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**AN EMPIRICAL EXAMINATION OF TWO MODELS
OF CULTURAL CAUSATION***

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The traditional macroscopic model of cultural causation advanced by Weber and modified by Parsons assumes that values provide orientation for human action. Thus, values are conceptualized as the intervening link between culture and behavior and in general, are viewed as predictive of human action. Swidler (1986) contends that values are a poor predictor of behavior. As an alternative model, Swidler asserts that cultures provide actors with a limited array of behavioral options. Because this array is finite and indicative of a particular cultural setting, intracultural behavioral similarities are observable. We empirically test the link between culture and behavior in a situation which Swidler defines as "unsettled lives." Our findings offer little support for the traditionally assumed link between values and behavior. The theoretical implications of our findings are discussed and an expansion of Swidler's model is offered.

INTRODUCTION

The assertion that culture affects human behavior is as close to a truism as exists in sociology. Values, as the theoretical link between culture and behavior, are assumed to be internalized by societal members resulting, for the most part, in actions consistent with cultural prescriptions. However, Swidler (1986), drawing heavily upon the works of Clifford Geertz, contends that the traditional cultural causation model of Weber (1958 [1904-5]) modified by Parsons (1951) is incorrect. Her position is that culture, rather than specifying values and ultimately ends which direct human behavior, provides actors with an array of behavioral options, a tool kit of sorts,

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from which they construct strategies of action (Swidler 1986, p. 277). Because this array is finite and culturally determined, an actor's behavioral choices are limited, resulting in intracultural similarities. Thus, the link between culture and behavior is the availability of options and the way action is organized, not values.

Swidler does argue that within stable social patterns, or "settled lives" (Swidler 1986, p. 280), strategies of action are relatively fixed and actors have the luxury of referring to and relying upon preexisting values when making choices between specific alternatives. However in "unsettled lives," i.e. in periods of cultural transition (Swidler 1986, p. 278) and/or in transitional periods of an individual's life (Swidler 1986, p. 282), these basic strategies of action are in flux and "values are unlikely to be good predictions of action, or indeed of future values" (1986, p. 282).

Using what Swidler defines as persons with "unsettled lives," it is possible to examine the validity of the two opposing models. If the traditional Weber-Parsons model is correct, we would expect a correlation between values and behavior in stable cultural settings. This relationship should exist regardless of the lives of the individuals: simply because the individuals are in transitional situations there is no reason to believe that the basic explanatory link between culture and behavior is temporarily suspended. Their values may change, or be changing, but whatever values they hold should predict behavior.

If Swidler's argument is correct, we would not expect an association between values and behavior in a transitional population. Individuals with "unsettled lives," whether culturally or individually determined, would be in the process of building a repertoire of action strategies, rather than being able to rely upon existing values as a means of choosing between established options.

In order to assess the two models, a population must be identified which conforms to three conditions. First, the individuals in the population must have "unsettled lives." The logic of using individuals in transitional life periods rather than individuals within a transitional culture is twofold. If values were measured in a transitional culture, and no relationship between values and behavior were found, supporters of the Weber-Parsons model could argue that the lack of relationship between values and behavior was a consequence of the values themselves being in flux, i.e., no clear cut values existed or could be identified and thus could not be adequately measured and linked to behavior.

An additional problem is the difficulty of identifying, a priori, a transitional cultural setting, since most periods of cultural transition are identified post hoc. Thus, if an association between values and behavior were found, supporters of the Swidler model could argue that since it is impossible to determine that a particular current cultural situation is transitional, a bonafide period of cultural transition may not have existed.

The second population requirement concerns the measurement of a value or set of values. In order to examine the validity of the two positions, a value or set of values must be identified and the orientation of the members of the

transitional population toward those values must be measurable. Finally, a behavioral variable which would logically be associated with the values measured, must be both identifiable and measurable for individual members of the population.

METHODOLOGY

Measurement of the Independent Variables

The values selected to test the two models of cultural causation are those associated with the Protestant Ethic. Weber's (1958 [1904-5]) argument is all too familiar and complex to be repeated here. It was Weber's contention that due to historical circumstances an ethos arose which produced a new orientation toward "professional activity, no matter in what it consists" (Weber 1958 [1904-5], p. 54) within the "Western world."

As Weber noted (1958 [1904-5], pp. 181-83), as well as others (cf. Roberts 1984, p. 278), the "Protestant Ethic" and "the spirit of capitalism" have become so intermixed that for all practical purposes they cannot be empirically and conceptually separated. Conversely, Greeley (1989, p. 500) found both the Protestant "individualistic" Ethic and the "flip side," the Catholic "communal" ethic, to be "alive and well" although not in their original form. Earlier work by Greeley (1964), using more traditional methods (i.e. achievement), also found differences between Catholics and Protestants. The present paper measures the phenomena which orient an individual toward his/her professional and economic life, or the extent to which the individual has internalized the principles of the "spirit of capitalism" as opposed to a "traditional" (Weber 1958 [1904-5], p. 58-61) economic orientation. For the sake of convenience, however, the label "the Protestant Ethic" will be used.¹

There are certain elements of the Protestant Ethic which consistently appear in the literature. The most frequently mentioned are work (cf. Weber 1958 [1904-5], pp. 60-62, 159; Greeley 1989), money (cf. Weber 1958 [1904-5], pp. 47-52) and idleness (cf. Weber 1958 [1904-5], p. 157). In addition to these topical elements, the Protestant Ethic advocates certain orientations toward these activities. Most frequently mentioned are the use of time devoted to each activity (toward work and the accumulation of wealth and away from idleness) (cf. Franklin 1961 [1748], pp. 304-8; Weber 1958 [1904-5], pp. 53, 157), the sense of duty (to work, accumulate wealth and to minimize idleness) (cf. Weber 1958 [1904-5], pp. 51, 166) and the rationality or calculability (in the advancement of work, the accumulation of wealth and the use of leisure time) (cf. Weber 1958 [1904-5], pp. 64, 180; Collins 1980, pp. 927-28) of the behaviors. Cross-tabulating the three topical elements of the Protestant Ethic (work, wealth and idleness) with the three orientations (time, duty and rationality) results in nine independent indicators of the values associated with the Protestant Ethic, i.e. time devoted to work, time devoted to the accumulation of wealth, etc.²

In constructing the nine indicators, five statements were developed ranging from the most to the least agreement with the Protestant Ethic, with a neutral statement in the middle position. The statements were reproduced on cards and presented in randomized lots of five to each member of a ten student panel. The members of the panel were asked to put the statements in a continuum. Redesign and retesting occurred until 95% agreement or higher was reached on each of the nine items (see Appendix).³

Measurement of the Dependent Variable in an Unsettled Population

The college experience, characteristically a time of great change (cf. Hyman and Wright 1979), comprises one of the more transitional periods in an individual's life and thus college students constitute one of the more generally agreed upon transitional populations (cf. Feldman and Newcomb 1969, pp. 325-38). Speaking of college students, Greeley (1971, p. 363) calls the college experience "part of their psychosocial moratorium, a part of their quest for personal identity." Others call the college experience a period of restlessness (Jameson and Hessler 1971) or a distinct phase of socialization, a process different from adolescence on one side and from full maturity on the other (Parsons and Platt 1973, p. 163). It is precisely for these reasons, in addition to the age and educational bias of college students, that samples from colleges and universities are so scoffed at as subjects of experimental and survey research. However, given the population requirements of the present investigation, a sample of college students are exactly what is needed, in that by definition college students have "unsettled lives" and any uniqueness of the population in terms of education and age should not be a complicating factor for either of the explanatory models. Neither the Weber-Parsons model nor the Swidler position would contend that the respective hypothesized relationships vary with specific segments of the population, i.e. males versus females, young versus old, educated versus uneducated, etc.

Additionally, college students not only comprise an available and easily accessible transitional population, but the central activity of students is work, albeit schoolwork, and the extent to which one is successful at this "job" should be related to the values associated with the Protestant work ethic, if values are predictive of behavior. Motivation to attend college is closely related to the drive toward occupational success (cf. Potter 1971), and the status attainment literature, from Blau and Duncan (1967) forward, has empirically documented the relationship between college attendance and successful occupational performance.

Students may also constitute one of the few, if not the only, unsettled population composed of individuals working at the same task. Since all population members are engaged in similar job-like activities, the necessity of trying to devise multiple, yet comparable, measures of job performance as would have been the case if a different transitional population had been selected, was eliminated.⁴

For a student, at least while in that status, schoolwork constitutes "professional activity," and an operational definition of success in that professional activity is grade point average. Grades represent a formal evaluation of (school) work (Kerbo 1983, pp. 360-61) (cf. Stanfiel 1973; Barger and Hall 1965). Therefore, self-reported grade point average (GPA) is the operationalization of the dependent variable. Although GPA is dependent on other variables such as I.Q. and curriculum, it is reasonable to assume that these attributes are not systematically distributed in such a way as to introduce bias. If the values associated with the Protestant Ethic in fact result in the behavior of working harder at school work, then in easier curricula those who work harder will achieve higher GPAs than those who do not. Likewise in more difficult curricula the same relationship should hold. In short if there is no systematic bias in the distribution of these variables, then the relationship between values and GPA should be evident.

Our sample, therefore, is one of 536 students from two institutions, one, a mid-size (approximately 15,000), state supported university in a mid-size (1980 population of 81,861) metropolitan area and the other, a small (approximately 2,000) 4 year private college in a small town (1980 population of 6,668). The use of students from two different schools not only facilitated representation of a variety of student types (e.g., class background, income differentiations, religion, etc.) but, more importantly, minimized any potential sources, however subtle, of independent variable suppression related to regional or local subcultural systems.⁵

RESULTS

Table 1 presents the results of the correlation analysis between each of the nine indicators and student grade point average. If the Weber-Parsons model is correct, we would expect that each of the value indicators would bear a significant and positive association with student success. If Swidler is correct, we would expect no relationship between each of the indicators and grade point average.

Of the nine indicator-dependent variable simple correlations, only two are significant. The correlation between duty to work and grade point average ($r=.136$) is in support of the Weber-Parsons position; i.e., the greater a student's sense of work obligation the higher their grade point average, although this indicator explains little of the variance in grade point average (1.8%). The second significant predictor, work rationality ($r=-.083$), is inversely related to grade point average and thus is not supportive of either of the two explanatory models.

Table 1. Protestant Ethic Values by GPA

	Zero Order --	GPA Controlling for:						
		AGE	RACE	SEX	PAED	MAED	NPROT	NCATH
Work T	.068	.068	.057	.061	.064	.065	.071	.068
Work R	-.083*	-.082	-.077*	-.084*	-.084*	-.081*	-.085*	-.084
Work D	.036***	.134***	.132**	.125**	.129**	.137***	.137***	.136***
Money T	-.066-	.062	-.059	-.059	-.062	-.064	-.066	-.066
Money R	-.002	.002	.003	-.001	-.002	.001	.001	-.002
Money D	-.038	-.031	-.044	-.042	-.036	-.039	-.039	-.038
Fun T	-.045	-.039	-.022	-.035	-.039	-.039	-.045	-.045
Fun R	-.062	-.061	-.058	-.061	-.066	-.066	-.063	-.062
Fun D	-.023	-.022	-.015	-.004	-.019	-.024	-.025	-.023

*.05
 **.01
 ***.001
 N=500

Table 2. Correlation Matrix of Protestant Ethic Values

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
WORK									
Time (1)	1.00								
Duty (2)	.271***	1.00							
Rat. (3)	.028	-.054	1.00						
MONEY									
Time (4)	.021	-.016	.071	1.00					
Duty (5)	.103**	.074*	.113**	.162***	1.00				
Rat. (6)	-.006	.060	-.025	.095	.157***	1.00			
IDLENESS									
Time (7)	.090*	-.005	.166***	.097*	.115**	.005	1.00		
Duty (8)	.065	-.041	.057	.103	.023	.028	.229***	1.00	
Rat. (9)	.030	.003	.194***	.090	.032	.038	.184***	.101*	1.00

*.05
 **.01
 ***.001
 N=500

Seven of the nine independent-dependent variable associations are insignificant, lending greater support to the Swidler position that, in "unsettled lives," values are relatively poor predictors of behavior. However, it could be argued that the college environment constitutes a sub-cultural system, where sub-cultural values override societal ones, such as those associated with the Protestant Ethic. If this were the case, the longer one was in college, the weaker the relationship should be between any one Protestant Ethic indicator and grade point average. Since age constitutes a measure of time in the college environment (89.1% of the sample were between the ages of 18 and 23), it was used as a control variable. The resulting partial correlations do not significantly alter the strength or direction of the zero-order coefficients (see Table 1).

Other standard controls, including race, sex, father's education and mother's education (SES), yielded similarly insignificant results, with the exception of the work-duty and work-rationality-GPA relationships which remain significant. Number of Protestant parents and number of Catholic parents were also used as control variables given the often hypothesized association between religion and the Protestant Ethic. Regardless of what controls were used, or what combination of higher order controls, the relationship between seven of the nine Protestant Ethic indicators and student grade point average remain insignificant, and those which are statistically significant account for little dependent variance.

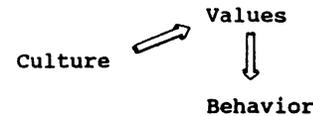
A second finding concerns the relationship of values concerning work, money and leisure to one another. Table 2 presents the inter-item correlation matrix for the nine measures of values associated with the Protestant Ethic. While several of the inter-item correlations are significant, the strongest independent variable association, that between work-duty and work-time ($r = .27$) yields less than 8% common variance, and the majority of the items are unrelated to one another. Given the blatancy of the items (see footnote 2 and Appendix) we can only conclude that while Swidler (1986, p. 282) contends that values are a poor predictor of future values in an unsettled population, values may indeed be poor predictors of other current values, even when they appear to be logically related (see Discussion below, Figure 1, C).

DISCUSSION

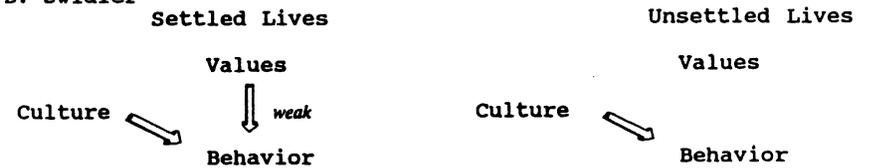
The traditional Weber-Parsons model of cultural causation assumes that the link between culture and behavior is dependent upon "values;" i.e., values act as intervening variables between culture and behavior (see Figure 1, A). Culture, by specifying values which are then internalized, defines ends toward which human behavior is oriented therefore determining behavior. Because values are culturally determined, intracultural similarities in behavior can be empirically documented and behavioral variations are often explained by differences in value orientations (cf. Parsons 1951, pp. 36-45).

Figure 1. Models of Cultural Causation

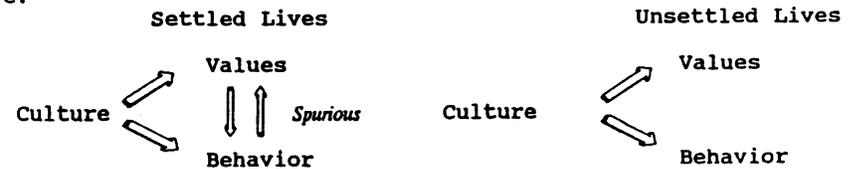
A. Weber/Parsons



B. Swidler



C.



D.



Swidler (1986) argues that a more conceptually accurate and useful model of cultural causation conceives of culture as a finite array of behavior options, a tool kit so to speak, from which individuals choose "strategies of action" within the limits of culturally defined alternatives. In presenting "two models of cultural influence" (1986, p. 278), she uses the concepts of "settled" and "unsettled" lives (see Figure 1, B).

In unsettled lives, where individuals are actively constructing strategies of action, values are poor predictors of behavior. However, in settled lives where strategies of action have already stabilized, individuals may depend upon values in choosing between limited alternatives. It is this relationship which is responsible for the oft noted correlation between values and behavior (cf. Rokeach 1973).

It is reasonable to assume that Swidler's two models represent extremes of a continuum. That is, the greater the extent to which lives are settled, the stronger the relationship between values and behavior. Conversely, the less lives are settled, the lower the correlations between values and behavior.

Using Swidler's concept of "settled lives," it is not possible to compare the Weber-Parsons model with the one she presents (at least with cross-sectional data) in that a positive relationship between values and behavior would be expected in either case. Therefore, the present research used a sample of respondents toward the "unsettled" end of the continuum (college students) in order to assess the two conflicting positions. Our findings tend to support Swidler. We find virtually no relationship between the values associated with the Protestant Ethic and performance in the most measurable of student endeavors, grade point average.

Swidler's presentation, however, probably because of the tendency to overstate positions which conflict with the prevailing ones, not only minimizes the role of values in cultural causation but largely ignores the question of how they arise. We believe that Swidler's insightful conceptualizations can be extended in either of two ways, both of which place greater emphasis on the importance of values and their relationship to behavior.

First, given our findings concerning the lack of intra-item correlations, if culture can be viewed as offering a finite array of behavioral options from which individuals create strategies of action, it makes equal sense to view culture as offering a finite array of value options from which individuals construct value sets. Since the same entity (culture) is causally linked to strategies of action and value sets, we would expect at least some correlation between values and behavior, although the relationship would be spurious. In unsettled lives where neither strategies of actions or value sets are fixed, there would be little or no correlation, either between values and behavior or between values and other values, which our data supports. In settled lives, however, where both strategies of action and value sets are stable, the correlation would increase (see Figure 1, C). This model can be empirically examined. If the often observed correlation between values and behavior is a

spurious one, accounted for by each variable's relationship with culture, then the correlation between values and behavior could not be greater than either the correlation between culture and values, or the correlation between culture and behavior.

Second, while empirical attempts to link values and behavior have often resulted in statistical support, the direction of causality has always been assumed. A more fruitful conceptualization may well be to reverse the direction of causality. Thus, as strategies of action emerge in response to concrete behavioral situations, and assuming again that culture offers a limited array of value options, individuals choose value sets which correspond with, and justify their strategies of action (see Figure 1, D). In unsettled lives, since strategies of action are in flux, value sets are correspondingly undetermined, accounting for the lack of correlation between values and behavior. Although the suggestion that behavior largely determines values, rather than the reverse, is in direct opposition to macroscopic sociological tradition, there is empirical support for this position (cf. Festinger 1957).

In settled lives, there are undoubtedly situations or categories of situations where each of the hypothesized relationships are accurate. A devoutly religious individual, when faced with the opportunity to steal may opt not to, because of religious beliefs. Thus values influence behavior. A ghetto youth presented with the same opportunity to steal does so on impulse and over time develops a value system which justifies this action. Thus behavior influences values. Finally, a member of a small tribal culture may believe theft to be wrong, and have no opportunity to steal since the scarcity of private property and public knowledge concerning ownership make theft a relatively unavailable action strategy. In this case, the correlation between value and behavior would be a spurious one.

Swidler has made a substantial theoretical contribution by defining under what circumstances values are, or are not, linked to behavior and challenges sociologists to search for new analytical perspectives within the presented framework (Swidler 1986, p. 287). We offer an additional challenge to expand Swidler's typology to include those situations where the relationship between values and behavior is spurious or, alternatively, to include circumstances under which behavior determines values.

ENDNOTES

1. The authors of this study fully realize the limitations of any scale that attempts to interpret or measure a concept as complex and multi-faceted as the Protestant Ethic. As Greeley (1989, p. 501) has noted, the very scholarship that previously defined the Protestant Ethic has itself changed and come to recognize that visions such as these are "far more complex, uneven, multidimensional, and multi-directional than appeared a hundred years ago."

2. While previous research has attempted measurement of the phenomenon under investigation these have generally been from the perspective of the work ethic as a personality variable (cf. Mirels and Garret 1971) or have involved attempts to link aspects of the work ethic to current religious affiliations (cf. Lenski 1963).
3. By setting our intra-item agreement at 95% we realized post hoc that this resulted in a decrease in variance on the independent variable. Our extreme statements had to be exaggerated in order to reach this level of agreement: for all practical purposes we were reduced to a three response item (collapsing the extreme statements made no difference in the results). Thus the researcher utilizing this technique is faced with an accuracy versus variance dilemma. In retrospect, a lower level of agreement might have been better. If we erred it was on the side of accuracy.
4. Although perhaps preferable, the lack of a comparative "settled" population does not invalidate the results or conclusions of the present investigation. Only respondents with clearly "unsettled lives" could be used to assess the two models, in that in "settled lives" the hypothesis for the two models would be the same. Additionally, there is no comparable "settled" sample where the same measure of the dependent variable could be used and the traditional measures of success (income, education, occupational prestige, etc.) were inappropriate for the present sample.
5. The use of two samples also allowed examination of the possibility that one of the settings was in a greater period of cultural transition than the other by permitting a comparison of value indicator means between samples. Respondents from the two samples did not significantly differ either in their rates of the Protestant Ethic values, grade point averages or the relationship between the two.

APPENDIX

Work Time:

Circle the letter of the statement you MOST agree with.

- a. People who do not spend most of their time working are wasting time.
- b. People should spend more time working than doing other things.
- c. People should try to balance their lives between work and other things.
- d. People should only spend as much time working as they have to.
- e. People who don't have to work are foolish if they spend any time working.

Work Duty:

Circle the letter of the statement you MOST agree with.

- a. People should work even if they don't need the money.
- b. People probably should work even if they don't need the money.
- c. People perhaps should work even if they don't need the money.
- d. People probably should not work if they don't need the money.
- e. People should not work if they don't need the money.

Work Rationality:

Circle the letter of the statement you MOST agree with.

- a. The only way to get ahead in this world is to carefully plan out what to do to be successful.
- b. Some people get ahead because of luck but most success is carefully planned.
- c. Success is a mixture of careful planning and luck.
- d. Planning to get ahead may help but success is usually a matter of luck.
- e. There is no sense in planning to get ahead in this world--it's all a matter of luck.

Money Time:

Circle the letter of the statement you MOST agree with.

- a. People should spend as much time as possible thinking about what to do with their money.
- b. People should spend a considerable amount of time thinking about what to do with their money.
- c. People should spend some time thinking about what to do with their money.
- d. People should not spend too much time thinking about what to do with their money.
- e. People should spend as little time as possible thinking about what to do with their money.

Money Duty:

Circle the letter of the statement you MOST agree with.

- a. People should save as much money as possible even if it means going without things they want.
- b. People should probably save some money even if it means going without things they want.
- c. People should probably save some money.
- d. People should buy what they want and save only if there is money leftover.
- e. Saving money is useless--you might as well spend it.

Money Rationality:

Circle the letter of the statement you MOST agree with.

- a. People should always consult a financial advisor when investing money and follow their advice.

- b. People should consult a financial advisor when investing money but use their own judgment as to whether or not to follow their advice.
- c. Whether or not a person should consult a financial advisor when investing depends on the individual.
- d. People should follow their own "hunch" when investing money although checking it out with a financial advisor might be a good idea.
- e. Financial advisors are a waste of time--people should invest money on the basis of their own "hunches."

Idleness Time:

Circle the letter of the statement you MOST agree with.

- a. People should practically never spend time just goofing off and having fun.
- b. Once in a while people should spend time just goofing off and having fun.
- c. Sometimes people should just goof off and have fun.
- d. Fairly often people should spend time just goofing off and having fun.
- e. People should very often spend time just goofing off and having fun.

Idleness Duty:

Circle the letter of the statement you MOST agree with.

- a. People do not owe it to themselves to have fun if it stands in the way of other obligations.
- b. People probably do not owe it to themselves to have fun if it stands in the way of other obligations.
- c. People may owe it to themselves to have fun even if it stands in the way of other obligations.
- d. People probably do owe it to themselves to have fun even if it stands in the way of other obligations.
- e. People do owe it to themselves to have fun even if it stands in the way of other obligations.

Idleness Rationality:

Circle the letter of the statement you MOST agree with.

- a. To have fun, people need to carefully plan what they are going to do.
- b. Good times are usually planned although sometimes they just happen.
- c. A little planning and a little spontaneity results in the most fun.
- d. Planning may help but usually good times just happen.
- e. People have the most fun when it is unplanned--it just happens.

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