# Culture and Identity

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In line with the charge given to the contributors to this volume by its editor, instead of providing a broad theoretical discussion of cultural theory and identity, I spell out my own contribution to the study of culture and identity. I will concentrate primarily on themes central to my most recent book, *The Dignity of Working Men* (Lamont, 2000a). I will also refer to my edited books, *Rethinking Comparative Cultural Sociology* (Lamont & Thévenot, 2000) and *The Cultural Territories of Race* (Lamont, 1999), and to recent papers. I will emphasize theoretical and empirical contributions. Within space constraints, I also will locate my work within the literature and discuss future challenges and research directions.

I share the widely held view that the constitution of personal and collective identity is relational in nature. I analyze this relational process by studying inductively boundary work, i.e., on how people define "us" and "them." Whereas the literature opposes primordial-essentialist and constructivist (or modern and postmodern) conceptions of identity, I position myself in between: My research suggests that identity is constructed but bounded by the cultural repertoires to which people have access and the structural context in which they live. My work largely consists in analyzing the meaning-making process by which groups create boundaries between "us" and "them"; I demonstrate how the meanings given to boundaries vary across class, race, nations, and so forth, depending on the cultural and structural contexts that shape these groups' lives. This focus on meaning-making in the drawing of boundaries across groups leads to new empirical insights in comparative sociology and the sociology of inequality that eschew flattening out differences in definitions of status and in the criteria of evaluation used across groups. It also leads to new theoretical insights by bringing to light a range of questions that speaks to issues of cultural membership and commensuration processes.

The discussion will revolve around (1) identity and symbolic boundaries; (2) comparative sociology and collective/national identity; (3) self, inequality, and resistance; and (4) boundaries and racism. I will conclude with a reflection on future research agendas.

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# IDENTITY AND SYMBOLIC BOUNDARIES

Symbolic boundaries are the lines that define some people, groups, and things while excluding others (Epstein, 1992, p. 232). These distinctions can be expressed through normative interdictions (taboos), cultural identities, attitudes and practices, and more generally through patterns of likes and dislikes.[1] They play a central role in the definition of identity. Indeed, Freud, Lacan, and other classical theorists of identity understand it as defined relationally, in opposition to other meanings, against which identities take on their own significance. References to this relational process also are present in much of the contemporary literature on identity in the social sciences and in cultural studies.[2] While contemporary social psychologists also understand the relational process as a universal tendency,[3] my own work is concerned with analyzing how boundary work is accomplished and more specifically with what kinds of typification systems or inferences concerning similarities and differences groups mobilize to define who they are. This is one of the loci where cultural sociologists can make a contribution to the literature on identity: by studying meaning-making processes and categories through which group boundaries are constructed and how they are shaped by available cultural repertoires and the structural conditions in which people live.

My approach to the study of categorization has been largely inductive: Through in-depth interviews, I have asked individuals to describe the types of people they feel are superior and inferior to them, or similar and different, and how they define worthy people more generally.[4] This inductive approach, which avoids imposing a priori definitions of identity onto my subject,[5] is supplemented by the use of survey data that allow me to identify patterns across groups and to generalize, within limits, about group differences.

In my earlier book, *Money, Morals, and Manners* (Lamont, 1992), I was specifically interested in analyzing how professionals and managers define worthy people and how they use these criteria to draw class boundaries. This book documented the relative salience of cultural, socioeconomic, and moral boundaries and the criteria used to draw these boundaries across contexts (e.g., in France vs. the United States, in cultural centers vs. cultural peripheries, among social and cultural specialists vs. for-profit workers). It provided a grounded critique of Bourdieu's (1984) most influential book, *Distinction*, by examining the importance of cultural boundaries relative to other types of boundaries and by questioning some of its meta-theoretical assumptions.

[1] For reviews of the social science literature on symbolic boundaries, see Lamont (forthcoming) and Molnár and Lamont (forthcoming).

[2] For instance, sociologist Richard Jenkins (1996) views collective identity as constituted by a dialectic interplay of processes of internal and external definition. On the one hand, individuals must be able to differentiate themselves from others by drawing on criteria of community and a sense of shared belonging within their subgroup. On the other hand, this internal identification process must be recognized by outsiders for an objectified collective identity to emerge. On this relational dimension of identity, see Calhoun (1994), who offers an excellent comparison of identity theory in sociology, poststructuralism, postmodernism, feminism, and literary criticism. From a cultural studies perspective, see Grossberg (1996).

[3] Social psychologists working on group categorization have analyzed the segmentation between "us" and "them." Brewer's (1986, p. 21) social identity theory suggests that "pressures to evaluate ones' own group positively through in-group/out-group comparison lead social groups to attempt to differentiate themselves from each other." This process of differentiation aims "to maintain and achieve superiority over an out-group on some dimension" (Tajfel & Turner, 1985, pp. 16–17).

[4] I take for granted that this categorization process has a cognitive and an emotional dimension and that it is shaped by past relations and their projection into the future. On this last dimension of the self, see Wiley (1994, p. 218). Concerning emotional categorizing, see Berezin (1997, pp. 19–30) on "hierarchies of felt identity."

[5] This is where my work differs most from Bourdieu's (1984). For a critique, see Lamont (1992, Chapter 7).

*The Dignity of Working Men* (Lamont, 2000a) is more ambitious in scope in that it does not focus on class alone: it explores how various criteria are used to draw symbolic boundaries by French and American workers against different groups, particularly racial minorities and immigrants, in addition to the poor and the wealthy. I compare the boundaries drawn by white and black workers in the United States and those drawn by native whites and North African immigrants in France.

The inductive approach allows for an empirical assessment of postmodern theories of identity. My findings support the postmodernist view of identity as constructed, as opposed to "primordial," essential and fixed in time. In particular, I suggest that French and American workers define who they are in opposition to different "others"—the straightforward workers versus the snotty professionals, for instance. However, my findings also undermine common postmodernist theoretical assumptions. Following Derrida, postmodernists/poststructuralists often assert that the relational principle functions in an undifferentiated manner across settings, and that identity is multiple, problematic, fluid, self-reflexive, "plural," and "decentered."[6] Instead of asserting this principle and/or illustrating it with anecdotal evidence, I systematically compare the different types of arguments that groups (e.g., white and black workers in the United States) use to define self and "other." Also, instead of positing that this process is open and fluid, I show that it is tied to the cultural resources workers have access to and to the conditions in which they live. For instance, I show that French workers are less likely than American workers to define themselves in opposition to the poor in part because socialism, republicanism, and Catholicism put at their disposal a discourse on solidarity and because institutional arrangements such as the quasi-absence of means-tested social benefits makes it less likely that they emphasize the boundary between workers and the poor (Lamont, 2000a, p. 237). In other words, I establish empirically that some patterns of self-identification and boundaries are more likely in one context than in another. This is not to deny the importance of individual agency or to flatten out intragroup differences and situational variations, but to show that boundary work is framed by the *differentially structured* contexts in which people live.

I should stress that my work on identity overlaps with poststructuralist and some postmodern approaches in its emphasis that exclusion is intrinsic to the constitution of identity. However, whereas authors as diverse as Pierre Bourdieu (1984), Judith Butler (1990), Stuart Hall (Hall & Du Gay, 1996) and Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (1984) posit that identification always proceeds through exclusion, *Money, Morals and Manners* (Lamont, 1992) takes into consideration the strength of boundaries. For instance, this book compares the degree of boundedness of French and American upper-middle-class cultures, showing that classification systems mobilized by French professionals and managers are more tightly bounded and less permeable than those of their tolerant American counterparts (Lamont, 1992, Chapter 4).[7] Hence, I consider empirical variations in degree of exclusion that postmodern theories ignore and I propose analytical devices to make sense of them. Similarly, in *The Dignity of Working Men* (Lamont, 2000a), I consider the *bridging* of boundaries (e.g., the discursive inclusion of the poor and blacks among "people like us" in France) as well as exclusion, instead of positing that boundary work is everywhere and always "at work." I show

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[6]Drawing on Rorty's antifoundational pragmatism and on Derrida's understanding of signification as unstable and shifting, postmodern cultural studies is concerned with the fixity/fluidity of dimensions of identity and the extent to which they presume foundational artifice that allows dominant groups to make universal statements (Lash, 1990, p. 14).

[7]Along these lines, see also Peterson and Kern (1996), Bryson (1996), and Barnett and Allen (2000).

the importance of looking at the definition of identity in connection with both the bridging and creation of boundaries, and with institutionalized definitions of social membership.

To state the obvious, I should also add that my approach to identity also contradicts the basic premises of rational action theory (RAT). While RAT in principle recognizes the importance of culture by positing the centrality of individual orientations, it also ignores it by assuming the principle of rational pursuit of goals. In contrast, my work demonstrates the multiplicity of cultural orientations across groups and considers rational action to be a distinct narrative privileged by specific groups. Giving rational action an a priori privileged status as a normative orientation would flatten out the cultural diversity revealed by my interviews, and thus proves to be theoretically unproductive, at very least for the kinds of questions that I am pursuing (Lamont, 1992, Chapter 7).

Other sociologists and anthropologists have been interested in analyzing boundary work by looking at self-definitions of ordinary people, while paying particular attention to the salience of racial and class groups in boundary work.[8] Just to take a few examples, Newman (1999) analyzes how poor fast-food workers define themselves in opposition to the unemployed poor. Lichterman (1999) explores how volunteers define their bonds and boundaries of solidarity by examining how they articulate their identity in relation to various groups. He argues that these mappings translate into different kinds of group responsibility, in "constraining and enabling what members can say and do together" (p. 7). Binder (1999) analyzes boundaries that proponents of Afrocentrism and multiculturalism build in relation to one another in conflict within the educational system. Becker (1999) studies how religious communities build boundaries between themselves and "the public." Finally, Gamson (1992) shows that identity, and especially "us" and "them" oppositions, serves as a source of mobilization and shapes the injustice frames that people use in defining their position on various political issues. While my work shares much with these studies,[9] it also has a systematic comparative dimension that distinguishes it from other contributions, which I now describe.

## COMPARATIVE SOCIOLOGY AND
## COLLECTIVE/NATIONAL IDENTITY

*The Dignity of Working Men* (Lamont, 2000a) offers a multifaceted theory of status that centers on the relationship between various standards of evaluation of the self—for instance, morality and socioeconomic status—within national repertoires. It also shows that racial and class divides are articulated differently across national contexts and that specific groups attach different meanings to the various attributes they use to define their own positioning and that of others in a hierarchy of worth, instead of positing a consensus about who is "up" and "down" and of flattening cultural differences in evaluation of status (Lamont, 2000a, p. 116). Thus, the study provides a comparative sociology of group boundaries and of ordinary models of definition of community while offering a dynamic and complex picture the fundamental aspects of inequality. The long-term theoretical stake is to develop a more sophisticated understanding of processes by which cultural membership is defined and equivalencies are established between different categories of people, in line with recent studies of commensuration processes (Espeland & Stevens, 1998; Boltanski & Thévenot, 1991).

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[8]See in particular the activities of the members of the symbolic boundaries network of the culture section of the American Sociological Association.

[9]In contrast to this literature, recent studies in cognitive sociology (e.g., Zerubavel, 1997) tends to focus on classification systems and are not concerned with group boundaries and inequality.

This section briefly sketches what this comparative sociology of group boundaries looks like in the case of French and American workers, how it leads to an analysis of national boundary patterns (as part of processes of definition of national identity), and how my explanation for these patterns differs from traditional culturalist explanations by focusing on the different cultural repertoires available across contexts. It also suggests that a focus on "cultural structures" offers a way out of the unproductive culture–structure dichotomy in comparative sociology and elsewhere.

Drawing on 150 in-depth interviews, *The Dignity of Working Men* (Lamont, 2000a) shows that in the United States white workers draw strong boundaries against blacks and the poor on the basis of specific moral criteria having to do with work ethic and self-reliance. Most are indifferent toward immigrants, or they are accepting of them if they perceive them to be in the pursuit of the American dream. In France, by contrast, white workers define the poor and blacks as "part of us," using the widely available discourse of class solidarity. They accept these groups but reject North African immigrants, who, they say, lack civility, violate the principles of republicanism, and are culturally incompatible with the French. Yet, amid laments concerning the decline of working class culture in France, French workers continue to draw on the language of class struggle to define their relationship with the upper half, whom they view as exploitative and dehumanizing. Even more than American workers, they adopt alternative definitions of success centered on personal integrity and the quality of their interpersonal relationships to locate themselves above or next to "people above." This permits them to guard their own self-worth and dignity, even though most of the men I talked to fare poorly on traditional measures of success.

This study reveals that group boundaries are organized very differently across two national contexts, and that ordinary definitions of cultural membership—of what makes a worthy person—vary as well. These definitions imply distinct views about collective identity: how "us" is different from "them." They also imply different types of imagined communities and distinct definitions of national identity (Anderson, 1983/1991). For instance, while compared to American workers, French workers downplay material success in their definitions of worth; they also draw boundaries against Americans for their materialism, defining what they view as France's distinctiveness and sacred values (e.g., solidarity) against Americans' perceived cold-bloodedness.[10] In the context of accelerated globalization, it will be important to assess whether such national boundary work is being replaced by a cosmopolitan logic that downplays the place of the nation in definitions of collective identity and in new forms of collective memory.[11] *The Dignity of Working Men* (Lamont, 2000a) suggests that patterns of boundary work remain localized and highly differentiated across national groups (Lamont, 2000b).

The explanatory framework I deploy to account for national patterns of boundary work can be contrasted with the standard framework used to study national cultural differences— the "modal personality" and "national character" frameworks—which stress psychological traits shared by all members of a society (Crozier, 1964; Inkeles, 1979).[12] Whereas this approach accounts for cultural orientations by childhood socialization, as indicated above, I account for French and American patterns of boundaries toward blacks, immigrants, the upper half, and the poor by available cultural repertoires (such as a prominent discourse on solidarity) and structural conditions in which workers live (such as the availability of welfare

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[10]Lamont (1995) dubbed this process "national boundary work." See Saguy (forthcoming) for another analysis of the place of boundary work in the construction of national identity.

[11]On the conflict between nationally based models and cosmopolitan ones, see Beck (2000).

[12]For a critique, see Lamont (1992, Chapter 5).

benefits). I understand these patterns of boundary work not as essentialized individual or national characteristics, but as cultural structures, that is, institutionalized cultural repertoires or publicly available categorization systems.[13] This framework can explain intranational variance that is ignored by culturalist approaches. Indeed, it accounts for patterns of boundaries across groups within a nation, as well as for patterns across nations; for instance, African Americans draw weaker boundaries toward the poor than white Americans in part because their experience with racism makes them more likely to dissociate moral worth from socioeconomic success (Lamont, 2000a, p. 144). Also, the mainstream black religious tradition historically has made available to blacks a ready-made discourse about the need for collective solidarity that is less readily available to whites (Lamont, 2000a, p. 50). Finally, unlike culturalist approaches, this framework takes into consideration, and can account for, cross-national similarities, such as the weak boundaries that white French workers and African-American workers draw toward the poor.[14]

   *Rethinking Comparative Cultural Sociology* (Lamont & Thévenot, 2000) complements *The Dignity of Working Men* (Lamont, 2000a) in that it provides a comparison of the salience of criteria of evaluation in France and the United States. Here again, the focus is on relatively stable schemas of evaluation that are used in varying proportions across contexts.[15] The analysis draws on eight case studies conducted by 11 French and American researchers who have worked together over a period of 4 years toward developing systematic comparisons.[16] Together, these case studies reveal that each nation makes more readily available to its members specific sets of tools which means that members of different national communities are not equally likely to draw on the same cultural tools to construct and assess the world that surrounds them. Hence, like *The Dignity of Working Men* (Lamont, 2000a), these case studies show that elements of repertoires are present across geographic units such as nations or regions, but in varying proportions. For instance, the cultural repertoires prevailing in the United States make market references more readily available to Americans and enable them to resort to such references in a wider range of situations (e.g., the assessment of literary and artistic value, the critique of sexual harassment, the meaning of voluntary activities, and so forth). In contrast, the French repertoires make principles of solidarity more salient and enable a larger number of French people to resort to them across situations and often precisely in

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[13]On cultural structures and institutionalized cultural repertoires, see Sewell (1992), Wuthnow (1987), Dobbin (1994), and Jepperson (1991).

[14]Because cultural repertoires, like structural conditions, change, the patterns of boundaries that I have documented should be regarded as historically contingent. A dramatic increase in the number of blacks in France could lead to a strengthening of antiblack boundaries, especially if combined with other structural and cultural changes (for instance, a sharp decline of the left and a greater availability of neoliberal ideas that would make solidarity less salient).

[15]They are also defined as "cultural environment(s) and the material contained therein ... the socially constructed, readily available cultural materials of a society—the archetypes, the myths, the epigrams and adages, the morals, the means–end chains, the evaluation criteria, the categorization schemas, all of the materials of shared "tool-kits" (Corse, 1997, p. 156).

[16]The cases bear on how French and American workers assess racial inequality; how French and American activists and intellectuals appraise what constitutes sexual harassment; how identity politics shape what is valued in literary studies in French and American academia; how publishers in Paris and New York understand the market and literary value of books; what kind of rhetoric the French and American publics use to evaluate contemporary art; how journalists (including Communists in France and the Religious Right in the United States) evaluate the legitimate boundary between personal commitments and professional roles; how participants in environmental conflicts in California and the South of France define their positions and evaluate those of others; and how French and American Rotary Club members understand their voluntary activity in terms of particular professional self-interest and universal humanitarian purposes.

situations in which Americans would resort to market principles (in the elaboration of an anti-racist discourse, the defense of the environment, etc.). However, this does not mean that market criteria of evaluation are absent from the French repertoires, but only that they are used in a small number of situations by a smaller number of people (Lamont, 1992, Chapter 3).

This cultural refocusing is a significant contribution to comparative sociology. Indeed, despite important changes, as is the case in comparative historical sociology, this field tends to privilege macroeconomic, political, and institutional differences. Despite the influential writings of Pierre Bourdieu, Michel Foucault, and others, in some quarters cultural "factors" continue to be thought of as "superstructural" (i.e., relatively insignificant) and cultural explanations as inherently conservative (for their idealism or because they allegedly involve "blaming the victim").[17] This is at odds with developments in cultural sociology and other fields where the unproductive dichotomy between "culture" and "structure" is being displaced by a new focus on "cultural structures" (Sewell, 1992) to stress both how resources are meaning-laden and how taken-for-granted definitions of reality act as structures.[18] Conceptual tools such as "cultural repertoires" make it possible to move beyond the psychologism, naturalism, and essentialism that characterized much of the comparative cultural analysis of the 1960s.[19]

## SELF, INEQUALITY, AND RESISTANCE

The intersection between culture and inequality has been one of the fastest growing subfields of cultural sociology over the last 15 years. Pierre Bourdieu (1984) and his collaborators (e.g., Bourdieu & Passeron, 1970/1977) have given the impetus to sociologists as diverse as Bryson (1996), DiMaggio (1987), Erikson (1996), Hall (1992), Halle (1993), and Peterson and Kern (1996), who have followed with significant theoretical and substantive developments. Most recently, important work has focused on the ways in which inequality shapes the self. For instance, Newman (1999) reveals in poignant terms how the working poor construct selves that go beyond the limits of their immediate environment while hanging on to minimum wage jobs. Waller (1999) analyzes how unmarried poor men understand their role as fathers and the emotional and material contributions they make to the lives of their children. Lareau (2000) shows important differences in childhood socialization across social classes, with upper-middle-class parents being involved in "concerted cultivation" of the self, whereas working-class people encourage "natural growth." Kefelas (forthcoming) analyzes how white working-class people define and defend their selves in what they perceive to be an imperiled world, through the care with which they keep their home clean, cultivate their gardens, maintain their property, defend the neighborhoods, and celebrate the nation. Like *The Dignity*

[17]Rueschemeyer (1999) describes some of these perspectives in his work in progress.

[18]Worldviews structure people's lives to the extent that they limit and facilitate their action. In Durkheim's words, "the power attached to sacred things conducts men with the same degree of necessity as physical force." (1911/1965, p. 260).

[19]Other recent research that refocuses on the cultural dimensions of comparative sociology, using conceptual tools recently developed by cultural sociologists, include Corse (1997) on the American and Canadian national identity and their literary canons, Spillman (1997) on the celebration of bicentennials in Australia and the United States (which shows that national identity creation is a continuous process that requires elaboration and reinforcement, but also loss and innovation in national representations), Griswold (2000) on the worlds of the Nigerian novel in England and Nigeria, and Saguy (forthcoming) on the meanings of sexual harassment in France and the United States. This new literature complements the very influential phenomenological comparative research on the rationalization of the world system carried by John Meyer, John Boli, Francisco Ramirez, David Strang, and others (e.g., Meyer & Jepperson, 2000).

*of Working Men* (Lamont, 2000a) these four studies demonstrate how meaning making, particularly at the level of the self, is an essential dimension of inequality and hint at a vast research area that remains unexplored. Together, they illustrate that the structural analysis of inequality, which largely defines the field of stratification, needs to be complemented by systematic empirically based research centering on the cultural dimensions of inequality. The latter should examine questions such as: (1) how inequality shapes the self (either today or historically, à la Elias (1982)); (2) how cultural practices are segmented across groups; (3) how various groups perceive racial, class, and gender differences; and (4) what is the impact of the media and various cultural institutions in shaping these group representations. Some of these topics already have been the object of several studies while others remain largely neglected. My book in progress, *Culture and Inequality* (Lamont, in progress) will provide an integrated framework for understanding these questions and a synthesis of available knowledge.

With the explosive growth of cultural studies since the 1970s, considerable attention has also been given to the study of cultural domination and of resistance among subaltern groups. These also are topics to which *The Dignity of Working Men* (Lamont, 2000a) contributes by focusing on group differences in standards of evaluation and on how these shape subjective group boundaries. For instance, it shows that white American workers emphasize moral standards related to "the disciplined self" (e.g., work ethic, perseverance, self-reliance) to distinguish between "people like us" and others: they distance themselves from the upper half, who lack integrity and straightforwardness, and from blacks and "people below," who are lazy and hold immoral values. Similarly, the moral standards privileged by African Americans, who emphasize "the caring self," overlap with the criteria they use to evaluate all whites, who are domineering and lack human compassion, and the white upper half in particular, who are exploitative and lack solidarity. Moreover, although each group takes their moral values to be universal, each privileges very different aspects of morality, with regard to which they judge the other group to be deficient. Both groups draw strong boundaries toward the other, but on the basis of very different criteria, with whites being better able to institutionalize their own criteria ("the disciplined self") as hegemonic (Lamont, 1997).[20] This illustrates how a focus on the content of moral criteria enriches the understanding of the process of constitution of strong symbolic intergroup boundaries.

To turn to the issue of resistance, I find that both in France and the United States workers put themselves above the "upper half" because they perceive themselves to be more moral and to have more personal integrity. Whereas most analysts view the development of alternative codes of honor and the rejection of mainstream norms of resistance as an explicit goal and act of resistance (e.g., Willis, 1977), my study suggests that resistance is often the unintended consequence of workers' search for respect and alternative spheres of worth; by defending their dignity, they defend distinct criteria of evaluation that allow them to locate themselves above the dominant group.

Social psychologists have shown that groups that are in positions of dependency or limited access to power often value morality and/or collective over individualistic aspects of morality. This is the case not only of blacks as compared with whites, but also of workers as compared with professionals and of women as compared with men (see Lamont, 2000a, p. 246). This may point toward a more general theory of boundary work among groups in

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[20]The "struggle for recognition" is a central theme in the literature on identity. The term refers to collective public struggles for legitimacy that calls upon other people or groups to respond (Calhoun, 1994, p. 20). My work speaks to this topic to the extent that the groups I study promote criteria that allow them to locate themselves above others (see also Bourdieu, 1984). However, my focus is on everyday narratives about identity and self-understandings, as opposed to identity struggles enacted in social or political movements.

subordinated positions.[21] However, instead of understanding the relationship between moral-
ity, self-worth, and hierarchical position in terms of the universal disposition of all low-status
individuals, as social psychologists tend to do, I stress the relationship between these agents'
emphasis on morality and the context in which they live. I explore how conceptions of self-
worth are shaped by the broader context of political and social relationships and by institu-
tionalized definitions of cultural membership that people have access to, a topic rarely visited
by social psychologists working on the self and identity.[22] I also historicize patterns of inclu-
sion and exclusion by analyzing how these conceptions of morality are shaped by changing
political traditions (such as the ideology of republicanism in France, which is central to the
inclusion of the poor and blacks among "people like us").

   A last point concerning the place of class identity in contemporary societies: Postmodern
writings have asserted the declining significance of class as a basis of identity (Pakulski &
Waters, 1996).[23] In contrast, my research suggests that it remains an important basis for
collective identity among workers: *The Dignity of Working Men* (Lamont, 2000a) shows that
many workers define who they are in opposition to hierarchically defined groups ("people
above" and "people below" broadly defined) and that they identify with people who share
similar living conditions ("nothing is easy for people like us") and similar cultural definitions
of "who we are not." In fact, like the professionals and managers analyzed in *Money, Morals,
and Manners* (Lamont, 1992), these working men use a rhetoric of class to talk about differ-
ences between "our kind of people" and others. Their definitions of social membership are
one of the cultural roots of inequality because, like racial identity, class identity is expressed
and tied to the criteria that workers use to evaluate others. The study thus confirms that we
should study class consciousness by focusing not only on taste, on explicit class conflict, or on
positions in the system of production.[24] We also need to look at workers' sense of *worth* and
more broadly at their social identification and group categorization as workers. Hence, the
greater radicalism of French workers, as opposed to American workers, is best understood in
the context of their wider moral worldview, which stresses solidarity and which plays an
important role in making this radicalism possible. As Grusky and Sorensen (1998) imply, if
the concept of class is to be salvaged, through occupational location, for instance, it will be
because sociologists pay heed to the identity and lifestyle dimensions of inequality, as well as
to its structural dimensions.

## BOUNDARIES AND RACISM

   The concept of boundary is central in the study of race and ethnicity. Indeed, the
relational process involved in the definition of collective identity ("us" vs. "them") often has
been emphasized in the literature on these topics. The work of Barth (1969) and Horowitz
(1985), for instance, concerns objective group boundaries and self-ascription and how feelings
of communality are defined in opposition to the perceived identity of other racial and ethnic
groups. More recently, Bobo and Hutchings (1996) analyzed racism as resulting from threats
to group positioning. They follow Blumer (1958), who advocates

[21]Along these lines, Bobo (1991, p. 80) finds that individuals who tend to emphasize social responsibility over
   individualism in survey tend to be individuals with low-status characteristics, namely, blacks and low-income and
   -education whites.
[22]For a review of social psychological approaches to the self and identity, see Gecas and Burke (1995).
[23]For a critique of the postmodern stance on this issue, see Wright (1996).
[24]This confirms the findings of Halle (1984, p. 219).

shift[ing] study and analysis from a preoccupation with feelings as lodged in individuals to a
concern with the relationships of racial groups ... [and with] the collective process by which a
racial group comes to define and redefine another racial group. (p. 3) (see also Hechter, 1975)

Racial boundaries are also a central concern in *The Dignity of Working Men* (Lamont,
2000a). My goal in this book was to explore uncharted territory in the area of racism and racial
differences by focusing on boundaries and meaning making, again bringing together cultural
sociology and the study of inequality. Whereas studies of racism tend to focus on racism per se
(e.g., Feagin & Vera, 1995; Wellman, 1993), I believe that we need to gain purchase on the
broad cultural frameworks that facilitate it and on those used to respond to it. Hence, *The
Dignity of Working Men* (Lamont, 2000a) contributes to the sociology of racism by analyzing
it in the context of individuals' broad moral worldviews and bringing to light their inner logic
through comparative lenses. For instance, the study shows that the concern white workers have
for providing for their families helps us understand the centrality of self-reliance in the
boundaries they draw against blacks. It also documents inductively which norms the majority
group perceives the minority group to violate (e.g., traditional morality, but not straightfor-
wardness), and thus, complements the literature on symbolic racism, which posits that the
majority group rejects blacks because they are viewed as not respecting ideal American values
such as individualism.

*The Dignity of Working Men* (Lamont, 2000a) also bring together cultural sociology and
the study of racial boundaries by analyzing how ordinary white Americans and French men
think about the issue of racial equality, i.e., about what makes people equal or commensurate.
Interviews reveal that whites American workers offer less evidence of racial equality than of
their equality with "people above," focusing, for instance, on the fact that money makes
people equal. In contrast, African Americans point to a wider range of evidence to demonstrate
racial equality, including the color of blood, our common human destiny, our common origin
as children of God, and so forth. Moreover, the most popular forms of antiracist discourse
found in academia, which center on multiculturalism and cultural relativism, find little
resonance among the black and white American working men I talked to. Instead, these groups
more often ground their understanding of racial equality in their everyday experience, epito-
mized by the notion that there are good and bad people in all races. Finally, the study analyzes
how ordinary blacks represent whites and understand racial differences: blacks challenge
dominant white representations of blacks as morally lacking when they emphasize their own
greater generosity and caring. Hence, the research informs our understanding of the cultural
frameworks through which minority and majority groups alike understand restricted and open
definitions of cultural membership.

Several studies assembled in *The Cultural Territories of Race* (Lamont, 1999) also
analyze the subjective experience of race and on racial and ethnic identity construction. For
instance, Waters (1999a) examines the repertoires of cultures and identity that West Indian
immigrants bring to the United States as well as their strategies of self-presentation and the
ethnic and racial boundaries they find most salient (p. 12). The goal is to move beyond the
simple "politicized dichotomies of structure and culture" (Waters, 1999b) that characterized
as much the "culture of poverty" debate as traditional Marxist and network-analytic frame-
works. It is also to unveil meaning-making processes that are at work in all aspects of
immigration and race relations. Along similar lines, Alford Young, Jr.'s (1999) work on the
understandings of mobility and racial constraints developed by "rags-to-riches" young black
men dissects the "mental maps" and "models for" living [to use Geertz's (1973, pp. 93–94
and 220) expression] found in various corners of American society. These studies are often
informed by the analytic tools central to cultural sociologists, such as "repertoires of strategies

of action," "symbolic boundaries," "cognitive classification," and "scripts of personhood." They herald what cultural sociology has to contribute to the study of race, ethnicity, and immigration: new analytical frames and concepts that can be used to identify neglected questions and that have the potential to broaden these fields' intellectual agendas.

Moving in another direction, drawing on Richard Jenkins (1996) who distinguishes between group identification and social categorization as essential dimensions of racial identity, Lamont and Molnár (2001) interviewed African-American marketing specialists to understand how they shape the collective identity of blacks in the United States. More specifically, we examined: (1) how African-American marketing specialists, considered as cultural producers, understand the images of the "black consumer" they diffuse, thus providing African Americans with resources for defining their collective identities; (2) how these marketing specialists provide blacks with models and recipes about how to achieve full social membership, through consumption, for instance; (3) how they believe blacks use consumption to signal aspiration to membership in symbolic communities (as citizens, middle-class people, etc.); and (4) how they believe black consumers perform, affirm, and transform the social meaning attributed to them.

## CHALLENGES AND FUTURE QUESTIONS

Although the contributions described speak to a range of substantive issues, they nevertheless converge around the fundamental social processes involved in the construction of commonalties and differences. The drawing and bridging of racial, national, and class boundaries and their relationship with definitions of identity and the self are at the center of my research agenda and they revolve around whether and how individuals think of "us" as similar, equivalent, commensurate, or compatible with "them." Perhaps the added value of these contributions is to be found less in specific theoretical propositions than in their pointing to ways of capturing old problems through different lenses, which I hope will have become apparent to the reader.

Several new challenges emerge from this research agenda. First, we need a synthesis of the various strands of work that speak to boundary issues across substantive areas. Second, we need a better understanding of the relationship between subjective and objective boundaries. Third, we need a better grasp of boundary work not connected to networks. Finally, we need comparative studies of the drawing and bridging of boundaries and of the place of universalism and particularism in these processes.

1. The concept of boundaries is playing an increasingly important role in a wide range of literatures beyond those discussed above. For instance, in the study of nationalism, citizenship, and immigration, scholars have used the idea to discuss criteria of membership and group closure within imagined communities (Brubaker, 1992; Baubeck, 1992; Zolberg & Long, 1998). Gender and sexual boundaries also are coming under more intense scrutiny (e.g., Epstein, 1992; Gerson & Peiss, 1985; Stein, 1997). Because these literatures deal with the same social process—boundary work—it may be appropriate at this point to begin moving toward a general theory of boundaries which, for instance, would analyze similarities and differences between boundaries drawn in various realms: moral, cultural, class, racial, ethnic, gender, and national boundaries.[25] This synthesis could be accomplished by focusing on a number of

[25]Tilly (1997) moves in this direction. He argues that dichotomous categories such as "male" and "female" (but also "white" and "black") are used by dominant groups to marginalize other groups and block their access to resources.

formal features and characteristics of boundaries, such as their visibility, permeability, bound-
edness, fluidity, and rigidity. We may also want to compare embedded and transportable
boundaries, explicit and taken-for-granted boundaries, positive and negative boundaries, and
the relationship between representations of boundaries and context. Social scientists also
should think more seriously about how different types of boundaries (e.g., moral and aesthetic
boundaries) combine with one another across local and national contexts (Lamont &
Thévenot, 2000).

2. Students of objective boundaries have focused on topics such as the relative impor-
tance of educational endogamy versus racial endogamy among the college educated (Kalmijn,
1991), racial hiring and firing (Silver & Zwerling, 1992), the extent of residential racial
segregation (Massey & Denton, 1993), and the relative permeability of class boundaries
(Wright & Cho, 1992). I have argued that symbolic boundaries are a necessary but insufficient
condition for the creation of objective boundaries (Lamont, 1992, Chapter 7). More empirical
work is needed on the process by which the former transmutes into the latter. It also would be
important to produce a more detailed analysis of the ways in which institutional forces, history,
and material factors shape boundaries. We also need to analyze more closely the process of
institutionalization of symbolic boundaries, i.e., how workers come to take them for granted
and give them objective reality.

3. More work is needed on collective definitions of cultural membership as locus for
"identity work," which does not require that individuals be connected through networks and
engage in face-to-face contacts (Cerulo, 1997). Such boundary work can operate either at the
level of bounded subcultures or at the level of widely shared cultural structures, of "hidden
codes that make individuals and groups predictable and dependable social actors" (Melucci,
1996, p. 8) that exist beyond the enactment of specific interpersonal ties.[26]

4. More work is needed on the bridging of boundaries across groups. In particular, we
know very little about how individuals produce universalism and promote forms of cosmopol-
itanism in different settings: at work, in the public sphere, in neighborhoods, in kinship net-
works, and so forth. We need to study the extent to which professionals and workers consider it
natural to first help "their own kind" and how they reconcile meritocratic norms in the
workplace with clientelistic practices (Lamont, 2000c). While in recent years, political philos-
ophers have given considerable attention to questions of community boundaries, by discussing
tribalism (Barber, 1995), patriotism–cosmopolitanism (Nussbaum, 1994, 1996a,b), and
particularism–universalism (Walzer, 1997), much work needs to be done before we can
understand how ordinary citizens conceptualize these questions as well as widely shared,
institutionalized views on these crucial issues.

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    *Sociological Forum, 15,* 145–164.

He points to various mechanisms by which this is accomplished, such as exploitation and opportunity hoarding. He
    asserts that durable inequality most often results from cumulative, individual, and often unnoticed organizational
    processes.
[26]For more network-bound approaches to identity, see Emirbayer and Goodwin (1994), Somers and Gibson (1994),
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