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CULTURES IN
ORGANIZATIONS

THREE
PERSPECTIVES

approach to absorb or distort another. The next section of this chapter explains the advantages of this framework and how it differs from more traditional approaches to theory-building.

Introducing the Three Perspectives

This book examines the commonalities and fundamental conflicts in culture research by distinguishing and then analyzing three social scientific perspectives: the Integration, Differentiation, and Fragmentation views.[3]

Studies conducted from an *Integration* perspective have three defining characteristics: all cultural manifestations mentioned are interpreted as consistently reinforcing the same themes, all members of the organization are said to share in an organization-wide consensus, and the culture is described as a realm where all is clear. Ambiguity is excluded.

In contrast, research conducted from a *Differentiation* perspective describes cultural manifestations as sometimes inconsistent (for example, when managers say one thing and do another). Consensus occurs only within the boundaries of subcultures, which often conflict with each other. Ambiguity is channeled, so that it does not intrude on the clarity which exists within these subcultural boundaries.

Studies conducted from a *Fragmentation* perspective focus on ambiguity as the essence of organizational culture. Consensus and dissensus are issue-specific and constantly fluctuating. No stable organization-wide or subcultural consensus exists. Clear consistencies and clear inconsistencies are rare.

These three social scientific perspectives are summarized in Table 1-1 and represented (in partial and idiosyncratic ways) in the second of the two culture arguments earlier.

Why These Perspectives Are Subjective

Many cultural researchers assume or assert that a particular perspective represents an accurate reflection of an objectively observed reality, rather than subjectively construed conceptual judgments. Thus some companies are said to have more consistency, organization-wide consensus, and clarity than others. Or a company is seen as passing, in stages, from having an Integrated culture to having a Differentiated or Fragmented culture. Furthermore, some researchers would argue that when enough high quality cultural research has been done, it will be possible to declare a winner in the war of the three perspectives, in the sense that one of the three (or some variant or combination of the three) will be shown to be the single most accurate way to describe the majority of organizational cultures. These conclusions reify cultures as having an objective reality that can be accurately assessed as fitting one of the social scientific perspectives more than the others.

In contrast, this book argues that *a social scientific perspective is an interpretive framework that is subjectively imposed on the process of collecting and analyzing cultural data. A social scientific perspective is not considered here to*

Table 1-1 Defining characteristics of the three perspectives

Perspective	Integration	Differentiation	Fragmentation
Orientation to consensus	Organization-wide consensus	Subcultural consensus	Multiplicity of views (no consensus)
Relation among manifestations	Consistency	Inconsistency	Complexity (not clearly consistent or inconsistent)
Orientation to ambiguity	Exclude it	Channel it outside subcultures	Focus on it
Metaphors	Clearing in jungle, monolith, hologram	Islands of clarity in sea of ambiguity	Web, jungle

Adapted from Martin and Meyerson (1988), Table 1; Meyerson and Martin (1987), Figure 3; and Frost, Moore, Louis, Lundberg, and Martin (1991), Table 1.1.

be an objective description of empirical facts. This is not because researchers are careless, dishonest, or otherwise inadequate social scientists. It is because different researchers, studying the same cultural members and the same organizational events with equal care, skill, and honesty may evaluate, recall, and interpret what happens differently. This is so, in part, because who a researcher is, or is seen to be, may affect what cultural members say and do. In addition, different researchers have different preconceptions, sensitivities, and skills. For example, an African-American researcher with personal experience of subtle forms of racial prejudice, in contrast to a white researcher less conscious of race, may elicit or offer a different interpretation of the meaning of an inter-racial interaction.

Because of these issues, it is essential to realize that when a study concludes, for example, that all members of a culture share a particular value, this is a subjective judgment. Whether that judgment is based on quantitative or qualitative data, the measurement, collection, and interpretation of that data are affected by subjective factors. The three social scientific perspectives, then, should be thought of as subjectively perceived "ideal types," rather than objective descriptions of particular cultural realities. Culture is not reified—out there—to be *accurately* observed.[4]

Once these social scientific perspectives are conceptualized as subjective, it becomes easier to see their shortcomings and imagine them changing. An example from another area might clarify this contention. There is nothing "natural" about categorizing people by the color of their skin. For instance, why do race classifications focus on skin color, rather than the color of a person's eyes? In the United States, why is color so often conceptualized as a dichotomy (black or white)? Once race is seen as a subjective, socially constructed category, different ways of seeing racial relations become possible. A "fact of nature" becomes a social relationship of domination and oppression that might be viewed quite differently and changed.[5] In a similar way, once the three social scientific perspectives are seen as subjective and socially constructed, it becomes possible to envision other ways of conceptualizing what cultures are and how they change.

included in order to illustrate the fact that each of the three social scientific perspectives is based on an extensive body of empirical literature. Explanatory material that I have added to these quotations is marked with brackets.

All or even most studies congruent with a given perspective could not be included in these references. There are simply too many. For example, the Integration perspective has become the dominant view of organizational researchers and practitioners in the United States. One review of a limited sample of journals counted almost 200 recent articles, most of which were conducted from this perspective.[2] Limitations in manuscript length and reader patience also make it impossible to discuss all of a cited text (or all of the writings of a given researcher). Therefore, those who are unfamiliar with particular researchers and texts quoted or referenced in this book are encouraged to read some of this work in its entirety, so that the context from which a quote is taken can be seen and the fairness and accuracy of descriptions can be assessed.

ORGANIZATION-WIDE CONSENSUS

The core of the Integration perspective is the lure of organization-wide consensus. Clark's description of "organizational sagas" (a precursor of organizational culture) states this point cogently:

> An organizational saga is a powerful means of unity in the formal workplace. It makes links across internal divisions and organizational boundaries as internal and external groups share their common beliefs. With deep emotional commitment believers define themselves by their organizational affiliation and in their bond to other believers they share an intense sense of the unique. (Clark, 1972, p. 183)

In Integration views of culture, people at all levels of an organizational hierarchy are said to agree about potentially divisive issues. For example:[3]

> Just as individuals process information, so also do groups and units of people. In doing so they develop collective belief systems about social arrangements. . . . They include beliefs about, among other things, organizational purpose, criteria of performance, the location of authority, legitimate bases of power, decision-making orientations, style of leadership, compliance, evaluation, and motivation. (Quinn and McGrath, 1985, p. 325)

Integration studies often describe organization-wide consensus in (harmonious) familial terms, which merge the (supposedly separate) public and private domains, so that organizations are seen as families and families of employees are described as part of the organization. For example, some OZCO employees, such as Denise and Stuart, quoted in Chapter 3, spoke of OZCO using a family metaphor. Other examples of familial language come from Schein's study of organizational founders and Ouchi and Jaegar's examination of "Theory Z" cultures:

> The people who were comfortable in this environment and enjoyed the excitement of building a successful organization found themselves increasingly feeling like members of a family and were emotionally treated as such. Strong bonds of mutual support grew up at an interpersonal level, and Murphy [the founder] functioned symbolically as a brilliant, demanding, but supportive father figure. (Schein, 1991a, p. 23)

> The slowness of evaluation and the stability of membership promote a holistic concern for people, particularly from superior to subordinate. This holism includes the employee and his or her family in an active manner. Family members regularly interact with other organization members and their families and feel an identification with the organization. (Ouchi and Jaegar, 1978, p. 688)

Perhaps because of the Integration perspective's emphasis on interpersonal, sometimes even familial closeness, organization-wide consensus is often described in highly emotional terms. For example, a study of the Los Angeles Olympic Organizing Committee concludes with a description of a party held for employees:

> A vice president who had been on the road for several days with the torch relay . . . told about the runner going over a winding road in the hills of West Virginia and encountering a man standing alone on the top of a hill with a trumpet playing "America the Beautiful" as the torch passed. There was not a dry eye in the house. The speaker himself broke down, overcome by emotion, and could not continue for several minutes. The staff filed out to the strains of ceremonial music, clutching their commemorative mugs and pins reading "Team 84" that were handed to them at the exit. (McDonald, 1991, p. 37)

This emotional language leaves no room for dissent. For example, in the quotation above, no "eye in the house" failed to cry, responded with skepticism, or felt embarrassed about the chauvinism, fervor, or abundance of tears.

Consensus is another name for conformity. Some Integration research has frankly responded to the harsh criticism that this perspective prescribes, as well as describes, a corporate form of fascism or cult religion:

> Those white-shirted, polite, competent, hard-working [IBM] employees of twenty years ago were often regarded as corporate "fanatics," or even corporate "fascists," because they appeared not to display in superficial ways their "American individuality." White shirts were mistaken for laundered minds. The shirts are now colored, but it appears that their wearers are still politely service-oriented, highly competent, and hard working (everything may change but the beliefs). And in our culture, any evidence of a reduction in obvious "individuality," which naturally accompanies increases in organizational commitment, will produce criticism from those who overvalue individuality. (Pascale and Athos, 1981, p. 186)

Even if pressures toward consensus sometimes make it necessary to over-ride the desires of individuals, some Integration studies find this justified because unity provides an antidote to the conflicts of interest that can divide and paralyze an

organization. Integration studies sometimes acknowledge conflict or deviance, interpreting them as reasons for seeking a transcendent, more powerful unity—one that gains the consent, even the enthusiastic commitment, of the governed.

CONSISTENCY

Many Integration studies acknowledge that organization-wide consensus is not easy to achieve. It must, researchers argue, be reinforced by a myriad of interconnected cultural manifestations, each of which is consistent with the others. For example:

> Each ideal type [of culture] represents a set of interconnected parts, each dependent on at least one other part. (Ouchi and Jaegar, 1978, p. 685)

An Integration study usually includes three kinds of consistency: action, symbolic, and content. Examples of each are discussed in the following sections.

Action Consistency

Action consistency occurs when content themes are consistent with an organization's formal and informal practices. For example, in the Integration view of OZCO's culture, some employees described management's espoused value of egalitarianism as consistent with a wide variety of formal and informal practices, including company participation in the United Way charity, the company's stock plan, profit-sharing, answering one's own telephone, "Management By Walking Around," need-based distribution of "perks," "bottom-up" consensual decision-making, and lateral promotions. In more abstract terms, action consistency occurs when

> the structural elements and organizational processes making up the design type are strongly underpinned by provinces of meaning and interpretive schemes that bind them together in an institutionally derived normative order. (Hinings and Greenwood, 1987, p. 2, quoted in Greenwood and Hinings, 1988, p. 295)

For example, Barley's study of funeral work examined practices consistent with a content theme emphasizing the denial of death:

> The funeral director seeks to create the appearance of normality or naturalness whenever the living are in the presence of the dead. This intention underlies strategies that organize the execution of many different activities; for example, preparation of the body, removal of the deceased from a home. (Barley, 1991, p. 44)

Symbolic Consistency

A second type of consistency is symbolic. It occurs when the symbolic meanings of cultural forms, such as physical arrangements, stories, rituals, and jargon, are described as congruent with content themes. For example, the Integration view of OZCO's culture offered egalitarian interpretations of Jim Hamilton's behavior at company rituals, "retirement village" jargon, and the story about the failure of corporate strategic planning. Physical arrangements, such as casual dress norms, a single cafeteria for all employees, and open office spaces also were described as reinforcing egalitarian themes.

Symbolic consistency is also evident in Pettigrew's study of public school headmasters.[4] According to this study, headmasters tried to introduce new values in their schools by reinforcing desired changes with cultural forms. For example, they created rituals or told organizational stories that expressed appreciation for the types of behaviors they were seeking to encourage. Similarly, at IBM rules were said to apply equally—to all employees. This espoused value was once put to a severe test, according to an Integration interpretation of the "Rule Breaking" story:

> A twenty-two-year old bride weighing ninety pounds, whose husband had been sent overseas and who, in consequence, had been given a job until his return. . . . The young woman, Lucille Berger, was obliged to make certain that people entering security areas wore the correct clearance identification. Surrounded by his usual entourage of white-shirted men, Watson [the president] approached the doorway to an area where she was on guard, wearing an orange badge acceptable elsewhere in the plant, but not a green badge, which alone permitted entrance at her door. "I was trembling in my uniform, which was far too big," she recalled. "It hid my shakes but not my voice. "I'm sorry," I said to him. I knew who he was alright. "You cannot enter. Your admittance is not recognized." That's what we were supposed to say. The men accompanying Watson were stricken; the moment held unpredictable possibilities. "Don't you know who he is?" someone hissed. Watson raised his hand for silence, while one of the party strode off and returned with the appropriate badge. (Rodgers, 1969, pp. 153–154, quoted in Martin, Feldman, Hatch, and Sitkin, 1983, p. 440)

Martin, Feldman, Hatch, and Sitkin found that versions of this and six other "common" organizational stories were told in a wide range of large and small, public and private organizations.[5] When we analyzed the scripts (the common elements) in various versions of these seven common stories, we assumed that these stories had only one interpretation—one that was consistent with the espoused values of top management. Such an assumption is a hallmark of an Integration study.

Other Integration studies focus on the ways leaders and enthusiastic employees can foster the development of symbolic consistency through attention to dress norms and the physical arrangements of the work space. For example:

> The architecture and office layout of Action reflected Murphy's assumptions about creativity and decision making. He insisted on open office landscaping; preferred cubicles for engineers instead of offices with doors; encouraged individualism in dress and behavior; and minimized the use of status symbols, such as private offices, special dining rooms for executives, and personal parking spaces. Instead, there were many conference rooms and attached kitchens to encourage people to interact comfortably. (Schein, 1991a, pp. 21–22)

Table 4-1 Defining culture from an Integration perspective

1. The pattern of shared beliefs and values that give the members of an institution meaning, and provide them with the rules for behavior in their organization. (Davis, 1984, p. 1)

2. Organizational culture can be thought of as the glue that holds an organization together through a sharing of patterns of meaning. The culture focuses on the values, beliefs, and expectations that members come to share. (Siehl and Martin, 1984, p. 227)

3. Culture is the set of important understandings (often unstated) that members of a community share in common. (Sathe, 1985, p. 6)

4. I distinguish among these elements by treating basic assumptions as the essence—what culture really is—and by treating values and behaviors as observed manifestations of the cultural essence. (Schein, 1985, p. 14)

5. An organization might then be studied as a culture by discovering and synthesizing its rules of social interaction and interpretation, as revealed in the behavior they shape. Social interaction and interpretation are communication activities, so it follows that the culture could be described by articulating communication rules. (Schall, 1983, p. 559)

6. A standard definition of culture would include the system of values, symbols, and shared meanings of a group including the embodiment of these values, symbols, and meanings into material objects amd ritualized practices. . . . The "stuff" of culture includes customs and traditions, historical accounts be they mythical or actual, tacit understandings, habits, norms and expectations, common meanings associated with fixed objects and established rites, shared assumptions, and intersubjective meanings. (Sergiovanni and Corbally, 1984, p. viii)

7. To analyze *why* members behave the way they do, we often look for the *values* that govern behavior, which is the second level. . . . But as the values are hard to observe directly, it is often necessary to infer them by interviewing key members of the organization or to content analyze artifacts such as documents and charters. However, in identifying such values, we usually note that they represent accurately only the manifest or *espoused* values of a culture. That is they focus on what people *say* is the reason for their behavior, what they ideally would like those reasons to be, and what are often their rationalizations for their behavior. Yet, the underlying reasons for their behavior remain concealed or unconscious. To really *understand* a culture and to ascertain more completely the group's values and overt behavior, it is imperative to delve into the *underlying assumptions*, which are typically unconscious but which actually determine how group members perceive, think, and feel. (Schein, 1984, p. 3)

8. Organizational theorists often claim that culture is best understood as a set of assumptions or an interpretive framework that undergirds daily life in an organization or occupation. However, despite such theoretical pronouncements, few organizational researchers have actually bothered to study the deep structure of a work setting. Instead, most have focused on symbolic phenomena that lie on the surface of everyday life: stories, myths, logos, heros, and assorted other verbal or physical artifacts. For this reason, cultural research typically belabors the obvious while failing to reveal the core of the interpretive system that lends a culture its coherence. (Barley, 1991, p. 39)

content themes, Kilmann "measured culture" by asking respondents to answer a questionnaire with items, for example, that asked respondents to report whether cultural members do or do not "encourage creativity" or "try to please the organization."[10] Such relatively superficial content themes may be espoused by cultural members because of a desire to present oneself or one's organization in a socially desirable manner, either as an intentional, impression management strategy or as a less conscious distortion of perception or memory.

In contrast, Schein (definition 7) and Barley (definition 8) argue that a focus on these kinds of content themes or on other kinds of cultural manifestations (such as formal and informal practices, stories, or rituals) is undesirable because these are all relatively superficial cultural manifestations. Instead, Schein and Barley argue that cultural studies should focus on deeper content themes, labeled *basic assumptions,* because such themes are less subject to rationalization and self-conscious manipulation. For example, Schein suggests the following basic assumptions may serve as content themes for a cultural analysis: humanity's relationship to nature (dominant, submissive, harmonizing, etc.); the nature of reality and truth (what is real and what is not); the nature of human nature (good, evil, or neutral); the nature of human activity (active, passive, self-developmental, etc.); and the nature of human relationships (cooperative, competitive, etc.).[11] One (somewhat tautological) rationale for this focus on deeply held assumptions, offered in Integration studies, is that culture should be defined in terms of those manifestations that are most likely to elicit organization-wide consensus. For example:

> Basic assumptions, in the sense in which I want to define that concept, have become so taken for granted that one finds little variation within a cultural unit. (Schein, 1985, p. 18)

This debate about depth versus superficiality can be illuminated by examining the results of three Integration studies of the same organizational culture, referred to here by a pseudonym—GEM Co. These three studies all work within an Integration definition of culture as that which is shared, but they all come to quite different conclusions about the nature of GEM Co.'s culture because they place different emphasis on the importance of depth. Martin, Anterasian, and Siehl, in the most superficial of the three studies, content-analyzed the externally espoused values in the annual reports of 100 very large corporations.[12] In comparison to the other companies, GEM Co. expressed less concern about the well-being of its employees, emphasizing instead bottom-line issues such as profitability and products—appropriate concerns for an annual report.

A second study by Siehl and Martin focused on internally enacted content themes at GEM Co.[13] Four content themes emerged from a study of cultural forms, such as stories, rituals, and jargon (symbolic consistency): "people are our most important asset," "the company's products and people are unique," "the family of an employee is part of the company," and "never take a short-term perspective." At least three of these themes express a humanitarian concern for employee well-being.

In a third, independently conducted research project, Dyer studied GEM Co. using Schein's emphasis on internally enacted, fundamental assumptions.[14] The themes which emerged from the observation of formal and informal practices (action consistency) and cultural forms (symbolic consistency) included: "long-term perspective on employees' careers," "egalitarianism," "truth through confrontation," and "protect women." A deeper look at the cultural manifestations expressive of these apparently humanitarian content themes revealed evidence of

wide range of studies claimed to show that under the right kind of vision-creating leadership, organizations can develop cultures based on shared values, harmony, and homogeneity. The Differentiation research to be discussed in the next chapter challenges this conclusion. According to these studies, the Integration perspective is a myth, created and perpetuated for the benefit of top management, to cover up the contradictions and intergroup conflict that inevitably characterize organizational cultures.

NOTE

1. Hatch (1990), Hoffman (1982).

The Differentiation Perspective:
Separation and Conflict

According to the Differentiation perspective, the apparently seamless unities of the Integration perspective mask a series of overlapping, nested organizational subcultures. These subcultures co-exist, sometimes in harmony, sometimes in conflict, and sometimes in indifference to each other. The Differentiation perspective unveils the workings of power in organizations, acknowledges conflicts of interest between groups, and attends to differences of opinion. This chapter introduces the Differentiation perspective and extends it to incorporate insights about environmental influences on the development of cultures in organizations.

Differentiation views of organizational culture have three defining characteristics. First, interpretations of content themes, practices, and forms are often inconsistent. Second, the Differentiation perspective is suspicious of claims of organization-wide consensus. To the extent that consensus exists, it is seen as located primarily within subcultural boundaries. Third, within subcultural boundaries, clarity reigns, while ambiguity is relegated to the periphery. These defining elements of the Differentiation perspective (*inconsistency, subcultural consensus, and the relegation of ambiguity to the periphery of subcultures*) are explored in more detail below, using quotations from studies that illustrate this viewpoint.

INTRODUCTION TO DIFFERENCE

Integration studies focus on that which is similar, often moving to higher levels of abstraction that sidestep difference by encompassing it. Because abstractions have a higher logical status, they are sometimes seen as having a firmer claim to importance or even a moral priority. Thus, claims of difference are often seen as "lower level, fragmenting, particularistic sorts of concerns," while similarities are considered "higher level, integrative, and universalistic sorts of concerns."[1] This process of valuing that which unifies, and devaluing that which differentiates, can be observed at all levels of organizations. Managerial advocates of unity may urge a recalcitrant labor force to accept a firmwide wage freeze "because we

opposition shaped by the consciousness of being on the bottom. . . . That these activities have been obscured from traditional social scientists should come as no surprise. Oppressed peoples may maintain hidden consciousness and may not reveal their true selves for reasons of self-protection. (Collins, 1986, p. 23)

Other Differentiation studies focus on what Feldman labels acceptance based on unconscious distortion. This distortion occurs because it can be difficult for members of less powerful groups to see their subordination as unjust; a dominant culture can silence dissent, making it difficult for the less powerful to articulate, enact, or even see an alternative way of life. This is a description of "false consciousness." Jermier offers two descriptions of a blue-collar worker at a manufacturing plant.[21] In the first description, the protagonist accepts management's assurances about the safety of his work and occupies his mind with consumerist fantasies. The only breaches in this false consciousness are vague and fleeting glimpses of an alternative reality—a partially articulated unease that is quickly dismissed. In the second half of this portrait, the same individual is overtly alienated, disbelieving management's claims of safety, angry about his exploitation, and well aware of the costs of joining the consumerist "rat race." Although Jermier's study is unusual in its portrayal of two starkly different psychic realities, Differentiation research generally assumes a self-concept that is compartmentalized by conflicting subcultural demands. In summary, the Differentiation view differs from an Integration perspective at the individual, subcultural, and organizational levels of analysis.

DEFINING CULTURE FROM A DIFFERENTIATION PERSPECTIVE

Differentiation studies define culture in terms that are surprisingly similar, in some ways, to the definitions used in Integration research: culture is defined as that which is shared. Table 6-1 presents a range of these Differentiation definitions.[22] In contrast to Integration definitions, however, Differentiation definitions specify that it is a group, rather than an entire organization, that is doing the sharing. See, for example, Trice and Morand's definition (1), Louis's definitions (3) and (10), Gregory's definition (5), Smircich's definition (11), and Van Maanen and Barley's definition (12).

Some (but not all) Differentiation studies define culture as unique or distinctive to a particular group (see, e.g., Louis's definition [10], Smircich's definition [11], Van Maanen and Barley's definition [12], and Gregory's definition [13]).[23] This theme of cultural uniqueness was also present in many Integration definitions of culture. Because this issue of distinctness transcends the boundaries between the Integration and Differentiation approaches to the study of culture, and because there is reason to believe that this claim of cultural uniqueness may not be well founded, this issue is discussed separately in the concluding sections of this chapter.

The most important aspect of these definitions is that they vary in the extent to which they admit the possibility that subcultures may co-exist with some form of

Table 6-1 Defining culture from a Differentiation perspective

1. Organizational subcultures may be defined as distinct clusters of understandings, behaviors, and cultural forms that identify groups of people in the organization. They differ noticeably from the common organizational culture in which they are embedded, either intensifying its understandings and practices or deviating from them. (Trice and Morand, in press, p. 1)

2. Culture's utility as a heuristic concept may be lost when the organizational level of analysis is employed. Work organizations are indeed marked by social practices that can be said to be "cultural," but these practices may not span the organization as a whole. (Van Maanen and Barley, 1985, p. 32)

3. Organizations are referred to as "culture-bearing milieus". . . . The [top of the] organization, vertical and horizontal slices, and other formal unit designations [such as department] all represent typical sites in and through which cultures may develop. . . . As such, they serve as breeding grounds, if you will, for the emergence of local shared meanings. (Louis, 1985, pp. 75–79)

4. [Studies] of culture most often portray organizational systems. . . . as working together in a shared cohesive totality. The theoretical position expressed in this paper develops an alternative stance—a perspective of organizational cultures that expects organizations to have subcultures and allows for rival images and competing systems of meanings. (Riley, 1983, pp. 414–415)

5. More researchers have emphasized the homogeneity of culture and its cohesive function than its divisive potential. This paper suggests, however, that many organizations are most accurately viewed as multicultural. Subgroups with different occupational, divisional, ethnic, or other cultures approach organizational interactions with their own meanings and senses of priorities. (Gregory, 1983, p. 359)

6. From this perspective, internal conflict becomes a frequent feature of organizational cultures. Subcultures can obviously clash over issues, programs, and missions. Also, they can exist side by side for long stretches of time without conflict, and clearly can be compatible. . . . In turn, the concept of power comes into focus since it would logically be generated and differentially distributed in and among subcultures. It follows that a political view of organizational behavior becomes relevant. (Trice and Morand, in press, p. 8)

7. From the perspective we have elaborated, the study of cultural organization is therefore closely bound to the study of organizational conflict. (Van Maanen and Barley, 1985, p. 48)

8. In a political-cultural approach to organizational analysis, conflict rather than being ruled out a priori, is the ground from which interest groups collectively construct the figure of organizational culture. (Lucas, 1987, p. 153)

9. Cultural arrangements, of which organizations are an essential segment, are seen as manifestations of a process of ideational development located within a context of definite material conditions. It is a context of dominance (males over females/owners over workers) but also of conflict and contradiction in which class and gender, autonomous but overdetermined, are vital dynamics. Ideas and cultural arrangements confront actors as a series of rules of behavior; rules that, in their contradictions, may variously be enacted, followed or resisted. (Mills, 1988, p. 366)

10. A set of understandings or meanings shared by a group of people. The meanings are largely tacit among members, are clearly relevant to a particular group, and are *distinctive* to the group. (Louis, 1985, p. 74)

11. In a particular situation the set of meanings that evolves gives a group its own ethos, or *distinctive* character, which is expressed in patterns of belief (ideology), activity (norms and rituals), language and other symbolic forms through which organization members both create and sustain their view of the world and image of themselves in the world. The development of a world view with its shared understanding of group identity, purpose and direction are products of the *unique* history, personal interactions and environmental circumstances of the group. (Smircich, 1983a, p. 56, emphasis added)

Table 6-1 *(cont.)*

12. Only when members of a group assign similar meanings to facets of their situation can collectives devise, through interaction, *unique* responses to problems that later take on trappings of rule, ritual, and value. (Van Maanen and Barley, 1985, p. 34, emphasis added)

13. A culture is conceptualized as a system of meanings that accompany the myriad of behaviors and practices recognized as a *distinct* way of life. (Gregory, 1983, p. 364, emphasis added)

organization-wide consensus. At one extreme, Trice and Morand's definition (1) assumes the existence of an overarching, "common" organization-wide culture, in which subcultures are embedded. Louis's definition (3), like many other Differentiation definitions, focuses on groups as the site where subcultural development may begin, but does not explicitly exclude the possibility of organization-wide consensus. Van Maanen and Barley's definition (2) argues that organization-wide unity *may* not occur. At another extreme, some Differentiation definitions set out to articulate an alternative to the Integration perspective by describing subcultures as oriented toward each other, rather than emerging in opposition to some "dominant" culture articulated by top management (see, e.g., Riley's definition [4] and Gregory's definition [5]).[24]

The definitions also vary in the extent to which they emphasize power differences and conflicts of interest between groups. Some Differentiation studies define organizational cultures as hierarchically ordered clusters of subcultures, putting conflict and power in the forefront of their analysis (see, e.g., Riley's definition [4], Gregory's definition [5], and Lucas's definition [8]), while others do not mention conflict or allow for the possibility that both organization-wide consensus and subcultural conflict might co-exist (see, e.g., Trice and Morand's definition [6] and Van Maanen and Barley's definition [7]).

To summarize, like Integration studies, Differentiation research defines culture as that which is shared. Unlike Integration research, however, Differentiation studies define the boundary of a culture at the group level of analysis, focusing on consensus within subcultures. Some Differentiation definitions deliberately set out to provide an alternative to the Integration approach, denying the possibility of organization-wide consensus, while other studies allow that subcultures might co-exist with some kind of organization-wide sharing. Differentiation definitions vary in the extent to which they define culture in terms of uniqueness and the extent to which they emphasize conflict.

As was the case with the Integration definitions of culture discussed in Chapter 4, these Differentiation definitions can be misleading. Although in some cases these Differentiation definitions sound much like an Integration definition of culture, the tone of a Differentiation study is quite different, even when evidence of organization-wide consensus is being discussed. This difference is discussed next.

THE POSSIBILITY OF ORGANIZATION-WIDE CONSENSUS

Some Differentiation research describes an organization-wide culture that co-exists with various subcultures. However, that organization-wide culture is inter-

preted quite differently than it would be in an Integration study. For example, in a study of the machinists on the shop floor, Young sees statements that apparently assert organization-wide commonality as a place where subcultural differences are subtly articulated:

> In this company, the existence of solidary values was explicitly marked by widely held views concerning the firm, assertions of its unique qualities, and regular statements of collective identity by shop floor groups. These were also the features of company culture proclaimed by its managers. Yet a closer appraisal suggests that precisely these statements of collectivity also constitute the vehicles whereby different interests among shop floor workers asserted superiority and celebrated sectional boundaries. Unity and division existed in tandem. (Young, 1991, p. 91)

Brunsson also offers a vision of the co-existence of organization-wide unity and subcultural development. He begins with the premise that there is sometimes a conflict between the acceptance of inconsistency and the need for action:

> So the problem for these organizations is how to produce both consistency and inconsistency, how to be both integrated and dissolved. (Brunsson, 1986, p. 174)

Brunsson argues that an organization can respond by decoupling over issues, using some issues as a magnet for conflict (usually those where action is not essential) and other issues as an arena for action. Organizations can also decouple into subunit structures, some of which can produce conflictive talk and inconsistent decisions, others which can produce coordinated action. Finally, organizations can decouple over environments, responding to some segments of the environment with evident inconsistency and internal conflict, and reacting to other segments with clear and unified actions. Brunsson incorporates into his description some evidence of organization-wide unity, although his emphasis on subunit differentiation and inconsistency is more characteristic of a Differentiation perspective. The three kinds of decoupling (regarding issues, subunits, and environments) are described as occurring simultaneously, suggesting an unusually complex configuration of difference.

It is important to distinguish Differentiation research from Integration studies that acknowledge the existence of an occasional inconsistency or the rare (usually enhancing) subculture. The cultural descriptions of Young and Brunsson, for example, are riddled with inconsistencies. Subcultural differentiation is their primary focus; unifying cultural elements are only a secondary consideration. Differentiation research does not see elements of organization-wide unity as mediating or transcending the potential for chronic, deep conflicts of interest between groups. Thus Differentiation studies do not argue that organizational productivity is enhanced by an appropriate balance of integrating and differentiating forces, as Blau, Chandler, and Lawrence and Lorsch have done.[25]

Other Differentiation studies describe managerial attempts to create organization-wide consensus with evident skepticism and stress employee resistance. For example, Kunda examines employees' reactions to deliberate attempts to create shared values through participation in rituals. To the extent that employees

These same connections are often ephemeral, deactivated instantly as other issues and other individuals enter the foreground of attention. The speed of (dis)connection, the plethora of information and problems to be solved, and the difficulty of resolving any one issue for long—these complexities bring cognitive overload.

Demographic and international sources of diversity within organizations mean that contacts among employees are mediated by ethnic, racial, social, religious, and age differences, by geographical distance, and by other disjunctions of interest and experience that are only incompletely understood. In addition, some employees at the lowest levels of hierarchies (and their family and friends who may be unemployed) experience a material suffering that is incommensurable with the life experiences of higher-status executives. Taken together, these factors create an organizational world characterized by distance rather than closeness, obscurity rather than clarity, disorder rather than order, uncontrollability rather than predictability.

The Fragmentation perspective brings these sources of ambiguity to the foreground of a cultural description. Building on the complexities introduced by the nexus approach to understanding culture, Fragmentation studies see the boundaries of subcultures as permeable and fluctuating, in response to environmental changes in feeder cultures. The salience of particular subcultural memberships wax and wane, as issues surface, get resolved, or become forgotten in the flux of events. In this context, the manifestations of a culture must be multifaceted—their meanings hard to decipher and necessarily open to multiple interpretations. From the Fragmentation viewpoint, both the unity of Integration studies and the clearly defined differences of the Differentiation perspective seem to be myths of simplicity, order, and predictability, imposed on a socially constructed reality that is characterized by complexity, multiplicity, and flux. When culture is viewed from a Fragmentation viewpoint, the Integration and Differentiation perspectives seem to deepen confusion and misunderstanding by misrepresenting the complexities of living in an inescapably ambiguous world.

Like the other two perspectives, the Fragmentation viewpoint is not just an intellectual position. When researchers exclude ambiguity from the study of culture, they are making a moral judgment about the ambiguous aspects of contemporary life:

> Many anthropologists have a kind of temperamental preference for the simplicity, order, and predictability of less complicated societies, in which everyone knows what everyone else is supposed to do, and in which there is a "design for living." If you share that preference, then you can turn culture into an honorific term by denying it to those social arrangements which do not "deserve" it, thereby making a disguised moral judgment about those ways of life. But that leaves a good part of modern life . . . out of the culture sphere altogether. (Becker, 1982, p. 518)

From this point of view, if theory and research are to be relevant to problems of contemporary organizational life, the exclusion of ambiguity cannot be an option.

BEYOND EXCLUSION AND CHANNELING: THE CENTRALITY OF AMBIGUITY

Some organizational researchers, such as Weick, Daft, Starbuck, and March and his colleagues, have long stressed the importance of ambiguity, although usually without a particular focus on culture. Weick lists various sources of organizational ambiguity that these researchers have explored:

> They include things like high mobility of people among positions, faulty memories, attempts to cope with overload by lowering the standards of acceptable performance, public compliance undercut by private deviation, sudden changes in authority or job descriptions, merging of odd product lines, and the like. (Weick, 1985, p. 117)

Fragmentation studies follow in this tradition, bringing ambiguity to the foreground of a cultural description. For example, textbook publishing has been described as a business riddled with ambiguity. According to Levitt and Nass, what makes a good textbook, why one succeeds and another fails, even what makes an editor have a successful career—all these critical factors are unclear:

> The editors consistently described their work in gambling terms, such as "a lottery with bad odds," "an attempt to hedge one's bets," or "a crapshoot." . . . The sense of confusion experienced by participants inhabiting this haphazard and unpredictable universe is captured in the following comment from a sociology editor: "Editors can become schizophrenic. You think a manuscript is good and it doesn't make money. Then you get a manuscript that you think is bad, and it makes money—but not always." (Levitt and Nass, 1989, pp. 191–192)

Social work has also been portrayed as an occupational culture permeated with ambiguity. According to Meyerson, there is no clear definition of what constitutes social work:

> Boundaries seem unclear because the occupation of social work includes a wide range of tasks and responsibilities, many of which are performed by members of other occupations. In a hospital, social work can include everything from concrete discharge planning—such as placing an individual in a nursing home—to less well-defined clinical work with patients and families. Yet nurses also plan discharges; psychologists counsel; and members of the clergy coordinate community resources. Thus, insiders, as well as outsiders, hold diffuse ideas about what social work is and about who is and is not a social worker. In addition, technologies seem ambiguous because what one does as a social worker (e.g., talk to clients) seems loosely related to what results (e.g., how clients behave). (Meyerson, 1991a, p. 136)

These social workers used metaphors to express the pervasiveness of ambiguities in their work lives. For example:

> One day I was feeling real scattered and I was trying to get a good image of what that meant for me. Tom said, "It sounds like you're trying to find a place to stand in the

middle of a kaleidoscope.'' And he just captured what I was feeling. (social worker, quoted in Meyerson, 1991a, p. 137)

Similarly, Feldman sees ambiguity as a central attribute of the work of policy analysts at the Department of Energy in Washington, D.C. In this cultural context, as in social work, metaphors were used to describe the experience:

Another claimed that he had ''never really perceived the department as a thing or an entity. [It] is an amorphous collection of things—parts that fit together only in a rather rudimentary way and without an obvious sense of order.'' (policy analyst, quoted in Feldman, 1983b, p. 229)

According to these researchers, no adequate cultural description of textbook publishing, social work, or policy analysis could exclude ambiguity. However, to include ambiguity requires a new approach to thinking about culture.

DEFINING AMBIGUITY

Before this new approach can be described, some clear definitions of ambiguous phenomena are needed. Ambiguity is subjectively perceived; its meaning is interpreted.[2] Something is judged to be ambiguous because it seems to be unclear, highly complex, or paradoxical. A lack of clarity occurs because something seems obscure or indistinct, and therefore hard to decipher. Silences and absences can also create a lack of clarity. Something is highly complex because a plethora of elements and relationships makes it difficult to comprehend in any simple way. Both a lack of clarity and high complexity can sometimes be resolved with more information or a fresh insight, making the ambiguity disappear. Paradoxes are not so easily resolved. A paradox is an argument that apparently derives contradictory conclusions by valid deduction from acceptable premises.[3] *Ambiguity is perceived when a lack of clarity, high complexity, or a paradox makes multiple (rather than single or dichotomous) explanations plausible.*

It is helpful to distinguish these three aspects of ambiguity (lack of clarity, complexity, and paradox) from external sources of and internal reactions to ambiguity. External sources of ambiguity stem from conditions external to the person perceiving the ambiguity. For example, uncertainties in an organization's environment, such as an unexpected environmental ''jolt,'' can cause the perception of ambiguity. Structural variables can also be an external source of perceived ambiguity, as when an organization's technical core is loosely coupled with the facade it presents to the outside world.

Such external sources of ambiguity should be distinguished from the various internal reactions people can have to ambiguity. These internal reactions range from disgust and antipathy (because many individuals do not tolerate ambiguity well) to joy and elation. Internal reactions to ambiguity, then, can be negative (e.g., a reaction of debilitating confusion or action paralysis) or positive (e.g., a reaction of feeling free of unhelpful constraints or able to innovate).

INTRODUCTION TO FRAGMENTATION: MODES OF THINKING

These definitions of ambiguity raise several questions: How is it, or is it, possible to think about multiple interpretations in a manner that is different from the oppositional modes of thinking characteristic of the Differentiation perspective? Furthermore, if there is a different mode of thinking characteristic of the Fragmentation perspective, what use is it? That is, what new kinds of understandings can emerge from this mode of thinking that would be, in a sense, ''unthinkable'' from the other two perspectives?

These questions must be answered in order to understand how Fragmentation studies conceptualize variations on the themes of consistency and consensus. Some of the more thoughtful answers come from postmodernism, an intellectual movement that was developed by philosophers, literary critics, feminist theorists, and anthropologists, among others. Particularly in the United States, postmodernism is controversial because it challenges the widely held assumption that theory and research can increase knowledge by bringing us closer to understanding objective truth. Most Fragmentation studies do not adopt a postmodern framework, although those that do offer insights inaccessible to those who rely on more traditional approaches.[4] Because the postmodern approach is fundamentally incommensurable with the assumptions of most of the research reviewed in this book, the implications of postmodernism will be discussed separately, in Chapter 10. *The few postmodern ideas introduced in this chapter can be understood and utilized without making postmodernism a necessary foundation for working within the Fragmentation perspective.*

Shortcomings of Oppositional Thinking

Before describing alternatives, it is important to understand why these alternatives are needed. In other words, what is wrong with the oppositional modes of thinking, such as dichotomies, that are used in Differentiation research? Studies conducted from a Differentiation viewpoint use oppositional thinking to distinguish subcultures, such as labor versus management, support versus professional staff, men versus women, blacks versus whites. Usually, subcultures represent ends of a dichotomy, and one of these dichotomous alternatives is viewed as having a higher status than the other. This emphasis on superior-subordinate relations may not be simply a reflection of how organizations are structured; some scholars argue that any kind of dichotomous thinking is inevitably hierarchical:

Thus, whites rule Blacks, males dominate females, reason is touted as superior to emotion in ascertaining truth, facts supersede opinion in evaluating knowledge, and subjects rule objects. Dichotomous oppositional differences invariably imply relationships of superiority and inferiority, hierarchical relationships that mesh with political economies of domination and subordination. (Collins, 1986, p. 520)

One problem with dichotomous thinking is that it oversimplifies and misrepresents the attributes and viewpoints of members of lower status groups. When

The interplay between presence and absence that produces meaning is posited as one of *deferral:* meaning is never truly present, but is only constructed through the potentially endless process of referring to other, absent signifiers. The "next" signifier can in a sense be said to give meaning to the "previous" one, and so on *ad infinitum.* There can thus be no transcendental signified where the process of deferral somehow would come to an end. (Moi, 1985, p. 106)

In this way, the postmodern approach challenges all claims to have found a single objective "truth" that transcends all other interpretations.

If meanings lie in absences, and multiple interpretations can be made, how is a researcher to proceed? Integration and Differentiation studies exclude or channel ambiguity from the domain that is labeled culture, in effect excluding from analysis all that which cannot be explained. Yet

how could we ever discover the nature of the ideology that surrounds us if it were entirely consistent, without the slightest contradiction, gap or fissure that might allow us to perceive it in the first place? (Moi, 1985, p. 124)

Only a definition of culture as fragmented—marked by gaps, slides, and silences—would enable cultural theory to explain how even the most homogeneous cultures generate their own lacunae.[9] Eagleton makes a similar point, speaking of Macherey's view of textual analysis:

It is in the significant *silences* of a text, in its gaps and absences that the presence of ideology can be most positively felt. . . . The text is, as it were, ideologically forbidden to say certain things; in trying to tell the truth in his own way, for example, the author finds himself forced to reveal the limits of the ideology within which he writes. He is forced to reveal its gaps and silences, what it is unable to articulate. Because a text contains these gaps and silences, it is always *incomplete.* Far from constituting a rounded, coherent whole, it displays a conflict and contradiction of meanings; and the significance of the work lies in the difference rather than the unity between these meanings. (Eagleton, 1976, pp. 34–35, quoted in Moi, 1985, p. 94)

The problem then is how to "read" gaps, slides, and silences.

An example may help address this problem and also clarify the difference between a Differentiation and a Fragmentation analysis. A picture was engraved on the Pioneer spacecraft. The image showed a nude man and woman, with the man's arm raised in greeting. Anderson analyzed this image by offering two dichotomous interpretations of the raised arm: it could mean goodbye or hello. In a subsequent analysis of the same image, Owens offered other possible interpretations, including

the same gesture could also mean "Halt!" or represent the taking of an oath, but if Anderson's text does not consider these two alternatives that is because it is not concerned with ambiguity, with multiple meanings engendered by a single sign; rather two *clearly defined but mutually incompatible* readings are engaged in blind confrontation in such a way that it is impossible to choose between them. (Owens, 1983, p. 60)

Owens castigated himself for initially not noticing other interpretations:

I had overlooked something—something that is so obvious, so "natural" that it may at the time have seemed unworthy of comment. It does not seem that way to me today. For this is, of course, an image of sexual difference, or, rather, of sexual differentiation. . . . For in this . . . image, chosen to represent the inhabitants of the Earth for the extraterrestrial Other, it is the man who speaks, who represents mankind. The woman is only represented; she is (as always) already spoken for. (Owens, 1983, pp. 60, 61)

The first interpretation of this image, by Anderson, offers two opposing interpretations (hello and goodbye). This is the oppositional thinking characteristic of a Differentiation viewpoint. In the second analysis, Owens draws attention to the complexity of a seemingly simple image and delineates a variety of ways its message could be interpreted. He also notes an absence: the woman does not raise her hand in greeting, as the man does. In this analysis, Owens is working from a Fragmentation perspective, seeing a cultural manifestation as ambiguous and offering multiple interpretations of its meaning. Owens's analysis also illustrates the dynamics of power working through silence (in this case, about gender). Differance is not purely a cognitive strategy for analysis; it reveals the power inequalities implicit in absences, the suppressed ideology that slips "between the lines" of a text or drawing.

To summarize, a Fragmentation study uses analysis of differance to explore *multiple meanings, paying attention to absence as well as presence. This is a mode of thinking that is particularly useful for understanding variation within groups and revealing the ways contexts influence interpretations. Although this section of the Fragmentation chapter has relied primarily on gender and race as examples, most Fragmentation studies do not focus on these particular group identities. However, when within group variation, contextual determinants of behavior and absences are seen as important sources of understanding, the silenced voices of demographic minorities are more likely to be heard.*

The next section of this chapter describes how Fragmentation studies utilize versions of this mode of thinking about differance to bring ambiguity to the forefront of a cultural analysis, reconceptualizing what is meant by the absence of consistency and consensus.

BEYOND CONSISTENCY AND INCONSISTENCY TO COMPLEXITY

Integration studies describe the relationship between one cultural manifestation and another as consistent. Differentiation studies describe these relationships as clearly inconsistent; the interpretation of one manifestation directly contradicts the interpretation of another. Fragmentation studies move beyond clear consistencies or clear inconsistencies to reconceptualize these relationships in multivalent terms, as partially congruent, partially incongruent, and partially related by tangential, perhaps random connections. In some Fragmentation studies, this reconceptualization of (in)consistency includes a rudimentary exploration of differance. For example, one of Meyerson's social workers saw her work in shades of

gray, rather than in the black and white oppositions favored by the Differentiation perspective:

> When they [other social workers] come to me for a simple, clear solution, I tell them: "Life is grey. If you want black and white go to Macy's. Black and white are in this year." (social worker, quoted in Meyerson, 1991a, p. 138)

This next section of this chapter traces patterns of differance across and down matrices. Rather than seeing relationships among cultural manifestations as either consistent or inconsistent, the relationships appear, from a Fragmentation perspective, to be unclear and multivalent. Three kinds of relationships are examined here. On a matrix these would appear horizontally between themes and practices (action ambiguity), horizontally between themes and cultural forms (symbolic ambiguity), and vertically among content themes (ideological ambiguity).

Action Ambiguity

Fragmentation studies often begin with an idealized vision of how things ought to be. These themes are then shown to bear an unclear relationship to observed practices. For example, some OZCO employees were confused about the relationship between the company's espoused values regarding employee well-being and its formal benefits policies. Sometimes this confusion arose simply because particular employees were ignorant of the relevant policies, as when the personnel director could not answer a question about spousal relocation benefits. And sometimes confusion arose because the policies themselves were so complex. Whether the relationship between espoused values and practices was unclear because of complexity or lack of information, these OZCO employees reacted with confusion and sometimes action paralysis: they simply did not know what to do.

Action ambiguity was also observed at the Department of Energy:

> Analysts are supposed to analyze relatively well defined problems and produce solutions that can be implemented by politicians (Feldman, 1989). . . . [But] analyses do not lead to positions that are promoted through politics. Analyses do not even support positions chosen by politicians. Analyses are being produced, but it is not clear for what or for whom. (Feldman, 1991, pp. 154–155)

This description of analysts' decision making bears some resemblance to the "garbage can" model of decision making. Cohen, March, and Olsen describe this model in terms of streams of loosely coupled problems, decision makers, choice opportunities, and "solutions" entering (and leaving) the organizational context according to a temporal, rather than a rational-causal logic.[10] Some problems attract others, some choice opportunities never happen, some decision makers enter or leave the decision making context, and some "solutions" get attached to new problems, while others go unheeded.

Organizations where garbage can decision making is the norm have been

labeled *organized anarchies*.[11] In these organizations, confusion and paradox are the rule, rather than the exception. Patterns of connection are diffuse, membership and participation in decision making is fluid, and coordination is hard to come by. When it does occur, it does so often on one level (perhaps agreement on a policy), but not on another (how to implement that policy or why that policy is desirable).[12]

The U.S. military has been described as an organized anarchy. The U.S. military bureaucracy includes the Department of Defense, the Office of the Secretary of Defense, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the various arms of the military. Although the government appointees and military officers in charge do what they can to see that decisions are made in a structured, "rational" manner,

> information still becomes lost in the system, directed to the wrong people, or both. Similarly, during a crisis, the wrong people may try to solve a problem because of their prowess at bureaucratic gamesmanship, or the right people (because of mismanagement or oversight) may be overlooked or sent elsewhere. (Sabrosky, Thompson, and McPherson, 1982, p. 142)

When decision-making practices differ so profoundly from the rhetoric about how such decisions are supposed to occur, the rhetoric provides no guide for action and and so patterns of response have to be developed.

Weick provides a listing of these kinds of reactions to action ambiguity:

> A loosely coupled system is a problem in causal inference. For actors and observers alike, the prediction and activation of cause-effect relations is made more difficult because relations are intermittent, lagged, dampened, slow, abrupt, and mediated. Actors in a loosely coupled system rely on trust and presumptions, are often isolated, find social comparison difficult, have no one to borrow from, seldom imitate, suffer pluralistic ignorance, maintain discretion, improvise, and have less hubris because they know the universe is not sufficiently connected to make widespread change possible. (Weick, 1979a, p. 122)

It is worthwhile to contrast Weick's description, written from a Fragmentation view, with the clear inconsistencies of Meyer and Rowan's discussion of loose coupling in school systems. Where Weick sees ambiguity, Meyer and Rowan describe clear inconsistencies between the school's formal practices (visible to the external constituencies of the school) and the informal practices of the teachers in the classrooms. Meyer and Rowan's teachers know what do do and loose coupling simply buffers them from outside interference. In Weick's description, actors are more confused about what they should do and what effect their actions will have and loose coupling makes everything more difficult to figure out.

A Fragmentation study seldom offers clear and comforting prescriptions for action. When an organizational situation is ambiguous, it is difficult to know if action is called for, which actions would be inappropriate, and what their consequences might be. The frequent result is inaction.[13]

Fragmentation studies that focus on action ambiguity often assume that the

experience of ambiguity is noxious. This can be seen, for example, in the descriptions of OZCO in Chapter 7 and in parts of the studies of the military and the Department of Energy, described earlier. A negative reaction to ambiguity is also evident in Weick's study of the factors that complicated decision making one night at the Tenerife airport. The fog was exceptionally thick, one flight crew (due to flight time regulations) was in a rush, and it was very difficult to turn around large airplanes (like the two KLM and Pan American 747 jets waiting for instructions) on the small runways. In addition,

> controllers at Tenerife were also under pressure because they were shorthanded, they did not often handle 747's, they had no ground radar, the centerline lights on the runway were not operating, they were working in English which was a less familiar second language, and their normal routines for routing planes on a takeoff and landing were disrupted because they had planes parked in areas they would normally use to execute these routines. (Weick, 1991, p. 122)

The stress on both controllers and flight crews was severe that night, amplifying the ambiguity they perceived:

> As stress increases perception narrows, more contextual information is lost, and parameters deteriorate to more extreme levels before they are noticed, all of which leads to more puzzlement, less meaning, and more perceived complexity. (Weick, 1991, p. 129)

The Fragmentation studies quoted in this section, including Weick's study of Tenerife, echo Katz and Kahn's assumption that ambiguity is noxious and potentially a threat to effective performance:

> Such research began with the assumption that ambiguity frustrates the human need for clarity and structure in the environment, accordingly regarded it as a stressor, and sought evidence of resulting strain and performance decrement. (Katz and Kahn, 1978, p. 206, quoted in Meyerson, 1989, p. 2)

Ambiguity can also be reacted to with neutrality, as an unavoidable aspect of organizational life that is tolerable, not dangerous, and only moderately stressful. For example, the textbook editors and social workers studied by Levitt and Nass were generally very aware of the ambiguity that pervaded their working lives, but relatively few expressed strong negative reactions to it.

There is a final possible reaction that is virtually absent in these Fragmentation accounts: ambiguity could be embraced with joy. A social worker came closest to this perspective:

> The social worker is really like the bastard who could go in anywhere. The social worker gets in between them all and can do it all. That's one of the advantages. It's certainly not a limitation. It is a flexibility that is phenomenal. (social worker, quoted in Meyerson, 1991a, p. 142)

Although few of Feldman's policy analysts expressed the unmitigated enthusiasm of the social worker quoted above, one analyst did acknowledge the possibility of joy in ambiguity, describing the Department of Energy as

"a vehicle that can be ridden for awhile with great joy." He went on to say that the vehicle could also just "be endured. One would hope it's a vehicle that can be steered— though a lot of able people have dashed their hopes on that one." (policy analyst, quoted in Feldman, 1991, pp. 150-151)

In contrast to this analyst's half-hearted observations about joy, other scholars seem to revel in ambiguity. For example, Barthes advocates taking joy in ambiguity:

> Imagine someone . . . who abolishes within himself all barriers, all classes, all exclusions, not by syncretism but by simple discard of that old specter: *logical contradiction;* who mixes every language, even those said to be incompatible; who silently accepts every charge of illogicality, of incongruity. (Barthes, 1975, p. 3)

Imagine a cultural description focused on paradoxes, grounded in the idea that "the center does not hold," that things are neither consistent nor inconsistent, that it is not even clear what consistency would mean in a world so confusing that oppositions, congruencies, and orthogonalities cannot be deciphered. Few Fragmentation studies of culture revel in ambiguity with this kind of enthusiasm, but they could do so—perhaps capturing a previously unexplored aspect of life in organizations.

Symbolic Ambiguity

From a Fragmentation point of view, there are no clearly consistent or clearly inconsistent relationships between themes and cultural forms (such as physical arrangements, jokes, and organizational stories). At OZCO, for example, egalitarian values seemed to bear no clear relationship to the physical arrangements of the open office plan; some effects of these arrangements were apparently egalitarian, others seemed inegalitarian, and still other effects were difficult to decipher. Physical arrangements[14] also seemed to bear an unclear relationship to espoused egalitarian values in Tom's study of the Women's Bank in New York City:

> Of the trainers, only Elaine has an office of her own. . . . All other trainers and trainees work in open areas. Some trainees are assigned desks of their own when their jobs require that they have a permanent work place. Many trainees do not actually belong in any one place at all but must sit where they can find a place close to the task they are performing. All trainers have desks of their own, usually somewhat larger than the trainees' desks. In general, the assignment of space is confused and fluid. People often lose things that they leave sitting in a space they had carved out for themselves when someone else appropriates the space. People use others' desks when they are vacant, and it is not uncommon for Elaine to be forced to vacate her office. (Tom, 1986, pp. 58, 62)

In this discussion, acknowledgment of ambiguity does not prevent the dynamics of status differences from surfacing. However, differences between groups do not appear as clear cut or as static as in a Differentiation account.

Some Fragmentation studies interpret cultural forms in terms that show aware-

ness of and ambivalence toward paradox. For example, according to Meyerson, social workers found cynical humor a helpful response to unresolvable dilemmas:

> Cynicism defused the felt ambiguity that erupted from seemingly unsolvable problems (e.g., when a patient refuses to cooperate with his rehabilitation), from irreconcilable differences (e.g., when the attending physician ignores seemingly essential emotional factors), and most frequently from situations in which social workers lacked the clarity or authority to take action (e.g., when they are faced with incomprehensible "red tape"). By acknowledging and suspending the ambiguity with a cynical remark, the cynic enabled the conversation to proceed without premature closure: allowing unsolvables, irreconcilables, and untenables to remain unresolved. (Meyerson, 1991a, p. 141)

There is a striking contrast between this cynical ambiguity acknowledgment and the clear hostility between groups reflected in the "Kotex" and "egg in the hard hat" jokes in Differentiation studies.

A similar cynicism was found in some of the self-deprecating jokes told by traders working in the chaos of Wall Street investment banking firms:

> What's the difference between a Wall Streeter and a pig? Not even a pig would stoop so low. What's the difference between a bond and a bond trader? A bond matures. Did you hear about the new Drexel bond? The maturity is twenty to life. (Abolafia, 1989, p. 14)

These jokes involve a play on difference that has echoes of differance. They are funny because of the similarities (e.g., between a greedy Wall Street trader and an omnivorous pig), as well as the differences between the two concepts in each joke. The fact that this similarity is not mentioned sets up awareness of other silences (e.g., A bond gets more worthwhile as it ages—does a trader? A greedy pig makes better eating, etc.). These jokes are popular, in part, because their silences reverberate; the cumulation of unspoken similarities and differences between the two juxtaposed concepts ultimately leaves each intact and unclassifiable: neither the same or different.

Organizational stories provide particularly rich data for this kind of analysis. The Fragmentation view starts from the premise that a story has multiple meanings:

> We can also see how the very same surface reality may embody many different meanings, some of which may be complementary and others contradictory, as when an action signifying genuine friendship on one occasion may on another be hollow and perfunctory, and on yet another, be used as a manipulative ploy. (Morgan, 1983, p. 388)

> *All* meaning is contextual. . . . A text can be taken to have any number of contexts. Inscribing a specific context for a text does not *close* or *fix* the meaning of that text once and for all: there is always the possibility of reinscribing it within other contexts. (Moi, 1985, p. 155)

For example, when the "Rule Breaking" story recounted in Chapter 4 is regarded from the Fragmentation perspective, the meanings of this story can vary, depending on the context in which the story was told, who was telling it, the audience listening, and so on.[15] One person might conclude the boss in this story was admirably obeying the rules; another might say he was self-consciously setting an example. A third might wonder why he sent someone else back for the badge he had forgotten rather than getting it himself.

The silences in this story are also eloquent. For example, the story is worth telling only because of an unstated assumption that most top executives don't obey company rules. In addition, the story is silent about gender differences. The story recounts the shock experienced by the men observing the confrontation between the low-ranking woman and her male boss. Why is the story silent about the woman's reaction to the situation? Would the story have the same shock value if a man, holding the subordinate position, challenged the boss? Why, in so many versions of this story, is the woman described as short and lightweight? Why is the boss never a woman? The absence and presence of such "unnecessary" details suggest a deeper, silenced level of meaning in this story.

A Fragmentation analysis can also illuminate reactions to the "Caesarean" story (recounted in full in Chapter 3) told by the president of OZCO. When he was asked what OZCO was doing to "help" women employees with children, the president said:

> We have a young woman who is extraordinarily important to the launching of a major new [product]. We will be talking about it next Tuesday in its first worldwide introduction. She has arranged to have her Caesarean [operation] yesterday in order to be prepared for this event. (Martin, 1990, p. 139)

A Differentiation analysis of this story would examine what the story says, focusing on the inconsistency between the president's claims to be helping women, in accord with OZCO's commitment to employee well-being, and the fact that this woman is being praised for altering the timing of her Caesarean operation to fit OZCO's product introduction schedule, rather than the baby's maturational needs. Rather than "helping" the woman and her baby, a Differentiation analysis would conclude that the company is helping itself at the woman's and baby's expense.

A Fragmentation analysis of this story would not disagree with the points raised by the Differentiation analysis above, but it would go deeper. A Fragmentation analysis would focus on multiple interpretations of the story's language—including what is not said. Martin used deconstruction (a postmodern analytic strategy for systematically examining texts) to analyze the Caesarean story.[16] This deconstruction focused on the connotations of metaphors and puns, as well the implications of silences, revealing unstated assumptions and sexual taboos implicit in the story's language. For example, the first phrase in the story, "we have a young woman," could have been restated as "we employ a young woman." The choice of the verb "have" in this sentence implies an extraordinary degree of corporate control, in excess of the rights and duties inherent in the usual employment contract. The phrase "having a young woman" also is a sexual pun which has male heterosexual connotations that are repeated in other sexual puns throughout the story.

In a subsequent part of this Fragmentation analysis, Martin revealed hidden assumptions of the story by examining the effects of two small changes in the text. Instead of a woman undergoing a Caesarean birth, the central character was rewritten to be a man undergoing a coronary bypass operation. This small change had massive ramifications. The story's structure, its use of metaphor, and the nature of its sexual puns, no longer "made sense"; the hidden workings of gender-biased ideology were revealed.

As these examples indicate, when the language in this story (its unstated assumptions, silences, metaphors, puns, etc.) is deconstructed, we can read "between the lines," finding traces of what has been suppressed by a dominant ideology. The workings of power and the interests of members of relatively powerless groups (in this story, a woman) can be exposed in this kind of Fragmentation study.

As illustrated in this analysis of the Caesarean story, a Fragmentation study offers a highly complex portrait of the relationship between espoused values and the multiple meanings inherent in a cultural form. In some Fragmentation studies, the relationship between espoused values and cultural forms is attenuated even further, so that these two types of cultural manifestation become decoupled and the forms loose their meaning. For example, Schultz describes how forms have become

> a hard and repetitive outward show without any underlying system of meaning. The rituals, stories, metaphors, etc. of the culture appear isolated from the fragments of meaning created by the members of the organization. . . . The same basic values are repeated perpetually: In speeches and annual reports, advertisements for recruiting staff, press releases and manuals for the personnel, on ceremonial occasions, speeches of thanks and appointments. . . . The same stories are told perpetually: In the canteen to new members of the staff, in nostalgic moments while drinking coffee in the afternoon. (Schultz, in press)

According to Schultz, these meaningless slogans, endlessly repeated stories, and empty rituals are perpetuated, carrying a seductive promise that is never fulfilled.

Fragmentation studies offer a complicated view of the relationship between content themes and cultural forms. Sometimes this relationship is hard to decipher because it is obscure or indistinct. In other instances, the relationship is difficult to comprehend because of the complexity of relevant factors. In still other cases, hidden traces of the suppressed interests of members of subordinated groups complicate interpretation, or empty cultural forms are perpetuated even though they have become decoupled from their meanings. From the Fragmentation viewpoint, symbolic interpretation is not simple.

Ideological Ambiguity

Given the ambiguities discussed above, it should be no surprise that Fragmentation studies also see ambiguity in the relationships among content themes. In accord with this point of view, March has long argued that tastes, values, and

preferences are seldom clearly consistent or inconsistent with each other. For example:

> Choices are often made without respect to tastes. Human decision makers routinely ignore their own, fully conscious, preferences in making decisions. They follow rules, traditions, hunches, and the advice or actions of others. Tastes change over time in such a way that predicting future tastes is often difficult. (March, 1978, p. 596)

If content themes operate like March's description of tastes or values, cultural perceptions should not be organized in any way that would be recognized by the consistency-seeking Integration study or the inconsistency-seeking Differentiation study.

In a Fragmentation study of cultures in organizations, themes do not provide a clarifying ideology. Instead, ideology is as ambiguous as other aspects of working life. For example, the female management of the Women's Bank attempted to provide benefits for women from all class backgrounds by instituting a bank teller training program for mothers who had previously been receiving welfare payments. The management staff who served as trainers in this program saw the trainees as immature and ungrateful, with poor working habits and inadequate mothering skills. These complications created unresolvable ideological tensions for the trainers:

> They speak vaguely of equal opportunity for women, building women's financial "presence" and sophistication, and offering a "chance" to trainees. This vaguely-felt sense of purpose offers the trainers little defense when faced with some of the contradictions of their organization—such as explaining the Bank's refusal to grant joint checking accounts to women and their husbands when some of them prefer such accounts and go to another bank to get them. (Tom, 1986, p. 93)

In Tom's study, both trainers and trainees encountered tensions that ideology did not help them resolve.

Meyerson reported that social workers also experienced ideological ambiguity. For example:

> One social worker mentioned that being "the elbow in the system's side" was her professional responsibility. Others viewed themselves as the patient's advocate. However, because social workers work in organizations in which they have little formal power, they must comply with and even become exemplars of the system to gain legitimacy. Some admitted that their job was to uphold, even "grease" the system. . . . Thus, although some social workers believed that their role was to change or resist the status quo, they also believed that to be effective they must work within and thereby perpetuate the status quo. Social workers must simultaneously advance reforms and preclude them, critique the medical model and enforce it. (Meyerson, 1991a, p. 140)

This is a paradox—an ambiguity that is unlikely to be resolved, once and for all, by a fresh insight or more information.

When a Fragmentation study moves beyond consistency and inconsistency it sometimes encounters a type of paradox that is a logical "dead end." Such a paradox (sometimes called an *aporia*) exposes a system riddled with irreconcilable ideological difficulties. For example, organizational behavior professors (like myself) are often horrified at the ways students demand simple, unambiguously "correct" answers to the complex problems of management:

> It was then suggested to the student that for managers to be decisive in the manner being advocated there had to be an assumption that the managers concerned actually knew what to do. This was received with a cry from another student of, "Managers are paid to know what to do," followed by an aside from a further student of, "It's your job to teach us." . . . This seemed to reflect a rather worrying conceptualisation of management as, being-told-what-to-do. (Golding, 1987, p. 3)

Although as organizational behavior teachers, we often expect our students to recognize and accept ambiguity, we do not hold ourselves to the same standards when we do research on organizations. We do not often admit, when we write about our research findings, what we do not or cannot know.[17]

A few academics and more than a few managers have confronted this difficulty, observing that organizational research does not capture context-specific complexities of the problems managers face.[18] This creates Starbuck's paradox:

> Prescriptions for managing organizations have to be simple in order to be understandable. When prescriptions describe methods and strategies which are easily translated into actual behaviors, these prescriptions oversimplify, they ignore contingencies, and they state half-truths. When prescriptions specify methods and strategies applying to complete, complex systems, these prescriptions read like poems that express verities but that have obscure applications to actual behaviors. (Starbuck, Greve, and Hedberg, 1978, pp. 122–123)

Starbuck's paradox implies that helpful advice from academics (and others) is always going to be hard to come by. The practitioner is left in the lurch, and teachers and researchers face an aporia: they cannot do research or teach in a way that is complex enough, and simple enough, to be both comprehensible and useful.

In summary, the Fragmentation view offers no comfort to those—academics or practitioners—who long for clarity. Truth claims are seen as invalid bids for domination, ideologies become false dogmas that conceal their opposites, and ambiguities multiply endlessly.

BEYOND CONSENSUS TO MULTIPLE, FRAGMENTED INTERPRETATIONS

The Fragmentation perspective reconceptualizes consensus in a manner which acknowledges that cultural members sometimes change their views from moment to moment as new issues come into focus, different people and tasks become

salient, and new information becomes available. Group identities (such as gender, race, or job classification) do not form stable subcultures in a Fragmentation study. Instead, multiple interpretations and reactions are always possible. For example, when OZCO employees acknowledged ambiguities in Chapter 7, some of them worried, others were apathetic, a few confessed ignorance, and many felt dismay. No clear organization-wide or subcultural consensus was evident in this Fragmentation view of OZCO.

Multiplicity of meanings can have extremely important practical consequences. For example, at Tenerife airport:

> After the KLM plane made the 180 degree turn at the end of the takeoff runway, rather than hold as instructed, they started moving and reported, "we are now at takeoff." Neither the air traffic controllers nor the Pan Am crew were certain what this ambiguous phrase meant, but Pan Am restated to controllers that they would report when they were clear of the takeoff runway, a communique heard inside the KLM cockpit. When the pilot of the KLM flight was asked by the engineer, "Is he not clear then, that Pan Am?", the pilot replied "yes" and there was no further conversation. The collision occurred 13 seconds later at 5:06 P.M. (Weick, 1991, pp. 118–120)

Five hundred and eighty-three people were killed when the KLM jet tried to take off and hit the Pan Am airplane in its path. The Spanish government conducted a postcrash investigation that, in part, analyzed the multiple interpretations and misunderstandings implicit in the conversation reported above. In addition to these cognitive confusions, the government investigators were sensitive to the power dynamics implicit in gaps and silences. The report focused on the silence that occurred after the pilot replied with an emphatic "yes":

> Perhaps influenced by [the pilot's] great prestige, making it difficult to imagine an error of this magnitude on the part of such an expert pilot, both the copilot and flight engineer made no further objections. The impact took place about 13 seconds later. (Spanish Ministry of Transport and Communication's report on the crash, p. 71, quoted in Weick, 1991, p. 121)

In this analysis of discourse, as in Martin's deconstruction of the Caesarean story, an analysis of the ambiguities of silences brings the hidden dynamics of power inequality into focus, illuminating why widespread consensus is unlikely.

Fragmentation studies often portray goals as unclear, making consensus very difficult to achieve. For example, in the study of the military:

> No consensus exists on either the proper means of assuring the common defense, or the preferred intermediate goals one ought to pursue. Without agreement on goals and general force types, there can be no agreement on programs. And without agreement on the definition of acceptable goals and adequate forces, "progress" toward either cannot be measured readily. (Sabrosky, Thompson, and McPherson, 1982, p. 142)

Lack of consensual understanding can also be seen in one of the few Fragmentation studies to mix quantitative and qualitative methods. Krackhardt and Kilduff used constructs generated by employees in open-ended interviews, so

their data are less superficial and have fewer of the researcher-generated constraints of many other quantitative studies of culture. After a series of statistical analyses, the authors conclude:

> The results demonstrate that individuals in a joint enterprise can construe the same interpersonal reality in completely different ways on constructs that capture the main dichotomies in the organization. The puzzle of how people with different perspectives succeed in enacting roles toward each other in organizations has partly been explained by the finding that the diversity of attributions is patterned by the network of personal friendships. (Krackhardt and Kilduff, 1990, pp. 18–19)

The language in the last sentence is important. The heterogeneity is explained only in part by the friendship network and that network is more a matrix of pairwise relationships than it is a set of subcultures.[19] This is a quantitative image of an absence of organization-wide consensus. From a Fragmentation viewpoint, this study's absence of consensus does not indicate an absence of culture, but rather the presence of a Fragmented culture. This conclusion is, in part, an effect of how culture is being defined.

DEFINING CULTURE FROM A FRAGMENTATION PERSPECTIVE

The definitions of culture offered in Integration and Differentiation studies often bear relatively little relationship to what is actually studied. In contrast, Fragmentation studies often abstain from defining culture at all. The exceptions, however, are informative and directly relevant to the conclusions of this kind of research.

A reviewer of one of my papers suggested that I seemed to be defining culture in these terms:

> Culture is a loosely structured and incompletely shared system that emerges dynamically as cultural members experience each other, events, and the organization's contextual features. (anonymous reviewer, 1987)

This definition does not exclude ambiguity from the domain of culture and it captures the sense of constant flux that is implicit in many Fragmentation studies.

However, this definition leaves open a question that is particularly relevant for organizational researchers: Given this ambiguity, how do people engage in coordinated action? How is this definition a socially constructed reality, rather than a collection of unique individual views? Meyerson has one answer to this dilemma:

> Members do not agree upon clear boundaries, cannot identify shared solutions, and do not reconcile contradictory beliefs and multiple identities. Yet, these members contend they belong to a culture. They share a common orientation and overarching purpose, face similar problems, and have comparable experiences. However, these shared orientations and purposes accommodate different beliefs and incommensurable technologies, these problems imply different solutions, and these experiences have multiple meanings . . . Thus, for at least some cultures, to dismiss the ambiguities in favor of strictly what is clear and shared is to exclude some of the most central aspects of

members' cultural experience and to ignore the essence of their cultural community. (Meyerson, 1991a, pp. 131–132)

Feldman offers an issue-specific response to the same dilemma:

> As others have noted (Martin and Meyerson, 1988; Van Maanen and Barley, 1985) culture does not necessarily imply a uniformity of values. Indeed quite different values may be displayed by people of the same culture. In such an instance, what is it that holds together the members of the organization? I suggest that we look to the existence of a common frame of reference or a shared recognition of relevant issues. There may not be agreement about whether these issues should be relevant or about whether they are positively or negatively valued. . . . They [may] array themselves differently with respect to that issue, but whether positively or negatively they are all oriented to it. (Feldman, 1991, p. 154)

This issue-specific focus is essential to understanding how the Fragmentation perspective defines culture. A focus on specific issues addresses one of the problems inherent in the Differentiation approach to understanding culture. In a Differentiation study, clear dichotomies and clearly defined subcultures cut up and constrain the ways we see a culture, making unintelligible all the issue-specific complexities that "fall between the cracks" of this way of thinking. In contrast, the Fragmentation perspective sees issues as connecting individuals in temporary, issue-specific coalitions. Other individuals and other issues are linked in different, overlapping, temporary patterns of connection.[20]

One metaphor for this approach to understanding culture is a web:

> Individuals are nodes in the web, connected by shared concerns to some but not all the surrounding nodes. When a particular issue becomes salient, one pattern of connections becomes relevant. That pattern would include a unique array of agreements, disagreements, and domains of ignorance. A different issue would draw attention to a different pattern of connections—and different sources of confusion. Whenever a new issue becomes salient to cultural members or researchers, a new pattern of connections would become significant. (Martin and Meyerson, 1988, p. 117)

Sometimes these issues can be content themes. For example, the Fragmentation view of OZCO presented in Chapter 7 focused on three content themes: egalitarianism, innovation, and employee well-being. Connecting concerns can also be more specific—a particular problem or a shared set of tasks. *From a Fragmentation perspective, then, an organizational culture is a web of individuals, sporadically and loosely connected by their changing positions on a variety of issues. Their involvement, their subcultural identities, and their individual self-definitions fluctuate, depending on which issues are activated at a given moment.*

A jungle metaphor for the Fragmentation view of culture captures some of the complexity evident in the web metaphor and also retains more of an emphasis on the unknown and the unknowable. In Chapter 4, culture was defined, from an Integration perspective, as that which is clear, "an area of meaning cut out of a vast mass of meaninglessness, a small clearing of lucidity in a formless, dark,

always ominous jungle.''[21] Rather than denying or channeling ambiguity, the Fragmentation perspective accepts it and makes it the focus of attention. In this view, culture is no longer the clearing in the jungle; it is the jungle itself. Table 1–1 in Chapter 1 contrasts the characteristics and metaphors used to define culture in Fragmentation studies to those in Integration and Differentiation research.

FRAGMENTATION AT DIFFERENT LEVELS OF ANALYSIS

Some critics have argued that a Fragmentation view reduces culture to an individual level of analysis because this perspective sees no stable organization-wide or subcultural consensus. This is a misunderstanding. The Fragmentation perspective offers a distinctive approach to the subcultural, individual, and organizational levels of analysis, as described next.

Fragmentation at the Subcultural Level

At the subcultural level of analysis, a Fragmentation study avoids the clear group boundaries and the clearly defined subcultural relationships (enhancing, conflicting, orthogonal) of the Differentiation perspective. Instead, a Fragmentation view of subcultures portrays boundaries as permeable, subcultural membership as fluctuating, and relations among subcultures as multivalent. In other words:

> Group alliances look like affinities or coalitions rather than identities, and they are characterized by fluidity, the ability to mobilize and disperse. Some theorists call them microresistances. (Gagnier, 1990, p. 23)

When subcultures are regarded from a Fragmentation rather than a Differentiation perspective, an examination of *differance* replaces an oppositional mode of thinking. A Differentiation study of gender subcultures, for example, would start with a men versus women dichotomy. In one such study, Millman and Kanter observe that men often fail to see that gender-segregated groups exclude women:

> When male sociologists (or men in general) look at a meeting of a board of trustees and see only men, they think they are observing a sexually neutral or sexless world rather than a masculine world. (Millman and Kanter, 1975, p. xiv)

This is a Differentiation analysis because it makes a generalization about men in tacit, binary opposition to women. It assumes that all male sociologists are "essentially" the same, with unified interests that stand in opposition to the interests of an equally homogeneous grouping of women.[22] Thus, all male sociologists would see an all-male board of trustees in sexually neutral terms, while presumably all female sociologists would not.

In contrast, a Fragmentation study would offer a far more complex analysis of this situation. Such an analysis would not deny the bias inherent in seeing a sex-segregated world as sexually neutral. Both Differentiation and Fragmentation studies work from the premise that people notice what they are comfortable

noticing; inequities from which they benefit will be ignored. However, a Fragmentation study would go further, analyzing how Millman and Kanter's generalization masks important differences between and within groups.

A Fragmentation analysis might begin by observing that Millman and Kanter do not mention the race of the trustees and the sociologists. Are the trustees all white? If so, why is this not mentioned by the male sociologists or by Kanter and Millman? Are all these researchers white? Next, gender and race might be considered simultaneously. Would black male sociologists tend to be sensitive to racial segregation among the trustees, but perhaps blind to sexual segregation? Would black female sociologists tend to be sensitive to both?

Finally, the possibility of variation within all these groups might be considered. Millman and Kanter imply that because the male sociologists are members of the dominant gender, they are blind to the gender segregation of the all-male group of trustees. However, membership in a dominant group does not necessarily mean that one is blind to the exclusion of subordinate group members. Some male sociologists might notice the gender segregation of the trustees group. Furthermore, some female sociologists might be gender-blind, seeing the trustees in sexually neutral terms. Similarly, some whites might be sensitive to racial segregation, while some blacks might not focus on this issue.

The complications revealed by a Fragmentation analysis are not merely "error variance" that can be easily dismissed as trivial compared with group averages. For example, women have different ethnic, class, and racial backgrounds and these sources of diversity mean that women can see things very differently, have similar or conflicting interests, and benefit from diverse and possibly diverging paths of social action. Similar diversity exists for men. In addition, denying differences within a subordinated group can further the subordination of minority members within that group. And denying the differences within a dominant group can mean the disregard of potential allies for those who are subordinated. These observations are as relevant for other groups (based, e.g., on occupation or hierarchical level) as they are for demographic groupings. Generalizations based on dichotomous statements about between group differences can often mask differences that are critical for understanding inequality or working toward change.

A Fragmented View of the Self

This approach to the study of subcultures also has implications for the individual level of analysis. When differences within categories are acknowledged, the boundaries of subcultures become diffuse, permeable, and fluctuating. Because these boundaries are subjectively construed and socially constructed, one person sees them differently than another. Subcultures overlap, they are nested within each other, and they intersect in the individual:

> One might plausibly keep dissecting levels of subcultures until one reaches the level of the individual. Each individual does, in fact, live in at least a slightly different subculture or intermeshing of subcultures. (Sternberg, 1985, p. 1116)