There is no one right way to perform a cultural analysis of interviews and other discourse. What you choose to look at depends on your research questions. My research questions have been, “What political-economic ideologies and cultural understandings are powerful for people in the United States?” and “How do people internalize public culture, especially conflicting sets of cultural messages?” I have used a mixture of methods—some already existing, others that I made up—to answer these questions.

There are at least three different ways in which ideologies and cultural understandings have power over thought and expression. This chapter considers each of these in turn. The sections devoted to each topic can be read separately if only one or two of them are of interest.

First, ideas can become powerful by being so deeply internalized that people are hardly aware they hold these beliefs and do not consider any alternatives. This is the nature of the shared, taken-for-granted assumptions that are at the core of what is meant by “culture.” More recently, conceptualized as holistic mental schemas, these taken-for-granted understandings (of everything from what kinds of supernatural beings there are to assumptions about what makes a good meal) have been called cultural models (Holland and Quinn 1987, D’Andrade and Strauss 1992). Currently some theorists refer to such assumptions as “cultural imaginaries.” The first section of this chapter (pp. xx–xx) discusses briefly how to find these implicit assumptions, then focuses on the personal meanings of shared schemas for individuals and social subgroups, for example, class differences in the connotations and emotional significance of cultural models.

Second, public ideas can have power as articulated ideologies, or social discourses. Unlike cultural models, social discourses have been made explicit—extensively by ideologists and at least in fragmentary form by people who have absorbed those ideas—amid general awareness of competing belief systems. The second section of this chapter (pp. xx–xx) first explains how to find traces of social discourses in people’s talk, then looks at different ways in which individuals might internalize and express multiple, conflicting social discourses.

Finally, public ideas can have power if they are seen as the common opinion. The power of public opinion may lead people who hold beliefs at
variance with it to utter their views defensively or censor them in public settings. The last section of this chapter explains how people signal (deliberately or unconsciously) what they take to be the cultural standing of their views, that is, the degree to which their views are socially accepted. It is important in our cultural descriptions to be mindful of the difference between views that are widely accepted from ones that are more controversial. Performing a cultural standing analysis alerts us to these differences.

These topics rely on a certain view of culture, in which in addition to shared, unifying understandings there is also interesting intracultural variation in people's perspectives (section 1), people are exposed to multiple discourses (section 2), and there is variation in the acceptability of competing views (section 3) (Bourdieu 1977, Williams 1977, Strauss and Quinn 1997).

Most of the examples that follow come from in-depth, semistructured interviews I conducted in 1995 about the welfare system (i.e., the system of government cash assistance to qualifying low-income individuals and families) with 16 Rhode Islanders chosen from a larger, randomly sampled group who had participated in a telephone survey I conducted on this topic. These men and women were chosen for diversity in their class (from struggling single mothers to comfortable professionals and a near-millionaire), race, and ethnicity, as well as diversity of attitudes about the welfare system (from former recipients to fierce detractors). I met with each interviewee twice (the first time was usually in a public location they chose, the second time in their home) for two lengthy (each approximately an hour and a half) interviews. The first interview focused on their attitudes about the welfare system including any experiences they had had with it, as well as related topics such as gender roles, race relations, immigration, government programs, and the state of the economy. In the second interview I asked for a life history. Interviewees were free to propose additional topics, and I followed their lead. Some additional examples below will come from in-depth interviews I conducted in 1984, 1985 and 1990 in Rhode Island (broadly on the topic of the free enterprise system), a Thanksgiving dinner group conversation about the first Iraq war, and some printed texts. Most of the methods described here can be applied to different kinds of discourse; they are not limited in their application to talk from interviews, although that method of collecting discourse is preferable for answering certain research questions, such as what are the individual meanings of cultural models.

Section 1. Cultural Models

A. Finding Shared Cultural Assumptions

What is tricky about finding shared cultural assumptions in talk is that ordinarily these deep assumptions are left unsaid. Unless the interviewer

1 There were also four North Carolina interviewees in that project. Those interviews will not be analyzed here.
has asked the sorts of questions that require speakers to make their assumptions explicit, the analyst will need to figure out, on the basis of what people do say, what basic assumptions they are leaving implicit. I encourage you to read the chapters in this volume by Quinn and D’Andrade, which are devoted to methods for uncovering cultural models. Here, briefly, are some possible ways to go about this task.

_Keyword analysis_

Cultural keywords should show up repeatedly and express important meanings. A keyword isn’t just any old repeated word. Articles, prepositions, conjunctions, and so on, will rarely express important meanings; a cultural keyword is likely to be a noun, verb, adjective, or adverb. Furthermore, it should be a word that has some expressive importance. In a printed text such as an advertisement, it might be in a different color or font; in speech it might be given a slight stress. Whether stressed or unstressed, however, you will notice that it conveys something important for the speaker. Assemble all the mentions of your keyword. What meanings are implicit in the way the term is used? For example, I found that _work_ was a keyword in my interviews with Americans about the welfare system. Here are four examples, out of many more I could have given, of the way in which _work_ arose in connection with the topic of welfare (boldface is used to highlight part of the text for the analysis; _italics_ indicate stress in the original, and all names of interviewees are pseudonyms):

1. I mean, everybody’s always talking about how there’s no jobs out there. There are no jobs out there. Okay, fine, there are not jobs out there. But I mean to go into a McDonalds and start working. I don’t see a problem with that. I mean, it is, it is some type of work. [Peter Vieira]
2. Like you’ll have some poverty-stricken woman, all she knows how to do is have kids. One after another. You know, like constantly having children. And, she’s never been educated into the fact that she should get off her butt and go to work. [Carol Russo]
3. I think I let, uh, with things like welfare, um, to me it’s...it’s a hard thing to justify. You know in terms of, you know, the whole capitalist, you know you work hard and I am a Midwesterner and I was raised with this very strong work ethic. [Linda Fuller]

2 Or perhaps an interjection. According to a recent description of the culture of West Point military academy, the word _huah_, frequently used as both adjective and interjection, “is the romantic warrior code...put into verbal form” (Brooks 2003, review of David Lipsky, _Absolutely American_).

3 _Additional transcription conventions:_ Three dots indicate untimed pause, uncertain transcriptions are placed in parentheses with a question mark (uncertain transcription?), inaudible words are indicated with empty parentheses ( ), italicized material in brackets is added to help interpret the text, and nonitalicized material in brackets are the interviewer’s backchannel signals. Where it is not relevant to the analysis I have deleted repeated words.

4 This quote came from a 1984 interview, the main topic of which was the free enterprise system. Russo frequently brought up the topic of welfare on her own.
4. [CS had asked what should be done to change the welfare system.] I think people, getting people to work whether it’s through volunteering or I mean, doing some sort of, I think, community service. Part of what the school [where she volunteers] does with the children is that these kids do about 40 hours of community service every year, every kid. That’s just part of going to school there. I see that this instills some, a sense of responsibility and also a reward. I think that’s the good thing about work . . . [Linda Fuller]

I would say that work is a cultural keyword in discussions of the welfare system because it was used repeatedly when my interviewees discussed welfare and it seemed to be invested with strong values for them. What does work mean for my interviewees? The word seems to be used in two senses. In passages 1 and 2 it means paid employment. Passage 3, however, is ambiguous (a work ethic can be applied to any task, not just paid employment) and in passage 4, Fuller talks about volunteer service as work. There she seems to be using the word to mean any kind of productive effort, paid or unpaid, as long as it involves regular responsibilities. These different understandings about what work denotes are part of the cultural model of work and can be inferred from the way the word is used.

The cultural model of work, however, goes beyond denotations to include connotations of the term. These can be determined from the other words and ideas that are regularly associated with the keyword. In the above passages there is “get off her butt and go to work” (2), a close association between capitalism and “hard work” (3), between work and responsibility (4), and the term work ethic. Out of the various elements of passages 1–4, I focus on these associations with work because they come up repeatedly when Americans talk about work and welfare (in other contexts, work may have other connotations). These close associations with work (work is linked to capitalism, responsibility, it involves principles to live by [“work ethic”], work collocates closely with hard, putting an emphasis on effort, and is opposed to sitting around) are all part of a widely shared American cultural model of work. The cultural model of work . . .

---

5 Later in the same passage, Linda said that her mother considered her housework to be her job, so work does not have to be outside the domestic sphere, but it usually does mean that. Notice the way Russo says, “go to work” and Fuller says “getting people to work.” This implies that work requires going out of the house, which is why asking married women “if they work outside the home,” which acknowledges that housework is productive labor too, has never really caught on.

6 This, of course, is using denotation and connotation not in the logician’s sense as synonymous with extension and intension but in the common usage as “the meaning or signification of a term” versus “that which is implied in a word in addition to its essential or primary meaning” (Oxford English Dictionary).

7 By contrast, among my Rhode Island interviewees, a connection between being a midwesterner and having a work ethic did not come up repeatedly, so I did not include that in my American cultural model of work. However, if I found that connection in a wider sample of Americans’ discourse, then I would add it.
work, as well, includes understandings about its importance. Notice the way the Vieira and Russo take it as not needing any further explanation that putting people to work is the best approach, while Fuller stresses hard work as a strong value. A fuller cultural models analysis would show, I think, that work is a sacred obligation in the United States (Mead 1986, Teles 1998; see also D’Andrade, this volume) and that in the United States the working person (prototypically, a working man), rather than a stay-at-home mother, wise elder, or salvation seeker, is the model of the ideal person. (See Yamada 1997 for a comparison with Japan.)

Cultural models without keywords

One way in which cultural models analysis differs from earlier methods in cognitive anthropology is that it is not as closely tied to lexical semantics, that is, word meanings (as Quinn explains in her chapter in this volume). There are a great many cultural assumptions that are not neatly tied up in word meanings. For example, in connection with welfare I have investigated ethnopsychologies, that is, folk psychological assumptions about human behavior. (Why do people do what they do? Do people have free will?) To uncover ethnopsychologies I started with the way people explained behavior, especially problematic behavior because that is more likely to require explanation, and then asked myself, “What assumptions about human psychology does this statement reflect?” Here are the ways two interviewees explained people’s decisions to go on welfare. What psychological assumptions do they reveal?

5. And maybe if they were educated in a different manner, they would realize that it’s a good idea to get the heck off your behind and go to work. But if they’re brought up in an environment—but I don’t know the answer. Because I know, like, um, if they’re brought up in an environment where they see everybody sitting around smoking cigarettes or whatever [deletion]. You know, sitting around and the check comes and good, we eat this week and stuff like that. And so-and-so drinks. But, what would be a better environment? [Carol Russo]

6. Many people feel if they’re unskilled and they can only earn $6 or $5 an hour, whatever the minimum wage is, they’re better off going on welfare. And there again, the system encourages people to go on welfare because . . . the minimum wage is so low that . . . by having a minimum wage what it is, that encourages people to go on welfare. [Tommy Marino]

I would say passage 5 expresses the ethnopsychological assumption that people follow the role models provided in their environment, especially ones they saw when they were growing up. It is almost as if people are completely the product of their environment, without free will. Passage 6, by contrast, expresses a different psychological understanding: a rational choice model in which individuals make decisions, but decisions that are
highly influenced by incentives (particularly, economic incentives) provided by others. Ethnopsychologies are implicit in other sorts of discourse. For example, I have found a variety of assumptions about what motivated the Columbine shooters in public discourses on that topic (Strauss n.d.).

Here are some other ways to uncover taken-for-granted assumptions. When a speaker gives evidence to support a position, they assume that this kind of evidence can be trusted. When they discuss one topic in connection with another, without any explanation for the connection, they take for granted the cultural models that explain the connection. When speakers describe an object or sequence of events, they omit details, they assume they do not need to explain. When they tell a story, it always has a point: the narrative evaluation, in sociolinguists’ terms. The narrative evaluation reflects cultural assumptions about what is funny, shocking, embarrassing, and so on. (See chapter by Mathews, this volume.) In general, you could take what your interviewees say and consider what else they have to assume for those statements to make sense. It helps to keep in mind some alternative ways of thinking about the topic that one might find to put your interviewees’ ideas into perspective. If you are analyzing cultural models from outside your culture or subculture, your sense of alternatives will be provided by the contrast between your cultural models and your interviewees’. If you are interviewing people whose cultural models you share, awareness of cross-cultural and intracultural variation will keep you alert to possible variation in schemas.

B. Personal Meanings of Shared Assumptions

In the last section I explained how to find shared meanings, such as the shared meaning of work for my interviewees. These are meanings they hold regardless of their own work experiences. But each person’s experiences will shape their personal interpretive framework, or, as I have called it, their personal semantic network (PSN). Studying PSNs can reveal subcultural differences. PSN analysis also sheds light on how important a schema is for someone, given their identity and motivating concerns. (Warning: It takes lengthy examples to demonstrate PSN analysis. If this topic does not interest you, skip to p. xx.)

To figure out PSNs I begin with a simple assumption, which I will call the assumption of contiguity: If topic B follows topic A when a speaker is allowed to talk without interruption, then A and B are linked in that person’s PSN. Therefore, the first step in tracing someone’s PSN is looking at what else they talk about in connection with the topic in question.

---

8 As Teun van Dijk has pointed out to me (personal communication, August 2004), the term personal semantic network is confusing if one believes in distinct semantic and episodic memory systems, with semantic networks in the former and personal memories in the latter. I follow psychologists who question that distinction (e.g., as summarized in Baddeley 1999:516).
Temporal contiguity or lack of contiguity (mentioning B after A, or not mentioning B after A) does not necessarily indicate the presence or absence of a strong cognitive connection, however. Maybe the speaker never had a chance to bring up B even though it came to mind. Or maybe something about the context brought B to mind this time, even though there is not a strong link between A and B in the speaker’s PSN. Thus, in addition to tracing associative links, it is also helpful to see whether A and B are discussed in the same voice. The concept of voice is tricky. It does not mean just tone of voice. I take “voice” from Bakhtin (1981), who uses it to mean the characteristic verbal expression of a personality and point of view. For example, we recognize when someone is going into the voice of a jokester, a moral crusader, an academic, or a therapist. It is not only their tone of voice that changes, but also their vocabulary and sentence structures. While a given person will usually have certain favorite expressions that are always typical of their voice, most people switch voices, depending on the context. A voice can be delineated by keywords, phrases, metaphorical imagery, sentence structures, and emotional tone. It may have characteristic prosodic and paralinguistic qualities as well. (See Hill 1995 for further discussion of voice.) If someone uses the same voice to talk about A and B, this suggests that A and B are closely connected in their PSN.

Contiguity and/or use of the same voice show what cognitive representations are closely connected in someone’s PSN. Sometimes you want to know everything someone associates with a keyword or concept, but usually the interesting question is how the topic in question relates to what is important for a speaker. How do you find that? After collecting passages surrounding a word or concept to see what other ideas are connected to it, I then look at three things: (1) strong versus weak associations (strongly associated ideas are mentioned repeatedly and usually without prompting from the interviewer); (2) self-relevant versus non-self-relevant associations (self-relevant associations are tied to the person’s self-image); and (3) associations with emotional and motivational hot spots (ideas connected to hot spots are expressed with strong emotions, trigger powerful memories, and are often associated with nonroutine goals speakers have pursued).

Let us take as examples the personal semantic networks that surround the keyword work in relation to welfare for two of my interviewees, Peter Vieira and Carol Russo. If you look only at passages 1 and 2, it would appear that Vieira and Russo use work in the same way, but analysis of their larger PSNs shows that this shared symbol is associated with very different outlooks and concerns. Vieira is a Portuguese American whose family emigrated from the Azores when he was young. At the time I conducted the interviews, he was in his early 30s, unmarried and with no children. Russo is a third-generation Italian American. I met Carol for six interviews when she was in her mid-40s, and I returned for three more interviews shortly after she turned 50. She was married and the mother of two teenagers. Vieira and Russo have similar working-class backgrounds, with parents who did exhausting factory work. While neither was particularly
well off at the time I conducted the interviews, their futures looked different. 
Carol and her husband (an unskilled laborer who was unemployed the first time I met her) owned their own home but money was tight and the future did not hold much promise of change. Peter, on the other hand, was an unskilled laborer who was unemployed the first time I met her) owned their own home but money was tight and the future did not hold much promise of change. Peter, on the other hand, was a management trainee in a discount store chain, hopeful that he would be a store manager someday soon. These similarities and differences in their life experiences—as well as other important factors I reveal later—affected the meaning of work for each of them. The differences were significant, leading them to favor quite different welfare policies.

The first step in this analysis is to find every place where a speaker uses the keyword or discusses the concept in question. Here are all of the places where Vieira talked about work and welfare. To keep this collection of quotes manageable, initially I just present passages in which Vieira or Russo talk about both welfare and work. There are other passages in which they talk about work outside the context of welfare, some of which will be introduced later. Passage 7 includes Passage 1 from above.

7. I mean, everybody's always talking about how there's no jobs out there. There are no jobs out there. Okay, fine, there are not jobs out there. But I mean to go into a McDonalds and start working, I don't see a problem with that. I mean, it is, it is some type of work. You're doing something, you're making some kind of money. Grant you it might not be enough money for you to live on, and at that point, yes, your assistance would still be provided. But at least you're there. And then from there after you have this job or whatever, there should be some way of finding out, well do you want to get into the restaurant business? You know, do you want to do this?

8. I really don't understand welfare. I don't know what it's for, first of all, I never used it. Never even been unemployed, you know. I've been fortunate enough where you know, the main thing that's been instilled to me is that if you don't have work, basically your worth actually as a person would, you would think less of yourself, I think. I've got a job. I've always had a job. I cannot see myself being unemployed, just lounging around. You go out of your head that way.

9. I mean you have people out there just making kids, just to get more money, and you hear about that all the time. And I, all right, I grant you, I can understand like a teenager, let's say a teenager gets pregnant. She needs assistance. Fine. If the family's not there, fine. Let's give them the assistance. If the family—if she's living at home and she wants to go back to school and she does have a child at home and someone is taking care of the child, a parent or something like that, I can see giving them a minimum amount of money, just to help her out, so she doesn't have to go out and work full time and not go to school and not finish the school. You know, go to school, have a part-time job, at least show that you are in the workforce, doing something to earn some money. Because you got to understand that, you know, it does teach you lessons throughout your life. If you have a job, you know, as to what you

One issue is how much of the surrounding passage to include. I have included the lines preceding and following the keyword that are on the same topic.
don’t want to end up with. And I grant you, all right, let’s say she’s 16 years old. She’s at home with her parents, she does have a child. She is collecting a little bit of money. But she should be out also, working at McDonald’s, let’s say, three nights a week. Just so she knows, if she doesn’t finish off her education and everything else—this is all you’ll end up with, you know.

10. But after that point, I mean she’s got to find something to do, right? She wants to be with her child, fine. The childcare program that she puts the child into, to see if there’s any work available there. She could, not only, take care of her own child, but maybe assist in taking care of some other children. And that would be a way for her to find out whether or not she wants to get into the childcare, you know, business. I mean, you never know.

11. Other than that, it goes back to where, let’s say he’s working at McDonald’s for a year and I mean, he’s not really making that much in money, I think somewhere along the line, someone should step in and say, “Well look here we want you to continue working here, but we also want you to take these night courses here to give you the skills you need to get a better job.” I mean, at that point, at least the guy will be working. He’s learning a trade, and somewhere along the line he’s going to benefit himself. But not only himself, his child and his wife, or the mother of his child, however he decides to see, how he wants to do it. But I mean, I think that’s a big problem where teenage pregnancies and I mean these teenagers think they can go out and make it on their own. And they’re going to provide for their children and all this and then this is where they fall flat.

12. Everything should be geared to stepping them up, you know, into the right direction. Let’s say there’s a mother and a child in low-income housing. Well what is this mother doing, you know, to improve herself? I mean, just working and providing for her child is a job in itself, but no, where does she see herself, let’s say five years down the road? Does she still want to be in the low-income housing, getting assistance? You know, I mean, that that just makes them want to be more dependent on what they’re getting. I think something should be done . . . if you’re going to move into low-income housing, I think it should be done, whereas, you know you’ve got a contract with the government. You know, five-year term. There should be some type of term there. Five-year term. This is what you’ve got to do within the first year. The first year, I think should be like a grace period. The second year, they should be made to do something. Get the skills that they need, you know. Go to school, do something. But to show some type of improvement before those five years are up. Once those five years are up, I would think she would be already set to move on and move forth. I mean, the American Dream is to own your own home. You know, and be self-sufficient, not self-sufficient, but to have a job and know that you’re secure there in your house. What’s the government doing about that, you know?

13. [CS asked if immigrants should get welfare] See, I’m an immigrant. I came, well I came over to the country when I was six years old. And I mean the most important thing that was instilled to me by my parents was to have a job. I mean, that’s the first thing that they do. I mean, if
they’re from the old country, and they get here. The first thing they’re going to do, see, it might be a mistake, then again it might not, but they do have a tendency of pulling their kids out of school and putting them into the workforce before they finish school. Is it right? Is it wrong? I don’t know. I mean, I’m not going to answer that part of it, ’cause I really don’t know if it’s right or wrong. Personally I think it would be wrong, but they instilled values of the old country that your work is what makes who you are. And I believe that, I really do. I mean without a job . . . I can’t imagine being without a job, first of all. But I do know people who are out of jobs and you can tell that their self-esteem is very low about themselves when they’re, when they don’t have something. And that’s the one thing that’s always instilled upon me, from my background, is that, you know, your job is what really, what makes you who you are.

All associations
Without making any initial judgments about what is important to Peter Vieira, let us look at what keywords, phrases, and topics he mentions when he is talking about welfare and work, taking the points he makes in order. We see that work is “doing something” (7, 9), earning money (7, 9), finding out what you want to do in the future, teaching lessons about what you might not want to do in the future, and imparting skills that will be useful in the future (7, 9, 10, 11). Work has to do with your “worth as a person” or what you think your worth is, your self-esteem, and makes you “who you are” (8, 13). He can’t imagine not working (8, 13), and work keeps you sane (8). People sometimes have kids just to get welfare (9). Work can interfere with going to school (9, 13), and having a job was stressed by his immigrant parents, more than an education (13). Every job is valuable, even one at McDonalds, but some jobs have better earnings and future potential than others. To help low-wage workers the government should provide income supplements and any education or training they need to move into a better job eventually (“five years down the road”, 12; see also 7, 9, 11).

Strong associations
The points that are repeated most often are that work is important for finding out what you want to do in the future, teaching lessons about what you might not want to do in the future, and imparting skills that will be useful in the future (7, 9, 10, 11), and that people should get the income assistance and any education or training they need to get a better job eventually (7, 9, 11, and 12). None of these points was stated or implied in my questions or comments. In other words, for Peter Vieira work is strongly associated with economic mobility, making a better life for oneself and one’s family.

This is very suggestive. But mere frequency of mentions is not an infallible indicator of what is important to interviewees, because in semistructured interviews the particular topics discussed are not rigidly standardized. Furthermore, even if all the questions were exactly the same from one interviewee to the next, the number of times someone talked about something
could be influenced by the interviewer’s subtle forms of encouragement (acting interested at some points, not at others). So we also need to examine interviewees’ self-images and emotion-laden memories to see what is important to them.

Self-image

Peter Vieira says in the passages quoted above that having a job is central to his identity. The kind of job is not important: His identity does not rest in a particular profession, but rather in holding some job (see passages 8 and 13).

Vieira’s identity as a worker was also the point of many of his life stories. A person’s self-image—at least, the identity they chose to emphasize at a given moment—is revealed in the stories they tell about themselves. (See also Luttrel’s chapter in this volume.) Vieira happily detailed his complete work history, going back to his first job of sweeping the parking lot of the fast food store near his house. The point of this was how important work has been to him, as it was to his parents. He said that as soon as he quit school and started working full time, his curfew was lifted and he was treated as an adult. He also recounted a recent disastrous experience in which he had lost money on a tenement he had bought. This story made the point that he could accept setbacks and move on without getting angry. His self-image, in other words, is of someone who does not let his emotions interfere with his goals.

I was particularly struck by Vieira’s discussion of why he chose to leave his previous job, where he was a successful department manager:

14. The only reason I’m leaving really is because I can see where I’d be in about five years, probably be in another [similar department] getting that one up to where it should be. And it’s not really where I want to go. I mean, I want to go up, you know. I don’t want to go lateral.

Here Vieira says, “I can see where I’d be in about five years.” In passage 12 he says, “Let’s say there’s a mother and a child in low-income housing. Well what is this mother doing, you know, to improve herself? I mean, just working and providing for her child is a job in itself, but no, where does she see herself, let’s say five years down the road?” This phrasing, along with the emphasis on economic mobility, is characteristic of Vieira’s voice and suggests that he thinks about welfare using the same schemas he applies to his own life goals. Just as he is future oriented, not letting things bother him in order to get on with pursuing his goals and choosing his jobs “to go up,” so he assumes that the best welfare policies are ones that help recipients “move on and move forth.”

According to another Portuguese immigrant I interviewed, and an anthropologist who has worked in that community, it is typical of Portuguese immigrants in Rhode Island and Southeastern Massachusetts to pursue a course of economic mobility by having every member of the household over 16 working full time and contributing their earnings to the family (Jim Ito-Adler, personal communication).
Emotional and motivational hot spots
Here I look for discussion of affect-laden memories (especially, although not exclusively, childhood memories), other points at which the interviewee expressed strong feelings, topics they brought up repeatedly throughout the interviews, and how they invest their time and energy now. A simple question to consider is, “Does the person have positive or negative memories in association with the word or topic?”

Peter Vieira’s stories about his childhood were not entirely positive. He remembers shame that his parents could not or would not spend money so he could have the same clothes as “all-American Bobby.” He tiptoes around the sensitive issue of being pressured to leave school to take a job (13 and elsewhere). But he also remembers with pride that his parents trusted him to keep the savings from his jobs, unlike his older brother, who was not trusted because he was not good at saving money. He showed no overt or covert resentment over his father “borrowing” those savings to remodel the kitchen. Instead, he figured he owed him something for making the hard decision to leave the Azores:

15. And every day I think about my dad, who just decided, you know, pack up and go to the new world and you know, I give him a lot of credit for that. ‘Cause he just wanted to set up a better life for his kids, which he did, you know.

Vieira has replicated his parents’ habits, disciplining himself to avoid unnecessary spending in order to save money for a house. He saves a remarkable $300/month from his modest paycheck. In just three years, he and his fiancée had built a nest egg of $17,000.

Summary and implications
Overall, it appears that work is a key element of Vieira’s PSN. Work is good, for Vieira: it is central to your identity, keeps you sane, and leads to a better life. It is central to his self-image (he thinks of himself as a worker), and is necessary for the economic mobility that is so important a goal for him. Occasionally, Vieira expressed resentment toward welfare recipients, but the dominant emotion of his remarks was bewilderment that anyone would not want to work (“I really don’t understand welfare,” 8) and a pragmatic, problem-solving attitude. He assumes that most people share his values: “I mean, a lot of people do want to better educate themselves. So they can improve, move on, and so on and so forth.” His approach to welfare reform is to institute programs that give others the help they need to realize their ambitions. Thus, he favors policies that would have the government assisting welfare recipients to get more education and training, or supplementing their income in entry-level jobs so that they could get the work experience they need to choose a career path. As he puts it, “Everything should be geared to stepping them up, you know, into the right direction” (12).

The PSN that surrounds work and welfare is very different for Carol Russo. Here are all the passages in which she talked about work and welfare.
16. [CS had asked, “What are the biggest problems in America today?” CR was talking about how the people who run Rhode Island “step on you.” She adds that America is still the best country around, but . . . ] It’s just that these . . . people just want a—I think that’s the biggest problem: People just want a free ride. And we’ve got a lot of people with free rides. But they’re not educated. Like you’ll have some poverty-stricken woman, all she know’s how to do is have kids. One after another. You know, like constantly having children. And, she’s never been educated into the fact that she should get off her butt and go to work. So she brings up like five or six kids the same attitude and they do the same thing again. Then you’ve got six, five more people, six people, right? ( ) Good example is someone mentioned to me about this young girl about 24 years old who had her fourth baby. All very young, like one, two . . . And the fourth baby was in the hospital on special care unit, because it was under, uh, underweight. And she was going to take this baby home to her home, which was unheated. Her husband wasn’t working. She wasn’t of course working. And they were going to take her to this—this young baby—to this, um, unheated house. They let her take the baby home! They didn’t tell her, “Look, you’re going to have to have your tubes tied.” Which I feel is mandatory.

17. [Recounts discussion she had with a professor who said people with low intelligence do not reproduce] He said, “That’s probably how it’ll end.” But I don’t think so, because there’s a lot of people that they don’t even know where babies come from. And they just keep having them, and having them and having. And these babies are brought up in a system where they don’t realize people are supposed to work for a living and become educated and stuff like that, and they just come, it becomes redundant [i.e., gets repeated].

18. [CS had asked how she feels things are going in the country. CR explains her mixed feelings about immigrants, especially from Southeast Asia, who get too many special breaks, but do care about education more than American children. American children put having a good time first.] But that’s why we’re Americans. You know, there are a lot of people who have died and suffered for these things that we have and it’s unfortunate that we have a lot of bozos, a lot of imbeciles, a lot of people that they’re allowed to have children one right after another. A lady went to that Cap—, no, wait a minute, State House, and she was out there with her kid, and her kid had on raggedy jeans, and she said to the man, “You don’t care about us” ’cause they wanted more money than they were allotted, ’cause they’re on welfare, for the kids, and he said, “Oh yes, we do.” Well, first off I don’t believe the politician cares one iota at all. But secondly, I don’t care about her. Why does she have all these kids? Well, I mean, I have two jobs. You know, I’m looking forward to working this other job, but I’m working out of necessity and here are these people that sit around on their butts smoking cigarettes and cigarettes cost what? $1.50 now? It’s outrageous. I don’t smoke, and of course I don’t drink and stuff like that. I’m a very low-keyed person but it’s out of necessity a lot of times. It’s because, that’s it. You don’t go on vacation. But a good example of the kind of person I am unfortunately or fortunately, I don’t know, my cousin invited us up to New Hampshire. She
Claudia Strauss and her husband live way up in New Hampshire and she said, “Why don’t you come for a weekend?” and stuff, and I said, “( ) I can’t because of my kids.” Now here’s Sarah going to be 19 and Hannah’s going to be 21 and—but I can’t bear the thought of having these kids out on their own like if they’re driving or if they’re home alone. Not that it’s any big deal, we don’t live in that bad of a neighborhood, but these are my priorities and then of course my four animals, the two dogs and the two cats. But other people just pick up and screw, leave the kids, they leave kids in houses alone by themselves and then we have to pick up after them. I’m sick of it. But it’s not going to change. It’s not going to change because these people have nothing better to do than sit on State House steps and complain and say, “I want, I want, I want.” That’s my opinions about that, but I could go on forever.

19. [CS follows up on the last comment, asking who else would feel the same way] People in my group. You know, people who are just really working people that really have no connections? And you don’t find people that, that work that have time to go to these meetings and go and complain.

20. [CS asked how CR would feel about system where the government would provide jobs for everyone who needed one] If it worked. You know. I’d like to say, yes, that’s a good idea. I think now people who are on welfare have to go and work in the park and cleanup, or CS: Oh, have they put in that workfare?
CR: Someone told me. Someone’s brother is on welfare; he lost his job. And he has to work in the park, cleaning up. There are jobs, there are all kinds of jobs. [Um-hm] We have welfare. So those people who are on welfare could just as well get the heck out and do something. There are a lot of parks that could be cleaned, a lot of streets, a lot of bottles that are on the roadside. That sounds good.

21. [On how immigrants are hard workers. They buy houses and fix them up.] Why it doesn’t happen to the people who live in these areas in America, to me is, because they’ve always had it soft. [Mmh] You know, they’re still going to get that check, that monthly check. They’re going to get paid by the month. People that come from other countries, like even the Cambodians and stuff. They’re hard-working people. They’ll work for a small amount of money, whereas people on welfare say, “Well, I’m not working for minimum. Heck with that, I’m not working for that. I’d rather stay home and collect a check.” And they do. You know, they never get anywhere and then you see these other people from other countries that start buying houses and property and educate their children.

22. [On how the government should not waste money on worthless projects] You know, like the Golden Fleece awards. [Yeah] You know, that bothers me too. [Yeah, yeah] That’s a lot—Don’t see kids starving. And maybe if they were educated in a different manner, they would realize that it’s a good idea to get the heck off your behind and go to work. But if they’re brought up in an environment—but I don’t know the answer. Because I know, like, um, if they’re brought up in an

---

11 Work is polysemous. Even though this use of worked to mean “operate effectively” is related to the meaning of work as paid labor, the schemas associated with each are quite different, so “If it worked” is not highlighted for analysis here.
environment where they see everybody sitting around smoking cigarettes or whatever—I just happen to hate cigarettes, that’s why. You know, sitting around and the check comes and good, we eat this week and stuff like that. And so and so drinks. But, what would be a better environment? I don’t know.

23. [CS proposed providing jobs for everyone] I’d like to see that. I want to see these people off the streets. Working. I’m sure there’s jobs they could be doing. I’m sure a lot of those people have talents that they’ve never even discovered they have. They don’t have any drive or initiative, then . . . forced into a particular situation, they just give up.

24. [CS asked whether her parents believed in the American Dream, which Russo had just said she didn’t think was true] My parents were very hard-working people. Their parents came here from, from Italy. And just worked very, very hard. Very hard-working people. And that’s what my mother and father always did. Just worked. My mother always, always worked. As a child I always remember my mother working [outside the home]. And, you know, like you just never expected to get handouts, or . . . it wasn’t talked about.

25. You know, like, these people [elderly couple that can’t afford nursing homes] worked all their lives and what’s happening to them? And of course, if they were on welfare, it’d be a completely different story.

26. Someone I knew who worked for welfare had said that one of her clients had called her up and her son wanted to know where to register. And she said, “Register for what?” And she said, “Well he’s getting married and he wants to register for, uh, welfare.” Just like you go to register for ( ), they registered for welfare. And she said, “This is the type of mentality, ‘Oh, my mother and father lived on welfare, now I’m going to get married and better go register to get welfare.’ ” Some of them don’t even think that they should be going to work and they have all negative ideas about work and who would like to work at some of those jobs, you know? I’m not going to do that. But again I think it’s the environment. You know? Why should they work if they accepted that type of lifestyle? You know? That’s it. You know, like they say, Well it’s Saturday night, they’re going to go out. Saturday night they’re going out . . . and raise hell. And Monday morning . . . Anyway, I don’t think there’s one right answer but I think one of the biggest answers would be to cut off all these illegitimate children.

All associations
What Russo discussed in connection with welfare and work is that people who do not want to work have too many children, especially, illegitimate children (16, 17, 18, 26); do not take good care of their children (16, 18); and do not model or teach proper values (including the importance of education), with the result that their children repeat the same behaviors when they are grown (16, 17, 22, 26). They waste money on cigarettes and alcohol (18, 22) and they waste time in political protests (18, 19). Everyone has a talent that would be useful in some job (23). Immigrants tend to have a stronger work ethic and appreciate the value of education more than some Americans (18, 21). Her grandparents were immigrants and her parents and grandparents worked hard (24). Welfare recipients should be
forced to work (20, 23) and women who have illegitimate children should be sterilized (16, 26).

**Strong associations**

Russo shares some associations with Vieira: Like him, she feels that one benefit of a job, even an entry-level job, is that it enables you to learn what talents you have that would be useful in earning more money later. That point, however, came up infrequently and only after I asked her how she would feel about government-provided jobs as an alternative to welfare. The topics she brought up repeatedly, without any prompting from me, were related to childbearing and childrearing: Welfare mothers have too many children, especially, illegitimate children (16, 17, 18, 26); do not take good care of their children (16, 18); and do not teach them proper values, with the result that their children repeat the same behaviors when they are grown (16, 17, 22, 26). The best policy would be to sterilize women who have illegitimate children (16, 26).

**Self-image**

In the above passages Russo describes herself as someone who does not smoke, drink, “and stuff like that” (18). Especially important is that she is a responsible mother. She offered as an example of the kind of person she is in the way she refused to go to New Hampshire for a weekend because she did not feel she could leave her daughters home alone, even though they were 19 and 21 at the time (18). This is consistent with her explicit and implicit self-descriptions throughout the interviews. When I asked her to describe herself, she replied simply, “A mother.” She frequently sought common ground with me through this identity we shared: “Really, as a mother, that’s what you think.”

Another consistent theme throughout the interviews was that she is someone who gets “stepped on” because she does not have influence. Thus, right after she complained about welfare mothers who, unlike her, leave children at home alone (18), she described her group as “people who are just really working people that really have no connections,” thereby contrasting herself as both a responsible mother and a working person without connections with irresponsible welfare mothers who have time for political protests (18 and 19). The phrase, “without connections,” carries a lot of meaning in Rhode Island, where being connected to people with political power means you can get things to go your way. Many of the stories Russo told were of times she tried to accomplish something (for her children’s schools or for her home business) and was defeated by the local establishment.

Throughout the interviews, it was typical that when Russo talked about her work (she was a school secretary for a while, then had a home business, and only later started a full-time job after her daughters were grown), she tied her work to being a parent: “I have to work; I’m a mother. It’s very important that I work. I need the money”; “I’m working to be a mother, a good mother.” For the most part she discussed work as a necessary evil,
part of the expected life of a good person (and particularly important for a woman in case her husband leaves her), not something that conveys positive benefits in itself. Above (18) she says she is looking forward to her new job, but immediately adds, “but I’m working out of necessity.” The emphasis is on a job as an economic necessity, not an activity that is inherently fulfilling or that gives someone their identity, as Peter Vieira stressed. She typically used verbs and nouns of obligation in connection with work (“should,” “supposed to,” “necessity,” 16, 17, 18, 26). Vieira sometimes did too (9), but more often spoke of a job or work as something you “have” or “got” (8, 9, 12, 13).

Emotional and motivational hot spots
In passage 24, Carol Russo mentioned that as a child she always remembered her mother working. Elsewhere she had much more to say about her mother’s working, because it was associated with very unhappy memories for Russo. Her mother worked the second shift, so she was never there when Carol came home from school. Afterschool care was the responsibility of her father, who kept Carol and her sisters housebound and beat them. This formative experience made Carol determined to take the sort of jobs that ensured she would be home when her daughters came home from school:

27. I thought it was important to have my mother home sometimes. Because sometimes you want to talk to somebody and she wasn’t there. […] I thought it was very important to stay home to be a good parent or to be accessible when they were home from school if something happened and I was able to get involved.

This leads me to speculate that when Russo talks about her hard-working parents, this is associated with her sense of loss that her mother was not available to her.

Russo may also have been angry with her mother for not taking better care of her. I wondered about this because she used the same word, “indifferent,” both to describe her mother and, at another point in the interview, to describe bad people:

28. I would say ( ) that this is a very indifferent world, a lot of indifferent people. I think that. That’s what it is. The world is made up of a lot of very indifferent people climbing all over everybody else to get to the top, they don’t care who they hurt.

When I showed her a draft of an earlier paper that pointed out that she used the same word to describe her mother and bad people, she was very upset and denied thinking that her mother was a bad person. So either the coincidence in terms is not meaningful or these are unconscious feelings. (For more on methods for uncovering unconscious feelings, see especially the paper by Luttrell in this volume.)
Summary and implications
Given Russo’s self-image and hot spots, it is not surprising that the dominant emotional tone in her discussion of welfare recipients is outrage. Instead of admiring welfare mothers for making the decision to stay home with their children, she accepts the stereotype, very prevalent in the U.S. media, that welfare mothers are neglectful (bring underweight newborns home to unheated houses, 16; leave their children at home alone, 18). Furthermore, work is not central to her identity, and she does not see it as very fulfilling in itself, so she resents working hard and having little provided for her when she sees others achieving what she thinks are the same results with less effort. (Welfare benefits are more meager than Russo thinks, but all that matters here are her perceptions.) She favored requiring welfare recipients to work after I suggested that (my suggestion had been phrased in terms of providing jobs) and most of all, sterilizing welfare mothers, which would solve both the bad parenting and freeloding problems from her perspective.

What makes PSN analysis a cultural analysis, instead of a psychological analysis? As I explain above, delineating a PSN is a step toward a cultural analysis when we repeat it for enough people to see clusters of shared associations. Peter Vieira’s experiences as the child of ambitious immigrants, and Carol Russo’s growing up with working parents who split shifts because they could not afford other options for childcare, are not unique. For example, two clusters I found could be grouped under the headings Work is bad and Work is good. Those who held unrewarding dead-end jobs assumed that people who are not working have to be forced to work, because work is not intrinsically rewarding. Those who found work fulfilling and important to their identity usually imagined everyone else does too. Their approach to welfare reform was to provide jobs for those who were unemployed and skills for those who could not find good jobs. There was a particularly interesting cluster of three men: Peter Vieira, Vincent Rocha, and Tommy Marino. Economic mobility was very important for all three: The latter two had already achieved it and Vieira was on his way. Rocha’s and Marino’s success at moving from working-class childhoods to the upper-middle class as adults made them very impatient with welfare recipients, who they felt were just not trying. At the same time, however, the welfare reforms they proposed were not punitive (as in Russo’s case) but involved income supplements, job training, and subsidized college education, which they saw as the best route for maximizing one’s future earnings. They assumed that what had been important for them was important for most people. In sum, PSN analysis can reveal how the standpoints of differently situated social groups affect the larger meanings they associate with a symbol or concept.

Personal semantic network analysis is also useful for determining the relevance of a cultural model for a particular group of people. One mistake cultural analysts can easily make is to find several people voicing a certain opinion and conclude that this is a central cultural belief. However, if you knew the people better you might discover that it is of little importance to them, because it is not closely associated with their self-image and personal
hot spots (see also Strauss 1992). For example, Marlene Randall, a working-
class woman like Carol Russo, at one point said about women on welfare:

29. You know what I mean—having—you can make a mistake, yeah. But
when you have child, and child, and child.

That sounds very much like Carol Russo’s complaints about the supposed
excessive fecundity of welfare recipients, and many of my other interviewees
made similar comments.12 “Child, and child, and child” was a verbal mole-
cule, a formulaic phrase (see section 3 below), often voiced in discussions of
welfare at that time. That does not mean that this issue had the salience or
meaning for other interviewees that it did for Carol Russo, however. Neither
Marlene Randall nor anyone else dwelt on this topic the way Russo did, and
for everyone except Russo the issue was one of economic rationality (Why
have more kids if you can’t afford the ones you have?) or “making kids just
to get more money,” as Peter Vieira put it (9), rather than bad parenting. This
topic was not linked to any other interviewees’ emotional hotspots around
parenting issues, and forced sterilization was not a popular proposal.

Clearly, conducting a PSN analysis is time consuming. You may decide
it is not worth the effort, given your research questions. The benefit of
it, however, is an analysis that gives more insight into the cognitive and
emotional meanings of keywords and concepts, evidence for patterns of
subcultural variation, and understanding of how people’s ideas on one
subject are related to other things they say, think, and do.

Section 2. Social Discourses

A. How to Find Traces of Social Discourses

Cultural models, such as the cultural models of work and the ethnopsy-
chologies discussed in the last section, can come to be shared in a variety
of ways. Sometimes they have their source in explicitly formulated social
discourses. For example, the idea that people make choices based on the
incentives (especially, economic incentives) available to them is a cultural
model that most people do not bother to explain or defend, but this
schema has both contributed to and derives from rational choice theories
that are quite explicit in the writings of some social scientists (e.g., Becker
1976). Writers and speakers in a particular social discourse tradition
usually develop a specialized jargon and phraseology. The easiest way to
recognize traces of social discourses in people’s talk, even if they are not
aware of their ideological13 sources, is to look for the ideas, jargon and

12 In fact, historically welfare recipients have had no more children than the average U.S.
13 Ideology usually denotes tendentious rhetoric that aims to legitimize or change power
distributions, which would be true of some but not all social discourses. However, I will use
ideology here in a broader sense to mean all explicitly formulated social theories, including
social scientific theories.
phraseology typical of that discourse. As Linde explains in her analysis of folk psychologies (Linde 1987), sometimes sentence structure can be a tip-off as well. For example, she found that folk Freudianism was expressed in sentences in which the agent of the action was not the speaker, but some force inside the speaker. This makes social discourse analysis quite similar to *voice* analysis, as I described it in the last section (pp. xx). For example, just as was the case for voice, emotional tone (revealed not just in tone of voice but also word choice and metaphorical imagery) might be clues to use of a particular social discourse. Think, for example, of the pervading gentleness of New Age discourses or the cool rationality of strategic defense discourses. (For an explanation of social discourse analysis, see Fairclough’s [1992] discussion of Foucaultian discourse analysis, for example, Foucault 1972; for a very similar non-Foucaultian approach, see Linde 1987, 1993 on “coherence systems.”)

Social discourse analysis is by necessity *intertextual* (Kristeva 1986), that is, it is concerned with the way other texts are incorporated into the text under analysis. This requires familiarity with prior verbal and written expressions of the ideologies in question, so you can recognize when a given text incorporates established ways of expressing certain sets of ideas. This may sound hard, but if the topic is one that you have been studying, this will not be difficult. For example, anyone with a passing knowledge of the abortion debate in the United States knows that *pro-choice* is the preferred self-designation of abortion rights supporters while *pro-life* is the preferred self-designation of abortion opponents, and that the former talk about the *fetus* and the latter about the *unborn child*.

Further examples of social discourse analysis are provided as we look at how to recognize the way individuals internalize multiple social discourses, to which I turn now.

**B. The Organization of Multiple Social Discourses in Talk**

At a minimum, any discourse analysis should show all of the viewpoints that are represented in the texts under consideration instead of arbitrarily picking out one or two that are especially striking (as is all too common in cultural analysis). This is a simple matter of intellectual honesty: We should not impose greater order and coherence than exists. There are practical consequences of being alert for competing ideas and discourses as well. For example, I found that while an individualistic approach to poverty (i.e., the cause of the poverty is the poor person’s failure to work hard, so the best solution is to encourage or force poor people to work harder) is dominant for most of the U.S. Americans I interviewed, it is not

---

14 I suggest the term *social discourse analysis*. Usually this approach is just called *discourse analysis*, which makes it hard to distinguish it from other ways of analyzing discourse.
Analyzing for Cultural Complexity

the only way they look at the issue. When antipoverty activists fixate solely on this central cultural theme, missing competing views that are widely shared as well, they miss an opportunity to build political support for policies that are helpful rather than punitive (Strauss 2000, 2002).

Beyond demonstrating the diversity of views that speakers hold, or the disparate social discourses they have appropriated, we could also ask how speakers mentally organize their conflicting ideas or the diverse social discourses they have internalized. I have found three general cognitive patterns: compartmentalization, ambivalence, and integration (Strauss 1990, 1997). In this discussion I focus on the ways of mentally organizing competing social discourses; the same methods could be used to find ways of mentally organizing competing cultural models.

When speakers compartmentalize (Singer 1972, Weiss 1990) conflicting ideas, they hold them in separate, largely unconnected cognitive schemas and are usually unaware of the conflict between them. Speakers who are ambivalent are aware that they seem to hold inconsistent ideas and show signs of psychic conflict as a result. When speakers integrate multiple social discourses, they draw on them selectively, blending them into a view that is consistent and makes sense for them, even if it does not fit any standard public theories. In that case you, as an analyst, might think there is a conflict, but that is a result of the imposition of your categories, which has led you to miss the logic that ties together their ideas. The usual disclaimer applies to these categories. They are ideal types; sometimes people are on a continuum between two of these types rather than neatly within one.

How do we tell when people compartmentalize, when they are ambivalent, and when they integrate a variety of social discourses? First, locate the traces of different social discourses by looking for ideas, jargon, and phraseology characteristic of each. Then consider their placement in relation to each other. Placement refers to whether the different ideas are expressed in close proximity as part of a connected discussion of a single topic or in different contexts. (Contiguity, which was discussed in the last section as a criterion of links in personal semantic networks, is a special case of placement in the same context, which would also include A and B both arising in the course of a longer connected discussion of a topic, but not one right

---

15 In Strauss (1990) I discuss two kinds of compartmentalization: horizontal and vertical. In Strauss (1997) I mention another possibility: unconscious compromise, where competing ideas are internalized in dynamically linked schemas so that acting on one creates some anxiety or need to compensate later. Peng and Nisbett (1999) suggest another possibility: dialectical thought that embraces the contradiction. I will not go into those further possibilities here.
Claudia Strauss

after the other.) I suspect that a speaker is compartmentalizing their different ideas if I find passages whose ideas are at odds, using the jargon and phraseology characteristic of different discourses, expressed in separate speech contexts (e.g., in connection with different topics, at different points in a single interview or different days in a series of interviews). Ambivalence is indicated by ideas that are at odds, articulated in the characteristic language of different social discourses, but in close proximity to each other along with indication that the speaker feels a conflict (“but on the other hand . . .,” “I don’t know,” and nonverbal expressions of frustration, such as sighs). Cognitive integration is indicated by phrasing and contents that show that although the ideas in question were drawn from disparate social discourses, they are closely linked in the speaker’s personal semantic network because as the speaker expresses them the ideas fit together, they are expressed in the same context, and the speaker shows no sign of discomfort or conflict when switching from one to the other.

These indicators should be employed as guidelines only. For example, as I mention in the first section of this chapter, placement is not an entirely reliable indicator of cognitive compartmentalization. Ideas speakers express at separate points in the discussion could be cognitively linked for them, but they lacked the opportunity to segue from one idea to the other given the flow of the conversation. Conversely, sometimes people will articulate one point of view, think about the topic more and come up with another point of view that they also hold, which they will express immediately afterwards. Normally, these separate schemas would not be expressed in the same context. In the course of the interview, however, they have more time to think and are often trying to be especially helpful, so they conduct a thorough mental inventory, unshelving schemas that are not usually displayed at the same time.

Compartmentalization
Here is a probable example of compartmentalization. The speaker, Vincent Rocha, was one of the three men I mentioned at the end of the last section. An immigrant like Peter Vieira, Rocha had worked hard and become a successful engineer. For the most part he expressed only scorn for welfare recipients. Thus, early in the first interview when I asked him why most

16 Some readers will object to the language of “unshelving schemas,” because it implies that the ideas are stored rather than constructed through talk. It seemed clear listening to people that there is a range. Some schemas were well formulated before I got there; others were developed and modified through the course of our conversation. In this section I present examples of each.
people go on welfare, he said

30. Sometimes there’s no choice but I’d say 60 percent of the time that person is going in [the welfare system] because they don’t care. Maybe 30 percent is forced into it, and the other 10 percent is miscellaneous. But I’d say—yes, there is a percentage that’s forced in there—I think the majority is because . . . it’s a way of life.

Yet, much later in the interview when I asked if welfare is related to women’s place in society he replied

31. Ninety-five percent of the time it’s the women caught in this situation. The husband takes off and she’s stuck with the kids. There’s no way of getting out other than financial assistance, because she cannot work due to small children—sometimes sickness—and that’s the reason probably 95 percent [of the time].

I would guess that the ideas Rocha expresses were learned in different contexts and are internalized in a compartmentalized way because the contents are at odds (in 30 he says 60 percent of welfare recipients are in the system because they don’t care, a statement typical of antiwelfare personal responsibility discourses, while in 31 he says most welfare recipients are women, 95 percent of whom were forced into the system when their husbands abandoned them, a statement typical of prevalent discourses condemning “deadbeat dads”) and because these passages came at different points in the interview and in the course of discussion of different topics (welfare in general in 30, women and welfare in 31).17

Here is another example of ideas that I suspect are largely compartmentalized. The speaker is Mason Carter, an African American minister. Try naming the social discourse or discourses represented below.

32. God gave us a will to choose between good and evil. I’m not a drug addict, I’m not a drunk, but if I wanted to choose to do that, I can be. If I choose that road, but I have not chosen that road. And so, therefore, a lot of peoples are pointing fingers at the government, and even with the television going on, hey, you can choose not to even watch television. The government says, “Hey, I’m going to put this out here.” You can choose not to smoke cigarettes, it’s your choice. It’s not the government’s fault. It’s not the government’s fault because we’re in poverty; it’s not the government’s fault that the man down the street is an alcoholic, that somebody’s on welfare. A lot of people are blaming the government for something because they are being irresponsible themselves. So therefore I have chosen, I used to be an alcoholic and I got saved, I received Jesus Christ as my personal savior. I had to make a choice, whether I wanted to

17 Interestingly, the voice as I define it in the first section is similar in 30 and 31. This is the voice of the dispassionate, quantitatively minded engineer. However, the social discourses expressed are different. That is why voice is not a reliable guide to social discourses.
be an alcoholic or I wanted to be a child of God. I made that choice. I could sit around and be an alcoholic and blame the government, but hey, I made the choice.

It would take more research in intellectual history than I can undertake now to pin down the complete genealogy of these ideas, but we could say that in terms of currently salient social discourses, Carter has drawn on evangelical Christianity ("I used to be an alcoholic and I got saved, I received Jesus Christ as my personal savior. I had to make a choice, whether I wanted to be an alcoholic or I wanted to be a child of God. I made that choice") and what could be called the personal responsibility discourse that was prominent during the 1990s in discussions of welfare and welfare reform. ("It’s not the government’s fault. It’s not the government’s fault because we’re in poverty; it’s not the government’s fault that the man down the street is an alcoholic, that somebody’s on welfare. A lot of people are blaming the government for something because they are being irresponsible themselves.")

In the first interview, however, Carter had made very different statements. For example, he talked about the time he was on welfare because he had gotten sick and lost his job. He praised the welfare system for helping him then. In passing, he mentioned that sometimes people manipulate the system, and I tried to get him to follow up on that. But he quickly returned to his main theme that sometimes people are poor for reasons that are beyond their control. What discourses do you think he draws on here?

33. [M]ainly all the drugs that’s coming in here, the user’s the one who’s going to jail, not the ones with the big money—not the big guys, are not going to jail. They’re not users. The users are going to jail. And they got the same thing in America where they say, “You’re innocent until proven guilty.” Lot of time they put you in jail and charge you with a big fine and you’re guilty until proven innocent in America. That’s why I don’t even watch television no more. Old Columbo movies—you are guilty until proven innocent in the court of law, in the state of America. Somebody accuse you of something, they don’t care you got... and really, if the people’s on welfare, it’s the low people that’s being oppressed. Still being oppressed. Oppression—you can just go in a poor section of a neighborhood and you can feel the oppression there because of the government. It comes from the head first. That’s where it comes from—it comes from the courts, high courts. And until the people come together to start protesting against certain things, there’s not going to be no changes... without confrontation, there’s not going to be any changes. We have to protest, we have to come together as a community, and protest against what the government is doing.

The content of 33 is very different from 32. In 32 Carter says it is not the government’s fault if people are poor; in 33 he blames the government. In 32 the solution he favors is for individuals to exercise free will to make different choices; in 33 the solution he favors is for communities to come
Analogizing for Cultural Complexity

together to protest inequities in the criminal justice system. The placement of 32 and 33 also suggest they are compartmentalized, for they were expressed in two different interviews held a week apart. The voice Carter uses is very different in 32 and 33, and even his dialect shifts, becoming much more marked by typical features of African American Vernacular English in 33 than in 32. Aside from the dialect shift, he also draws on black power social discourse (“it’s the low people that’s being oppressed. Still being oppressed. Oppression—you can just go in a poor section of a neighborhood and you can feel the oppression there because of the government,” “we have to come together as a community, and protest against what the government is doing”) and populist social discourse, which in America always sets up a contrast between the big (guy, government, business) and the little (guy, man, person) (“the ones with the big money . . . the big guys”) in 33. Unlike 32, with its stern yet hopeful tone, the tone of 33 is cynical and angry.

Because passages 32 and 33 came at different points in the interviews and express conflicting ideas using the jargon and phraseology typical of different social discourses, my guess is that Carter learned these ideas in different circumstances and these schemas are cognitively compartmentalized. This does not mean that Carter is unaware of the conflict between them. When he voiced 32 Carter may have been thinking about some points he made in the first interview, including his comments in passage 33, and decided that that was not the message he wanted to leave with me. Nor are these two sets of ideas irreconcilable: Carter may feel that poverty has both systemic and individual causes. However, it seems clear that in some contexts he emphasizes the ideas of passage 32 and in others the ideas of passage 33, and that normally these are not joined because they do not mesh very easily.

**Ambivalence**

In the following passage Carol Russo expresses ambivalence because she favors policies that limit income support to poor families, but she hates to see children starving. The context was discussion of childcare for working mothers. Russo remembered a daycare center that her daughter attended for a short time that took low-income children. The program was available only in the mornings, but they always fed the children lunch. When Russo questioned why it was so, she was told that that might be the only meal the children had all day. Since I am making a line-by-line analysis of this passage, I number each line.

34. 1 She said, “This is probably all they’ll eat, anyway.”
   2 And that really, oh, that hurts bad.
   3 You know, uh—I don’t want—
   4 but then, this is how they’re brought up.
   5 So, if you’re brought up this way, you just think this is right. [Mmh]
   6 You know no other way.
   7 You think that’s in the movies, where you see everybody sitting around a beautiful table, all loaded with food.
Claudia Strauss

8 It’s movies.
9 You know, ’cause I see things in the movies and I say, “Well, that’s just Hollywood.”
10 I don’t accept it.
11 And, maybe this is what these kids say, and feel, and think.
12 And so that’s how they live.
13 Uh. I’d like to see that [returning to a suggestion CS had made that welfare recipients be provided with jobs].
14 I want to see these people off the streets.
15 Working. [She continues with passage 23]

The verbal fumbling in passage 34 (“You know, uh—I don’t want—but then . . .” in lines 3 and 4 and the “Uh” between lines 12 and 13) mark where Russo switches voices. Pauses, verbal fillers, and disfluency often indicate schema boundaries (see Chafe 1977, also Hill, this volume, for other interpretations of disfluency). In lines 1 through 3 Russo expresses deep concern for poor children and the overall emotional tone is pity. The emotional tone of the primary voice she uses to discuss poor people, by contrast, is angry and resentful, a hard voice that uses tough, direct language (e.g., “get the heck off your behind” in passage 22) and shows no sympathy (“I don’t care about her,” passage 18). This is the voice she returns to from line 13 on in passage 34. In between, from lines 4 to 12, she seems to be groping for a way to reconcile her conflicting schemas. Interestingly, she returns to a culture-of-poverty discourse based on a folk psychological model of people as constructed by what they are taught and observe, an appropriately in-between model (I found it voiced across the political spectrum, Strauss 2002) that now conveniently serves to rationalize why we do not need to act on concerns for hungry children (they’ve been brought up that way, so they’re used to it). However, Russo seemed to be improvising in response to her awareness of inconsistency: “You know, uh—I don’t want—but then . . .” She acts as if she’s torn between competing ideas, not as if she has (until now) integrated them.

Integration

In Habits of the Heart (1985), Robert Bellah and his coauthors worry that managerial and therapeutic discourses, which posit no higher ends than the corporate bottom line and the needs of the self, are displacing religious and civic discourses of absolute values and community belonging in the United States. While these social discourses carry these implications, are they so conflicting in their meanings for U.S. Americans? Not necessarily.19

18 See Kusserow (2004) on hard versus soft individualism. Hard individualism stresses a tough attitude toward life; soft individualism stresses a tender regard for others’ feelings. While Kusserow seems to have found only hard individualism among her working-class interviewees, I heard switching between voices, with the hard voice as the one that they adopted when they were particularly working-class identified.

19 For a similar critique of Bellah et al.’s tendency to see a sharp divide between an earlier America in which absolute values reigned and a newer one of relative values, see Quinn’s (1996) discussion of how Americans think about marriage.
I found that for a number of my interviewees, therapeutic discourse (detectable by keywords like *self esteem* and *self worth*, an emphasis on people’s psyches, and concern with the learned or biochemical causes of their problems), was perfectly consistent with talk of work as an absolute value. We saw an example of this with Peter Vieira. Thus, in passage 8 he says, “[T]he main thing that’s been instilled to me is that if you don’t have work, basically your worth actually as a person would, you would think less of yourself, I think.” From “your worth actually as a person,” which seems to mean moral worth, an absolute value, he slides into the therapeutic language of “you would think less of yourself.”

Joan Morse integrated all four of the discourses that Bellah et al. worried were at odds in contemporary America. She is a member of the baby-boom generation who, typical of those born in the second half of the twentieth century, was very comfortable with therapeutic discourses, employing them to make sense of her own feelings as well as those of others. She is an accountant, so capitalist entrepreneurial and managerial discourses, which focus on factors that improve the bottom line, also come easily to her. Finally, she is an evangelical Christian with a large sense of social purpose who frequently employed Biblical as well as civic/humanitarian discourses. When I knew her, she was writing a workbook on Biblical economics (joining Biblical, managerial, and civic discourses) and she had helped start a soup kitchen (the need for which she explained with a mixture of Biblical, civic/humanitarian, and therapeutic discourses). Yet, although she had learned a variety of social discourses, she melded them into a consistent whole. The underlying idea in the following passage is that if one knows God, one will receive love; receiving love makes people emotionally healthy; and if people are emotionally healthy, they will be successful economically. So the solution to poverty is to show love through one-to-one interaction and to take care of poor people’s needs in a missionary outreach setting where they will also come to Jesus. Religious, humanitarian, therapeutic (see her emphasis on “self-image,” the importance of feeling “okay about themselves”, emotional “health”), and entrepreneurial capitalist discourses (the last is particularly evident in her discussion of success, failure, and risk below) are combined in a way that makes internal sense whether we agree with it or not. Furthermore, these ideas appear in the same context, with no abrupt switching of discourses, so we can conclude that Morse has integrated these social discourses:

35. God is a God of one-to-one relationships with *us* and unless we do it with other people . . . I led somebody to the ( ) last Sunday and he had gone to a place where it was very isolated and cold and he just didn’t want to receive Jesus as his savior because it’s like, if Jesus was like that, forget this. You know, I’m a person I have needs, I cry, I laugh, I—you know, whatever. I spent like 20 minutes talking to him and telling him that God loved him. Well, he wanted that kind of a God. So okay if you

---

20 I am using “therapeutic discourse” to cover both of the opposing psychodynamic and biomedical clinical approaches.
do that on a one-to-one basis, you know, somebody is hungry today and then they need some job skills tomorrow, and on a one-to-one basis you help them... pretty soon their self-image is better. When you think you’re a jerk you act like a jerk. (laughs) When you think you’re going to fail, you’re going to fail. The only people who succeed are those who are willing to fail and take the risk, and the only people who can take risks are those who feel okay about themselves. My self-image is not going to die if I make a mistake with a client. I’m going to try like crazy not to ever make one. But the thing is I’m going to one day, I’m a human being. I spent time in my life where if I made a mistake, my gosh I was going to have to be blown away, I mean my image was totally wrapped up into whether or not I was totally successful. Seems like a contradiction in terms, but people who have a bad self-image set themselves up for failure, ’cause that’s what they expect of themselves. People who are healthy will risk having a failure because their self-image is not tied up into their success. So, and the only way that can happen—you can’t mass lecture people into having a good self-image, that doesn’t make any sense. So you one-to-one take care of it, you do one family at a time, one person at a time... you know get them the job, get them the house, get them the training... then they like, “Wow there’s somebody that loves me, my heavenly father loves me. These people care enough about me to take time to touch me.” I mean these people, nobody ever touches them. Remember—who was it that did the surrogate mother, with the monkeys? The surrogate mother? Uhm, it wasn’t Pavlov, he did the dogs. The surrogate mother where they had the wire cage and then they had the cage with the lamb’s wool all around it?21

I should note that Morse’s integration of these discourses was not something she accomplished all by herself. (This discussion should not be taken as implicit praise for her integration in this realm in contrast to Rocha and Carter’s compartmentalization or Russo’s ambivalence.) She had probably read works and heard speakers who combined religious and therapeutic discourses as well as religious and capitalist discourses.22 I know she belonged to a Gospel businessman’s lunch group; I attended one of those

21 Here is another example of Morse’s integration of neoliberal, therapeutic, and religious discourse: “Well, the government is projecting itself to being my savior but it’s not doing it because it can’t. So if it’s projecting itself to being my savior and it doesn’t do it, then I’m angry because my expectations were thwarted. Well, looks like we’ve got to do two things, we’ve got to change the expectations and then have the civil government stay out of things that it has not business being in. Your protector is your heavenly father, and you know he uses your husband to do that on occasion, sometimes he may even use angels to do that. But for you to look to your husband and say, ‘Well, you haven’t taken care of me or protected me the way I wanted,’ is this triangle thing of persecutor, persecuted. You know with this vicious circle then takes place because you have expectations about how you want to be protected and he’s not going to know that. So he’s not going to do exactly the way you wanted, and unless you’re really healthy within whom you are, and in the relationship to God knowing that he’s your protector, you’re going to expect all of these things from people around you that they can’t give you nor should they.”

22 See also Schram (1995) on the way “economistic-therapeutic-managerial discourse” is dominant in policy documents about welfare.
lunches with her. And it is very likely that she and the other members of her church had thought about how to integrate some of the sternerscriptural doctrines with the soup kitchen they started, because she discussed this problem:

36. So the scripture clearly says if you don’t work you don’t eat. So then you think, “Well, okay the soup kitchen is in violation of that.” Well, nobody’s taught them, they’ve got to be taught. Just like your two-year old, you’re going to teach her and train her and train her well. You’re not going to expect her to know what your twelve-year old knows. People have to crawl before they can walk and run, and that’s what we’re all about.

This is the same conflict that Russo dealt with: how to reconcile beliefs in self-reliance with the desire to help people who need help. In Russo’s case it appeared that she had not thought about this conflict before. I suspect that the interview context itself raised the conflict, as a result of which she felt torn, and strove to reconcile the views. Morse, on the other hand, deals with the seeming conflict between the Biblical injunction and the soup kitchen with ease (no verbal fillers, false starts, or pauses), as if her answer to this conflict had been rehearsed. Probably she and her co-congregationists had discussed the issue previously because the conflict between scripture and their practice was too blatant to be ignored.23

Finding a way to integrate the competing ideas that one should feed the hungry and “if you don’t work, you don’t eat” had the practical consequence that Morse and the other members of her church could then throw themselves into their humanitarian work. This is why it is useful not only to catalog competing discourses and ideas but also to understand how people mentally organize them. The way people act on the diverse ideas they hold is probably influenced by the way in which they hold them. My guess would be that compartmentalized ideas would lead to people to act differently in different contexts, integrated ideas would lead to actions that are more consistent across contexts, while ambivalence would lead to paralysis or change, to resolve the inconsistency.24

Finally, like personal semantic network analysis, by investigating the way people organize the different discourses to which they are exposed we obtain a better sense of subcultural patterns and possibly historical shifts.

23 Interestingly, in this passage the solution Morse gives was the same Russo came up with: to mitigate individual or social responsibility by seeing people as constructed by their sociocultural environments. In Russo’s case, that smooths the way to the conclusion that poor people don’t necessarily react to privation the same way as people who have known a better life; in Morse’s case it leads to a much softer conclusion: They are not responsible for their failures to be self-sufficient.

24 Naomi Quinn (personal communication, April 2001) reminded me that extreme ambivalence can lead to change as well as paralysis. Leon Festinger argued that cognitive dissonance is painful, hence leads people who hold conflicting beliefs to change one of the inconsistent beliefs to resolve the contradiction. What this overlooks is the possibility of compartmentalization, in which case the belief holder is not aware of the conflict.
in the meanings of key ideas. The Biblical admonition, “If you don’t work, you don’t eat,” is much harsher without its newer codicil, “This injunction does not apply until you have received enough love to reverse the effects of your poor home environment.”

Section 3. The Power of Public Opinion

In the last section we looked at the way people have internalized multiple discourses. Here we consider a related issue: Do speakers register awareness that there are ideas that compete with theirs, whether they hold these other views or not? If so, how seriously do they take the competition: Do they act as if their own views are embattled, a respectable alternative, or the common view? To put it another way, how does discourse reflect the cultural standing of different ideas, or the weight of public opinion?25 The cultural standing of some idea is its acceptability in an opinion community. I believe that most people, most of the time, mark the perceived cultural standing of any opinions they voice, if these are opinions on topics that have been part of public discussion and they are aware of that. As Bakhtin put it, discourse “cannot fail to be oriented toward the ‘already uttered,’ the ‘already known,’ the ‘common opinion’ and so forth” (Bakhtin 1981:279). It is important in cultural analysis to pay attention to the cultural standing of the views we are studying because we can go seriously astray if we think a certain view is the common opinion when it is really just one perspective that is quite controversial.

Elsewhere (Strauss 2004) I give a theoretical background to cultural standing analysis. Here, I focus on how speakers mark cultural standing in American English. Cultural standing may have other markers in other speech communities.26 Even among American English speakers, there may be differences in the way cultural standing is marked.

Cultural standing is a continuum. Four important points along this continuum could be labeled as follows:

Controversial Opinion—Debatable Opinion—Common Opinion—Taken-for-granted

---


26 The linguist Anna Wierzbicka observes that Anglo communicative norms rest on a “cultural emphasis on the value of compromise, of harmony in disagreement, of a balance between freedom of disagreement and a search for agreement” (as in the expression, “Let’s agree to disagree”) (Wierzbicka 1994:79). This may lead to culturally specific ways of marking cultural standing when the speaker expects the hearer to disagree.
We have already discussed the taken-for-granted end of this continuum, the cultural models that are so ingrained that they are not even considered to be matters about which one could have an opinion (Bourdieu 1977:167–170).27 Social discourses, explicitly formulated in an environment of competing discourses, will instead be the common opinion, debatable or controversial. American English speakers have certain typical ways in which they mark each of these points on the cultural standing continuum.

Controversial Opinion

If a speaker feels that their views are highly controversial in the community represented by their audience (or in the larger society, if the speaker is unsure about where the hearer stands), sometimes they will simply censor them. For example, in an earlier set of interviews I conducted, one interviewee, Daniel Collins, called for a revolution for workers to regain their rights. At one point I asked him what he thought about socialism.

37. Collins: I'd rather not go into that . . . It might get into different things. CS: [After long pause to see if Collins would say more] I remember you saying last time that there's no freedom of speech; people call you a radical. [Collins nods] Because, actually, what you were talking about with the government owning the utilities and so on sounds like democratic socialism in Europe. [Collins nods]

I had the distinct impression that Collins did not want to be tape-recorded saying he is a socialist.

In other cases, speakers will state views they take to be controversial, but in a guarded way. To put it in the terms used by discourse analysts, they modalize their utterance, signaling low commitment to or low affinity with the proposition (Fairclough 1992:158, Hodge and Kress 1988:123). Fairclough lists some ways of doing this: use of modal auxiliary verbs such as “may” and “should”; modal adverbs such as “probably” and “possibly” or the corresponding adjectives (“probable,” “possible”); other hedges (“sort of,” “a bit”); and a hesitant way of speaking (Fairclough 1992:159, also Dijk 1987). Another way of modalizing I have observed is lamination (Goffman 1974, especially pp. 516–523).28 Goffman used lamination to refer to layering of frames of activity or speech (e.g., pretending to be serious). In the case of narratives in which the speaker

27 Many other anthropologists have commented on the fact that some cultural knowledge is held in this “transparent” (Hutchins 1980:12) way. The importance of Bourdieu’s scheme is that it recognizes a range of cultural standing.

28 Modality and modalization are used in different ways by different analysts. Here, I am using these terms to refer to all the devices speakers use as a way of commenting on the truth or acceptability of their own statements (drawing on Halliday’s useful distinction between modality and modulation functions of modal auxiliaries, Halliday 1976). Unmarked, modalization refers to comments that express lower commitment or acceptability. Strengthening modalizers (Schiffrin 1985) express higher commitment or acceptability—but less so than no modalizers at all (Lyons 1977:763, cited in Simpson 1993:49).
tells a story about themselves, there is a necessary layering: The speaker is
distinct from the self who is spoken about. (For one thing, the speaker has
the wisdom of hindsight, while the self who is the protagonist of one’s life
story had only the knowledge available to him or her at that time.)
Sometimes lamination has a humorous effect, for example, the self who is
the protagonist of a personal narrative could be the young-and-foolish
version, or the drunk-out-of-his-or-her-mind version, of the now mature,
sober self telling the story. Sometimes, however, lamination serves the
purpose of attributing to another version of the self a view the speaker is
hesitant to embrace fully.

We can see all of these devices, and others as well, in the following
passage. The speaker, Nancy Goodall, was the most radical of my 1995
interviewees (numbers in brackets indicate the length of pause in seconds):

38. 1 NG: I view little facts like
2 most people when they hear welfare their portrayal is [1.9]
3 [switches to a faster sing-song voice] primarily a black woman
4 who’s been on it for all her life,
5 her mother has been on it prior to her
6 and her grandmother,
7 she has 13 children,
8 and that’s what we are supporting.
9 [switches back to her normal voice] Where in actuality, uh, most partici-
10 pants in welfare are white,
11 they have two or three children
12 and they’re on and off welfare.
13 Now a lot of people do need it
14 and use it as a short-term breach [1.2] for any type of uh economic [1.3]
drop-off in their life.
15 Um, and, I think it is a very, very distorted view. [3.3]
16 And, I think it’s propagated by the media
17 CS: Why?
18 NG: And our government.
19 CS: Why?
20 NG: [heavy sigh] Well [2.9] if you want to get into a real paranoid view
21 you could almost say that [2.2] um [2.8]
22 Well, you’ve probably read Big Brother, 1984 [Um-hm]
23 and, um, if you can divert people’s focus [2.4] from problems that per-
24 haps would be a little more difficult for them to address [1.3], um,
25 you can divert them.
26 And, I think it works for our political system.

The sing-song voice that Goodall uses in lines 3–8 is a kind of lamination:
Goodall makes it very clear that she does not subscribe to such racist views
by using a different intonation, which says, in effect, “I don’t hold this—
I’m not even talking in my normal voice.” (For more on the use of sing-song
intonation, see the Common Opinion section below.) The main lines I
want to discuss are 19–20, which begin with a heavy sigh and “Well.”
“Well” often precedes what conversation analysts call a “dispreferred second,” that is, the less typical “marked” response. Lines 19 and 20 are heavily modalized. Notice, for example, the way Goodall backs off from the forthright “I view” in line 1 and “I think” in lines 14 and 15 to an impersonal “you” who is now propounding her views in line 19 and 20, before finally owning her views again in line 24. She further signals low commitment to her views by hedging (“almost say”) and by using the subjunctive tense and modal auxiliary (“could almost say”). She laminates, saying, “if you want to get into a real paranoid view.” If she recognizes this is a paranoid view, then she is sane—it’s her crazy alter ego that thinks that.29 And, of course, she hesitates considerably. Hesitation is not always a sign of low cultural standing. For example, the 3.3 second pause between lines 14 and 15 probably marks the boundary between schemas. (See discussion of this on p. xx above and in Chafe 1977.) The long pauses in lines 19 and 20, by contrast, along with her heavy sigh and other ways of modalizing all contribute to the sense that the ideas she expresses have low cultural standing. (Just as dragging out a word can also indicate reluctance to commit to the ideas it conveys.) Her hesitation could be a way of deliberately signaling low commitment to the proposition or may be an inadvertent delay caused by trying to put into words a view that she does not have much practice in expressing or hearing expressed. In the latter case, hesitation would be an indicator of objectively low cultural standing and not just perceived low cultural standing, for the views that come to our lips the most readily are the common opinion or debatable opinions that people are not afraid to discuss. If we have not heard it, it probably lies at one extreme (taken-for-granted) or the other (highly controversial) or perhaps off the chart altogether because it has no standing at all in the society (although it might in another culture or historical period).30

Debatable Opinion

Debatable opinions are in the realm of discussion and debate. It is recognized (in the communities represented by the parties to the discussion, or the larger society if it is not clear where one’s interlocutors might stand) that there is more than one widely held opinion on the subject. Typically American English speakers indicate that this is a debatable opinion by explicitly marking it as their own opinion with an expression like “I think,” “I view,” “In my opinion,” or “To me” (as Nancy Goodall did in lines 1, 14, 15, and

29 It would still be lamination if she used a first-person construction, for example, “In my more paranoid moments I think that. . . .” Here is a parallel example from Goffman: “Take this bit of melodrama: ‘There is no excuse. You are right to hate me. I am coming to do so myself.’ Warmly animated, this utterance is something of a paradox. After all, anyone who identifies himself with the standards against which the culprit is being judged (and is found wanting) can’t himself be all bad—and isn’t, and in the very degree that he himself feelingly believes he is” (1974:521).

30 Daniel Segal pointed out the “off the chart” possibility when I presented this material in a talk at Pitzer College, February 2000.
24 of passage 38 above). Or they will present the opposing point of view, or represent the discourse of the critic (e.g., by using words and phrases associated with that social discourse),\textsuperscript{31} then respond to it. Sometimes they acknowledge that there is another point of view implicitly by giving reasons for their views instead of stating them flatly.\textsuperscript{32} A gradient of degrees of cultural standing can be inferred from the way in which an argument is framed, for it can be assumed that if a speaker offers proposition B in support of proposition A, then they judge B to be less controversial than A for the addressee.

Returning to passage 1 of Peter Vieira’s we can see examples of all three of these ways of marking his views as being a debatable opinion:

1. I mean, everybody’s always talking about how there’s no jobs out there. There are no jobs out there. Okay, fine, there are not jobs out there. But I mean to go into a McDonalds and start working. I don’t see a problem with that. I mean, it is, it is, some type of work. You’re doing something, you’re making some kind of money.

Vieira frames his view (working in a menial, low-paying job is better than not working) as a debatable opinion first by representing the other point of view “everybody’s always talking about how there’s no jobs out there.” (From the context, it appears that “there’s no jobs out there” means “there are no good jobs out there.”) Then he marks this as his opinion: “I don’t see a problem with that.” “I see/don’t see,” like “I think” or “in my opinion,” acknowledges that someone else might think differently. Finally, he gives reasons for his view: “You’re doing something, you’re making some kind of money.” He assumes (rightly so, I would say on the basis of my research) that doing something and making some kind of money have high cultural standing in the United States. They are less controversial than the opinion that one should take any sort of menial job, so can be used to bolster his argument.

Common Opinion

Common opinions are the views that speakers assume are widely shared, either in the larger society or in the community of opinion they share with their interlocutor. They are typically not modalized at all, and show no prosodic or paralinguistic signs of hesitation. Rhetorical questions might be used to express these culturally obvious truths. Sometimes the common opinion is indicated by formulaic language, what I have called verbal

\textsuperscript{31} Here is an example of representing the discourse of the critic. David Horowitz’s controversial ad opposing reparations for slavery, which appeared in several college newspapers during the 2000–2001 academic year, had the headline, “Ten Reasons Why Reparations for Slavery Is a Bad Idea—and Racist Too.” By calling reparations for slavery “racist,” Horowitz uses (and preempts) the terminology of his critics. As this example indicates, this technique is used for controversial ideas as well as ones that are a debatable opinion.

\textsuperscript{32} See also Schiffrin (1985) on features of “rhetorical argument.”
molecules, that is, frozen bits of discourse repeated verbatim by different
speakers or by the same speaker on different occasions (Strauss 1997:242).
Verbal molecules are especially likely to be indices of the common opinion
when they are adages (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 1969). Some exam-
pies invoked by interviewees who were unsympathetic to welfare were,
“You make your bed, you sleep in it” and “If you play, you have to pay.”
On the other side, representing a more sympathetic approach, were “Walk
a mile in my shoes” and “There but for the grace of God go I.”

Sometimes a verbal molecule is not a seemingly timeless saying but a
clichéd phrase that is in the air because it is the way a lot of people talk
about that topic. These canned phrases serve two purposes. They give you
something all packaged and ready to say when the topic comes up
(Abelson 1968). Furthermore, because you have heard these phrases many
times before from other speakers like you, they seem to be the safe way to
express the common opinion. With verbal molecules of this sort wording
may change a little, but the basic formula is preserved. Thus, Carol Russo
says of welfare recipients, “she’s never been educated into the fact that
she should get off her butt and go to work” (2) and “here are these people
that sit around on their butts” (18), and so does Marlene Randall, “these
young girls . . . sitting on their butt.”

Deborah Schiffrin found that you know sometimes “marks the general
consensual truths which speakers assume their hearers share through their
co-membership in the same culture, society, or group” (Schiffrin 1987:274).
She adds this is more likely if you know is spoken with falling rather
than rising intonation (ibid:291).33 Schiffrin also points to quotative
expressions like “they say” as conveying consensus. Both of these features
are combined in passage 26, where Carol Russo, talking about welfare
recipients, says,

26. You know, like they say, Well, it’s Saturday night, they’re going to go
out . . . and raise hell. And Monday morning . . . Anyway, I don’t think
there’s one right answer but I think one of the biggest answers would be
to cut off all these illegitimate children.

Notice that when Russo is repeating what people say, and what she takes
to be the common opinion, she frames her comment with you know. As
soon as she leaves what she takes to be safe, consensual common ground
to voice the more debatable opinion that welfare recipients should be ster-
ilized, she marks the latter with an I think rather than you know and
acknowledges that there are other points of view: “Anyway, I don’t think
there’s one right answer but I think one of the biggest answers would be to
cut off all these illegitimate children.”

33 Macaulay (2002, see also Macaulay 1991) takes a different position on the function of
you know. I am not claiming that every use of you know means “you know what I’m talking
about,” only that when it does have that meaning, it refers to a view that the speaker believes
to be the common opinion.
Sometimes, a speaker frames the common opinion as conventional wisdom. We call a view “conventional wisdom” if it is a common opinion that we think is wrong. One way of showing we think this is the conventional wisdom is to use a mocking, sing-song voice, as Nancy Goodall does in repeating the standard stereotype of welfare recipients in passage 38.

Taken-for-granted Ideas

I discussed earlier how to infer implicit, taken-for-granted ideas from what speakers do say. Sometimes views that are taken-for-granted, or lie somewhere between the common opinion and what is taken-for-granted, are buried in embedded clauses (Fairclough 1992:120–121). If a proposition is taken-for-granted, it does not have to be directly asserted, and indeed it would be odd to do so. Thus, for example, at a Thanksgiving dinner I attended and where (with permission) I taped the conversation, one of the hostesses said, “The reason that Communism fell down was because of the prosperity in capitalist countries.” This sentence has two embedded clauses: Communism fell down and Capitalist countries are prosperous. She presupposes these ideas instead of asserting them because she assumes they are beyond question. (If she had asserted them, she would have said, instead, something like “Communism fell down. Why? Capitalist countries are more prosperous.”) Notice also her use of “the reason that” before “Communism fell down” and “the” before “prosperity in capitalist countries.” The reason that and the definite article the are presupposition triggers, that is, words and other utterance features that generate presuppositions. For example, if I say, “The reason that you are behaving so strangely is that you forgot to take your medication,” the proposition asserted is that you are behaving strangely because you forgot to take your medication. That you are behaving strangely (which you might question!) is simply presupposed.

Final Thoughts: Collecting Discourse, Transcribing it, and Replication Issues

In the beginning of the chapter I said that the methods presented here are applicable to different kinds of discourse. Cultural standing, for example, can be analyzed using any kind of discourse, both oral (unelicited or elicited, one-on-one or group) and written (fiction, essays, letters, speeches, and so on). Notice in the following published essay the way Barbara Ehrenreich

34 In line with Grice’s Maxim of Quantity: “Make your contribution as informative as is required for the current purposes of the exchange; do not make your contribution more informative than is required” (Grice 1975).

35 Levinson (1983) has a nice discussion of these, drawing on a manuscript by Lauri Karttunen.
uses lamination and the impersonal third person to indicate her awareness that her views are controversial:

39. One could conclude, if one was in a very bad mood, that it is not in the interests of affluent feminists to see the wages of working-class women improve. (Ehrenreich 2000)

It would be fascinating to take certain ideas and trace their rhetorical treatment historically to see if they shift from being controversial, to debatable opinions, to the common opinion, or vice versa. Certain signs of cultural standing (e.g., hesitation, repairs of a misstatement) will be lost in texts that have been edited for publication or that are rehearsed for delivery before a wide audience, but others will doubtless remain.

Analysis of personal semantic networks and the way people internalize social discourses can be performed on written as well as oral discourse, but for these analyses it is necessary to have a great deal of discourse produced by the same person. Published letters or several lengthy articles or essays might be good sources. On-line instant messages would probably be a poor source.

Interviews are not suitable, either, if they are too short or too mechanical because the interviewer has created a let’s-get-this-over-with-as-quickly-as-possible atmosphere. Inconsistent ideas are most likely to be revealed in a lengthy interview, or over the course of two or more interviews, as a result of the interviewer asking different kinds of questions and eliciting different kinds of discourse (e.g., personal narratives as well as general statements of opinion). For personal semantic network analysis, it is imperative to let interviewees speak in a stream-of-consciousness fashion, moving from one topic to another as the interviewee sees fit instead of adhering to a fixed interview schedule. For interviewees to reveal their emotional hot spots, interviewers have to be nonjudgmental and friendly: A stiff, formal approach will not work. That does not mean the interviewer pretends to be a friend. Conversations between friends are reciprocal. An interview is different: It should be the interviewee’s opportunity to speak at length, without the interviewer competing for conversational turns. The interview transcript should contain long turns by the interviewee, broken up only infrequently by the interviewer.

Oral data has to be transformed into written text so you can mull over it and present your analysis to readers. How much detail is necessary in transcription? You probably noticed that different passages in this article include different levels of detail. In passage 38 pauses were timed, with their length indicated in square brackets; in all other passages pauses were indicated only by ellipses. In passages 34 and 38 I numbered every sentence; in the rest I did not. Others would argue for greater consistency, but I think this should be a matter of convenience. It is extremely time consuming to take a stopwatch to every pause or to number every line, and it is distracting for the reader to deal with that extraneous information. If the length of
pauses is relevant for your analysis, you should measure it, and if it improves
the readability of your exposition to number lines in a long quoted passage,
do it. If not, why bother?

Qualitative discourse analysis methods inevitably raise the issue of
replicability. How likely is it that two people will find the same personal
semantic networks or social discourses or markers of cultural standing in
the same texts? I tried this once. I gave a graduate assistant the complete
interview transcripts for one of my interviewees and taught her how to do
a personal semantic network analysis. She came up with the same key ele-
ments I had. Clearly some parts of the analysis are more cut-and-dried
than others. It is straightforward to determine what topic follows what in
a PSN analysis. Determining emotional hot spots is not. I would argue,
however, that it is better to try to find emotional hot spots and the other
features described here, presenting all the evidence that you used so readers
can judge for themselves whether your analysis is plausible, than to leave
out these important aspects of discourse on the grounds that a machine
could not do it.

References

Abelson, Robert P. 1968. Computers, polls, and public opinion—some puzzles and
Baddeley, Alan. 1999. Memory. In The MIT encyclopedia of the cognitive sciences,
Press.
Bakhtin, Mikhail M. 1981. Discourse in the novel. In The dialogic imagination,
Holquist. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.
Becker, Gary. 1976. The economic approach to human behavior. Chicago, IL:
University of Chicago Press.
Bellah, Robert N., Richard Madsen, William M. Sullivan, Ann Swidler, and
Steven M. Tipton. 1985. Habits of the heart: Individualism and commitment in
Chafe, Wallace. 1977. Creativity in verbalization and its implications for the
nature of stored knowledge. In Discourse production and comprehension,
D’Andrade, Roy G. and Claudia Strauss, eds. 1992. Human motives and cultural
Dijk, Teun A. van. 1987. Communicating racism: Ethnic prejudice in thought and
Analyzing for Cultural Complexity


Claudia Strauss


