

Accountably Other: Trust, Reciprocity and Exclusion in a Context of Situated Practice

ANNE WARFIELD RAWLS and GARY DAVID

*Associate Professor of Sociology, Bentley College, Waltham, MA 02452, E-mails:
arawls@bentley.edu, g david@bentley.edu*

Abstract. The first part of this paper makes five points: First, the problem of Otherness is different and differently constructed in modern differentiated societies. Therefore, approaches to Otherness based on traditional notions of difference and boundary between societies and systems of shared belief will not suffice; Second, because solidarity can no longer be maintained through boundaries between ingroup and outgroup, social cohesion has to take a different form; Third, to the extent that Otherness is not a condition of demographic, or belief based, exclusion in modern societies, but rather something that happens to people otherwise available to one another in interaction, othering is a *process* that occurs over the course of interaction, turn by turn, not a set of beliefs or a state of mind; Fourth, othering may be supported by accounts and narratives, and these may exist before the fact – or be articulated after the fact. But, over the course of an ongoing interaction, beliefs and narratives do not explain what goes wrong with practices; Fifth, practices require reciprocity and trust. Therefore, practices require a *more* stringent form of morality – not a less stringent form – and *more* social cohesion – not less – than traditional society.

The second part of the paper illustrates these five points with an extended analysis of a cross-race interaction in which accounts are invoked, reciprocity breaks down, and participants are rendered as Accountable Others.

Key words: account, cross-race interaction, justice, narrative, other, othering, race, reflexivity, trust

1. The Problem of Otherness

For persons in traditional societies, the boundary between members of the society and the “Other” is an important distinction between insider and outsider, whose strength helps create and maintain cohesion within the social group. For this to work, “Others” must be easily identifiable as those who are not “us,” and sharp differences between the customs and beliefs of different groups are developed to create a clear distinction between ingroup and outgroup (see Claude Levi-Strauss, 1962). In a highly differentiated modern social context, however, there is little sustainable core of sameness against which the creation of distinctions of “Otherness” could produce cohesion.¹ Furthermore, as people engage increasingly in interactions that are open to

anyone who is competent to participate, the supply of candidates for sustainable Other status – and situations in which that status could be maintained – dwindle. Opportunities for groups to self-segregate are increasingly limited, and people are constantly exposed to those who have different beliefs and personal characteristics. (The dilemma faced by persons who are forced to remain on the margins of such a society, who must by necessity participate, but are excluded from insider status, is given powerful voice in Georg Simmel's *The Stranger*, 1950). Social cohesion, created by ingroup/outgroup distinctions in traditional society, must now be produced over the course of situated interactions, through a mutual commitment to practice, by persons who have little in common beyond the encounter. Consequently, in differentiated social contexts, manifestations of "Otherness" – as exclusion – serve no purpose, while threatening the production of cohesion through mutual commitment to practice, and thus are accountable as violations. We refer to this accountable status of Otherness as "Accountably Other."

Ironically, while shared beliefs and distinctions between insider and outsider are less relevant to social cohesion as society becomes differentiated, the Other as an equal participant in interaction – with, through, and against whom processes of self discovery and self presentation take place – has become more important. This Other, however, rather than constituting difference, exclusion, and boundary, shares with the self a mutual orientation toward the same situated practice. As a result, a type of *situated solidarity* and a new type of *morality* develop through shared commitment to interaction. Because this mutual orientation toward practice has become the primary source of solidarity and the primary collector of selves (as members of situated groups) in modern society, self and Other find themselves now bound together in an essential dance that requires boundaries between them to be overcome and equality achieved.

The boundary of contrast against which the self and its meanings can be experienced has moved from the exterior to the interior of social experience. Furthermore, whereas in traditional societies a multiplicity of ritually defined social roles interlace relations between people in everyday life, constituting recipes for creating and maintaining difference, and against which meanings could be positioned, equality and trust between self and Other have become essential to the achievement of intelligibility in modern life. And, whereas formerly Others were excluded, now they must be both included and trusted. The irony remains that more actual equality is usually maintained in traditional societies – a problem taken up by Emile Durkheim in *The Division of Labor in Society* (1893/1933).

In this dance between self and Other it is essential that no one be "Othered." Mutual orientation and trust have become essential to interaction. It is a process of overcoming difference through reciprocity, rather than creating difference through exclusion. This change in the relationship of Other and

self – from boundary to interior – and the importance of a mutually affirming commitment to mutual engagement in practice – mutual “trust” – is a distinguishing feature of interaction in highly differentiated modern contexts. In fact, as Harold Garfinkel (1963, 1967) argued, both trust and reciprocity are requirements of situated practices. The taken-for-granted sameness that held traditional society together cannot be counted on in a society of strangers. In its place, a mutual focus on the coordinated activity required by everyday encounters becomes a foundation for intelligibility and social order.

The process of “Othering” destroys this foundation of trust whenever it occurs. Furthermore, because, in a context of situated practice, trust and reciprocity are essential to intelligibility, self, and social order, when people are systematically excluded, or rendered in subordinate roles, they are forced to erect boundaries of their own to create protected situations that offer them the possibility of mutual reciprocity and trust within those boundaries. In such cases, loyalty groups that define themselves in terms of who is excluded are likely to spring up and have at least a temporary life (Rawls, 2000). While these groups offer some practical relief, and guarantees of equality and trust among the excluded, they pose a serious threat to trust relations and intelligibility for the whole, and between whole and excluded parts.²

The popular idea, offered as an explanation for the persistence of discrimination of various sorts, that it is *natural* for people to feel *more comfortable* with persons of their *own kind*, depends on ideas about “kind” and “group” that have no place in situations requiring mutual reciprocity and trust. The notion of “kind” cannot be allowed to mean the same thing in a context of practice – and the orientation toward personhood and identity must depend at least as much on competence in, and commitment to, face-to-face interaction as it does on group orientation or demographic characteristics if encounters are to be considered in any sense open and democratic.

Because practices require displays of trust and competence, displays of Otherness are accountable. They violate the expected order of things – raise questions about competence and trustworthiness, and require justification. The accounts produced as justifications constitute the most visible, or generally accessible, evidence of Othering. Consequently, the process of Othering has itself come to be associated with the mental and social attitudes portrayed in these accounts, rather than with the violations of practice that they are accounts of.

Unfortunately, treating Othering in terms of accounts and narratives, or attitudes and beliefs, renders the details of the actual processes that lead to Otherness invisible, and the essential point is missed. Situated social encounters have a form and structure that is essential to their coherence. That is why they require trust and mutual commitment in the first place. Accounts, which aim to formulate generally acceptable explanations, do not preserve what went wrong in details of practices. At best, they offer clues to what went wrong. In

a context of practice, the relationship between “Otherness,” social cohesion, and intelligibility occurs in social processes in the interior. Accounts, beliefs, and attitudes, which are about boundaries, are not adequate for explaining phenomena at the heart of practices. We need to understand how Otherness is produced in this interior – in moments of what should be mutually oriented practice. To do this we must approach Otherness in terms of social practice rather than orientation toward beliefs, values, or narrative accounts.³

2. The “Trust” Requirement of Situated Action

In order for situated practices to be equally available to all citizens who choose to participate, regardless of cultural orientation, group affiliation, or personal characteristics, it must be possible for persons to engage in practices solely on the basis of their competence to perform and their demonstrable commitment to do so. Demographic characteristics and group membership need to be irrelevant, and the competence to produce practice needs to be neutral with respect to such differences in order for interaction to be democratic in character. A moral commitment to the achievement of the interaction in a mutually recognizable way must replace the commitment to a belief or value system that characterizes traditional morality.

Garfinkel referred to this feature as the “trust” requirement of situated action (Garfinkel, 1963, 1967). If persons commit to the same structure of expectations and can trust this of one another, then they can manage complex situations, and complicated communications, on the basis of this mutual process alone. If they cannot make this mutual commitment, or are not competent with regard to the practices in question, then interactions fail, and persons are stigmatized, or even formally divorced from situations. (See for instance Garfinkel’s treatment of dishonorable discharge from the army as a “degradation ceremony” (1963) or leaving a social situation as a “divorce” (1948/2005).)

The process of becoming a social self, as Goffman (1959) described it, similarly requires a commitment to a working consensus by participants. When the self is confronted by an Other, in order for the process to result in a successful presentation of self, or a mutually intelligible communication, both self and Other must make a commitment to the same working consensus and give each Other the “benefit of the doubt” that each has done so and that each is competent to do so. In this sense the Other, who in Mead’s (1934) terms is an essential part of the process of self-realization, must, in a context of situated practice, be what Garfinkel calls a “member” of the same practice. Regardless of other ways in which we may think of persons as the “same” (gender, race, class, profession, etc.), if they are not competent in, and committed to, the same practice, they cannot be Others for one another in the required way: as those who share

“significant symbols,” to use Mead’s term. To be an Other who reciprocates with a self in the doing of a shared practice in such a way that the two share significant symbols requires that both self and Other be – in just and only the ways that commitment to a particular interaction requires – the “same.”

The process of situated interactional “Othering,” by contrast, reveals – or constructs – ways in which persons are not “the same” (that is, not committed to the same practices, not committed to one another’s performances within a practice, not giving one another the benefit of the doubt, not sufficiently competent to perform). This process in turn threatens self and practice and prevents actors⁴ from engaging in mutually oriented and intelligible interaction. Othering, in this sense, originates with problems in the orientation toward, or the production of, practices.

Thus, as Garfinkel argues (1948/2005), in a context of situated practice, the demographic aspects of populations are not the relevant measure of either “membership” or “motivation” (the required primary motivation always being commitment to practice). Demographic populations, groups identified by kinship or sustained relations over time – visible differences often called cultural, tribal, religious, or racial – and generally the focus of sociological researchers⁵ – have been replaced as the relevant variable in interaction by what Garfinkel calls *populational cohorts*, groups collected solely by the fact that they enact the same practice together (Rawls, 2005a).⁶

Social cohesion no longer has at its center collections of people with identifiable personal characteristics, beliefs, and values that are more or less stable across time and space. Globalization expands the arena of situated action and increases dependency on those who are demographically different, but situationally relevant. The essential centers of social cohesion are now constituted by transient populations of actors, whose personal characteristics *need* to be irrelevant, and who, for the moment, are engaged in enacting a practice together – making them members of just this group of us here and now – but who at another moment will be engaged in enacting a different practice with a different set of member others.

This movement of the Other from the exterior to the interior, and the requirement of situations that all member Others be trusted, means that demographic “Otherness” has no positive role to play in situated action in a modern democratic context. Yet demographic Otherness and the social problems it engenders are ever-present problems in contemporary society, as the many accounts, narratives, or stereotypes, associated with Otherness as exclusion will attest. The problematic character of demographic Otherness seems, in fact, to have increased – in spite of the fact that ritual and legal barriers to inclusion have decreased – and situated interaction demands mutual reciprocity in its own right.

What a modern differentiated society in a context of globalization needs to maintain are situations in which diverse persons from diverse backgrounds,

who do not share beliefs and values, can come together to trade, buy and sell, and share ideas. This is not possible, however, unless they share *something*. Since it is no longer possible, in a context of diversity, for beliefs, values, or shared culture and biography to provide this shared background, what develops are shared background expectations that treat the practices that constitute situations as that which must be held in common and respected above all else. Trust becomes a matter of how one fulfills one's involvement obligations with regard to specific situated practices.⁷

Situated practices and their involvement obligations, not beliefs, values, or culture, have come to determine what is appropriate, trustworthy, and moral in contemporary society. People must display mastery of, and compliance with, situated practices, in order for the Others with whom they engage in interaction to trust and maintain mutual orientation with them. Otherwise, it is not possible for them to participate intelligibly in social occasions with Others. One may name a practice in which one claims competence, but demonstrations of actual competence will be required to substantiate the claim. Persons who cannot demonstrate competence in detailed situated ways are not considered trustworthy and will be ostracized and find themselves either alone or segregated from others, physically, socially and legally.

At the point when situations come to define the boundaries of populations (in place of shared culture and values, or personal characteristics), the question of Otherness is transformed. Otherness is no longer a matter of persons being excluded from *groups* or from categories within groups. This form of exclusion continues, of course. But, to the extent that situations replace groups as the primary centers within which the work of commerce, politics, social, and intellectual life take place, being excluded from groups is no longer the biggest issue.

The more serious problem of Otherness for a modern democratic society is the exclusion of persons from those *situated interactions* in which the essential economic, political, and social transactions take place. This situated form of exclusion threatens the possibility of self and intelligibility for the whole – not just for those excluded.

This is the problem of Otherness explored here. The extent to which this form of exclusion runs along racial, ethnic, and gender lines suggests that, rather than having diminished, these forms of inequality may be increasing in significance, for reasons embedded in practices, that have not been touched by changes in the rule of law – that in fact resist such changes.⁸

3. The Justice Requirement of Situated Practices

Durkheim argued in 1893, in *The Division of Labor in Society*, that in modern highly differentiated societies justice becomes a requirement, and that unless

such societies achieve *actual conditions of justice* they will fail. The reason, he argues, is the increasing importance of practices, which must develop to take the place of solidarities formerly sustained through shared belief. These practices are different from rituals and customary behaviors in that they are not accountable to systems of belief but only to themselves. They are also self-sanctioning insofar as they break down when not done recognizably and therefore do not require external constraint. Durkheim refers to these features as the “self-regulating” character of modern practice. Because the coherence of self-regulating practices depends on their own internal dynamics, everyone must produce practices in ways that can be seen by others as consistent with the practice.

Inequalities interfere with the justice requirement of practices in various ways and, therefore, threaten the social solidarity of such societies (see Durkheim, 1893/1933, Book III, Chapter One). There is an interesting parallel between Durkheim’s argument about the relationship between practices and justice and the moral implications of Garfinkel’s “Trust” argument (Rawls, 2005a, 2004, 1990, 1987). In both cases this requirement of situations, that everyone be treated equally and produce practices the same way, creates social contradictions when it fails.⁹

Because the erosion of belief-based solidarity groups means that trust in modern society must be cemented through the achievement of coordinated situated practice, the ability of interactants to meet their respective obligations, in terms of preferred and expected structures of practice, replaces the belief-based solidarity of traditional societies. If situated interactions exclude categories of persons, it is not possible for those persons to demonstrate trustworthiness or contribute to social solidarity. Consequently, they are not able to communicate with others and even basic and necessary social exchanges become problematic.

Otherness *between* traditional societies does not disenfranchise people from their own society. Nor does it interfere with daily practices and unity within a given society. In fact, it enhances such unity, and, as a consequence, enhances communication and understanding based on shared values that depend on that unity. This is how people routinely think of Otherness and, thus, they also think of the boundaries as both normal and necessary. But boundaries of Otherness *within* differentiated societies prevent the very forms of social engagement that the society at large has come to depend on.

In so far as modern practice-based society requires equality of access to practice, it promotes equality. But, ironically, as equality becomes more prevalent and important, it also becomes more problematic. Inequality is no longer a problem that the social form can coexist with – it has become essential to practice and thus inequality stands as a contradiction that threatens the very possibility of social solidarity and intelligibility.

Traditional societies make use of ideas of Otherness to cement their boundaries and create a feeling of “us” versus “them” that strengthens group feeling. The shared beliefs so cemented provide a context for mutual understanding and interpretation. The strength of this solidarity means that some inequality can be tolerated and is often considered normal. There is a natural limit to inequality in societies based on shared beliefs, however, because they need to be fairly self-sufficient and thus also need to maintain an internal balance between parts over time.¹⁰

Durkheim refers to this state of equilibrium in belief-based societies as “morality” and distinguishes it from what he calls “justice.”¹¹ Morality is a reflection of the beliefs and values that sustain a society and, as such, differs from group to group and over time. Justice, by contrast, is the condition of equality, equal access, and equal distribution of chances, required by practice-based social forms. In so far as all practices require the same equal distribution of chances to participate, justice in this sense is a universal.

Unlike systems based on morality that can tolerate a good deal of inequality, practice-based social forms require equality. When a practice-based social form operates in the absence of justice, Durkheim says, it exists in a state of self-contradiction: as an “Abnormal Form.”¹² What does Durkheim mean by Abnormal Form? He means a contradiction in modern society that creates opportunities for inequality to increase. Practice-based social forms, which require inequalities to be eliminated, retain remnants of traditional inequalities, at least in the beginning, that contradict this requirement. Durkheim argues that practices such as “inherited wealth,” considered prerequisites of the modern “free” market, are holdovers from belief and kinship based solidarities and have no place in a practice based social form (Rawls, 2002).

Access to practice on the basis of competence and commitment alone is a requirement of justice. When this requirement is not met, external constraint interferes with practices and they cannot be self-regulating. (By self-regulating Durkheim means that practices need to be self-sanctioning. Order and intelligibility need to be constructed within and accountable to the practice, not imposed by external constraint.) Durkheim argues that the possibility of science, social stability, communication, and healthy social selves all depend on this self-regulating character of practices. When it fails, belief-based social forms will try to reestablish themselves to stem the chaos. Witness the revival of fundamental religious forms worldwide in the early 2000s. Unless and until practices are able to sufficiently supplant beliefs, there is nothing to stop the increase of inequality in this transitional phase. This is why Durkheim argued so forcefully against the development of new systems of belief, instead championing the development of scientific practice. Only when the society at large comes to depend sufficiently on practices could the *need* that practices have for justice *force* justice to become a reality.¹³

In a context of situated practice, elaborate processes of reflexivity have become the means through which participants establish and convey meaning to, and with, one another.¹⁴ What Durkheim suggests – and Garfinkel works out in detail – is the way in which reciprocity in situated practices solves the problem of boundary and inclusion: of meaning and intelligibility in a context of situated practices.

4. Reflexivity as a Requirement of Communicative Intelligibility

In a context of practice, as opposed to belief, participants are required to use the practices at hand, in any given situation, to make sense of the talk and action of Others. Grammar and the meaning of words are insufficient to the task; they work like narrative and require a shared context rather than supplying it. They can be relied on to “frame” meaning to some extent *where they are shared*. But where conceptual frames are not shared, something more is required – something more immediate and situated. There must be *practices* of communication that will – in and of themselves – allow participants to narrow down the meanings of their utterances.

Garfinkel (1948/2006, 1963, 1967) not only describes devices for producing meaning through form and sequence but also argues that these devices only work as elements of carefully (but thoughtlessly) built reflexive (mutually oriented) sequences of action. (The idea of carefully, but normally thoughtlessly, is meant to indicate that it matters a great deal how persons build their actions and utterances. They must be recognizable to the others as actions of a very particular sort. But they must be able to perform without thinking about it – normally thoughtlessly.) One person speaks – the Other has an obligation to interpret and offer an interpretation next. That offered interpretation must at the same time move the conversation forward. This cannot be done through clarification. Each speaker has an obligation to respond to the interpretation the Other makes with another interpretation, while again moving the conversation forward, and so on. In this way each next turn constitutes a “reality check” on the last. Both speakers can confirm whether they are still “both on the same page” so to speak.

Something needs to be said about the word “interpretation.” In the context of post-modernism, interpretation came to mean that persons interpret what they hear against a context. The context could be related to the situation or to some conceptual framework. Either could be individual or institutional. Garfinkel has insisted that he does not mean interpretation in any of these senses. He argues that people “recognize” the moves of Others in a sequential order – they do not interpret them. But, in this process of recognition, there is often more than one possibility. What speakers must do – referred to as interpretation by Garfinkel – is act on the basis of their best recognition and build

their understanding of that recognition back into their own next turn. In this way each can convey recognition to the Other. The one who spoke first can see what the Other made of the first turn and, if there is a problem, make whatever adjustments are required. In this sense interpretation is a sequentially embedded *activity*, referred to by Garfinkel as reflexivity, not a thought process, and alternatives are given largely in reference to the ongoing sequence.

For example, if we have been talking about movies, a reference to “Miss Congeniality” is treated as a reference to the movie. If it was not, this can be indicated in the next turn, either through correction, silence, or other indications of trouble. While context remains relevant to meaning, sequence has become the most important context. We may be at a beauty pageant, but if we have been talking about movies, “Miss Congeniality” will still likely be recognized as a reference to a movie. Harvey Sacks (1992/1995) in his 1964–1965 *Lectures on Conversation* suggested that turn-taking is an ordering of sequentiality essential to pinning down meaning. The unproblematic (normally thoughtless) character of talk is achieved in and through the sequential character of turns. Without the sequential features of turns there is *too much meaning* and no way to narrow the possibilities.

By reflexivity, Garfinkel meant to indicate the ongoing back and forth sequential process wherein interpretations by each, of the Other, are a mutual obligation. These mutual interpretations must be made in such a way that they preserve and encourage mutual commitment to the interaction if it is to continue. The interpretations must be “thrown into” the ongoing sequence with a commitment to taking seriously the response of the Other. They are thrown out in short bits, the understanding of which requires attention to sequential detail. Longer grammatical bits would not achieve the required attention, according to Sacks, because they can be given a sense independently from the sequence. Understanding small pieces – strung together by a back and forth process – by contrast, requires attention to sequential detail and an understanding of how all the little bits are built to be related to one another. Thus, the ability to take a following turn, after a short bit, demonstrates commitment and verifies understanding. Taking a turn under such circumstances, according to Sacks, fulfills essential “listening and hearing” obligations. Because they can stand alone, large grammatical bits do not ensure this. They carry too much meaning and work like concepts and beliefs in that they are not mutually built and don’t require mutual attention to, and mutual display of, the building. Not only is grammar a problem – not a solution – but clarification is not a viable option either. Within the steady stream of sequentially ordered interactional moves, there is limited opportunity to stop and clarify what is being done. Furthermore, each next clarification would require its own clarification, resulting in an infinite regress such that even the most routine interactions would degrade into an abyss of negotiating meaning. Reflexivity is, by contrast, a method or practice of speaking that can

be used to confirm or disconfirm understanding in an efficient and ongoing way.

5. Mutual Obligation and Benefit of the Doubt

A particular speaker does not know what the Other has heard the speaker to have said until the speaker gets an interpretation back from the Other. At that point the speaker can fix the utterance if necessary but essentially “owns” and is obligated to accept the interpretation the Other has made of what the speaker said – unless and until it is successfully changed. This point is important. It is the *Other’s* job to offer an interpretation, but it is the original speaker’s job to supply the correction, account, or evidence if one is needed (see Schegloff, Jefferson, and Sacks, 1977). A speaker cannot just dismiss the Other’s interpretation as wrong without consequence. It is the speaker’s job, if the interpretation is not what was expected, to clarify or correct, to consider how the Other heard, and provide an account when called for. Otherwise the listener will assume both are working with the same understanding and the speaker will own the consequences of this assumption.

The preference orders for turn taking can be seen as sensitive to this process. Some preferences involve the distribution of chances to participate. Other preferences involve the speaker giving the listener the benefit of the doubt. Some involve giving one hearing an ordered preference over others through which speakers can rule out possibilities by a mutually engaged process of elimination. There are procedures for correction, clarification, and for distributing turns (Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson, 1974). If you can’t know what something you said meant until the Other responds, then the Other’s lack of a response is itself significant. This is why “turn ownership” and the ownership of silences – the length of pauses, etc. – are interesting. It is not only the presence of talk that is relevant, but also the absence of talk, as together they constitute a recognizable order of reflexivity that confirms meaning and displays reciprocity. To be seen as “competent” within a given situation, an actor must demonstrate attention to these situational relevancies as they unfold sequentially.

Given the complexity of conversational practices, the preference for giving the benefit of the doubt, allowing a speaker to self-correct, not pointing out problems, but instead letting self-corrections pass without comment, is very efficient and face-saving. The face-saving aspects of preference orders are particularly important for maintaining trust. When the benefit of the doubt is given, violations of interactional preference orders can be overlooked. There is a limit to this benefit, however, and persons who repeatedly violate expectations will find that they are no longer given this benefit. Then they become stigmatized.

Even among competent members of the same practice, however, interactional breakdowns do occur. How these breakdowns are treated over the course of interaction stands at the heart of becoming “Accountably Other.” As Goffman pointed out, such breakdowns are largely responsible for significant forms of stigma. When the benefit of the doubt is not extended, apparently minor transgressions can lead to serious disruption. Ultimately, the willingness to give the benefit of the doubt is related to the extent of trust present as a feature of the encounter. Things quickly break down when speakers stop giving the benefit of the doubt and fall back on stigmatizing and “Othering” narratives to interpret what the Other has done.

Narratives introduce several sorts of problems into conversation. For instance, narratives represent the beliefs of the individual who is speaking, and may or may not be shared by the Other. Narratives, unlike practices, are shared by members of demographic groups, specific worksites, or institutional memberships, not members of situations. Furthermore, narratives are generally conceptual and not situated. Unlike accounts that speak directly to shared aspects of situated practice (such as “I’m sorry. I didn’t hear you” after failing to take a turn), narrative accounts may not be done reflexively *for* the Other – not subject to the assessment of the Other. They may be *about* the Other – and done *at* the Other instead. They do not invite the Other to interpret them and, as a consequence, can interfere with the building of a reflexive exchange.

This is Othering: the speaker now and henceforward rejects any interpretations the hearer may make of them in subsequent turns, while at the same time claiming the right to make interpretations of the Other that the Other is not allowed to assess. Choosing a narrative account that is unknown or offensive to the Other, and treating the Other’s reciprocity of the interpretation as irrelevant, treats the Other as the *Object* of interpretation rather than as a *recipient*. Far from providing a basis for meaning in situated interaction, the use of narrative – when it is not shared and not open to reflexive assessment – threatens reciprocity and recipient design, which are essential to mutual orientation and trust. (Of course it is possible for an interaction to break down and for a participant to invoke a narrative that both have access to. Then it could be inclusive. The account would still signal a problem but, if they both accept the account, it doesn’t Other either of them. However, in a society of strangers, accounts referencing demographic groups and shared contexts of work usually Other someone.)

6. The Immigrant-Owned Store as a Setting for Situated Practice: An Illustration

The data presented as an illustration here were collected as part of a five-year participant observation, ethnographic, and video/audio, ethnomethodological

study of intercultural communication issues and business workplace interactions in small Arab-owned convenience stores in metropolitan Detroit. The situation represented in the data is one in which recipient design and the benefit of the doubt break down. It involves a practice to which everyone theoretically has equal access: making purchases of small items for cash at the counter in a small store. Small stores in busy locations draw a diverse range of customers, few of whom are regulars. Thus, both store workers and customers must draw on widely available practices for engaging in service encounters with strangers. These exchanges are usually fairly simple and involve asking for prices, the location of items, making purchases, and making change. Customers and storeworkers sometimes tell jokes and make references to the weather or sports that liven up these exchanges and lend them a more personal touch. But in general they are quick and unproblematic. There are occasional problems, involving challenges to prices, claims about freshness, or the making of change, but they are usually simple and handled without trouble. Rarely, however, they escalate into verbal and physical violence. People have been killed over misunderstandings in stores that began with matters so trivial that they are hard to explain in retrospect.

There is of necessity some underlying tension in such situations. People who live in the surrounding neighborhood often have complaints about storeowners, and there are power relations inherent in the situation. The store owner sets prices and decides whether or not to make change. Customers have to ask about prices and for goods kept behind the counter. Special requests for change can be particularly problematic. Customers need change for buses and pay phones but stores are often short of change – there are few banks in these neighborhoods – and cashiers often refuse to make change. The owner owns and the customer buys. The owner makes money from the transaction whereas customers leave the store with less money than they came in with. It would appear to be the basic free market transaction, but, to the extent that small, *immigrant*-owned stores tend to be the only ones operating in certain high traffic urban locations, patrons of the store may feel that the storeowner has a monopoly on their business and is taking unfair advantage of it. Urban narratives about immigrant storeowners suggest that this view is prevalent among those who live in the neighborhoods immediately surrounding these stores.

In one urban rumor/narrative we encountered, storeowners are reported to receive preferred treatment from the IRS (David, 2005). People who tell this narrative claim that the U.S. government has adopted a policy that does not require immigrant storeowners to pay the taxes that their American counterpart would have to pay on the same business. The rumor is quite elaborate and provides for years and years of tax-free benefits for immigrants and their extended families. Why anyone would believe this is a mystery, but the widespread character of this rumor underscores a general feeling that recent

immigrants would not be able to get ahead of those who were here first unless they were cheating in some way. (Several reviewers and the editor of one journal wanted us to “prove” the rumor was not true. Evidence from the IRS and the tax code was not considered sufficient. So it is not only the uneducated who find the rumor credible.)

In spite of these underlying difficulties, most interactions are positive, and the practices required to enact business in the store are relatively simple.

6.1. *Making Change*

The making change encounter analyzed here occurred in a small convenience store in urban Detroit. The cashier was Arab-American and the customer African-American. One of the authors (engaged in participant observation) was standing behind the counter assisting the cashier who regularly worked in the store. The store had been set up for the research with a camera and audio recorder so that all transactions at the counter would be available as both audio and video recordings.¹⁵ The counter appears on the video as a strip about 20” wide at about waist height, splitting the left and right sides of the screen and standing between the cashier and the customers. There is no bulletproof glass or other form of separation. Behind the cashier are rows of cigarettes, liquor and lottery tickets. On the video the cash register appears in the middle of the screen, with the cashier on the right and customers on the left. The researcher appears farther down the counter toward the center of the screen and on the cashier’s right. Visibility is good and facial expressions, hand movements, and eye contact can be clearly seen.

The encounter begins with a request for change. As it proceeds, first the cashier and then the customer begin producing accounts, ending by hurling insults at one another in loud voices. This is interesting because in the first lines of the encounter both customer and cashier appear to be engaging one another in mutually expected ways. But, when the cashier produces an account – for not being able to make change the way the customer requested – the reciprocal character of the encounter starts to break down. Sequential possibilities for repair remain but are not taken advantage of.

The customer challenges the cashier’s account for not giving one dollar bills as change and then presents a challenging account of his own. When this is not understood by the cashier, it is followed by a racialized “you people” narrative – and the process of Othering escalates. They go from mutual engagement, in the first lines, to almost physically coming to blows, in a matter of seconds.

As the customer (an African-American man in late middle age, who has made a previous purchase) approaches the counter, he begins making a request for change. Walking up to the counter at line 1 of the transcript, the customer holds out a fifty dollar bill and says, “How about two twenties, a five, and five

ones?” At line 2, the cashier, who has been standing to the side of the register – directly in front of the customer as they approached the counter – moves over to the register and opens the drawer. He begins to make change. After looking into the drawer and poking through the ones, however, the cashier says in line 3, “Sir, I am very short of ones. I need the ones for (0.7) for later on. You know, tomorrow.” The cashier then begins handing back change with two twenties and two fives, no ones.

- 1 C: How about two twenties, a five, and five ones? (9.0)
- 2 ((W goes to register to get change for customer))
- 3 W: Sir, I am very short of ones. I need the ones for (0.7) for later on. You
- 4 know, tomorrow
- 5 (1.5)

The cashier has started to make change for a fifty dollar bill without complaint, which is somewhat unusual. Cashiers typically guard their change and often refuse requests to make change. It is particularly unusual in that the customer has made the request to change a large bill in a rather abrupt manner without giving a justification. That he is able to provide justifications later makes their absence at this point more significant. We might be tempted to say that the customer displays a lack of mutual orientation right from the beginning. Nevertheless, the cashier begins to comply with the request. When he sees that he is short of ones, however, he reorients. His production of the account for not being able to provide the ones (lines 3–4) indicates a sensitivity to not doing as the customer requested. Accounts are usually given when there is some question (anticipated or actual) about the Other’s response. In addition to offering an account, the utterance also exhibits three other indications of trouble. There is a (0.7) pause in the middle, a restart repeat “for (0.7) for”, and an attempt to solicit agreement from the customer, “you know,” about the position the cashier is taking.

- 3 W: Sir, I am very short of ones. I need the ones for (0.7) for later on. You
- 4 know, tomorrow
- 5 (1.5)

In addition to the troubles in the production of the cashier’s turn, we also see problems in the customer’s reciprocity of the turn. There is a (1.5) pause. A (1.5) pause is long and noticeable. It creates an awkward moment. If the customer has come in with an “attitude,” here is an indication that his beliefs about the cashier are being confirmed. The pause is an opportunity for the cashier to self-correct. But the cashier does not. He is failing to fulfill the customer’s request – and, as the customer will remind him in a minute, the customer has just spent money in the store.

Self-correction is the face-saving move. The next move would be for the customer to correct him – which he does. But the cashier either does not see, or does not take, the opportunity. Possibly the intersection of talk and work serve to obscure the length of the pause for the cashier. He is absorbed in making change for the customer. Or, it may be that he sees no reason to self-correct. He has offered what he considers to be an adequate account. His lack of any further response at this point would constitute a failure of reciprocity *if* he did notice the pause. The pause does not just signify that the customer has nothing to say. We know from later turns that the customer has plenty to say about the change he is not getting. But what he has to say takes a dispreferred form. He waits.

When the customer does take the next turn after the pause, it constitutes a direct challenge to the cashier's account for not giving him the one dollar bills. This challenge (line 6) takes a narrative form, "You could make a million dollars from now till tomorrow." It is said in a rising tone and is not at all tentative. It is as if the customer said, "You are making a lot of money here so no, you do not need the ones for tomorrow." It is a direct rejection of the cashier's account with no benefit of the doubt.

5 (1.5)

6 C: You could make a million dollars from now till tomorrow.

7 W: ((handing two twenties and two fives to the customer)) Huh

8 (0.7)

The cashier, however, does not get the point of the customer's narrative, which refers to the cashier's ability to make money rather than his need for ones. Rather than extending the benefit of the doubt, the customer moves directly to a challenge. This seems to confuse the cashier, who says "huh" at line 7, and then there is another (0.7) pause at line 8. The divergent orientations of the two toward money – and the customer's orientation toward a narrative about storeowners and money – create differences that prevent understanding.

After the (0.7) pause at line 8 the customer demonstrates that he is no longer available for reciprocity with the cashier. He sounds like he is still engaged in the conversation but his failure to respond to what the cashier does over the next several turns demonstrates that he is *not* still engaged. The customer repeats his challenge at line 9, "You could make a million dollars from now till tomorrow." Then he justifies his request with another account at lines 9 and 10, "Heck, I just spent five dollars with ya. You couldn't make change to give me five ones[↑]." Then he appears to articulate a modified request at lines 9–10, "How about ((W reaches for five dollar bill from customer)) three ones then." But even though the cashier is responding to his customer status and complying with the request, the customer continues and produces his complaint.

- 9 C: You could make a million dollars from now till tomorrow. Heck I just
 10 spent five dollars with ya. You couldn't make change to give me five
 11 ones[↑]. How about ((W reaches for five dollar bill from customer))
 12 three ones then. I don't know why you people are so cheap with folk
 13 ((worker continues to hold five dollar bill and directs gaze directly to
 14 customer)) all the time when it come to dealing with money.
 15 Everywhere you go it is always a complaint.
 16 W: ((worker reaches for change in customer's hand)) Sir, can I have (.) can
 17 I have this money back please.

The cashier is still engaged in reciprocity with the customer throughout these turns. He has been trying to understand the customer and fulfill his request. As the customer begins to produce his complaint and modified request, the cashier has been complying with the request. But the apparent request for modified change at lines 10–11 turns out not to be a request at all. The cashier begins to produce the ones as soon as the customer reminds him he just spent five dollars, even before the modified request (line 11), “three ones then.” But the customer's complaint narrative follows the modified request without a pause at lines 11–14. The customer can see the cashier begin to produce the ones, but that does not stop him from producing the complaint. It is only after this point, at line 15, that the cashier withdraws from reciprocity with the customer.

There are several preferred ways of dealing with disagreement, and giving one another the benefit of the doubt, that could have left both customer and cashier with a wider range of options. All would have been available to the customer up until the point when the cashier removes himself from reciprocity. For instance, the customer, at the first sign of trouble, might have pointed out that he had spent money in the store, rather than saving that information for lines 9–10, *after* challenging the cashier's account. Or the customer could have asked the cashier for “three ones” and change (lines 10–11) *before* producing the challenging account. The (1.5) pause at line 5 indicates that the customer was still engaged in reciprocity of some sort (although not giving benefit of the doubt) at that point but by lines 11–14 the customer is no longer engaged in reciprocity with the cashier. The complaint “I don't know why you people are so cheap with folk” is an Othering narrative. The cashier's attempt to make change is ignored. To continue making requests, while at the same time ignoring the cashier's compliance, *displays* the customer's lack of reciprocity.

Repair work, or clarifying turns, whether self or Other initiated, would have been required for the encounter to work. But those in turn require sufficient trust to sustain reciprocity. The customer's reference to himself as just having spent five dollars in the store initiates the required repair work. The cashier begins to readjust and produce either ones, or three ones and change. But although the customer is *saying the words* as though he is still mutually

engaged in the interaction, he is no longer *responding* to the cashier's turns. The customer is no longer available for reciprocity. The cashier at this point is still in the interaction, is still engaged in reciprocity. But the customer is no longer engaged in "trust" relations with the cashier.

Not only does the customer not accept the cashier's account, but the cashier's willingness to reverse his previous position after hearing the man had spent five dollars in the store may, ironically, support the customer's view that the cashier doesn't need the ones in the first place and was just being cheap. The two are talking at cross purposes because the trustworthiness of what they say, rather than depending on a demonstration of competent practice, has come to depend on narrative accounts that they do not share. The cashier's principle of "saving the ones" is not accepted by customer. The customer's "you people are so cheap" account is certainly not accepted by the cashier – from his perspective making change has nothing to do with being cheap. A clash of narrative presuppositions is involved. The customer is talking about money in general while the cashier is focused on the problem of having enough ones to make change. Both narrative accounts are followed by pauses, and the customer's at line 6 receives a "huh" from the cashier at line 7, indicating that he does not get the point.

The customer's challenging account at line 6 does not address the cashier's worksite concern that there may not be enough ones in the drawer to get him through the weekend. The cashier's concern is not available to the customer, and the customer's narrative displays his lack of understanding. Even if the cashier did take in a million dollars by tomorrow, it would not be in ones. In order to make the money he will need ones to make change. But this concern of the cashier is related to specific exigencies of his work not available to the customer as a concern.

The customer's talk about "cheap" is problematic in a similar way. Because the customer is focused on money in a general sense and the cashier's relationship to it, what the cashier does can be constituted as being "tight with money" or cheap, even though it really has nothing to do with "giving" or "spending" money. Giving change can only be connected to the idea of cheap or stingy through a set of narrative presuppositions about storeowners against which anything they refuse to do can be constituted as proof of the allegation that they are cheap. What the customer needs are ones. The cashier has money and he will not trade it for the perfectly good money the customer has and is willing to trade for it.

Some clarification of the accounts might have helped. The cashier might have tried to explain his need for ones *if* he saw that the customer had not understood him. But we can see from the transcript that the cashier did try several remedies without getting a positive response. Between persons who share an account, the move to accounts might provide a space for clarification. But the two are not able to make enough sense out of each Other's accounts

to attempt clarification and in any case the accounts themselves rapidly move them out of reciprocity. The initial move to accounts is accompanied by a reduction in the attention to mutual reciprocity necessary to use sequential tools to achieve understanding. Instead of giving mutual attention to the bits, both are assuming that their accounts make sense to the other – which they demonstrably do not. Repairing trust through an appeal to accounts would require a mutual understanding of the accounts involved, and that is not available to these two. Instead they begin to scuffle over the money and then to hurl insults at one another.

- 15 W: ((worker reaches for change in customer's hand)) Sir, can I have (.) can
 16 I have this money back please.
 17 C: You give it to me. Now it's my money.=
 18 W:= Okay. Take your money and leave.=
 19 C:= It's my money. Not yours. ((takes money and walks away from counter))

There is a complete breakdown of civility here. Not only has the cashier tried to grab back the change he has given, but he has begun yelling at the customer as he moves away from the counter. The customer for his part gives as good as he gets. He keeps reiterating his focus on the money. At line 17 he says, "You give it to me. Now it's my money" and at line 19 he says, "It's my money. Not yours." Even though he has not gotten the change he requested, he seems to be taking some satisfaction in the fact that the money is his. This underscores the theme of the customer's account overall – that it is about *money* and the *ownership of money* and that he has entirely missed the cashier's concern with *ones* – not as money but as a way to *make change*.

The encounter continues to escalate as the customer walks toward the door. The cashier responds to the customer's assertion (line 19) that "It's my money. Not yours" by yelling at the customer (line 20) "Yeah, you don't call me cheap alright. You don't like it get the hell out of here." The customer responds (line 22) that "I won't ever come in here again."

- 20 W: Yeah, you don't call me cheap alright. You don't like it get the hell out
 21 of here.=
 22 C: =I won't ever come in here [again
 23 W: [Piece] of shit. I don't give a shit.
 24 C: ((inaudible))
 25 W: Because you're (.) you're (.) you're a idiot. That's why. (1.4) ((directing talk

There is a great deal of heat in this exchange. As soon as it is over the cashier turns to the researcher, line 25, and provides an account. He seems at that

point to be surprised by what he has said to the customer and at line 32 says he knows that it was wrong.

- 25 W: Because you're (.) you're (.) you're a idiot. That's why. (1.4) ((directing
26 talk to researcher)) Man (why is he) fucking calling me cheap↑ (I need
27 singles for) you know. I explained it to him. I need singles for today
28 and tomorrow. ((inaudible)) ((laughs)) You know.
29 R: Right.
30 W: ((laughing)) And he calls people cheap.
31 R: (I have no idea. man)
32 W: You know↑. (2.4) I mean I know its wrong to talk to a old person like
33 this but[
34 R: [But you know
35 W: But people piss you off sometimes, man.
36 R: Yeah.

The cashier's lines 25–28 are particularly interesting. He calls the customer an "idiot" (line 25) and then turns to the researcher and explains his bewilderment (lines 26–28) "Man (why is he) fucking calling me cheap – (I need singles for) you know. I explained it to him. I need singles for today and tomorrow. ((inaudible)) ((laughs)) You know." He reiterates what his account meant for him. The cashier needed singles for tomorrow. This is what the customer could not understand and his not being able to understand this makes him seem like an idiot to the cashier. Of course, in calling the cashier cheap the customer has acted like an idiot. But, this is not the big problem being related in these lines. The big problem is that the cashier cannot understand *why* he has been called cheap. The customer's failure to understand the cashier's account has rendered the entire exchange *unintelligible* for both.

After line 15 neither the cashier nor the customer is oriented toward the exchange as a mutually reflexive process. In other words, no matter what the other said next they would not have revised their interpretation of what they themselves had said in the prior turn on the basis of it, are not listening to one another – well they *hear*, but as another (an excluded Other), not as a reciprocating participant in the reflexive production of meaning.

When a problem is practice-based, actors have remedies in terms of repair. Both speakers own the misunderstandings and they can work jointly to sort them out. In this interaction, both participants fall back immediately on accounts. Failure in the more subtle forms of repair problems may still be accountable within a practice itself – without reference to excluding beliefs and/or practices. For instance, a mishearing may be given an account and clarified: "I'm sorry I didn't hear you; the machine was making too much noise." Accounts that refer only to the practice at hand in this way are more likely to be mutually intelligible and offer a remedy

both can understand and accept. But any remedy requires the benefit of the doubt.

In the case of making change analyzed here, the cashier does give a practice based account for not giving ones – but it is a specialized worksite practice account referencing a practice, or concern within a practice, that the customer does not share rather than an account addressed to the speech practices of the situation that they do share. As such it requires trust without comprehension and the benefit of the doubt in a situation in which the customer is being denied what he needs. The customer is not willing to extend this benefit of the doubt. The cashier's worksite orientation tells him that he is not a bank. But maybe for the customer he is in fact a bank. Furthermore, the customer's concerns about immigrant storeowners, as expressed in his narrative, are not shared by the cashier.

The problem in this case is that the accounts offered by both the cashier and the customer reference either beliefs or worksite concerns that are not mutually available. Thus, they fail to establish mutually intelligible grounds for the problems they are experiencing. Accounts require agreement, whereas practices only require mutual orientation. These two don't share anything, so accounts fail them whereas practices might not. In interactions where there is mutual reciprocity, repairs can be very elaborate, and much bigger problems than this can be repaired, with mutual apologies if necessary. But here feeling Othered leads quickly to an overt attempt to "Other the Otherer" with "you people are cheap." The accounts *both display* the relationship *and create it*: Accountably Other.

7. Accounts and Narratives

It has become popular to think of narrative as a necessary context for interpretation in interaction, but if shared practices that do not require shared beliefs are what makes mutual understanding possible in contexts of diversity, narrative cannot be the foundation of such encounters. As interactions become progressively more practice-based, narrative or accounts are invoked primarily at points of sensitivity where the practice has become problematic and persons feel the need to either justify or fall back on context for interpretation. The problem that arises is that practices have come to predominate precisely because narratives are no longer shared. Therefore, falling back on narrative as a remedy causes more problems.

Otherness results from a process of breakdown that is storable. As people try to make sense of interactions that have been problematic, they will tell these stories to others. Actors will develop collections of such narratives that they carry with them into interactional situations. Persons who share the same beliefs and values are likely to have similar sets of narratives. They

are not likely to share a set with anyone who is demographically different from themselves. If they are ready to use these narratives at the first sign of interactional trouble, they will generally be in trouble whenever they are interacting with someone whose narrative set is different from their own. Practices offer a sufficient store of remedies. If they gave each Other the benefit of the doubt and remained mutually engaged, they could solve their problems. But as soon as they fall back on narratives, they cease to make sense to one anOther and feel Othered.

Between two groups like the customer and cashier, narratives about each Other already exist because problems occur so regularly between them. The stronger the narrative becomes, ironically, the more often interactions will fail because the narratives are invoked. The more often interactions fail, the stronger the narrative accounts will become. It is a vicious circle. Durkheim argued that attempts to fix problems with practices through an appeal to shared beliefs are not only doomed to failure; they amplify the problem. The only hope for success in a context of real diversity is to trust practices and remain imbedded in them.

The Accountable Other is in our sense not a demographic Other but a violator of local order – who is held accountable through narrative and becomes excluded via a failure of trust that becomes embedded in narrative and belief. This Othering is a process of driving someone outside of practice, either because of problems that emerge over the course of interaction or by invoking excluding categories even before problems arise.

7.1. Loyalty Group Formation

Because mutual intelligibility depends on a reflexive process of mutual reciprocation and recipient design, persons cannot make sense in interaction when they are not treated equally: there is no trust. Whenever inequality occurs, self and intelligibility suffer. People who experience sustained inequality over the long term protect themselves by retreating into loyalty groups (Rawls, 2000; Du Bois, 1903). These collective orientations protect people by guaranteeing equality within a circle of practice. They also create a framework of accounts that can be used to make sense when interactions with outsiders fail. The customer's "you people are so cheap" is such a narrative.

Loyalty groups place a premium on guarantees of equality, and members are expected to provide loyalty displays as evidence of their commitment to these guarantees. These priorities stand at odds with the priority placed on reciprocity and recipient design as displays of trust and mutual orientation to practice in general. The preference orders of loyalty groups are therefore significantly different. When practices and their preference orders are not the same, displays of competence will also be different. Where trust and mutual commitment cannot be recognizably displayed

through competence, they cannot be maintained – even where people are willing.

In a context of inequality the formations of such groups may be necessary but in a context of modern democratic practice-based exchange, there are immediate negative consequences for everyone. Ironically, the negative consequences are especially great for loyalty group members, who, because of their efforts to protect themselves, now find themselves stigmatized and excluded from the practices of the larger society to which they hope for equal access. As a consequence, where too much inequality has occurred in predictable ways over time, loyalty groups based on Otherness that have developed as a defense against oppression also begin to act as barriers to communication. They are barriers not only because beliefs and accounts are different, although that *can* become a problem when outgroup member accounts are elaborated, or even because of the physical fact of separation, because in a modern cosmopolitan society people still have to interact with one another to some degree. Rather, the more serious problems occur because of the need to display competence in practices themselves. Without the ability to display competence in practices – in a practice-based society in which competence is required for trust – loyalty group members find they are not trusted, do not trust Others, and hence have difficulty engaging in trust relations outside of the loyalty group – even as the original sources of their inequality are reduced.

The process of Otherness that results can be invoked quickly whenever trust relations, tentatively entered into, look like they are breaking down. Differences in expectations with regard to practice often lead to their breakdown. Rather than being forced to stick with an interaction and do a repair – giving one another the benefit of the doubt and protecting one another's selves, as practices require, and as most of us do most of the time – narrative accounts and the Accountable Otherness they generate provide a fall-back position from which the Other can be accountably excluded as soon as an interaction shows signs of trouble.

7.2. *Situated Civility and Social Cohesion*

It has become popular to talk about the decline of society, culture, and morality in a context of modernity, but when practices fail it is not because of a “lack” of culture or morality. Practices, when persons are mutually committed to them, provide a basis for strong bonds of social cohesion that can replace traditional cultural bonds. But when, in a context of diversity, practices fail or are abandoned, intelligibility fails as well. Only narratives can be invoked past the point of breakdown – but they are only intelligible among insiders and are therefore Othering. The clash of narrative creates the impression that the problem is a clash of culture, but clashing narrative only occurs if participants abandon practice and fall back on culture and belief.

In the “Decline of Civility” (1976) Peter K. Manning argued that the polite regard persons in society had formerly extended to one another was disappearing. This position is consistent with the many contemporary arguments bemoaning the loss of society, morality, and social cohesion. What all of these arguments have in common is the idea that shared beliefs and ritual practices *of the old sort*, conceptual frameworks that transcend situations, are the bedrock of human morality and social order and that when they dissolve, social and moral order dissolve with them. But the way communication works in a context of diversity embeds morality in the production of intelligibility through practice. Morality has become the trust relation and mutual obligation required by practice. Commitment to these obligations must be consistent and ongoing. This strengthens morality – it does not weaken it. Certainly Manning is right that what used to be meant by civility is fast disappearing, but, just as situated populational cohorts have replaced demographic populations as the relevant units producing social order, so civility has changed both its venue and its form. The practice of etiquette, as tied to systems of beliefs and status and role relations, does not belong in a social context based on practice.

There has been a transformation of civility, rather than a decline. Civility, as a civil *practice-based morality*, has increased as traditional forms of civility, tied to role, status, and belief, have declined. As mutual commitment to practice, civility is nothing like manners and, although it involves details of how one should engage in practices, the form it takes in particular situated practices can be the opposite of traditional manners, and often intentionally so, especially when the intent is to negate traditional status differences.

Because mutual regard and commitment to the practices relevant to the production of each and every situation have become increasingly necessary as traditional group-centered social forms have broken down, civility in its new form, as civil moral regard for the mutual obligation to those practices in which self and the possibility of intelligibility are invested, has necessarily increased. As society has become increasingly contingent in traditional terms (no shared values, no given identities, indexicality at all points), the job of mutually constructing meaning and self through shared practice has become a more important one, and persons have come to place an increasingly higher value on just how persons perform their obligations to one another in and through those situated practices in which they find themselves. This results in a society that is actually *less contingent* at specific points of practice (Rawls, 1987, 1990).

Because of the importance of practices in creating order and reducing contingency, interactional breaches cause immediate trouble and scholars have noted an increasing attention to what others think, to what looks like conformity. David Reisman in *The Lonely Crowd* (1950) referred to this change

as “the other-oriented” character. The tendency has been to confuse this development of attention to practice with the old style conformity to group that characterized traditional societies, and, thus, to think of this characteristic as strategic and lacking in principles because it is oriented toward pleasing Others. What has happened in fact is an increased orientation toward practice. What looks like trying to please Others is really reflexive sequentiality – incorporating the interpretation of Others into one’s own understanding. This is important because persons who are oriented toward Others strategically in an effort to get their own way are not oriented toward principles, but the person who is deeply embedded in trust relations and mutual commitment *is oriented toward principles* – only now those principles are located in relation to practice and commitment to them rather than in conceptual principles that stand outside practices in the beliefs and cultures of groups.

The group has become situated and defined by practice (Garfinkel, 1948/2006). What we have in this apparent conformity is a very new thing: *a moral obligation to conform to situated interactional expectations that set us free from traditional conformity*. This imperative becomes increasingly important as society makes the transition from demographic groups to population cohorts, and from shared beliefs and values to shared practices. The transformation from traditional morality to practice-based civility involves just this: The transformation from shared ritual forms of behavior considered appropriate for particular persons, in a specific setting, on the basis of shared beliefs about status, religion, and culture to shared forms of behavior as a form of practice that belong to particular situations, and only to persons in so far as, and in just and only the way that, they inhabit identities in those particular situations, for particular periods of time.

On this view there is no decrease in civility. There is in fact an increase in civility, just as there is no decrease in social order or in morality. But there is also a change in the consequences of a failure in civility. Sanctions formerly involved punishing individual persons to maintain the sacredness of beliefs and boundaries, but now, failures of practice are self-sanctioning – situated practices fail entirely. Every participant is threatened by a breakdown and the appearance of boundary at the center threatens coherence and order. People who create such boundaries are excluded on the basis of lack of competence rather than personal character or status/role.

Much of this Durkheim discussed in *The Division of Labor in Society*. But without the turn toward the development of character through social interaction that occurred at mid-century, perhaps best represented by Reisman’s *The Lonely Crowd*, and the understanding of practices and presentation of self worked out by Goffman and Garfinkel, Durkheim’s argument was not complete. How he understood it at the time remains a mystery and a testament to his brilliance.

8. Conclusion

There is a difference between being able to “see” that Others may be Others who will do things differently, and extending to them the benefit of the doubt when their displays of competence are different from ours, and seeing them just as Others, having only one standard of practice by which to “see” the intelligibility of what Others do. In the latter case, anyone who fails to display competence in expected ways becomes disturbingly Other, deviant and threatening. This is the essential paradox of equality and difference in modern society: If you see the Other at the beginning as Other and different, then it is impossible to treat that Other as a normal member Other whose competence to produce practice is the measure of trust. But if you do not see the potential for difference as Other, then differences in the production of practice lead to breakdown and the construction of Othering accounts between those who need to be considered the “same” for the purpose of practice. Recognizing the possibility of Otherness, rather than leading to discrimination, can alert participants that local orders may be different and justify extending the benefit of the doubt. As long as there are differences in practices, refusal to see differences between people, such as alleged “colorblindness” with regard to race, creates discrimination as much as traditional prejudice does. It does not prevent it. Because it assumes a single standard of behavior that does not yet exist, and then uses that standard to evaluate competence, all Others will be found incompetent. Discrimination over time has forced people to adopt different standards of practice as a protective mechanism. Yet we operate on the basis of a single standard of practice. An awareness of possible differences and an acceptance of their legitimacy are required in the interim while we work toward equality. What this single standard will be remains to be worked out in interactions over time. Only after it has developed will justice in the larger legal, social, political, and economic senses be possible. Until then the principle of “one law for all” will work against all “Others” in the interior.

Persons excluded at the interior have not just been excluded from an interaction. They have been excluded from being human, refused reciprocity and excluded from intelligibility. These are serious matters. Descriptions of racial discrimination are often belittled by whites because they involve apparently trivial matters, but interactional difficulties are not trivial. Others have their presentation of self denied. Their competence cannot be validated. They cannot be trusted. Traditional society offers protections to insiders when “outsiders” do this. What does a modern practice-based society offer as protection – or even as acknowledgment of the problem – when it happens inexorably to groups of insiders continually and without relief? Nothing. Only the claim that justice resides in the rule of law.

In our practice-based society there are no real outsiders. So, when we Other each Other, we do it as insiders. It is a form of situated interactional exile. A

negation of self and self-worth. An exile from the ability to make sense as a person with Others and thus from human status.

Notes

1. We have adopted the practice of putting the “O” in Other in capitals to highlight the number and variety of relations in which this distinction appears. That sustainable sameness is still possible was demonstrated post 9/11. But, its effect is largely symbolic and it has little utility for producing cohesion between participants in actual interactions. Degrees of sameness generated by the process of Othering in modern societies are largely transitory, based in the immediate context, and easily lost due to the high degree of differentiation.
2. Du Bois argued that Black Americans formed a group of this sort after the failure of Reconstruction in the 1870’s (Du Bois, 1903). Boundaries around black solidarity were redrawn in the 1960’s and excluded whites expressed anger about this. It violated their own newly formed sense of democratic inclusion – very ironic to say the least, given the three centuries of exclusion that required the formation of those boundaries in the first place (Rawls, 2000).
3. The status of Other as a reciprocating agent engaged in sustained interaction with a self, and the contribution of that relationship to the production of both self and intelligibility, might at first appear to be an entirely separate use of the word Other, from the idea of other as excluded outsider, but in fact is not. Ironically, the fact that the group provides less context for meaning and cohesion means that the reciprocating Other becomes more important in modern society. But, Other in this sense must be an equal and equally committed to the ongoing practice in which both are engaged. As soon as the Other fails in this regard – is no longer mutually engaged or trustworthy – selves can be damaged and processes of Othering in the sense in which I am using it here can occur. Thus, while being an Other for an interacting self is an essential process of practice, being excluded from that process of reciprocation is referred to as being Othered.
4. The term actor is substituted for the word person to indicate that we are only concerned with the identity of an actor in a specific situated practice and not with biography and personal characteristics.
5. Populational cohorts are collections of actors defined by mutual participation in a practice. Membership categories identify persons, or aspects of persons with narrative account status (Rawls, 2005a, 2005b; Garfinkel, 2002, 1948/2005).
6. Note on “collection”: Wittgenstein’s problem – what is it about some things (in his famous case, games) that make them the “same” such that one could say they constitute a collection? Wittgenstein couldn’t say and settled for the idea of “family resemblances.” If you focus on demographics (which is something like focusing on the meaning of words rather than sequences), that is, the characteristics of a thing, then you can never find what it is about two or more things that makes them a collection. But, if they are collected not by a characteristic of themselves but by their relationship to something else – all the people now playing chess or all those in this room at this moment – then the characteristics of the collection are not at all ambiguous. Situations and practices as collectors solve the problems inherent in trying to use concepts and abstract characteristics as collectors. All those who know how to play chess – as a collector – would already introduce such an ambiguity. All those who are engaged in playing – or who are in the room – are collected by a relationship to practice. Then complaints like “You are not really here, are you?” can be understood as referencing really serious matters of attention to practice that introduce ambiguities quite different from the ones we think we are dealing with when we approach things demographically.

7. What a situated identity searches for in conversation are the relevant situated identities that they share with the other they are talking to. I have referred to this as categorial identity (Rawls, 2000), and contrasted it with demographic identity and self-identification with loyalty groups.
8. The extent to which practices also exclude persons whose physical abilities interfere with the ability to demonstrate competence explains much that we would refer to as stigma (with regard to blindness for instance). See Coates and Rawls (2005), unpublished manuscript.
9. Criminal law draws a boundary and tries to control access. But tort law must allow open access to everyone in order to work. There would seem to be a parallel between that and the distinction between society with the boundary around, contrasted with the practice whose boundary consists in matters produced in the interiors of situations. Violations of practice at the interior would also constitute important boundaries to access, but of a different sort.
10. It has been pointed out that even in cases of slavery in societies of this sort, slaves have rights and are treated as members of the society in some areas of interaction. The modern practice of treating persons as property does not occur – and would likely be disruptive in such a social context (see Orlando Patterson, 1985).
11. See the original introduction to the first edition of *The Division of Labor in Society* reproduced as an appendix in the 1933 English translation for a discussion of ethics in relation to differentiation. In the second edition and most other translations, only about 10 pages of the original introduction are preserved and the argument is essentially lost.
12. This argument has caused a great deal of confusion and Durkheim has been persistently misunderstood as making a “normative” argument that society should not exist in an abnormal form. But the argument he makes is not normative, it is logical. He does not argue that it should not – but that it cannot. However, while a practice-based society creates equality and needs equality to continue existing over the long term, it also increases inequality, at least in the short term, and by increasing inequality it contradicts itself (Rawls, 2002).
13. This is, in my estimation, the heart of Durkheim’s functionalism. It is not a conservative argument, as is generally supposed. It is a shame that its identification with later forms of functionalism that were developed in the mid-twentieth century, and were conservative, have led to this misunderstanding.
14. As Levin noted in *The Flight from Ambiguity* (1988), people in more traditional tribal situations do not have the preoccupation with eliminating ambiguity that modern western scholars have, but Levin suggests that the worry about ambiguity is itself misplaced. While I would agree with him in seeing ambiguity as a tool of sorts, rather than as a problem, I would note that the possibilities with regard to playing with ambiguity that he describes in the context of a traditional society simply do not exist in practice-based social contexts. The context of shared narrative and belief necessary for disambiguating the ambiguity – rendering it funny, etc. – simply do not exist most of the time.
15. The stores were appropriately posted to the effect that all encounters were being audio- and videotaped and permission was obtained from the Wayne State University Behavioral Investigation Committee before the research began. The confidentiality of all research subjects has been maintained.

References

- Coates, D. and Rawls, A. (2005). *Trust, Trouble, and Lies: Language Games of Blindness*. Unpublished Manuscript.

- David, G. (2005). 'Making Change' in an Arab-owned Convenience Store. Unpublished Manuscript.
- Du Bois, W.E.B. (1903/2004). *The Souls of Black Folk*. Boulder: Paradigm Press.
- Durkheim, E. (1893/1933). *The Division of Labor in Society*. New York: Free Press.
- Garfinkel, H. (1948/2006). *Seeing Sociologically*. Boulder: Paradigm Press.
- Garfinkel, H. (1963). A Conception of and Experiments with 'Trust' as a Condition of Stable Concerted Actions. In *Motivation and Social Interaction*. O.J. Harvey. (Ed.) New York: The Ronald Press.
- Garfinkel, H. (1967). *Studies in Ethnomethodology*. Englewood-Cliffs: Prentice-Hall.
- Garfinkel, H. (2002). *Ethnomethodology's Program: Working Out Durkheim's Aphorism*. Ed. and with an introduction by A. W. Rawls. Boulder: Rowman and Littlefield.
- Goffman, E. (1959). *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. Garden City: Doubleday Anchor.
- Levi-Strauss, C. (1962) *Totemism*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Levine, D. (1988). *Flight from Ambiguity: Essays in Social and Cultural Theory*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Manning, P.K. (1976). The Decline of Civility: A Comment on Erving Goffman's Sociology. *Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology* 13: 13–25.
- Mead, G.H. (1934). *Mind, Self and Society*. Chicago: Free Press.
- Patterson, O. (1985). *Slavery and Social Death*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Rawls, A.W. (2005a). Introduction. In H. Garfinkel. A. Rawls (Ed.) *Seeing Sociologically: The Routine Grounds of Social Action*. Boulder: Paradigm Press.
- Rawls, A.W. (2005b). *What Shape Epistemology and Practice: Durkheim's The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Rawls, A.W. (2004). *Epistemology and Practice: Durkheim's The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Rawls, A.W. (2002). Editor's Introduction. In Garfinkel (2002).
- Rawls, A.W. (2000). Race as an Interaction Order Phenomena: W.E.B. DuBois's 'Double Consciousness' Thesis Revisited. *Sociological Theory* 18, 2: 239–272.
- Rawls, A.W. (1990). Emergent Sociality: A Dialectic of Commitment and Order. *Symbolic Interaction* 13: 63–82.
- Rawls, A.W. (1987). The Interaction Order Sui Generis: Goffman's Contribution to Social Theory. *Sociological Theory*. (5)2: 136–149.
- Reisman, D. (1950). *The Lonely Crowd*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Sacks, H. (1992/1995). *Lectures on Conversation*, Vols. 1 & 2. Ed. G. Jefferson and with an Introduction by E.A. Schegloff. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Sacks, H., Schegloff, E.A. and Jefferson, G. (1974). The Simplest Systematics for the Organization of Turntaking in Conversation. *Language* 50: 696–735.
- Schegloff, E.A., Jefferson, G. and Sacks, H. (1977). The Preference for Self-Correction in the Organization of Repair in Conversation. *Language* 53, 2: 361–382.
- Simmel, G. (1950). The Stranger. In *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*. Trans. K. Wolff. New York: Free Press.

Copyright of Human Studies is the property of Springer Science & Business Media B.V. and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.