

## An “amorphous mist”? The problem of measurement in the study of culture

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**Abstract** Sociological studies of culture have made significant progress on conceptual clarification of the concept, while remaining comparatively quiescent on questions of measurement. This study empirically examines internal conflicts (or “infighting”), a ubiquitous phenomenon in political organizing, to propose a “resinous culture framework” that holds promise for redirection. The data comprise 674 newspaper articles and more than 100 archival documents that compare internal dissent across two previously unstudied lesbian and gay Marches on Washington. Analyses reveal that activists use infighting as a vehicle to engage in otherwise abstract definitional debates that provide concrete answers to questions such as who are we and what do we want. The mechanism that enables infighting to concretize these cultural concerns is its coupling with fairly mundane and routine organizational tasks. This mechanism affords one way to release the culture concept, understood here as collective self-definitions, from being “an amorphous, indescribable mist which swirls around society members,” as it was once provocatively described.

Culture is “one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language” (Williams 1976: 87), one that has “acquired a certain aura of ill-repute...because of the multiplicity of its references and the studied vagueness with which it has all too often been invoked” (Geertz 1973: 89). Although the “cultural turn” buzz has subsided and despite efforts to move beyond it (Bonnell and Hunt 1999), the “cacophony of contemporary discourse about culture” (Sewell 1999: 35) continues unabated.<sup>1</sup> Conceptual debates over what the term means persist, which then have consequences for how to study it (Jepperson and Swidler 1994). One common route analysts pursue is to isolate what are called “cultural dimensions” from a distinct “social life.” Examples range widely from how meaning-making and symbols affect

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<sup>1</sup>Vivid evidence stems from *Cultural Sociology*, “the first journal [launched in 2007] explicitly to be dedicated to the sociological comprehension of cultural matters,” as stated on the American Sociological Association’s website.

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political debates (Gitlin 1995; Hunter 1991), participation in community life (Bellah et al. 1985), education campaigns (Binder 2002), construction of social class (Beisel 1990; Bourdieu 1984; Lamont 1992b), affirmative action debates (Skrentny 1996), and social movement organizing (Johnston and Klandermans 1995). Analysts also inquire into traditional “cultural objects,” or shared significance embodied in form (Griswold 1986). Examples here are equally expansive and include the sport of cricket (Kaufman and Patterson 2005), fashion (Crane 2000), opera (Stamatov 2002), paintings (Baxandall 1972), music (Peterson and Berger 1975), television (Bielby and Bielby 1994), theater (Berezin 1994), and other forms of art or literature (Becker 1982; Beisel 1993; DiMaggio 1987; Griswold 2008).

The choice between the study of cultural dimensions of social life (sometimes called “cultural sociology”) and cultural objects (sometimes called the “sociology of culture”) reflects ontological debates over whether culture is a perspective or a subfield (see Table 1). Those who work in the left side of Table 1 argue that culture is a “perspective, not specialty” in which understanding social action—the general aim of sociology—requires that we bear in mind the symbolic (Greenfeld 1987: 2). But if understanding social action requires grasping the symbolic, and if culture pertains to all things symbolic, then the disciplinary realm of sociology overlaps almost entirely with the perspectival realm of culture. No one subfield can claim it as a specialty. As John Mohr (2003: 2) argues, “Cultural sociology is not a sub-field of the discipline concerned with a particular institutional sphere (such as the arts, the media, or popular culture). Rather I would describe it as...an approach to sociological work that highlights the human side of social phenomena, which is to say, it is an endeavor that emphasizes the ways in which social life is received and produced through the active agency of human beings who, as Geertz (1973) asserts, are suspended in webs of meaning that they themselves have spun. Cultural sociology is that project which seeks to track the way that people make sense of the world” (Mohr 2003).

Not everyone agrees with this position. “Conceived as a perspective,” Jeffrey Goldfarb cleverly observes, “the cultural is everything. Therefore, we must ask ourselves, is it anything in particular?” (Goldfarb 1987: 2). Culture risks becoming at once everything and nothing. In light of this concern, Robert Wuthnow (1997:1) wondered, “Is cultural sociology doomed?” (Wuthnow 1997). That is, will it disappear if it lacks specificity? And so we find ourselves with a competing perspective that sees culture as a distinct and autonomous subfield within sociology. This group emphasizes the structural and historical processes in which meaningful objects (typically works or products of artistic activity) are created, produced, distributed, received, interpreted, and consumed (see also Beisel 1997; Goldfarb 1987; Jacobs 1999; Lamont 1992a; Spillman 2008; Wagner-Pacifici 2003; Zolberg 1988).

My interest is not to resolve this debate but rather to use it to confirm the validity of Raymond Williams’ assertion: culture is indeed a complicated concept.<sup>2</sup> For decades, scholars have labored over how to prevent research from treating culture as if it was “an amorphous, indescribable mist which swirls around society members,”

<sup>2</sup> It is not possible in the space of this article to provide a comprehensive review of the culture concept. For summary statements, see (DiMaggio 1997; Griswold 1994; Kaufman 2004; Mohr 1998; Mukerji and Schudson 1986; Peterson 1979; Wuthnow and Witten 1988).

**Table 1** Culture as a perspective and a subfield

	Culture as a perspective	Culture as a subfield
Object of Investigation	Symbolic phenomena	Structural and historical processes in which works, products, or practices of artistic and intellectual activity are created, produced, distributed, or consumed
Ontology	Culture is part of all meaningful social action, often subsumed under society	Culture is a distinct and autonomous sphere of study, generally not reducible to or a reflection of society
Benefits	Few empirical or theoretical restrictions; cross-fertilization and interdisciplinarity	Increased likelihood of conceptual consensus; professionalism and claims to specialization/expertise
Risks	Problem of commensurability (if everything is culture, nothing is uniquely so)	Disciplinary dogma and limited innovation

in Gary Alan Fine's provocative words (Fine 1979: 733). Part of the problem stems from a proliferation of definitions. To redress this, Richard Peterson parsimoniously suggests that when sociologists say "culture," they generally mean one or more of "four elements: norms, values, beliefs, and expressive symbols" (Peterson 1979:137). Over the years, studies of culture have attended more to these and many other conceptual efforts (e.g., DiMaggio 1997; Kaufman 2004; Mohr 1998; Vaisey 2008) than to related yet distinct concerns of operationalism, that is, how to concretely measure the concept. This is not entirely surprising, since measurement precision first requires clear (even if actively debated) definitions (Cook 1985).

But how does one make "culture" concrete? How does one measure something that presumably defies materiality? For example, how can one sketch operational boundaries around classic definitions such as "the best that has been thought and known" (Arnold [1869] 1949), traditionally associated with the humanities, or "that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society," (Tylor [1871] 1958) favored by social scientists? Here we encounter a paradox: If culture encompasses the range of thought and awareness or if it is that complex whole, then it is everywhere and is everything—"an amorphous, indescribable mist"—at which point its analytic utility dissipates. The editors of a 2008 special issue of *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* devoted to "Cultural Sociology and Its Diversity" respond to "the growing significance of culture to our discipline" by abandoning definitions altogether: "We abstain from coming up with an analytical definition that fixes the conceptual boundaries of what is taken to be culture. In fact, we happily embrace the chameleon-like nature of culture as a concept and the many shapes and forms culture takes" (Binder et al. 2008: 6, 8). But the paradox persists. If everything is culture or somehow cultural, then nothing is uniquely so. If culture, whatever that even means, is a chameleon that is always blending into its surroundings, then our scholarly vision to detect, to observe, and to measure it is strained.

Over 30 years have passed since Williams, Geertz, and Fine commented on culture's complexities, studied vagueness, and amorphousness, respectively. It is today common wisdom that culture means many different things and that sociologists may do better to measure those more specific things than to study "that complex whole." Culture is today more narrowly conceived as discourse, symbols, boundaries, frames, cognitive schema, narratives and stories, identities, norms, values, beliefs, works of art, ways of life, and institutional codes. There is now a widely recognized sociology of culture (Crane 1994), distinct from a cultural sociology (Spillman 2002). Phrases like "cultural structures" and "strong program" (Alexander 2003) along with the "autonomy of culture" (Sewell 1999) routinely enter scholarly conversations. There are well-established research centers and conferences. All this enables scholars to ask more specific questions about culture: what it means, how it works, and how to measure it (c.f., Archer 1996; Biernacki 2000; Giddens 1984; Sahlins 1985; Sewell 1992).

Yet debates persist—indeed rage—in light of this meteoric development. If culture means so many different things, then how can we measure how effectively people use it to influence others? Definitional catholicity or abstinence is fine in principle, but it undermines the development of a research program pertaining to operationalism, since "deciding on a clear definition is crucial to measurement" (Cook 1985:38). The difficulty of this enterprise is exacerbated by the fact that it implicates two related analytic problems. On the one hand, a group of scholars have recently argued that investigations into various "matters of culture" continue to be "blocked" by a persisting duality between "material, objective 'social' things that are separate, and fundamentally different, from more subjective, interpretive, cultural artifacts" (Friedland and Mohr 2004: 6). Despite moving toward specificity, "the social [remains] the domain of materiality, of hardness, thingness" (Friedland and Mohr 2004; see also Bonnell and Hunt 1999).

The concern of culture's immateriality vis-à-vis the presumed materiality of the social is the logical antecedent of a second and related measurement problem. The culture concept's relegated mist state robs it of concreteness and tangibility. But then how do you measure mist? Although culture as an explanatory concept has found a "new prestige" within sociology (Kaufman 2004: 353) in part through efforts to isolate its autonomy from social structure (Alexander 2003; Sewell 1999), the problem of measurement requires further consideration. According to Ann Swidler, the culture concept remains today "extremely hard to grasp concretely,...a diffused mist within which social action occurs" (Swidler 1995: 38, 39), a statement eerily redolent of Fine's description nearly 20 years earlier. Although the two problems (of immateriality/mist and measurement) are related, the former "derives from the long history of western philosophy, the Cartesian dualism of mind and body, subject and object, ideal and material forces" (Friedland and Mohr 2004: 6). My objective in the present article is more modestly geared toward the latter problem of measurement. How can we empirically detect and thus appraise the influence culture might have on what people think and how they behave?

The study of culture is robustly expansive. When the culture section of the American Sociological Association first convened in August 1987, there were 383 members. At last count (in 2008), there were 1180 members. This represents more than a 200% increase in 20 years. Today, the concept is "put into use in many areas

of sociological inquiry, some of which, at first glance, seem to have little to do with culture” (Binder et al. 2008: 6). This ostensible strength of the culture concept poses challenges in its study. Potential gains accrued by allowing culture to mean so many things (that is, by loosening conceptual boundaries) are off-set by sacrifices in operational rigor. The “impossibly vague” strategies of definitional catholicity or abstinence “provide no particular angle or analytical purchase” for the study and measurement of the culture concept (Sewell 1999: 41).

Heeding Sewell’s (1999:38) call to “modify, rearticulate, and revivify the concept,” my aim is to take a step toward identifying and resolving the problem of measurement by focusing on one aspect of culture in one particular context. I compare internal conflicts or “infighting” across the organizing of two previously unstudied Marches on Washington. I use infighting as a case to build on an active theoretical dialogue pertaining to “how culture works,” focusing my inquiry conservatively on how activists converge on collective self-definitions amid a flurry of debates on alternatives. This research will show that activists air dissent as a means to grapple with deeper, seemingly elusive divisions of strategy (or collective self-definitions of group activity) and identity (or collective self-definitions of group membership). The key mechanism by which this occurs is a coupling of infighting with fairly mundane organizing tasks that recur across the two demonstrations. Overlaying conflict onto such routine tasks is one way to empirically detect and thus measure the construction of collective self-definitions, which itself constitutes one way of thinking about the culture concept. Dissentious dialogues concerning nuts-and-bolts decisions provide what we might think of as a resin onto which definitional debates can stick. This measurement mechanism—what I call a *resinous condition*—provides one way to release the culture concept from being “an amorphous mist.”

### How culture works

One area that engages the problem of measurement has proceeded through three deceptively simple words: how culture works. Michael Schudson (1989) points out that asking how culture works may be a question some find “bizarre, one that by the asking reveals a fundamental misunderstanding.” However, if scholars link culture, however defined, to organizational aspects of social life, as I do here, “then the question of what work culture does and how it does it is not self-evidently foolish. Indeed, it can then be understood as a key question in sociology” (Schudson 1989: 153). I proceed with this assumption.

Gary Alan Fine (1979) articulated the problem that motivates the present study. He also suggested a solution with his concept of “idioculture,” or small group culture. Fine emphasizes ethnographically studied, face-to-face interactions that transpire in local contexts (e.g., Fine 1996, 1998, 2001). Much of his work takes issue with “culture creation,” or why some artifacts become meaningfully incorporated in small groups whereas others do not. Idioculture is his solution for how broader schemas, beliefs, behaviors, symbols, and customs influence behavior in small group settings. So how do you measure mist? Fine’s answer to his own question is to specify a localized and interacting (especially face-to-face) small group

as the unit of analysis. In this context, that which is known (derives from a pool of common knowledge), usable (morally sanctioned), functional (enables the group's survival), appropriate (does not violate the group's status and hierarchy systems), and triggered (is sparked by something) is more likely to be meaningfully incorporated into a group's idioculture. From the perspective of the ethnographer, these are also the objects that are most readily observable. Fine's collection of studies provide a useful transition to my concerns with how members of an imagined community (c.f., Anderson 1983) wrestle with abstractions of collective self-definitions. I pursue operation mechanisms for larger contexts studied non-ethnographically.

Fine's micro-sociology is one of several approaches scholars use to investigate how systems of meaning, symbols, and other expressive aspects of social life influence attitudes and behavior.<sup>3</sup> Robert Wuthnow approaches the puzzle by examining the institutionalization of cultural forms, that is, why certain objects (from bundles of discourse to religious ideologies) are produced and survive whereas others wither and die. His macro social ecology model emphasizes how ideologies (understood as "sets of statements" from pro-choice to Pentecostalism) operate in "fields." This culture-as-language approach moves to a field-level of analysis to resolve measurement concerns (Wuthnow 1987, 1989). As an analogy, we might think of this as the difference between walking down a busy city street and viewing it from a sky deck above, where the sights are presumably easier to measure.

Bringing the level of analysis down to the individual—but not in small groups and thus conceptually situated in-between Fine and Wuthnow—Ann Swidler argues for the strategic uses of expressive resources. Following Max Weber, she focuses on how social actors variably make use of such resources in structuring their lives (Swidler 1986, 2001). During settled or stable times, people choose among diverse perspectives to orient their actions. This is why when they are happily married, for example, that people talk about love in contradictory ways, at times viewing it as prosaic (a lot of work) and at other times as mythic (it was meant to be). This variation decreases in unsettled times of separation or divorce when people gravitate toward fewer yet more explicit ideologies. Swidler's culture-as-toolkit views people as instrumental actors who select from their repertoire that which will best suit their needs. She advances the dialogue by emphasizing culture's strategic malleability, or how people actually use expressive resources, although operational directives for abstractions such as "society's core symbols" (Swidler 2001: 2) remain underspecified.

Students of social movements have taken a particular liking to perspectives that emphasize how collective actors strategically use and manipulate meanings and symbols to accomplish their political objectives. Penny Becker (1998, 1999), for example, blends frameworks from Wuthnow and Swidler to suggest that pastors manipulate institutional bundles of identities from their toolkit to solve organizational problems in their respective congregations (Becker 1998, 1999). Others assert that successful campaigns for social change depend on the correspondence between the meanings activists attribute to social problems and the organizational forms they

<sup>3</sup> The study of "meaning" or how people make sense of their world, has from the earliest days been the domain of a distinctively cultural sociology, although how much emphasis to place on it and how to go about studying it have been matters of ongoing debate (see Griswold 1992 for review).

build to remedy them (Polletta 2002; Wilde 2004). The general wisdom in these studies is to investigate the fit between culture and organizations (e.g., Armstrong 2002; Downey 1986; Hallett 2003; Lichterman 1995; Williams 1995; Wood 1999).

Assessing this link implies that the effectiveness with which aspects of culture influence deliberations and decision-making is itself an empirical question. This is Schudson's (1989) primary area of concern. In his article aptly titled "How culture works," he argues that the work of culture, that is, the capacity of symbols (mass media messages, specifically) to more or less influence people's attitudes and behavior is contingent on the degree to which any particular message exhibits five conditions (where the more it has on each of the following dimension, the more effective it will be): It must be retrievable (be readily available), have rhetorical force (be memorable), resonate with the audience (be relevant to them), achieve institutional retention (be preserved within organizational practices that promote the object), and have resolution (provide directives for action).

The present research builds on Schudson's aesthetic and alliterative framework. Although his five dimensions enable us to better assess how culture works, the problem of measurement is unaddressed. This creates the possibility, not that his five dimensions lack validity, but that we can increase the explained variation for questions of effectiveness by honing in on the specific problem of measurement. I will show that collective self-definitions, as one part of the culture concept, more readily influence attitudes and behaviors when they can plug into, or overlay with, practical organizing tasks. Collective self-definitions therefore work more effectively when they are *resinous*, or sticky—that is, when they can attach to fairly mundane organizational tasks that, in effect, help make them more empirically observable. This augmenting maneuver introduces a sixth *resinous condition* to Schudson's framework that is specifically targeted toward the problem of measurement.

## Research design

### Conceptualizing culture

That there are complexities in conceptualizing the culture concept is now axiomatic. I, like others (Binder et al. 2008), believe in the virtues of definitional catholicity, since it is questionable what we will gain by attempting to produce a definitive statement about culture. While this stance is exemplary, we still require some definition before we can pursue the question of measurement. The present research takes issue with the "entitvity" of the culture concept in the hopes of elucidating a measurement mechanism for how to concretize expressive aspects of social life (Shadish et al. 2002). To do this and like Schudson (1989: 18), I think of culture "somewhat arbitrarily" as collective self-definitions, narrowing my focus to articulations of identity and strategy.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Strategies delineate a desirable course of action by identifying objectives and goals, means and ends. Relevant concerns include what members want and how to obtain it (Gamson 1975; McAdam 1982). Identities denote agreed upon definitions of group membership. To make this systematic, I emphasize how the social category "gay" was elaborated (identity catness) and how different contenders who claimed membership were connected (identity netness) (Melucci 1995; Taylor 1989; Tilly 1978; White 1992)

This approach has two advantages. First, my definition deliberately blends Geertz's (1973: 89) emphasis on "an historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols," with Williams' (1976) discussion of culture as "a way of life" of a group of people, with Wuthnow's definition of culture as "symbolic expressive behavior" (Wuthnow 1987) and Schudson's emphasis on the "symbolic dimension of human activity" (Schudson 1989). It is therefore grounded in the methodology of "multiple operationalism," which rejects the notion that there is only one correct meaning or measurement of a concept, thereby triangulating the results that follow (Cook 1985: 39). Second, despite our shared interest in "how culture works," Schudson and I approach the puzzle differently. He defines culture as "the symbolic dimension of human activity" and operationalizes it as "discrete symbolic objects (art, literature, sermons, ideologies, advertisements, maps, street signs)" (p.153). I emphasize collective self-definitions and operationalize it as debates over discrete organizing tasks involved in staging a political demonstration. In this difference lies an opportunity to show that Schudson's 5 Rs have analytic purchase with regard to *processes* as well as *objects*. Selecting a definition and operational scheme that points to a different aspect of culture (and one that is comparatively intangible) opens up a previously unseen theoretical space to address the problem of measurement. Here I am motivated by Thomas Cook's (1985: 39) advice: "Because it is not always clear what a 'correct' measure is, it is desirable to measure or manipulate a construct in several ways." Blending definitions of the culture concept and moving Schudson's framework from the study of discrete mass media messages to debates over collective self-definitions facilitates a "postpositivist critical multiplism" in the study of culture.<sup>5</sup>

### Infighting as a case

I use infighting to assess competing collective self-definitions, an approach that connects to a long history in sociology (c.f., Coser 1956; Park and Burgess 1921; Ross 1920; Simmel 1955; Weber 1949). As a subtype of conflict, infighting is particularly pronounced in political organizing (Balsler 1997; Brown-Saracino and Ghaziani 2009; Ghaziani 2008; Ghaziani and Fine 2008). We see it, for example, in early debates in 1895 between Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. DuBois on the nature of black political and economic progress. Washington advocated gradualism and accommodation to white oppression—a program DuBois found intolerable. For him, real change came from persistent agitation, direct action, and academic education. DuBois leveraged internal dissent to muse on collective self-definitions: "The black men of America have a duty to perform, a duty stern and delicate,—a forward movement to oppose a part of the work of their greatest leader...[S]o far as Mr. Washington apologizes for injustice,...and opposes

<sup>5</sup> A common attack on the social scientific inquiry of culture targets "the straw person called the 'positivist'" (MacCoun 2003). Social scientists return the favor and criticize humanistic approaches to the study of culture as "highly abstract verbal theories with little predictive power" (Cook 1985: 34). Although I believe meaning versus quantitative measurement is ultimately a false opposition (see also Mohr 1998), I nonetheless employ a three-part integrative strategy: I use multimethod design, multiple theoretical frameworks, and ground my observations in specific historical events (c.f., Cook 1985: 21–22).



the higher training and ambition of our brighter minds,...we must unceasingly and firmly oppose them” (DuBois 1903).

Such examples of “horizontal hostility,” a term coined by feminist Florynce Kennedy in 1970 to describe infighting within minority groups (Penelope 1992), are not limited to social movements. Instances in contemporary politics also abound, perhaps most deliciously captured by the late President Ronald Reagan’s “11th Commandment”: “Thou Shalt Not Speak Ill of A Fellow Republican.” Another unforgettable exchange occurred when Harry Belafonte dubbed former Secretary of State Colin Powell a “house slave” who only serves his “master” (read: President Bush) and therefore sells out the black community. This argument contends that if you are a conservative black person like Powell, you are against the black community and damage the movement. Malcolm X argued similarly against Dr. King, that by wanting to be part of the white man’s world, he was doing more harm than good (McAdam 1982; Morris 1984). This is the same argument that DuBois launched against Washington and, 100 years later, Richard Goldstein, executive editor of the *Village Voice*, lambasted against “Homocons,” or conservative, especially Republican, gay people (Goldstein 2003).

Infighting is the expression of a difference of opinion or the offering of a discrepant view that either does not produce, or erupts prior to, an organizational defection.<sup>6</sup> It is a subtype of general conflict that is particularly well-suited for facilitating a dialogue on identity and strategy. For example, women activists used dissent to find concrete answers to otherwise elusive questions such as “What is a woman?” and “What are female values?” (Echols 1989; Rich 1980; Taylor and Rupp 1993: 41). Infighting became a source of “creative disunity” that helped materialize a distinctly female way of life (Lorde 1984). I use infighting to understand how activists create and negotiate a variety of meanings as they organize politically. To hone in on its meaning-making capacity, I frame infighting as a case of “cultural skepticism.” According to Swidler (2001:19), scholars cannot study culture without acknowledging dissent: “Our ability to describe a cultural perspective, or to see it at all, comes only from our skepticism about it.” This insight was identified years earlier by Dick Hebdige: “If we emphasize integration and coherence at the expense of dissonance and discontinuity, we are in danger of denying the very manner in which the subcultural form is made to crystallize, objectify, and communicate group experience” (Hebdige 1979: 79). The idea is the same: scholars can leverage infighting as a measurement directive for the study of culture. It is a key site to appraise how culture works.

Infighting brings to the fore and delimits assumptions and boundaries that may otherwise remain implicit. Despite the unease it may sometimes elicit among participants, infighting nonetheless promotes the multivocality of meaning, gives a nod to group heterogeneity, highlights the fine line between including some while excluding others, and reveals clues for how to plan a political demonstration in light of volatile power dynamics (Ghaziani and Fine

<sup>6</sup> Much of the social movements literature conflates infighting with organizational defections, a distinct phenomena in which groups fail at conflict resolution, that is, in which there is a “proper break-up of the group” (Simmel 1955: 48–49). This marks defections as analytically distinct from infighting. See (Balsler 1997; Mushaben 1989; Stern et al. 1971; Zald and Ash 1966; Zald and McCarthy 1980).

2008). In a contest over what it means to be a member of the group and what strategies are most savvy, there are often winners and losers. This contrasts with much of social life, in which there are less clear dividing lines. But this is precisely the analytic advantage of focusing the theoretical question of how culture works around the empirical study of internal conflicts. Infighting can allow scholars to better measure the effectiveness with which people use competing self-definitions to influence others.

### Data and analytic strategy

This research is part of a larger project that investigates the prevalence, role, and patterns of infighting across four Washington marches in 1979, 1987, 1993, and 2000 (Ghaziani 2008). No previous sociological account exists of these demonstrations. In this article, I compare the second (in 1987) and third (in 1993) marches. These two cases capture differences in the claims activists articulated while revealing a common and general process that holds true across the four events. They are modal cases. The first demonstration (in 1979) and the fourth (in 2000) do not provide additional analytic insights into the question of how culture works. They answer alternate questions such as how group boundaries are initially imagined (1979) and the consequences for violating organizing norms (2000). I use “comparative cultural analysis” (Ghaziani 2008: 317) to concretely measure culture in a way that can “achieve the dual goals of theory building and particularistic historical explanation” (Armstrong and Crage 2006: 727–728; Quadagno and Knapp 1992; Sewell 1996).

The American lesbian and gay movement has “received relatively little notice from scholars who emphasize the sociological literature on social movements” (Epstein 1999: 76). Those who have examined it have documented its competing visions for a collective project. While some suggest it developed “unity through diversity” (Armstrong 2002), others have shown that diversity drives dissent (Bernstein 1997; Gamson 1995, 1997; Ghaziani 2008; Robinson 2005; Warner 1993). This movement is therefore well-suited for an empirical study of infighting.

Washington marches leave behind paper trails, facilitating the collection of primary source materials that include newspaper and archival accounts. My data includes over 100 archival and 674 newspaper documents (news, letters to the editor, and editorials) across 11 sources that include local and national, mainstream and gay presses as follows: *Advocate* (national gay news magazine), *Bay Area Reporter*, *Bay Windows*, and *The Sentinel* (San Francisco gay press), *Gay Community News* (Boston gay press), *Washington Blade* (D.C. gay press), *Windy City Times* and *Gay Life* (Chicago gay press), *New York Times*, *San Francisco Chronicle*, and *Washington Post*. I include every published article for one full year before and after each march.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> See (Ghaziani 2008) for a detailed description of the data set, coding, and analysis. Note there is persisting debate in the social movements literature on the use of newspaper accounts (Earl et al. 2004). This literature councils against using such data to construct a list of time-varying protest events or to assert social-psychological arguments (McAdam 1982), neither of which affects the analytic strategy of the present study.

A growing gay press “created an arena in which lesbian and gay leaders waged their battles over what their social movement would be and where it was headed... [W]riters stood at the front lines of the ideological warfare, defining the themes debated...across the country” (Streitmatter 1995: 117). Since the Stonewall riots in 1969, the gay press “reflected its own political movement and community.” Early editors embraced a responsibility for “building the movement.”<sup>8</sup> Newspaper articles therefore represent a Geertzian public forum (Geertz 1973: 12), a sentiment echoed by activists about Washington marches: “Marches are a good place to have political conversations with the rest of our collective community.”<sup>9</sup> This methodological directive is aligned with the study’s theoretical objectives, as well.

### Argument overview and general model

I reconstruct historical narratives to detect competing, collective self-definitions of identity and strategy. The narratives derive from how the demonstrations were assembled. Each march was organized using a series of “national conferences” where an elected, 164-member “steering committee” (including 3–4 overseeing “national co-chairs”) met and voted on all the major decisions pertaining to the march (Fig. 1). According to one steering committee member, “One vision for the march is to put a face on gay America.”<sup>10</sup> To analytically reconstruct this face, I report deliberations that transpired at the conferences depicted in Fig. 1 along with the rank and files’ reactions to the decisions that were made there. I use both to make inferences about “the movement” as a whole, rather than claim that any particular group of activists spoke for all gay people (or that there is such a unitary entity).

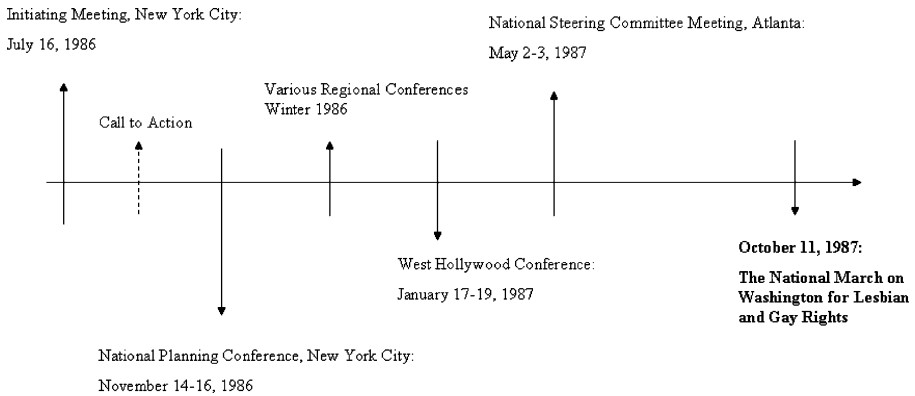
There will always be competing visions for how and why to organize an event like a Washington march, a conversation that implicates questions of strategy and identity (Barber 2002). These tensions can remain unarticulated or inaccessible for many reasons. Collective self-definitions, embodied in answers to questions such as who do we think we are and what is it that we want, may be too abstract to engage with focus. There may be too few institutional arenas within which to voice such concerns, too few opportunities for activists from across the country to convene and brainstorm. The realities of discriminatory legislation and rights-stripping referenda may make such questions seem self-indulgent and wasteful. A March on Washington proposal, however, can operate as an “originating spark,” “triggering event,” or “precipitating factor” that creates a need for a conversation over who we are and what we want (Fine 1979: 742; Lang and Lang 1961: 495; Smelser 1963: 16–17). The possibility that the event will happen encourages activists from across the country to collectively hash out questions of group membership and activity, although talking about such issues can still feel painfully abstract.

Collective self-definitions, as one part of culture, may become more readily observable when abstract meanings are tied to fairly mundane organizing tasks. Activists repeatedly deliberated six tasks across each of their four Washington

<sup>8</sup> “Gay Community News: 30 Years Later,” by Scott A. Giordano. *Bay Windows*, January 16, 2003.

<sup>9</sup> “Why a signer of the Ad Hoc Call is marching in the MMOW.” *Windy City Times*, April 6, 2000, p. 13.

<sup>10</sup> “Lessons from the March.” *Windy City Times*, May 27, 1993, p. 12.



**Fig. 1** National Conferences and March on Washington Organizing

marches: should we march and if so, then when should we march, what organizing structure should we adopt, what should we title it, what should we include in its platform, and who should we invite to speak at the post-march rally. I will show that activists used infighting over these tangible tasks to carry on a meaning-rich *communiqué* with their imagined, national community to whom they sought to articulate nebulous yet vital conceptions of who we are (our identity) and what we want (our strategy). The mechanism by which this occurs is the coupling of infighting with one or more of these six tasks. This linkage permits a more precise calibration of collective self-definitions by imbuing logistical decisions with symbolic carrying capacity, transforming infighting into a *culture carrier* (see Fig. 2). Said more simply: strategies and identities emerge from hashing out tasks that must get done. The nuts and bolts of organizing do more than get people into place; the process also concretely clarifies their identity and strategy. This alludes to an analytic technique that links meaning-making with specific organizational dilemmas (Ghaziani and Ventresca 2005; Pratt and Rafaeli 1997; Williams 1981; Wuthnow et al. 1984).

The remainder of this article is organized as follows: I compare the 1987 and 1993 marches. I first situate each demonstration in its respective historical context. I then isolate two of the six debates described earlier: what to title the march and what to include in its platform. I use the former to illustrate the relationship between infighting and identity and the latter to illustrate the relationship between infighting and strategy. For both, I italicize key phrases. I report primary source evidence in footnotes and insert secondary source evidence parenthetically. Because my interest

#### INFIGHTING COUPLED WITH ORGANIZING TASKS

1. Whether to March
2. When to March
3. Title / Theme
4. Speakers
5. Platform
6. Organizing Structure

*Culture Carrier*

#### COLLECTIVE SELF-DEFINITIONS Strategy and Identity

**Fig. 2** Infighting as a culture carrier

is in augmenting—not critiquing—Schudson’s framework, I present my data with an eye toward articulating a sixth R, or what I call the *resinous condition*.

## Results

Historical context: lesbian and gay life in the 1980s

Despite setbacks at the local level that had national resonance, lesbian and gay activists in the late 1970s maintained a feeling of optimism and efficacy that was required to sustain political activism (McAdam 1982). “The general feeling was that Lesbians and Gays were moving forward and that Lesbian and Gay civil rights were attainable,” one activist recalled.<sup>11</sup> This prompted descriptions of the movement having “an effervescent quality” in which being politically involved was “a way of life, for others life itself” (Armstrong 2002: 81). But then came AIDS. And everything changed. On July 3, 1981, the *New York Times* ran a headline portending, “Rare Cancer Seen in 41 Homosexuals,” noting that this “outbreak occurs among men in New York and California” and that “eight died inside 2 years.”<sup>12</sup> The next day, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) released a medical alert that confirmed that the prevalence of this rare cancer was considered “highly unusual.”<sup>13</sup>

The *Times* article and CDC report comprised the first public mention of the “rather devastating” disease that reconfigured gay life in an era that veteran activist Urvashi Vaid characterized as “the worst years of our lives” (Shilts 1987; Turner 2000; Vaid 1994: xi) and that sociologist Debra Gould described as “life during wartime” (Gould 2002). “I don’t know anybody who doesn’t know somebody who has died of AIDS,” one activist observed. “We’re watching the leadership of our community being devastated by it, and we’re watching our community’s resources being used for it because the federal government has failed to respond in any sort of appropriate way.”<sup>14</sup> In the 1980s, the movement was entrenched in a war with AIDS against the backdrop of an unresponsive presidential administration: Reagan did not publicly mention the disease until 6 years after the *Times* article and CDC report (Jones and Dawson 2000).

The Supreme Court dealt another blow in 1986 with *Bowers v. Hardwick*, a case that criminalized consensual sodomy, even in a citizen’s own home. As one activist described, “[T]hey took away gay people’s right to even be in the closet in the privacy of their own bedrooms. When they took away our closet, they really took away our right to exist at all.”<sup>15</sup> Said another, “Not since the black civil rights

<sup>11</sup> “Pulling through in a big way,” by Steve Greenberg. *Washington Blade*, October 11, 1987, p. 7.

<sup>12</sup> Altman, Lawrence K. 1981 (July 3). “Rare Cancer Seen in 41 Homosexual Men.” *New York Times* A20.

<sup>13</sup> Kaposi’s Sarcoma and *Pneumocystis Carinii* Pneumonia Among Homosexual Men—New York City and California. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. 1981 July 4; 30: 305–308.

<sup>14</sup> “Pulling through in a big way.”

<sup>15</sup> “Civil Disobedience: Are We Entering a New Militant Stage in the Struggle for Gay Rights?” *Advocate*, September 29, 1987, p. 48. Reported by Mark Vandervelden.

movement have we seen ... a movement that is hated for its very identity, not just for its political program.”<sup>16</sup>

AIDS and *Bowers* catalyzed action. March co-chair Steve Ault explained, “People are saying, ‘We have no other recourse, we have to turn to the streets’...There just doesn’t seem to be a response coming otherwise. It’s a matter of necessity, really. It’s a matter of survival.”<sup>17</sup> This made “people feel up against the wall” and “created a more militant stance among people who never had any intention of becoming militant. It was the last straw for many of us.”<sup>18</sup> This was the context that surrounded the organizing of the 1987 march.

### Infighting over the title of the 1987 March on Washington

The 1987 march was titled, “The National March on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights.” A consideration of who activists excluded from this title provides clues for how they delineated the social identity category “gay” and how they envisioned connections across different types of gay people. Media reports reveal that bisexual inclusion, in particular, was explosive during the 1987 march. In a letter to the editor titled, “A call to bisexuals,” one activist remarked, “*Gay liberation is our liberation...Once we begin to publicly claim our bisexual identities, we will no longer go unacknowledged or left out. The very fact that the march isn’t called ‘The Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual March on Washington’ is symptomatic of the fact that we haven’t been visible enough, as bi’s, within the Gay community.*”<sup>19</sup>

For whom was this march? As activists fought over the title, they clarified the boundaries of their identity. Pointedly titling her letter to the editor, “Bi’s, Gays struggle for same thing,” one rank and file member argued that “we” are just like “you”: “It would seem that the Gay community would be the last to condemn anyone for their sexuality, yet the apparently popular opinion of bisexuals in the Gay community is ‘they’re trying to pass as straight’ or ‘they can’t make up their minds.’ Bisexuality is not acceptable to much of the Gay community...As unpopular as homosexuality is with the government and society, the Gay rights movement cannot afford to condemn nor alienate any group, especially *one that shares their struggle.*”<sup>20</sup>

Wrestling with the same question of how bisexuals were connected to lesbians and gay men, another activist advocated separation: “*Bisexual and gay issues aren’t identical. We can’t let gays represent us in D.C. We have to go there ourselves, as bisexuals, to speak openly and vociferously as a separate and vital contingent. We must achieve some visibility on our own terms instead of passing as either heterosexual or gay.*”<sup>21</sup> Although embodying diverging logics, title debates converged on a common question: In what manner are we, bisexuals, connected to

<sup>16</sup> “Pulling through in a big way.”

<sup>17</sup> “March on Washington,” *Advocate*, August 18, 1987, p. 11.

<sup>18</sup> “Civil Disobedience: Are We Entering a New Militant Stage in the Struggle for Gay Rights?”

<sup>19</sup> “A call to bisexuals,” by Lucy Friedland and Liz Nania. *The Washington Blade*, September 25, 1987, p. B-13. A note on style: Italicized items are those that most closely speak to the theoretical concerns of the study.

<sup>20</sup> “Bi’s, Gays struggle for the same thing.” By Tracy S. Dryden. *Washington Blade*, November 6, 1987, p. B-17.

<sup>21</sup> “Bi’s march on Washington.” *Gay Community News*, September 6–12, 1987, p. 4.

you, lesbians and gay men? Was this march for us as well? Activists debated a discrete organizing task (what do we title the march?) to make concrete an identity conversation (what does it mean to be gay, and how are different contenders connected?).

Bisexual inclusion debates in 1987 were redolent of lesbian inclusion debates during the first march in 1979. At that time, women struggled to augment all organizational titles—including the title of the march—to stipulate “lesbian and gay” rights as opposed to just “gay” rights. During the 1970s and earlier, activists generally used the word “gay” to connote the experiences of both men and women. However, as Elizabeth Armstrong (2002:145) observes,

Simply by demanding that ‘lesbian’ be included in organization names, lesbians asserted that: (1) women’s experience of being gay was different; (2) it was both as universal and as specific as men’s experience; (3) lesbian issues were of equal importance; (4) one could not claim to represent lesbians without including ‘lesbian’ in the organization’s name; and (5) organizations that claimed to represent lesbians had to have lesbians as members and leaders.

The logic across Armstrong’s statement, 1979 debates, and 1987 debates is the same: Rhetorical representation was required for bisexuals, in the later days, and lesbians, in the earlier days, to feel like they shared in their imagined group’s collective identity (see also Rich 1980: 649–650). Infighting over the title helped to make possible this otherwise abstract conversation.

### Infighting over the platform of the 1987 March on Washington

The preceding discussion illustrates how title debates enabled identity conversations. The operative definitional question concerned the meaning of “we” (i.e., who are we, and how are different types of people who claim membership in our group connected?) During the organizing for every march, activists also debated the platform, a fight that triggered a different definitional question pertaining to strategy, that is, what do we want, and how do we best secure it?

Delegates who attended the national conference (see Fig. 1) at which platform debates transpired compiled a laundry list of demands. Prominent among these, and as a response to the sociopolitical context, were the repeal of sodomy laws, the passage of a federal lesbian and gay civil rights bill in Congress, the extending of heterosexual benefits and rights to lesbian and gay couples, the end of discrimination against people with AIDS, the end to discussions of mandatory HIV testing and the quarantining of the seropositive, and a massive increase in funding for AIDS research, treatment, and education. These fairly conventional single-issue demands for gay rights met with little resistance. The most rancorous debate developed over whether the march ought to embrace a multi-issue, coalition platform and also include non-gay demands.<sup>22</sup> Examples of “non-gay demands” included the abolition

<sup>22</sup> “Bitter Debate Opens Nat’l March Planning,” *Gay Community News*, December 7–13, 1986, p. 1, 3. For a discussion of why coalition building was not a viable strategy in the first march, see (Ghaziani 2008).

of racism and sexism, support for the Equal Rights Amendment, and an end to South African apartheid. Those favoring a single-issue march argued that introducing demands to end racism and sexism would “divert the focus” from “gay concerns” and “alienate” conservative march supporters. Multi-issue folks responded that “all oppressions are interconnected” and that discrimination against gays was systemically connected to the subjugation of other minorities. A multi-issue march would “broaden its appeal,” especially among people of color and women.<sup>23</sup> In platform debates we hear another conversation over strategy: What do we want and how do we best secure that which we want? Should we define ourselves as political *sui generis* or as a social justice movement that seeks to build coalitions with others?

Coalition building promised to broaden the appeal of the march. One activist asserted, “As members of the lesbian and gay movement, we too are affected by the rising racism and sexism which oppresses people of color and women; thereby the liberation of lesbians and gay men is *intricately linked* to the struggle against racism, sexism, and anti-Semitism. We realize that *none of us are free until we are all free*. We therefore call upon all of our sisters and brothers to actively confront racism and sexism on all levels both within our movement and in the larger society.”<sup>24</sup> One press release continued with this line of reasoning, but it also emphasized a sense of ownership: “The march cannot be single issue march *if People of Color are to be vocally and critically involved* from its organization to its implementation.”<sup>25</sup> At one of the national conferences, the self-named People of Color Caucus pressed further: “Racism inside and outside the gay and lesbian community must become a serious agenda item for white gays and lesbians *if this community is to become a viable entity in which we actively participate at all levels...Spread the word—This is our march, too!* And no one, or anything, not even racism, will stop us from fully sharing our role.” The caucus used platform debates to concretely carry to the table a conversation over strategy that, in the absence of being linked to this specific task, may have remained unintelligible.

Like their counterparts, single-issue supporters also used the tangibility of the platform to articulate competing strategic visions. An exemplary letter titled “List of March demands is a lampoon of itself” argued, “*The central importance of our sexual orientation...is obscured in a barrage of liberal propaganda...The whole tone of the document, with its ‘demands’ and cries of ‘oppression,’ is naïve and pretentious.*” Writer Rick Rosendall of D.C. was keenly aware of the platform’s capacity to facilitate a deeper conversation over collective self-definitions: “Of course, these demands that *bear no conceivable relation* to Gay and Lesbian rights *represent an effort to build coalitions.*” Yet Rosendall remained restless. He asked, “But how effective is this?” To which he replied, “Whenever I hear the litany of oppressed minorities recited, I listen in vain for any mention of Gays. We adopt

<sup>23</sup> “Bitter Debate Opens Nat’l March Planning.”

<sup>24</sup> “National March on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights, October 11, 1987,” p. 34 (Official Program). Primary source material, Gerber Hart Library, Chicago, IL.

<sup>25</sup> “Notes from the People of Color Caucus at the National Conference for the March on Washington November 14–16, 1986.” Folder: 1987 L & G March/Jan. L.A. Meeting. Box: 1987 March on Washington National Committee—Record. Box 1. GLBT Historical Society of Northern California, San Francisco, CA.



other groups' agendas without their adopting ours. *Assembling questionable coalitions serves only to destroy the focus of the march* and alienate those who disagree on the other issues." For him, some of the proposed demands were outrageous: "And why, for God's sake, must apartheid and the contras be dragged into everything? We have to pass every liberal litmus test or we are out of step... Forgive me if I seem hard, but polite murmurings would hardly be noticed amid *the inflated clamorings of reflexive, indiscriminate liberalism*... Surely as a community in the 1980s we can do better than this."<sup>26</sup> Such platform critiques were not uncommon. Many perceived the demands as having "an unabashedly leftist tilt," a description printed in the *Advocate*, the largest national lesbian and gay news magazine.<sup>27</sup> Its publication there may be one indicator of its broader reach.

National conference delegates were receptive to the pleas of the People of Color Caucus, and, "an end to racism and sexism" was ultimately included in an unmistakably coalition platform. The POC Caucus, however, pressed to include more resolutions than were approved. A consideration of what was not passed reveals limits within which activists understood what it was they sought to accomplish. For example, activists voted down a demand to "end U.S. intervention throughout the Third World." They similarly rejected a proposal for "an end to U.S. corporate and government support for South African apartheid and the freedom of South African political prisoners." The newly formed and playfully named DAFFODIL (Dykes and Fags Fighting in Our Own Defense and for International Liberation), who co-sponsored the intervention resolution, voiced dismay in its defeat: "While it's 'safe' to be against apartheid, denouncing intervention—particularly CIA backing for the Nicaraguan contras—is a little too challenging. We have to work hard to *counter the rightward move in the gay community*, which only reflects the general trend in this society."<sup>28</sup> Thus, although activists used platform fights to negotiate competing collective self-definitions of strategy, this process was not without limits.

To summarize: At one level, the preceding public forum was about organizational decisions: What should we title the march? How should we construct the platform? At another level, however, activists were contending with a problem of meaning. Title debates reveal a deeper engagement with identity questions such as who do we think we are, and how are different types of people who claim membership in this group connected. Platform fights, on the other hand, facilitated answers to strategic questions: what do we want, and how do we best secure that which we want? Single-issue supporters were motivated by an "interest group political logic" that perceived discrimination against gays as the main problem with society that could be resolved through reform. Multi-issue supporters, on the other hand, embraced a "redistributive political logic" in which structural inequality was the fundamental problem that could only be resolved through societal transformation. The groups saw past one another due

<sup>26</sup> "List of March demands is a lampoon of itself," *The Washington Blade*, October 9, 1987, p. B-15.

<sup>27</sup> "March on Washington," *Advocate*, August 18, 1987, p. 11.

<sup>28</sup> "Notes from the People of Color Caucus at the National Conference for the March on Washington November 14–16, 1986." Signed by Jaime Credle. Folder: "1987 L & G March/Jan. L.A. Meeting." Box: "1987 March on Washington National Committee Record, Box 1." GLBT Historical Society of Northern California.

to core differences in understanding how society was organized, what the appropriate goals were for political action, and what the appropriate strategies were to accomplish those goals (c.f., Armstrong 2002:17). To test the validity of this claim, let us now compare the 1987 march with the one staged immediately after it in 1993. These two cases reveal differences in the strategy and identity claims activists articulated while illustrating a common underlying measurement mechanism. I begin with an elaboration of the historical context.

Historical context: lesbian and gay life in the late 1980s and early 1990s

Historian John D’Emilio observed, “Something happened in the 1990s, something dramatic and irreversible. A group of people long considered a moral menace and an issue previously deemed unmentionable in public discourse were...discussed in every institution of American society...During the 1990s, the world seemed finally to turn and take notice of the gay people in its midst” (D’Emilio 2002). D’Emilio’s sentiment speaks to a broader sociopolitical trend, as the love that once dared not speak its name was suddenly on everyone’s lips. *Entertainment Weekly*, for example, dubbed the era “The Gay ‘90s” on their cover.<sup>29</sup> This was not an isolated incident. From 1989 to 1993, headlines highlighted the public coming out of Congressman Barney Frank (D-Mass.) (*Newsweek*, September 25, 1989), debates on whether homosexuality was born or bred (*Time*, September 9, 1991; *Newsweek*, February 24, 1992), gays in the military (*Newsweek*, February 1, 1993), and general interest cover stores variously titled, “The Future of Gay America” and “Gays Under Fire” that endeavored to “Uncover the Limits of Tolerance” and to get to the bottom of “what America thinks,” respectively (*Newsweek*, March 12, 1990; *Newsweek*, September 14, 1992). This journalistic mainstreaming “signifies a major shift in societal definitions” (Gross 2001:123) that defined gays as “the people next door” (Ghaziani 2008: 128).

Recognizing the American gaze upon them, gays fought with each other over whether to return a “palatable” image. The *New York Times* picked up on this impression management during the third march, staged on April 25, 1993: “This march was Ozzie and Harriet compared with the Stonewall days...They [lesbians and gay men] wanted to show America that they were ‘regular’ people, the kind that live next door, go to work every day and pay their taxes...‘Ordinary’ and ‘The People Next Door’ were mantras of the weekend.”<sup>30</sup> Although life during the Gay ‘90s was complex, two particular trends forcefully influenced the march organizing. First, the nature of conflict changed. Although the discrete threat of AIDS persisted, a militant organization known as ACT-UP succeeded in getting “drugs into bodies” through a politics of “cultural provocation” (Crimp 1996; Gamson 1989; Gould 2002). In addition, President Ronald Reagan made his first public speech about AIDS in 1987 and established a commission on HIV (the Watkins Commission) that same year. In

<sup>29</sup> “The Gay ‘90s.” *Entertainment Weekly* September 8, 1995.

<sup>30</sup> “Washington—by Way of Stonewall.” *The New York Times*, April 27, 1993, page A20.

his speech, he described AIDS as “public health enemy number one.”<sup>31</sup> Also in 1987 the FDA approved the first Western blot blood test to detect HIV antibodies, and Congress approved \$30 million in emergency funding for AZT. Infection rates decreased for the first time.

These and other developments allowed activists to shift their attention to a diffuse backlash generated by the Religious Right. The fundamentalist Christian Right has for many years symbiotically jostled with gay activists (Fetner 2008). What was different in the early 1990s was the rhetoric the Right used to persuade the public to repeal existing, and block new, pro-gay legislation. The tried-and-true strategy of demonization was no longer their key; the Right now warned against providing “special rights” (read: preferential treatment) to gays. Discrimination against lesbians and gay men, the argument went, was not the same as that against other minorities. Just as the Supreme Court did not confer a “fundamental right to sodomy” in its 1986 *Bowers v. Hardwick* decision, so too the government should not confer special rights to a lifestyle group that chose to be that way (Keen and Goldberg 2000).

The second trend speaks to identity specialization within the movement. In the 6 years between the second and third marches, gay organizations continued to grow with a notable rise in people of color and bisexual organizing. Activists of color challenged the mainstreaming of the movement, pushed leaders to think radically, and emphasized coalition building (Epstein 1999). Bisexual organizations also flowered. In fact, infighting during the 1987 march helped consolidate bisexuals as a distinct group and, as we will see, prompted title augmentation rather than a bisexual defection or dissolution as the social movement literature might predict (Gamson 1975). Ironically, HIV/AIDS also helped consolidate bisexuals as a distinct group, especially when, in the late 1980s, the Centers for Disease Control identified them as a “special risk group” that could introduce the virus into the “general population” (Hutchins 1996). This was the context that surrounded the organizing and infighting of the third demonstration in 1993.

### Infighting over the title of the 1993 March on Washington

The 1993 march was titled, “The National March on Washington for Lesbian, Gay, and Bi Equal Rights and Liberation.” There are two departures in this title compared to the second march in 1987 (and even the first march in 1979). Unlike its predecessors, the third demonstration included bisexuals; this had never before happened. When activists debated the title, votes for bisexual inclusion twice exceeded those for just a “lesbian and gay” titled protest event. This was not inevitable, as activists described title fights as “by far the most contentious issue” at the national conference at which this discussion transpired.<sup>32</sup> Activists used infighting over the title as a vehicle to clarify over-time changes in their identity,

<sup>31</sup> See the NIA Plan of the African American AIDS Policy and Training Institute’s “Chronology of Selected Events.” [http://www.blackaids.org/niaplan/niaexec\\_chronology.htm](http://www.blackaids.org/niaplan/niaexec_chronology.htm) (accessed June 21, 2005).

<sup>32</sup> “First March on Washington Meeting Proves Contentious.” *Windy City Times*, January 30, 1992, p. 4. See also “1993 March on Washington National Steering Committee Meeting, Los Angeles, CA, January 18–19, 1992, Meeting Summary.” Personal Papers of Billy Hileman.

augmenting how the category “gay” was defined and reconfiguring how different groups who claimed membership in the movement were connected (which now for the first time included bisexuals). That “bi” was included in the title in 1993 but not in 1987 suggests that debates over collective self-definitions at one point in time may structure discrete outcomes at a later point in time.

But why “bi” and not bisexual? The answer to this question lies in the changing nature of external threat that confronted the movement. In the 1980s, the movement witnessed the discrete threats of HIV/AIDS and the Supreme Court’s *Bowers v. Hardwick* decision. In the early 1990s, however, we see the rise of the Right’s diffuse backlash, catapulted through their “special rights” crusade. This argument gained traction in a societal context where Americans were debating the origins of sexual orientation: was it born or bred? Activists countered by demanding “equal rights,” the second departure in the 1993 march title. Although linguistically unremarkable, the phrase had particular resonance in this historical context. The word “bi” deemphasized sex, a move activists felt would bolster their efforts to be treated like everyone else. According to one activist, “The [steering] committee decided to use ‘bi’ instead of ‘bisexual...because a number of delegates felt ‘bisexual’ had a sexual connotation.”<sup>33</sup> However, at the risk of sounding too mainstream and as evidence of a developing tension between leftist and centrist impulses within the movement, activists included the phrase “and liberation” in the title, as well.

Same as before, activists once again debated the title to wrestle with questions of identity. Arguing against bisexual inclusion, one letter in the gay press titled “Major Mistake” opined, “The purpose of the 1993 March is to send a clear signal to straight America. Confusing the March title to make it *an umbrella for every minority group* is a major mistake.”<sup>34</sup> Another writer was “really getting fed up with all the catering going on in the Gay community for bisexuals...From the time of that fateful night in 1969 when the Gay Liberation Movement as we know it began, Gay men and Lesbians have fought long and hard to get where we are today. Now, *the bisexuals are crawling out of the woodwork to reap the benefits.*”<sup>35</sup> These and many other activists wanted to limit who was included within the parameters of “gay.”

In a letter revealingly titled “Expand Definition” and to the gentleman who was fed up, prominent bisexual activist Loraine Hutchins replied: “I too am ‘fed up’...What I’m fed up with is her/his attitude and misinformation! Bisexuals were at Stonewall. Bisexuals helped build the Gay movement. *The movement belongs to us as much as anyone...Our Gay community needs to expand its definition and our goals* if we are to succeed.”<sup>36</sup> Another writer, titling her thoughts with an equally forceful “Same Struggle” succinctly added, “Bi inclusion boils down to one basic premise: *our struggle is exactly the same...*Bis are not the

<sup>33</sup> “National march adds the word ‘bi’ to official title.” *Washington Blade*, January 31, 1992.

<sup>34</sup> “Major Mistake,” by Dave Reyman. *Washington Blade*, February 14, 1992, p. 31.

<sup>35</sup> “Fed up,” written by B.G. Johnson. *Washington Blade*, February 21, 1992, p. 31.

<sup>36</sup> “Expand definition,” written by Loraine Hutchins. *Washington Blade*, February 28, 1992, p. 31.

enemy...We are on the same side of this struggle...*We are you.*"<sup>37</sup> In both the 1987 and 1993 marches, infighting over practical tasks such as the title operated as culture carrier that enabled activists to materially engage in the abstract work of defining their collective identity (see Fig. 2).

### Infighting over the platform of the 1993 March on Washington

Similar to the second march, the bitterest platform debate in 1993 was whether the demonstration ought to be single-issue in focus, and only identify traditionally gay demands, or whether instead activists should embrace a multi-issue, coalition approach. Also similar to the second march, activists once again used this organizing task as a vehicle to debate deeper concerns of strategy: What do we want? And how do we best secure it? What is noteworthy, however, is that activists no longer used this debate to self-define as a social justice movement in pursuit of coalitions, as they had indeed done in 1987. They now used this same organizing task (the platform) to redefine themselves as a "mainstream" movement in pursuit of "equal rights." This self-redefinition was bolstered in the face of an unexpected, unprecedented, and unanimous endorsement of the march by the NAACP.

Reflecting on the increasing diversity of the movement, steering committee members proposed with little controversy a 55-item list of demands that included the expected currency of gay rights and some surprising claims, such as the legalization of polygamy and polyandry and an end to economic injustice internationally. "The long list of demands represents the diversity of our community," explained one steering committee member in a letter to the editor of Washington, D.C.'s gay press.<sup>38</sup> Despite the ease with which delegates proposed the demands, its reception in the public forum was far from calm and cool. The draft was immediately criticized for being "a laundry list for the left" that "represents a fringe group within a fringe group." Local D.C. activists advised, "Because of the great diversity within our community ... we recommend that...*the sole purpose* of the 1993 March on Washington be for 'the equal rights and liberation of Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual People.'"<sup>39</sup> We can hear participants using the platform to wrestle with strategic disagreements over diversity management that provided competing answers to questions such as what do we want and how do we best secure it. Is diversity better managed using a lowest-common denominator logic, as local D.C. activists recommended? Or should activists instead cast a wider net to encompass and represent specific individual groups, as the steering committee proposed?

Rumblings on both sides overlaid infighting onto the platform in an effort to concretize abstract concerns of strategy. Veteran activist Franklin Kameny advised that diversity management required unity around a single demand: "There is an old saying: '*Shoemaker, stick to your last.*' Our 'last' is gay rights, and that alone. *Let's*

<sup>37</sup> "Same struggle," written by Debra R. Kolodny. *Washington Blade*, February 28, 1992, p. 31.

<sup>38</sup> "A clear majority," *The Washington Blade*, May 29, 1992, p. 33.

<sup>39</sup> "D.C. march committee says it can't endorse Dallas platform." *The Washington Blade*, May 29, 1992, p. 11. See also "D.C. March Committee Urges Platform Rescission," *Windy City Times*, June 18, 1992, p. 10.

*stick to it in our platform.*"<sup>40</sup> Other single-issue supporters accused multi-issue folks of being out-of-step with a mainstreaming movement, that is, with being "ideologically rigid march organizers."<sup>41</sup> The controversy snowballed into a national dialogue that wondered, "*What are we marching for?*"<sup>42</sup> According to one activist, "Our march has ceased to be a march of gay rights and has been successfully hijacked by the 'looney left'...Our march has...become a march for a national utopia, or a march for a perfect society, or a march against all oppression—or a cure-everything march. *It has ceased to be a gay-related march at all.*"<sup>43</sup> This side felt the platform committee "just could not bring itself to care enough about *our issues* because it had too many *other agendas*." Quickly, "the suspicion grows that members of the committee frankly did not know what 'our' issues are."

The question of what constituted "our issues" plugged into the special rights debate reverberating throughout American society. Some D.C. residents complained that the platform "provides ample ammunition...*for those who accuse us of seeking special privileges*." Chicagoans agreed: "If retained, the...55 'support items' of the march *will provide unlimited anti-gay fodder for the right-wing* and may reverse years of hard-fought political gains...Jesse Helms, Patrick Buchanan and other anti-gay leaders will use this platform against us for years to come."<sup>44</sup> Yet another writer expressed the same frustration: "We remain concerned that *the right wing will use the platform to stymie gay and lesbian political gains*" since certain demands will become "ammunition that the right can, and almost surely will, use against us."<sup>45</sup> Thus, not only was infighting in dialogue with the sociopolitical context, but activists also leveraged the tangibility of a routine organizing task (what to include in the platform) to engage in definitional debates over strategy (what do we want, and how do we best secure it?).

Given persisting infighting, the co-chairs called for an emergency meeting to review, revise, and resubmit the demands to the public. Multi-issue advocates took this opportunity to respond to single-issue supporters by identifying the difficulties inherent in drafting a singular strategic statement. Platform committee co-chair Chip Wells summarized this position: "The task of producing a platform that is acceptable to everyone in a community as diverse as ours is almost impossible...*Growing and expanding our consciousness is not always an easy or painless process.*"<sup>46</sup> Some of the rank and file agreed: "The long list of demands represents the diversity of our community," expressed one letter to the editor. A single-issue platform "would *divide our community because it would ignore the needs* of people of color, women, and those of limited economic means."<sup>47</sup>

<sup>40</sup> "Political Correctness Endangers March on Washington." *Windy City Times*, December 3, 1992, p. 19.

<sup>41</sup> "A Disaster in the Making." *Windy City Times*, December 10, 1992, p. 13. Unauthored Editorial.

<sup>42</sup> "What Are We Marching For?" *Windy City Times*, June 4, 1992, p. 14. Written by Paul Varnell.

<sup>43</sup> "Political Correctness Endangers March on Washington."

<sup>44</sup> "A Disaster in the Making."

<sup>45</sup> "...But Don't Risk the Movement." *Windy City Times* Editorial, March 25, 1993, p. 13.

<sup>46</sup> "1993 March on Washington Finalizes Agenda, Executive Committee meets to complete Platform Planks and Items." Press release dated June 9, 1992. Folder: March on Washington—April 1993 IV, the ONE Institute.

<sup>47</sup> "A clear majority," *The Washington Blade*, May 29, 1992, p. 33.

Although this sentiment seemed reasonable, the fights still required some type of resolution. The platform committee released a revised draft that included two notable amendments: (1) they deleted the most controversial item calling for “the legalization of multiple partner unions”; and (2) they modified the language of an age-of-consent demand from recognizing “sexual relations among youth, between consenting partners” to “graduated age of consent laws.” In finalizing the new document, co-chair Nadine Smith revealed, “Our priority has from the beginning been one of inclusivity...*No one is on the outside of this movement.*”<sup>48</sup> But if no one is outside the movement, then everyone is necessarily inside it, at which point such distinctions become meaningless. This is very much like the culture concept itself: if everything is culture or somehow cultural, then nothing is uniquely so.

Just as this situation was in danger of becoming a stalemate, organizers received an unexpected, unprecedented, and unanimous endorsement of the march from the NAACP. Their spokesperson commented that this “marks the beginning of a new and very important coalition. The NAACP supports efforts to end discrimination against gay men and lesbians in areas of American life where all citizens deserve *equal protection* and *equal opportunity* under the law.” It seems that the controversies buzzing through American society at the time—are gays asking for special or equal rights?—may have structured the NAACP’s decision to endorse the 1993 march. Activists reframed Gibson’s endorsement as signaling their now-mainstream status. According to Smith, “The lesbian and gay movement has moved from being viewed as a *special interest fringe group to being in the mainstream of America...* We’re now seen as part of the broader civil rights movement.”<sup>49</sup> This idea was echoed 2 weeks later in Chicago: “The March on Washington could illustrate our resolve to achieve basic civil rights... With the participation of the NAACP,...the message that gays and lesbians are only asking for *the same rights* that others have—and *not special rights*—will be loud and clear.”<sup>50</sup> Whereas activists used platform debates in 1987 to self-define as a social justice movement, 1993 organizers responded to changes in the sociopolitical context by leveraging this same task to now redefine their strategy away from a social justice program toward one that emphasized obtaining equal rights in the mainstream.

The platform controversies persisted to the day of the march itself. This prompted some activists to advocate ignoring the document altogether. The platform “was designed to please everyone, and it ended up not pleasing anyone,” in the words of a key organizer from 1987. He continued, “We had a cockamamie platform in 1987, too, but people didn’t pay attention to it. The platform is irrelevant, and no one will remember what it said. If you don’t like the agenda, ignore it.”<sup>51</sup> A call to ignore politics of the event, extolled in the platform, serves as a counterfactual in support of emphasizing the cultural dimensions of political organizing. Another 1987 march organizer attested that people “were transformed by it [the march]. If you go to this [the 1993] march, you will not come back the same person.” Thus, a march on Washington may have a

<sup>48</sup> “1993 March on Washington Finalizes Agenda.”

<sup>49</sup> “D.C. March: ‘Historic’ Coalition Forged.” *Windy City Times*, March 4, 1993, p. 1. Reported by David Olson.

<sup>50</sup> “Support the March...” *Windy City Times*, March 25, 1993, p. 13. Unauthored Editorial.

<sup>51</sup> “Community Unites Around D.C. March.” *Windy City Times*, February 4, 1993, p. 4. Reported by David Olson.

defibrillating effect that can help jumpstart activism by providing a forum for activists to engage in definitional debates. Another writer also captured this sentiment: “I was at the previous lesbian and gay March on Washington and I was at the one before that. I don’t remember the formal platform or demands from either march. Does anybody?...I *do* remember two...magnificent milestones in the growth of our...power.”<sup>52</sup> To summarize, at one level, the preceding public forum was about march logistics: what should we include in our platform? At another level and especially in light of assertions to ignore the demands, activists were also engaged in a process of meaning-making: they used infighting to facilitate a deeper conversation over who we are (our identity) and what we hope to accomplish by marching (our strategy).

### Conclusion: a resinous culture framework

In this article, I use previously unstudied protest cases to make a plea for the development of a research program pertaining to the problem of measurement in the study of culture. I have shown that activists use infighting as a vehicle or *culture carrier* to transport abstract meanings fashioned from fights overlaid onto fairly mundane and routine organizing tasks (see Fig. 2). At one level, the preceding deliberations were ostensibly about purely logistical decisions: what should we title the march? What should we include in its platform? At another level, however, activists were engaged in definitional debates, wrestling for answers to abstract questions of identity and strategy. The mechanism that enables infighting to carry deeper conversations of collective self-definitions is its coupling with discrete organizing tasks. This coupling reconfigures otherwise common organizational tasks into symbols, a la Geertz, that are more empirically observable and measurable. Activists made abstract ideas concrete—that is, provided identity and strategy with a thingness—in the crucible of conflict. This outcome transpired in debates activists had during their national conferences (see Fig. 1) and was disseminated to the rank and file and American public via media reports in gay and mainstream presses.

Journalists marshaled a wealth of provocative and pithy phrases to muse on infighting, a sample of which includes the following: “that ol’ gay infighting gene,” “eating our own,” “lavender fascists,” “trashing and cannibalizing,” “internal lesbian and gay bashing,” “culture war raging in our community,” “cultural caste system,” “pride and prejudice,” “a formula for being gay,” “queer peer bashers,” “the politics of divide and dis,” “the slash and burn approach to gay politics,” “the impulse to divide and demonize,” “a sadomasochistic style of politics,” and “shredding the rainbow.”<sup>53</sup> This list further signals infighting’s capacity to speak to concerns of identity (e.g., “the right way to be”) and strategy (e.g., “style of gay politics”).

<sup>52</sup> “Going with the Community’s Flow.” *Windy City Times*, February 4, 1993, p. 12. Written by Joseph Schuman.

<sup>53</sup> “Eating Our Own,” *Advocate*, August 13, 1992; “Pride and Prejudice,” *Advocate*, February 9, 1993, p. 6; “Why I Hated the March on Washington,” Undated (but referencing the 1993 march); “Shredding the Rainbow,” *Frontiers*, May 28, 1999, p. 63; “The longing of the Age of Aquarius,” *Advocate*, January 18, 2000, p. 7; “Cease fire!” *Advocate*, February 15, 2000, p. 36.



Activists on the ground were keenly aware that collective self-definitions were highly disputed and often vague. Their self-reflexivity provides additional evidence that the culture concept's amorphousness may be analytically alleviated by looking for places where meanings map onto specific conflicts. Consider the following: "There is much more at stake here than hammering out the logistics of a march. In fact, what is at stake is the very heart of our movement."<sup>54</sup> Infighting, said another, allows us "to define who we are [read: identity] and where we struggle [read: strategy]" (Cohen 1999: 117–8). A third activist observed, "This is about...who sits at the table and who decides how the table is set. This is about the direction of our ... movement."<sup>55</sup> The "rift," according to a fourth activist quoted in the *New York Times*, is about "who speaks for the movement and how decisions are made."<sup>56</sup> And finally, "[T]his ... ruckus is part of a larger culture war raging in our community. Like the culture war in American society, this conflict is ultimately about control. Behind the sound and fury lies a perennial question: Who owns gay liberation?"<sup>57</sup> These statements point to a promising relationship between infighting, organizational decision-making, and measurement of the culture concept.

The evidence I have presented synthesizes theoretical perspectives on how culture works, that is, how collective self-definitions influence what people think—which I have shown to be empirically accessible in the articulation of activists' dissent—and how they act—which I have shown to be empirically accessible in their organizational decisions. Activists used practical tasks to flesh out concerns of strategy and identity at national conferences broken down into small, interacting groups (Fine). In this way, they constructed strategies of action (Swidler), codifying, repeating, and institutionalizing lessons that were successful (Wuthnow). Retained ideas (e.g., the title reflects who is represented in the movement) worked as a switchman (Weber) that directed the tracks along which future organizing unfolded (e.g., title augmentation in 1993 was based on 1987 infighting). Assembling the marches along recurring tasks was ritualistically re-enacted, which enabled activists to affirm and celebrate themselves (Durkheim). Infighting captured a struggle to determine which were the ruling ideas and values and therefore who was the ruling, valued groups (Marx and Engels) (e.g., do bisexuals and transgenders count?).

This article's deepest theoretical roots lie with the Schudsonian question of how culture works. Rather than emphasize cultural *objects*, such as his mass media messages, I have focused instead on cultural *processes*, such as definitional debates. This move has two payoffs. First, despite emphasizing a different aspect of the culture concept, my data nonetheless confirm the validity of Schudson's five Rs. Collective self-definitions are more likely to affect what people think and how they behave the more they exhibit of the following five dimensions: (1) Definitional debates must be "retrievable," which activists ensured by organizing

<sup>54</sup> "March moves forward on misguided course," by Nadine Smith. *The Washington Blade*, April 17, 1998, p. 33.

<sup>55</sup> *Gay Community News* 24(1), 1998, pp. 24–25.

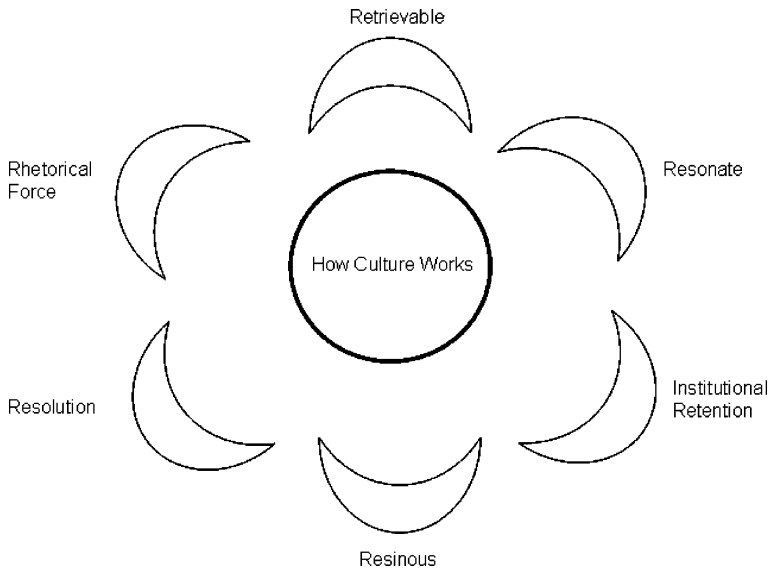
<sup>56</sup> "A Gay Rights Rally Over Gains and Goals," by Robin Toner. *The New York Times*, May 1, 2000, p. A14.

<sup>57</sup> "Cease Fire!" by Richard Goldstein. *Advocate*, February 15, 2000, pp. 36, 39–40.

a handful of national conferences (Fig. 1) on which the media extensively reported. This made “available” and allowed for participation in otherwise out-of-reach debates with an imagined national community (Schudson 1989: 161). (2) Collective self-definitions must also have “rhetorical force,” which activists ensured in two ways. They focused their dissent on symbolically charged tasks that possessed “that indefinable quality of vividness or drama or attention-grabbing.” Activists also used elected steering committee members, a type of “high-status speaker,” as communication brokers (Schudson 1989: 165). (3) Definitional debates must “resonate,” which activists ensured by dialoguing the march with the sociopolitical context. The special rights controversy, for instance, effectively anchored platform fights in 1993 because it was “relevant to and resonant with the life of the audience.” This also explains why different people advocated managing diversity differently (competing lowest common denominator versus wide net logics): people “perceive selectively from what they attend to” (Schudson 1989: 167). The audience is not monolithic. (4) Collective self-definitions must be “institutionally retained,” which activists ensured by codifying their lessons learned. Elsewhere I describe how 1993 march organizers invited leaders from the 1979 and 1987 demonstrations to share their wisdom (Ghaziani 2008). Organizers in 1993 used these lessons as the infrastructure upon which they built their third march. This approach put into place “a set of concrete social relations in which meaning is enacted” and provided “social or institutional support” (Schudson 1989: 170). (5) And finally, definitional debates must provide “resolution,” which was most vividly ensured in the demand items that provided “precise directions” (Schudson 1989: 172) for legislative action. My point is this: the move from objects to processes does not enfeeble Schudson’s five conditions under which culture influences what people think and how they behave. On the contrary, the present research provides additional empirical evidence for the robustness of his framework.

Besides confirming the validity of Schudson’s model, the move from objects to processes has also enabled me to open up a previously-unseen theoretical space from which I can identify and name a sixth dimension that is specifically targeted toward the problem of measurement. The efficacy of definitional debates is enhanced when they can attach to organizing tasks that provide a metaphorical resin onto which meanings can stick and therefore become more readily measurable. If we allow the contest for collective self-definitions that drive such debates to be a part of the culture concept, then we may say that an activist’s ability to use meanings to influence what another activist thinks or how this other person behaves is enhanced under a *resinous condition*, a sixth R in Schudson’s now-augmented framework that remains allegiant to his alliteration (see Fig. 3).

So what does all this mean for the problem of measurement? The culture concept does not necessarily have to be “an amorphous, indescribable mist which swirls around society members” (Fine 1979: 733). It is not “doomed,” *qua* Wuthnow, nor does it have to be “extremely hard to grasp concretely...a diffused mist within which social action occurs” (Swidler 1995: 38, 39). People may more effectively use collective self-definitions to influence others’ attitudes and behaviors if they can find ways to make their desired meaning systems tactile or



**Fig. 3** The six conditions of cultural effectiveness. Source: Adapted from Schudson (1989)

sticky. In more general terms, the methodological imperative for cultural concretization is “to attach abstractly available symbols [or definitional debates and meaning-systems, in this case] to concrete things [organizing tasks, in this case] or circumstances [march on Washington organizing, in this case]” (Sewell 1999: 51). Meanings may be more readily measured by mapping social conflicts onto discrete organizational tasks. Sociologists can therefore conceive of such tasks as providing a resin onto which competing systems of meaning attach in a process that lends operational rigor to the problem of measurement in the study of culture.

My resinous condition most resembles Schudson’s institutional retention. The present study suggests that cultural effectiveness requires more than mere presence within institutions (such as the national steering committees that deliberated the march’s title and platform). Following Marx who viewed proletariat organizing as disrupted by worker infighting (Marx and Engels 1978:481), movement scholars have generally ascribed to such internal conflicts a “sorry reputation” since they presumably “hasten movement collapse” (Gamson 1975:101). Lessons learned from the decline of the American New Left, for example, point to activists’ inability to placate conflict—despite movement organizations’ willingness to make space for the fights. Why was infighting more destructive in the later years of the New Left? Todd Gitlin (1980) attributes this vulnerability to a turn of events in which airing dissent became decoupled from specific organizing tasks. Absent this resinous condition that provides a focus to the fights, activists may become power hungry and use “ideological postures as a means of gaining support” (Gamson 1975:100). It is here—even in the presence of institutional retention—that infighting may become destructive and that collective self-definitions may become incapable of influence. Thus, resinous and institutional retention exhibit discriminant validity in understanding how culture works. Meaning systems can become

incorporated within the practices of an institution, yet remain in the bottom of its bin of priorities (March and Olsen 1976).

Some words of caution pertaining to the theory and the case, respectively, are in order. I have focused on contested meanings of collective self-definitions, a processual aspect of the culture concept, in one particular context. This should not be alarming, as “most research areas are circumscribed in coverage” (Cook 1985: 24). I therefore make no presumption that my findings are representative of culture as a whole or that they hold across cases. I do hope that the more general move of investigating cultural processes instead of cultural objects will inspire comparative studies across cases and across conceptualizations of the culture concept.

The second word of caution pertains to infighting as a case. Not all conflict may facilitate the articulation of collective self-definitions. Infighting may sometimes prompt organizational defection or worse, dissolution. Elsewhere, I leverage all four Washington march cases, explore outcome variability, and elaborate a “contingency theory of infighting” that specifies the conditions of generalizability (Ghaziani 2008: 304). That said, questions of why infighting sometimes leads to defection or what might be the enduring effects of the marches are related but theoretically distinct enterprises outside my narrower scope in the present study of understanding how culture works and the problem of measurement.

These words of caution do not minimize the results. That gay people fight with each other does not mark them as different from anyone else. According to Sabrina Sojourner, former legislative aide to Representative Maxine Waters (D-CA), “I haven’t found a movement yet that doesn’t eat its leadership alive.”<sup>58</sup> A scholarly inquiry into infighting within lesbian and gay political organizing holds broader explanatory reach. The movement’s “rampant diversity”<sup>59</sup> makes it a typical case to empirically isolate and illuminate under-theorized meaning-making processes and to theoretically appraise how infighting may enable culture to work in/effectively in measurable ways. Redirecting the study of culture away from conceptual clarification (around which there has been much progress) toward questions of measurement precision and operationalism (around which there has been comparatively less) may allow us to deepen our appreciation and use of the concept in ways that may inform different perspectives and subfields in sociology.

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<sup>58</sup> “Eating Our Own.”

<sup>59</sup> “Cease fire!”

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