Conceptualizing and Measuring Culture in Surveys: Values, Strategies, and Symbols*

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MNEMONICS: IMPFINAN IMPMAR IMPKIDS IMPGOD IMPTHNGS IMPCULTR IMPJOB IMPSELF STANDUP SELFIRST BIGBAND BLUEGRASS COUNTRY BLUES MUSICALS CLASSICL FOLK GOSPEL JAZZ LATIN MOODEASY NEWAGE OPERA RAP REGGAE CONROCK OLDIES HVYMETAL LFEGOD LFEGENES LFESOCTY LFEHRDWK LFECHNCE FRDCREAT FRDCULTR FRDDYNAM FRDFUN FRDHONST FRDINTEL FRDRES ATTSPRTS VISITART MAKEART AUTORACE CAMPING GARDEN DANCE GOMUSIC HUNTFISH PERFORM DOSPORTS SEEMOVIE USEVCR PLYMUSIC TVSHOWS TVNEWS TVPBS JUDGEART TRSTPROF CLASSICS GRTBOOKS MODPAINT ENGLISH PCLIT EXCELART HOSTHOME UNITED

Abstract

This article reviews the content and development of a topical module on aspects of culture that appeared in the 1993 General Social Survey. This process drew on many extant survey resources for studying culture, and the interview schedule it produced focused on three elements of culture: personal values, predispositions toward particular strategies for action, and symbolic indicators of group membership such as tastes and activities. Also included were several items measuring attitudes toward cultural objects and figures. Cursory analysis of response distributions for these items reveals a relatively high degree of consensus among Americans regarding the value of self-sufficiency, the efficacy of individual striving, and the virtues of honesty and responsibility in friends. The article concludes with observations about aspects of culture that survey approaches are not well-suited to measuring, and about implications of routine ways of developing surveys for studies of culture.

INTRODUCTION

The 1993 General Social Survey (GSS) included a module of questions designed to measure aspects of culture. Many, many sample survey items might fall under this rubric, of course. The items that appeared in the 1993 GSS are best interpreted as measures of (1) certain values people hold; (2) predispositions toward or strategies for action that people draw upon; and (3) tastes, preferences, and activities that serve as symbolic indicators of membership in and boundaries between social groups. Inclusion of these items, particularly those in group (3), reflects the emphases pursued by scholars involved in the recent resurgence of interest in the sociology of culture (see Peterson, 1979; Wuthnow and Witten, 1988).

This article presents the questions that appeared in the survey and summary statistics giving the typical responses of a representative sample of U.S. residents. It also reports on the process that developed the items, and on what that process taught us about the use of survey methods to measure concepts of interest to cultural sociologists. We reflect on what was and was not attempted, distinguishing between those issues that had to be set aside owing to practical limitations on the scope of the undertaking and those that were not pursued because they were not amenable to this approach to measurement. At various points in the article, we suggest some analyses that might be undertaken using the data that were gathered.

THE 1993 GENERAL SOCIAL SURVEY "CULTURE" MODULE

The General Social Survey is an almost-annual sample survey in which a randomly selected cross-section of English-speaking residents of U.S. households is interviewed. The survey covers a wide variety of topics, including many sociopolitical attitudes and behaviors; it also provides substantial sociodemographic data on both the current social positions and the social backgrounds of the roughly 1500 persons interviewed each year. A total of 1606 persons--more than 82 percent of the eligible persons contacted--responded to the 1993 survey.

Davis and Smith (1992) provide a general introduction to the design and content of the GSS.

The interview schedule for each GSS consists of three portions: a "replicating core" including sociodemographic items and attitude/behavior items measured over time in order to trace trends; an "international module" of items on a given topic area (e.g., role of government, environment) that is also administered in national surveys conducted in more than twenty other countries, as part of the International Social Survey Program; and one or more "topical modules."

The 1993 "culture" module was designed as a topical module. Topical modules include a focused set of questions that pertain to issues in an active area of social science inquiry; past topics include social networks, political participation, religion, and intergroup relations, among others. Such modules appear in only one GSS. They are usually designed under the auspices of the GSS Board of Overseers, in collaboration with experts in the topical area and the GSS principal investigators. As is typical, the interview time available for the culture module was limited to fifteen minutes.

When the GSS Board selected culture as the focal topic for the 1993 module, it recognized that few, if any, of its members had expertise in this field. For this reason, advice was solicited from many specialists in the area. The module was designed by a subcommittee consisting of four substantive experts from among those consulted (Judith Blau, Paul DiMaggio, Richard A. [Pete] Peterson, and Ann Swidler), two representatives of the GSS Board (Marsden and then-Board Chair Andrea Tyree), and the principal investigators of the GSS (James A. Davis and Tom W. Smith).

Given the breadth of "culture" as a topical focus, a wide variety of potential topics could be, and were, suggested. Beyond those actually appearing in the final instrument (see "Module Content" below), these included cultural literacy (familiarity with particular cultural objects, works or figures), tastes in home decorations, and the perceived availability of particular cultural activities in the area near one's residence. Several participants suggested that the informal social networks of respondents should be measured to permit investigation of issues involving socialization and cultural diffusion.

Where possible, sources giving interview items used in the past were consulted. Prior surveys proved useful in a number of ways: they suggested topics of interest, provided initial checklists (subsequently modified) for several multiple-item questions (e.g., explanatory frames, music tastes, and leisure-time activities), and aided in the choice of question wordings and response categories. On-line searches were conducted of the archives of the Gallup and Harris polls, as well as the Roper Center for Public Opinion Research. Questionnaires used in several large-scale surveys touching on culture were inspected; these included the American Dream Survey, the Euro-Barometer Survey, the Family Values Survey, the Survey of Public Participation in the Arts (DiMaggio and Ostrower, 1992), and the World Values Survey (Harding et al., 1986). Beyond these sources, participants examined research instruments drawn from specific works, including The Anatomy of Racial Attitudes (Apostle et al., 1983), Distinction (Bourdieu, 1984), The Love of Art (Bourdieu and Darbel, 1990), The Nature of Human Values (Rokeach, 1973), and The Secularization of Leisure (Katz and Gurevitch, 1976). Below, as we discuss the GSS items themselves, we will note those prior surveys which were most influential in their development.

Developing the items followed relatively standard survey research procedures. Pretest interviews, using many more items than could be administered in the full survey, were conducted with 72 respondents. The subcommittee selected the final items. Its decisions were based primarily on criteria of novelty and expected interest to cultural sociologists. It also considered information that emerged from the pretest, including response

distributions (items yielding little variety in responses were generally discarded), associations of items with basic sociodemographic indicators such as gender, education, and age, and problems in administration reported by interviewers who conducted the pretest.

The final version of the module questionnaire was administered in the 1993 GSS interviews conducted from February through April. After cleaning and documentation, the data became publicly available in the fall of 1993 (see footnote 1 above on how to obtain them).

MODULE CONTENT

To frame our discussion of the content of the culture module, we have drawn on distinctions made in Peterson's (1979: 137-8) review of cultural research in sociology. Peterson observes that sociological work published in the late 1940s and 1950s treated values--conceptualizations of desirable end-states--and the behavioral norms they specify as the principal explanatory elements of culture. Talcott Parsons (1951) figured prominently in this school of thought, and more recent survey studies of culture and cultural change in both the United States (Rokeach, 1973) and Europe (Inglehart, 1977) continue the Parsonsian tradition of examining values as a core concept.

Cultural sociologists writing since the late 1970s, however, have accented other elements of culture. These include, especially, beliefs and expressive symbols. Peterson's (1979: 138) usage of "beliefs" refers to "existential statements about how the world operates that often serve to justify values and norms." As such, they are less to be understood as desirable end-states in and of themselves, but instead as habits or styles of thought that people draw upon, especially in unstructured situations (Swidler, 1986).

Moreover, cultural sociology in the last two decades has given primacy to various expressive symbols, especially material artifacts like literature (Griswold, 1992) and art (DiMaggio, 1987). As Peterson notes, symbols and symbol systems may be studied from numerous standpoints. Some regard them as concrete reflections of less visible patterns in society, while others contend conversely that they are devices used deliberately to create beliefs, values, and patterns of behavior. Still others concentrate on what Peterson (1979: 153) calls "mundane facts," like market and organizational contingencies, involved in the production of cultural artifacts.

All three of these strands of cultural research are represented by some survey items included in the 1993 GSS. The first set of items discussed below asks respondents to assess the importance to themselves of various goals or personal values. The bulk of the survey questions, however, were included in order to capture more recent directions in cultural sociology. Thus, major segments of the culture module were devoted to measuring styles of thought or world views (individual versus collective orientation, and "explanatory frames") as well as to examining tastes, activities, and preferences for qualities in friends--all of which can be interpreted as symbolic indicators of status group membership. One last set of items does not fit neatly into Peterson's classification of elements of culture: it measures attitudes toward diverse aspects of culture and the desirability of cultural boundaries. We discuss these sets of questions in turn, together with figures that give a general picture of the answers given by GSS respondents.

Items on Values

Rokeach defines a value as an "enduring belief that a specific mode of conduct or end-state of existence is personally or socially preferable to an opposite or converse mode of conduct or end-state" (Rokeach, 1973: 5).

Rokeach's definition is closely tied to Parsonsian theory which asserts that values, or value-orientations, signal preferred end-states that guide human behavior. This understanding of social action stresses an internalized pattern of preferences acquired by individuals through socialization.

Such conceptualizations of culture--as underlying and somewhat static foundations of social life--have a natural affinity with survey research methodology, as Wuthnow and Witten (1988: 51) indicate. Works by Rokeach (1973, 1974) and Inglehart (1977, 1990) are representative of previous empirical research on value systems. Rokeach asked respondents to rank two sets of values, one consisting of eighteen end-states ("terminal values") and the other including eighteen modes of behavior ("instrumental values"). Using these data Rokeach examined the relative importance of specific values within segments of the population studied, and charted changes in values over time.

Inglehart's work on European values and culture is based on the Euro-Barometer and World Values surveys. His discussion centers on a distinction between "Materialist" and "Post-Materialist" value priorities. He measures these by asking respondents to select one or two "most desirable" alternatives from a set of goals for a country. Those emphasizing such things as "fighting rising prices" or "maintaining security" are said to be Materialists, while those stressing aims like "protecting freedom of speech" or "giving the people more say in important political decisions" are regarded as Post-Materialists (Inglehart, 1977: 28-9).

Several GSS items were formulated in an effort to tap foundational values or orientations which guide social behavior. Specific items were selected after review of a number of different sources, including Rokeach's (1973) questionnaire, the World Values Survey, the American Dream Survey, and various Harris and Roper polls. These value items focus on the importance of different goals in an individual's personal life, and as such are more closely tied to the tradition of work associated with Rokeach. Table 1 reports the items and the percentages of respondents who say that particular values are of great importance to them. The respondent is asked to evaluate the importance of such end-states as being financially secure, being married, being cultured, and being self-sufficient. These states do not constitute a comprehensive inventory of value possibilities; instead they cover several dimensions salient on the American scene (e.g. materialism, individualism, and religiosity).

Table 1: Items Measuring Personal Values

Question text: "I'm going to read you a list of some things that different people value. Some people say these things are very important to them. Other people say they are not so important. Please tell me how important each thing is to you personally, using the responses on this card. How about being financially secure? Is it one of the most important values you hold, very important, somewhat important, not too important, or not at all important?"

	Percent Saying "One of Most Important" or "Very Important"	
Being self-sufficient and not having to depend on others	89.5%	(1588)
Being financially secure	78.3%	(1589)
Having faith in God	78.1%	(1586)

Having a fulfilling job	77.5%	(1585)
Having children	62.1%	(1584)
Being married	50.8%	(1587)
Being cultured	28.6%	(1567)
Having nice things	26.0%	(1585)

Case bases for percentages are given in parentheses. Items were presented to respondents in a different order than that shown here. They are listed in order of the percentage of respondents endorsing them as "very important" or "one of the most important" values.

The question asks respondents to use a rating scale for the values, rather than forcing an "all-or-nothing" response to any of the possibilities. It thereby recognizes the possibility that cultural values may be shared--to varying degrees--by all members of a society, a state of affairs which Rokeach (1973: 3) assumes outright.

In Table 1, we see that nearly 90 percent of those interviewed regard independence as either "very important" or "one of the most important" personal values. Financial security, religiosity, and fulfillment at work are endorsed as important by nearly four-fifths of the respondents. All four of these values receive greater stress than the two "family values" of having children and being married; the latter is rated highly by only a slight majority of those who answered. On the other hand, two items pertaining to what might be termed loosely as lifestyles, "having nice things" and "being cultured," are rated in one of the top two importance levels by only about a quarter of the interviewees.

Strategies: Individual/Collective Orientation and Explanatory Frames

Table 1 makes it clear that self-reliance is of great importance to American adults. The finding resonates with various discussions of American national character, the study of public moral discourse in Habits of the Heart (Bellah et al., 1985) among them. In that work, culture is conceptualized as a depository of languages which, in the American case, includes a dominant language of individualism along with less prominent languages of spiritual or democratic communitarianism. People are seen as actively drawing upon this repertoire of discursive traditions in a struggle to give meaning to their lives.

This view of American individualism sees it less as a value in and of itself than as a habitual way of thinking about and organizing lives--as part of what Swidler (1986) calls a cultural "tool kit." Swidler asserts that the relevance of culture to action lies in the provision of means rather than in the provision of ends. She argues that personal values (and orientations) are shaped to fit what an individual is culturally equipped to do: "Action is not determined by one's values. Rather action and values are organized to take advantage of cultural competences" (Swidler, 1986: 275). Individualists, in this understanding, are people whose learned competencies predispose them toward pursuing goals and interests on their own rather than in a collective fashion.

The culture module included the three questions that appear in Table 2 in an effort to measure such individualist proclivities. The items pose choices between actions oriented toward oneself and those that take account of others. The first asks whether the respondent will voice a personal opinion or keep it to herself when it is known that the opinion will make others around her uncomfortable; most respondents say that they would make their opinion known. The second item asks about the extent to which respondents agree that one should take care of oneself before helping others; more than three-fifths of those questioned place themselves first. The final item complements the second by assessing instead the rationale one should have when helping others; it contrasts obligation and self-fulfillment as reasons for making sacrifices on behalf of an elderly parent or ill spouse. Here, obligation was the majority response, though nearly 40 percent of the respondents stated that such care should be given only if someone "really wants" to give it.

Table 2: Items Measuring Individual/Collective Orientation

Question text: "Some people think that it's important to stand up for your own opinion even if it makes others around you uncomfortable. Others think that it's better to keep your views to yourself if they would make others around you uncomfortable. Which position comes closer to your view?"

Stand up for your own opinion even if it makes others around you uncomfortable	56.6%
Keep your views to yourself if they would make others around you uncomfortable	38.6%
Neither (volunteered by respondent)	4.8%
	(1572)

Question text: "As I read each of the following statements, please tell me whether you strongly agree, agree, neither agree or disagree, disagree, or strongly disagree with it."

	Percent Saying "Strongly Agree" or "Agree"	
You have to take care of yourself first, and if you have any energy left over, then help other people.	62.6%	(1588)

Question text: "Sometimes people are asked to make great sacrifices for others in their family by caring for an elderly parent or a spouse who is seriously ill or injured. When someone is asked to give such care, is it their obligation to do so, or should they give care only if they really want to?"

It is their obligation 56.6% Give care only if they really want to 39.8% Other (volunteered by respondent) 3.6% (1573)

Case bases for percentages are given in parentheses.

These three questions were adapted from items found in the World Values Survey, the Family Values Survey, and questionnaires brought to our attention by Robert Wuthnow (see Wuthnow, 1991: chapter 5). In pretesting these and several related items that did not appear in the final module, we found that respondents had difficulty in answering them--often giving nonsubstantive (e.g. "don't know") responses, or seeking to agree with both sides of a forced-choice contrast. We cannot say whether such difficulties in administration mean that the items effectively posed challenging, ambiguous dilemmas for respondents, or whether instead they reflect more mundane semantic and task problems with the items. Examination of the associations among responses to different items pretested did not reveal an unambiguous underlying dimension of individual-collective orientation; thus, "individualism" may be a multifaceted construct. Several members of the module subcommittee were hopeful that future studies might probe more deeply into predispositions toward individualism.

Values, according to Rokeach, are just one set of beliefs. They are unique in that they offer prescriptions or proscriptions for action (Rokeach, 1973). Descriptive or existential beliefs, on the other hand, are thought by many to be more important than values for understanding social action because they shed light on subjective perceptions of what is possible (and not possible) rather than perceptions of what is simply desirable. Ann Swidler (personal communication) has pointed out that some cultural sociologists regard existential beliefs or world views as a "deeper" dimension of culture, a potential "'holy grail'. . . that would unify and account for the pattern of people's specific cultural beliefs."

In an attempt to measure the explanatory frames on which a respondent tends to rely, one set of questions asked respondents to rate the importance of different reasons why a person's life might turn out well or poorly. These items appear in Table 3. Reasons or explanations proposed for success or failure in life included God, genes, society, will power, and chance. As with the personal values items (Table 1), respondents were asked to assess the importance of these factors individually rather than to rank them explicitly or make a yes-or-no decision about the relevance of each. Items found in the American Dream Survey and in a questionnaire used by Apostle et al. (1983) were helpful in the formulation of the questions displayed in Table 3.

Table 3: Items Measuring Explanatory Frames

Question text: "I'm going to read some statements that give reasons why a person's life turns out well or poorly. As I read each one, tell me whether you think it is very important, important, somewhat important, or not at all important for how somebody's life turns out."

	Percent Saying "Very Important" or "Important"	Percent Saying "Not at all Important"	
Some people use their will power and work harder than others.	94.3%	1.3%	(1581)
Such things are decided by God.	53.1%	23.5%	(1547)

Society gives some people a head start and holds others back.	52.3%	13.9%	(1550)
Some people are born with better genes than others.	38.4%	31.2%	(1552)
It's just a matter of chance.	19.5%	42.7%	(1564)

Case bases for percentages are given in parentheses. Items were presented to respondents in a different order than that shown here. They are listed in order of the percentage of respondents endorsing them as "very important" or "important" reasons.

As in the two previous tables, there is a strong hint of "individualism" in the findings displayed in Table 3. Nearly all respondents (94.3%) rate the importance of will power and hard work highly. Both the structure of society and divine decision are attributed importance by more than half of the GSS sample; a quarter of it, however, regards decisions by God as bearing little or no weight. A significant minority (38.4%) assigns substantial importance for outcomes to genetic factors, while explanations involving chance are of high importance to less than a fifth of the respondents.

Some of these findings--in particular that regarding the widespread importance assigned to individual initiative and hard work--are of immediate interest. If these items have effectively tapped the basic aspects of cultural beliefs mentioned by Peterson and Swidler, however, we also should find that respondents drawing on different explanatory frames vary systematically in their views on more concrete social issues such as sex roles, sexuality, social welfare policy and race relations. The "payoff" of items like those shown in Table 3, then, may well lie in their associations with attitude items that appear in the replicating core of the GSS.

Markers of Symbolic Boundaries: Tastes and Activities

Recent research on the seemingly diverse topics of tastes, qualities preferred in friends, and participation in nonwork activities has tended to view these as byproducts of social processes which, once created, act back upon, influence, or constrain individual behavior (see, e.g., Lamont and Fournier, 1992). These products are held to be important symbolic markers of the boundaries demarcating status groups; as such, they are regarded as more crucial bases for subcultural differentiation than values or other orientations. In these studies, the search for an "intellectually coherent pattern of culture" (Peterson 1983: 423) proceeds by inferring "values from the things which people choose to surround themselves, and from the ways they choose to spend time" (Peterson, 1983: 427).

Due to the prominence of symbolic products and attachments in the recent literature, a large fraction of questions in the culture module was devoted to this theme. Pertinent items include preferred qualities in personal friends (Table 4), tastes for different musical styles (Table 5), and participation in leisure-time activities, including

television viewing (Table 6).

Friend qualities. In Money, Morals, and Manners (1992), Mich?e Lamont examines middle-class definitions and stereotypes of the qualities required to be a "worthy person." Her argument, in part, is that the differential distribution of these symbols and stereotypes across social groups creates and maintains symbolic boundaries or cultural rules which prescribe and proscribe individual behavior. These symbols also help to constitute identities: in telling what they value in personal friends, people are telling about the virtues most central to their definitions of self.

In line with this current work, the GSS items displayed in Table 4 measured the importance that respondents assign to seven qualities (creative, cultured, dynamic, fun-loving, honest, intelligent, and responsible) that might be found in a personal friend. These seven descriptions were inspired in part by the list of personal qualities given by Bourdieu (1984:514, question 11), which contrasts different conceptions of virtue.

Table 4: Preferred Qualities in Personal Friends

Question text: "I'm going to read seven qualities one might look for in a personal friend. All of the qualities may be desirable ones for a personal friend, but I'm interested in those that are most important to you. As I read each one, could you tell me whether it is extremely important, very important, fairly important, not too important, or not at all important?"

	Percent Saying "Extremely Important" or "Very Important"	
Honest	98.2%	(1587)
Responsible	89.4%	(1586)
Fun-loving	67.2%	(1584)
Intelligent	49.1%	(1582)
Creative	23.5%	(1569)
Cultured	20.9%	(1565)
Dynamic	19.6%	(1550)

Case bases for percentages are given in parentheses. Items were presented to respondents in a different order than that shown here. They are listed in order of the percentage of respondents endorsing them as "extremely important" or "very important" qualities.

The findings displayed in Table 4 show that American adults converge in assigning high importance to honesty and responsibility as qualities valued in friends. Nearly all GSS respondents (98.2%) regard honesty in a friend as "very" or "extremely" important, and only slightly fewer (almost 90%) assign a similarly high rating to the quality of responsibility. These virtues seem to be nearly universal prerequisites for friendship within the population sampled, and as such do not seem to provide a basis for defining group boundaries. Less commonly emphasized qualities such as creativity, being "cultured," or dynamism--each of which is highly regarded by about a fifth of the sample--may be used by "excluders" in the manner suggested by Lamont. Further examination of these data may reveal the class and status groups that regard particular qualities as virtues.

Music tastes. Several analyses of survey evidence on patterns of cultural choice (Peterson and Simkus, 1992; DiMaggio and Ostrower, 1990; Marsden et al., 1982) as well as field analyses (Gaines, 1991) suggest that music tastes play an important role in defining status groups. Differences in such tastes are appreciably associated with age/cohort/generation, socioeconomic standing, and race/ethnicity; certain forms are rather unambiguously identified with particular sociodemographic groups. For this reason substantial effort was devoted to measuring such tastes.

The question about music styles (Table 5) asks respondents to give their feelings, both positive and negative, about eighteen types of music that range from classical to heavy metal. Feelings or tastes were measured rather than the frequency or amount of listening. People often listen to music under conditions that are outside their control--in the presence of others or in public places, for example. Since the concept of interest here involves preferences, expressions of liking and disliking seem more central than the actual consumption of musical styles. A thirteen-item list found in the Survey of Public Participation in the Arts (SPPA) questionnaire was the basis for developing the set of styles that appear in Table 5.

Table 5: Items Assessing Music Tastes

Question text: "I'm going to read you a list of some types of music. Can you tell me which of the statements on this card comes closest to your feeling about each type of music? Let's start with big band music. Do you like it very much, like it, have mixed feelings, dislike it, dislike it very much, or is this a type of music that you don't know much about?"

	Percent Saying "Like Very Much" or "Like"	Percent Saying "Don't Know Much About"	
Oldies rock	68.5%	2.6%	(1596)
Country/Western	61.2%	1.4%	(1596)
Mood/easy listening	59.6%	4.5%	(1593)
Gospel music	58.2%	2.2%	(1594)
Blues or Rhythm and Blues	55.8%	3.5%	(1594)
Big Band/Swing	53.8%	10.3%	(1594)

Contemporary pop/rock	53.4%	3.1%	(1594)
Broadway musicals/show tunes	50.1%	4.8%	(1592)
Jazz	49.9%	2.4%	(1591)
Classical music-symphony & chamber	47.6%	4.1%	(1595)
Bluegrass	44.3%	10.2%	(1595)
Folk music	42.8%	4.9%	(1594)
Reggae	28.0%	18.5%	(1595)
Latin/Mariachi/Salsa	25.7%	13.9%	(1594)
Opera	20.7%	5.2%	(1593)
New age/space music	14.7%	18.3%	(1592)
Rap music	12.7%	3.8%	(1595)
Heavy metal	10.7%	4.4%	(1596)

Case bases for percentages are given in parentheses. Items were presented to respondents in a different order than that shown here. They are listed in order of the percentage of respondents who answered "like" or "like very much".

According to the results in Table 5, "oldies rock" and country/western music are the genres having the broadest appeal to American adults in the early 1990s; more than three-fifths of the respondents say that they like each. A wide variety of other forms--from mood/easy listening (59.6%) to folk music (42.8%) are liked by most or many of those who answered the survey. Some styles that tend to be identified with particular subgroups in American society--including Latin/Mariachi/Salsa, Reggae, rap, new age/space music, and heavy metal variants on rock--are among those with the narrowest appeal. These latter forms may well be the types of music that most effectively serve to constitute or reinforce identities for people attached to them.

An interesting feature of the series of questions on music tastes is that the "don't know much about this type" answer was explicitly offered to respondents; this response is of substantive interest as one indicator of familiarity with subcultures or cultural literacy. Table 5 shows that relatively few respondents (less than five percent for most styles) claim a lack of knowledge about any of the types of music. Admitted unfamiliarity is highest for some of the less popular forms (Reggae, Latin, and new age), but by no means for all of them: rap and heavy metal are well-known, if not well-liked.

Activities and television viewing. By contrast to the items on music tastes, the items on activities and television viewing that appear in Table 6 are explicitly behavioral. These questions ask respondents to tell about their participation in leisure or recreational activities and the frequency with which they watch three kinds of television programming. The rationale for including these items in the GSS is, however, similar to that for other items discussed in this section. As with tastes in music, these two sets of questions can be used to define "patterns of cultural choice" that may be associated with class or status group differences, or instead may constitute "lifestyle alternatives" that are not hierarchically ordered (Peterson, 1983: 433).

Table 6: Questions on Activities and Television Viewing

Question text: "Next I'd like to ask about some leisure or recreational activities that people do during their free time. As I read each activity, can you tell me if it is something you have done in the past twelve months? Let's begin with attending an amateur or professional sports event. Did you do that within the past twelve months?"

	Percent Saying "Yes"	
Go out to see a movie in a theater.	69.9%	(1594)
Grow vegetables, flowers, or shrubs in a garden.	60.5%	(1594)
Record a TV program so you could watch it later.	59.7%	(1594)
Participate in any sports activity such as softball, basketball, swimming, golf, bowling, skiing, or tennis.	56.5%	(1594)
Attend an amateur or professional sports event.	53.6%	(1594)
Go camping, hiking, or canoeing.	41.7%	(1593)
Visit an art museum or gallery.	40.6%	(1593)
Make art or craft objects such as pottery, woodworking, quilts, or paintings.	40.3%	(1593)
Go hunting or fishing.	35.2%	(1591)
Play a musical instrument like a piano, guitar, or violin.	23.4%	(1590)
Go to a live ballet or dance performance, not including school performances.	19.7%	(1593)
Go to a classical music or opera performance, not including school performances.	16.0%	(1592)

Go to an auto, stock car, or motorcycle race.	15.4%	(1593)
Take part in a music, dance, or theatrical performance.	9.7%	(1590)

Question text: "I'll now ask about some different kinds of television shows. Would you tell me how often you watch prime-time drama or situation comedy programs? Would you say every day, several times a week, several times a month, rarely, or never?"

	Percent Saying "Every day"	Percent Saying "Rarely" or "Never"	
Prime-time drama or situation comedy programs.	21.1%	24.9%	(1595)
World or national news programs.	64.1%	8.1%	(1597)
Programs shown on public television.	18.7%	29.2%	(1591)

Case bases for percentages are given in parentheses. For the activities question, items were presented to respondents in a different order than that shown. They are listed in order of the percentage of respondents saying "yes".

The fourteen leisure or recreational activities shown in Table 6 were chosen after modifying and selecting from much longer activity lists that appear in the SPPA and in various Harris polls. Respondents were asked only whether they had done the activity in question during the previous twelve months. The activities included here are, of course, only a selection from a much larger set of possible activities. They span the major contrasts that previous research in this area (e.g. Marsden et al., 1982) has identified. Among these are distinctions between active and passive activities (for example, playing a musical instrument versus attending dance or classical music performances), between high and popular culture, or "highbrow" and "lowbrow" activities (e.g. visiting an art museum or gallery versus going to an auto race), and between activities usually pursued domestically (such as gardening or arts and crafts) rather than away from home (such as attendance at performances or hunting and fishing). Somewhat related to this last distinction is a contrast between activities that are--or can be--pursued alone, and those often done with others. The fourteen activity items in Table 6 will not suffice to describe activity patterns precisely, but this sampling of activities should allow analysts to discern the different styles typically used by respondents in their free-time pursuits.

It is fitting that passive activities often labelled as "popular" culture--watching movies at theaters (70%), recording television programs to watch later (60%), or attending sports events (54%)--are among the things that GSS respondents most commonly claim to do. Certain active forms of participation, including gardening and taking part in sports activities, are also claimed by a majority of interviewees. More rarified activities include several that are identified with "high" culture--attending or taking part in the performing arts--but also one--attending auto races--that definitely is not so labelled.

The second set of items displayed in Table 6 gathers limited information about what the respondent watches on television and how often. Respondents were asked to say how often they watch three types of television programming: prime-time drama or situation comedy programs, world or national news programs, and programs

shown on public television.

In contrast to the music and activities items which seek to identify differences in taste and consumption patterns, the principal purpose of the television items is to measure the extent to which respondents are in contact with a central medium in U.S. society through which mass cultural products diffuse. We observe in Table 6 that nearly two-thirds of those questioned say that they watch news programming on television on a daily basis; less than ten percent of the respondents "rarely" or "never" do so. Consumption of the other two sorts of programming is much less widespread, however. Both prime-time and public television programs are viewed each day by only a fifth of the sample--and roughly equal or larger percentages say that they rarely or never see such programming.

Cultural Attitudes

The set of "cultural attitudes" items included in Table 7 illustrate a distinct approach to the study of cultural issues. These questions do not seek to measure any single element of "culture," as the items presented in the preceding sections do. They are instead standard agree/disagree survey items that ask respondents to respond to statements about issues involving cultural objects and figures.

Table 7: Attitudes about Cultures and Subcultures

Question text: "I'm going to read several statements. After I read each one, please tell me whether you strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree with it."

Statement	Percent Saying "Strongly Agree" or "Agree"	(N)
Artistic excellence can be found in popular and folk culture just as much as in the fine arts.	95.0%	(1463)
Only a few people have the knowledge and ability to judge excellence in the arts.	49.2%	(1482)
Modern painting is just slapped on: a child could do it.	40.7%	(1473)
I trust the judgment of the teachers & professors who decide what high school and college students should be reading.	63.2%	(1512)
High schools & colleges make students spend too much time reading "classics" that have little relevance in today's world.	37.9%	(1431)
The greatest books are universal in their appeal: there is no "white literature", "black literature", or "Asian literature", there is only human literature.	77.4%	(1456)

It is a shame when traditional American literature is ignored while other works are promoted because they are by women or by members of minority groups.	66.9%	(1419)
It is better for everyone if English is the only language used in the public schools.	48.2%	(1537)
I would feel uncomfortable entertaining people I don't know well in my home.	54.0%	(1560)

Question text: "There is a lot of discussion today about whether Americans are divided or united. Some say that Americans are united and in agreement about the most important values. Others think that Americans are greatly divided when it comes to the most important values. What is your view about this?"

Americans are greatly divided when it comes to the most important values	66.1%
Americans are united and in agreement about the most important values	33.9%
	(1527)

Case bases for percentages are given in parentheses. Items were presented to respondents in a different order than that shown.

The first three cultural attitude items measure dispositions toward classical and contemporary art forms. Respondents overwhelmingly agree that popular and folk culture can produce artistic excellence. A considerably less egalitarian result is that nearly half of the sample agrees that the ability to perceive excellence is confined to a few people. A sizable minority--more than 40 percent--seem to feel that the production of modern art requires little in the way of talent.

Two statements shown in Table 7 focus on matters of cultural authority. Most respondents (63%) say that they have faith in the academic professionals who set curricula for high school and college students; a sizable minority (38%) nonetheless agrees that excessive portions of curricula are devoted to "classic" works that have become outdated.

Three of the items in Table 7 deal, in essence, with the desirability of cultural boundaries, by asking about attitudes toward "universal" rather than group-specific cultural products. Three-quarters of the respondents agree that great books are part of a single "human literature," as distinct from literatures specific to particular race/ethnic groups. Two-thirds of the sample agrees that ignoring "traditional American literature" in favor of works by women or minority authors is unfortunate. English-only instruction in public schools is endorsed by less than half of those questioned, however. These three items pose questions relevant to current debates over multiculturalism in the United States.

The last question displayed in Table 7 provides an indication of whether people perceive meaningful and substantial group boundaries in American society. We see in the table that only about a third of these respondents think that Americans are in agreement when it comes to highly important matters. A substantial majority takes the view that the society is deeply divided over important questions. DISCUSSION

In closing this article, we first sketch a few analytic possibilities that the items in the culture module present. We then turn to some general remarks about what was learned about the use of survey methods for studying culture in the process of developing the items reviewed above. This approach to the measurement of meaning has well-known strengths, but it is more suitable to the study of some facets of "culture" than others.

Analysts can use subsets of the cultural items to identify "subcultures," underlying "types," and the like. For example, it may prove more informative to study the relative importance accorded to different explanatory frames (Table 3) than to examine responses to these items in isolation. Likewise, various multivariate techniques can be used to abstract lifestyles or cultural choice patterns from a respondent's profile of answers to items on music tastes (Table 5) and/or activities (Table 6). One intriguing set of contrasts would examine factors that differentiate generalists who participate in a wide variety of cultural arenas--people termed "cultural omnivores" by Peterson (Peterson, 1992; Peterson and Simkus, 1992: 169)--and people with more specialized and identifiable tastes and activities.

Whether they describe cultural patterns using individual items or profiles, researchers examining these data will doubtlessly use them to study cultural stratification. Because the GSS contains substantial data on a respondent's current socioeconomic position, and relatively detailed reports on his/her social origins, rich analyses should be possible. Linking measures of cultural segments to sociodemographic variables should reveal race/ethnic, gender, generational, and class differences in cultural orientations and activities. Such studies can provide some indication of the extent of cultural segmentation along these lines, and may identify the kinds of people most likely to "bridge" between different patterns or styles.

There certainly will be informative studies of individual module items as well. In particular, we imagine that certain items on cultural attitudes displayed in Table 7--especially those that contrast a society with a single cultural center and one that accords legitimacy to multiculturalism--will be the subject of separate analyses. These items center on matters of cultural policy that are parallel, in many respects, to the "public opinion" focus of other GSS attitude items. It will be of interest to see where social cleavages over cultural policy converge with and diverge from divisions found for other social issues.

A different approach would use the measures of culture given here to conduct better-informed analyses of attitude/behavior items that appear in the replicating core of the GSS; these studies would examine the way in which matters of public opinion are shaped by cultural predispositions and outlooks. Attitudes toward (sub) cultures, for example, may play a part in understanding responses to core items on racial tolerance (or other kinds of tolerance). Likewise, to the extent that the items on explanatory frames have been successful in capturing a respondent's views about "how the world works," they should aid in the interpretation of many other GSS items. Boosting explained variance in analyses of attitude items is not the sole success test for a cultural item, but it certainly would increase their appeal to survey researchers.

We turn now to some more general reflections on survey methods and the sociology of culture that were occasioned by our involvement in developing this topical module. The approach certainly has many virtues; among these are the use of representative sampling and control over the quality of data. These will enable

analysts to make more confident statements about patterns of cultural stratification, for example, than those based on more specialized or in-depth inquiries. Not every study of culture should stress the capacity to generalize with confidence, but it is certainly valuable if there are some studies that can do so.

As is apparent from the above, many topics of interest to cultural sociologists are amenable to measurement in social surveys. Some of the topics included could bear much more detailed inquiry, and quite a few others--political/civic aspects of culture, for instance--were left out of the culture module only due to a scarcity of interview time.

Notwithstanding these observations, some elements of culture are considerably more difficult to approach using survey methodology. Cultural sociologists have given substantial attention to highly implicit, taken-for-granted understandings that structure social interactions. As Garfinkel (1967) and others have demonstrated, such "seen but unnoticed" assumptions and practices operate in a largely pre- or un-conscious manner, surfacing only when unstated understandings are violated or breached. Stinchcombe (1990:111)) refers to mastery over these implicit routines as "competence in ethnomethodology."

Survey methods use pre-scripted questions, even for open-ended items; this is part of the way in which comparability of answers across different respondents is ensured. It is difficult to imagine survey questions that could effectively measure ethnomethodological competence, largely because the process of conducting an interview requires that the interviewer and the respondent share basic understandings about how their interaction will proceed. Indeed, one purpose of pretesting a questionnaire is to check on this assumption. Survey items are regarded as problematic when interviewers must deviate from the script, or when respondents often ask for clarification or seek to give answers that do not fit within precoded categories (see Presser and Blair, forthcoming).

The reliance of most surveys on closed-ended questions with fixed, mutually exclusive responses means that the capacity of the approach to tap multidimensional aspects of culture is limited. Surveys do not allow for the complex, multiple, and sometimes contradictory interpretations highlighted by concepts of culture stressing differentiation and (especially) ambivalence or ambiguity (Martin, 1992). Indeed, pretests deliberately eliminate those items for which meanings are not shared between respondents, interviewers, and researchers; hence selection processes tend to lead to a set of items for which clarity is high. Such items almost certainly cover a selected set of the issues that respondents might conceivably be asked about. Surely methods such as less structured in-depth interviewing, in combination with content/textual analysis, can yield greater insight into these aspects of culture.

The reliance of survey methods on respondent reports of beliefs and actions is likewise not compatible with interpretative approaches to culture which conceptualize it as something revealed through "lived experience." Such frameworks tend to view survey responses as suspect because they are divorced from the "natural" social settings in which daily life is experienced, settings in which people may exhibit behavior that is inconsistent with self-conscious statements made in the course of responding to an interviewer or a questionnaire. Such ambiguities and inconsistencies will be better revealed by other approaches to studying culture.

The use of standardized survey items, thus, typically involves the imposition rather than the discovery of meaning. Still, when researchers concur on the importance of certain aspects of meaning or it is observed that certain objects or practices have acquired widespread significance as symbols, sample surveys are an indispensable tool for understanding their prevalence and distribution across different groups of people.

The standard process by which questions are developed and selected for inclusion in a research instrument may also lead analysts to miss certain kinds of findings of interest to cultural sociologists. Some perspectives on culture emphasize consensus--particularly on values or beliefs--as a defining property. If responses to pretested survey items have little variation, however, the items are typically discarded on the grounds that they yield little information. Some of the more intriguing findings displayed above--the widespread belief in the importance of hard work to success, the near-universal endorsement of honesty and responsibility as friend qualities, and the importance accorded to self-sufficiency as a personal value--are, however, precisely those for which consensus is very high. If cultural sociologists are interested in locating consensual aspects of culture such as these, they must consciously alter this aspect of the usual routine when constructing surveys. They must be prepared, as well, to invest substantial interest in the univariate distributions of selected items, since of necessity there will be little to say about how such items differ among respondents.

Our final remarks have to do with the probability sampling designs usually employed for selecting respondents. Much of the representativeness and value of surveys for developing generalizations rests on the use of such procedures; surveys are best-suited to providing overviews of common cultural patterns, not to the nuanced investigation of particular patterns. Surveys do not gather sufficient information on small and/or distinctive groups that have specialized or novel cultural patterns; more highly targeted studies are certainly better tools for such situations.

One feature central to much conceptual thinking about elements of culture is that they are shared configurations of values, beliefs, or symbolic systems. Surveys usually cannot provide insight into the extent of such sharing, since they deliberately avoid sampling related respondents. The network items that participants in the development of the culture module sought to include would constitute a partial remedy to this problem. Inclusion of network and cultural items in the same survey design would permit inquiry into the interplay between social affiliations and cultural orientations/practices and begin to yield insight into questions of the relative parts played by processes of selection, diffusion, and influence in the formation of subcultures.

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