Chapter X: Meta-theoretical Controversies in Studying Organizational Culture

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Meta-theoretical Controversies in Studying Organizational Culture*

Joanne Martin

Stanford University

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To see a world in a grain of sand,

And a heaven in a wild flower,

Hold infinity in the palm of your hand,

And eternity in an hour.

(Blake, Auguries of Innocence I, 2000, p. 285)

To understand the contemporary state of organizational culture theory and research, it is necessary to grapple with some of the major intellectual disputes that have swept through the humanities and social sciences in recent years. Some researchers choose to study a single cultural context, in great detail and depth. In effect, these researchers heed Blake's advice and see the world in a grain of sand; they study culture with a sample size of one context. Other researchers react with disdain to such case studies, and prefer to study many cultures, even if that means understanding less about each one. Such differences in research strategies occur because cultural researchers make radically different assumptions regarding fundamental issues.

Often these disagreements are framed as methodological disputes about the relative merits of quantitative and qualitative methods for studying cultures in organizations (e.g. Rousseau 1990a; Martin forthcoming). Others prefer to frame the disagreements in term of theoretical differences (Frost et al. 1991; Martin 1992). Still others frame the conflicts as reflecting managerial interests or the views of critical theorists (Alvesson and Melin 1987; Barley, Meyer, and Gash 1988; Calas and Smircich 1987; Stablein and Nord 1985; Martin forthcoming). However underlying these

important sources of disagreement are other, meta-theoretical controversies that merit

discussion.

Five of these controversies are the focus of the present chapter.[1] Those

controversies include: objectivity and subjectivity; etic (outsider) and emic (insider)

research; generalizable and context-specific research; focus and breadth; and level of

depth. These issues are introduced in terms relevant to all of organizational studies and

their particular application to cultural studies is then discussed. These disputes are usually

framed as struggles between opposing terms -- dichotomies, such as "objectivity and

subjectivity" or "etic and emic." I use the word "and" between these opposing terms to

signal that these dichotomies are overdrawn, exaggerating differences at the expense of

understanding ways these oppositions blur and merge.

X.1 Ontology and Epistemology: A Bit of Background

As a prelude to discussing objective and subjective approaches to studying

culture, a few words about ontology and epistemology may be useful.[2] Here I draw

heavily on the work of Chia (1996), because his framing is of particular relevance for

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[1] This chapter is a revision of Chapter 2 in a book, <u>Organizational Culture: Mapping the</u>

<u>Terrain</u> (Martin forthcoming). It is revised and reprinted here with the permission of

Sage Publications. I wishe to thank H. Tsoukas for helping me sharpen some of the

philosophical material in this chapter.

[2] Ontology is a set of assumptions about the nature of reality, how things are. In contrast,

epistemology concerns theories about how we *know* about the nature of reality, that is,

how we *know* about how things are. Of course, epistemology entails some assumptions

about the nature of reality itself, making it difficult to disentangle it from ontology.

cultural research. Chia usefully distinguishes two kinds of ontology, which he calls

being-realism, and becoming-realism.

X.1.1 Being-Realism

Chia, (p. 36) argues that in being-realism:

… there is a fundamental split between the *word* and the *world* (Harre

1986) and that the world is made up of discrete and identifiable material

and social entities (Whitehead 1926/1985: 58) which can be faithfully

documented using precise literal concepts and categories…to *know* means

to be able to represent accurately in our minds using linguistic or visual

forms what the world 'out there' is really like…combinations of words,

from which theories are build, somehow match up with pieces of the 'real'

world. (Author's italics)

According to being-realism, reality "pre-exists independently of observation" (Chia 1996,

p. 33). This approach enables organizational scientists to treat ideas, such as

"organizations" or "cultures" as unproblematic objects of analysis, as if "their ontological

status were not a critical issue in its own right."

Unlike some other researchers to be discussed below, Chia believes that ontology

and epistemology are tightly coupled. He argues that being-realism is congruent with

representational epistemologies, so that language can be used, unproblematically, to

represent reality, accurately communicating what is 'out there.' Chia (1996, p. 39)

explains it this way:

The grammatical structures of language organize our consciousness and

thought processes, making it then possible for us to think about our

experiences retrospectively in a discrete, differentiated, linear and sequential manner. As an epistemological posture, therefore, representationalism entails the systematic filtration of our concrete experiences into the precast moulding of the grammatical logic of language. In this abstractive manner, we selectively reduce and make more comprehensively manageable our lived experiences in the very act of recounting them.

Representational epistemology is invoked, implicitly, when a critic observes that a particular study "reifies culture." Reification means writing about culture as if it could be accurately known and as if that knowledge could be represented in language, unproblematically. To use my own work as an example, I have sometimes described the three theoretical perspectives that have dominated most organizational culture research in being-realism terms: (Martin, forthcoming): "Although there is little that these three theoretical perspectives agree about, each has generated an impressive body of empirical support, suggesting (to those of a neo-positivist persuasion) that none of these three perspectives can be easily dismissed." If (and only if) one disregards the parenthetical remark alluding to neo-positivism, this "being realism" language treats the three theoretical perspectives as if they were reified things "out there," whose existence could not be challenged because of the volume of empirical evidence that supports their existence. In contrast, as described below, a becoming-realism ontology would ask how these concepts came to be created as categories, perhaps drawing attention to what other conceptual approaches represent "paths not taken," that could have been utilized.

X.1.2 Becoming-Realism

Becoming-realism focuses on the process of becoming, so that how things come to be, defines what they are. Becoming-realism directs the attention of organizational researchers, according to Chia (1996, p. 34), to processes: how we order, codify, frame, and classify our perceptions, our data, and our theoretical abstractions. These processes create *apparently* stable and reified ideas, such as truth claims about what is known about abstractions such as "individuals," "organizations," and "cultures." Thus, processes of ordering and classifying, etc., are intimately intertwined with the ways we use language in our texts to summarize data and build theories about how reality is socially structured. Chia is an advocate of becoming-realism. He argues that the problem with being-realism ontology and representational epistemologies is that they gloss over important shortcomings in our knowledge base, shortcomings that are inescapably tied to the inherent limitations of language, and the ways those limitations shape our perceptions and conceptualizations. As Chia (1996, p. 39) explains:

> As an academic ideology for directing research and inquiry, [representationalism] suppresses the problematical nature of its own truth claims by unreflexively concentrating attention onto the 'outcomes' of research, thereby ignoring the philosophical problems underpinning its own epistemological stance. In so doing it conveniently ignores the paradoxes and contradictions surrounding its knowledge claims.

Chia argues that we can know only what we can put into language, but if we use representational writing strategies, we are not expressing awareness of the ways language is shaping what we can think. Thus, whether we want to or not, when researchers write or speak about culture, we use words, categories, and concepts to alter meanings, hide

ambiguities, and circumvent problematic contradictions and uncertainties. There are ways to write about culture, in accord with becoming-realism, to highlight the inevitable uncertainties of the conceptualization and writing processes. These writing strategies attempt to reflect the ambiguities inherent in the study and representation of cultural material (Clifford and Markus 1986; Van Maanen 1988; Martin forthcoming).

X.1.3 Relationships Between Epistemologies and Methods

One assumption, underlying Chia's arguments, merits discussion here. Chia views ontology, epistemology, methods choices, and writing strategies as tightly coupled (see also Burrell and Morgan 1979). Others view methods and epistemology as being much more loosely coupled, taking the position that the problem for research lies not in being-realism, but in representational epistemologies. From this point of view, one can accept the being-realism view, yet endorse epistemologies that eschew representationalism. For example, assuming we are all limitedly rational knowers, we may construct knowledge within the constraints of language, and do so in a way that captures elements of differing viewpoints. Cultural descriptions, written in this manner, can refrain, to a limited extent, from using representational epistemologies. In spite of these differences of opinion, Chia's ideas, particularly regarding representational epistemology, will be useful background for the material that follows below.

X.2 Objectivity and Subjectivity

Much of the organizational literature, like most fields of social science, reads as if scholars could discover and accurately represent the objectively "true" nature of the empirical world, in accord with being-realism and representational epistemology. This is the dominant view in the U.S., particularly in most mainstream organizational journals. In

contrast, European scholarship often remains open to other viewpoints. In accord with this emphasis on objectivity, in the U.S. most doctoral students are taught to do organizational research according to the scientific method, using deduction and induction to prove or falsify hypotheses. However, most researchers, when pressed, would agree that purist claims of objectivity (sometimes labeled "naïve realism") are overblown (e.g. Bogdan and Taylor 1975; Cook and Reichardt 1979; Gephart 1988; Van Maanen 1979). As H. Markus (personal communication, 2000) puts it, "Counting pond scum or stars requires categorization, and is therefore subjective and problematic."

This modesty about objectivity is appropriate. Philosophers of science have repeatedly undermined claims of objectivity, challenging the logical foundations of the fundamentals of the scientific method, such as induction, deduction, and falsification (e.g. Chalmers 1982; Nord and Connell 1998). Even "hard" scientists such as physicists struggle with the implications of data suggesting that the act of perceiving or measuring transforms whatever is being assessed. In addition, what may seem objectively true at one time, is subject to revision as it changes and as apparent understandings change. What may seem to be objective fact, such as an experience or a body of data, is subjectively perceived by humans and processed by human sense making (e.g. Rorty 1999; Tsoukas, 1998).

Research in a variety of disciplines lends support to this contention. Even an apparently objective stimulus, such as the set of sounds in a language, may be heard differently by speakers of different languages, as their preconceptions influence the sound distinctions they can perceive (1901). In a psychological experiment, subjects identified slides of ordinary playing cards; when anomalous cards, such as red spades or black

hearts, were added to the deck of cards, study participants misperceived the anomalous

cards, in accord with their preconceptions (Bruner, Goodnow, and Austin 1956). For

similar reasons, eyewitness testimony is notoriously unreliable, as different people

observing the same event recall it differently (e.g. Yarmey and Yarmey 1997).

This brief and simplified discussion of objectivity and subjectivity has

implications for cultural research. As discussed above, some cultural researchers treat

culture as a reified object, a "thing" "out there" that can be objectively perceived and

measured, the same way, by anyone who views it. This is, in part, what is meant by the

criticism that a study "reifies" culture, in according with being-realism and

representational epistemologies. In contrast, most cultural researchers argue, in accord

with becoming realism, that researchers and cultural members subjectively interpret and

represent what they observe, rather than perceiving an objective reality. For example, the

taste of some foods, like dog meat, is not objectively determined. There is considerable

variation in people's subjective reactions: Americans deem dogs inedible and esteem

beef, while some Indians refuse to eat beef and some Africans consider dog meat a

delicacy (Sahlins 1995). As these examples indicate, the same material conditions can

produce a variety of perceived and enacted cultural "realities." Sahlins (1995) supports a

subjective position, arguing that the cultural cannot be derived directly from experience

or event, because experiences occur in a world already symbolized, and so meanings are

always somewhat arbitrary in relation to the object being signified.

Many cultural researchers adopt a modified version of a subjectivist approach,

viewing perceptions as constrained by what is being perceived. As Stablein (1996)

argues, subjectivity does not mean "anything goes." Subjectivity is constrained by

aspects of the stimulus being perceived, and this process of perception, memory, and interpretation is not just an individual phenomenon. Observation occurs in a collective, social context where the social construction of reality (Berger and Luckmann 1967) constrains and influences judgments. If reality is subjectively constructed even in this limited way, then a cultural researcher must focus some attention on the subjective frameworks of cultural members, in addition to the apparently objective "facts" and material conditions of their lives.

Although some of organizational culture studies take a purely objectivist or subjectivist approach, many researchers view culture as both objectively and subjectively constrained. This approach implies that cultural descriptions should include physical manifestations of a culture, such as dress norms, the noise and dirt, or the quiet and luxury of a workplace, as well as observable formal practices and structures, such as the amounts of money different employees earn or who they report to. Subjective meanings associated with observable cultural manifestations must also be gathered and interpreted. Material and ideational aspects of culture cannot be easily distinguished and both must be studied.[3]

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[3]Rorty (1999) offers an explanation for the difficulties encountered when a researcher attempts to distinguish objective and subjective, or material and ideational approaches to studying culture. Perceptions of the material aspects of culture are inevitably mediated by language. They enter discourse as already-contextualized objects. In Rorty's terminology, the world causes us to have beliefs but it cannot tell us what to believe in. Only other people can help us with that, hence the significance of language, discourse, and the acknowledgement of subjectivity (Tsoukas, 1998).

It is important to note that subjectivity does not imply consensus. Interpretations need not be consensual, as the same cultural manifestation may carry different meanings for different perceivers (e.g. Martin 1992). For example, if an oil company gives women managers a nine per cent pay raise, the management may believe that this pay increase is quite generous, while the women managers may be discontent because comparable male managers still earn considerably more (Martin, Brickman, and Murray 1984). A ritualized event, such as an award banquet, a training program, or a planned change intervention may be perceived differently by different participants, who may react variously, with skepticism, ambivalence, or enthusiastic endorsement (e.g. Bartunek and Moch 1991; Rosen 1991; Van Maanen and Kunda 1989). When cultural studies include meanings and interpretations of material cultural manifestations, their authors are tacitly or explicitly assuming that the social meanings of an object, event, or experience are subjectively experienced and interpreted and cannot be inferred directly from its material or physical characteristics.

X.3 Etic (Outsider) and Emic (Insider) Research

The distinction between objective and subjective approaches to the study of culture is reflected and refined in the distinction between etic and emic research (e.g. Agar 1986; Morris et al. 1999). Most organizational research outside the cultural arena takes an etic stance, assuming that a researcher can adequately, and perhaps even accurately, decide what categories and questions are appropriate for investigating a particular context or set of theoretical questions. Usually, in etic research, categories are deduced from prior theory and research, not from material gathered during a study.

To give a quantitative example of an etic approach used in cultural studies, a

researcher might decide (drawing on prior research) which dimensions are important

aspects of culture in organizations. This researcher might then construct a questionnaire,

asking respondents to report cultural norms along these dimensions. For example,

members might be asked to rate, on a nine-point Likert scale, whether their group is

cooperative or competitive, individualist or collective, or autocratic or participative.

These kinds of self-report data are etic, in that the researcher who chooses the dimension

categories does so while maintaining an outsider position with regard to the cultures

being studied. Responses to these kinds of questionnaires can be factor analyzed. Here

too the researcher etically determines the labels assigned to those factors, naming the

relevant dimensions of cultural comparison. An example of this kind of research is

Hofstede's multi-dimensional classification of national cultures (1980, 1991) in terms of

power distance, masculinity-femininity, individualism-collectivism, etc. (see also

dimensional studies of organizational culture by Kilmann, Saxton, Serpa & Associates

1985; Denison 1990; Rousseau 1990b). Etic cultural research includes any study,

quantitative or qualitative, where the conceptual categories are imposed by the

researcher, rather than initiated by the cultural member who is being studied. The key, for

an etic study, is to explain cogently why these particular concepts and operationalizations

were chosen, usually with reference to both reliability and validity.

In contrast, most organizational studies of culture follow the lead of those socio-

cultural anthropologists who have argued that it is essential that a researcher learn, as far

as is humanly possible, to see things from an emic or insider point of view. One of the

first to articulate this approach was Malinowski (1922/1961, p. 25) who claimed

(although he also kept scandalous, racist research diaries) that he sought to "grasp the

native's point of view, his relation to life, to realize his vision of his world." Geertz

(1983, p. 58) described the emic approach in more colloquial language, "The trick is to

figure out what the devil they think they are up to." The emic approach is particularly

useful when a researcher is trying to understand cultural practices, such as headhunting or

mass layoffs, that may be quite unfamiliar to the researcher. For example, Evans-

Pritchard (1937, p. 69 ff.) studied Azande beliefs in witchcraft, "…a group of people

were sitting beneath a granary which, unknown to them, had been weakened by termites.

The granary collapsed, causing injury, and witchcraft was blamed." As Hatch rephrases

Evans-Pritchard's observations (1937, p. 249), "The Azande were aware that the natural

cause of the granary's collapse was the action of termites, but to the people this merely

explained how, and not why, the structure fell. Why was it this granary which happened

to collapse, and why did it do so precisely when these persons were beneath it?"

To reach the level of understanding required to phrase the question in this way,

especially when trying to understand an unfamiliar or distasteful cultural practice, a

researcher needs to learn enough about a culture to get inside the minds of cultural

members, to "think like a native." Among anthropologists, is sometimes given credit for

being among the first to pack his bag, pitch his tent in the middle of a village, and attempt

to get "behind the veil" that stood between him and the thoughts of the people he wished

to understand. How does a researcher achieve this kind of empathetic understanding?

(1901, p. 1) advised:

> …the student must endeavor to divest himself entirely of opinions and emotions
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> based on the peculiar social environment into which he is born. He [sic] must
>
> adapt his own mind, so far as it is feasible, to that of the people whom he is

studying. The more successful he is in freeing himself from the bias based on the group of ideas that constitute the civilization in which he lives, the more successful he will be in interpreting the beliefs and actions of man [sic].

This is an idealized description, implying that a cultural researcher must have a corner on the empathy market, "some sort of extraordinary sensitivity, an almost preternatural capacity to think, feel, and perceive like a native…some unique form of psychological closeness, a sort of transcultural identification…" (Geertz 1983, p. 56). Instead, Geertz offers a more attainable vision of the process of developing emic understanding, "…understanding the form and pressure of …natives' inner lives is more like grasping a proverb, catching an allusion, seeing a joke – or…reading a poem – than it is like achieving communion." Geertz (1983, p. 10) describes the anthropologists' task as that of a translator (rather than being an empathizer) from the native's emic into the translator's community's etic, blurring boundaries between emic and etic:

> 'Translation,' here, is not a simple recasting of others' ways of putting things in terms of our own ways of putting them (that is the kind in which things get lost), but displaying the logic of their ways of putting them in the locutions of ours; a conception which again brings it rather close to what a critic does to illumine a poem than what an astronomer does to account for a star.

Implicitly, Geertz' description of research as a translation task draws attention to the difficulty of making a clear distinction between the etic and emic approaches, a point explored in more depth in critiques of social science research (e.g. Clifford and Marcus 1986). Emic analysis inevitably incorporates the etic (and vice versa), at least in so far as the researcher's emic perspective is etic to the situation being studied. Geertz (1973, p. 9)

describes this problem in simpler terms: "What we call our data are really our own constructions of other people's constructions of what they and their compatriots are up to…" For example, Boas refers, in the quotation above, to the researcher as "he" and the subject of study as "man." This language choice prefigures the criticisms of feminist anthropologists, who have found that male anthropologists mostly study men, in part because it is easier for male anthropologists to establish close relationships and build emic understandings of members of their own sex. To the extent that male and female experiences of a culture differ, such studies are incomplete (e.g. Rosaldo and Lamphere 1974).

There are many different versions of what it means to adopt an emic perspective, but most acknowledge that the identity of the ethnographer inevitably creates an objectifying distance between researcher and informants. In contrast, reflexive ethnography seeks to characterize the relationship between the ethnographer and the informant in more equal terms (Bruni and Gherardi, forthcoming, p. 8):

> …a relation of reciprocal implication and participation: while the researcher observes, s/he is observed, so that ethnography can be viewed as the result of a textual collaboration, as the outcome of this dual hermeneutic process. The ethnographer is considered to be engaged in a symmetrical reflective exercise (Linstead 1993) and, far from being an 'alien', the ethnographer conveys cultural assumptions and preconceptions, and enjoys an active presence which makes his/her role different from that of the 'professional stranger' (Agar 1980) as an 'uncontaminated expert' (Van Maanen 1988; Tedlock 1991).

Acknowledging the difficulty of attaining an emic position uncontaminated by etic

distancing, Geertz suggests a more modest goal (1973, p. 57) -- that the researcher's task is to find a balance between emic and etic vantage points:

> …so as to produce an interpretation of the way a people lives which is neither imprisoned within their own mental horizons, an ethnography of witchcraft written by a witch, nor systematically deaf to the distinctive tonalities of their existence, an ethnography of witchcraft written by a geometer.[4]

Organizational researchers who seek an emic-etic balance have an extremely difficult task to perform, because we do not study tribes living on isolated Pacific islands or deep in the jungles of Brazil. In most cases, the cultures we study are microcosms of the cultures we live in, or if not, they are at least more familiar to us than the witches of Azande were to Evans-Pritchard. The difficult of finding an etic-emic balance is exacerbated for those of us who do "halfie research," that is "research conducted by a researcher who comes from the culture she studies, but who, during the work, is a member of another culture, that 'commissioned' the research project" (Czarniawska 1998, p. 4). This kind of study is becoming more common, as anthropologists return home from exotic islands to study their own cultures, as those "exotic" cultures are penetrated by influences from the industrialized world, as immigrants study the cultures of their origins, and as cultural scholars study organizations in their own societies. In such circumstances, as Czarniawska (1998, p.5) points out, researchers and actors in the field keep alternating between "She is like us/I am like them" and "She is…/I am different," making misunderstandings multiply.

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[4] A geometer practices geometry.

For many organizational researchers, whether or not we are "halfies," it is as difficult to maintain sufficient distance from what we observe, to free ourselves from strong preconceptions, as it is to translate "what the devil they think they are up to" with sufficient empathy. The illusion that we may have attained an emic view may come too easily to us, unless we deliberately select organizations that seem, at first glance, to be odd, distasteful, or simply unusual. And if the sites we study are outliers in some way, then how can we think about moving from our data to some kind of generalizable theory? Of course, as outlined in the next section, many cultural researchers do not seek to build generalizable theory – a stance that is inconceivable to many organizational researchers trained in the neo-positivist tradition.

X.4 Generalizable and Context-Specific Knowledge

Geertz' words, quoted immediately above, reveal an important assumption: the task of an anthropologist is to produce "an interpretation of the way a people lives." Geertz is assuming that the task of a cultural researcher is to study a singular way of life, not to produce abstractions that can be used to generalize across cultures. He seeks to describe a single culture, richly and deeply (e.g. 1973), and/or to contrast a very small number of cultures, mostly in order to highlight their differences (e.g. 1983). Many ethnographers and other researchers share Geertz' focus on the concrete details of particular contexts. For example, Van Maanen and Barley, (1985, p. 35) state their distrust of theoretical abstractions quite openly:

> Theorists of the social world deal with the most ephemeral, delicate, and elusive of matters. It is easy to slip away and start granting theoretical entities (like culture, rules, deviants, organizations, etc.) status as iconic significations. They

are always metaphoric. From my perspective, the only effective antidote for the air sickness caused by theoretical flight is periodic returns to the field.

One reason given for preferring to avoid generalization is the assumption that every culture is unique. Boas explained this viewpoint by arguing that historical accidents, such as a hostile attack from a neighboring tribe, produce a singular cultural configuration, much as a boulder tumbling down a mountainside produces an erosion pattern unmatched anywhere else. Particularly if people place great value on individual distinctiveness, (less often the case in collectivist societies such as China (e.g. Markus and Kitayama 1991, 1994; Morris and Peng 1994), it may be socially desirable to belong to a collectivity which is (objectively) or which sees itself (subjectively) as unique.

Organizations often seek to define themselves as unique, in order to have a distinctive niche in a market or in order to attract and retain employees. Some -- but by no means all -- organizational studies of culture assume cultural uniqueness. Others make a softer claim: that specific kinds of cultural knowledge may be context-specific, as when copier repair technicians give advice in the form of context-specific recommendations rather than general, abstract rules (e.g. Brown and Duguid 1991). It is likely that organizational cultures, being a microcosm of the societies in which they are embedded, contain some elements that are unique, some that are falsely believed to be unique, and still others that are not unique at all (Martin et al. 1983; Martin 1992).

Another way to justify the study of a single culture is to argue that any one culture is not the only one conceivable in a particular context. The same circumstances could have led to a multiplicity of possible outcomes (e.g. Sahlins 1985; Sebag 1964, pp. 166-167). From this point of view, the study of a single case is possible; the study of

generalizable principles -- a dead end road. The objective of a single case study, then, is

an appreciation of contextually specific knowledge, rather than an understanding that

emerges from the process of abstraction and generalization across cases. Geertz (1983, p.

232) admits that this approach is "rather entranced with the diversity of things." He

concludes (1973, p. 43) that "…the notion that the essence of what it means to be human

is most clearly revealed in those features of human culture that are universal, rather than

those that are distinctive to this people or that, is a prejudice that we are not necessarily

obligated to share."

For other researchers, trained to appreciate large sample sizes, random sampling

procedures, reliability and validity measures, and statistical tests, a disdain for

generalization is hard to comprehend: isn't building theory, they ask, the goal of

empirical research? What use is a study unless the goal is to understand what causes a

phenomenon and to use that knowledge to predict, under appropriate conditions, what

effects will occur? At the very least, shouldn't one seek multiple, systematic comparisons

to build generalizations within and across case studies of culture? Such concerns for

generalization, for example, led Hodson (1998) to code organizational and workplace

characteristics (rough indicators of culture) in 108 English-language ethnographic case

studies, seeking generalizations. There is some tendency for a concern with

generalizability to be congruent with an objectivist approach to representation, which in

turn has some congruence with being-realism and a search for causal laws.

In contrast, other social scientists adopt a different explanatory strategy. They

search for reasons, rather than causes. Reasons make actions rationally intelligible, show

how a given action is appropriate, efficient, and/or correct (Rosenberg, 1988, pp. 28-30).

For example, ethnographic accounts often do not focus on generalizability concerns, for they are often not trying to provide knowledge for instrumental application, for which a presumably "accurate" representation of "reality" is desired. Instead, they often are (in accord with being-realism) offering practitioners and scholars a way to reflect on experience in novel ways, in order to construct new forms of action.

For all these reasons, ethnographers' goals are to understand a context deeply, provide reasons that explain social phenomena, and offer an interpretative frame for understanding. They do not usually seek to make predictions, discover generalizable laws, or build theories of causality:

> A characteristic of scientific explanation is that it allows predictions, since it attempts to supply the causal factors behind a phenomenon so that when appropriate conditions exist, the phenomenon can be expected. By contrast, [ethnography] attempts to make a phenomenon intelligible, and the issue of prediction does not arise. (Hatch 1973, p. 336)

> Conceptualization [in ethnography] is directed toward the task of generating interpretations of matters already in hand, not toward projecting outcomes of experimental manipulations or deducing future states of a determined system. (Geertz 1973, p. 26)

This disagreement, regarding contextually specific versus generalizable knowledge, underlies a conflict in the cultural literature. Studies that treat culture as a variable, and seek to predict outcomes (such as commitment or profitability) usually are trying to build generalizations, while studies that define culture as a metaphor, a way of looking at life within a collectivity, usually focus on context-specific knowledge (Smircich 1983b) and

eschew most generalizations.

If ethnographies do not seek to build generalizable theories, what then is the purpose of ethnography? Is there any role for abstraction or for theory in context-specific cultural research? Geertz (1973, p. 25-26) addresses this issue:

> The major theoretical contributions not only lie in specific studies – that is true in any field – but they are very difficult to abstract from and integrate into anything one might call 'culture theory' as such. Theoretical formulations hover so low over the interpretations they govern that they don't make much sense or hold much interest apart from them…the essential task of theory building here is not to codify abstract regularities but to make thick description, not to generalize across cases but to generalize within them.
>
> [Cultural theory is] inseparable from the immediacies thick description presents…What generality it contrives to achieve grows out of the delicacy of its distinctions, not the sweep of its abstractions.

"Thick descriptions" are richly detailed accounts of single cultures. Echoing the quotation from the poet Blake, with which this chapter began, such case descriptions give readers an ability to "see the world in a grain of sand," that is, to see an entire culture in a single, sharply focused description. Such a description is based on information from multiple informants and other sources of information, such as conversational analysis (e.g. Tulin 1997). The objective of such accounts is not to build generalizations from a sample size of one (context).

From this point of view, an abhorrence of generalization or abstraction is more comprehensible, because these conceptual activities gloss over the richly textured detail

that is the content and the goal of ethnographies. For example, Alvesson (1998)

challenges Hofstede's classification of national cultures according to power distance,

drawing on ethnographic evidence that suggests such categories are misleading. Alvesson

concludes (1998, p. 15):

> The rich interpretive capacities of culture can only be utilized if the study
>
> is open-minded, careful, locally oriented and close to social practices and
>
> meanings in organizations. This is then the opposite from questionnaire-
>
> based, generalization-oriented research, which cannot go beyond "thin
>
> description" (to reverse Geertz' concept of thick description).

This debate about the desirability of generalizability echoes the old dispute

between ideographic research (interpretation of a single case) and nomothetic research

(developing generalizable laws from the study of many cases) (e.g. Morrill and Fine

1997). Nomothetic researchers, such as experimental psychologists and quantitative

sociologists, often disdain the ideographic approaches of their case-study-oriented

forebears, echoing the old Talmudic saying, "For example is no proof." In contrast,

ideographic researchers, such as those who do ethnographic case studies, are also

sometimes disdainful of abstraction, being especially critical of those who would develop

an abstract theory from a single case study. For example, Geertz' (1973, p. 21) is

dismissive of the "Jonesville-is-the-USA microcosmic model" and "the Easter-Island-is-

a-testing-case 'natural experiment' model."

Such expressions of disdain for opposing points of view regarding generalization

should be regarded with some skepticism. It is a rare ethnographer who does not fall into

some kind of generalizing language. Even Geertz (1983) argued that he didn't study the

culture of a village; he studied the culture of a larger collectivity in a village. His claim

can be seen as a variant of the whole/part fallacy; generalizing about a whole culture

from the study of a smaller unit within it is a fallacy because one cannot assume cultural

homogeneity (e.g. Martin 1992). Indeed, some ethnographic accounts, rather than being

disdainful of generalization, use ethnographic detail as an occasion for sharpening

abstract analysis (Tsoukas 1989). Thus, the dichotomies evident in any discussion of

generalizability tend to mask a more complex reality (Weick 1999). In any discussion of

methodology, rhetoric is often more dichotomous than what people actually do, at least

when they study cultures.

X.5 Focus and Breadth

Cultural research shows great variation in what is studied, when researchers claim

to be studying culture. Some studies focus narrowly, on one or more cultural

manifestation. Thus, for example, O'Reilly, Chatman, and Caldwell (1991) asked study

participants, in what is called a Q sort task, to sort cards, each card containing an

adjective, into piles of words that did and did not describe the cultures of the

organizations where they worked. Kilmann et al. (1985) and Rousseau (1990b) used

questionnaires, much like those described above as etic research, to get study participants

to report the behavioral norms of their organizational cultures. These are narrowly

focused, or specialist studies of culture. They use one kind of cultural manifestation, such

as self-reports of behavioral norms, to operationally define a culture. Implicitly, narrowly

focused studies assume that it is sufficient to study a single cultural manifestation or a

very few manifestations, because if a wider range of manifestations were studied, the

results would be largely the same. Implicitly, then, such studies assume that study

participants' answers would be consistent across manifestations, another version of the whole/part fallacy.

In contrast, other cultural studies emphasize breadth by examining a variety of cultural manifestations. In these studies, researchers need not assume that interpretations of these manifestations are consistent with each other. For example, Botti's (1995) study of a Japanese-Italian effort at collaboration in a manufacturing plant, Kondo's (1990) examination of a family-owned food processing company in Japan, and Kunda's ethnography of a U.S. engineering company (1992) all include interpretations of formal policies, structures, informal practices, rituals, and organizational stories, as well as extensive descriptions of the physical environments in which people worked. In Geertz' terms, these are thick descriptions.

This breadth, in the range of cultural manifestations studied, is characteristic of ethnographic research, and is more difficult to achieve when quantitative measures are used. Because it takes time to build a rich understanding of the relationships among a wide variety of cultural manifestations, breadth is achieved at the cost of being able to study only one or a very few cultural contexts, thus making generalization across contexts, even if it were desired, very difficult to attain. Tradeoffs, then, between focus and breadth, constrain the kinds of theoretical conclusions that can be drawn from a study. It is important to acknowledge that this dichotomy between focus and breadth, like many of the other dichotomies discussed in this chapter, is overdrawn. Deciding how much breadth is enough requires a judgment call, and any research project requires compromises regarding the breadth of cultural manifestations studied.

X. 6 Level of Depth

X.6.1 An Argument for Depth of Cultural Understanding

Socio-cultural anthropologists advocate that researchers learn the language of cultural members, and then spend one or two years as a participant-observer, living and working with the people being studied. Eventually, hopefully, the researcher will come to be accepted as a cultural member. Under ideal circumstances, the researcher might even be invited to undergo a formal, ritualized initiation into membership status. This is a first step toward emic understanding, which is predicated on the researcher being able to "penetrate the front" of public, polite behavior and gain the insights that come when people relax the constraints expected in interactions with outsiders. Psychologists make similar points when they argue that social desirability concerns affect how people behave, for example, when they try to control the impression they make on others. Only when facades are penetrated, can a researcher hope to gain depth of understanding.

More recent ethnographic accounts are often skeptical about the difficulties of a researcher ever being accepted as an insider or ever being able to see a culture from an emic perspective. On the cover of Clifford and Marcus' (1986) book, which critiques such claims of privileged cultural acceptance, the cover photograph shows an ethnographer. He is pictured bent over his notes, with a cloth over his head shielding him from the sun and blinding him to his surroundings. "Natives" stand in the shadows watching with various indecipherable expressions. Granted, this ethnographer's notes may contain deeply empathetic, emic understanding of the "natives," but the photograph suggests otherwise. However, even skeptical views regarding the ability of ethnographers to develop emic understandings, like those in Clifford and Marcus' book, retain the conviction that the insights available from a long-term participant observation study offer

greater depth of understanding than other, more superficial approaches to understanding, such as the use of quantitative survey instruments.

Schein (1985, 1996, 1999)) and Rousseau (1990a) also stress the theoretical importance of depth of understanding. Schein (1985) distinguished three levels of depth in cultures, beginning with the most superficial: artifacts, such as stories, rituals, dress, décor, etc.; values (attitudes which can be articulated with relative ease); and basic assumptions (which are usually tacit, hard to see because they are taken for granted). According to Schein (1987), the best method for gaining an in-depth understanding of the assumptions underlying a culture is to enter a discussion with cultural members, using the interview goals and techniques of a clinical psychologist to tap unconscious and preconscious preconceptions. Schein argued that within a collectivity such as an organization, if a researcher attains in-depth understanding, he or she can ascertain if most members of the collectivity share the same basic assumptions. According to Schein, these assumptions tend to be quite abstract, such as whether people can be trusted or whether concerns about an organization's well-being should focus on short- or long-term considerations. This emphasis on depth in cultural studies has been crucially important, in part because the methods most easily able to create in-depth understanding, such as ethnography and clinical interviews, had become unfashionable wherever and whenever quantitative methods gained dominance in organizational studies.

X.6.2 An Example of Depth Analysis

Perhaps an extended example will clarify this depth argument. When Ouchi (1981) studied a particular electronics company, employees told a "second chance" story about an employee who made a disastrous mistake. When the culprit was called to his

boss' office, he feared he would be fired. Instead, his boss expressed faith that the

employee would never make another such mistake, and gave him a very tough

assignment. This assignment was a testimony of the boss' faith that the employee could

redeem himself, as a second mistake would have done the company grievous harm. This

story ended happily; the employee succeeded beyond his boss' fondest dreams, and was

thereafter one of the company's most loyal employees.

A second, and superficially unrelated manifestation of the culture at this firm was

the company's promotion policy, sometimes labeled the spiral staircase. Before being

promoted up a level, employees were usually moved laterally to another functional area.

In this way, the high level employees of the firm had extensive exposure to the problems

of marketing, engineering, finance, human resources, etc., giving them a broad

perspective on the firm as a whole. Although these two manifestations, the story and the

spiral staircase promotion policy, may seem unrelated, Schein might argue that they

appear unrelated because this analysis, so far, has been relatively superficial, focusing on

the level of artifacts. If the interpretation were to go deeper, as Schein argues it should,

the researcher might conclude that both manifestations illustrate a tacit, basic assumption

about the benefits -- to individual employees and to the company as a whole -- of taking a

long-term perspective.

X.6.3 Another Approach to Depth of Understanding

Others (including myself) argue that artifacts and values are not necessarily

superficial. A cultural artifact, such as a story or a ritual, is important because of how

people interpret its meanings. Those meanings need not be superficial; they may reflect

deep assumptions. In this way, artifacts, values, and assumptions do not necessarily

reflect separable, varying levels of depth. A cultural researcher should, I would argue, seek deep meanings associated with each type of cultural manifestation. For example, in a superficial cultural study, interpretations and meanings can reflect formulaic expressions of espoused values in a "Corporate Values" statement. Alternatively, interpretations may reflect deeply held personal values that take the form of basic assumptions, sometimes so taken for granted that they are hard to articulate. Such basic assumptions may include "walking the talk" -- values inferred from, and congruent with, behavior. Other kinds of interpretations of events and artifacts are less value-laden, and more like cognitive conclusions, or beliefs, about "how things are." Some of these beliefs may have the characteristics of basic assumptions.

In each of these examples, what is important is not the cultural manifestation itself, but how people interpret it. The depth of a researcher's analysis of these interpretations, that is, the patterns of meaning underlying a collection of cultural manifestations, can approach the depth of understanding that Schein terms "basic assumptions." However, it is important to note that even at the level of deep assumptions, collectivity-wide consensus may not emerge. In a single context, some assumptions might generate collectivity-wide consensus. Other assumptions might be common to some subcultures but not others. And, finally, some assumptions might be so ambiguous that clear agreement or disagreement among substantial numbers of people would be unlikely (Meyerson and Martin 1987; Martin and Meyerson 1988; Martin 1992).

X.6.4 The Costs of In-Depth Study: Pragmatic Considerations

Depth of understanding clearly has its advantages, but it is purchased at a cost: the

time it takes to gain in-depth understanding. Although this is a pragmatic concern, rather than a theoretical issue, it merits consideration. An anthropologist, for example, may invest years in learning a language, traveling to a distant land, enduring physical discomfort, emotional isolation, and other forms of hardship. He or she may spend a year or two doing participant-observation, then another year or two deciphering and interpreting field notes. The final product of all this effort is (usually) a book-length ethnography, because the complexity of this kind of data is difficult to carve up in journal-length articles. This is a large time investment, particularly in universities where tenure decisions are usually made after the first seven years of employment.

Ethnographers studying organizational culture share some, but not all of these problems of time investment. As long as an ethnographer studies an organization within a familiar culture, the problems of physical and emotional hardship, travel, and language differences are minimized. The etic-emic dimension, however, is difficult to manage in a relatively familiar organizational culture, and many of the other difficulties of ethnographic research remain. Some obstacles to ethnographic research are intensified in organizational studies. In the academic departments where many organizational researchers work, there is not much understanding of the assumptions underlying ethnographic methods and even less sympathy with putting "all one's eggs in a single basket" – a book – rather than publishing numerous refereed journal articles. An organizational ethnographer pays these costs and deals with worrisome publication decisions, in part, because of a conviction that depth of understanding is crucial. Imagine, then, an ethnographer's reaction to a study claiming to understand a culture on the basis of a questionnaire or a short-term qualitative study, involving a few months of

observation and/or interviewing. Appreciation seems unlikely.

Given all this emphasis on depth, who would advocate a "superficial" approach to studying culture? There are pragmatic reasons for doing so. Doing a good ethnography is difficult and very time consuming. And when it is finished, it is still only a study with a sample size of one. Although several publications can come out of a single ethnographic study, sooner or later a researcher may want to go back the field to study a different context. However, given the realities of modern academic and family life, most researchers do only one long-term ethnography -- the dissertation.

These pragmatic considerations have theoretical implications. The time involved in each study means that an ethnographic researcher is unlikely to be able to use his or her own data to make comparisons among significant numbers of cultures, or to build empirically-based, theoretical generalizations about culture. Some culture researchers may not want to do so, but for those who want to build empirically based theoretical generalizations, less time-consuming methods for studying cultures are essential. Depth must be sacrificed, in these instances, if generalization is the goal.

However, this struggle regarding depth, like the other dichotomies discussed above, is overdrawn; it is important not to regard the issue as a dichotomous choice between depth or superficiality. There are many ways to gain a multi-faceted, moderately unsuperficial understanding of a culture, even using short-term qualitative methods or innovative survey measures. All methods can be designed and applied in slap-dash or probing ways, making some degree of depth a possibility worth striving for, even in a study that seeks to generalize across a number of cultures.

X.7 Effects of these Intellectual Disputes on Organizational Studies: The Paradigm

Proliferation Debates

These disputes about objectivity and subjectivity, etic and emic research, generalizability and context-specific knowledge, focus and breadth, and level of depth are of particular relevance to cultural research, but they also have surfaced, to varying degrees, in organizational studies as a whole. Scholars have engaged in a fierce debate about whether these disputes have had favorable or unfavorable effects on the development of organizational theory and research.

Within organizational studies in the U.S., disputes about these issues have been framed as the "paradigm proliferation problem." In the 1960's and 1970's, a single paradigm (focused on neo-positivism and quantitative methods) held sway among most U.S. organizational scholars. In the early 1980's, the renaissance of interest in cultural studies and, more broadly, qualitative methods, activated many of the intellectual disputes described above. As a result of these and other intellectual influences, now there is some lack of consensus within the international domain of organizational studies about what theories are worth studying, what methods are valid, what values and interests should be pursued, and what epistemological assumptions are merited (e.g. Burrell and Morgan 1979; Clegg and Dunkerly 1977; Nord and Connell 1998; Donaldson 1985; Silverman 1970; Smircich, Calas, and Morgan 1992). Thus, the intense disputes within organizational culture studies are mirrored in the organizational field as a whole.

Concern about these issues within organizational studies in the U.S. came to a head with the paradigm proliferation debates at the Academy of Management annual award ceremonies. As always when discussing paradigms, it is useful to begin by noting how this disputed term is being defined. A paradigm offers a way of approaching

scientific work, as Van de Ven (1997, p. 2) explains:

> A paradigm is a worldview, a general perspective, a way of breaking down the
> complexity of the real world. As such, paradigms are deeply embedded in the
> socialization of adherents and practitioners, telling them what is important, what
> is legitimate, what is reasonable. Paradigms are normative; they tell us what to do
> without the necessity of long existential considerations.

I would argue, in accord with Donaldson (1985), that the concept of a paradigm has been
over-utilized; the various intellectual disputes discussed above do not fall easily together,
into well-defined, competing paradigms. However, among cultural researchers, positions
in these various disputes do tend to cluster. For example, some scholars favor being-
realism, representational epistemologies, etic research, the search for empirically based,
generalizable theory; this cluster of researchers generally prefer a relatively narrow focus
on a few cultural manifestations, with relatively less concern about issues of depth. This
cluster of approaches, usually hovering around being-realism assumptions, has dominated
organizational research and, more specifically organizational culture research in the U.S.,
because it promises control over a complex and ambiguous reality (attractive to
management) and it justifies avoiding the costs (time investments, etc.) of ethnographic
field studies.

Other cultural scholars prefer becoming-realism, post-representational
epistemologies, and emic research, in order to affirm the advantages of a broader and
deeper contextual understanding. Of course, there are exceptions to these clusters --
different ways to mix and match preferences regarding these issues. Organizational
researchers outside the cultural domain also tend to fall in these two clusters. Whether

these clusters represent different paradigms, or simply a cacophony of different opinions about fundamental issues, is less important than the dialogues that have ensued.

Three recent recipients of an annual major award from the Academy of Management used their acceptance speeches to articulate quite different reactions to the developing discord within the field. In his speech, Pfeffer (1993) argued that the proliferation of research paradigms in the field of organizational studies had eroded the field's prestige in the rest of academia, making it difficult for us to garner resources, and impeding the cumulative development of knowledge. Pfeffer argued that, for the advancement of the field and the enhancement of knowledge, a board of elite researchers should select a small number of research topics, on which all organizational researchers would have to work.

The next year's award recipient, Van Maanen (1995), took umbrage at Pfeffer's call for the dominance of a few elite-approved research topics, which Van Maanen labeled "Pfefferdigms." Van Maanen argued that any elitist determination of what topics were worth studying was "insufferably smug; pious and orthodox; philosophically indefensible; extraordinarily naïve as to how science actually works; theoretically foolish, vain, and autocratic." Van Maanen saw the proliferation of paradigms as a sign of the moral and intellectual health of the field, and called for "letting a thousand flowers bloom" as an effective means of encouraging innovative research.

Subsequently, a third award recipient, Van de Ven (1997) spoke vehemently against the ways advocates of particular paradigms had demeaned and devalued research conducted from other paradigmatic orientations. Van de Ven (1997, p. 9) used neo-positivist language to argue that empirical evidence could resolve the competing claims

of paradigms, "Valid empirical evidence is the ultimate external arbitrator for sifting and winnowing among our paradigms and for advancing those that provide empirically better explanations than others." In these remarks, Van de Ven was making assumptions about the objectivity of data, and its determinant value in a theoretical dispute. The assumption that theoretical (and possible paradigmatic) differences of opinion can be empirically resolved is a basic tenet of neo-positivism (e.g. Campbell and Stanley 1966).

Many other scholars, working from different (not neo-positivist) epistemological or methodological positions, would challenge Van de Ven's assumptions in this regard. Burrell and Morgan (1979) made a strong and influential argument for "paradigm incommensurability,"[5] that is, evaluating contributions by the standards of their own paradigm, not the standards of others. These authors carried "paradigm incommensurability" a step farther, arguing that research within paradigms should be kept separate, so that less known paradigms could develop without outside interference. Soon Hassard and Pym (1990) and Weaver and Goia (1994) called for an end to this "smug protectionism." As calls for paradigm incommensurabilty became less accepted, uncertainty increased (Fleming and Stablein 1999):

> Now paradigm differences must be taken seriously, not ignored or granted
> "separate but equal" status (Reed 1996). Today, we are left with the uncertainties
> that characterize the 1990's regarding definitions, meaning, method, the nature of
> theory and the role of the theorist (Clegg and Hardy 1996).

The disputes among cultural researchers, that have been the focus of this chapter, can

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[5] To address these issues, I will put aside for the moment differences of opinion about whether or not these are truly paradigmatic disputes (Donaldson 1985).

therefore be seen as part of a larger struggle -- the paradigm proliferation debates in the field of organizational studies.

X.8 The Culture Wars

The uncertainties that spread throughout the field of organizational studies at the turn of the century, giving rise to the paradigm proliferation debates, are particularly intense within the domain of organizational culture studies. In addition to the five issues discussed in this chapter, cultural researchers are deeply divided on the question of whose interests and values merit representation and advocacy, which theoretical perspectives should be used, and whether quantitative or qualitative methods are preferable. When cultural studies come to contradictory, empirically based conclusions, these fundamental disagreements make it difficult to adjudicate conflicting conclusions, perhaps with further empirical research. For these reasons, intellectual disputes have made it nearly impossible to write a cumulative review of "what we have learned" so far, about cultures in organizations.

For example, when Peter Frost and I were asked to contribute a handbook chapter reviewing the accomplishments of culture research to date, we found it impossible to write the usual enlightenment tale of knowledge advancement. Instead, we (Martin and Frost 1996) described cultural theory and research using a "culture wars" metaphor.[6] We described culture research as a series of ongoing battles between opposing viewpoints. We began with the "revolutionary vanguard" who spear-headed the renaissance of

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[6] In contrast to the usage in this chapter, the term "culture wars," in popular usage, refers to multi-cultural conflicts among representatives of different groups, defined usually by race, gender, ethnicity, class, or ideology.

interest in cultural studies in the 1980's. Next, we described attacks and counter-attacks by armies representing opposing theoretical viewpoints, a skirmish between quantitative and qualitative methodologists, a meta-theoretical move to alter "the battle lines," and a postmodern[7] attempt to rout all armies from the field of battle.

Although we had fun using the culture wars metaphor to review the cultural literature, these intellectual disputes (a local version of the paradigm proliferation debate) have had serious consequences. Because it is difficult to present a cumulative picture of what has been learned from culture research, as Pfeffer predicted in his speech, the perceived worth of this area of inquiry has been difficult to explain and understand, making it easier for critics to marginalize and devalue work in this area. When a theoretical domain, such as cultural research, challenges neo-positivist assumptions about the empirical resolution of theoretical differences, it runs the risk of being dismissed, by some, as unverifiable, and therefore empty rhetoric. For example, to continue with extracts from Van de Ven's award acceptance speech (1997, p. 5), "Then there are the endless rhetorical diatribes of neo-modernists – culture theorists, critical theorists, post-positivists, feminists, Saussurean linguists. They are taking the discursive turn to deconstruct one another, and particularly the schools in Pfefferdigm. They lay bare the belly of the positivists." Although critical, feminist, postmodern, and linguistic theoreticians offer cultural researchers fine intellectual company, this remark could be

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[7] For a deeper discussion of postmodern approaches to culture see Alvesson and Willmott (1996); Berg (1989); Calas and Smircich (1991); Czarniawska-Joerges (1988); Grafton-Small and Linstead (1987); Jeffcut (1991); and Letiche (1991).

interpreted as an attempt to marginalize and devalue cultural research. Even if Van de Ven did not intend this, he may have influenced others to do so.

If cultural researchers are to counter attempts to marginalize and devalue cultural research, we need to make ourselves understood, build on each other's work, and begin to explain, to the rest of the field, why what we are doing is important. This is difficult, in part because cultural researchers do not have commonly accepted, unproblematic resolutions to offer, to the debates that are the focus of this chapter.

Cultural researchers have several options at this point. We could prolong the culture wars by continuing to take sides in these battles. Following Pfeffer's advice, we could enforce conformity to elite preferences (here I'd agree with Van Maanen about the undesirability of this alternative). We could try to build consensus about the "right" answers (an unlikely outcome, given the depth of conviction on these disputed issues). Or, we could, whatever our positions on these issues, learn about viewpoints other than our own, read research conducted in accord with these viewpoints, and see, open-mindedly, how these divergent ideas could enrich our own. Given that paradigms have proliferated in the cultural domain, and more broadly speaking in the field of organizational studies, this last alternative seems to be elusive and desirable, as it would leave an important role, as teacher, for those who prefer to advocate particular resolutions to these debates.

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