that student voice at times is paradoxically marginalized in the public domain of the teachers lounge. This phenomenon is especially true at Neighborhood High, but we see evidence for the pattern at City High as well. We will demonstrate below that students’ confidences become fodder for teachers’ gossip. A prominent example is when students confide in teachers about family and other personal, private matters. The point is not to belittle teachers’ professionalism because indeed we have no evidence from the interviews that their student’s welfare was not of paramount concern.

The three discursive constructions we interpret below are trust, respect, and care. We represent these as African American students’ “moral constructions”
in inner-city high schools for several reasons. First, the moral valued of respect and care are of central concern to the African American tradition. Indeed, respect for cultural heritage comes through strongly in the interviews at City High, where students spoke of “knowing where one came from.” Without respect, it is difficult to imagine that care and trust are meaningful categories. Trust, obviously, is directly tied to the ideology of professionalism.

Second, our methodological aim from the perspective of theory building is to understand how social space actually works in the everyday life of schools enrolling large numbers of African American students. This concern is quite obviously exceedingly complicated in large measure because of the large percentages of White teachers employed in majority African American neighborhood schools (see Darling-Hammond & Berry, 1999).

Finally, our normative goal in this study is to provide an empirically and historically grounded “deconstruction” of moral leadership (see Sergiovanni, 1992; Starratt, 1991, 1994). Several previous administrative leadership studies of the noble goals of building an ethical school during Columbine times notwithstanding, these studies tended to ignore the voices of African Americans and poor students of color. The point is to escape blame laying by respecting the good (although White and middle-class) intentions of traditional studies of moral leadership while seeking to highlight important contextual differences. The most salient of these differences that we are concerned with here are those related to processes of racialization (see Miles & Torres, 1999).

Beginning Anew

Complexities of Trust

We begin with discourses of trust, which we characterize as the students’ prevailing belief that the teachers and administrators have their best personal and group interests in mind. For the reasons stated above, trust seems central to constructions of morality in these two schools. Thus, we devote more space to analyzing the discourses of trust. Where we infer a trusting relationship, educators tended to give students the benefit of the doubt. At City High, trust evolved into positive communication. That is, the students, teachers, and administration described their interdependence in caring terms—as a “family bond.” In stark contrast, trust at Neighborhood High is curbed by policies prohibiting schoolwide assemblies and seemingly fostering in students’ and classroom teachers’ sociocultural prejudices as well. Furthermore, in both schools, trust is made complicated by the students’ apparent wish to keep their private lives separate. These students often resisted sharing personal information with teachers and even fellow students. City High is a “magnet” school, drawing its enrollment from the entire city, and thus separation of home from school is
physically evident. We found here, however, that the social divisions between home and school life are actively maintained by students in both schools. With their criticism of “teachers talking about them,” the students’ interview statements revealed tensions present in both schools circulating in the problem of privacy.

An often-mentioned item of discomfort was personal or home life among both groups of students. However, it is clear that the types of activities that would lead to students’ discomfort in front of teachers are quite different at each school. At City High, the most-often-cited uncomfortable activity was “nothing,” followed by personal or home life, and, unique to City High, to talk a certain (academically) appropriate speech. At Neighborhood High, the most-often-cited uncomfortable discussion item was personal or home life, followed by cursing and dancing, and then playing or clowning; only one student said “nothing” was uncomfortable in front of teachers. The student responses were somewhat surprising, excluding the expected disciplinary action for disruptive or disrespectful behavior. Many Neighborhood High students mentioned that the teachers gossip among themselves about a student’s behavior, to the apparent detriment of the student. One would normally expect teachers to discuss these problems (such as fear of pregnancy or relationship difficulties) with students. Students at this school did not mention this as a practice; rather, they voiced antagonisms about teacher gossip.

At Neighborhood High

AB: They do have [their] lil’ conversations about certain students. Like you said, sometimes they’ll have teachers that hear your conversation. Then they’ll start [their] lil’ own conversation about the subject, about the certain person you were talking about, or whatever. So they have [their] own lil’ attitudes toward certain students. No, I don’t really know if they would treat them differently, but I think that this affects them in some way ’cause that’s not showing no kind of example. You shouldn’t sit up there and if you’re supposed to be an adult and supposed to be mature—it’s not your business. You shouldn’t sit up there and talk about anyone or anyone else’s business if they weren’t talking to you. Now if they are talking to you, that should be among you and that person. But as far as going around saying something else to another teacher or you know another administrator, that’s not right. So that’s kind of, like, showing a bad example in life, too.

MM: They would—I mean, some teachers would talk about you. That’s the way teachers are. They’re like little kids. They’ll sit there and talk about you in front of your face. Because I found out that, you know, . . . I used to do that. Some things happen on the weekend. You do want to bring it to school and tell the teacher if you know you feel you can talk to them. And I used to feel like that, but you know, if you tell the teacher something to them, and you said this is between you and me, but then really it’s not. You find out that it’s not. They would discuss it with other teachers they’re friends with, and the teacher would come ask you about it, wanting to get all in your business. It gets back. And if it’s something bad . . . well then.

The most consistent response at City High, conversely, was that the teachers and administrators would be helpful.
At City High

JD: They probably talk to you at school; then you know, when they get home, they might call your parents to see what’s wrong. Like I say, you know, they’ll try to help you.

CT: But then—like, some teachers, if you’re having problems, they’ll talk to you and offer you help on the side and stuff, or you can come in the morning or after school for tutoring or whatever.

It is clear that the students at Neighborhood High are much more cautious or wary about the implications of their behavior in front of teachers. Their private space seems subjugated to the ideology of professionalism and teachers’ dominance of the use of public space. They do not feel that teachers actually care about them, trust them, or would keep their best interests in mind. Because there is a lack of trust, students feel that teachers gossip about the students’ private affairs. Private conversations between teachers and students, then, become potential grist for the mill in the public domain of the teachers’ lounge. The reverse was not apparent: Students at Neighborhood High do not have a public space to give voice to their concerns and questions, especially as to why the administration—with apparent tacit acceptance among the teachers—had shut down all student assemblies and clubs. At City High, the students seemed much more assured that their teachers have their best interest in mind, that they can be trusted.

City High’s positive climate is also apparent in the student-student social relationships, the types of student cliques, and the general lack of escalation of student conflict (fighting). None of the respondents mentioned student conflicts as a problem, and one student even volunteered that, unlike at other schools, at City High there are no fights. Significantly, the school climate appears to foster student voice because students can air out differences verbally, without resorting to fighting.

JD: So far this year, we really don’t have fights, like, at other schools. We had rather just talk problems out with each other.

The types of cliques at City High are overwhelmingly (8 of 12 respondents) school-related extracurricular clubs (Spanish Club, National Honor Society, Band, Big Brother, etc.) or sports groups (football, baseball, cheerleading, majorette, etc.) followed by religious groups (2 of 12) and school grade (1) or old friends (1). Here is but one example:

WT: We have Future Business Leaders of America. We have the choir. We have the Art Club. We have the National Honor Society. We have Alpha Theta; that’s a math club. Oh, yeah. [Laughs.] We have dance groups. We have the modern dance, the Eaglets. They perform . . . cheerleaders, majorette, tracks, sports, baseball, softball. (See Mirón & Lauria, 1998, pp. 202-203.)

Trust in City High: Potentially violating private space. Although City High students characterized the relationship between students and between students and teachers as family bonds, they are nonetheless highly sensitive to teachers’ sharing
information about students. From a student’s perspective, these educational conversations did not change the material and social differences between school and residential neighborhoods. So a reasonable question is, “Why should students talk to teachers or even fellow students at all?”

**TS:** In general being a student here is mainly excelling in your academics, being involved in a lot of activities. Also, it’s really . . . being a student here is like you have a bond with everybody else. You get to at least know a lot of . . . you meet a lot of people here, and you get exposed to a lot of different things here. Everybody . . . it’s—it’s’ sort of family. We have a family environment here, but everybody guess you would say everybody do.

**JM:** Sometimes certain things you might could talk to your friend about, they won’t say anything. But like you go tell a teacher or something, they might go and tells somebody and then it’ll be a whole big mess. Like say you witness a crime or something, you might tell your friends, they be quiet. You tell a teacher. They call the police, and it’s a whole big old mess over something you saw, but you might not have anything to do with it.

Neighborhood High students echoed responses from City High regarding teacher’s gossip:

**AH:** There’s some teachers that you can go to talk and tell them anything, and you know, they’ll relate to you and won’t tell anybody. But there’s some teachers don’t want to hear it, and you tell them, and the next thing you know, the teacher down next door knows. And the next teacher knows and everybody knows.

**MM:** They would— I mean some teachers would talk about you. That’s the way teachers are. They’re like little kids . . . Some things happen on the weekend. You do want to bring it to school and tell the teacher if you know you feel you can talk to them. And I used to feel like that, but you know, you tell the teacher something to them. And you said this is between you and me . . . But then really it’s not. You find out that it’s not, you know. . . . So you don’t trust them. No, I don’t. I don’t trust anyone. . . . They would—they would discuss it with other teachers that they’re friends with, and the teacher would come ask you about it wanting to get all in your business. It get back. And if it’s something bad . . . .

**Trust in Neighborhood High: Working against the African American tradition.** Sociocultural prejudices also contribute to the lack of trust at Neighborhood High. Without opportunities to discuss safely and openly (see Fine, Weis, Centrie, & Roberts, 2000) sociocultural differences with teachers and administrators, Neighborhood High students hold some doubts as to whether they are treated fairly compared to White and Vietnamese American students. CH clarifies the difference between most of the students in Neighborhood High being treated “good” and African American students being treated “fair”:

**CH:** Good is good and fair is a l’il under good. All right the difference between good and fair. Good, you just, they don’t watch you, you know, but fair is like they got to watch you and make sure you don’t do nothing, like they do me, you know. Some of the teachers back here, they don’t know me. See some of them could act bad just because they might see me, you know I have got golds in my mouth, you know different things. You know they gonna expect bad of me, you know.

This disparity may also play out the perception by some students of unfair academic grade distribution and school discipline practices. The students we interviewed per-
ceive higher expectations for White students and the majority of Asian American students; furthermore, these students are perceived as given more “slack” when they “slip up.”

TH: Now, there’s some teachers that won’t, you know, it doesn’t matter, but there are some teachers that treat Blacks differently. You know, if a White person comes in late to class, you know they won’t tell them anything. But then a Black person comes late to class, they get fussed at. That’s not a lot but about 10% of the teachers.

MP: Well, they get teased on that, and there’s like when they’re taking the ESL classes, well there’s ESL problems from the time they get here and most of their 12th-grade year. But when it’s time for graduation ceremonies to be handled, they move up into the “Val” or Salutatorian spot, and then they don’t take regular classes. And most of the other students are upset about that ‘cause if you’re taking ESL, how are you going to get above someone who’s been in other classes. Oh, I . . . well I don’t know if they’re hard or not. But if a student is taking ESL and they’re in that class for, what?, almost four or three and a half years?, and then they could come up and just move into a higher spot than someone whose worked really hard for it, I think that’s wrong. Because if you work . . . if you’re in ESL and you can’t and you’re not . . . if you don’t understand [English], then how are you going to be able to do it, you know?

Trust is also complicated by the presence of school violence at Neighborhood High—fighting and occasionally even violent crime. Corresponding to the high crime rate, a lack of trust and fear of violence pervade the school climate. This climate manifests itself in terms of sociocultural prejudice; student cliques based on race, neighborhood, and sports; and the frequent escalation of verbal conflicts into physical brawls. Conflicts at Neighborhood High are often organized around race and residentially based gang violence (see Mirón & Lauria, 1998).

In response to both actual and perceived school violence at Neighborhood High, the administration cancelled all schoolwide assemblies and curtailed student organizations. Although some fights may be prevented, from a student’s perspective this response results in a lack of public space in which students may voice their concerns and questions regarding school policies. Thus, their voices become silenced. Denied are physical and social spaces in which students may congregate and develop positive conceptions of cooperative learning and multiculturalism. The practice of shutting down all assemblies and clubs fails to solve (and perhaps exacerbates) the problem of trust. Here, the chasm between teachers and students is vast, and the school administration appears isolated from the everyday activities of the school.

Overall, the multiple discourses of trust at City High and Neighborhood High highlight the contradictory relations between public and private space. We see that it is difficult for teachers, for example, to avoid bringing students’ private concerns into teachers’ professional domains. On the other hand, students understandably feel the need to communicate things of a personal nature
to their teachers. Methodologically, this points to the need to design studies that bring student voices to the foreground.

**Respect**

Closely linked to the moral value of trust is what Gert Biesta (1994) nicely captures as practical intersubjectivity. That is, when teachers can engage in social relations that pragmatically emphasize high school students as subjects, as the near adults that their ages suggest, teachers can be reasonably expected to respect student contributions to curriculum, school policies, and extracurricular activities. Lacking adult-like relationships with teachers, students apparently suffer a lack of dignity (Anfara & Mirón, 1996).

**Respect at City High**

At City High, the general feeling one gets from the interviews is that the students respect each other for being African Americans and for gaining admission into City High. They feel they are in it together to beat society’s odds against them as African Americans.

WT: We treat each other with respect because I mean everyone else tends to ... society you know they tend look down upon us because we are Black, so we treat each other with respect because I don’t know, it’s like a family.

City High students also experience respect through the challenging, college preparatory curriculum and teachers’ genuine interest in student learning. Students perceive this approach to learning as teachers’ respect for their education.

JM: Well [here] they [teachers] encourage going to the top of the line college, Howard, Yale, Oxford, places like that. If you don’t apply to a college, they call you in the office: “Why haven’t you applied for a college? You need to do that.” Things of that nature. They keep you in school a lot instead of allowing you to leave, especially juniors and seniors who have already met the requirements for graduation. They [the administration] keep you in school the whole period to get you more “well-rounded,” as they say to meet that successful goal [of getting accepted into an elite university]. The administration, they make sure that I have the top of the line. ... The school should have a balance in teaching so much about success because you [the students] have to keep in mind where I came from and, personally, I don’t think all the financial success means a lot. And I have millions of illustrations of that persons who are well known and have lots of money. They kill themselves. ... I think, instead, that they [the administration and teachers] should allow each person to decide what he wants to do. If you want to be the executive of this building, I want you to be the “head” of this. The “head” doesn’t mean anything. In the majority of cases, the head is not the one who comes out with the fantastic plans anyway, so that’s what I think about that.
WT: I think coming here is like a reward as far as the teachers and administrators and stuff because they really try to help you. I really haven’t . . . I’ve had some teachers but not as many as I have here who are interested in me learning.

Respect at Neighborhood High

Without trust from teachers and administrators and denied opportunities from their (mostly White) teachers for extracurricular activities, students at Neighborhood High appear to experience little respect. In their responses, they hypothesize that teachers are only “out for a paycheck,” not the students’ education. Along with the cancelled student assemblies, the presence of guard dogs serves to curtail school violence. Students perceive these policies as restricted freedom and denial of respect.

DH: You don’t feel privilege to be here, not at all. The only privilege you feel is maybe the air conditioner. Other than that it’s just like anywhere else you go, you don’t feel safe as you used to, you know? Now everybody is always bringing guns [to school], you’re in class and you see dogs walking around—guard dogs, you know, to sniff you. But I don’t know . . . I never saw them sniff anyone, but they bring them back here, and I don’t know if that’s just to scare you or what. I mean, ever since the boy got killed back here, they try to be strict, but it’s mostly—mainly, on all of us for all the wrong reasons.

AH: I mean like I might go home and study. Well with me I don’t know how to study. I just listen to the teacher. If I catch it, I catch it. I know a boy that’s graduating right now that can’t read. And you know, they not helping him by you know letting him go. It’s gonna be hard for him to get a job. He’s not going to be able to take care of himself. I mean I feel like they only care about they self because if they cared about the students, they wouldn’t put up with half the stuff that they do with them. They would let them know, you know they have a big world out there. You have to do what you have to do. And you know if it takes for them to sit down and talk to the students and tell them how hard it is, well let them do that, you know. I don’t know. I guess they only look out for they self.

KV: I can’t wait till I get out this school because when I get out, I’m not coming back here for anyone . . . when I get out of school, my children aren’t coming here.

Ultimately, we want to argue that the discourses of respect turn on the question of racialization (see Miles & Torres, 1999). Processes of racial representation and, less explicitly, racism differentially structure social life at these two inner-city high schools. At City High, students apparently benefit from racial-ethnic pride, whereas at Neighborhood High, Black males especially are written off as weak students and potentially dangerous.

Thus, the overall school climate of City High appears to be one of mutual respect and cooperation to learn the socially acceptable behaviors, attitudes, and skills to succeed in the wider society. In sharp contrast, tense social competition that often escalates physical conflict appears to characterize the organizational climate of Neighborhood High. The seemingly sullen atmosphere at Neighborhood High is mirrored in the student relationships among them-
selves; cliques based on race, neighborhood, and sports; and the frequency of escalation of student verbal conflicts into physical fights.

**Care**

We argue that the constructions of trust and respect foster care at City High and Neighborhood High. City High students learn mutual respect and trust and are allowed public spaces to positively develop their sense of African American identity and pride. They feel strong support from their teachers; the teachers were there to help them intellectually, professionally, and personally. Through all of this, they learn how to care for their families, their fellow students, and their African American cultural heritage. Although City High is structurally located in an urban center with a high crime rate, its social organization appears beneficial to students’ moral development. The reverse seems true at Neighborhood High (see Anfara & Mirón, 1996).

**Care in City High**

City High students had very little negative comments about their school (other than rules against chewing gum and those mandating tucked-in shirts). These minor distractions apparently do not detract from their overall positive description of the school. City High students feel that the teachers were actively engaged in helping them to learn, to become self-reliant, and to prepare them to assume one of the select spots among the city’s social and economic elite.

JD: The teachers, they are—they are very helpful because if I have a problem, they are not only our teachers, but they are also a friend and a counselor towards us. They’ll help us during class if I need help. They take time out during their class period and pull you on the side and talk to you and not too many teachers can offer that. And if I—if the teachers can’t help, I also have the vice principal or our counselors to talk to. And it’s just—it’s love sort of her, and it really helps a whole lot of children. It really does.

TS: Umm, basically it’s a sort of bond between the teacher, and the teacher helps you, you know, develop ideas. And also when you learn to develop ideas, it helps you to develop yourself in a way.

WT: But then . . . like some teachers if you having problems, they’ll talk to you and offer you help on the side and stuff or you can come in the morning or after school for tutoring or whatever.

**Care in Neighborhood High**

By contrast, Neighborhood High students apparently do not believe that teachers truly care about them. Student belief regarding care is tied to the busy work curriculum and the restricted opportunities for extracurricular activity.
As a result, these students simply want to graduate, to finish high school, and “never come back.” A near universal statement is that they do what they have to do to get by.

AH: Just let the child know that they care and that's not all they here for. Well, basically that's what they're here for, but just let the child know if you need somebody talk to, I'm here. You know some teachers are really cold. They'll be like "I don't care," you know. I don't know. They just real cold, and I think you know just be open with the students. Teach them—treat them as though they're your child. ... I think they should just do what they can and don't give up so easy.

Although at Neighborhood High, the students generally insisted that the teachers and administrators treat the different segments of the student population the same or fairly (that is, with no difference), there were hints in their responses that in subtle ways this is not the case.

AH: Because a teacher—I learned that this year. A teacher [is] gonna look at what you do and decide whether she want[s] to be your friend or not.

SI: Oh, for me, it's all right. I don't know about any other students. Well, they feel that some teachers are not teaching. Some teachers don't like the students. Some classes have over 40 students, and some of the teachers don't want to teach in that class. And quite a few students that are discouraged because what the teachers say about them. Some teachers may call them dumb, so, you know.

In particular, some students mentioned that teachers expect White and Asian American students to be smarter than the African American students and that this leads to subtle differences in academic expectations and discipline.

CH: Some teachers have their favorite student, but it [isn’t] a racial thing. Yeah, she thinks I'm a hoodlum. She thinks every Black male she see[s] that dresses like me—you know, have something that's you know in style that Black people wear—she consider[s] them a hoodlum or gang member. ... A lot of teachers say that, though. I hear them say that.

NB: Yeah, they expect more from the Vietnamese kids that always [are] smarter and stuff. And they don't really, really—I mean, it's like the Vietnamese [are] always smarter, and they never expect a Black student to be smarter than a Vietnamese, you know. They always automatically think that we're dumb.

SI: From what I know some teachers may think that, well, if that person is White, well, they are better than the rest, you know, the rest of them in classrooms. And you know, [if] another person makes [a] higher grade than them, they say, "Well, she probably—or that person had a bad day" or something like that. Yeah, something is wrong, you know, for that day. You know, they won't like put them down or announce their grade out, you know, in front of anything. They'll just keep it to themselves and come talk to that student.

A significant feature of the student responses was that 90% of students we interviewed at Neighborhood High feel that the teachers simply do not care about the students or the quality of their education.

AH: I know a boy that's graduating right now that can't read. And you know, they not helping him by you know letting him go. It's gon' be hard for him to get a job. He's not going to be able to take
care of his self. I mean, I feel like they only care about [themselves] because, if they cared about the students, they wouldn’t put up with half the stuff that they do with them. They would let them know, you know, they have a big world out there. You have to do what you have to do. And you know if it takes for them to sit down and talk to the students and tell them how hard it is, well, let them do that, you know. I don’t know. I guess they only look out for they self.

DG: They have very few teachers that really take time, and if you don’t get it, you know. And it’s all right being a student back here. They treat them fair. I know they can be harder, you know, to make them motivated and just failing them. You know, they need to be more caring, I think. You might have one or two people that care about us.

At the same time, some students mentioned that the teachers would threaten them with failure. Neither of these was ever mentioned in the City High interviews, and as can be seen above, the Neighborhood High students feel quite the contrary.

MM: It’s not all the students’ fault. Sometimes, it’s the teachers’ fault back here ’cause different teachers do different things back here. Some teachers don’t give a care what you do. Teachers back here have favorites: either they like you or they don’t. They like you, [you] really, really have an advantage. If they don’t like you, they’re going to make it hard for you, but they can’t fail you. But some will. Some will tell you, “You better, you know, do what I say or I can fail you.” And there’s nothing you can do about it, and there’s no way you can prove it. It’s your words against mine. Some teachers back here make you aware of being back here, what they want done back here. They won’t help you. [emphasis added] (See Mirón & Lauria, 1998, pp. 200, 201.)

On the surface, most educators appear to care for the welfare of their students. However, borrowing from Bourdieu’s work, we see that care as cultural capital is tied to teachers’ use of public space. In the end, care must be deconstructed so as to make explicit teachers’ class and professional interests. Following Miles and Torres (1999), we argue that such moral discourses must be placed within a perspective of racialization.

**Sociocultural Prejudices and Educational Consequences**

Moral-social relations between groups of students and between students and teachers were apparently constructed on the bases of individual and collective judgments grounded in group membership, often reflecting differences in race, gender, and/or language. Common to both schools is the lack of mutual trust between teachers and students. We found in the interview data empirical support for Furman’s argument that the traditional basis for community—feelings of belonging and trust—is structurally threatened in an increasingly complex social setting (such as the inner city). That is, City High and Neighborhood High students both appear to resist sharing their lives outside of school with teachers. Although City High is a magnet school and thus separation of home from school is physically evident, social divisions between home and school life are actively maintained by students in both schools. As noted above, with their critique of teachers talking about them, the students’ state-
ments reveal the tensions present in both schools circulating in the problem of privacy.

Neighborhood High and City High students appear to have a very strong sense of the boundaries between personal and private. They try to sustain these distinctions. For example, at both schools students believe that teachers apparently violate this moral code when talking to other teachers about them. Students appear to view the fact that some teachers try to intervene in their lives by sharing information about students with their colleagues as a moral transgression (i.e., violating a private relationship and trust). The students seemed not to have any educational context that offered alternative perspectives on information sharing and/or collaborative learning. What they do have are different sociocultural perspectives from their experiences with other students and teachers. Interventions, whether educational or personal, should confront these perceived moral transgression’s by providing a school climate that fosters the sharing of information and collaborative learning.

However, even in the students’ quid pro quo reactions to others, we noticed the “if-then conditional” qualities of students’ direct and immediate reactions offering opportunities for individual dialogue. What prevents teachers and schools from recognizing and acting on these openings? Why are so many adult discussions of students’ behaviors marked by labels and unexplained behaviors that hide qualitative evidence of the possibilities for changing behaviors?

We found that students want more discipline, more caring, and a more relevant curriculum. Many adults inside and out of schools agree. Some high school students, however, wonder out loud how today’s teachers and administrators can possibly help them. “[The adults] they’re ignorant on the subject so therefore how can you teach somebody something you don’t know?” (City High). This includes knowledge of neighborhoods and the needs of students.

Students’ humanistic critique and thus our ideals—as grounded, lived experiences—go beyond the school and classroom walls into broader sociocultural issues. Students say, “I don’t live in the best neighborhood. . . . I don’t think, you know, society really cares about me” (City High). The educational question this raises highlights the lack of social and political knowledge teachers have about injustice, material conditions of students, and alternative futures. In this regard, we argue that teachers and administrators (as well as society) have no choice but to follow, perhaps even to include their students in reimagined notions of educational leadership.

Many high school students in the inner city are apparently denied human agency as learning subjects. Educational interventions need to confront the perceived moral transgression (i.e., violations of private relationships and trust) by providing an educational context for sharing information and collaborative learning. Students have different sociocultural perspectives from their experiences with other students and teachers. These differences need to become part of the educational discourse of urban schooling.
The Good Life

In the prototypical social constructions, it was evident that the cultures inside City High and Neighborhood High schools were deliberately, that is historically, designed as different and as ultimately transitioning students away from their neighborhoods, homes, and a sense of community. For some African American students, this direction offers hope of a more affluent and peaceful life. For school leaders, however, it was hard to cope with the chaos of postmodernity, its endless moral complexity in the midst of the endless societal quest for social control, self-regulation, and effective educational governance.

“Well at this point in time, society just wants peace of mind, tranquility, and that’s the only thing. They want to see hard workers in a society that can be productive” (City High). “You know, you have to have proper etiquette you know to fit in and it depends on what. . . . You want to have some manners wherever you’re going” (City High).

Another City High student asked, “Why we’re not having funding on a lot of important programs, such as etiquette for those who are unfortunate . . . why we don’t have programs like that for our students?” Their request to learn etiquette is an interesting one. We can only speculate what exactly this term means to the City High students. Perhaps, these students crave preparation for the outside world beyond learning a more mature (adult?) way of speaking and academic preparedness. They may feel that a different code of moral behavior, separate from that of their school and home contexts, will help them fit into society. An assumption underlying the desire to fit in is that they are not yet “in” a society they envision. For example, even at Neighborhood High, a prevalent sense of isolation was revealed in statements using the term “back here” to refer to the school. Although a (potentially interesting) discussion of students’ sense of isolation is beyond the scope of this article, we nonetheless make the inference that students conceive and alternate between several concurrent worlds. Their space-time experiences include the schools they attend, residential communities that they often maintain separate from the former, and a professional society they envision as separate from what they currently know.

Jameson (1988) noted that “spatial peculiarities of post-modernism as symptoms and expressions of a new and historically original dilemma, one that involves our insertion as individual subjects into a multidimensional set of radically discontinuous realities” (cited in Harvey, 1990, p. 305).

Toward a Grounded Theory of Morality

How students negotiate access to a better curriculum, although largely political in nature (see Popkewitz, 1998), and how they articulate their sense of self as they acquire academic knowledge may inevitably point to what they value beyond the classroom. African American students in the South (who constitute 100% of the sample reported here), owing to the legacies of the civil
rights movement, demanded access to quality schooling as their civil right (see Mirón & Lauria, 1995, 1998). These students grew to resent the perceived irrelevant curriculum, defined the quality of learning activities they experienced in the classroom as “busy work,” and were appreciative when Black teachers and building administrators treated them with pride and respect. They viewed access to quality public schooling in primarily political terms. Furthermore, students’ active or passive politics—in short, their strategies of “accommodation” or “resistance” (see Mirón & Lauria, 1998; also Mehan, Hubbard, & Villanueva, 1994)—may have profound implications for a grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) of morality based on student voice and desire. Students now view both the good life (see Taylor, 1989) and the life worth living as inextricably tied to a quality education.

The students and what they view as the good life—quality education—are relationally defined. In particular, these relational notions of everyday lived morality in inner-city high schools appear to be tied to how students and teachers perceive racial-ethnic identity. For example, it is clear that a sense of collective identity is present at City High, having been fostered by teachers and administrators through racial solidarity. On the other hand, owing to the shutdown of schoolwide assemblies, the lack of cultural activities, and seeming absence of cultural knowledge of the African American tradition, students at Neighborhood High may feel that they are on their own (see Ulichny, 1996). Put simply, students are able to relationally pursue happiness (defined here as quality education) at City High, whereas at Neighborhood High, the school’s disciplinary technologies (see Anderson, 1998; Anderson & Grinberg, 1998) following Foucault may have the unintentional effect of shutting down collective voice and student agency altogether. Social action there is displaced.

Denied access to quality schooling and high-paying jobs owing to the disappearance of work in many inner cities (Kozol, 1991; Weiner, 1999; Wilson, 1996), pesky income inequality (U.S. Census Bureau, cited in “Rising Income,” 1999), and persistent low wages for many racial minority groups (see Valle & Torres, 2000), students who choose to remain in high school perceive that they have few material options other than to graduate. Moreover, as this study (and previous ones cited above) has shown, those who do graduate and go on to seek admission into college often have to learn to negotiate separate personal identities and establish social and cultural distances from their everyday life in their residential neighborhoods (see Bogotch, Mirón, & Murry, 1998; also Mirón, 1996). High school students in the inner city (especially like those at Neighborhood High) sometimes have to develop a new, academic self to succeed in high school and go on to college (see Hemmings, 1996). They will thus inevitably experience a sense of loss from their nonacademically oriented peers, who may get pushed out by formal policies and practices (Fine, 1991), or choose to drop out of school, or simply fail. The negotiation of separate identities makes up part of some students’ moral strategy to obtain quality schooling in search of the good life.
We may surmise based on the interview data that high school students in the inner city now have internalized the messages from the wider society, especially emanating from corporate and philanthropic elites (see Steinberg, 1999, p. A1). The message is that education is the ticket to happiness and success in the quickly arriving information age (Castells, 1996; Poster, 1990). These messages are now global in scope, facilitated by electronic communication, and have apparently reached hegemonic, commonsense understanding. Poster (1990) noted,

> The exchange of symbols between human beings is now far less subject to constraints of space and time. In principle, information is now instantly available all over the globe and may be stored and retrieved as long as electricity is available. (p. 2)

Education, in Harvey’s (1990) materialist language, is now “exchanged” for money. Acknowledging a high school diploma as minimum criterion for entry-level employment and a college degree for placement in the knowledge sectors (Carnoy, Daley, & Hinosa, 1989), minority students in inner-city high schools understandably perceive graduation as key. This, in fact, becomes their moral strategy, their use of “moral ontology” to borrow Taylor’s (1989, pp. 5-8) powerful conception. By meeting minimum requirements for admission into college with a high school diploma, poor high school students in the inner city potentially seek to alter their historically acquired subjectivity and possibly enter the middle classes. On a personal level, these students may believe that they can reverse their fate to bear the brunt of income inequality. We contend that these students’ desires that appear to align with the wider society’s emphasis on quality education, independent of whether they are obtainable, should be the focus of our attention as educators and educational leaders and researchers.

**Conclusion: The Politicization of Morality in Inner-City High Schools**

What we have presented here is only a first step; listening to student voices is not enough. Researchers and practitioners must act on the moral values of students in the inner city (see Mirón, 1997). Our reinterpretation of the qualitative data indicated that students constructed moral relationships from everyday social interactions—as immediate and direct experiences, sociocultural prejudices, changing identities, and ideals. Although these relationships are empirically evident (i.e., can be heard) inside of schools, their status as everyday moralities easily could be suppressed either as starting points for reform discourses or as pragmatic moral consequences of modern school communities. This is because leadership practices historically have denied students...
voice, agency, and a sense of efficacy. Social action is needed; we prefer to call this type of social action moral politics.

Educational leadership as expressed in the administration of schools has tended to be transactive rather than transformational. Educational leaders, thus, must deliberately politicize high schools around student voice and agency. Otherwise, the material and social limits in inner-city high schools may overwhelm entire school communities and relegate schooling to busy work and quid pro quo deals (see Weiner, 1999). The evidence presented in this study is neither moral nor immoral. It may be used for school reform purposes or, as is often the case, simply ignored. How we view the empirical evidence, hopefully in dialogue—whether as ignorance, social consequences, stereotypical attitudes, or the basis for dialogue—is an issue of interpretation. How we ultimately decide to act on the evidence, on the other hand, is political and we assert inherently moral. This action carries ethical content. In public high schools in the inner city, it potentially affects the abstract vision of the good life that students implicitly hold. One decides a priori whether to weave these voices/discourses into the deliberate transformation of school structures, interpersonal relationships, and teaching, learning, and administration. Our argument rests on seeing students as participants, not as other people’s children.

By denying the inherent moralities of students, educators may unfortunately miss golden opportunities to reconstruct public high schools in ways that would bring students inside the multiple educational relationships we have described. Thus, educational leadership practices within public, inner-city schools appear to struggle repeatedly with trying to educate students who historically have been left outside of the social construction of schools. These students are cast as the “Other” in public schools. Perhaps this history explains teachers’ ongoing complaints that they “can’t teach these students.” Given that as much as 50% of what is needed to teach (student contributions) consistently has been left out of the educational process, why should educators expect to find short- or long-term solutions to urban public school problems (see Mirón, 2002)?

As to the practice of educational leadership, especially the discourse of moral-ethical leadership (see Sergiovanni, 1992; Staratt, 1991, 1994), the school administrator and teacher-leader can never be the final authoritative sources of morality or its final arbiters in public schools. This binary perspective needs to be reconfigured by entering into a pragmatic intersubjective relationship (see Biesta, 1995; Maxcy, 1995) in which what one wants to achieve professionally and morally through leadership can be modified—even transformed—by the student and the broader school community. Put more abstractly, morality can only come from those in-between social and intellectual spaces created by the interaction of administrators, teacher-leaders, and students. And it is the task, so we believe, of moral politics in everyday practice and research to identify the opportunities for educational discourses and act on them on students’ behalf.
Notes


2. The interviewers were beginning graduate students for whom we provided brief training in qualitative research methods and interview techniques.

3. The researchers relied on interviews conducted by doctoral students as well as their informal observations of classroom and school life. The data were not formally triangulated—that is, verified with interviews with teachers—in large part because of our hope that we could make student voice a reality by having high school students spend an hour with the interviewer. See Mirón and Lauria (1998).

References


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Proem for the Queen of Spain

Ivan Brady
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Your Most Holy Majesty, Esposa to God and the Holy Majesty King of Spain,

I am in the humbleness of the poor servants of this wretched land asking of you to share the Grace and Beauty of Your Holy Motherhood to the publics of Nueva España and to give us Your Love as You would Your Own Children absented from Your Grace by the Mysteries and Wisdoms of His Holy Father. *(Khe San is a malfunction, Sir, like your mother and this whole fucking country!)* We are Love and Truth for You, as You command. The marks on our bodies are God’s Will, His Gift to the Wonder of our inhumanity, Glory Be To God, and the brave deeds of the Leadership of the Church and all Soldados in finding us who have been most lost in the Darkness of Satan and the cravings of our flash and blood *(Lui lai, lui lai, you Cong-faced motherfuckers! Back up and nam xuong dat! Nam fuckin’ xuong dat! Lie the fuck down! Or y’all gonna fuckin’ die sucking full-metal eggs in this goddamn dog-humping ricehole piece of shit you call home!)* to be better. We have been blind in our pulque customs and sacrifice of the unforgiven enemies who would join us in keeping the Darkness from the True Light of Your Holy Motherness and saving us *(One more fucking Dink shows his pockmarked little Congolese dick in this bar, we’re fucking outta here, and that eye-winking body-bag of a bitch on your lap ain’t coming with us.)* from the depths of Hell on Earth. Please do not think of me inexperienced in the Ways of God, Your Holiness, for I am benefitted for years in the Embrace of the Mission and the Love of God, Amen. I am with horses everyday and have learned *(The LT is in the LZ with the VC without no fuckin’ radio. What the fuck else could you want for Christmas?)* the Power of Prayers and Writing. The benefits of a Sacred Heart are to love all of God’s Children as You love us. Your Majesty may be served in such a way by the humbleness of us and strength of our hands in the land *(Spitshine your own ass, pal! If it don’t look like me, walk like me, and talk like me, I shoot it. Simple. Saves time. I fuckin’ live. They fuckin’ die.)* and the will of our humble publics to assemble as One in the end of civil strife and the junction of all to make gold and fight Satan with *(Hoeee, motherfuckers! Night scope this! Hot stuff for you Mamasans, coming down right now! Brought to you this evening free of charge by Little Nicky’s Napalm Factory, Uncle Fuckin’ Sam and the Pharoahs, and all the good people of Iowa City, Iowa! Burn, baby, burn!)* the help

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of Almighty and the generous Mother in Your Love. All a naked man asks is to be Clothed by Your Wisdom, Grace, and Love. Omine Osprentu Dios,

Forever to Your Service, I remain,

Fernando Junípero Dominguez de Ixtapatl
Nueva España, The Year of Our Lord, 1539

*******************************

This is an ethnographically rich and complicated document and I think testimony to the power of laconic texts. Whether Fernando Dominguez was as real a person as the historical Jesus Christ, I cannot say. My sources suggest that he was a charismatic Indian from what is now Mexico’s northern territory. Apparently, he was trained as a translator by Spanish missionaries, made his first trip to Spain in 1537 as a servant in the company of the exhausted and forlorn explorer Cabeza de Vaca, and was returned to Mexico shortly thereafter. His prose/praise poem to the Queen of Spain may have been stimulated by a draft of Cabeza de Vaca’s proem to the King of Spain—His Holy, Imperial, Catholic Majesty, Charles I of Spain, Charles V of the Holy Roman Empire—that eventually formed the prologue to de Vaca’s account of the ill-fated Narváez expedition to Florida and New Spain from 1528 to 1536. In any case, the multicultural theme of Dominguez’s wobbly statement can be read through contemporary eyes variously as a reminder of the crushing power of Empire, the many layers and difficulties of cross-cultural translation, the power of naming, and semiotic diversity in codes. It can also be read as a call for an anthropology and history that include not only the victors but also the vanquished, the paramount and the powerless, the voiced and the voiceless, and the observers themselves. As an erstwhile historical document, it revisits 20th century pleas for a history sensitive to its own ideology; in its passion, divisiveness, heavy gendering, and contrived supplications, it speaks to the need for an empathetic and humanistic anthropology and to much of what exists as subaltern themes in modern criticism. And not least, in what has to be a surprising form of text, it begs the presence of a modern translator’s or reader’s own culture with its distracting “soldier talk” as fits of interference from another violent cross-cultural collision, the war in Vietnam. The overall effect puts anthropology and history squarely in the poetic and sometimes hallucinatory world of magical realism, of fantasy and reality mixed in special and compelling ways, in this case, specifically in a universe on the order of Gert Hoffman’s Balzac’s Horse (1988), Tim O’Brien’s Going After Cacciato (1978), and Juan Manuel Marcos’s Gunter’s Winter (2001). For translations of de Vaca’s final text, see Pupo-Walker (1993, pp. 3-4) and Favata and Fernández (1993, pp. 28-29).
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