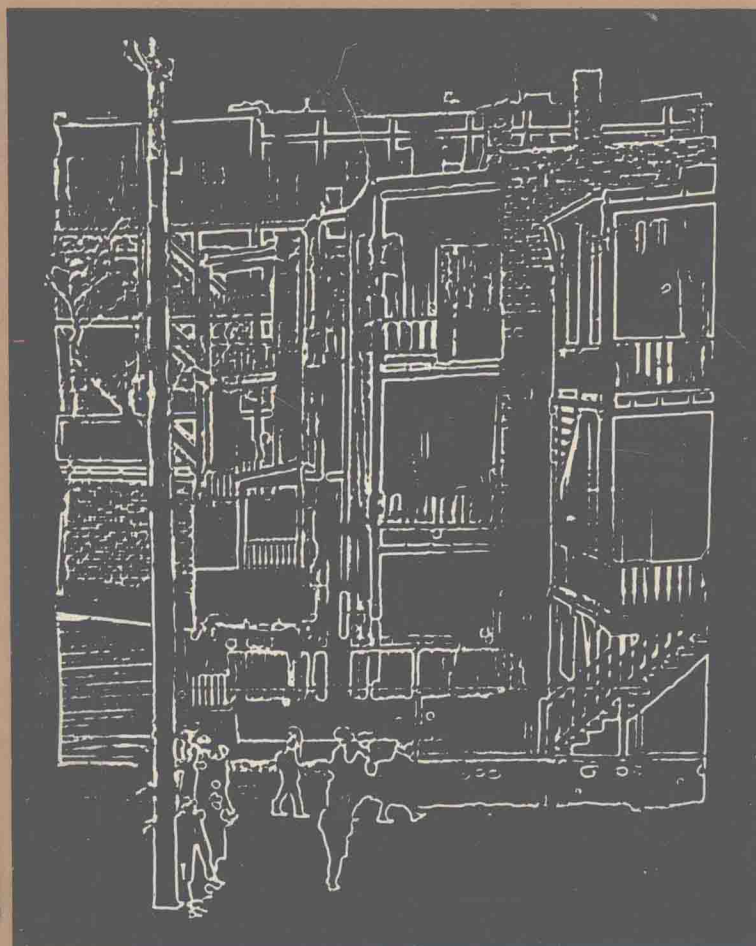


Ruth Rosner Kornhauser

Social Sources of DELINQUENCY

An Appraisal of Analytic Models



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There were many diversions in the intervening years; I became a teacher at Mills College and undertook various other research tasks. In the later phases of this study, I was guided and encouraged by Morris Janowitz and Gerald Suttles, supervisors of my dissertation at the University of Chicago. To them I owe the greatest debt of gratitude, for reasons they will know. I am also indebted to Mills College for a faculty research grant and to the Department of Sociology at the University of Chicago for a grant enabling me to prepare this manuscript for publication.

I was the victim of a stroke as I began editing the manuscript and have been in the hospital convalescing until the present day. The main editorial task was undertaken as a labor of love by my dear friend, Gertrude Jaeger. Shelley Abelson later devoted additional time to improving the manuscript.

I appreciate very much the encouragement my old friend Howard Becker gave me. Shortly after it was completed, he chanced to read the report I had prepared for the Law and Society Center. In it I referred to the report as a paper or a monograph. Although he couldn't have agreed with a word of it, with characteristic generosity he said, "This isn't a report or a monograph. It should be a book."

He also made a suggestion I tried to follow. He said I made Sutherland sound like "some kind of nut" and that I should try to improve the presentation of his

work. Try I did, but to no avail. I re-read all his books, the collected papers, and searched out the first, pristine edition of his text. Yet my initial impressions were confirmed rather than amended, so that I continued to rely on quotations from his works wherever possible. *Criminology in the Making*, by John Laub, a book that appeared after the hardcover edition of my book was published, supports my original estimate of Sutherland still more strongly. In an interview with Albert Cohen, who studied with Sutherland, the author reports Cohen as saying, "Somewhere he said, actually he wrote it too, that the southern practice of dropping the r's is explained by the southern practice of dropping the r's—that's all you have to know—which incidentally is wrong. . . ."

I am also indebted to Albert Reiss, Jr., in whose course in urban sociology at the University of Chicago my interest in Shaw and McKay's work was aroused. His infectious enthusiasm in reporting their research results left me with a fascination that exists to this day.

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Finally, to those scholars who fear their books will have no influence on those not already predisposed to believe them, I offer one bit of contrary evidence: the original report I wrote for the Law and Society Center was a critique of Sutherland, but a defense of Merton's and other strain models. I then read Travis Hirschi's *Causes of Delinquency* and was convinced his data disconfirmed strain models. I then turned my attention back to Shaw and McKay.

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1. Introduction

Culture in the modern world is everywhere at bay. But in the annals of delinquency theory it blooms with vigor. The history of sociological thought is alive with efforts to describe and explain the depredations on community and culture by modern social forces: Marx, Weber, Tönnies, Durkheim; more recently, Park, Thomas, Redfield, Riesman, Mills. This roster evokes the tolling of bells for modern cultures and subcultures buffeted by powerful trends: industrialization, urbanization, migration, mobility, the tyranny of size imposed by the massive increase in scale of societies and subunits, the rapid social change entailed by advanced technologies. Within the social fabric itself are continuing trends—bureaucratization, the growth of mass tendencies, the “disenchantment of the world” expressed in its secularization—that abrade cultures and subcultures.

If some versions of this grand tradition overstate the cultural disarray, nevertheless a valuable legacy is contained in its acute analyses of polar types of societies. For, irrespective of the theory of social change espoused, preoccupation with the transformation of societies leads to a view of the conditional nature of culture, and hence of its variable effectiveness under different conditions. Implied also are sharply demarcated conceptions of culture, of social organization, of situation, and of the relations among them.

Two Approaches to the Conditions of Culture

Of central importance are two ideas, that there are conditions of culture and that cultures therefore vary in their scope and effectiveness. Culture, basically a design for moral order, is viewed as conceptually distinct from other social phenomena and from nonsocial aspects of the environment. The focus of inquiry is on the interrelations between cultural and noncultural forces, both structural and situational. Efforts to build or maintain cultures are seen as occurring in situations that limit appropriate modes of social organization. Situations consist of a set of problems and a set of resources, social and nonsocial, given in a milieu. The instituting of that moral order contained in a culture is therefore problematic, for it depends in part on the adaptations of social organization to given situations. Since societies, and subgroups within them, confront situations that vary in the

problems and resources presented, the structural and cultural solutions they devise must also vary.

All these theories originate in a conception of differential social organization. Rooted in efforts to interpret social change, all had to characterize the transformations in social structure for which they attempted to account—the shift from estates to classes, from primary to secondary relations, from a simple to a complex division of labor, from traditional to bureaucratic administration, from feudal to capitalist modes of production. Thus there emerged the view of social structure as variable in the kind and degree of integration it entailed and variable in its capacity to support or embody culture. No matter what the theoretical emphasis—whether on size; social isolation; homogeneity; production relations; functional specialization; the relative importance and nature of the links among primary, intermediate, and national relations; or some other aspect of social structure—each of these structural characteristics is seen as consequential for the degree of coherence, unity, and stability of culture and for the extent to which cultural values can be effectively institutionalized.

The idea that there are conditions of culture is thus based on the distinction between culture and social structure and yields the conception of culture as a variable, rather than an equally viable emergent in any setting.

Preoccupation with the conditions of culture has led to a somber evaluation of its fate in modern society. Modern culture is itself weakened by its loss of sacred legitimation in divine or natural law. Apart from the secularization of culture, nearly all the structural trends examined by these writers are viewed as weakening the social foundations of culture. Yet modern societies are not in a state of disintegration. All adapt in varying degrees; some prosper. If some writers in this tradition judge or imply that the modern world is in jeopardy, others have been able to apprehend, and to judge favorably, the kinds of stabilizing adaptations that had emerged. What enabled them to do so was a conceptual heritage common to them all, despite their different diagnoses, namely, the conception of social structure and culture as variables.

A tradition that characterizes social organization as varying according to types, levels, and degrees of linkage between units is able to find bases other than value consensus for cohesion and control in societies or subgroups. For example, disorganization is not a necessary consequence of attrition of sacred value systems, nor is deviance a sole function of allegiance to common values. Order and conformity are independently secured by interlocking positions and affiliations and the lines of action they constrain. Today complex modes of social organization partially substitute their integrative and controlling functions for those formerly provided by the pervasiveness, solidity, and sacredness of culture. Increased functional interdependence; the elaboration of intermediate structures, such as voluntary

associations, that link primary units with those more remote; and the centralization of political and economic institutions and the media of communication create bonds at the societal level that are in some ways stronger—at least compared with feudal society—than those hitherto based on a sacred common culture, and replace in importance once powerful but now eroded structures of kinship and community (Durkheim 1947, 158; Park 1916, 1925).

If modern culture is weakened, modern societies nevertheless do have cultures, and they contain subcultures. Yet subcultures fare no better than culture; indeed, worse. The structural characteristics that debilitate culture also debilitate subcultures, while the integrative structures of modern societies strengthen culture at the expense of subcultures. Culture and subcultures suffer similarly from the effects of rapid technological change—large size, the decline of communal forms, high rates of mobility, and the like; but culture alone gains from the enlarged scope of functional interdependence, the growth of linking structures, the centralization of basic functions, and the rapidity and penetration of the mass media. These may provide the structural foundations of a common culture, but destroy the autonomy and social insulation required for the maintenance of subcultures.

Some structural characteristics, such as social differentiation, which appear to favor the nurturance of subcultures, are sometimes nullified in their effects. Moderate social differentiation may foster subcultural formation, but when it reaches an advanced stage, activities are too specialized to provide sufficient autonomy, too fragmented to provide sufficient meaning for the development of powerful subcultures. Instead, those engaged in them must look outward for the coordination and wholeness that make their activities meaningful. Functional interdependence is the other face of social differentiation.

In like manner the increased heterogeneity resulting from massive migrations within and between societies, which again promises to sustain varied subcultures far stronger, more complete, and firmly rooted than others so named, is nullified by concurrent social processes. The initial similarity of condition of migrating subgroups is destroyed by the fluidity of modern socioeconomic structures. Social mobility, which must be accomplished in most cases in the larger society, requires assimilation to the societal culture and the suppression of some aspects of subculture, such as language and manners. Social mobility also leads to the internal stratification of ethnic and racial groups, thus diminishing their cohesion. Further attenuation of subcultures is produced by the defection of the successful, who now judge and are judged by society-wide standards. Those who challenge the melting-pot interpretation by stressing the persistence of racial and ethnoreligious identities would find it difficult to rest their case on the strength of minority cultures, which have largely disappeared. Cultural

assimilation on the one hand and varying degrees of structural exclusion on the other, particularly in primary relations of marriage and friendship, have been the fate of most minorities (Gordon 1964).

All this is not to say that culture is strong, but only that it is less weak than subcultures. Besides the external stresses on culture, many social commentators have found within modern culture itself—especially the American variety—characteristics that render it still more fragile; its commitment to technological progress, rationalization, and science and its emphasis on material well-being contain an inner dynamic that constantly dissolves existing cultural solutions. Even the commitment to democracy, so powerful an integrating factor in American culture, has problematic consequences for the strength of culture, for the brand of egalitarianism it embraces is profoundly at odds with the development of a richly complex national culture or the persistence of genuinely distinctive subcultures.

If culture at all levels is fragile and variable, its causal importance in the explanation of social phenomena also varies. Where culture is weak, we may conclude, social action is increasingly generated by its weakness—not its strength—and by social structures and situation.

In contrast to the tradition of its precariousness is another in which culture, or, more precisely, subculture, is robust and ubiquitous. As fast as culture and subcultures disappear, they are planted anew by sociologists eager to supply what modern society finds it so difficult to maintain. There is scarcely any aggregate of individuals—no matter how tenuous, intermittent, or even nonexistent their collective identity—that has not been endowed with a subculture, if its “members” exhibit some similarity of outlook or behavior. Their differences may be greater than their similarities, their orientations to the “subcultures” attributed to them ambiguous or even antipathetic; yet social analysts are so enchanted with culture as an explanatory concept that the people they study are sometimes compelled to bear witness to cultures they neither have nor want.

This insistence on the ubiquity and power of culture is especially prominent in explanations of deviance. Drug use, poverty, illegitimacy, both the conformity and the alienation of youth, violence—all are attributed to some appropriate subculture. Delinquency theories provide an impressive list of subcultures that play a vital role in explanations of delinquency—ethnic and racial cultures; lower-class or slum culture; male culture; youth culture; varieties of delinquent subculture, such as a parent delinquent subculture; drug, conflict, and criminal subcultures; an internecine subculture (Sutherland and Cressey 1955; Sellin 1938; Cressey 1961; Shaw and McKay 1942; Miller 1958; Wolfgang 1967; Cohen and Short 1958; Cloward and Ohlin 1960; Cohen 1969).

In this view cultures flourish everywhere, no matter how barren the soil. More precisely, there are no conditions of culture: every problem of mean-

ing and action calls forth its solution in culture or subculture, and cultures, once formed, are equally potent in gaining and keeping the commitment of their constituencies. For culture is seen not as a variable but as a constant, as absolute creation of human adaptability. Cultures may not be—or at least are not in this tradition—compared in quality or strength, structural supports, or milieus. If there are no conditions of culture other than social differentiation and the existence of a number of people who share a problem, then cultures cannot vary in their intrinsic power. Of the abundance of subcultures discovered in social science writings, each is on a par with every other and all are equally competitive with the societal culture. Here is one reason that subcultural explanations of deviance are so frequently invoked: subcultures are everywhere generated with equal ease and are of equal potency in causing behavior.

While most sociologists, schooled in the classic writings, would accept the claim that modern culture is weaker than folk or feudal culture, the *principle* behind this judgment—namely, that culture is a variable—remains elusive and unacknowledged by many. Some modern sociologists, under the spell of the spectacular complexity of modern social differentiation, have transferred to myriads of subcultures the awesome power once thought to characterize culture. In the countless subcultures identified explicitly or implicitly in the literature on deviance, norms are generated and enforced with enviable efficiency. When there are thought to be so many subcultures, each undifferentiated in potency from all the others, the analyst easily identifies many delinquent and criminal subcultures: these are just a few more in a vast array of equivalent formations. Albert Cohen, for example, lists a huge variety of subcultures and simply adds the delinquent subculture to the list (1955, pp. 12–13).

Neglect of the problem of the conditions of culture and subculture is one root of the failure to treat subculture as a variable. Yet even more than culture, subcultures are conditioned, if only by their implication in the larger society. Theories of delinquency that find its cause in numberless deviant subcultures invite the question: Do the social positions that form the base of the great variety of supposed subcultures have sufficient scope, importance, and autonomy to permit full subcultural development?

The coexistence of these traditions—one which stresses the problematic nature of culture, another which can easily locate many thriving cultures—suggests that the concept of culture is being used in different ways. Explicit definitions of basic sociological concepts have not been attempted by all major contributors to the literature and, when essayed, are rarely helpful from the perspective developed here. Of interest, rather, are the kinds of implicit conceptual distinctions required in different modes of analysis.

The study of social change fosters the idea that culture and social structure are distinct and that they are variable in effectiveness. Geertz, in his

analysis of ritual in relation to urbanization in Java, notes that the unwillingness to distinguish culture from social structure impedes the understanding of social change (1957, pp. 33–34). To investigate the link between a substructure of class relations and a superstructure of ideas, ideologies, and values, as did Marx; to question the primacy of economic organization compared with ideal interests based on religious beliefs and values, as did Weber; to weight unequally the contributions to social solidarity of a sacred common culture and functional interdependence, according to the complexity of the division of labor, as did Durkheim; to inquire how the patterning of social relationships in urban society affects rationality and secularism and hence the strength of culture, as did Park and Redfield—all require the separation of culture from social structure.

In one usage, therefore, culture is viewed as but one source of patterning in human conduct. First, culture is marked off from social structure and from psychological and nonsocial aspects of the environment. Social structure is construed as independently variable, a patterning of social relationships separable from the situational problems to which it adapts and from the ultimate meanings attributed by a people to common experiences. Culture, then, is restricted to the realm of meaning; it refers to the shared meanings by which a people give order, expression, and value to common experiences. While thus restricted, culture is not coterminous with meaning, for to define culture as “shared understandings” or the “shared symbol system” is still to risk merging the cultural with the social by overlooking what is distinctively cultural. All sustained social interaction is symbolic and requires a minimum of shared understandings. In the grand tradition of cultural analysis, the distinctively cultural refers to those symbols by means of which a people apprehend and endow experience with ultimate human significance.

Second, the components of culture are assigned different weights according to their contribution to its strength. Culture is strong when it engenders deep commitment. In fully cultural orientations cognitive and expressive elements are linked to values to provide an underlying moral design. But not all the shared understandings that constitute a culture are objects of equal commitment. Many cultural responses, particularly in the cognitive domain, are adaptations to situational exigencies rather than embodiments of cultural values. Hence the emphasis is on moral values, those that express the underlying “design for living” of a group, those that are legitimated on “ultimate” grounds and engender deep, noninstrumental commitment. Culture in this sense is a powerful concept and can have an important place in causal theories of behavior. But precisely because of the strictness of the concept, theorists who use it are sensitized to weaknesses in culture and to the importance of other sources of patterning in human behavior.

If culture is manifested in those aspects of behavior enjoined by ideal patterns of belief, social structure is manifested in those aspects of behavior enjoined by the patterns of interrelationship among social positions. Social structure refers to the stabilization of cooperative efforts to achieve goals, by means of the differentiation of a social unit according to positions characterized by a distinct set of activities, resources, and links to other positions and collectivities. The elements of social structure are social positions (or the roles based on them) and closely related positions that cluster around some function to form collective units. It is a maxim of structural analysis that social differentiation produces diverse perspectives, whether positions are functionally or hierarchically differentiated. Performance of different activities, differential access to resources, and variance in links to other positions and collectivities result in different needs and interests (occasionally, different values), according to position.

Social structure is more immediately influenced by situations than is culture. Culture must adapt to situational exigencies in the long run, but the continued performance of activities stabilized in social structure requires immediate response, however inadequate, to the changing contingencies that always arise in situations in which structured social interaction is embedded. Whatever the response to situational demands, its consequences often cannot be foreseen. Hence the construction of the shared meanings that constitute culture must sometimes await the unfolding of experiences in which meaning can be apprehended. Therefore structural analysis is usually accompanied by assessment of situational factors, but cultural analysis may proceed without regard for their effect.

Similarly, for the individual, culture is more nearly the realm of freedom, social structure more nearly the realm of constraint. People to some degree opt into culture but are locked into social structure. If devalued or difficult to honor, commitments to cultural values can be withdrawn, or they can be merely postponed until they can be realized. The obligations entailed in social positions and in the networks where they exist can be neither withdrawn nor postponed without cost. Inaction and action call forth accommodations or reprisals by those whose activities are affected by either. Social interaction is therefore more immediately controlled by the principles of exchange and coercion that inhere in social structure than it is by the consensual values supplied by culture.

We have seen how conceiving of culture and social structure as variables rather than constants enabled at least some of the classic analysts of social change to arrive at a guarded optimism about the future of social order despite their more or less uniformly pessimistic judgments of modern culture. We can see that their optimism is founded on a basic distinction between social structure and culture. To assess the relative importance of structural and cultural sources of either social integration

or social control, social structure and culture must first be separated from each other.

Further, once culture has been conceptually freed from its immersion in the totality of the social, it can be treated as either an independent variable (Weber) or a dependent variable (Marx). As a corollary, attention is directed to the complex interrelations between culture and social structure, and neither need be taken as a blueprint for the other.

Free not to attribute all socially engendered patterns of behavior to culture globally conceived, the analyst working with a conception of the distinctiveness of culture can search for explanations in structural and situational domains. If, for example, it is found that the middle-aged more than the young tend to have moderate attitudes on a wide variety of issues, a middle-aged subculture need not be invoked in explanation—nor can it be. Variation in belief and attitude by age cannot by itself supply evidence of the existence of age-graded subcultures. Since culture is always a property of collectivities, not aggregates, and since the middle-aged do not (at present) constitute a corporate entity, they cannot have a subculture (though one will be invented for them). By employing structural analysis, however, one can find an explanation of age-linked variation in orientations. A catalog of social positions typically occupied by persons of different age will reveal, among other things, the balance of resources and tasks that engenders prudence among those whose social relationships require heavier burdens of obligation. The middle-aged do not need to be socialized to a prudential attitude by their “peer groups,” for each will independently experience the stress of meeting multiple obligations to job, spouse, children, colleagues, kin, and friends at a time of life when options narrow. Inexorably, each will experience for himself the moderating influence of reality, as time reveals the limits of aspiration. Youthful unfulfilled dreams are likely to remain so. A subcultural explanation, even if one were available, would be redundant.

The distinctions elucidated here are especially important in the delineation of subcultures and the assessment of their causal significance. The orientations of a subgroup are shaped by many forces unrelated to subculture, for the situation in which subcultures are embedded is complex. Besides subculture, sources of patterning in the behavior of members of a subunit include personality systems, their relations to the culture and social organization of the whole society, the social organization of the subunit, and the situational problems and resources to which they must adapt. In many theories which attribute substantial causal importance to subculture, the concept of culture has been used indiscriminately to apply to all these factors.

Though presumably part of the common heritage of sociologists, the tradition stressing the distinctiveness of culture has in fact had a hardy

competitor in another tradition stemming in part from older usage in anthropology, in which culture is conceived as embracing the totality of the social.

The tendency to view behavior as subculturally caused frequently rests on the merging of anthropological and sociological usages of culture. Older, omnibus definitions of culture are merged with sociological definitions of culture which restrict culture to values and norms. Beginning with Tylor, who defined culture as inclusive of all "capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society," many anthropologists have followed suit and identified culture as "learned behavior," or simply as "the way . . . [members of a society] behave." As a way to separate culture from biology, culture grew to encompass the entire "social heritage." Culture in this sense is a kind of vast, undifferentiated residual category of the nonbiological, which includes "all social activities," or more particularly, "all . . . activities . . . that are not automatically reflex or instinctive." Thus "cultural" and "social" become synonymous. With so broad a province, culture naturally includes social structure: "culture, in the anthropological sense of the word . . . [refers to] shared patterns of learned behavior . . . [and to] the appropriate institutions [through which social needs are gratified]"; "culture includes all that man has made . . . , all that he has elaborated in the way of attitudes and beliefs, ideas and judgments, codes, and institutions, arts and sciences, philosophy and social organization" (E. B. Tylor, Ruth Benedict, Melville Herskovitz, Bronislaw Malinowski, Clark Wissler, A. L. Kroeber, Geoffrey Gorer, and E. G. Reuter, respectively, quoted in Kroeber and Kluckhohn 1963, pp. 81, 112, 97, 90, 82, 91, 108, 126).

Anthropologists in the past have not been very interested in decomposing the social into the cultural and the structural, perhaps because in many primitive societies they are so harmoniously linked. In contrast, as Yinger (1960, p. 628) notes, sociologists, probably because they study complex, heterogeneous, rapidly changing societies in which culture and social structure may not be closely meshed, more often use culture to refer solely to the normative order derived from cultural values.

Many accounts of subcultures have confused these two usages. First, all the relatively frequent behavior patterns of a subgroup are labeled culture; then the whole "cultural" conglomerate is assumed to be valued, and hence normatively ordered. This loose usage presents a problem in the evaluation of theories that posit subcultural causes of behavior. The problem is not simply the empirical one of finding out whether in fact the behavior in question is normatively sanctioned in a given subgroup. It is, instead, one which requires conceptual clarification. When everything is included under the rubric of culture, nothing is left with which to compare the causal importance of culture. How can such theories be tested? If culture includes

all learned behavior irrespective of whether it is directed toward the realization of cultural values, then culture will always be the sole cause of behavior. If culture includes social organization, then the constraints imposed by the patterning of social relationships will simply be viewed as culturally determined.

The failure to distinguish between culture and social structure also entails failure to treat culture as a variable. If culture includes everything, each culture is equally complete and equally viable. When culture is not construed as variable in the effectiveness of its articulation by values—that is, variable in the degree of its completeness, balance, consistency, authenticity, and hierarchical ordering—then there is no way to gauge the nature of the commitment it engenders.

But the causal importance of culture is based on the degree of commitment it commands. When we think of culture as a cause, as in the resistance of culture to social change, it is not simply because culture is transmitted, but because it is transmitted as a *valued* heritage. Values are the elements of culture which form the basis of commitment to it. Many behavior patterns are intergenerationally transmitted, for example, but as elements of personality systems rather than of culture. Moreover, many items of culture, such as information or techniques in occupational subcultures, are objects of cultural transmission but not deep commitments, because they are not closely linked to cultural values. Commitment to a culture or subculture is based on the articulation of its elements through moral values into patterns whose design is imposed by the efforts to exemplify and realize those values. Such commitments strongly resist change.

Yet when behavior is not guided by values or the norms derived from them, but is imposed by structural and situational constraints, removal of those constraints would more easily lead to a change in behavior. No resistance results from value commitment (although, of course, there may be other sources of resistance, such as interests).

A good example of the hazards of indiscriminate use of the global conception of culture is Oscar Lewis's notion that the "culture of poverty" includes every disabling characteristic of the poor, from high birth and death rates, bad housing, unemployment, and insufficient food and money to low participation, lack of organization, despair, violence, sexual promiscuity, family instability, and the like. This hodgepodge of more than seventy traits is said to be "a culture . . . a design for living . . . remarkably stable and persistent, passed down from generation to generation" (1963, p. xxiv). The "design" is imperceptible, and for good reason: Lewis made no effort to segregate the cultural from the noncultural. Situation and response, reality and ideal, culture and social organization, personality and social system are fused, and thus confounded. The entire inventory of traits constituting the culture of poverty is supposedly "valued," by virtue of the "design" for a viable "way of life" it contains. What are the values

of people in this subculture? They are not the values people profess to have: "People with a culture of poverty are aware of middle-class values; they talk about them and even claim some of them as their own, but on the whole they do not live by them. Thus, it is important to distinguish between what they say and what they do." What they do is die young, lack jobs, have no money, live in wretched housing, feel despair, fail to organize themselves, engage in violence and promiscuity, neglect to marry, and so on. These then are their "real" values, and they are firmly implanted early in childhood (Lewis 1960).

Culture, then, is everything that people do. Ignore what they say they would like to do. Claim for them as their cultural heritage all the activities in which they engage, even if they do so against their will, and all the feelings they experience in response—rage, despair, hopelessness. Include all their feelings, that is, save one: their feeling of loathing for the lives they are forced to lead. To include this would be to give credence to their profession of traditional values, and this would destroy the validity of the subculture of poverty conception.

Given the inclusiveness of Lewis's concept of poverty culture, it is no wonder he concludes it is self-perpetuating. What else is left outside such a "culture" to account for its persistence? With Lewis's conception of values as including virtually all behaviors and conditions, and excluding affirmed values, and his failure to grasp the distinctive role of values in culture, he does not ascertain how the behavior patterns he described are articulated with values, and to what degree they are normatively regulated. He simply assumes that every pattern is a cultural one and is equally an object of commitment and therefore a product of internal socialization. It is not surprising that he considers it easier to eradicate poverty than the culture of poverty. By his own reckoning, however, there is poverty but no culture of poverty in primitive and caste societies; and in socialist, fascist, and welfare capitalist societies the culture of poverty declines with or without a decline in poverty. Apparently the culture of poverty is not so hardy (for a critique, see Valentine 1968).

There are important elements of a meaningful explanation in his work, but Lewis cannot use them when he works solely with culture globally conceived. He recognizes that culture is a variable. The culture of poverty "is a relatively thin culture. There is a great deal of pathos, suffering, and emptiness. . . . It does not provide much satisfaction and its encouragement of mistrust tends to magnify helplessness and isolation. The poverty of culture is one of the crucial aspects of the culture of poverty" (1966, p. lii). Where there is a "poverty of culture," the explanation of both poverty and the behavior associated with it must lie not in that weak culture—so weak that it can engender only meager commitment—but in social structure and situation. Having failed to disentangle these