Women's Cultures and Social Movements in Global Contexts

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Abstract

This article examines the role that women's cultures and communities have played in political protest and social change. We argue that women's cultures, which form around the reproductive roles, labor, and emotional expectations placed on women, have been used to express femininity and as cultural resources or ''toolkits'' to transform male-dominated spheres of society. We begin by defining women's cultures, emphasizing that there is no universal women's culture because the structural arrangements and cultural meanings of gender vary by race, ethnicity, class, nationality, and political context. We then review research that demonstrates the significance of women's cultures for the collective identities and tactics deployed in social movements and protest, demonstrating how the study of women's cultures and gender processes in social movements has contributed empirically and theoretically to understanding social movements. We examine women's cultures and collective identities in communities as wide ranging as self-help groups, lesbian communities, feminist organizations, and anti-feminist groups. We then draw on prevailing theories of cultural change in globalization studies (cultural differentialism, cultural convergence, and cultural hybridization) to understand how women's cultures have contributed to social change. We conclude by identifying future directions for the study of women's cultures and social movements.

Introduction

Although women's subordination is ''one of the true universals,'' or what Ortner (1974, p. 67) has termed ''a pan-cultural fact,'' there is wide variation in the ideas, symbolism, codes, and practices that maintain gender inequality across different cultures. Scholars of gender tend to agree, however, that the gender division of labor that assigns particular activities to women related to childbirth and caretaking and women's culturally attributed second-class status in virtually every society give rise to distinctive women's cultures formed around the reproductive roles, labors, and emotional demands women experience. Women's historians (Cook 1979; Cott 1977; Freedman 1979; Rupp 1997) have argued that women's culture and the intimate bonds that form between women played a benevolent role in the development of the first-wave feminist movement in the United States. In her classic article, ''Separatism as Strategy,'' Estelle Freedman goes so far as to attribute the decline of the US women's movement in the 1920s to the devaluation of women's culture and the decline of separate women's institutions in this period. This line of analysis is supported by the observation among social movement scholars that ''free spaces,'' or autonomous networks, are necessary for the mobilization of social protest (McAdam 1988; Polletta 1999; Tilly 2000). In most parts of the world, communities of women have played a critical role in collective protest, sometimes on their own behalf and other times on behalf of other causes. Although no

monolithic women's culture has developed across lines of race, ethnicity, class, and sexuality – protests have ranged from food riots in immigrant neighborhoods, to labor strikes, to protests against the lynching of African-American men, to suffrage demonstrations, to self-help movements advocating for attention to breast cancer, postpartum depression, and other health issues – women have formed communities and fashioned oppositional cultures to sustain their struggles for change. In this article, we argue that women's cultures, which both affirm and challenge gender subordination, have played a critical role as ''cultural toolkits'' in the mobilization of social protest and social movements (Swidler 1995).

We define women's cultures as the shared values, habits, skills, aesthetics, and practices that women develop by virtue of their subordination that encompass the myriad ways that a community of women express who they are, or their commonalities, as women. We agree with scholars who hold that the structural arrangements and cultural meanings and practices associated with gender vary by race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, nationality, and political context, which calls into question the universality of a singular women's culture even within a particular society (Collins 1990; Moraga and Anzaldúa 1981; Spivak 1990). Despite these variations, we argue that women's gender identities tend to give rise to distinctive cultures, characterized by female values and practices that can become the basis for the formation of gender-based collective identities that lead to collective mobilizations for social change.

If the devaluation of women is itself a construct of culture, as social constructionist perspectives on gender assume, then it is important to understand the effects that collective mobilizations, particularly women's movements, have played in the reconstitution of women's cultures and in redefining femininity. We are interested in the ways that women's communities give rise to cultures that nurture collective processes, consciousness, and practices that promote resistance. We use the term women's communities to emphasize the sites where culture is produced and enacted and to call attention to the social relations and places where women interact. The concept of social movement communities has been proposed for understanding the more diffuse mobilizing structures associated with contemporary social movements (Buechler 1990; Taylor and Whittier 1992). Our use of the concept women's communities also emphasizes that women's cultures can emerge in a variety of contexts, including inside institutions when, for example, women's networks or caucuses form. Women's culture is often also expressed through informal, diffuse, and virtual communities, and friendship relationships. For example, Reger (2012) has argued that contemporary feminism persists ''everywhere and nowhere,'' meaning that contemporary feminist communities share shifting and fluid generational identities and collective identities but may only occasionally be ''visible'' in outward political displays (Reger 2012). When women form relationships to challenge and oppose male-dominated institutions, they may also develop their own break away groups or women's alternative communities. Research on women's alternative communities elaborates how women's cultures develop in spaces segregated from men's work and reflect symbolic systems particular to women's values, bodies, emotions, and labors. Radical and lesbian feminists have resisted patriarchy by developing a myriad of institutions such as alternative bookstores, record labels, and vacation resorts. From women's segregated communities to the relationships women form through mother-daughter connections to networks of ''sisterhood,'' a range of women-only spaces have historically been important to the formation of women's collective consciousness concerning the inequalities they experience as a group. Women's communities contribute to social change by nurturing

distinctive collective identities and emotion cultures that support ideas, practices, and tactical repertoires specific to women's bodies, labors, and values.

In this article we argue that women's cultures are nascent cultural "toolkits," mobilizing structures that emerge from women's consciousness of their subordinate position and the unique values and relationships that derive from their subordination, which have the potential to transform male-dominated cultures and communities. We elaborate how women's cultures develop through the boundary making and consciousness of that boundary making that women engage in within their communities. We examine women's cultures and collective identities in a variety of communities and forms of activism to elaborate the diversity of mobilizations that have been shaped, at least in part, by symbols and practices associated with women's cultures. We then draw on prevailing views of cultural change in globalization studies (*cultural differentialism*, *cultural convergence*, and *cultural hybridization*) to understand how women's cultures contribute to a variety of outcomes when they come into contact with dominant groups. We conclude by taking stock of how women's cultures contribute to social change and suggest future research directions to address women's cultures and globalization.

The origins of women's cultures

Women's cultures vary by women's class, status, race, ethnicity, and nationality. To understand the culture of any group requires attention to the contexts in which it is produced, so we turn our gaze to the communities that give birth to women's cultures and communities. In a variety of forms, the cultural belief that women were fundamentally different from men led to sex-segregated public and private spaces. The ideology of sex segregation and the values, emotions, and cultural objects that women have developed within the boundaries of their daily lives spawned the creation of unique women's cultures.

In many societies, women's biological differences – both the practice of their reproductive responsibilities and the symbolism surrounding menstruation, birth and motherhood – led to women's physical separation from men and to the development of sex-segregated institutions and the domestic sphere, which bounded the private from public. Within these separate and sex-segregated spaces, a distinctive women's culture flourished. Nuns, for example, developed complex spiritual and loving companionships with each other and created unique dress and rituals in Christian monasteries across Europe from the 7th to 16th century and in Buddhist monasteries in China from the mid-14th to mid-17th centuries as a result of the physical and symbolic boundaries drawn between men and women (Rupp 2009). Bourgeois women in 18th century Europe were excluded from the blossoming art, literature, and politics in the coffee houses of the public sphere but held salons in their homes to discuss women's writing and politics. Mary Wollstonecraft, often described as one of the early feminists, pioneered salons where she argued that it was women's lack of education and access to the public sphere that made them vain, petty, and frivolous. In the mid-20th century, women's colleges and women's studies programs continue to be seedbeds of feminism as distinctly separate institutions that sustain women's cultures (Freedman 1979). Until the early 21st century, women were excluded from a variety of social and cultural institutions including medicine, religion, politics, and education. While this produced tremendous gender inequalities in knowledge and status, it also facilitated gender segregation, the creation of gender identity, and the emergence of a distinctive culture among women. The segregated spaces and subordinated status of women have functioned historically, then, as both physical and symbolic boundaries that contribute to the creation of distinct women's cultures and formation of gender consciousness.

Women's exclusion from the male public sphere and male-dominated industries led to the elaboration of specific ideologies, symbolizations, and belief systems to justify women's subordination. There is, however, considerable research documenting the existence of rich and complex women's cultures, which flourished in spaces where women came together to question their status and resist domination. Participation in social movements requires that aggrieved groups recognize that they share a common problem. Female expressions of art, spirituality, and medicine provide alternative representations of women, and women's communities provide spaces where women can become aware of their commonalities, construct shared interpretations of their problems, and imagine new identities and more just possibilities for the future. For example, during the Ottoman Empire, women lived in segregated quarters where they managed domestic and sexual labors, enjoyed sisterly and at times erotic relationships with other women, and where prestigious women began to wield political influence over their husbands. In the United States in the 18th and 19th centuries, White bourgeois women advocated the continuation of gendered and racially separate spheres in order to recognize and sustain ''true womanhood,'' which separated them from black slave and white working-class women who worked in their homes. Slave women also worked in sex-segregated conditions and created racially segregated solidarities opposed to the violence they faced from their male and female masters (Hewitt 1985). In the late 19th century United States, a separate sphere for a new class of working and professional often single women began to redefine femininity in the emergent modern city in the settlement house movement, exemplified by Jane Addams' Hull House in Chicago (Kerber 1988). Female spheres of segregated work, women's shared subjectivities in their private lives, and consciousness of the subordination of women's cultures to male-dominated culture, knowledge and public life formed the foundation for women's collective action.

Women's separate social structures and their collective recognition of their grievances and desires have been essential to the formation of women's movements and feminism. At times, however, women have acted collectively and politically to protect the traditional femininity promoted by women's separate spheres. For example, the anti-suffragist movement in the United States in the 1910s mobilized women to resist entering the public sphere in order to maintain a protected private space for femininity, which they believed would be corrupted by women's right to vote (Marshall 1986). Women's consciousness about gender difference and inequality has also validated women's collective identity, contributing, for example, to the rise of women's suffrage movements in the 1920s. By recognizing inequalities in women's labors as compared to men's – whether in the home or industry – women's cultures provided toolkits for social change. The distinctive women's cultures that form among women of different races, ethnicities, classes, and nationalities can, however, make it difficult to organize across social divides of race, ethnicity, and class (Hull et al. 1982; Ryan 2001).

The nature of women's cultures

While women's cultures may solidify shared belief systems among different groups of women, women's active use of those beliefs and practices within particular political, cultural, and structural contexts varies greatly. The notion of ''toolkits'' has become an important conceptual idea for elaborating the set of skills, habits, and strategies used within any given context and subculture to accomplish social change (Swidler 1986). Diverse processes and practices that vary by race, ethnicity, locality, and class produce a gendered set of cultural tools including *collective identity*, *tactical repertoires*, *cultural objects and*

aesthetics, and *emotion cultures* that women's communities use to understand and address the injustices they face. Women's communities have strategically used these toolkits for a variety of feminist and anti-feminist mobilizations in a wide range of contexts.

Women's cultures, first and foremost, provide free spaces where women can form a distinctive *collective identity*. Scholarship on collective identity analyzes how groups develop a sense of "we," rather than remaining atomized and disconnected individuals, and how a collective identity can become a tool for social change (Melucci 1989). Becoming aware of group solidarity around their shared gender identity, experiences, or interests is a key psychosocial process linked to participation in women's movements. Taylor and Whittier's analysis allows us to understand how lesbian feminist communities created separatist, emotional, political, sexual, and aesthetic cultures to develop a lesbian feminist collective identity to resist dominant heteronormative values in a homogeneous community that did not and could not attract women of color or working-class women (Taylor and Rupp 1993; Taylor and Whittier 1992). Lesbian feminist identities allowed participants to critique hegemonic gender identities and male-dominated culture through a variety of observable practices from using consensus based decision making within organizations to wearing masculine or gender ambiguous clothing (Stein 1997; Taylor and Whittier 1992). But the belief that women are fundamentally different from men has also led to cultures opposed to lesbian and gay movements and women's liberation. Antifeminist countermovements that value virtuous Christian motherhood and hetero-normative marriage also develop out of women's cultures. Notably, women's movements to preserve traditional female identity defeated the Equal Rights Amendment (Mansbridge 1986; Marshall 1985). The collective identities that women form around gender identity and that are used to maintain and nurture women's cultures and the collective goals of women's communities can advance both feminist and antifeminist agendas (Klatch 2001).

Over the course of history, as women have come to recognize the absence of their art, bodies, rituals, feelings, and ideas in male-dominated spaces, they have constructed and deployed their collective identity as women to mobilize for social change. Women's cultures have strongly influenced women's movements' selection of *tactical repertoires* and the intentional protest actions or performances activists have used to express claims (Taylor and Van Dyke 2007; Tilly 1978). In women's movements, femininity is often deployed in embodied tactics used by protestors to defy and resist dominant gender norms and practices. For example, young women Zapatistas redefine and reclaim their marginalized identity as women, youth, and students when they march against the World Trade Organization (Taft 2011). In 2002, a group of 50 women of all ages from West Marin, California, calling themselves "Unreasonable Women," turned the objectification of women to its own use by lying down naked in a light rain to spell out "PEACE" with their bodies to shock the Bush administration into paying attention to the grassroots opposition to the war against Iraq. Likewise, self-help movements for breast cancer survivors use displays of their mastectomy scars as symbols of strength and pride opposed to societal expectations about feminine beauty and sexuality (Taylor and Van Willigen 1996). Support groups that foster communication between women about their personal lives and health are a form of healing, political consciousness-raising, and an internally oriented tactic that has often been used by self-help and health movements (Taylor 1996; Taylor and Zald 2010). Women in postpartum self-help movements also deploy externally oriented tactics to influence the public sphere, such as appearing on talk-shows, lobbying politicians, and persuading medical professionals to recognize women's depression as a disease linked to pressures

from their reproductive roles and labors as mothers. Maternalism has often served as a basis for mobilization (Taylor 1996). Along with the One Million Signatures Campaign petition and publication of popular writings that embraced their own interpretations of the meaning of family, women in Morocco reclaimed and wore the veil at rallies and in their everyday lives to assert respect for Muslim femininity and human rights (Salime 2011). The protest actions that women's movements use in political contention frequently draw upon the cultural practices, skills, and strategies derived from the values and habits that sustain women's cultures.

Cultural objects and aesthetics are important markers of women's values and their conscious negotiation of skills and strategies in opposition to patriarchal values. Women in Boston organized during the late 1960s and 70s to discuss feelings and questions about their health that doctors failed to acknowledge, then transformed their shared knowledge into a collective political project by writing the encyclopedic reference book, *Our Bodies Ourselves*. The Michigan Womyn's Music Festival is a feminist cultural event attended and staffed by women, which reproduces women's separate sphere to advance women in the music industry. The centerpiece of the feminist art wing of the Brooklyn Museum is Judy Chicago's "Dinner Party," a table of place settings that recognize the contributions of women throughout history. Feminist cultural objects and aesthetics defy the cultural norms associated with femininity by challenging patriarchal conceptions of beauty and knowledge that serve the interests of male bodies and labors and perpetuate the subordination of women.

Informed by female values, habits, and rituals, women's communities typically form distinctive *emotion cultures* of solidarity that serve as tools for the construction of collective identity, solidarity, and opposition in women's movements. Activists make claims by managing emotions among participants, movement audiences, and the targets of movements (Taylor 1999; Goodwin et al. 2007). For example, the emotion culture of the postpartum self-help movement mobilizes a collective identity to oppose the ideology of traditional motherhood and allow participants a space for their experiences of depression and personal healing that deviate from the maternal ideal (Taylor and Leitz 2010). Just as women's cultures draw on female values and allow the exchange and validation of women's feelings, self-help activists oppose male-dominated cultural spheres' emphasis on rationality and objectivity (Ferree 1992). Feminist and anti-feminist collective identities also mobilize by promoting emotion cultures that allow for the expression of traditionally non-feminine emotions, such as anger and hate that are conducive to collective action and protest (Blee 2002; Hercus 1999; Taylor 1996). A movement's use of emotion as a tactic in political contention is limited by the emotion cultures of the institutional fields in which collectivities act (Whittier 2001). For example, Guenther (2009) demonstrates that local culture and politics created different patterns of funding for women's centers in the former East Germany after the fall of socialism, influencing whether feminist organizations mobilized through dispassionate employment workshops rather than animated and emotionally charged discussion groups.

Women's communities, in other words, are mobilizing structures for a myriad of creative symbolic and expressive practices and products that have the potential to mobilize social movements and other campaigns for social change. Women's movements mobilize out of the collective consciousness and gender identity created by virtue of women's participation in sex-segregated communities. Whether they are explicitly feminist or not, women's cultures promote the formation of new gender meanings and practices that have the potential to influence the ideas, identities, tactical repertoires, and internal dynamics of social movements (Taylor 1999).

Women's cultures and social movements

Research on the variations in women's cultures and cultural toolkits contributes to our understanding of the diversity of women's movements, including differences in the composition, exclusiveness, organizational structures, goals, strategies, and tactics used by different women's movements to challenge gender inequality. Women's communities and the distinctive cultures they foster serve not only as pre-existing mobilizing structures that shape the nature of collective mobilizations by women, but they also provide spaces for coalitions with other movements and for cross-racial/ethnic-feminist organizing (Roth 2004; Taylor 1996; Taylor & Rupp 1987). For example, US women's communities have played a critical role in the civil rights, gay and lesbian, peace, labor, immigrant rights, environmental and global justice movements.

Women's cultures have contributed to feminist mobilizations through two main processes: (1) nurturing a feminist oppositional collective identity; and (2) providing free spaces where feminist identity and solidarity are able to survive and continue in hostile political environments. Social movements engage in a great deal of identity work to develop collective identities around not only who "we" are but also to oppose some collectively defined "them," or "who we are not." For example, women in both left and right wing organizations in the 1960s grew conscious of gender inequality across the political spectrum, leading to their participation in both feminist and non-feminist movements in the late 1960s and early 1970s in the United States (Klatch 2001). In self-help movements, shared values and gender beliefs become oppositional when women link their problems and conditions to women's inequality and mobilize to support one another and politicize their problems in spite of prevailing definitions and ideas about the individual nature and causes of illness and other conditions that disproportionately affect women (Taylor 1996). Female bonding, the core of women's cultures, is likewise the root of cultural feminist and lesbian feminist collective identities that have played a crucial role in mobilizing and sustaining the US women's movement (Taylor and Rupp 1993).

The emotion culture of caring (compassion, empathy and love) characteristic of many women's communities stimulates collective identity and collective action among women. For example, mothers imprisoned for infanticide mobilize from behind prison walls using pen-pal networks to acknowledge and share their feelings of guilt, grief, anger, and love through letter writing. They develop a collective identity as part of a larger postpartum depression movement opposed to their stigmatization as criminals (Taylor and Leitz 2010). In the global south, grassroots organizations mobilize women to meet the needs of other women and children by forming microcredit welfare programs and childcare cooperatives that often prove better at community development than bureaucratized organizations, international non-governmental organizations, or the state. For example, at the local and national levels, Indian women created the Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA), a cooperative trade union to provide benefits to informal sector workers (Desai 2009). At the global level, the Huairou Commission, a global network of grassroots women's organizations, builds partnerships between local women, policy makers, and the United Nations to implement the Millennium Development Goals (Desai 2009). Women's emotion cultures of caring and connection frequently serve as mobilizing structures that both promote and sustain activist involvement.

The shared subjective experience of participating in women's alternative and separate cultural activities and communities tends to ensure the continuity of women's movements (Staggenborg 2001; Taylor 1989). A considerable body of research finds that culture is one of the key elements that determine whether movements persist or perish during

inhospitable political eras (Taylor 1989; Whittier 1995; Staggenborg and Taylor 2005). In the case of the US women's movement, after winning the right to vote, the Belmont House of the National Woman's Party in Washington, DC, became a strategic location for women's deep emotional ties and commitment to feminism (Rupp and Taylor 1987). Belmont House kept alive a rich feminist culture, allowing women to maintain feminist collective identities, engage in tactics such as lobbying and letter writing, and recruit new membership as first-wave feminist mobilization declined. Submerged organizations of women drew on the strengths and resources of separate and autonomous women's communities and cultures to sustain the feminist challenge through the hostile political climate and feminist backlash of the 1940s and 1950s (Rupp and Taylor 1987). A growing body of research suggests that the women's movement is currently in abeyance in the United States and Western Europe and that the abeyance structures that facilitate continuity vary globally under the political opportunities particular to the national context in which the movement exists (Grey and Sawer 2008).

In periods of abeyance as well as during robust mobilization cycles, culture serves as a resource or toolkit for a social movement's tactical repertoires. For example, the gender hierarchy within the black church, specifically women's lack of access to leadership positions, promoted mass mobilization in civil rights movement organizations. Women became ''bridge'' leaders, or informal leaders who connected grassroots communities, composed to a large extent of women, with social movement organizations (Robnett 1996). Women's cultural networks and bridge leaders' lobbying efforts with ministers and other formal movement leaders were also fundamental to mobilizing the Montgomery bus boycotts (Robinson 1987). The use of bridge leaders, a tactic that drew on women's separate sphere of influence, female values and emotion cultures, was foundational for the development of the battery of tactics used by the civil rights movement, including voter registration and freedom rides (McAdam 1988; Robnett 1997). Women's cultural communities in the United States have had a profound effect on the frames and tactical repertoires of other mixed-sex movements such as labor, peace, and lesbian and gay movements (Meyer and Whittier 1994). Women's communities provide the cultural toolkits that have mobilized collective challenges to gender inequality in many institutional arenas of society – from politics to the family, from education to health. Women's cultures, in turn, continually shape and are shaped by the collective mobilizations of women.

Women's cultures and social change

Studying women's communities and their cultural dynamics and products is important for understanding processes by which cultural change takes place. Women's movements have played a central role in modernization, democratization, and revolution, as well as in altering the gender regimes and practices of societies (Ferree 2012; Paxton et al. 2007). Prior research on the impact of social movements concentrated mainly on the political outcomes of social movements, since most social movements address their claims to the government (Gamson 1975; McAdam et al. 2001). Frequently, however, social movements fail to achieve their desired policy changes, and their most lasting impact may be changes in public attitudes and opinions, the introduction of new cultural tastes and aesthetics, and the legitimation of new identities and cultural practices. The social movement literature suggests that social movements and activist communities play an important role in cultural change through the effects of extended protest cycles (Whittier 2007) the diffusion of novel ideas, strategies, and tactics (Earl 2007; Swidler 1986), and the creation

of new identities and forms of community (Blee 2012; Melucci 1995; Rochon 1998; Staggenborg 1995), thereby contributing to broad social change.

Women's communities and women's mobilizations at the local, national, and transnational levels have been central players in globalization and modernization, creating a dynamic relationship between social movements and culture (Ferree 2012; Moghadam 2005; Salime 2011; Whittier 2009). The alternative symbols, values, languages and frames of women's cultures can sow the seeds of challenge and mobilization. The individuals, groups, and organizations that comprise a social movement community have an impact on culture by adding, changing, reconstructing, and reformulating dominant conceptions of themselves and their relationship to the world and producing transmutations of what is culturally given (Johnston and Klandermans 1995, p. 5). Social movement scholars argue that social movements and oppositional subcultures in the ''global culture'' are functioning as seedbeds for oppositional thought and discourse (Inglehart 1990; Melucci 1995). Women's cultures increasingly blend and meld distinctions between the dominant culture's conception of gender and the movements' oppositional culture, in part because established gender identities and practices no longer always correspond to the various possibilities opened up for women in modern societies. Women's mobilizations offer new positively valued identities for participants, allowing women to challenge and remake traditional femininities, and they often promote new gendered ways of organizing social life that mix with dominant patterns.

We draw on Nederveen Pieterse's (2009) work on globalization and culture to suggest a framework for understanding three outcomes that can occur when women's mobilizations come into contact or conflict with dominant cultures. This framework problematizes binary approaches to cultural change that emphasize either cultural continuity or difference when conflicting cultures come into contact, arguing instead for the need to reconceptualize cultural change as hybridity, or the emergence of new, mixed forms of cultural expression and social cooperation that make more fluid boundaries of race, gender, nationality, and other identities. From this perspective, we argue that there are three outcomes when women's cultures engage with dominant cultures: *cultural convergence*, *cultural differentialism*, and *cultural hybridization* (Nederveen Pieterse 2009).

Cultural convergence describes a process of cultural diffusion where institutions or groups tend toward sameness. A large body of sociological research shows that transnational communications and economic exchanges within the structures of international markets and state relationships result in national markets and governments that are more similar than different globally (Meyer et al. 1997). Ritzer (1993) argues that transnational cultural influences result in ''McDonalidization'' or the shared adoption of institutional structures and efficiency represented by the ubiquity of the popular food chain in almost every country of the world. Comparable processes occur in women's movements because there are many aspects of women's cultures that are more alike than different. Although feminist movements seek to challenge gender difference and inequality, some women's movements have sought to embrace traditional gender practices and beliefs in order to preserve femininity and gender difference, thereby converging with dominant patriarchal cultures. In the case of the anti-suffrage movement and the movement against the Equal Rights Amendment, women fought for the continuity of women's separate sphere (Marshall 1985, 1986). Cultural convergence also took place as women's movement organizations increasingly became bureaucratized in the late 1880s through the 1930s by adopting similarities to professional social movements in the existing political field (Clemens 1993). Using *Our Bodies Ourselves* as a guide, contemporary Brazilian feminists developed women's health organizations with goals and beliefs similar to US feminist social

movement organizations that were successful in garnering funding from international agencies like the Ford Foundation (Thayer 2000). The tendency for social movement organizations to converge with dominant cultural templates helps to explain similarities in the ideas, identities, and tactics of women's movements transnationally. Cultural convergence explains cultural change on the basis of isomorphism, which is the tendency for organizational cultures in an institutional field to become increasingly similar (Meyer et al. 1997).

Another persistent feature of women's cultures and feminist movements has been *cultural differentialism*, or cultural conflict that occurs because of differences that develop between challenging groups and the external cultural context. Women's communities and feminist cultures, especially, are spaces for the development of distinctly female values, habits and skills built on the subordination of women and their exclusion from male-dominated cultural arenas. Lesbian and gay movements and conservative homophobic counter movements, for example, have been locked in a "culture war" as they contest the meanings of sexual identities and rights (Ghaziani 2008). Cultural differentialism is a movement outcome when women's cultures resist dominant cultures. When the impact of cultural change is cultural differentialism, movement participants and organizations emphasize the contradictions and conflict between cultures.

In many cases, women's communities neither converge with nor resist dominant cultures but develop *cultural hybridities*. Women's cultures encompass, mix with, transform, and are transformed by dominant cultures and the cultures of other movements in complex ways. Scholars of globalization locate cultural hybridization in objects as diverse as Korean tacos and new transnational communications facilitated by the Internet (Desai 2009; Nederveen Pieterse 2009). Two theories in social movement studies approximate the idea of cultural hybridity: spillover effects and cultural borrowing. Women's movement activists spilled over into working with peace movements in the 1980s and brought into being a new era of peace activism that critiqued the gender inequalities in militarism and war and exercised the strengths of women's separate culture and sphere, introducing the innovation of peace camps (Meyer and Whittier 1994). Research on the 2004 protests for same-sex marriage in California found that the spillover of activists from a range of related movements, including women's, AIDS, peace, and health care movements, influenced the cultural tactics used in contention. The mass disobedience, which took place over a month-long period and mobilized over 4000 couples who married as part of the protest, reflects the kind of cultural borrowing typical of social movement repertoires; demonstrators challenged but embraced traditional marriage laws by demanding marriage licenses for same-sex couples, and activists drew on the cultural symbolism (wedding dresses, flowers, and cakes) that accompanies traditional heterosexual weddings (Taylor et al. 2009). The concept of cultural hybridities provides analytical power to extend the concepts of spillover and cultural borrowing to emphasize the cultural impact of new and mixed organizations, tactics, strategies, and ultimately movements.

New collective identities, practices, cultural objects, and forms of solidarity are often the result of cultural hybridization. In most regions of the world women's mobilizations target local, national, and global processes, and women mobilize in multiple institutional contexts, ranging from education and health to politics and the mass media (Staggenborg and Taylor 2005). Chicana feminists have mobilized by developing a hybrid borderland culture that includes multiple languages and collective identities that negotiate mixed racial, ethnic, sexual, and gender identities (Anzaldúa 1987; Roth 2004; Sandoval 2000). Similarly, women's health movements achieve hybridity by reframing illnesses to incorporate diverse subjectivities that embrace experiential, scientific, and political

explanations of disease (Taylor and Zald 2010). Women's communities, such as the Women's Networking Support Programme, contribute to the globalization of culture by developing community Internet access and training women to participate in global discourse about women and technology and in policy advocacy through email campaigns (Desai 2009).

Conclusion

Scholars of gender and feminist studies have been critical of the concept of women's culture because it can imply an essential, or biologically based, universal women's culture (Echols 1989). In this article, we have emphasized the diversity of women's cultures, arguing that to speak of a single women's culture is to ignore significant cultural variations on the basis of national and political context and differences in the racial, ethnic, class, and sexual composition of women's communities. Our major premise is that women's communities and the rich oppositional cultures they sustain and perpetuate have often been the building blocks of women's movements, which have had a tremendous impact on processes of change, including democratization, modernization, neoliberalism and globalization. Drawing from research on a wide range of women's communities, we have elaborated how women have developed unique ''mobilization cultures'' (Johnston 1991) to influence contention in a variety of different political opportunity structures and contexts, demonstrating that women's cultures have been important forces for social change. We have emphasized the diversity of women's mobilizing cultures and the range of different movements – feminist and antifeminist, gender-based and non-gender based, that have drawn on women's cultures as a base of mobilization.

Women form alternative communities as a response to exclusion and domination in the public sphere, but these communities often survive by fostering an oppositional culture and consciousness that promotes and sustains political protest (Taylor 1989). In the past few decades, social movement scholarship has understood the importance of indigenous cultures for the mobilization of broad based movements (Mansbridge and Morris 2001). Morris' (1986) analysis of the civil rights movement emphasizes how the structure of southern black communities and elements of black culture that developed under conditions of oppression shaped the civil rights movement. Similarly, we have argued that women's cultures expressed in women's collectives and communities provide the cultural meanings, practices, identities, and objects to express and critique women's subordinate status. Women's communities, however, have influenced the emergence and dynamics of a range of social movements both in the United States and in other regions of the world, not just gender-based movements (Grey and Sawer 2008). To the extent that gender inequality is one of the few cultural universals, it is not surprising that women have tended to form exclusive communities that give rise to feminist collective identities as a form of protest or subversion of male cultural hegemony, even in the most repressive of regimes (Salime 2011). Such forms of community allow women to produce aesthetic cultural products that call attention to their spheres of responsibility, draw on feminine aesthetics to express emotional commitments, and create new codes and forms of community and identity, in the process promoting change. Women's communities provide a free space where women can put forward new ways of expressing their femininity and power as women (Taylor 1996). Spivak (1990) has referred to this as a form of ''strategic essentialism,'' where subordinate groups embrace their differences and exaggerate their commonalities in order to form the solidarity necessary to challenge their subordination and oppression. Not all women's communities, however, develop strategies that

oppose dominant gender ideas, practices, and identities, and further research is necessary to understand whether and how the interactional dynamics and cultural features of women's communities explain variations in feminist ideology and identification.

For social movements, the fundamental goal is change. We have drawn upon theories of culture and globalization to delineate three ways in which women's mobilizations influence the local, national, and global cultures they seek to influence. While cultures change, with the exception of revolutionary upheaval, they do so very slowly. We conclude by calling for greater attention to the processes of cultural production and cultural influence as they relate to social movements. What goes on in small, bounded groups, such as women's communities, which often become the building blocks of social movements, is critical for understanding the interactional level at which culture is produced. Research is paying increasing attention to the everyday life within women's social movement communities as the locus of cultural production (Reger 2012; Taylor 1996; Whittier 1995). It is within the context of these submerged networks (Melucci 1989) or social movement communities that women engage with the larger male-dominated culture and formulate the critical elements of a women's culture of resistance. The products of these interactions are a social movement's "cultural work." There is much to be learned about the history of the women's movement, its peaks and valleys and its successes and failures, by paying greater attention to women's culture.

Short Biographies

Heather McKee Hurwitz is a Doctoral Candidate in the Department of Sociology at the University of California Santa Barbara where she researches social movements, gender, feminist studies, and global studies. She holds an MA in Sociology from University of California Santa Barbara, an MA in Women and Development Studies from the University of the Philippines Diliman, and a BA in Sociology from George Washington University. Her current research is on social inequalities and feminism in Occupy Wall Street movements, and she has also written about women's movements, Muslim Arab American femininities, sexualities and feminism, and the role of new media in protest policing. She held the George Washington University Dorothy M. and Maurice C. Shapiro Traveling Fellowship in 2001–2002 and recently received an InterGender Research School grant for Transnational Feminisms from Umeå University in Sweden.

Verta Taylor is Professor and Chair of Sociology and affiliated faculty member in Feminist Studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara. She teaches courses on gender and sexuality, feminism, and social movements and has won numerous teaching awards, including the Ohio State University Distinguished Teaching Award, a Multicultural Teaching Award from the Office of Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Student Services, and a University Distinguished Diversity Enhancement Award. Taylor is the author of 15 books and edited volumes and over 100 scholarly articles. Her books include *Rock-a-by Baby: Feminism, Self-Help and Postpartum Depression*, *Drag Queens at the 801 Cabaret,* and *Survival in the Doldrums: The American Women's Rights Movement, 1945 to the 1960s*; and nine editions of *Feminist Frontiers*. Taylor's scholarship has been recognized by numerous awards: *Drag Queens at the 801 Cabaret* received the 2005 Distinguished Book Award from the Sex and Gender Section of the American Sociological Association. In recognition of her lifetime of scholarship on women, Taylor was the 2011 recipient of the American Sociological Association's Jessie Bernard Award, and she has been honored by Sociologists for Women in Society (SWS) with its Mentoring Award and the Feminist Lectureship Award. In 2008, she also received the John D. McCarthy Lifetime Achievement

Award for her scholarship on social movements and the Simon and Gagnon Award for her career of scholarship in sexualities.

Note

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