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**POLITICAL PRACTICE:  
A HERMENEUTIC-PHENOMENOLOGICAL INQUIRY**

**A Dissertation  
Presented for the  
Doctor of Philosophy  
Degree  
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville**

**Michael E. Arfken  
August 2006**

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## **DEDICATION**

To Kristen, for everything.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

At this time, I would like to take a moment to thank those who have either directly or indirectly contributed to the shape of the present project. While I have gained much from these relationships, I assume responsibility for any errors that the reader may find within these pages.

My family has played an important role in the completion of the present project. Throughout the years, my parents and sister encouraged me to do my very best in everything I have undertaken. I am eternally grateful for all the support they have given me.

My interactions with faculty and students as an undergraduate at Texas State University enabled me to begin to formulate some of the issues that appear in the following pages. The friends that have contributed to this project are too numerous to mention though I expect they will know who they are if I express my appreciation to all of the “Austin/San Marcos Crew.” Several undergraduate mentors were particularly influential in my decision to take the plunge into academia; these include Maria Czyzewska, Stan Friedman, Christopher Frost, Tom Grimes, Jeffery Gordon, and Timothy Hulsey. I am also indebted to the Texas State University Honors Program for encouraging a form of interdisciplinary scholarship that permeates the pages of the present project.

Faculty, staff, and students at The University of Tennessee were instrumental in the completion of this dissertation. In particular, I would like to thank Jack Barlow, Harry Dahms, Allen Dunn, Lowell Gaertner, Howard Pollio, and Richard Saudargas. The conversations I had with these individuals are largely responsible for the trajectory of my intellectual pursuits.

A healthy dose of *Tool* and *Rage Against The Machine* encouraged me to keep up the fight even when faced with a number of hardships. While the present project is but the beginning of a more thorough investigation of phenomenology, politics, and practice, these artists have done much to inspire my intellectual interests as a whole.

I would also like to thank the folks at Sunspot for making themselves available for hours of intellectual conversation and spirits. I can honestly say that this dissertation would not have been the same without their influence.

Finally, many thanks go to my wife Kristen and her family and friends for all of their encouragement in the tumultuous process of writing a dissertation.

## **ABSTRACT**

The present project focuses on some of the similarities between social cognition, transcendental phenomenology, literary theory, and epistemological hermeneutics. I argue that developments in hermeneutic theory call into question the view that interpretation is a cognitive process residing within the minds of individuals. Drawing on Heidegger's project for a fundamental ontology, I suggest that hermeneutic phenomenology provides a radical critique of social cognition's view of the nature of social reality. I also introduce the concept of *practice* as an alternative to psychology's focus on subjectivity.

These theoretical explorations provide a foundation for investigating the practices that embody an interpretation of political reality. Using open-ended qualitative interviews, I ask participants to describe in as much detail as possible, salient political situations. I categorize these situations into three broad areas: (1) media (2) conventional political activities and (3) political socialization. Within each of these categories, I discuss variations in the way people understand political life.

Finally, I explore the implications of these practices for our understanding of democracy. I discuss how the movement from epistemology to ontology calls into question the role of subjectivity in contemporary democratic societies.

## PREFACE

The purpose of this dissertation is to explore the concept of practice as it relates to politics. The two broad research questions it seeks to answer are (1) how is the concept of practice relevant to the theoretical foundations of phenomenology and social cognition and (2) how do everyday political practices embody an interpretation of social and political reality?

Chapter 1 explores the possibility that phenomenology may be able to do more than provide contemporary psychology with rigorous descriptions of human experience. In fact, I argue that when phenomenology is fused with ontology, a radical revision of the concept of *interpretation* is in order. I demonstrate this by focusing on social cognition's view of the nature of the relationship between the individual and his or her context. This chapter is relatively long as I endeavor to clarify the philosophical foundations that guide the present project.

Chapter 2 begins with a review of the literature in political psychology. Here I explore the differences between psychological and sociological approaches to political research. I also discuss the implications of these approaches for phenomenological investigations of political practice.

Chapter 3 focuses on methodological issues. Here I discuss the stages of a qualitative research study including thematizing, designing, interviewing, transcribing, analyzing, verifying, and reporting. I also explore some of the theoretical issues that emerge in qualitative research.

Chapter 4 looks at the interviews with a particular emphasis on the practices that people discuss in the context of concrete political experiences. I focus on three broad categories: (1) media (2) conventional political activities and (3) political socialization.

Chapter 5 summarizes the implications of this investigation for research in social and political psychology.



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# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

The present project focuses on two interrelated issues: (1) to what extent can a revised understanding of phenomenology call traditional views of social reality into question and (2) what can the transition from epistemology to ontology tell us about the everyday practices that embody an interpretation of political reality? While this chapter is one of the longest in the present project, it is important to provide a thorough introduction to the theoretical foundations of this investigation. We will begin by exploring what has become one of the dominant approaches within contemporary social psychology.

### **Social Cognition**

Although a number of texts deal specifically with social cognition (Bless, Fiedler & Strack, 2004; Kunda, 1999; Moskowitz, 2005), the present analysis draws on the work of several primary texts (Fiske & Taylor, 1984, 1991; Wyer & Skrull, 1984, 1994) that focus on the theoretical foundations of social cognition. Fiske and Taylor (1991) define social cognition as the, “study of how people make sense of other people and themselves. It focuses on how ordinary people think about people and how they think they think about people” (p.1). In other words, social cognition focuses on the way people interpret social reality in everyday interactions.

Although social cognition is a relatively new area of social psychology, it has become a significant force in social psychological research. In the forward to the second edition of the *Handbook of Social Cognition*, Ostrom (1994) proclaims that the sovereignty of social cognition as a field of study is beyond question while predicting, “the ultimate destiny of social cognition as monarch of social psychology” (p.xi). Moreover, he suggests that it is, “easy to envision a future in which there is no longer a need for a separate *Handbook of Social Cognition*. The *Handbook of Social Cognition* will become the *Handbook of Social Psychology*” (p. xii). Though this characterization of social cognition is not

shared by all, it demonstrates the extent to which some researchers view social cognition as a radical and dominant movement in social psychology.

### ***Origins***

Fiske and Taylor (1991) suggest that the origins of social cognition can be found in the everyday experiences of people navigating social reality. Much of our lives are spent trying to understand why people think and act in particular ways. We try to make sense of the world around us as well as of the people who inhabit it and, for the most part, these interactions occur with minimal difficulty. For social cognition researchers, this suggests that the thoughts and behaviors of individuals in concrete social situations are guided by an often implicit understanding of the nature of social relationships – what Heider (1958) refers to as a “naïve psychology”—and that social psychology must ultimately begin with a thorough understanding of the way individuals experience these everyday encounters.

This focus on experience is often referred to as *phenomenology* or “the study of human experience.” For Fiske and Taylor (1991), the purpose of phenomenology is to, “describe systematically how ordinary people say they experience their world” (p.1). At a phenomenological level of analysis, the aim is not to establish the veracity of these experiences but to develop a rigorous and detailed description of the way people experience themselves and others in a variety of situations. That an understanding of our everyday experiences is an important component of social cognition research is reflected in Fiske and Taylor’s (1991) suggestion that phenomenology remains, “one of the major foundations of social cognition research” (p.4). Yet, it is also clear that in order to identify factors that are causally related to specific interpretations of social reality, it is necessary to move beyond “mere” phenomenological description. From this perspective, phenomenology is a means for developing a description of human experience while social cognition researchers attempt to identify cognitive



Figure 1. Rubin Figure

mechanisms and environmental factors that *cause* individuals to interpret social reality in specific ways.

At the phenomenological level, it is clear that in our everyday experiences we do not encounter a, “blooming, buzzing confusion” (James, 1890) but instead find various aspects of our surroundings coming into focus while other aspects remain in the background. For example, I can attend to my pencil as it stands out against the background of my paper. It is also possible to alter my focus so that the desk provides a ground against which I can delineate the contours of the paper that was only moments ago in the background. Within psychology, this figure/ground relationship is often demonstrated through the use of the Rubin Figure (see Figure 1) where it is possible to see either a vase against a dark background or two silhouettes facing one another against a light background. This demonstration is meant to draw attention to the way perception involves a relationship between a salient figure and a background. Moreover, it is clear that when I look at a collection of objects, I perceive certain items as belonging together: the stack of books on my desk form a group while the various stacks can be distinguished from one another. For Gestalt psychologists, examples such as these drawn from our everyday experiences indicate that our perceptions, far from being chaotic and unintelligible, exhibit significant organization that can be described in lawful ways.

Within social cognition, the Gestalt approach to human experience serves as a valuable alternative to the elemental and atomistic framework that

dominated psychology in the early part of the twentieth century. During that time, it was believed that in order to develop a scientific understanding of a particular phenomenon, it was necessary to reduce what was viewed as complex into its constituent parts. For Gestalt psychologists, such atomism fails to recognize that the whole is *different* from the sum of its parts. For example, although the individual elements of a water molecule are combustible, water as a whole exhibits a conflicting property, namely, the ability to extinguish fire. This suggests that to understand the nature of water is not equivalent to reducing it to its individual parts. As Fiske and Taylor (1991) observe, “Gestalt psychologists saw the mental chemistry metaphor of the elementalists as misguided because a chemical compound has properties not predictable from its isolated elements” (p.4). For Gestalt and social psychologists, this suggests that people not only perceive individual elements from the “bottom-up” but that stimuli are also organized from the “top-down” based on specific rules of organization.

Commonly regarded as the father of social psychology, Kurt Lewin applied these insights to the realm of social reality. Instead of viewing the individual as an isolated part of a casual chain or as a collection of basic elements, Lewin (1951) developed what he referred to as a “field theory” of psychology whereby “behavior (B) is a function of the person (P) and the environment (E),  $B = F(P, E)$ , and that P and E in this formula are interdependent variables” (p.25). Lewin’s formulation of what has become a fundamental principle of contemporary social psychology reflects his interest in applying phenomenological insights to the study of social reality. It is not the environment, as some behaviorists maintain, that is the basic unit of analysis, nor is it the person in isolation. Instead, it is the *interdependent* relationship between the person and her environment that provides a foundation for social psychology. Much as the paper I am writing on provides a background from which my pencil stands out for what it is, the individual must always be understood within a particular context or environment.

For researchers in social cognition, this means that it is necessary to pay attention to the “total psychological field” (Fiske & Taylor, 1991, p.5) whereby a

complete description of human behavior is only possible by paying attention *to the person in the situation*. Fiske and Taylor (1991) claim that, “ever since Lewin, social psychologists have seen both the person and the situation as essential to predicting behavior. The study of social cognition focuses on perceiving, thinking, and remembering as a function of who and where one is” (p.5).

As the name indicates, social cognition is particularly interested in the way cognitive mechanisms function in particular circumstances. Researchers want to understand the *mental processes* that lead people to interpret social reality in particular ways. Fiske and Taylor (1991) have even gone so far as to suggest that social cognition has an “unabashed commitment to mentalism (cognition)” (p.14). Indeed, nearly all social cognition researchers are united by a desire to understand how *mental processes* produce particular interpretations of social reality (Bless, Fielder & Strack, 2004; Bodenhausen & Lambert, 2003; Devine, Hamilton & Ostrom, 1994; Fiske & Taylor, 1991; Kunda, 1999; Moskowitz, 2005; Ostrom, 1984, 1994; Smith, 1998).

### ***Information-Processing Theory***

Social Cognition shares with cognitive psychology the aim of understanding human behavior in terms of cognitive processes. Within cognitive psychology, mental activity is largely viewed as analogous to the way computers process information. Researchers refer to this computational metaphor as *information-processing theory*.

In many ways, social cognition can be viewed as a hybrid discipline integrating social psychology’s interest in the situated nature of human behavior with information-processing theory’s focus on the cognitive processes that people use to interpret reality. Holyoak and Gordon (1974), for example, claim that “the mutual influence of social psychology and the information-processing paradigm of cognitive psychology has intensified dramatically over the past decade. The resulting new subdiscipline – social cognition – now has its own distinct identity” (p.39-40). Likewise, Ostrom (1994), suggests that,

at the heart of social cognition is the conceptual orientation that has emerged from the information-processing perspective in cognitive psychology, a perspective that recently has expanded to include cognitive science ... Social cognition researchers share this theoretical perspective, differing solely in the phenomenon to be understood (p.ix).

Indeed, the importance of the computer for social cognition research is also reflected in Fiske and Taylor's (1991) suggestion that the computer,

has become a methodological tool as well as a theoretical metaphor. It serves as a tool in that cognitive scientists actually use computers to simulate human cognitive processes; they write complex programs that play chess, learn geometry, and summarize the news... The computer is also a metaphor in that it *provides a framework and a jargon for characterizing mental processes; psychologists talk about input-output operations or memory storage and retrieval, with respect to human cognition*. More important, most current theory builds on the idea that human cognition resembles computer information processing in important ways (p.9; italics mine).

In other words, the computer is both a tool for exploring various aspects of the mind and a common discourse for discussing mental activity. Indeed, this "discourse" has come to dominate the way researchers describe and understand social phenomena.

The computational view of mind has also led social cognition researchers to embrace a framework that understands mental processes as fundamentally *rule-governed*. Much as a computer program contains rules for processing input and displaying the resulting output, social cognition researchers view mental processes as governed by rules that determine how individuals behave in specific situations. That social cognition researchers view mental activity as rule-governed is evident from Ostrom's (1984) list of concurrent tasks that an individual may need to perform in the midst of a social exchange:

1. The perceiver must observe the instigating action. This involves selective attention to the stimulus field and the sensory modalities.
2. Observations are entered into the cognitive system.
3. Past observations of the same stimulus person are retrieved to provide a context for interpreting the instigating act.
4. Inferences, judgments, and attributions are implicitly made, evaluated, and revised.
5. Since the perceiver must respond to other person's instigating act, a review of possible response alternatives is made.



6. Short- and long-term consequences of each alternative must be evaluated.
7. The perspective of the other toward each alternative is reviewed. Will the other veridically interpret it and make the desired response?
8. One response alternative is selected and enacted.
9. The partner's response is observed and interpreted in light of the behavior enacted by the self.
10. Based on feedback from the partner, the adequacy of the self-enacted behavior is evaluated according to whether it produced the intended consequences. It is compared in effectiveness to alternative response that could have been selected for enactment.
11. Affective processes that may have been aroused are dealt with.
12. The significant observations and thoughts that resulted from this brief interaction segment are recorded in memory for future use. (p.15)

Ostrom's (1984) list is by no means exhaustive, as a myriad of simpler tasks may need to occur between each of these general procedures. Nonetheless, this list demonstrates how adoption of a computational view of the mind suggests that human cognition is ultimately the result of applying determinate rules in, and to, specific situations.

For social cognition researchers, the fact that an individual's behavior is the result of applying a rule in a specific situation does not require the individual to recognize that her behavior is rule governed. By and large, people navigate social reality without being aware that their interpretations are the result of determinate laws of mental organization. Nonetheless, a computational view of the mind ultimately requires that human cognition be viewed as governed by determinate rules. That people are largely unaware of these rules has become a central theme in research on automaticity and implicit psychology (Bargh, 1997; Chen & Bargh, 1997; Dovidio, Kawakami, Johnson, Johnson & Howard, 1997; Fazio & Dunton, 1997; Greenwald, McGhee & Schwartz, 1998; Wegner & Bargh, 1998; Wittenbrink, Judd & Park, 1997).

### ***Mental Representation***

Another central theme in social cognition research is the belief that our experiences, beliefs, thoughts, and emotions are represented within the mind—

what psychologists and philosophers of mind refer to as *mental representation*.

For Smith (1998) psychologists,

generally define a representation as an encoding of some information, which an individual can construct, retain in memory, access, and use in various ways. Thus your impression of your Uncle Harry—your body of interrelated feelings about him and beliefs about what kind of person he is—is a mental representation on which you might draw to describe, evaluate, or make behavioral decisions about him (p.391).

Just how these experiences are represented has become a source of contention in contemporary social cognition research. Smith (1998) identifies four “theoretical mechanism” used by researchers to explain particular interpretations of social reality. These include associative networks (Carlston & Smith, 1996; Fiske & Taylor, 1991), schematic mechanisms (Brewer & Nakamura, 1984; Holyoak & Gordon, 1984), exemplars (Lewicki, 1985; Linville, Fisher, & Salovey, 1989) and parallel-distributed processing (Read & Miller, 1998; Rumelhart & McClelland, 1986; Smith, 1996). The relationship between social cognition and parallel-distributed processing (or connectionism) is especially difficult to grasp. First, it is also not entirely clear whether connectionism should be viewed as a competing perspective with more traditional approaches to information-processing such as associative networks and schema driven theories (Bechtel & Abrahamsen, 1991) or if connectionism can be viewed as an evolutionary development *within* an information-processing approach (Grainger & Jacobs, 1998; Massaro & Cowan, 1993). Moreover, although connectionistic models generally adhere to a representational model of the mind (Grainger & Jacobs, 1998; Smith, 1998), there are some who advocate an eliminativist approach to connectionism in which case the latter is viewed as a neurophysiological alternative to social cognition’s conception of “mind” (Ramsey, Stich & Rumelhart, 1991). In any event, it is clear that, “schematic models have been the most popular conceptualization of mental representation within social psychology over the last two decades (Smith, 1998, p.410). Indeed, Holyoak and Gordon (1984) have suggested that, “if there is any current theme that serves as an integrative framework, it is the concept of knowledge structures or *schemas*” (p44-45).

A schema is a *mental representation* that stores information from experience and uses this information to make sense of novel situations. Rumelhart (1980) has even suggested that schemas be understood as “the building blocks of cognition.” Brewer and Nakamura (1984) define schemata as, the unconscious mental structures and processes that underlie the molar aspects of human knowledge and skill. They contain abstract generic knowledge that has been organized to form qualitative new structures... The unconscious operation of the schema gives rise to the specific conscious contents of the mind. At output, generic production schemas interact with new incoming information to allow appropriate response to an indefinite number of new situations (p.141)

Sometimes schemas are viewed as *intervening variables* such that while they may not be linked to any physical structure (like the brain) they are able to account for measurable differences in observable behavior (MacCorqudale & Meehl, 1948; Ostrom, 1984). In other cases, schemas are viewed as *hypothetical constructs* that have the possibility of being instantiated in neurophysiology. This view is held by Neisser (1976) who claims that,

from the biological point of view, a schema is a part of the nervous system. It is some active array of physiological structures and processes: not a center in the brain, but an entire system that includes receptors and afferents and feed-forward units and efferents (p.54).

This is congruent with Brewer and Nakamura’s (1984) suggestion that schemas are, “ mental entities [that] have a physiological base, but that in the ultimate scientific account of things it will always be necessary to provide a scientific explanation at the level of mental entities” (p.136).

### ***Social Reality***

Social cognition views the psychological subject as a collection of mental representations and processes. This has led to a variety of different theories regarding the way individuals interpret social reality. One approach claims that individuals are motivated to maintain existing beliefs and that this consideration influences the interpretation of social reality. When the perception of a new event is incongruent with a previously held belief, the individual experiences cognitive

discomfort. Within this perspective, people strive to reduce discomfort by engaging in activities that are designed to establish *consistency* between incongruent cognitions (Festinger, 1957). Theorists from this perspective claim that, “people change their attitudes and beliefs for motivational reasons, because of unmet needs for consistency” (Fiske & Taylor, 1991, p.11). Unfortunately, the individual motivated by a desire to be consistent may not always develop an accurate representation of reality. This has led to a tremendous amount of research into how cognitive biases distort people’s interpretation of social reality (Bless, Fiedler & Strack, 2004; Fiske & Taylor, 1991).

Another approach within social cognition suggests that while the individual may seek to establish consistency between her beliefs and what she experiences in the social world, the navigation of social reality often requires more than the mere securing of harmony. Individuals encounter a variety of situations that are best dealt with by developing an *accurate* perception of reality. Within this approach, individuals take on the features of a lay scientist attempting to collect and analyze information that can help them understand the causes of particular social events. Much of this research seeks to understand those factors that contribute to the attributions people make regarding the causes of a variety of circumstances (Bless, Fiedler & Strack, 2003; Fiske & Taylor, 1991; Kelly, 1972, Kunda, 1999).

While people may strive to develop an accurate perception of reality, there are numerous factors that prevent such a project from succeeding. Individuals are often called upon to make a variety of decisions with only a limited amount of information and resources. Social cognitive research often focuses on the mental shortcuts, or heuristics, that people use to draw conclusions with only a limited number of resources. From this perspective, individuals are viewed as *cognitive misers* attempting to develop appropriate tools for drawing conclusions while using a minimum of cognitive resources. Research here has attempted to identify the mental rules people use for making economical decisions in everyday

interactions (Bless, Fiedler & Strack, 2003; Fiske & Taylor, 1991; Kahneman & Tversky, 1973; Kunda, 1999; Tversky & Kahneman, 1974)

Up to this point, we have explored some of the fundamental assumptions guiding social cognition research. At the most basic level, social cognition researchers are interested in understanding why individuals interpret social reality in specific ways. We have also explored Gestalt Psychology's influence on modern social psychology. Especially with the work of Kurt Lewin (1951), the relationship between people and their environment remains a central focus for social psychology. For social psychologists attempting to apply insights from cognitive psychology, the figure/ground relationship is transformed so that, "the central issues of both elemental and Gestalt theories are how to understand structures and processes occurring inside the mind" (Fiske & Taylor, 1991, p.6). With the advent of the computer, mental activity is integrated into an information-processing model of cognition in which stimuli enter an individual's mind where processes occur that result in specific behaviors. These behaviors are governed by determinate rules that dictate how an individual will interpret social reality. For social cognition researchers, interpretation is located within the minds of individuals and it is these cognitive process that ultimately lead to specific behaviors. Finally, social cognition generally relies on the concept of a "schema" to explain how knowledge is represented in the mind.

This view of interpretation is not unique to social cognition. In fact, there are a number of similarities between this view and what I will refer to as *epistemological hermeneutics*. At this point, I would like to explore some of these similarities in order to understand how such an approach to interpretation has a number of implications for the way we view social reality.

# Epistemological Hermeneutics

## *Origins*

Hermeneutics emerged as an area of study concerned with developing procedures for interpreting legal texts and scripture. Such texts were created to convey a particular message and it was the job of the interpreter to uncover the text's one true meaning. Because words are polysemic, it becomes necessary for an interpreter to distinguish the true meaning from imposters. As Ricoeur (1991) observes,

this activity of discernment is properly called interpretation; it consists in recognizing which relatively univocal message the speaker has constructed on the polysemic basis of the common lexicon. To produce a relatively univocal discourse with polysemic words, and to identify this intention of univocity in the reception of messages: such is the first and most elementary work of interpretation. (p.55)

Early hermeneutics focused on the task of developing procedures for dealing with any ambiguity that might emerge during the interpretation of a text. By using proper procedures, the interpreter could apprehend a text's true meaning. The development of techniques and procedures to arrive at an objectively valid interpretation of a text is often referred to as *epistemological* or *methodological* hermeneutics. This approach views the interpreter as a knowing subject trying to understand the meaning of a particular object, in this case a text. The text is an expression of an author and it is the aim of epistemological hermeneutics to accurately recreate the author's intention in the present. Especially in the work of the historian Wilhelm Dilthey, hermeneutics becomes a way to develop a rigorous science of subjectivity capable of developing objectively valid knowledge comparable to the natural sciences.

Dilthey and his predecessor, the theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher, view textual interpretation as an inherently reconstructive process. To know what an author intends in a particular passage, it is necessary to recreate the author's world. Palmer (1969), discussing Schleiermacher's approach to hermeneutics, suggests that he views understanding as:

the reexperiencing of the mental processes of the text's author. It is the reverse of composition, for it starts with the fixed and finished expression and goes back to the mental life from which it arose. The speaker or author constructed a sentence; the hearer penetrates into the structures of the sentence and the thought (p.86).

In textual interpretation, the words on a page are a medium used by authors to express their subjectivity and it is the job of the interpreter to use such expressions to reconstruct the author's original intention. The passages in a text are viewed as an exteriorization of the inner life of the author. In epistemological hermeneutics, words are signs pointing back to the subjectivity of an author. The text, by manifesting the inner life of an author, serves as a point of departure for reconstructing his or her unique perspective.

Within hermeneutics, the interpretation of a text is best viewed as a dialectical processes rather than as a linear progression towards some final meaning. As we read, more and more comes into focus so that what we are reading at present may illuminate previous interpretations even as these interpretations may modify our understanding of the text as a whole. Indeed, as Palmer (1969) has observed,

in order to read, it is necessary to understand in advance what will be said, and yet this understanding must come from the reading. What begins to emerge here is the complex dialectical process involved in all understanding as it grasps the meaning of a sentence, and somehow in a reverse direction supplies the attitude and emphasis which alone can make the written word meaningful" (p.16)

Our sense of the meaning of the text as a whole allows us to make sense of the individual parts while it is these individual parts that give us a sense of the whole. This is what is commonly referred to as the *hermeneutic circle*. For Dilthey, the relationship between the whole and its parts could be extended beyond the interpretation of texts disclosing the circular process inherent in life itself:

An event or experience can so alter our lives that what was formerly meaningful becomes meaningless and an apparently unimportant past experience may take on meaning in retrospect. The sense of the whole determines the function and the meaning of the parts (Palmer, 1969)

The hermeneutic circle suggests that when we understand something, this involves drawing on knowledge that we already possess, while remaining open to the possibility of modifying this knowledge in the light of new information.

As we will recall from our discussion of social cognition, the way people experience everyday interactions is important for understanding why people interpret social reality in specific ways. While I only touched on phenomenology at that point, I would now like to explore a type of phenomenology that shares a number of similarities with epistemological hermeneutics and social cognition.

### ***Transcendental Phenomenology***

For its founder, Edmund Husserl, transcendental phenomenology was meant to provide a means for surpassing numerous philosophical problems that have left contemporary scientific inquiry in a state of crisis. Although much of Husserl's philosophy focuses on the way phenomenology can cure this crisis, it is in his last major work that this task is given its most systematic attention. In *The Crisis of European Science and Transcendental Phenomenology (1970)*, Husserl argues that the crisis of the sciences can be understood as a crisis of foundations resulting from modern science's failure to recognize both its philosophical origins and its grounding in human subjectivity (Buckley, 1990). For Husserl, contemporary science's rejection of its roots in philosophy and subjectivity constitute an impediment to rational inquiry and lead to a crisis in its foundations. This rift between human experience and scientific knowledge leads to what Buckley (1990) views as:

the positivistic tendency of the sciences to resign themselves to the knowledge and manipulation of brute facts without ever raising questions of value and meaning. Ever more content to live in its world of abstractions and ideal objects, science becomes ever more oblivious to the actual world of human life (p.25).

Indeed, the distinction between facts and values that serves as a foundation for traditional objectivist science is for Husserl an obstacle to restoring reason to scientific inquiry – what he regards as a necessary condition for establishing a truly unified (scientific) world-view. In Husserl's view, any attempt to establish a



unified science beyond the reach of human subjectivity is irrational and ultimately doomed to failure. The only way such a crisis can be averted is through developing a rigorous science capable of disclosing this neglected realm of human experience.

For Husserl, if scientific discoveries gain their legitimacy by being supported by empirical research, such discoveries remain tentative so long as researchers fail to grasp the essential features of human experience. Moreover, it would be absurd to explore the structure of human experience using psychological theories and constructs since their validity stems from empirical research that has heretofore failed to critically examine the nature of human experience. For Husserl, phenomenology must be a *presuppositionless* science disclosing the structure of experience itself. Through careful observation of the way entities are immediately available to consciousness, the phenomenologist is able to produce a rigorous description of human experience, one that provides a foundation for empirical findings in the special sciences. Indeed, phenomenology is to be, “an a priori transcendental science of pure consciousness as such” (Moran, 2000, p.2). To understand the radical nature of phenomenological inquiry, it is important to explore several of its key concepts.

Natural Attitude & Lifeworld. The *natural attitude* or *natural standpoint* refers to the fact that when we encounter things in our everyday activities, we typically accept them as they are experienced. For Husserl, the existence of that which we encounter in our ordinary lives is indubitable. There is a public world out there and a private set of experiences in my mind. In my ordinary activities, this fact is beyond question. To even begin to reflect on the ontological status of the entities I encounter is to have move beyond the natural attitude. As Husserl (1976) observes,

this ‘fact-world’, as the word already tells us, I find to *be out there*, and also *take it just as it gives itself to me as something that exists out there*. All doubting and rejecting of the data of the natural world leaves standing the *general thesis of the natural standpoint*. ‘The’ world is as fact-world always there; at the most it is at odd points ‘other’ than I

supposed, this or that under such names as 'illusion', or 'hallucination', and the like, must be struck *out of it*, so to speak; but the 'it' remains ever, in these sense of the general thesis, a world that has its being out there (p.106)

The general thesis of the natural attitude remains intact so long as I am immersed in my ordinary activities. That the world exists *as it exists* remains on the periphery of my attention though this *knowledge* always provides a background for my everyday practical activities.

In his later work, Husserl focuses specifically on the world that exists for us prior to theoretical concepts and scientific reflection. The region where the natural attitude is given free reign is what Husserl refers to as the *Lebenswelt* or 'lifeworld'. The lifeworld is the realm of our everyday practical engagements where we participate in activities, encounter other people, and generally go about our everyday lives. For the sociologist Alfred Schutz (1973),

the everyday life-world is to be understood as that province of reality which the wide-awake and normal adult simply takes for granted in the attitude of common sense. By this taken-for-grantedness, we designate everything which we experience as unquestionable; every state of affairs is for us unproblematic until further notice" (p.3-4).

When I go about my normal activities, I do not reflect on whether this building exists or how it is possible that other people exist. Instead, all of these things are taken for granted. It is the fact that the world is indubitable that enables me to navigate the social world with minimal difficulty. I interact with others and find my way home without for a moment reflecting on the ontological status of my friend or of my house. In fact, in my everyday activities, it is quite clear that I *know* what is going on and that with this knowledge, I am able to act in a variety of socially appropriate ways.

Even though the lifeworld is necessarily restricted in focus, it remains our point of entry into all other spheres of inquiry. For Husserl, the lifeworld is the foundation of all our understanding whether this emerges in everyday practical activities or scientific theories. As he observes,

when science poses and answers questions, these are from the start, and hence from then on, questions resting upon the ground of, and addressed to, the elements of this pregiven world in which science and every other life-praxis is engaged (Husserl, 1970, p.121).

Exploring this region requires the development of a rigorous science capable of disclosing the invariant features of our taken for granted everyday experiences. Indeed, Husserl (1970) views phenomenology as, “a pure theory of essence of the life-world” (p.141). Yet in order to grasp the essence of the lifeworld, it is necessary for the phenomenologist to relinquish some of the concerns that provide a background for her everyday activities.

Reduction. In the *phenomenological reduction*, “we put out of action the general thesis which belongs to the essence of the natural standpoint” (Husserl, 1976, p.110). In other words, the existence of our taken for granted world is no longer assumed to be given. This is not to say that we follow Descartes in negating the existence of the world to arrive at certainty; instead, I reach no final verdict regarding the existence of what, in the natural attitude, I have taken for granted. My everyday activities indicate that I take the ontological status of the entities with which I interact as indubitable. In the phenomenological reduction, I neither accept nor reject this thesis. Indeed, I refuse to allow this concern to influence me in any way. To do this, I must also refuse to make use of all of the knowledge accumulated through the practice of the special sciences. Once again, the reduction does not mean that I reject scientific knowledge, only that I suspend judgment regarding its validity (Husserl, 1976).

The phenomenological standpoint, as achieved through a reduction or bracketing, consists of a radical alteration of the natural attitude. As Moran (2000) observes, this reduction enables Husserl to,

detach from all forms of conventional opinion, including our commonsense psychology, or accrued scientific consensus on issues, and all philosophical and metaphysical theorising regarding the nature of the intentional... [moreover] it allowed him to return to and isolate the central structures of subjectivity (p.146).

The reduction allows me to transcend what I uncritically accept in my everyday surroundings in order to explore how this understanding is structured. Thus, in the reduction, “I turn toward that traditional ‘ordinariness’ and in egological

terms, look to its organization” (Natanson, 1973, p.130). An example should help clarify the meaning of this approach.

If I look at the pencil lying on my paper, I may begin to notice that what I actually see is not a single pencil but instead a multiplicity of presentations. Standing in my present position, I see one side of the pencil. As I move to the left or right, I notice that I still see *the same* pencil even though I am seeing a different side of the pencil *at this moment*. In other words, although I am only seeing part of the pencil in each of these presentations, I still perceive it as a unitary phenomenon. Moreover, I encounter the pencil not just by looking at it – I can also grasp it and feel its resistance; I can smell the wood from which it was carved; I can gnaw on it leaving indentions in its various sides. As Husserl (1970) observes:

there are various individual things of experience at any given time; I focus on one of them. To perceive it, even if it is perceived as remaining completely unchanged, is something very complex: it is to see it, to touch it, to smell it, to hear it, etc.; and in each case I have something different. What is seen in seeing is in and for itself other than what is touched in touching. But in spite of this I say: *it is the same thing*; it is only the manners of its sensible exhibition, of course, that are different (p.157; italics mine)

From a detached scientific perspective, I may encounter ‘sensory stimuli’ that coalesce to form my perception of a single object, yet within the lifeworld, I see a pencil rather than its various sides. Phenomenologically speaking, I do not encounter discrete sensations but a unitary phenomenon; in this case, the pencil in front of me. For Husserl, the phenomenological reduction allows the researcher to grasp the organization of what we take for granted in our everyday practical experiences.

Intentionality. As I continue to explore my experience through the phenomenological reduction, I come to notice that an essential feature of all of my experiences is that I am always directed *towards* something. When I think, I think about something; when I love, I love something and so on. The directedness of consciousness is what Husserl refers to as *intentionality*.

All perceptual acts, according to Husserl, have one dominant characteristic; they point toward, or intend, some object. Thus, all thinking is thinking of something; all willing is willing of something. Perception is not a state but a mobile activity. In its essential dynamic, perception (which we are taking in the widest possible sense) projects itself toward its intended object, but that object is not to be understood as a thing but rather as the correlate of its accompanying act or acts (Natanson, 1973, p.85).

Moreover, the same intentional act can accompany different objects as when I *think* about Canada or I *think* about marriage. Indeed, different intentional acts can correlate with the same intentional object so that I may *anticipate*, *desire*, *scorn*, or *remember* eating ice cream. The relationship between intentional acts and their objects also does not depend on whether the object actually exists. I may think about an actually existing chair or a non-existent unicorn. For Husserl, the point is that consciousness is always directed and the presence of an intentional act always requires its correlated intentional object.

Intentionality can be viewed as that which unites the intentional object and the intentional act. In *Ideas (1976)*, Husserl refers to the intentional object as the *noema* and the intentional act as the *noesis*. This distinction is meant to emphasize that, “noesis and noema are correlative parts of the structure of the mental process” (Moran, 2000, p.155). In every experience, it is possible to discern the two poles of noema and noesis. At the same time, it is important to note that,

the *noema* is not the object towards which the object is directed, but rather provides the vehicle which connects my occurrent thought to the intended object. The noema is that *through* which the object is grasped; it is the route to the object. Husserl always emphasizes that we are at first naïve realists in perception; we see the tree out there, we do not see the *noema*. But we see a tree because our perceptual act has a noetic-noematic constitution, *because* our act has a *noema* (Moran, 2000, p.157).

Indeed, it is the noema that makes it possible to perceive the same thing when we encounter a multiplicity of presentations.

It is clear that when hermeneutics is viewed as an attempt to establish a secure foundation for valid interpretation, it shares a number of similarities with Husserl’s transcendental phenomenology. Both stress the need to establish

foundations for exploring human subjectivity. Moreover, both approaches advocate the development of specific procedures for exploring this region. At this point, I would like to introduce an additional domain where hermeneutics and phenomenology converge. From there, we can explore the implications these approaches hold for the theoretical foundations of social cognition.

### ***Literary Theory***

As we have seen, the concept of consciousness plays a significant role in the development of methods for exploring human subjectivity. Within epistemological hermeneutics, the text is viewed as the expression of consciousness – a representation of the subjectivity of an author. For the transcendental phenomenologist, we are able to grasp the essential features of consciousness when we “bracket” what are usually taken to be indubitable aspects of our existence. By assuming a position free from prejudice, the transcendental phenomenologist is able to establish a secure foundation for attaining certain knowledge in the special sciences.

It is clear that literary theory shares a number of similarities with the field of hermeneutics. Both are interested in exploring relationships between elements such as author, text, and reader. Indeed, the concept of interpretation plays a central role in both domains. Literary theorists also drawn upon phenomenological insights to explore human experience within the context of literature. For Culler (1982),

since literature takes as its subject all human experience, and particularly the ordering, interpreting, and articulating of experience, it is no accident that the most varied theoretical projects find instruction in literature and that their results are relevant to thinking about literature. Since literature analyzes the relations between men and women, or the most puzzling manifestations of the human psyche, or the effects of material conditions on individual experience, the theories that most powerfully and insightfully explore such matters will be of interest to literary critics and theorists (Culler, 1982, p.10-11).

Indeed, literary theorists explore issues directly relevant to social scientists, from the nature of “mind” to the role “interpretive communities” play in the

interpretation of a variety of phenomena (Fish, 1980; Knapp & Michaels 1985; Rorty, 1979). Moreover, social scientists interested in challenging the assumptions of their own discipline will find some of the most interesting debates regarding “interpretation” being explored within the realm of literary theory.

E.D. Hirsch’s approach to literary interpretation is particularly useful as it demonstrates some of the most important components of an epistemological approach to hermeneutics. In the preface to *Validity in Interpretation (1967)*, Hirsch clearly aligns his projects with the work of such writers as Schleiermacher, Dilthey, and Husserl. For Hirsch, the meaning of a text is identical with the intention of the author. Indeed, he believes that a valid interpretation of a text is ultimately a reproduction of the author’s original intention.

Hirsch suggests that his interest in establishing validity in interpretation is a reaction against prevailing forms of literary criticism. He specifically focuses on the New Critics, who held that the intention of the author, including the author’s biography, and the social context of the piece, are largely irrelevant in understanding a particular text. To understand a text, one need not go outside of the text. The work itself is an entity independent of the author that is, as Wimsatt and Beardsley (2001) note, “neither available nor desirable as a standard for judging the success of a work of literary art” (p.1374-1375).

Hirsch views the New Critics’ approach to textual interpretation as inviting a relativism that makes it impossible to compare competing interpretations. In order to establish objectively valid interpretation, it is necessary to have one true interpretation. He views contemporary literary criticism as “banishing the author”, only to replace her with an untenable notion of “semantic autonomy”. Such a position, in Hirsch’s view, can never provide literary theory with the necessary means for establishing validity in interpretation. Validity requires a determinate subject matter and, as Hirsch (1967) observes, “the only compelling normative principle that has ever been brought forward is the old-fashioned ideal of rightly understanding what the author meant” (p.26).

Hirsch begins by identifying several conditions he believes are necessary for establishing a valid interpretation of a text. The first condition is that the meaning itself must *remain the same*. This is necessary because if the meaning of a text were to change over time, it isn't clear what an objectively valid interpretation would look like or how such an interpretation could prevail over rival interpretations. It is the unchanging meaning of a text that provides a foundation for adjudicating between competing interpretations. For Hirsch, such a determinate meaning is necessary for establishing validity in interpretation. Were he to allow the meaning of a text to change, it would introduce an element of uncertainty lethal to his quest for validity.

A further requirement for establishing validity in interpretation is that meaning be understood as an affair of *consciousness* rather than of *words*. Although words are used to convey the meaning of a text, they ultimately refer back to the immutable intention of an author. As Hirsch observes, "a word sequence means nothing in particular until somebody either means something by it or understands something from it. There is no magic land of meanings outside human consciousness" (p.4). Words, standing in for the author, make his or her intentions publicly available. This makes the role of words in Hirsch's theory similar to Dilthey's use of 'expressions'; both serve as an exteriorization of the inner life of a subject.

To maintain the immutability of the text and to establish meaning as an affair of consciousness, Hirsch introduces a distinction between a text's *meaning* and its *significance*. For Hirsch (1967),

*meaning* is that which is represented by a text; it is what the author meant by his use of a particular sign sequence; it is what the signs represent. *Significance*, on the other hand, names a relationship between that meaning and a person, or a conception, or a situation, or indeed anything imaginable... Significance always implies a relationship, and one constant, unchanging pole of that relationship is what the text means. Failure to consider this simple and essential distinction has been the source of enormous confusion in hermeneutic theory. (p.8)

To understand the unchanging meaning of a text, it is necessary to draw a distinction between a text's meaning and its historically contingent significance.



While a text may assume various roles in different time periods, Hirsch believes that a text's *true* meaning is to be identified with the original intention of the author.

Hirsch draws on the phenomenological concept of intentionality to illustrate his distinction between meaning and significance. As we have seen from our discussion of transcendental phenomenology, the noetic correlates, or intentional acts can diverge while intending the same intentional object, or noema. In other words, it is possible for our intentional acts (noesis) to vary while the intentional object (noema) remains the same. The cup in front of me exhibits different sides when I move around it, looking at it from above and below, from the left and now the right. I notice different qualities when I touch it rather than when I am looking at it. Yet in all these various aspects, it remains the same cup.

Hirsch views the understanding of a text as exhibiting similar characteristics. The author's meaning, what Hirsch (1967) refers to as *verbal meaning*, remains the same while the text's significance can vary in any of a number of ways. He claims that, "an unlimited number of different intentional acts can intend the same verbal meaning" (p.38). The stability of verbal meaning ensures that it can be reproduced, one of the requirements for valid interpretation. Indeed, if verbal meaning changes, it would be impossible to reproduce it in any consistent way. Failing to appreciate the distinction between meaning and significance leads one to the erroneous conclusion that the text itself is changing. For Hirsch, the distinction between meaning and significance is crucial for establishing validity in textual interpretation.

This distinction allows divergent interpretations to be compared using a similar criteria, in Hirsch's case, the extent to which they reproduce the original intention of the author. Indeed, because the author's meaning is unchanging, it can be reproduced. While the verbal meaning of the author is identical with the text, the text alone cannot serve as a foundation for adjudicating between competing interpretations. For Hirsch, objectively valid textual interpretation is only possible by securing a determinate region impervious to historical

contingencies and interpretive fancies. Establishing the validity of a textual interpretation can only occur through recourse to a secure foundation of knowledge; and it is the original intention of the author, expressed in his or her verbal meaning, that provides this foundation.

### ***Interpretation & Social Cognition***

Up to this point, we have discussed the origins of epistemological hermeneutics as it emerges in the interpretation of legal and biblical texts. We have also discussed the concept of the hermeneutic circle, transcendental phenomenology, and the way these issues play a role in contemporary literary theory. At this point, I would like to draw some parallels with some observations I made earlier regarding social cognition.

Although it is not clear to what extent transcendental phenomenological concepts such as ‘intentional state’ and ‘intentional object’ support Hirsch’s approach to textual interpretation, it is obvious that both Hirsch and Husserl are interested in establishing a secure foundation for knowledge. In transcendental phenomenology, intentional objects emerge in a variety of contexts. Not only does my pencil emerge against the background of this piece of paper, but in each presentation, only one side is available. Yet within these multiple presentations, I experience the unity of the pencil as an object of my consciousness. By moving from the natural to the phenomenological attitude, it is possible to identify those invariant features of consciousness that provide a secure foundation for knowledge. Indeed, Husserl’s transcendental phenomenology, “can be called a kind of foundationalism: an attempt to discover a realm of indubitable and transparent meanings or experiential entities that can provide a firm basis on which to build valid knowledge about human existence (Sass, 1988, p.229). For Hirsch, although the text emerges within a variety of historical contexts and though readers of various dispositions may attend to different aspects of the text itself, it is still possible to discern a unity within the various presentations. The text itself does not change. The original intention of the author, expressed in the

words that constitute the text, remains the same even as the text is encountered in a variety of contexts.

Moreover, we will recall that Hirsch's approach to interpretation requires us to recognize meaning as an affair of consciousness rather than words. The words on a page represent an author's intention. Words are merely a means for *expressing and fixing* the ideas residing within the consciousness of a particular subject. Indeed, this fixing of consciousness in language ensures that the interpreter will have a determinate subject matter with which to adjudicate between competing interpretations. As Palmer (1969) notes, the author's intention,

is a determinate entity about which objective evidence can be gathered and that, when evidence is in hand, a determination of the meaning can be made which will be universally recognized. Dilthey's dream of objectively valid interpretation would seem to be realized (p.60).

The distinction between a text's meaning and its significance allows Hirsch to establish a secure foundation for objectively valid interpretation. Because a text's meaning is to be found in the author's intention, competing interpretations can be evaluated according to their correspondence with this original intention. Hirsch's approach allows the historical to be relegated to the realm of significance leaving the idea of an original intention unscathed.

The idea that determinacy is required for establishing validity in interpretation is also important to several key features of social cognition theory. In other words, much as Hirsch claims that objectively valid interpretation requires that we talk about meaning in terms of authorial intention, social cognition's view of the mind enables researchers to share a common language for discussing the way individuals interpret social reality. Social cognition's view of the mind establishes both interior (rules) and exterior (reality) determinate regions where competing interpretations can be compared. Through experimentation, the cognitive processes that govern human behavior can be identified while the correspondence between mental representations and external reality can be evaluated.

For example, social cognition researchers acknowledge a difference between sensation/perception and input/processing. Sensation or input is usually understood as the point of contact between external (physical) reality and internal (mental) reality. Save for variations in the individual functioning of sensory apparatuses (i.e. eyesight, hearing, etc.) the source of our sensations is *determinate*. If it were possible for two people to occupy the same position in space, and assuming that their sensory organs are working properly, they would receive identical sensory information. In fact, sensory information is usually what is viewed as an unadulterated reception of external reality. In other words, sensory information (input) is immediate; our sensory organs are merely *the location* at which external reality is converted to information capable of being processed by internal cognitive mechanisms.

This internal manipulation of information is typically referred to as perception or cognitive processing. Although schemas function in the same way because of invariant characteristics of the mind, the content of these schemas vary from individual to individual based on differences in life experiences. In other words, though mental representations may vary in *content*, the *form* such mental representations take remains a basic feature of our mental activity. My friend and I may have different mental representations of Wisconsin, but the fact that Wisconsin is represented mentally in one way or another is a basic assumption guiding social cognition. Indeed, such schemas represent an additional determinate region for identifying stable rules that govern the way individuals *interpret* social reality.

For Hirsch, the concept of mental representation is vital for understanding textual interpretation. In *Validity in Interpretation (1967)*, the concept of schema is discussed only briefly, though his idea of 'genre' seems to fulfill a similar role in the interpretation of texts. With the publication of *The Aims of Interpretation (1976)*, Hirsch explicitly aligns his attempt to establish validity in interpretation with developments in cognitive psychology. He suggests that, "for theory of interpretation, the potential importance of this psychological-cognitive model is

beyond estimate, though, in its ecumenical, nonmetaphysical form, it has received little attention in hermeneutics” (Hirsch, 1976, p.33). Indeed, his view of understanding fits well with our discussion of the role of schemas in human understanding. Indeed, Hirsch (1976) suggests that,

for that which we understand is itself an hypothesis constructed by ourselves, a schema, or genre, or type which provokes expectations that are confirmed by our linguistic experience, or when they are not confirmed, cause us to adjust our hypothesis or schema (p.33-34)

Although Hirsch’s initial work focuses on establishing validity in interpretation, he came to view the process of validation and understanding as intimately related, so much so that he claims, “*the process of understanding is itself a process of validation*” (Hirsch, 1976, p.33). Though he admits that the validation procedures he has espouses are of a more public and interpersonal nature, he ultimately suggests that a similar procedure occurs within the mind of an individual interpreter.

Another aspect of epistemological hermeneutics that shows some significant similarities to social cognition’s view of mental representation is the hermeneutic circle. As we will recall, the hermeneutic circle refers to the fact that our understanding of the whole is dependent on our understanding each of the individual parts and that these individual parts give us a sense of the whole. It is not difficult to see similarities between the hermeneutic circle and the role schemas play in the interpretation of social reality. Schemata are continually being modified as we have new experiences. At the same time, these representations are responsible for the way we see the world. Because of my unique experiences, my mental representations ensure that I see different things than people with dramatically different life experiences. Moreover, my interpretation of a social situation is at least partially determined by the understanding I bring to the situation. What I learn from the situation will be incorporated, to some extent, into my schemas thereby influencing the way I understand other situations in the future. In fact, for Hirsch (1976), the concept of a schema is a superior way to grasp the dialectical aspects of understanding.

All cognition is analogous to interpretation in being based upon *corrigible schemata*, a useful phrase I take from Piaget. The model of corrigible schemata, which was exemplified in the description of Piaget's experiments, is, I think, a more useful and accurate model than that of the so-called hermeneutic circle (Hirsch, 1976, p.32).

Even cognitive scientists, such as Gallagher (2004), have begun to notice the similarities between schema theory and the hermeneutic circle.

There is no opposition here between the cognitive sciences and hermeneutics. The accounts given by schema theory and protocol theory are perfectly in tune with accounts given of the hermeneutical circle. One account would enrich the other and indeed there would be a mutual enrichment and a deeper understanding of cognition if we put these two kinds of accounts together (p.166).

A number of researchers have also begun to explore the relationship between Husserl's transcendental phenomenology and contemporary issues in cognitive science. These researchers believe that Husserl's ideas regarding such things as intentional states, the stability of the noemata, and mental representation all have a number of implications for contemporary cognitive research. As Dreyfus (1982) observes,

Husserl has finally begun to be recognized as the precursor of current interest in intentionality—the first to have a general theory of the role of mental representations in the philosophy of language and mind. As the first thinker to put directedness of mental representations at the center of his philosophy, he is also beginning to emerge as the father of current research in cognitive psychology and artificial intelligence (p.2).

In all, there appear to be a number of similarities between transcendental phenomenology, epistemological hermeneutics, Hirsch's approach to textual interpretation, and the theoretical foundations of social cognition. Each of these approaches can be called *epistemological* in so far as they posit a knower in a specific relationship with an object of knowledge. Within an epistemological framework, knowledge is given privileged status since my interpretation of social reality is always the result of drawing on a shared stock of social knowledge. Moreover, interpretation is viewed as residing within consciousness (or mind) and is vulnerable to historical, cultural, and subjective prejudices.

Before I develop an alternative to this view of interpretation, I would like to offer an example that may enable us to make the transition from epistemology

to *ontology*. Given the significance of the 'cognitive revolution' for research in social cognition, I think it is wise to explore Thomas Kuhn's' (1970) contribution to the way we understand the practice of scientific research. With cognitive psychology hailed as a new psychological *paradigm*, it would be interesting to explore how the concept of paradigm is understood, especially by the philosopher who brought the term into general currency in the twentieth century.

What is interesting about the concept of paradigm, especially when it refers to something like cognitive psychology, is that it often refers to the unique way a community of researchers approach a range of scientific problems. Given cognitive psychology's reliance on the concept of a schema as the means for interpreting social reality, it would seem that the concept of paradigm would also have to be understood as a mental representation. In other words, the paradigm of cognitive psychology must constitute a mental representation contained within the individual minds of the scientists working within a particular area. That paradigms are understood in this way is supported by Mey 's (1982) claim that, "paradigms are internal models, cognitive structures which give shape to the specific expectations that guide the research of 'normal' scientists" (p.89).

As we have seen, social cognition inherits cognitive psychology's assumption that an individual's interpretation of a particular situation may be regarded as the following of a rule. This is further supported by social cognition's embracing of an information-processing approach to cognition. Within such an approach, interpretation is viewed as a serial process that follows a set of discrete steps similar to the steps we observed in Ostrum's (1984) example. Therefore, if a paradigm is responsible for the unique way an individual or community of scientists interpret the world, within a social cognitive framework, this interpretation must be the result of the application of a rule -- that is, what course of action do I take in this particular situation. Now, although Kuhn's thesis regarding the dialectical nature of scientific progress is generally viewed as his most controversial contribution to the sociology of scientific knowledge, I would

like to draw attention to another aspect of his thesis that is particularly relevant to the idea of mental representations and rule-governed behavior.

As a philosopher and historian of science, Kuhn recognizes the difficulty in identifying the specific rules that scientists follow when conducting research. If one looks at the way researchers conduct everyday scientific activities, it is nearly impossible to identify a discrete set of procedures they use to conduct their research. For Kuhn (1970),

though there obviously are rules to which all the practitioners of a scientific specialty adhere at a given time, those rules may not by themselves specify all that the practice of those specialists has in common. Normal science is a highly determined activity, but it need not be entirely determined by rules. That is why, at the start of this essay, I introduced shared paradigms rather than shared rules, assumptions, and points of view as the source of coherence for normal research traditions. *Rules, I suggest, derive from paradigms, but paradigms can guide research even in the absence of rules* (Kuhn, 1970, p.42, italics mine)

In Kuhn's view, though it may ultimately be possible to identify rules that people within a particular paradigm follow, such an achievement is of a derivative character. In other words, these are not the rules that scientists actually follow when they conduct their research. For the most part, paradigms operate quite smoothly without specifying specific rules or procedures. Once again, Kuhn (1970) suggests that a,

lack of a standard interpretation or of an agreed reduction to rules will not prevent a paradigm from guiding research. Normal science can be determined in part by the direct inspection of paradigms, a process that is often aided by but does not depend upon the formulation of rules and assumptions. Indeed, the existence of a paradigm need not even imply that a full set of rules exists (p.44)

If the following of a formalized set of rules does not unite a paradigm, then how is it possible to account for the orderly behavior that one observes within scientific communities? In other words, if paradigms are not mental representations or rule-governed cognitions, how are we to explain the fact that researchers do in fact know what to do when they are conducting research? Kuhn (1970) suggests as an alternative to paradigms as shared rules the idea that scientists,



may relate by resemblance and by modeling to one or another of the scientific corpus which the community in question already recognizes as among its established achievements. Scientists work from models acquired through education and through subsequent exposure to the literature often without quite knowing or needing to know what characteristics have given these models the status of community paradigms. And because they do so, they need no full set of rules (p.46)

It is important to stress that Kuhn is not explicitly arguing against a cognitive interpretation of paradigms, nor is he saying that rules play no role in scientific research. Instead, Kuhn is suggesting that the identification of such rules is not a necessary part of scientific research. Moreover, when such rules are identified, they are more likely to be derived from the everyday *practical* activities of scientific researchers.

One is at liberty to suppose that somewhere along the way the scientist has intuitively abstracted rules of the game for himself but there is little reason to believe it. Though many scientists talk easily and well about the particular individual hypotheses that underlie a concrete piece of current research, they are little better than laymen at characterizing the established bases of their field, its legitimate problems and methods. If they have learned such abstractions at all, *they show it mainly through their ability to do successful research. That ability can, however, be understood without recourse to hypothetical rules of the game* (Kuhn, 1970, p.47; italics mine)

What I would like to suggest is that although social cognition views interpretation as a rule-governed affair of consciousness, it may be possible to see interpretation as *shared practices* emanating from our practical engagement in the world. For Kuhn, paradigms do not specify the criteria for interpreting reality in one way rather than another but instead are a manifestation of the practices shared by a community of scientists. In the next section, I would like to explore developments in contemporary hermeneutics that provide an alternative to social cognition's mentalistic view of interpretation. Moreover, I would like to suggest that viewing interpretation as shared practices leads to a radically different understanding of social reality.

## Ontological Hermeneutics

When interpretation is viewed epistemologically, an individual is placed in a *knowing* relationship with an object to be known. Hirsch, for example, views the text as an expression of an author and it is the duty of an interpreter to discover the meaning intended by this author. Indeed, it is the original intention of the author that should serve as the final criteria for determining whether an interpreter has grasped the true meaning of a text. Valid interpretation requires that we have a determinate subject matter and it is authorial intention that insures that competing interpretations are to be evaluated by consistent criteria. This also prevents readers from substituting their own beliefs regarding the meaning of a text (significance) for the unchanging meaning intended by the author.

Transcendental phenomenology strives to develop a rigorous description of human experience that ultimately may provide a secure foundation for all other forms of empirical inquiry. By remaining a purely *descriptive* discipline, phenomenology claims to avoid the prejudices that result from interpreting phenomena through either established scientific theories or through biases that individuals harbor as a result of their immersion in the lifeworld. In other words, traditional approaches to knowledge interpret phenomena through the lenses of entrenched a priori assumptions. Phenomenology avoids this interpretive dilemma by remaining purely descriptive. This guarantees the certainty of the knowledge it produces. Moreover, transcendental phenomenology emphasizes the role of consciousness in the constitution of objects of experience – a move that recognizes *intentionality* as an essential feature of human experience.

Social cognition views interpretation as a mental activity responsible for the various ways individuals navigate social reality. Indeed, interpretation is analogous to computation, with mental representations guiding the way people interpret specific situations. Schemas are viewed as lenses intervening between the individual and social reality. This view of interpretation has led researchers to

develop methodological procedures for excluding subjective biases that may *interfere with* attempts to develop an accurate perception of reality.

Developments in hermeneutic theory suggest that this may not be the only way to view interpretation. Though epistemological approaches focus on such things as consciousness, subjectivity, and mental activity, it is also possible to explore the *ontological* foundations of interpretation. Instead of relying on procedures to distance individuals from phenomena so that they may occupy a presuppositionless perspective, ontological hermeneutics seeks to uncover the nature of understanding. As Palmer (1969) observes,

but what if the guiding question is no longer ‘How can I obtain valid interpretations?’ but ‘what is the nature of understanding itself?’ The preoccupation with valid judgments causes the question of what elements are involved in all understanding to be passed over; conversely, a focus on the essential nature of all understanding will tend to leave aside the necessary development of systems of distinguishing valid from invalid interpretations. Both questions are worthy, and their exploration makes a contribution to understanding the hermeneutical problem (p.66-67)

What I am proposing is that the movement from an epistemological to an ontological hermeneutics has important consequences for the way we view interpretation in the social sciences. Moreover, I believe that these developments have implications for the relationship between phenomenology and social cognition. Finally, I believe that the turn to ontological hermeneutics has profound implications for the way we view social reality thus requiring researchers in the social sciences to reevaluate their reliance on mental representations and cognitive processes. The substance of my critique draws on the work of Husserl’s most important student, Martin Heidegger.

The differences between Husserl and Heidegger’s approach to phenomenology remains a controversial topic within phenomenological circles. My analysis is based on the work of those authors (Dreyfus, 1991, 1992; Moran, 2000; Palmer, 1969; Ricoeur, 1991; Sass, 1988) who view Heidegger’s approach, not as merely an explication of what the later Husserl terms the lifeworld (Merleau-Ponty, 1958), but as a radical departure from Husserlian phenomenology all together. Although the extent to which Heidegger’s project is

a critique of Husserlian phenomenology is by no means resolved, I agree with Palmer (1969) who suggests that,

it would be a mistake to see 'phenomenological method' as a doctrine formulated by Husserl and used by Heidegger for another purpose. On the contrary, Heidegger rethought the concept of phenomenology itself, so that phenomenology and phenomenological method take on a radically different character (p.125-126).

Husserlian phenomenology rests on fundamental assumptions regarding the importance of concepts such as intentionality and the transcendental ego. The objects of consciousness are constituted by intentional acts and it is these acts that provide a glimpse into the essence of a particular phenomenon. For Heidegger, discussions of 'intentionality' and 'constitution' presuppose a subject that is the site of psychical acts. Rather than focusing on the intentional structure of consciousness, Heidegger looks to the way *Being* emerges within the context of our everyday *practical* engagements – what he refers to as being-in-the-world. The aim is not to begin with an already constituted subject but to focus on the emergence of subjectivity in a concrete historical situation. This shifts the focus from questions of knowledge (epistemology) to an analysis of Being (ontology). Within Heidegger's fundamental ontology, interpretation is not a cognitive event but a fundamental condition of human existence. Moran (2000) suggests that for Heidegger, "our understanding is *interpretive* from the very start and that interpretive involvement with things need not be at a level of intellection or cognition, but more usually comes in concerned, practical dealings" (p.231). The focus on practical engagement leads Heidegger to view *comportment* rather than intentionality as the proper foundation for phenomenological analysis. For the psychologist accustomed to viewing the individual mind as the basic unit of analysis in scientific inquiry, the movement from cognition to practice may seem like little more than an exercise in philosophical obscurity. Yet I believe a further analysis of this maneuver may have important implications for the way researchers view social reality. I will begin by discussing key features of Heidegger's turn to ontology with an emphasis on the way his radical

interpretation of social reality calls into question specific assumptions of social cognition.

### ***Dasein***

Although Heidegger is critical of a number of philosophers, it is probably Descartes who bears the brunt of his criticisms. For Descartes, it was necessary to call into question all of our taken-for-granted beliefs and it was only through rigorous methodological doubt that we could come to understand the nature of reality. Descartes ultimately concludes that his existence can be confirmed only because he recognizes that he is at this moment thinking. This leads to his famous maxim, 'Cogito Ergo Sum' – 'I think, therefore, I am'. Heidegger views his own project as a critique of the Cartesian privileging of a knowing subject ('cogito') encountering its own existence through reflection. For Heidegger, the meaning of the Being of this thinking subject has been entirely neglected by Descartes.

With the '*cogito sum*' Descartes had claimed that he was putting philosophy on a new and firm footing. But what he left undetermined when he began in this 'radical' way, was the kind of Being which belongs to the *res cogitans*, or—more precisely—the *meaning of the Being of the 'sum'*. By working out the unexpressed ontological foundations of the '*cogito sum*', we shall complete our sojourn at the second station along the path of our destructive retrospect of the history of ontology (Heidegger, 1962, p.46).

Moreover, Heidegger claims that our everyday use of the copula 'is' indicates that we already have an understanding of the meaning of Being and that we must focus on the everyday practices that disclose this understanding. In other words, my relationship to social reality cannot be understood, first and foremost, as the relationship of a knowing subject to a known object. What I exhibit in my everyday practical activity is an understanding of the meaning of *Being* itself.

For Heidegger, it is important that this understanding not be understood as an affair of consciousness or the product of individual subjects. Doing so would simply reintroduce the primacy of the Cartesian 'cogito' and undercut his attempt to ground understanding in shared practices. To combat a premature

return to epistemology, he introduces the term 'Dasein' (literally 'being-there'). Because Heidegger is attempting to critique the primacy of an isolated ego, it is of the utmost importance that we understand what he means by 'Dasein. For Dreyfus (1991),

the best way to understand what Heidegger means by Dasein is to think of our term 'human being,' which can refer to a way of being that is characteristic of all people or to a specific person—a human being . . . The challenge is to do justice to the fact that Dasein names beings like you and me, while at the same time preserving the strategy of *Being and Time*, which is to reverse the Cartesian tradition by making the individual subject somehow dependent upon shared social practices (p.14)

The importance of the term 'Dasein' is not simply to acknowledge that an individual must always be situated within a particular context. If this were all that was being said, it would not represent a significant departure from Lewin's (1951) contention that behavior is always a function of the person and the environment. The significance of the term 'Dasein' is that it does not posit an ego or 'I' in a particular situation but instead claims that this single term reflects Dasein's ontological primacy. The minute I have posited a subject in a particular situation, I have already reverted to Cartesian dualism, inheriting all the problems that come with it. For Heidegger, the dichotomy between a subject and her context is derived from Dasein's primordial engagement in the world.

Giving Dasein rather than individual consciousness ontological priority reflects Heidegger's desire to avoid a premature return to the Cartesian cogito. Yet it is also important to understand that the situated nature of Dasein is itself the focus of Heidegger's inquiry. In other words, delineating the boundaries of Dasein must ultimately give way to a more fundamental interest, "in *the way of being* that human beings, cultures, and institutions share. Human beings, it will turn out, are special kinds of beings in that their way of being embodies an understanding of what it is to be" (Dreyfus, 1991, p.14-15 – italics mine). This understanding is manifested in the everyday practices in which Dasein is engaged rather than in the psychological process that may be said to reside within the

minds of individual subjects. Such practices are the historically and culturally contingent interpretation that Heidegger refers to as 'existence'.

For Heidegger, the essence of human existence cannot be completely fixed by any single interpretation whether it be a cognitive mechanism or reinforcement principle. Through social engagements and practices Dasein continually interprets itself. In this sense, an ultimate or final interpretation of human existence would be impossible, since every interpretation emerges within the concrete practices of human beings. The fact that social cognition posits a thinking subject in a specific relation to a situation constitutes only a spurious way of viewing social reality. The importance of Heidegger's use of Dasein is that it represents another view of social reality, one not rooted in the cognitive mechanisms of an individual subject but instead reflecting a new (for Heidegger, perhaps old) way of understanding our fundamental ontological situation.

### ***Hermeneutic Phenomenology***

It is important to understand the significance of Heidegger's departure from Husserl's transcendental phenomenology. As Dreyfus (1991) observes,

Heidegger succeeds in taking over Husserl's definition of phenomenology and totally transforming it for his own ends, making 'phenomenology' mean exactly the opposite of Husserl's proposed method for spelling out the intentional contents of his own belief system and thereby arriving at indubitable evidence. In Heidegger's hands, phenomenology becomes a way of letting something shared that can never be totally articulated and for which there can be no indubitable evidence show itself (p.30).

Instead of viewing phenomenology as an eidetic science leading to a description of the essential features of consciousness, Heidegger's phenomenology is a means for bringing into focus the background practices that are an embodiment of our understanding. This is clear when we explore Heidegger's etymology of the term 'phenomenology'.

Our ordinary understanding of 'phenomenon' is that which is immediately available to our senses. Our everyday experiences, from the inspection of objects in our world to the people we encounter, are understood as phenomena. As

Heidegger (1962) notes, “the expression ‘phenomenon’ signifies that which shows itself in itself, the manifest” (p.51). Yet for Heidegger, this ordinary understanding of phenomenon must give way to an even more fundamental sense of the term. That something shows itself presupposes something that remains in the background allowing that which shows itself to become thematic in a particular sort of way. If we return to our visual example of the figure/ground relationship, my pencil emerges against a background and it is because of this background that the pencil is able to become thematic in the first place. The pencil becomes thematic *because* the paper remains in the background. Were I to focus on the paper, it would emerge against a background that remains hidden and in doing so, allows the paper to become visible. For Heidegger (1962),

that which already shows itself in the appearance as prior to the “phenomenon” as ordinarily understood and as accompanying it in every case, can, even though it thus shows itself unthematically, be brought thematically to show itself; and what thus shows itself in itself (the ‘forms of the intuition’) will be the ‘phenomena’ of phenomenology (p.54-55).

We will see that while the figure/ground relationship may be helpful for understanding how that which shows itself always emerges against a background of something that remains hidden, it will be necessary to revise this relationship. Heidegger will ultimately reinterpret this figure/ground relationship in such a way that it is no longer a *knowing* relationship but instead reflects Dasein’s practical involvement in the world.

To understand the way Heidegger views ‘phenomenology’ it is also necessary to explore the meaning of ‘-logy’ or *logos*. Although logos can be interpreted in a variety of ways, for Heidegger, its basic signification is best understood as ‘discourse’. Given contemporary discussion regarding the meaning of ‘discourse’, this may not seem to clarify what is already a difficult investigation. This is further complicated for in the remainder of his analysis of the meaning of logos, Heidegger focuses on exploring the meaning of the Greek ‘logos’ which has an extraordinary range of meanings. At one point, Heidegger (1962) suggests that logos, “lets something be seen, namely, what the discourse is about; and it does



so either for the one who is doing the talking (the medium) or for persons who are talking with one another, as the case may be” (p.56). Here I only want to draw attention to the similarities between the letting something stand out of ‘phenomenon’ and the letting be seen of the ‘logos’.

With Heidegger’s etymology of ‘phenomenology’ complete, we can now understand the significance of Heidegger’s departure from Husserlian phenomenology. To begin with, Heidegger distinguishes between two different ways of understanding the project of phenomenology. The first distinction is a formal one and for the most part conforms to Husserl’s understanding of phenomenology as a method for discerning the essence of a particular phenomenon. For Heidegger (1962), this understanding of phenomenology,

neither designates the object of its researches, nor characterizes the subject-matter thus comprised. The word merely informs us of the ‘*how*’ with which *what* is to be treated in this science gets exhibited and handled. To have a science ‘of’ phenomenon means to grasp its objects *in such a way* that everything about them which is up for discussion must be treated by exhibiting it directly and demonstrating it directly. The expression ‘descriptive phenomenology’, which is at bottom tautological, has the same meaning (p.59)

Within this conception, phenomenology is a method for identifying the invariant features that one *perceives* when they are in the presence of a particular phenomenon.

Yet for Heidegger (1962), if phenomenology allows us to see something, “what is it that phenomenology is to ‘let us see’? What is it that must be called a ‘phenomenon’ in a distinctive sense? What is it that by its very essence is necessarily the theme whenever we exhibit something explicitly” (p.59)? If we return to the pencil example, it is that which is not thematic (the paper) that allows the pencil to be seen and it is precisely because it remains hidden that it can stand out in the first place. For Heidegger, that which remains hidden because it is phenomenologically the closest is *Being*. This means that phenomenology, “is our way of access to what is to be the theme of ontology, and it is our way of giving it demonstrative precision. *Only as phenomenology, is ontology possible*” (Heidegger, 1962, p.60). The epistemological sense in which

phenomenology is viewed as a method for allowing one to *know* something about a phenomenon is ultimately a derivative sense in which phenomenology brings that which remains hidden into sharper focus.

At this point, the radical nature of Heidegger's departure from Husserlian phenomenology should be clear. As Dreyfus (1991) observes:

Husserl says that phenomenology should study only that which can be made fully evident. Heidegger's reverses Husserl's understanding of phenomenology at this point. Husserl's method, which aims at *adequate evidence* and complete freedom from prejudice, cannot be used when we wish to understand the background upon which all our understanding takes place. Our understanding of being is so pervasive in everything we think and do that we can never arrive at a clear presentation of it. Moreover, since it is not a belief system but is embodied in our skills, it is not the sort of thing we could ever get clear about (p.32)

Within Heidegger's approach, phenomenology cannot be viewed as a presuppositionless science that provides a neutral description of what is immediately available to consciousness. Instead, phenomenology as ontology must become hermeneutic, that is, it must become *interpretive*.

### ***Being-in-the-World***

As we have seen, Heidegger is interested in challenging the privileged status of the Cartesian/epistemological approach to interpretation. To do this, it is necessary for Heidegger to clarify the fundamental condition of Dasein's existence. For Heidegger, Dasein's primordial engagement in the world is interpretive. This should not be understood as an affair of consciousness but rather as ontological, that is, as residing in shared practices. Heidegger refers to this fundamental engagement as *being-in-the-world*. Yet if Heidegger is to present a challenge to the Cartesian approach to interpretation, it is of the utmost importance that he clarify the nature of the relationship between individuals and their situation.

To begin with, Heidegger thinks it is necessary to clarify what he means by being-in (In-sein). He wants to separate as much as possible the type of being-in of an object from that of Dasein. Whereas the very nature of Dasein is interpretive in so far as it, "is an entity which, in its very Being, comports itself

understandingly towards that Being” (Heidegger, 1962, p.78), the being of objects is entirely different. Heidegger proposes that the sense of ‘in’ that describes the location of objects ‘in-the-world’ is entirely different from the ‘in-the-world’ of Dasein. For an object, this ‘in’ is understood as designating a location such that when we say the water is ‘in’ the glass, we are claiming that objects are *spatially* related to one another. As Heidegger (1962) explains,

by this ‘in’ we mean the relationship of Being which two entities extended ‘in’ space have to each other with regard to their location in that space. Both water and glass, garment and cupboard, are ‘in’ space and ‘at’ a location, and both in the same way (p.79).

Heidegger refers to this being-in of objects as *categorical* to distinguish it from what he views as the “being-in” of Dasein. The being-in of Dasein cannot be understood as a spatial relationship in which Dasein occupies a particular location over and against the ‘world’. He shows through etymological derivation that the term ‘in’ is better understood as ‘to reside’ or ‘to dwell’. As Dreyfus (1991) observes:

Heidegger’s specific discussion of the senses of the preposition ‘in’ will be illuminating only to those who know German. We can, however, capture his point in English. In English we also distinguish two sense of ‘in’: a spatial sense (‘in the box’) and an existential sense (‘in the army,’ ‘in love’). The first use expresses inclusion, the second conveys involvement (p.42-43).

What Heidegger is trying to demonstrate is that the being-in of Dasein can only derivatively be understood as the relationship between a conscious subject and an object. The being-in-the-world that Heidegger views as primordial to all other modes of being-in is better viewed as an *inhabiting* wherein Dasein’s involvement in the world is ontologically primary. Individuals are not in situations in the same way that a glass is in the cupboard. For Heidegger, the ‘in’ of ‘being-in-the-world’ is one of practical involvement and it is only when this involvement has become problematic that a dichotomy between person and situation emerges. Although the different understandings of ‘in’ may seem unnecessarily precise, I believe that it has a number of important implications for the way we approach social cognition.

If we return to the emphasis Fiske and Taylor (1991) place on understanding “the *person* in the *situation*” (p.5), it is possible to see Heidegger’s analysis as focusing our attention on the meaning of ‘in’ that precedes any distinction between people and situations. This may help us understand the importance of the concept of being-in-the-world. Primordially, Dasein is engaged in the world through its practical everyday activities. When social cognition conceives of human behavior as a function of the person and the environment (Lewin, 1951), it overlooks the fact that phenomenologically, Dasein’s activities only emerge against the background of practical activities. Within Heidegger’s framework, behavior is not the end result of a person located within a context but it is a manifestation of Dasein’s being-in-the-world. Any perspective that fails to clarify the practical nature of Dasein’s immersion in the world has overlooked Dasein’s fundamental way of being-in-the-world.

### ***Comportment***

If we will recall from our discussion of epistemology, an approach that views interpretation as a cognitive process whereby the individual “makes sense” of reality will necessarily privilege a detached, objective perspective. In other words, mental representations mediate our perception of reality and it is therefore necessary to methodologically exclude such biases in order to grasp the “true” nature of a phenomenon. This can be done by relying on specific procedures or by restricting observation to the level of description. For Heidegger, the infatuation with disinterested knowledge reaches its peak not only in contemporary positivist science but also in the transcendental phenomenology of his mentor, Edmund Husserl. Instead of beginning with a consciousness that synthesizes various perceptions into a coherent unity, Heidegger suggests that we first encounter our world in a meaningful way and that this engagement is what defines the being of Dasein:

Rather than first perceiving perspectives, then synthesizing the perspectives into objects, and finally assigning these objects a function on the basis of their physical properties, we

ordinarily manipulate tools that already have a meaning in a world that is organized in terms of purposes (Dreyfus, 1991, p.46).

Instead of focusing on intentionality – which posits a consciousness directed towards a particular object – Heidegger claims that our everyday practical engagements must be understood in terms of *comportment*. This term is meant to draw attention to the way Dasein's understanding is manifested in concrete engagements that precede any mentalistic commitments. Hermeneutic phenomenology endeavors to foreground these practical engagements and to demonstrate the derivative character of approaches that view interpretation as mental activity.

Yet Dreyfus (1991) is correct in arguing that the movement to comportment should not be understood as simply an inversion of the subject-that-*knows* for the subject-that-*does*. Such a view fails to recognize the degree to which Heidegger's approach is a devastating critique of Husserl's concept of intentionality. As we will recall, intentionality refers to the fact that consciousness is always directed towards something whether it be an actual object or mental content.

Heidegger does not want to make practical activity primary; he wants to show (pace Husserl) that neither practical activity nor contemplative knowing can be understood as a relation between a self-sufficient mind and an independent world... Knowing is an exemplary subject/object relation, so that if one makes knowing basic, one is from the start locked into the intentionalistic picture of human beings as subjects with beliefs (justified and unjustified) about objects and states of affairs (Dreyfus, 1991, p.49).

By bringing our practices into the foreground, Heidegger seeks to draw attention to a way of being that need not be grounded in intentionality. He sees Husserl's distinction between a mode of consciousness (noesis) and an object of that consciousness (noema) as introducing a subject/object dichotomy that is itself derived from everyday practical engagements. Thus while Husserl's analysis would permit the essence of a phenomena to be grasped unadulterated by a transcendental ego, Heidegger suggests that such disinterested knowledge requires a world of practical engagements and that, "all relations of mental states

to their objects presuppose a more basic form of being-with-things which does not involve mental activity” (Dreyfus, 1991, p.52).

That interpretation is ultimately grounded in participation in practical activities is in many ways reminiscent of Kuhn’s observation that paradigms need not be understood as governed by the following of a rule. For Kuhn, scientific communities are united by their involvement in shared activities and it is these activities that come to distinguish paradigms from one another.

Scientists, it should already be clear, never learn concepts, laws, and theories in the abstract and by themselves. Instead, these intellectual *tools* are from the start encountered in a historically and pedagogically prior unit that displays them with and through their application (Kuhn, 1970, p.46; italics mine).

Paradigms should not be viewed as mental representations or cognitive mechanisms that determine how scientists will interpret reality. Concepts and laws are tools that emerge in the way they are applied in specific situations. As we will see, Heidegger’s emphasis on comportment will also draw heavily on the way tools emerge in our everyday practical activities.

### ***Availableness & Occurrentness***

Heidegger distinguishes two ways of being which he refers to as *zuhandenheit* (readiness-to-hand) and *vorhandenheit* (presence-at-hand). Since the standard English translation of these terms is somewhat awkward, I will follow Dreyfus (1991) in translating the terms as *availableness* and *occurrentness*.

This distinction is important as Heidegger is calling into question the notion that we encounter the world as it really is by assuming a disinterested position. He suggests that Dasein’s use of *equipment* reveals an understanding that precedes the knowledge one gains from detached reflection. In other words, our everyday interactions with objects should not be viewed initially as an encounter with a meaningless collection of entities but as an immersion into a world saturated with meaning. Thus Heidegger aims to demonstrate that:

the situated use of equipment is in some sense prior to just looking at things and that what is revealed by use is ontologically more fundamental than the substances with determinate, context-free properties revealed by detached contemplation (Dreyfus, 1991, p.61).

The use of equipment reveals a background of practices preceding the adoption of a neutral standpoint that purports to describe the world in its “actuality”. This calls into question the view that an individual subject is ultimately a collection of cognitive processes and mental representations. Moreover, it suggests that we do not encounter a realm of neutral entities that we subsequently invest with particular meanings. On the contrary, Heidegger notes that such a view is necessarily derived from a more primordial engagement with entities and that the purpose of phenomenology is to bring these practical dealings into focus.

It was Heidegger who forced Husserl to face precisely these problems. He pointed out that there are other ways of ‘encountering’ objects than relating to them as objects of perception or predication. When we use a piece of equipment like a hammer, Heidegger claims, we actualize a bodily skill (which cannot be represented in the mind) in the context of a socially organized nexus of equipment, purposes, and human roles (which cannot be represented as a set of facts). This context and our everyday ways of skillful coping in it are not something we *know* but, as part of our socialization, form the way that we *are* (Dreyfus, 1982, p.20-21).

By equipment Heidegger refers to the being of entities that we use for specific purposes in our everyday interactions. Thus when I pick up a pencil, I am not relating to this equipment as a neutral entity that I subsequently infuse with meaning; instead I encounter the pencil as a means for pursuing a particular goal, which is in this case the writing of my dissertation. Moreover, the use of a pencil is embedded within a nexus of other activities that makes the practice of writing what it is. For Heidegger, *availableness* denotes a way of being of equipment that is embedded within a particular practice, in this case, writing.

As we become immersed in the activity of writing, the being of this equipment tends to disappear. In other words, as we are fully engaged in the practical activity of writing, we tend to pass over the object as possessing any definite properties and instead relate to it in terms of *practical dealings*. The

pencil in my hand is not an entity among others but is indistinguishable from the activity that we refer to as writing. Here the pencil assumes a relationship to the activity of writing such that, “precisely when it is most genuinely appropriated equipment becomes transparent” (Dreyfus, 1991, p.65). The practice of the task has taken precedence over the individual functioning of the pencil. In this sense, the determinacy of equipment only occurs later and in response to a very specific type of relationship, in this case, detached reflection.

At this point, it is important to understand the impact of Heidegger’s analysis of the use of equipment. To begin with, his analysis suggests that the phenomenological (and to some extent cognitive) notion of intentionality fails to address the way that Dasein is primordially engaged with entities in a meaningful way. Heidegger introduces the concept of comportment and the being of entities that is “availableness” to draw attention to the everyday background practices that provide a foundation for more specific modes of being-in-the world. For Dreyfus (1991),

if this introduction of a more primordial level of phenomena is to be convincing, however, it cannot ignore the traditional account of subjects and objects but rather, must show its limited legitimacy. We shall see that there are subjects and objects but that the tradition has introduced them too early in the analysis and, moreover, has mischaracterized them so as to give them a foundational function they cannot perform (p.69).

For Heidegger, the distinction between subjects and objects emerges only when our practical engagements have become problematic. In this case, deliberation arises when what was previously unproblematic assumes a particular importance.

As I write, my pencil assumes no particular importance as it is completely integrated into the task at hand. Yet it is possible that when I lose myself in the activity of writing, I may press down too hard on my paper and break off the tip of my pencil. At this point in time, the being of the pencil is significantly different from what it was before. In Heidegger’s (1962) view, the equipment is no longer integrated into the ongoing activity in which it was previously employed and “when its unusability is thus discovered, equipment becomes conspicuous. This conspicuousness presents the available equipment as in a certain



unavailableness” (p.102-103). For Dasein, this necessitates a different practice whereby the pencil is no longer a piece of equipment for writing but becomes a goal of another activity, in this case, some activity designed to reestablish the availableness of the pencil. In this case, one may use a pencil sharpener and we can see that the sharpener exhibits the same availableness that the pencil previously assumed. In this sense, there is deliberation but Heidegger wants to make clear that this need not be viewed as a collection of mental processes residing within a mind that has been juxtaposed with an independent and external reality. For Heidegger, “even deliberation is not the pure detached theoretical reflection described by the tradition. Rather it must take place on the background of absorption in the world” (Dreyfus, 1991, p.74). What Heidegger is saying is that we need not view understanding as a mental process residing within individual minds but instead as something that is exhibited in the way we engage in our everyday practical activities.

We have seen that, in dealing with the available, Dasein is transparently absorbed in equipment without experiencing its activity as caused by a “mental state.” We have now added that temporary breakdown calls forth deliberate action and thus introduces “mental content,” but only on the background of nonmental coping (Dreyfus, 1991, p.76).

What is revealed when equipment ceases to work is the embeddedness of Dasein’s understanding in everyday background practices. This breakdown permits another level of analysis more closely aligned with the theoretically detached attitude we find in contemporary scientific practice.

When an entity is no longer available, and it has exhausted any possibility of being reintegrated into practice, the entity now exhibits *occurrentness*. This means that equipment has become, for the time being, unavailable and a particular theoretical detachment has become necessary to ensure that the equipment can once again be made available. For Heidegger, theoretical reflection emerges *only after* our everyday engagements are thoroughly beyond repair. This type of reflection removes entities from their practical context in such a way that equipment exhibits *occurrentness*. Within psychology, this *occurrentness* would be similar to the sense data that an individual integrates

into a complex interpretation of social reality. Yet the thrust of Heidegger's critique of cognitivism is to draw attention to the way that such an analysis is in fact a derivative mode of relating to entities rather than their basic condition. In his view, reality is not populated by neutral entities that we only truly encounter through detached reflection but that it is through our practical engagements that we encounter a world of meaningful relations. This means that the thematization of the hermeneutic phenomenologist must be distinguished from the thematization that occurs in contemporary scientific research:

The scientist is detached from and so is able to thematized and objectify his object, nature, while the hermeneutic ontologist makes his theme precisely the shared background understanding in which he dwells and from which he cannot detach himself... Heidegger must mean to distinguish his involved *thematic* analysis of existence, which reveals that in which we already dwell, from the detached, objectifying thematization characteristic of any discipline from physics to factual history (Dreyfus, 1991, p.83)

The significance of the hermeneutic form of thematizing will become especially important when we look to the way hermeneutics discloses the background practices that embody our practical understanding.

At this point, I would like to return to the figure/ground relationship that we discussed in the context of social cognition. For the most part, this phenomena has been viewed perceptually in terms of what individuals interpreting social reality come to *know*. Thus people will discuss 'seeing' one image against another or 'hearing" an instrument against the background of the entire orchestra. Heidegger's aim was not so much to undermine this view of 'holism' but to reformulate it in terms of action or practical activity rather than perception or knowledge. If we return to our example of the pencil and paper, up to this point, it has principally been introduced as a visual phenomenon – something that can be seen. For Gestalt and social psychology, what is fundamental is that everything emerges within a particular context. The contours of my pencil are discernable because of the paper that provides a background.

For Heidegger, this phenomenological insight, while important, does not penetrate deeply enough into the way we are actually engaged in the world. Even

before objects of perception emerge against a specific background, we are practically immersed in the world in a way that these items are fused with everyday concerns. Indeed, as I sit here writing, to see the pencil against the paper is to have ceased to write. To see the pencil as a figure against a ground is to no longer treat it as a pencil. It is only when it has ceased to be a pencil with which I can write that it emerges as something that I see. Fundamentally, when I encounter objects, I encounter them as tools for practical activity. It is only when they have ceased to function in a particular way that they take on the derivative character of being items. Heidegger has not abandoned holism but has suggested that we understand this relationship not as a perceptual item against a particular background but as emerging against a background of practical activity. This background of practical activity provides a means for objects to emerge in particular ways.

### ***Artificial Intelligence***

The view that interpretation is embedded in our practical engagements rather than in cognitive processes is a controversial claim, especially for areas such as social cognition that appear to be committed to a mentalistic view of human understanding. Given cognitive psychology's reliance on a computational model of the mind, it seems appropriate to compare Heidegger's insights with interpretive issues that have emerged in the field of Artificial Intelligence (AI). To do this, I will draw primarily on Dreyfus' book, *What Computers Still Can't Do* (1992).

In discussing the applicability of the information-processing model to human cognition, there are at least two different ways to discuss the matter: (1) is to look to empirical work within cognitive science to see if evidence supports the hypothesis that the mind functions like a computer or (2) is to demonstrate the *contingency* of several a priori arguments and to show that something more than empirical research is being used to buttress an information-processing model of human cognition. Both possibilities are covered extensively by Dreyfus (1992)

though I would like to devote the majority of my discussion to arguments of the theoretical variety. In other words, I would like to show that while empirical evidence can be produced and evaluated by social cognition researchers, these approaches remain grounded in non-empirical (i.e. a priori) assumptions regarding the nature of interpretation. These problems are directly related to what we have discussed regarding epistemological and ontological approaches to interpretation. Moreover, these critiques support the suggestion that phenomenology, instead of providing a foundation for social cognition (Fiske & Taylor, 1991), actually calls into question many of its most cherished assumptions.

To begin with, Dreyfus highlights the way psychology has come to be dominated by a computational view of the mind. He suggests that,

in psychology, the computer serves as a model of the mind as conceived of by empiricists such as Hume (with the bits as atomic impressions) and idealists such as Kant (with the program providing the rules). Both empiricists and idealists have prepared the ground for this model of thinking as *data processing* (Dreyfus, 1992, p.157; italics mine).

This observation is congruent with Fiske and Taylor's (1991) suggestion that contemporary research in social cognition is ultimately grounded in the dialectical relationship between Humeian elementalism and Kantian holism. As we have already seen, this part/whole relationship shares a number of similarities with schema theory and the hermeneutic circle. What I would like to suggest is that Heidegger's transition from epistemological to ontological hermeneutics has profound implications for the way we consider this relationship.

As we will recall from Heidegger's discussion of ontological hermeneutics, when people inquire into a particular state of affairs, scientific or otherwise, they always begin with an understanding that determines what an appropriate answer would resemble. If I am interested in the cognitive mechanisms that account for variation in orderly behavior, I have already delimited what will count as a suitable explanation. What an information-processing approach views as an adequate psychological explanation is not an empirical question but is instead an

a priori assumption regarding the nature of the mind. Psychologists working within an information-processing framework,

assume that our very notion of explanation or complete description *requires* that behavior be described in terms of a set of instructions, that is, a sequence of determinate responses to determinate situations... In their view, if psychology is to be possible at all, an explanation *must* be expressible as a computer program. This is not an empirical observation but follows from their definition of explanation (Dreyfus, 1992, p.175).

This insight is at the heart of the epistemological approach to interpretation. All inquiry must begin with a set of assumptions that are not themselves empirical in nature. In every act of investigation, the nature of that which is to be investigated is assumed to be of a particular type. If we recall Ostrom's (1984) list of twelve cognitive tasks that are likely to occur when we interact with another person, it is clear that he views an explanation of human behavior as *synonymous* with identifying a series of rules that intervene between input and output. Moreover, even the recognition that such a series of tasks seems at least improbable elicits a telling response from Ostrom:

It is staggering, indeed, to realize that these myriad concurrent tasks are compressed into the time it takes to nod understandingly, raise an eyebrow, or fleet a smile. The motivational, cognitive, and affective mechanisms that allow us to perform them are at present bafflingly complex and poorly understood. *Of course, this quest for understanding has always been, and will continue to be, the primary objective of psychology.* It is in the field of social cognition that the full complexity of this task becomes apparent (Ostrom, 1984, p.16; italics mine).

In other words, despite our reluctance to believe that these tasks do occur in everyday social interactions, it is not clear what a scientific psychology would look like without such an explanation. For social cognition researchers, interpretation *must* be viewed in this way if they are to identify variables that lead to specific interpretations of social reality.

Social cognition's exclusion of discourses that do not correspond to a computational model of mind is strikingly similar to Hirsch's attempt to restrict all legitimate discourse regarding the meaning of a text to approximations of the intention of the author. In other words, Hirsch believes that it is necessary to

have a determinate subject matter in order to discuss issues of validity. For him, it is the author's intention that ensures rival interpreters will understand one another even if they disagree on the validity of a particular interpretation. Were theorists unable to agree as to what constitutes a legitimate form of inquiry, it would not be possible to progress beyond endless bickering regarding the nature of a phenomenon.

Moreover, Kuhn's discussion of paradigms draws attention to the role such dominant forms of discourse play in scientific understanding. In each case, a determinate subject matter is established on a priori grounds so that competing interpretations can be compared within the framework of 'legitimate' discourse. Yet for Dreyfus (1992), the discourse of information-processing represents an a priori rather than an empirical framework for viewing the human mind:

Although man is surely a physical object processing physical inputs according to the laws of physics and chemistry, man's behavior may not be explainable in terms of an information-processing mechanism processing inputs which represent features of the world. Nothing from physics or experience suggests that man's actions can be so explained, since on the physical level we are confronted with continuously changing patterns of energy, and on the phenomenological level with objects in an already organized field of experience (Dreyfus, 1992, p.187-188).

With social cognition's desire to identify a determinate region that is neither reducible to neurophysiology nor phenomenology, it has had to colonize the human mind. Yet the fact that an explanation of the human mind must ultimately take the form of a series of *specific rules* is by no means an empirical claim. On the contrary, it is an a priori framework for deciding whether a particular explanation constitutes legitimate psychological discourse.

A further problem arises when we reflect on the type of world one would have to inhabit in order for the human mind to be a computational device. As long as social cognition views interpretation as a rule-governed cognitive process, it will have to continue to posit a determinate region which can supply variables to be manipulated by the proper cognitive equation. In other words, when I have had 'X' past experiences and I find myself in situation 'Y', I will behave in a predictable way. Of course, the point of social cognition is to increase the

complexity of this equation to account for variation, yet the basic desire to understand behavior in terms of rules remains the same. Given social cognition's reliance on an information-processing model, this would appear to be the only compelling way to explain variations in the interpretation of social reality. Moreover, our failure at times to develop an accurate perception of reality would have to be explained by suggesting that certain interpretive rules have led us astray. Much as we may fail to grasp a text's meaning if we rely exclusively on the contingent significance that it has in a particular time period, so do we fail to gain an accurate perception of reality if we confuse our contingent perceptions with that reality.

As we have seen from our discussion of schema theory and the hermeneutic circle, this knowledge is gained through a dialectical relationship between parts and the whole. Our understanding of the whole leads us to view parts in a particular fashion while individual parts allow us to grasp the whole. Although this is something that humans do easily in their everyday social interactions, it is an extremely difficult process for a computer to complete. For Dreyfus (1992), "in order to understand an utterance, structure a problem, or recognize a pattern, a computer must select and interpret its data in terms of a context. But how are we to impart this context itself to the computer" (p.208)? In other words, how are we to account for interpretation as a computational process when the context that social cognition acknowledges is necessary for all interpretation cannot be apprehended through rule-governed processes? Indeed, if interpretation requires a cognitive equation, how can the proper variables be gathered from the situation if an understanding of the situation is what is required to identify these variables in the first place? One would need to process the individual elements to determine the context, yet it is the context that makes these individual elements intelligible:

It is only in the broader context of social intercourse that we see we must normally take into account what people are wearing and what they are doing, but not how many insects there are in the room or the cloud formations at noon or a minute later ... only this

broader context enables us to determine whether these facts will have their normal significance” (Dreyfus, 1992, p.221).

For Heidegger, context is not provided by knowledge represented in the mind but through our everyday practical activities. The fact that it is difficult for AI researchers to instantiate such basic processes in specific rules calls into question the appropriateness of an information-processing model of the human mind.

### ***Implications***

Dreyfus (1991) identifies several assumptions guiding Western philosophy that he believes are especially vulnerable to Heidegger’s criticisms. Moreover, these assumptions provide a foundation for research in social cognition. Indeed a thorough examination of these assumptions may have a profound impact of the way we view phenomenology, cognitive science, and social reality.

Explicitness. The idea that human thought and behavior is governed by rules is perhaps the defining feature of modern psychological theory and research. Social cognition researchers focus on uncovering the cognitive mechanisms and situational variables that produce specific interpretations of social reality. If we return to the figure/ground relationship, we can see that although these variables and mechanisms remain in the background, scientific procedures aim to bring them into focus. Indeed, this may be the essence of what is referred to as scientific progress – bringing what is hidden into the light of day. Yet Heidegger’s radical approach to the hermeneutic circle calls into question the possibility of bringing such background practices completely into focus.

The hermeneutic circle refers to the fact that all understanding involves a dialectical relationship between the parts and the whole. It suggests that when we know something, this knowledge influences the way we understand any of a number of phenomena. Moreover, we have seen that this dialectical relationship shares a number of similarities with schema theory, transcendental phenomenology, and certain approaches within literary theory. For Heidegger,



**this dialectical approach is relevant to all forms of human understanding, including the accumulation of scientific knowledge:**

In a scientific proof, we may not presuppose what it is our task to provide grounds for. But if interpretation must in any case already operate in that which is understood, and if it must draw its nurture from this, how is it to bring any scientific results to maturity without moving in a circle, especially if, moreover, the understanding which is presupposed still operates within our common information about man and the world (Heidegger, 1962, p.194).

Here, Heidegger is claiming that scientific inquiry always begins with an understanding of the phenomenon in question. Moreover, this understanding emerges in the way a community of researchers have come to define the object under investigation. In *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology (1982)*, Heidegger focuses on how the dialectical nature of understanding influences scientific inquiry.

For nature, physical as well as psychical, always replies in an experiment only to that which it is interrogated about. The result of positive inquiry can always corroborate only the fundamental mode of inquiry in which it moves. But it cannot substantiate the fundamental mode of inquiry itself and the manner of thematizing entities that is implicit in it (p.52).

Heidegger is claiming that every question that posits itself on the relationship between a knower and a known (epistemology) presupposes what constitutes an answer to that question; that is, what we understand as the being of the entities to which the question is put. Thus, if I posit an entity that is a collection of cognitive mechanisms, schemas, and mental processes, I have already determined what sort of information will be salient in my investigation. This has not occurred because of explicit rules as to what is or is not relevant but is instead the result of shared practices in a scientific community – practices that never become fully explicit. For Heidegger (1982),

the positive positing of any being includes within itself an a priori knowledge and an a priori understanding of the being's being, although the positive experience of such a being knows nothing of this understanding and is incapable of bringing what is understood by it into the form of a concept (p.52)

In other words, although this knowledge is operative in the way we encounter a phenomenon, it is not something that can be made completely explicit. As we have seen with Kuhn, a community of scientists is often unable to supply rules for how they are to behave in particular situations. Instead, researchers come to behave in certain ways because of their immersion in a scientific community. While science has privileged the sort of conceptual knowledge that can be made fully explicit, it is our *background practices* that make such knowledge meaningful in the first place.

But if scientific inquiry is already guided by a particular understanding of the phenomenon under investigation, how are we to ever grasp reality as it “really” is? Indeed, doesn’t the dialectical nature of understanding demonstrate that what we have really encountered is a vicious circle? Heidegger does not believe that the hermeneutic circle must be a vicious one; instead, he believes that when the circle has been properly understood, it offers us a *positive* means for disclosing the nature of understanding. Heidegger (1962) argues that,

*if we see this circle as a vicious one and look for ways of avoiding it, even if we just ‘sense’ it as an inevitable imperfection, then the act of understanding has been misunderstood from the ground up... If the basic conditions which make interpretation possible are to be fulfilled, this must rather be done by not failing to recognize beforehand the essential conditions under which it can be performed. What is decisive is not to get out of the circle but to come into it in the right way (p.194-195).*

This means that we must remain aware of the way background practices shape our understanding of a phenomenon while simultaneously recognizing that such practices cannot be made completely explicit. For Heidegger, all inquiry is intimately related to the practices that emerge within a particular cultural and historical community:

Heidegger is very aware that our understanding grows or decays according to the kind of lives we are leading and the kind of cultural situation we inhabit. So to understand the question of Being we have to be alert to the kind of situation which gives rise to that question or covers it up. In particular, we shall have to be aware of the average understanding of being which our particular culture or mood carries with it (Moran, 2000, p.237).

This means that the hermeneutic circle should not be approached as an unavoidable means for gaining knowledge (epistemology) but as the way of being-in-the-world that underlies all forms of understanding (ontology), scientific or otherwise.

Theoretical Holism. We have already noted social cognition's commitment to a holistic view of human knowledge (Fiske & Taylor, 1991). This holism is reflected in Lewin's (1951) elaboration of the relationship between individuals and their environment. Since Heidegger also appears to advocate a holistic position, it is important to distinguish his holism from the one maintained by social cognition. The type of holism embraced by social cognition is what Dreyfus (1980, 1991) refers to as *theoretical holism*. While a theoretical holist may acknowledge that interpretation is ultimately grounded in everyday background practices, she does not see any obstacle to making such practices entirely explicit. Indeed, if these practices are to be the foundation of human understanding, a theoretical holist would demand that such practices be made explicit in terms of concrete rules and beliefs. In other words, "insofar as background practices contain knowledge, they must be based on implicit beliefs; insofar as they are skills, they must be generated by tacit rules (Dreyfus, 1991, p.5).

Dreyfus (1980, 1991) argues that Heidegger embraces a *practical holism* in which the shared practices that unite a community are not capable of being fully formalized into tacit rules or implicit beliefs. Instead, such practices represent a commitment to a particular mode of being-in-the-world. Dreyfus (1980) suggests that

practical understanding is holistic in an entirely different way from theoretical understanding. Although practical understanding—everyday coping with things and people—involves explicit beliefs and hypothesis, these can only be meaningful in specific contexts and against a background of shared practices... such skills embody a whole cultural interpretation of what it means to be a human being, what a material object is, and, in general, what counts as real (Dreyfus, 1980, p.7).

The significance of this position is that it offers a radically different perspective on the hermeneutic circle and the nature of interpretation. We are not involved in the world in such a way that our background practices can be made entirely explicit. Indeed, these practices represent an interpretation of our existential situation. This knowledge is not to be found within our mental representation of the world but in our active involvement in practical activities. It is clear that this approach represents a significant departure from the view of interpretation that one finds within social cognition. As Stern (2003) observes

the practical holist agrees with the theoretical holist that we are already within the 'hermeneutic circle' – we have no alternative to starting with our current understanding – but argues that theoretical holism mistakenly conceives of understanding a language on the model of formulating a theory, or mapping an unfamiliar landscape. This leaves out the background practices, equipment, locations, and broader horizons that are not specific presuppositions or assumptions, yet are part and parcel of our ability to engage in conversation or find our way about (p.189).

In addition, Stern (2003) suggests that the theoretical holist's presumptions regarding the possible explicitness of background practices is entirely unfounded. He suggests that, "it is a mistake to postulate tacit belief whenever explicit beliefs cannot be found, and to fail to do justice to the contextual, embodied, and improvisational character of practice" (p.189). Indeed, the practical and theoretical holist agree that understanding involves a dialectical process but differ in the way they view the nature of these background practices. For the theoretical holist, the way people interpret social reality can ultimately be formalized into specific rules. The practical holist, on the other hand, argues that the theoretical holist's explanation of human behavior in terms of rules is dependent on the practical activities of a community of scientists whose behavior cannot be reduced to the "following of a rule." We fail to make these background practices explicit not because of any temporary limitation of scientific knowledge but because the very nature of human understanding is dependent on these practices remaining essentially hidden.

Detachment and Objectivity. While the theoretical holist would like to formalize background practices into explicit rules and beliefs, she still must contend with the specter of relativism that haunts those who wish to adopt a holistic position. To a large extent this challenge has been met by claiming that while the hermeneutic circle may be vicious, one's ability to adopt a position outside of this dialectical process facilitates an understanding that remains untainted by implicit assumptions or prejudices. As we have seen, this is a vital move for anyone working within an epistemological framework.

For Hirsch, by restricting discussion of the meaning of a text to the author's original intention, it is possible to prevent a text's significance in a particular time period from distorting its true meaning. In other words, Hirsch controls for the effect of changing significance by restricting all legitimate discussion of a text's meaning to issues of authorial intention. This enables him to adopt a perspective immune to historical contingencies. Moreover, Hirsch argues that objectivity in interpretation absolutely *requires* that we identify a determinate region of meaning. By equating the true meaning of a text with the intention of the author, Hirsch claims to provide a way for readers to compare competing interpretations.

Husserl believed that he could cure what he diagnosed as the crisis plaguing Western science by developing a rigorous method free from all philosophical presuppositions and prejudices. By seeking to be a descriptive science, transcendental phenomenology tries to avoid interpretive practices that distort the intuiting of essences – the ultimate aim of an eidetic science. Through rigorous description of the way experience appears to consciousness, transcendental phenomenology endeavors to put scientific inquiry on firm footing once and for all.

Conventional science is also guided by the idea that a true representation of reality requires that scientists and lay people distance themselves from the distorting influence of their own beliefs and desires. For Dreyfus (1991), “according to the philosophical tradition, whether rationalist or empiricist, it is

only by means of detached contemplation that we discover reality” (p.6). Once again, the understanding we derive from a theoretically detached position is viewed as superior to the vagaries of subjective prejudices. Methodological procedures ensure that subjective biases will not prevent researchers from ultimately grasping the nature of reality. Indeed, by positing both a determinate mental and physical reality, social cognition researchers hope to discover the cognitive mechanisms and situational variables responsible for specific interpretations of social reality.

Within this epistemological approach to knowledge, *prejudice*, whether it is in the guise of ‘significance’, ‘interpretation’ or ‘subjective bias’, represents an obstacle to valid knowledge of the nature of reality. Yet for Heidegger, it is this view that needs to be called into question. He suggest that a strictly negative view of prejudice presumes the very subject/object split that it claims to uncover and that such objectivity must ultimately be understood as deriving from our everyday practical engagements.

From Heidegger’s perspective, prejudices do not only serve a deleterious role in human understanding but instead are the foundation for all forms of human understanding. Understanding does not occur by adopting a disinterested perspective but emerges through practical engagement with the phenomenon in question. Indeed, Heidegger’s distinction between the being of objects and the being of Dasein calls into question the privileging of knowledge gained from a ‘disinterested’ perspective. For if Dasein’s fundamental involvement is being-in-the-world, it is only a derivative stance that places an object in front of a conscious subject. Yet it is not clear why this derivative stance has been given priority since the time of Descartes:

The whole array of philosophical distinctions between inner subjective experience and the outer object of experience, between perceiving and the perceived, and between appearance and reality arise at this point ... Only by exposing the derivative character of the detached, reflective stance, Heidegger holds, can we see the limits of subjective consciousness and the object it knows (Dreyfus, 1991, p.45)

For Heidegger, traditional approaches to knowledge privilege a disinterested knower encountering a reality beyond the influence of subjective biases. Yet, as we have seen, this is only a derivative way of encountering other people and objects. Primordially, we are immersed in a world of practical activities and it is only through these activities that other people and objects are ultimately disclosed to us. For Heidegger, shared practices are not revealed by locating them in cognitive mechanisms or implicit belief systems but by looking to the fundamental way in which people are engaged in their world. This does not mean that such practices can be rendered entirely explicit but instead suggests that any perspective beginning from a disinterested perspective has already misunderstood the nature of Dasein's being-in-the-world.

## **Practice Theory**

The movement from epistemology to ontology entails a radical transformation of the phenomenological foundations of social cognition. Instead of focusing on mental representations, intentionality, and consciousness, this new approach looks to the everyday activities that already embody an interpretation of social reality. Indeed, the foundation for analysis is no longer the individual mind but the practical activities of a group of people. From this perspective, interpretation is a *practice* rather than a mental activity. For Westerman (2004),

our understanding, even when it takes the form of theoretical propositions, remains at bottom a lived knowledge. It is not a view of the world as it is "in itself" nor how we would choose to see it, but a hold on things that always refers beyond itself to our involvement in the world of practices (p. 134).

The concept of practice has been explored either explicitly or implicitly within a variety of areas including sociology (Giddens, 1976, 1984; Coulter, 2001, Turner, 1994), anthropology (Bourdieu, 1977, 1990), cognitive science (Dreyfus, 1988, 1992, 2002; Turner, 2001, 2002), literary theory (Fish, 1980; Knapp & Michaels, 1985) and philosophy (Gadamer, 1976; Heidegger, 1962; Rorty, 1979; Wittgenstein, 2001). Moreover, psychologists have begun to discuss the

implication of moving the level of analysis away from individual consciousness (Gergen, 1991, 2001; Potter, 1996; Richardson & Bishop, 2004; Richardson & Christopher, 1993; Sampson, 1983; Slife, 2005; Stenner, 1998; Westerman, 2004). While there has been a growing interest in the concept of practice, it would be a mistake to assume that all practice theorists agree on the role this concept plays in scientific research (Schatzki, Cetina & Savigny, 2001). Moreover, even an agreed upon definition of 'practice' has not always been forthcoming.

Despite these ambiguities, I would like to discuss several conceptualizations of practice that are relevant for the present project. In practice theory, the goal is to establish a level of analysis that is neither reducible to the functioning of individual subjects nor completely dependent of systematic considerations. For Barnes (2001),

the successful execution of routines at the collective level will involve the overriding and modification of routines at the individual level. Practice at the collective level is not a simple summation of practices at the individual level (habits). Shared practice is, as the ethnomethodologists say, a collective accomplishment (p.23).

In other words, orderly behavior need not be understood as simply the aggregate of individual actions. Collective behavior exhibits a quality that supersedes the functioning of individual agents. Practical activities constitute an interpretation of reality that is neither the product of consciousness nor entirely determined by systematic factors.

It is clear that one of the benefits of the concept of practice is its ability to resolve a number of dualisms that have plagued Western thought. As we have seen, Heidegger's conception of Dasein was intended to undercut the tendency to conceptualize human subjectivity as an entity distinct from the world in which it inhabited. Instead, Heidegger views human existence as being-in-the-world, a practical engagement that already embodies a particular understanding of the meaning of Being. Within sociology, the concept of practice has been hailed as an alternative to choosing between a micro-level of analysis with its focus on human subjectivity and a macro-level of analysis that views systemic factors as solely determining the functioning of society. For Coulter (2001), "the proper route to a



solution to the 'micro-macro' relationship problem is to be found in a systematic elucidation of the logic of our ordinary practices (including our communicative practices) in our ordinary life circumstances "(p.29).

Perhaps one of the most interesting contributions to practice theory has been undertaken by the sociologist Anthony Giddens (1976, 1984). Giddens structuration theory attempts to mediate between some of the micro/macro debates we have already discussed.

The basic domain of study of the social sciences, according to the theory of structuration, is neither the experience of the individual actor, nor the existence of any form of societal totality, but social practices ordered across space and time. Human social activities, like some self-reproducing items in nature, are recursive. That is to say, they are not brought into being by social actors but continually recreated by them via the very means whereby they express themselves *as* actors. In and through their activities agents reproduce the conditions that make these activities possible" (Giddens, 1984, p.2).

For Giddens, people within a society are not simply constrained by systematic factors – such factors are reproduced by the everyday practical activities of a community. In other words, individuals not only behave in ways that conform to societal norms, they also reproduce such norms in their various activities. The concept of practice allows researchers to understand the activities that people engage in and that therefore embody an interpretation of reality.

I will have much more to say about practice throughout the remainder of this project. The important point at this moment is that by focusing on the practices that embody an interpretation of reality, we can begin to explore a new role for phenomenological investigations in the social sciences. With the transition from epistemology to ontology, phenomenology is no longer a foundation for social cognition research but instead a radical critique of social psychology's interpretation of social reality. This is especially important as the present project will focus on *politics* – an area within psychology that has come to be dominated by social cognitive theories of interpretation. As such, it is important to understand how this revised interpretation of phenomenology can contribute to our understanding of political phenomena.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

In the first chapter, we explored the implications of viewing phenomenology as an investigation of shared practices. Indeed, I believe that analysis is absolutely essential if we are to understand the practices that embody an interpretation of political reality. At this time, I would like to explore various ways of approaching political research. For the present project, it is important to understand how the political is typically approached psychologically, sociologically, and phenomenologically. This should give us a clue as to the role this revised understanding of phenomenology can play in political research.

#### **Political Psychology**

I would like to begin my discussion of political psychology by focusing on its origins as an interdisciplinary field as well as some of the ways it has been defined by its most prominent scholars. In tracing the origins of political psychology, Deutsche and Kinnvall (2002) note that,

the increasing political turmoil, the irrationality and destructiveness of the First World War, the development of modern totalitarian regimes with their barbarities, the emergence of the mass media and their systematic use by propagandists, suggested an urgent need for more systematic knowledge about the relationship between political and psychological processes (p.15).

Prior to the First World War, psychology and political science generally developed independently with few researchers exploring points of intersection. With political tensions increasing throughout the world during the first half of the twentieth century, it became increasingly important to integrate an understanding of basic psychological processes with investigations of both totalitarian and democratic societies (see Adorno et al., 1950). By focusing on various aspects of the individual, psychologists and political scientists believed they could prevent the formation of repressive regimes and facilitate the emergence of democratic forms of government. Moreover, as mass media emerged as the dominant form of communication between political elites and

citizens, it became necessary to focus on the way individuals interpret mediated images and messages within a political context. This led to an interest in what has become the interdisciplinary field of political psychology.

Most scholars see political psychology as a field integrating insights from political science and psychology. Indeed, Deutsche and Kinnvall (2002) suggest that political psychology, “is a child of political science and psychology, having been conceived in the ambivalent mood of optimism and despair that has characterized the scientific age” (p.15). Yet Sears et al (2003) argue against the idea of a single political psychology given the difficulties of identifying any uniform approach within either political science or psychology. They note that, there is no one “political psychology.” Rather, there are a number of political phenomenon that have been investigated from a psychological approach, and using a number of different psychological theories. In that sense there are a number of “political psychologies,” though of course every theory is more appropriate for some phenomena than for others (Sears et al., 2003, p.4).

Instead of providing a general definition of political psychology, Sears et al (2003) divide political psychology into several, “major psychological theoretical approaches” including personality, behaviorist learning theories, developmental theory, incentive theories, intergroup relations, and social cognition. They suggest that political psychology is, “at the most general level, an application of what is known about human psychology to the study of politics. From psychology it draws on theory and research on personality, psychopathology, social psychology, developmental psychology, cognitive psychology, and intergroup relations” (Sears et al., 2003, p.3). Bar-Tal (2002) defines political psychology as a science,

concerned with the influence of psychological factors, such as perceptions, beliefs, attitudes, values, motives, personality, cognitive styles, dynamic processes, group membership, group characteristics, structure and performance, and way of social influence, on political beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors of individuals and groups alike, on the one hand, and with the influence of political culture, systems, movements, parties, ideologies, mechanisms of political socialization, and intergroup relations on the human repertoire, on the other (p.174-175).

Deutsche and Kinnvall (2002) argue that political psychology's primary focus, especially in America, has been on, "individual and social psychological processes – such as motivation, conflict, perception, cognition, learning, socialization, attitude formation, and group dynamics – and on individual personality and psychopathology as the causal factors influencing political behavior" (p.16). From these definitions, it is clear that the political realm is primarily seen as an additional context for exploring basic psychological processes. Moreover, political psychology's trajectory largely parallels changes in psychological theory. Thus, psychology's transition from behavioral to cognitive forms of explanation is duplicated within political psychology. Indeed, Sullivan, Rahn and Rudolph (2002) suggest that the emphasis in political psychology has gradually shifted, "from personality and politics, to political attitudes and beliefs, and then to political cognition and information processing. In turn, there is evidence of an evolving emphasis on the role of affective factors in politics" (p.27).

Contemporary research in political psychology draws on a number of insights from the more general field of social psychology. Indeed, Taber (2003) notes that, "to an increasing extent, political psychologists and social psychologists use a common language to address an overlapping set of research questions" (p.433). As we have already seen, much contemporary social psychological research is grounded in the theoretical orientation of social cognition. As a result, Sullivan, Rahn and Rudolph (2002) suggest that political psychology primarily focuses on cognitive processes and mental activity:

In part due to the success of the interdisciplinary "cognitive science" revolution, social psychology turned away from an almost exclusive focus on attitude theory to a strong emphasis on social cognition. Social psychologists began to study very precisely how people perceive, store, process, recall, and use information from their social environment. In turn, then, political psychologists began to turn their attention to how people similarly deal with information about their political world (p.25).

Moreover, Bar-Tal (2002) argues that, "by providing the basis for the development of political psychology, social psychology stamped political psychology with its own cognitive orientation" (p.180). Clearly, social cognition

provides a foundation for much of the research conducted within the area of political psychology. As noted in the first chapter, social cognition's reliance on a computational model of the mind and its adherence to theories of mental representation has important implications for psychological research. This is equally true for research in political psychology.

We will recall that social cognition views interpretation as a mental process that resides within the minds of individual actors. Indeed, social cognition strives to identify the rules that govern particular interpretations of social reality. In other words, social cognition researchers are interested in understanding the mental processes that lead people to think or behave in particular ways in particular situations. Within political psychology, this has led to a tremendous amount of research into the way people's mental representations and cognitive processes influence their political beliefs and activities. As Taber (2003) notes,

the engines of public opinion are individual citizens as information processors. However humble their location in the political process, people form their opinions – when they form opinions – in response to political discourse, public and private. At times they may actively seek out information about candidates, parties, or issues; more frequently, citizens receive political information unsolicited. When they attend to it, this information is interpreted and evaluated by citizens and integrated into their existing political attitudes and beliefs. These private opinions become public when they are converted into some form of political action ... (p.435).

Here we see that citizens are generally seen as “information processors.”

Interpretation is viewed as a mental activity where individuals process political information according to their existing beliefs, integrate this information into those beliefs, and then engage (or fail to engage) in relevant political activity. In other words, social cognition sees political activity as a form of output resulting from specific interpretations of social reality. Indeed, Taber (2003) suggests that,

democratic citizens may fruitfully be thought of as information processors ... they are expected to convert their private opinions into public participation ... Their now public opinions may have greatest impact on public policy and broader political action when combined with the opinions of others, but this does not invalidate the individualistic nature of the opinion formation process (p.439).

Further along, Taber (2003) suggests that, “the information-processing approach gives us methods and theory that allow us to peer into the minds of citizens” (p.455). Once again, the focus is on an interpretive mental process that guides political activity. Political opinions, presumably in the form of mental representations, are both an influence on these interpretive processes and the outcome of this process. In other words, interpretation results in a more or less coherent political opinion that is capable of governing the public expression of that opinion; what researchers refer to as political participation. At the same time, political opinions influence the way novel information is processed leading to variations in political activity. In this sense, political opinions can serve as filters or biases that influence the processing of specific aspects of political reality. Indeed, Hermann (2002) suggests that,

how people define what is in their self interest, what is salient to them, what they feel compelled to act on can differ depending on the lenses through which they view the world ... these lenses become their “possessions” and descriptive of who they are politically and what they value (p.48).

Thus, people view the world through different lenses and it is these lenses, among other things, that account for variations in political belief and behavior. From this perspective, who we are politically (i.e. existentially) is a result of the various lenses we possess, which in turn leads us to engage in particular political (in)activities. What I would like to suggest is that this view of political belief, opinion, and activity has several important implications for political psychology.

To begin with, if political beliefs, attitudes, or cognitions are viewed as the impetus for political activity, then it is not clear how we could understand political *ideology* as anything but a mental construct. In other words, if people interpret political reality in specific ways because they possess a particular political ideology, then ideology would seem to be virtually synonymous with one’s political beliefs, attitudes, or cognitions. This is congruent with Klandermans’ (2003) definition of ideology as, “a relatively coherent set of cognition, attitudes, and feelings maintained by an individual” (p.684). Moreover, Rosenberg, Ward and Chilton (1988) draw on Piaget’s explorations in

genetic epistemology to assert that political ideology, “is the result of an ongoing process of subjective construction, negation, reflection and reconstruction” (p.13). This is not to say that political ideologies only exist within the minds of individual actors. History and art demonstrate the power of ideological symbols and slogans embedded within various cultures and historical epochs. Yet it is clear that social cognition researchers believe that ideologies guide political activities only in so far as these ideologies are represented within the mind. Of course, ideologies generally gain their strength from large numbers of individuals possessing what social cognition researches would refer to as the relevant ideological lenses, but then the relationship between individuals and groups becomes all the more pressing. Are ideologies, and therefore political beliefs, attitudes, and feelings, represented in each of the individual minds of those participating in political activities? Furthermore, if political ideologies are conceptualized as mental representations, should these mental entities be viewed as antecedents to political activity? To answer these questions, it is necessary to focus on the way political psychology approaches the relationship between the individual and the group.

Clearly, political psychology is extremely interested in the relationship between the individual and the group, especially in the context of political activity. Indeed, Deutsche and Kinnvall (2002) note that, “how we define the individual as a political actor also has implications for how we understand collective identity formation and collective action” (p.21). Moreover, they argue that,

collective identity, whether based on ethnicity, class, gender, race, religion, nation, or the state must, in other words, be understood within the framework of how individuals constitute political actors. The focus, and problem, of aggregating from the individual level to the group level is thus at the forefront of political psychology (Deutsche & Kinnvall, 2002, p.21).

Exploring the relationship between individual and group is one of the most formidable challenges for political psychology researchers. Yet it is clear that political psychologists working within a social cognitive framework generally see

groups simply as a collection of individual actors. This does not mean that actors operate independently of one another when they are in a group; rather, social cognition researchers view shared interpretations of a situation as located within each of the individual minds of the actors involved. While these individual representations may result in thoughts or behaviors unique to the group, such behaviors are still viewed as the outcome of individual interpretations coalescing into group behavior.

While political psychologists may disagree as to the relative emphasis that should be given to the individual in organized behavior, it is clear that the individual remains the basic unit of analysis in political psychology research.

Indeed, Herman (2002) argues that political psychologists,

focus on the individual person as the unit of analysis – not the group, not the institution, not the government, not the international system. Of critical importance is how individuals (voters, protesters, opinion makers, leaders) interpret, define, and represent their political environments ... true, in much of politics, people are embedded in groups, institutions, cultures, and governments, and it is the decisions of these entities that we seek to understand. However, it is individuals who identify and frame the problems that face such entities, who have disagreements and jockey for position, who generate compromises and build consensus, and who originate and implement change. Leaders are chosen by individuals either through election, selection, or the use of coercion; ideologies and causes are delineated and promulgated by individuals; ideas and norms become shared through the efforts of individuals (p.46-47).

Clearly, approaches that view interpretation as a mental activity will emphasize the role the individual plays in political activities. This is not to say that situational factors are irrelevant to political psychology research; rather, social cognition researchers believe that such factors only become relevant when they lead individuals to interpret political reality in specific ways.

It is also interesting to note that one of the primary means by which researchers establish the individual as the basic unit of analysis is by reference to political systems that are grounded in some form of individualism. Thus, democratic societies require citizens to choose representatives in elections in which their individual votes are aggregated and compared to determine a winner.



Because each individual has to make his or her own choice, political psychologists sometimes argue that it is necessary to focus on the beliefs, attitudes, feelings, and ideologies that guide these decisions. Indeed, Taber (2003) notes that, “in principle democracy invests the responsibility for public opinion in individual citizens. Democracy, at least in its Enlightenment form, is inherently individualistic” (p.435). Here we see that the focus on the individual is not merely as a choice among a variety of possibilities but instead is a result of the demands of a particular political system. From this perspective, it is not the researcher who decides to focus on individual mental processes but the nature of democracy itself.

Yet there has also been a call to reflect on political psychology’s focus on the individual as the basic unit of analysis. Indeed, some argue that an exclusive focus on individual mental processes obscures other potential avenues of inquiry. For Deutsche and Kinnvall (2002),

there has been a propensity to neglect previously important fields in political psychology, such as anthropology, microsociology, and cultural studies. To provide a more dynamic and complex picture of political action, it is important that this omission is rectified, that we balance the scales between the individual and society (p.35)

Integrating this call to focus on political issues that emerge at the intersection of the individual and society with the transition from epistemology to ontology I outlined in the first chapter, several observations seem particularly relevant. To begin with, political psychology’s focus on individual mental processes should not be adopted uncritically. Indeed, given Heidegger’s ontological view of interpretation, we may begin to call into question the subject/object dichotomy on which political psychology appears to be grounded. The implication here is that subjectivity is something that emerges out of a shared understanding of a situation. Thus, it may not be individuals that come together to form a group but the group that provides a background against which different forms of subjectivity emerge. While this may have a number of implications for psychological research into group and political behavior, it also has serious consequences for the concept of the subject.

Clearly, if subjectivity emerges against the background of a shared community, social scientists are in the interesting position of needing to justify their focus on the individual as the basic unit of analysis. Because the decision to focus on subjectivity is embedded in the dynamics of a particular community of scholars, it seems that the subject may be the end rather than the beginning of a political process. In other words, it is not individuals that come together to further political goals but a community already held together by resources, training, traditions, cultural heritage etc., that provides a background against which certain forms of subjectivity emerge. Indeed, one purpose of the analysis presented in the first chapter is to bring this insight to bear on political phenomena. The focus is no longer on consciousness but on the shared practices of a community. If we enlarge the community to include Western thought, we may inquire into the historical, economic, and social context in which the contemporary subject emerges. In this sense, the movement towards practice draws attention to the way the very concept of the subject emerges through the collective arrangement of a particular community.

It is also clear that calling the primacy of the subject into question has important implications for the way we approach ideology. Within a social cognitive framework, ideology is viewed as a mental construct guiding certain interpretations of political reality. Thus, people who possess divergent mental representations of political reality will see the world in different ways. As a result, their political activities are engineered to bring about different outcomes, a situation that often puts ideologies in conflict with one another. Indeed, from a social cognition perspective, ideologies would seem to function in much the same way as Kuhn's paradigms. Yet it was precisely Kuhn's point that paradigms *cannot* be viewed as rules governing scientific activity. A scientific paradigm is grounded within the concrete scientific practices of a community of scholars. These scholars are not necessarily guided in their activities by an explicit (or implicit) understanding of a set of rules that prescribe how scientific research should be conducted. Instead, these practices embody an interpretation of their

scientific tradition. In other words, it is not a mental representation of a tradition that guides scientific activity – these scientific practices *are* a tradition. Indeed, this moves us in the direction of understanding ideology in terms of practices rather than as possessions of individual minds.

While contemporary political psychology has increasingly followed psychology's lead in viewing interpretation as a mental activity located within the minds of individual actors, the tensions and contradiction surrounding subjectivity and ideology should warrant greater attention to the intersubjective aspects of political life. Indeed, Deutsche and Kinnvall (2002) argue that,

to the extent that that the social sciences, including political psychology, have uncritically imitated the methodologies appropriate to a technical cognitive interest, they have tended to neglect the fact that human action has to be understood with reference to the meanings that the action has for the actors and its audience: Human action is rooted in intersubjective contexts of communication, *in intersubjective practices and forms of life that have distinctive historical origins*. The uncritical imitation of the technical orientation of the natural sciences has also led many social scientists to ignore how their theoretical and empirical work – that is, their scientific activities – are influenced by the implicit assumptions, the value positions, ideological orientations, and political-economic viewpoints in the communities in which they participate (p.18 – italics mine).

For these scholars, political psychology researchers need to recognize the extent to which their own conceptualizations of human subjectivity influence the trajectory of their political investigations. Rather than focusing exclusively on mental representations and cognitive processes, political researchers need to explore “interpersonal practices” that cannot be reduced to the functioning of individual minds. In this context, Ward (2002) argues that,

political psychologists cannot be content to focus on individual or psychological explanations of political behavior, nor can we limit our attention to the systemic roots of individual psychology. Individuals and systems interact and that interaction transforms both the individual and the system, sometimes almost imperceptibly and on occasion radically (p.72).

Moreover, he suggests that, “points of friction between the individual and the culture are perhaps the most important areas political psychologists can study.

Here is where we can discover the links between individual, social, and cultural change” (Ward, 2002, p.73).

Clearly, researchers need to pay more attention to issues that emerge at the intersection of the individual and society. Up to this point, I have focused on political psychology’s emphasis on the individual as the basic unit of analysis. I have argued that contemporary political psychology generally focuses on the mental processes that contribute to particular interpretations of political reality. These interpretations then serve as the impetus for engaging in specific political activities. Moreover, interpretation is viewed as a mental activity residing within the minds of individual actors while group activities are usually conceptualized as an aggregate of individual behavior. At this point, I think it is important to compare political psychology with a neighboring interdisciplinary field in order to understand the implications of grounding political research in either subjectivity or in the collective we have come to refer to as “society.” I would also like to explore the implications of introducing some flexibility into what we regard as the foundation of political life.

### **Political Sociology**

A number of scholars have attempted to delineate the proper boundaries for research in political sociology. For Nash and Scott (2001), “the problem of boundaries is particularly intense in the case of a subarea like political sociology which exists within or between the two disciplines which have formed it: political science and sociology” (p.1). Yet they also note that this ambiguity places political sociology in a unique position to explore a variety of issues that might have otherwise gone unnoticed. Indeed, they suggest that,

... political sociology, precisely because of its location in the gaps of the conventional boundaries drawn between the political, cultural, and economic is, and always has been, in a particularly good position to absorb and transmit emerging developments, to understand the ambiguity of these – possibly arbitrary – boundaries and to recognize the intimacy of the connections between these “spheres” (Nash & Scott, 2001, p.2).

Thus, political sociology finds itself in a unique position to explore issues emerging at the intersection of politics, culture, economics, and society.

Dowse and Hughs (1972) suggest that, “political sociology is a branch of sociology that is mainly concerned with the analysis of the interaction between politics and society” (p.6). Moreover, they argue that politics should be understood as, “the exercise of power in social situations” (p.7). This definition of politics,

encourages an awareness of the potential political relevance of almost all aspects of social life not obviously to do with government and the state. Thus all structures and processes having an impact, intended or otherwise, on the political system become of interest to the student of political life (Dowse & Hughs, 1972, p.6)

By purposely defining political sociology in broad terms, Dowse and Hughs (1972) hope to encourage research in areas that are not always expressly identified as “political.” Here politics is not restricted to issues of “government” and “state” but instead encompasses all social situations in which power plays a decisive role. Indeed, Bottomore (1993) concurs by arguing that, “political sociology is concerned with power in its social context” (p.1) while Burnham (2003) defines political sociology as, “the study of power and domination in social relationships. It could thereby include analysis of the family, the mass media, universities, trade unions, and so on” (p.421). Braungart (1981) claims that political sociology focuses on, “the dynamic associations among and between (1) the social origins of politics, (2) the structure of politics or the political process, and (3) the effects of politics on the surrounding society and culture” (p.3). Moreover, he notes that political sociology investigates,

political development, class and status politics, generational and mass politics, political socialization, elites, sociopolitical systems, the distribution of power (at the community, national, and multinational levels), the nation-state, institutional politics (including parties, voting, participation, consensus), and non-institutionalized politics (such as mobilization and mobility, revolution, conflict and violence, social movements, and terrorism) (Braungart, 1981, p.3)

From these observations it is clear that political sociology is particularly interested in exploring the way power functions in a variety of social contexts.

This may involve investigating how class differences influence the relationship between different groups or the way modern institutions centralize power in the hands of a minority of individuals. In any event, it appears that political sociology conceptualizes the social in a significantly different way from political psychology. Generally speaking, it does not begin with individuals as information processors but with groups related to one another in a particular social context.

Scholars also note that political sociology has gone through a number of transitions since its emergence in the middle of the twentieth century. For Outhwaite and Martell (1998), these changes are largely due to attempts by political sociologists to distinguish their own aims from those of political science:

Where political *science* tended to concentrate on constitutional issues and on the technical aspects of voting and other forms of political behaviour, studied in relative isolation from wider social processes, political *sociology* was concerned in essence with the social structural determinants of that behaviour, notably with the effects of class and social mobility on voting and other forms of political participation (p.ix).

For political sociology, political participation is fundamentally grounded in economic, social, and historical processes. Indeed, these processes play an important role in the political activities of the members of a society. Yet, beginning in the 1970's, the field of political sociology began to expand rapidly as it attempted to integrate insights from various political and intellectual developments during this tumultuous time period. As Outhwaite and Martell (1998) note,

a thinker such as Michel Foucault suddenly appeared highly relevant to the sociology of politics as he did to the sociologies of medicine, deviance, education and so forth. The theme of power linked all these areas of inquiry, and political power appeared as just one form of this, and in Foucault's view one whose importance has been somewhat exaggerated. Foucault's observations on the mobilization of power outside political institutions led to broader concern with power in its social context (p.ix).

Clearly the concept of power occupies a central role in political sociology research. Yet it is also true that the meaning of power has depends on the way political sociologists view modern institutions as a whole.

Within political sociology, there has been a tendency to view the exercise of power either as a means for ensuring society's smooth functioning or as a way to radically alter existing power relationships. Indeed, Bottomore (1993) suggests that,

in the political sociology of the past few decades there has been a general opposition between those who are mainly preoccupied with the functioning of existing political institutions, conceived as one element in a social system that tends toward a state of equilibrium; and those who concentrate their attention mainly upon the forces which tend to produce instability and potentialities for change (p.5).

The first approach, known as *functionalism*, views modern institutions as a means for fulfilling social needs. Society is viewed as a means for ensuring that individuals and groups have access to the resources they need for their continued existence. Thus, societies are populated by various institutions and norms that enable people to satisfy fundamental needs (Dowse & Hughs, 1972). Within this framework, institutions, norms, and rules are connected and provide support for the members of a society. Indeed, functionalists believe that modern institutions exert a stabilizing influence on the trajectory of modern society. Bottomore (1993) notes that functionalism,

was especially influential in sociology during the 1950's and conveyed an image of society as an integrated system which is maintained in existence by complementary relationships between its various elements, or sub-systems, and rests ultimately upon a set of common values. It was in terms of this image or model that the notion of 'stable democracies' was propounded, and the same general model shaped much of the discussion of 'development' and 'modernization,' which were conceived largely as a process whereby agrarian societies gradually adapted to the conditions of life, values and institutions of the present-day industrial societies (p.6).

For functionalists, the modernization of societies refers to the movement of these societies towards a state of relative stability. Modern institutions such as the state, school, and family are seen as integral to establishing this stability. Bottomore (1993) notes that, "in this manner, stability was enshrined as the highest political value, most fully exemplified in the politics of the democratic industrial societies" (p.6). Democratic societies were seen as relying on a shared

system of values ensuring their prosperity in the modern age. For Kourvetaris and Dobratz (1980),

the functionalists (consensus model) conceive of society as a social system. To them the social system consists of well-integrated interdependent parts of social units (institutions, groups, classes, organizations). Both the structure and the function of each social unit contribute to the harmony and fulfill the needs of the social system. The structural relationship of the parts and processes to the social system in general are viewed by functionalists as complex, and system are held together by shared common values and goals of its members (consensus) (p.5).

Functionalists see society as an interconnected whole with various institutions linked by a shared system of values and beliefs. This common foundation enables individuals and groups to focus on similar goals. In this sense, society becomes a means for forwarding the shared aspirations of a group of people.

For other theorists, society is not a collection of interrelated institutions moving towards stability but a site of internal contradiction perpetuated by a variety of antagonisms endemic to modern capitalistic societies. Within political sociology, these *conflict* theories became particularly prominent during the political crises of the 1960's. During this time period, there was,

a marked renewal of interest in the alternative model, broadly Marxist in inspiration, which takes as its starting point the existence of strains, contradictions and conflicts in all social systems, and treats the maintenance of order and stability as only a partial and temporary (though in historical terms not necessarily short-lived) resolution of the various antagonisms (Bottomore, 1993, p.6).

Unlike the functionalists, conflict theorists emphasized the tensions and contradictions inherent to modern capitalistic institutions. Moreover, they focus on the historical origins of contemporary inequality. For these theorists, power provides a means for maintaining an unequal distribution of resources in the face of growing social unrest. Indeed, Kourvetaris and Dobratz (1980) note that,

the conflict perspective challenges the basic assumptions of the functionalists. Society is not a well integrated social system but one based on conflict and dissensus. Society is held together not by consensus but by coercion. While the functionalists stress stability and shared values as the key functional prerequisites of the system, the conflict theorists stress social change and dissensus as the most dynamic aspects of society (p.5).



Instead of citizens in a democratic society sharing values that ensure the stability of the political process, conflict theorists emphasize the role power plays in preventing the members of a society from recognizing contradictions that may become the impetus for radical social change. Indeed, it is clear that the meaning of democracy is significantly different when the background against which it emerges promotes stability or encourages dissent.

Finally, an important difference between political psychology and political sociology lies in the latter's recognition of the social foundations of scientific inquiry. Political sociologists often focus on the way scientific knowledge is embedded in a specific historical, cultural, and economic context. Dowse and Hughes (1972) argue that,

what was ultimately responsible for the present uneasy separation of the social sciences was a process which has marked academic development in industrial societies for the last century, namely the professionalization of the academic role and the institutionalized differentiation of scholarly activities. No longer is it possible for scholars to receive much the same classical education. Instead specialization begins early and full professional academic license requires many years of apprenticeship within the chosen 'field.' This tendency has its organizational reflection in the increased size and complexity of the institutions of higher learning ... [which have become] large, federally organized institutions, with considerable budgets, and accounting and managerial problems common to extensive business firms (p.1-2).

As we have seen, political sociologists are interested in the way power functions in a variety of social contexts. This makes topics such as the increased pressure on social scientists to specialize in exceedingly narrow areas of study of particular interest to political sociologists. By focusing on the division of labor that often prevents researchers from collaborating with colleagues in neighboring departments, political sociologists draw attention to the way modern institutions play an important role in reproducing some of the dominant features of modern society. In this sense, political sociology exhibits a degree of reflexivity that often seems missing from psychological investigations of political phenomena. This reflexivity enables researchers to reflect on the interdisciplinary foundations of political sociology research:

Social scientists easily forget that they and the subjects they teach are every bit part and parcel of the society which they study. While we would not necessarily argue that this renders them 'invalid,' it does have important repercussions on the nature of the disciplines concerned. For one thing, the compartmentalization of the social sciences has meant the separate self-development of each ... this has meant that some areas of the social sciences, like political sociology, stand uneasily upon academically separated disciplines (Dowse & Hughes, 1972, p.2).

A sociological analysis of the division of academic departments brings a number of issues into focus. By looking at the way power functions in a variety of social contexts, political sociology broadens our understanding of political phenomena. Furthermore, political sociology encourages us to reflect on the cultural, historical, and economic foundations of social science research.

My primary aim in juxtaposing political psychology and political sociology is to introduce some flexibility into the way social scientists approach political research. Contemporary political psychology generally focuses on individual's cognitive processes as explanations of political activity. Political sociology typically looks at the role this political activity plays in the distribution of power between the groups and institutions that constitute modern society. At this time, I would like to explore the implications these two areas have for phenomenological investigations of the political. Integrating this with the analysis in the first chapter will set the stage for the remainder of the present project.

## **Political Phenomenology**

As we have seen from our discussion of political psychology and political sociology, different insights emerge depending on whether our basic unit of analysis is the mental activity of individual minds, or the relationship between groups and institutions. The present project is an attempt to navigate between the individual and society by focusing on the *practices that embody an interpretation of political reality*. In the first chapter, I argue that the movement from epistemology to ontology requires a radically different conception of the

nature of social reality. It requires us to, “rethink interaction in such a way that we can recognize its place in political life” (White, 1989, p.9). Indeed, the movement towards practice enables us to foreground contemporary political practices that may have otherwise been reduced to mental activity or to the macro-level processes of sociological analysis. With the emergence of the concept of practice in social and political theory, new ways of conceptualizing the relationship between the individual and society are beginning to come into focus. Dallmayr (1984) suggests that, “it is possible to discern a subtle shift of attention in contemporary social and political thought: a shift involving a progressive deemphasis of epistemology in favor of pragmatic or “practical” preoccupations” (p.1). Here we see that even in political research, the movement towards practice has encouraged researchers to challenge the epistemological foundations of their disciplines. For Dallmayr (1981),

the literature of social and political science is filled with observations about human action or behavior, and also about the salient features of societies, cultures, and political communities. But the meanings of these terms are rarely explored and, for the most part, remain obscure. Sample questions arising on this level are: What is the significance of action or practice and what is its relationship to behavior? To what extent is social or political practice an outgrowth of human agency or a human subject, and what is the meaning of subjectivity? In what sense can social and political life be said to emerge from human interaction or intersubjectivity? Does intersubjectivity denote an aggregation of human actors, and how is such aggregation intelligible (p.39)?

These questions focus attention on the way our understanding is grounded in everyday practices. Instead of focusing on subjectivity or society, a practice oriented approach attempts to uncover the concrete activities that both reproduce dominant features of modern society and provide a background against which political subjects emerge.

As the present project focuses on practice, it is necessary to reflect on the type of phenomenology adequate to this task. In the first chapter, I argued that a phenomenology grounded in ontological hermeneutics enables us to investigate the background practices that embody an interpretation of social reality. Since this project centers on political practice, it is important that we concentrate on

previous attempts to explore these issues. This brings us to two of the most important intellectual influences on the trajectory of the present project. While Michael Oakeshott and Fred Dallmayr's work covers a number of the issues explored in the first part of this project, their insights are particularly relevant to the intersection of practice, politics, and phenomenology.

Much as the history of psychology records a transition from behavioral to cognitive explanations of human activity, researchers and theorists interested in political phenomenon have also focused on the relative merits of these approaches. For Oakeshott, neither approach appears particularly well suited for investigating political activity. Indeed, his work can be understood as an attempt to develop an alternative to either behavioral or cognitive explanations of political activity. Oakeshott (1962) begins by noting that, "every science, every art, every practical activity requiring skill of any sort, indeed every human activity whatsoever, involves knowledge. And, universally, this knowledge is of two sorts, both of which are always involved in any actual activity" (p.7). He refers to the first form as technical knowledge. This sort of knowledge can be,

formulated into rules which are, or may be, deliberately learned, remembered, and, as we say, put into practice; but whether or not it is, or has been, precisely formulated, its chief characteristic is that it is susceptible of precise formulation, although special skill and insight may be required to give it that formulation (Oakeshott, 1962, p.7).

For Oakeshott, people possess technical knowledge when they identify a rule governing a particular situation and apply that rule when the relevant situation arises. The important point about this sort of knowledge is that it can be expressly formulated so that once it has been learned, it is only up to the individual to execute the rule in an appropriate context. Indeed, whenever people use a technique to do any sort of activity – from baking a cake to testing a scientific hypothesis – they are necessarily drawing on technical knowledge.

On the other hand, people also draw on practical knowledge when they participate in a variety of activities. Oakeshott (1962) argues that this form of knowledge,

exists only in use, is not reflective and (unlike technique) cannot be formulated in rules. This does not mean, however, that it is an esoteric sort of knowledge. It means only that the method by which it may be shared and becomes common knowledge is not the method of formulated doctrine. And if we consider it from this point of view, it would not, I think, be misleading to speak of it as traditional knowledge. In every activity this sort of knowledge is also involved; the mastery of any skill, the pursuit of any concrete activity is impossible without it (p.8).

The primary difference between technical and practical knowledge is that the latter cannot be formulated as an explicit rule. As such, the acquisition of practical knowledge does not involve the transfer of specific rules but emerges through direct participation in the relevant activities. Furthermore, Oakeshott notes that the concept of “tradition” may be helpful in understanding the nature of practical knowledge. Thus, although each of us is embedded within a variety of traditions (ex. America, psychology, quantitative research, etc.), our knowledge of these traditions cannot be expressed in the form of an explicit rule. Indeed, our understanding of these traditions and our ability to successfully participate in activities associated with these traditions comes from our *participating* in these traditions. Oakeshott (1962) notes that,

practical knowledge can neither be taught nor learned, but only imparted and acquired. It exists only in practice, and the only way to acquire it is by apprenticeship to a master – not because the master can teach it (he cannot), but because it can be acquired only by continuous contact with one who is perpetually practicing it. In the arts and in natural science what normally happens is that the pupil, in being taught and in learning the technique from his master, discovers himself to have acquired also another sort of knowledge than merely technical knowledge, without it ever having been precisely imparted and often without being able to say precisely what it is ... a scientist acquires (among other things) the sort of judgment which tells him when his technique is leading him astray and the connoisseurship which enables him to distinguish the profitable from the unprofitable directions to explore (p.11).

For example, let us take the indoctrination of new scholars into an area of scientific inquiry. While emerging researchers are usually required to take courses designed to teach them which research methods are applicable in particular situations, they are also required to conduct their own research under

the direction of a scholar in their area of study. In doing so, they not only acquire technical knowledge such as “do X in circumstance Y”, they also learn a host of skills that cannot be expressed in terms of specific rules or procedures. This practical knowledge comes from participating in a research tradition that cannot be made fully explicit in terms of discrete rules or procedures. Nonetheless, new scholars eventually become senior scholars as a tradition continues without every activity being guided by a scientific rule book.

Although practical knowledge cannot be given precise formulation in terms of discrete rules or procedures, it is possible to recognize this sort of knowledge by paying attention to the practices that embody an understanding of these activities. Indeed, practical knowledge’s, “normal expression is in a customary or traditional way of doing things, or, simply, *in practice*. And this gives it the appearance of imprecision and consequently of uncertainty, of being a matter of opinion, of probability rather than truth” (Oakeshott, 1962, p.10; italics mine). For Oakeshott, the perceived imprecision or uncertainty of practical knowledge should not be used as an argument against its status as a form of knowledge. Rather, the desire to make something fully explicit in terms of rules or procedures signifies an attempt to view all legitimate knowledge as ultimately synonymous with technical knowledge. In other words all knowledge comes to be judged by the extent to which it can be specified in discrete rules and procedures – knowledge *becomes* technical knowledge.

Oakeshott (1962) explores the way technical knowledge has come to occupy a dominant position, specifically in political science, but also more generally in the natural and social sciences. Indeed, his critique of rationalism centers around the privileging of technical over practical reasoning:

Rationalism is the assertion that what I have called practical knowledge is not knowledge at all, the assertion that, properly speaking, there is no knowledge which is not technical knowledge. The Rationalist holds that the only element of knowledge involved in any human activity is technical knowledge, and that what I have called practical knowledge is really only a sort of nescience which would be negligible if it were not positively mischievous. The sovereignty of ‘reason,’ for the Rationalist, means the sovereignty of technique (Oakeshott, 1962, p.11).

The substitution of technical knowledge for knowledge in general is, in Oakeshott's estimation, a result of the influence of "rationalist" doctrines on contemporary scientific research. Indeed, research in political science, sociology, and psychology is often evaluated by assessing the degree to which the research recognizes the "sovereignty of technique." In this case, technical knowledge, "has the aspect of knowledge that can be contained wholly between the two covers of a book, whose application is, as nearly as possible, purely mechanical, and which does not assume a knowledge not itself provided in the technique" (p.11-12).

While descriptions of the way individuals interpret social reality are often formulated in terms of the demands of technical knowledge, the latter also exerts a significant influence on the way scientific research is actually conducted. Thus, researchers not only describe social knowledge in terms or rules and procedures, they also follow explicit rules and procedures when conducting their own research. For Oakeshott (1962),

what is required is a 'sure plan,' a new 'way' of understanding, an 'art' or 'method' of inquiry, an 'instrument which (like the mechanical aids men use to increase the effectiveness of their natural strength) shall supplement the weakness of the natural reason: in short, what is required is a formulated technique of inquiry (p.14)

Oakeshott singles out the philosophers Bacon and Descartes as two of the most vocal advocates of the "sovereignty of technique." Indeed, he suggests that Descartes' intellectual journey is grounded in the belief that, "certain knowledge can spring up only in an emptied mind; the technique of research begins with an intellectual purge" (Oakeshott, 1962, p.16).

Thus, it is not only the social actor who possesses a knowledge that can be formulated in rules and procedures but researchers must also follow specific procedures if they are ever to be able to arrive at certain knowledge. For Oakeshott, this represents the triumph of technical knowledge over all other forms of knowledge. Indeed, he notes that,

the history of Rationalism is not only the history of the gradual emergence and definition of this new intellectual character; it is, also, the history of the invasion of every department of intellectual activity by the doctrine of the sovereignty of technique (Oakeshott, 1962, p.17).

In both the conduct of research and the knowledge that is sought, technical knowledge has come to be understood as the only form of knowledge worthy of being called scientific. Moreover, knowledge that cannot be formulated in terms of specific rules or scientific practices that cannot be instantiated in terms of discrete procedures are ultimately viewed as obstacles to scientific progress. For Oakeshott, this is an error that is in drastic need of correction. He notes that,

the precise formulation of rules of inquiry endangers the success of the inquiry by exaggerating the importance of method ... the significance of Rationalism is not its recognition of technical knowledge, but its failure to recognize any other: its philosophical error lies in the certainty it attributes to technique and in its doctrine of the sovereignty of technique; its practical error lies in its belief that nothing but benefit can come from making conduct self-conscious (Oakeshott, 1962, p.20).

By paying excessive attention to methodological issues, the social sciences have failed to recognize the extent to which our knowledge is embedded within everyday practices. Our inability to formulate these practices in terms or rules or procedures is an indication of the nature of this knowledge and the dominance technical knowledge exercises both in the natural and social sciences.

Oakeshott believes that this situation is particularly pronounced in the realm of politics where rationalism maintains a firm grip on the boundaries of legitimate scientific research:

That all contemporary politics are deeply infected with Rationalism will be denied only by those who choose to give the infection another name. Not only are our political vices rationalistic, but so also are our political virtues. Our projects are, in the main, rationalist in purpose and character; but what is more significant, our whole attitude of mind in politics is similarly determined (Oakeshott, 1962, p.21).

Indeed, it is particularly within the realm of “political education,” that Oakeshott recognizes an excessive focus on technical knowledge and a failure to grasp the more practical aspects of human understanding. His discussion of political education is particularly illuminating as it not only challenges our understanding of the development of political ideas, but it also offers a novel role for these ideas in political activity. For the purposes of exploring political education, Oakeshott (1962) sees politics as,



the activity of attending to the general arrangements of a set of people whom chance or choice have brought together. In this sense, families, clubs, and learned societies have their own politics ... as we have come to understand it, the activity is one in which every member of the group who is neither a child nor a lunatic has some part and some responsibility. With us it is, at one level or another, a universal activity (p.112)

This should be viewed less as a strict definition of politics and more as an invitation to focus on the “general arrangements” or practices that embody an interpretation of political reality. In changing our focus, we shift from the minds of individual actors and technical knowledge to the political activities and practical understanding permeating the political.

Oakeshott focuses on the concept of “political ideology” as a means for exploring the role technical knowledge plays in contemporary political research. Indeed, it is here that he believes the emphasis on abstract principles and discrete procedures is particularly prominent. For Oakeshott (1962), a political ideology, purports to be an abstract principle, or set of related abstract principles, which has been independently premeditated. It supplies in advance of the activity of attending to the arrangements of a society a formulated end to be pursued, and in so doing it provides a means of distinguishing between those desires which ought to be encouraged and those which ought to be suppressed or redirected (p.116).

Within political research, the concept of ideology is often used to explain why individuals or groups engage in certain political activities or behaviors. The strength of the concept of ideology supposedly lay in its ability to direct the concrete behaviors of political actors. In other words, one behaves in a particular way because one possesses a particular political ideology. Variations in political behavior can be attributed to divergent political ideologies which may postulate different concrete political goals. Oakeshott (1962) argues that the concept of ideology acquires its explanatory force by asserting that political activity is preceded by,

knowledge of the chosen political ideology – a knowledge of the ends to be pursued, a knowledge of what we want to do ... the common characteristic of all the kinds of knowledge required is that they maybe, and should be, gathered in advance of the activity of attending to the arrangements of a society... It is supposed that a political ideology is the product of intellectual premeditation and that, because it is a body of principles not

itself in debt to the activity of attending to the arrangements of society, it is able to determine and to guide the direction of that activity. (p.117-118)

As we have seen in our discussion of political psychology, this is precisely the role that political attitudes and beliefs are supposed to play in explaining political activity. In this case, political ideology was viewed as a cognitive bias coloring the way an individual perceives political reality. Thus, to say that someone possesses a political ideology is to say that mental representations and cognitive processes guide the way political actors interpret various aspects of that reality.

Yet Oakeshott wants to point out that this way of viewing political activity may be motivated by rationalism's failure to recognize the role practical knowledge plays in our everyday political interactions:

So far from a political ideology being the quasi-divine parent of political activity, it turns out to be its earthly stepchild. Instead of an independently premeditated scheme of ends to be pursued, it is a system of ideas abstracted from the manner in which people have been accustomed to go about the business of attending to the arrangements of their societies. The pedigree of every political ideology shows it to be the creature, not of premeditation in advance of political activity, but of meditation upon a manner of politics. In short, political activity comes first and a political ideology follows after ... (p.119)

For Oakeshott, political ideologies are abstractions that are ultimately derived from our everyday political practices. Yet contemporary science has seen fit to privilege the abstraction over the concrete political engagements. Clearly, Oakeshott's critique of the role rationalism plays in politics is similar to Heidegger's notion of being-in-the-world. In both cases, we are primordially engaged in the activities of a community and it is only in a derivative fashion that something like a solitary political subject emerges. Indeed, Oakeshott (1962) emphasizes this point by exploring the relationship between scientific practices and research.

The truth is that only a man who is already a scientist can formulate a scientific hypothesis; that is, an hypothesis is not an independent invention capable of guiding scientific inquiry, but a dependent supposition which arise as an abstraction from within already existing scientific activity (p.119)

Scientific research is always embedded within a collection of practices that enable researchers to formulate a scientific hypothesis. In this case, it is not the hypothesis that guides scientific research but the concrete practices of which the hypothesis is an abstraction. The hypothesis does not guide the research but instead embodies in derivative form the practices that are scientific research. Moreover, Oakeshott (1962) suggests that,

even when the specific hypothesis has in this manner been formulated, it is inoperative as a guide to research without constant reference to the traditions of scientific inquiry from which it was abstracted. The concrete situation does not appear until the specific hypothesis, which is the occasion of empiricism being set to work, is recognized as itself the creature of knowing how to conduct a scientific inquiry (p.119)

In this sense, a hypothesis only makes sense against a background of scientific research practices and these research practices are as much a part of science as the explicit formulation of rules and procedures.

Oakeshott's focus on scientific practice is meant to demonstrate the error of placing a theoretical abstraction ahead of concrete scientific activities. Although these practices cannot be translated into technical knowledge, they play a fundamental role in the conduct of scientific research. He suggests that the situation is much the same for political ideology. Scientific hypotheses and political ideology are derived from concrete scientific and political practice. Oakeshott (1962) argues that political ideology,

must be understood, not as an independently premeditated beginning for political activity, but as knowledge (abstract and generalized) of a concrete manner of attending to the arrangements of a society. The catechism which sets out the purposes to be pursued merely abridges a concrete manner of behavior in which those purposes are already hidden. It does not exist in advance of political activity, and by itself it is always an insufficient guide. Political enterprises, the ends to be pursued, the arrangements to be established (all the normal ingredients of political ideology), cannot be premeditated in advance of a manner of attending to the arrangements of a society; what we do, and more over what we want to do, is the creature of how we are accustomed to conduct our affairs ... (p.120).

Oakeshott (1962) concludes by suggesting that, "what has to be learned is not an abstract idea, or a set of tricks, not even a ritual, but a concrete, coherent manner

of living in all its intricateness” (p.129). I believe this view is congruent with the transition from epistemological to ontological hermeneutics outlined in the first chapter. Instead of focusing on the lifeworld of an individual subject or the power dynamics within modern society, the present project focuses on the practices that embody an interpretation of political reality.

While Oakeshott has contributed much to our understanding of the relationship between politics and practice, it is important for the present project to integrate his insights into a phenomenological orientation. For Dallmayr (1984), by focusing on concrete political practices and the “general arrangement” of a group of people, Oakeshott, “sought to preserve the wholeness of practical experience: the synthesis of thought and reality, of agency and world” (p.62). Indeed, Dallymayr’s project can be viewed as an attempt to integrate this insight into Heidegger’s interest in the ontological foundations of human understanding. As White (1989) notes,

to found analysis on “subjectivity” of any sort means that one has already presupposed the validity of that binary distinction, so basic to Western thought, between subject and object. And that separation itself already orients philosophical reflection on politics in precisely those directions Dallmayr wanted to avoid (p.5).

Dallmayr’s work emerges at the crossroads of politics, practice and phenomenology. One of his most systematic attempts to explore the relationship between these three issues can be found in the *Twilight of Subjectivity* (1981). Dallmayr begins by noting that,

the theoretical perspective animating this volume might be labeled critical post-phenomenology; but it might also (and perhaps better) be described as a practical ontology – provided ontology is not confused with an ontic objectivism and the term practical is not narrowly or exclusively identified with subjective-intentional activity (Dallmayr, 1981, p.5).

As we have already seen, Heidegger’s critique of transcendental phenomenology centers on the role accorded to subjectivity in Western thought. In Heidegger’s view, Dasein is fundamentally being-in-the-world such that singling out subjectivity already grants too much to the epistemological project. If phenomenology is to recognize Dasein’s indissoluble unity, it is necessary for it to

become ontological. Dallmayr calls his investigation a *practical ontology* in order to align his interest in political practice with Heidegger's ontological investigation. Moreover, Dallmayr suggests that his project also shares a number of similarities with investigations grounded in French phenomenology, the work of Merleau-Ponty and Foucault being notable examples.

In a fashion similar to Heidegger and Oakeshott, Dallmayr argues that 'practice' should not be viewed simply as a theoretical abstraction that is applied in a concrete situation. He notes that a practice, "is not the application of a prior theoretical blueprint, nor does it furnish (in a narrowly inductive vein) a reservoir of cognitive lessons" (Dallmayr, 1984, p.4). Indeed, he argues that Heidegger's movement away from epistemology and toward ontology throws the traditional distinction between theory and practice into disarray. In his view, practice should not be seen as the application of an idea residing within the mind but as an indication of our immersion in a world of practical affairs. Indeed, to formulate it in this way is perhaps not strong enough. It is not that a subject is immersed in a world that opens up to surround her but that a distinction between subject and object is a derivative understanding of our fundamental being-in-the-world. Dallmayr's point is that person and world are not two entities but an indissoluble unity such that an emphasis on subjectivity already presumes the legitimacy of the subject/object dichotomy.

In the first chapter, we discussed the difference between Husserl's focus on the lifeworld and Heidegger's notion of being-in-the-world. While the former takes subjectivity as its presupposition, the latter calls into question the legitimacy of the distinction between subject and object or person and world. Dallmayr explores this issue by suggesting that we recognize variations in the way theorists have used the lifeworld for their own investigations. He argues that these variations typically fall somewhere between "weak" and "strong" conceptions of the lifeworld:

In the weak conception, the life-world is basically viewed as a preamble to reason or rational reflection, as a non- or pre-rational antechamber to cognition – but an

antechamber that pliantly submits to thought (as the result of an inherent affinity between prereason and reason) (Dallmayr, 1989, p.26).

Dallmayr identifies Husserl as the primary example of a theorist who relies on a weak conception of the lifeworld. Within his approach, the basic unit of analysis remains the individual ego. Although Husserl recognizes that all scientific understanding is fundamentally grounded in this lifeworld, it is still through the process of constitution that a world emerges for an individual subject. As we have already noted, Husserl's transcendental phenomenology relies on examples from visual perception to demonstrate how objects of consciousness come into view. Indeed, Dallmayr (1989) notes that,

the focus on things or objects is justified by Husserl by the (normal) primacy of visual perception in human experience. More importantly, the focus in his view is able to surmount or undercut cultural or idiosyncratic variability and to lay bare generic or universal structures of the life-world (p.31).

By focusing on things in the world as objects of consciousness, Husserl endeavors to identify invariant features of the lifeworld so that its essential structure can come into view. Because Husserl believes that all scientific knowledge is ultimately grounded in the lifeworld, discerning a universal structure would enable him to provide a secure foundation for all forms of scientific understanding.

For Dallmayr (1989), this “weak” version of the lifeworld should be juxtaposed with a “strong” version of the lifeworld:

In the strong version, by contrast, the life-world functions no longer as a mere precursor of reason or as its relatively immature or embryonic modality, but rather emerges as an integral dimension of thought, a dimension impinging powerfully on the status of rational or cognitive claims (not by nullifying them, but by changing their sense) (p.26).

The movement from epistemology to ontology that I outlined in the first chapter parallels Dallmayr's observation that, since Heidegger, theorists have usually found themselves oscillating somewhere between a version of the lifeworld grounded in human subjectivity and an understanding of the lifeworld grounded in what has been referred to as practice. This “strong” version of the lifeworld, which I take to be synonymous with Heidegger's being-in-the-world, challenges

the claim that understanding should be viewed within a strictly egological framework. Indeed, Dallmayr (1989) notes that,

presenting human Dasein as a “being-in-the-world” (or a being in integral union with the world), *Being and Time* from the outset countered the phenomenological construal of the life-world as an incipient subject-object correlation; also, by concentrating on everyday routine activities, the study ... inaugurated a practical or “pragmatic” shift from cognitive or epistemological modes of analysis (p.48).

All of this calls into question the role of subjectivity in contemporary political activity. We need not begin with a solitary individual who, out of a desire to achieve his or her own goals, collaborates with other individuals so that a group begins to exert political pressure. Instead, we can focus on the concrete political practices that embody our primordial immersion within a tradition. For Dallmayr, political research should investigate practices that cannot be reduced to the functioning of individual minds of the power dynamics regulating the relationships between groups and institutions.

Of course, this has a number of implications for the way we view the citizen in a democratic society. Should we view democracy as an idea (even an ideology) that guides the formation of democratic societies? If so, then it seems as if society is conceptualized as an aggregate of individuals who orient themselves according to the idea of a democracy. On the other hand, we can view democracy not as an idea or ideology but instead as an abstraction derived from our everyday political practices. If we link this with the suggestion that subjectivity emerges against the background of a community, the political individual can be seen as the outcome of a political process rather than its origin. At the same time, this becomes problematic in so far as democratic practices such as voting are grounded in the aggregation of individual votes. Perhaps this means that our understanding of democracy, grounded in our everyday political activities, requires substantial revision. In any event, the relationship between the individual and political practices seems to be more problematic than initially imagined.

All of this leads me to the conclusion that phenomenologists should be weary of following the lead of either political psychology or political sociology. In both cases, the *political* is usually viewed as an additional domain for consolidating the explanatory power of the more fundamental disciplines. In other words, researchers ask whether psychological or sociological knowledge remains consistent within political contexts. If so, then each discipline's ability to make general statements about the basic process underlying psychological or societal functioning has been enhanced. I think it is important for phenomenology to avoid traversing the same path. It would be a mistake for phenomenology to treat politics as a domain where phenomenological insights (and more importantly method) can simply be applied. Clearly, a phenomenology that focuses on subjectivity and consciousness would approach the political in a very different way from a practical/ontological orientation that calls into question the subject/object dichotomy.

In the next section, I would like to outline the specific course taken in the present project. I intended to show that the move from epistemology to ontology requires a radical shift in the way we understand the role of *method* in the social sciences.



## CHAPTER III

### METHODS

In the first chapter, I stressed that *epistemological* approaches to human experience and behavior fail to recognize their *ontological* commitment to an individual knower interpreting social reality in one fashion or another. The movement towards practice was meant as a means for applying Heidegger's insights into the nature of being-in-the-world, an insight that has important implications for epistemological approaches to human understanding. One of the most important implications of this transition revolves around the role of method in the human sciences. If we no longer view interpretation as an affair of consciousness, what can we make of the methodological procedures that aim to eliminate the "prejudices" of individual knowers? Moreover, what role does understanding play in the human sciences? So important was Heidegger's insight into the relationship between understanding and the human sciences that one of his most influential students, Hans-Georg Gadamer, devoted a dense volume to the issue of *Truth and Method* (1989). Indeed, given the nature of Heidegger's transition from epistemology to ontology, is it even feasible to speak of a method in terms of the present project?

The difficulty in identifying discrete procedures for the present study is tied to the way *method* is generally understood in the social sciences. More often than not, a method enables researchers to distance themselves from the phenomenon under investigation. This seeks to ensure that subjective biases do not interfere with a researcher's ability to discover objectively valid knowledge. In this sense, the use of a scientific method provides researchers with a common language for adjudicating between competing knowledge claims. Indeed, when scientific research is disputed, it is often the case that this dispute centers on issues of method.

As we will recall from our discussion of paradigms, Kuhn (1970) argued that scientific practitioners are not *necessarily* united by an explicit rule that governs the way they conduct research but instead relate to one another through

a set of scientific practices that embody an understanding of the phenomenon of interest. For the present analysis, this means that understanding should not be viewed as a collection of mental representations that govern the way an individual interprets a particular situation but as a collection of activities that embody an interpretation of that reality. In other words, the methodological prescription that procedures should remove subjective biases already represents a specific interpretation of human knowledge and existence. In fact, the methodological priority of “alienated distancing” (Ricoeur, 1991) embodies a social practice – one that already assumes an epistemological stance regarding the nature of human understanding. As Gadamer (1989) observes,

the recognition that all understanding inevitably involves some prejudice gives the hermeneutical problem its real thrust. In light of this insight it appears that historicism, despite its critique of rationalism and of natural law philosophy, is based on the modern Enlightenment and unwittingly shares its prejudices. And there is one prejudice of the Enlightenment that defines its essence: the fundamental prejudice of the Enlightenment is the prejudice against prejudice itself, which denies tradition its power (Gadamer, 1989, p.270).

It is not the removal of prejudice that grants us a privileged view of reality. Indeed, it is only through our participation in shared practices that something like understanding can emerge in the first place.

The challenge to the present study is to make the various aspects of this research as explicit as possible without generating a set of procedures that aspire to become a prescription for conducting research. Thus, it is necessary to, “steer between the free spontaneity of a no-method approach and the rigid structures of an all-method approach” (Kvale, 1996, p.13). Moreover, the way we understand the concept of *method* should change to fit the nature of the present analysis. As many researchers have noted, one way of generating a novel insight within a traditional domain is to alter the metaphor structuring our understanding of a particular phenomenon (Kuhn, 1979; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Pepper, 1970, Pollio, Smith & Pollio, 1990). At this juncture, I would like to explore the implications of altering the metaphor that typically guides empirical research.

For Kvale (1996), altering the metaphor that dominates empirical research changes the way we approach the qualitative research interview. Within traditional approaches to research, the interviewer is often viewed as a *miner*. When this is the case,

knowledge is understood as buried metal and the interviewer is a miner who unearths the valuable metal. Some miners seek objective facts to be quantified, others seek nuggets of *essential meaning*. In both conceptions the knowledge is waiting in the subjects' interior to be uncovered, uncontaminated by the miner. The interviewer digs nuggets of data or meanings out of a subject's pure experiences, unpolluted by any leading questions ... The knowledge nuggets remain constant through the transformations of appearances on the conveyor belt from the oral stage to the written storage. By analysis, the objective facts and the *essential meanings* are drawn out by various techniques and molded into their definitive form. Finally the value of the end product, its degree of purity, is determined by correlating it with an objective, external, real world or to a realm of subjective, inner, authentic experiences (Kvale, 1996, p. 3-4; italics mine).

When the researcher is viewed in this way, method becomes a means for preventing subjective biases from distorting an accurate perception of reality. Indeed, this view of the role of the researcher is grounded in epistemology in so far as the knower is placed in a specific relationship with the phenomenon under investigation. Yet this is not the only way to approach scientific research. As a number of theorists have noted (Gadamer, 1989; Gergen, 1999; Hazelrigg, 1989; Heidegger, 1962; Kvale, 1996; Smith & Deemer, 2000), one can also view research in a way that does not see the individual's horizon as strictly detrimental to developing a rigorous understanding of a particular phenomenon. Instead, the researcher may play an integral role in the research as a *traveler* navigating new vistas of experience. As Kvale (1996) notes,

the interviewer-traveler wanders through the landscape and enters into conversation with the people encountered. The traveler explores the main domains of the country, as unknown territory or with maps, roaming freely around the territory. The traveler may also deliberately seek specific sites or topics by following a *method*, with the original Greek meaning of "a route that leads to the goal." (p.4)

In this case, method is not a means for distancing the investigator from a particular phenomenon but instead enables the researcher to explore a rich range

of important issues. Through this process, the researcher uncovers aspects of human understanding that may have been overlooked if he or she was confined to an exceedingly rigid methodological framework. In the present study,

what the traveler reporter hears and sees is described qualitatively and is reconstructed as stories to be told to the people of the interviewer's own country, and possibly also to those with whom the interviewer wandered. The potentialities of meanings in the original stories are differentiated and unfolded through the traveler's interpretations; the tales are remolded into new narratives, which are convincing in their aesthetic form and are validated through their impact upon the listeners (Kvale, 1996, p.4).

For the present project, I will draw on some of the developments in hermeneutics and phenomenology that I outlined in the first chapter in order to explore the practices that embody an interpretation of the political reality

A number of texts focus on the proper procedures for conducting phenomenological research (Aanstoos, 1984; Churchill & Wertz, 2001; Colaizzi, 1978; Giorgi, 1970, 1975, 1985; Giorgi, Fischer & Murray, 1975; Kvale, 1983, 1996; Moustakas, 1994; Polkinghorne, 1989; Pollio, Graves & Arfken, 2006; Pollio, Henley & Thompson, 1997; Pollio & Ursiak, 2006; Thomas & Pollio, 2001; von Eckartsberg, 1986; Wertz, 1984, 2005). The present project is an attempt to integrate insights from these sources while also remaining committed to a focus on the practices that embody an interpretation of political reality. As such, the procedures employed in the present project are somewhat different from traditional phenomenological approaches that attempt to derive an *essential structure* from participant's reports of a particular experience. Congruent with the theoretical orientation outlined in the first chapter, this project attempts to move away from a focus on consciousness (epistemology) and towards an understanding of concrete political practice (ontology). In the remainder of this chapter, I describe and justify the procedures I use in the present study. The overall structure of this project corresponds to Kvale's (1996) seven stages of a qualitative research interview: (1) thematizing (2) designing (3) interviewing (4) transcribing (5) analyzing (6) verifying and (7) reporting. We will take each one of these stages in turn.

## **Thematizing**

In this stage, the researcher clarifies the *content* and the *purpose* of the research study (Kvale, 1996). The point is to ensure that the research question and theoretical orientation of the study are as explicit as possible. The present study focuses on political practices. Within this framework, the term “practice” is used to denote the intersection between individual consciousness and everyday practical involvement (being-in-the-world) in social, historical, and cultural activities. These activities need not be restricted to observable behavior – instead, the focus on practice is intended to prevent a hasty reduction to situational or dispositional factors, what some have termed the struggle between “system and lifeworld” (Habermas, 1987) or “agency and structure” (Giddens, 1984). The analysis presented earlier was intended to clarify the theoretical orientation of the entire project. Drawing on insights from hermeneutic phenomenology, the present study focuses on the concrete political practices that people discuss when asked to reflect on salient political situations. Instead of viewing interpretations of political reality as residing within the minds of individuals, I will look at the way these practices embody an interpretation of the political. In this sense, the movement is away from individual consciousness and epistemology and towards practices and ontology. The primary research question is: *When people are asked to discuss concrete political situations, what practices/activities are particularly salient?*

## **Designing**

For the present study, I decided that an unstructured phenomenological interview would be the best way to explore salient political practices. These interviews encourage participants to choose situations that they believe are particularly relevant (Fontana & Frey, 2000). I will have much more to say about specific aspects of the interview in a moment.

I selected research participants based on two criteria. To begin with, participants needed to have an interest in discussing salient political situations.

Moreover, participants need to be able to provide a thorough description of their experiences (Creswell, 1998; Polkinghorne, 1989; Pollio, Graves & Arfken, 2006; Pollio, Henley & Thompson, 1997). Based on these criteria, I selected a total of 12 participants to interview for the present study. The number of participants reflects the point at which participants description of salient political situations reached a point of saturation and minimal novel practices were introduced in the interviews (Guest, Bunce & Johnson, 2006; Kvale, 1996; Pollio, Henley & Thompson, 1997). Moreover, the number of research participants is congruent with Kvale's (1996) claim that, "in current interview studies, the number of interviews tend to be around 15 +/- 10. This number may be due to a combination of the time and resources available for the investigation and of the law of diminishing returns" (p.102).

Participants ranged in age from 20 to 35. All participants had at least some college education. Participants came from various occupations including undergraduate and graduate students, college professor, bartender, and pharmaceutical salesperson. All 12 participants reside in the United States with 9 living in the southeast, 2 in the north, and 1 in the south.

## **Interviewing**

As already noted, the format of the interview was *unstructured* so that participants were given maximum flexibility to describe in as much detail as possible salient political situations. In an unstructured interview, "a first, topic-introducing question is asked and the remainder of the interview proceeds as a follow-up and expansion on the interviewee's answer to the first questions" (Kvale, 1996, p.127). All participants were given the same initial research question: *Can you tell me about some times when politics stood-out to you?* The question was designed to enable participants to describe specific situations where politics were figural. Once an experience had been fully explored, I asked participants to describe any additional situations where politics stood-out to them.

While the initial research questioned encouraged participants to describe in detail salient political situations, I formulated follow-up questions during the interview that were designed to encourage participants to continue to talk about these experiences. These follow-up questions typically took one of three forms: (1) concretizing (2) elaborating or (3) interpreting. The following passage is an example of a concretizing follow-up question:

- P: It wasn't even really--it wasn't elections; I'm thinking I guess how like the school systems works, like I was trying to graduate high school early and I had to go through certain people that knew certain other people; so I guess more the politics of being connected to the right people.
- I: **Can you think about a time when that happened?**
- P: Oh it was just--I was trying to go--I had to get it approved by the County Board; so I had to ...

In this case, the follow up question encouraged the participant to focus on a concrete situation when her sense of having to be “connected to the right people” was salient. These questions were designed to move participants from the abstract to the concrete, though insights gleaned from abstract reflection were not excluded from the analysis. Another type of follow-up question encouraged participants to go into greater detail regarding a particular aspect of their experience:

- P: ... and so in doing that paper, I like--I ended up writing like a really long autobiographical section and I think after finishing that though, it kind of--it gave me a sense of more coherence to my political views.
- I: **Can you say a little bit more about that?**
- P: Yeah; what that sense of coherence is about?
- I: Uh-hm.
- P: It just--it--it was--it seemed like--like it made sense that I believed what I believed in terms of my life experiences. Whereas before ...

Here the follow-up question “Can you say a little bit more about that?” encourages the participant to expand on a particularly salient experience. Finally, the last type of follow-up question provides an interpretation of a participant's experience which participants were free to either accept or refute. In the following example, the participant agrees with my interpretation:

P: Well I mean it's--it's a fine line because I mean you draft your strategy and you're painting a picture. When you go through the explanation of what's going on with the customer you emphasize things more and de-emphasize other things, because you're trying to create a panic or a dire situation. You want them to go you know what; if we don't do this which is the decision we want then we're going to lose this account or we're going to lose this negotiation. And at sales we ultimately can't do anything unless the Business Group signs off on it, so we have to paint that--paint that picture.

I: **I see; so you're saying that you kind of--you all draft a sort of strategy and that you emphasize certain things and de-emphasize others kind of trying to get people to come to the conclusions that you already...?**

P: Exactly, yeah.

In another case, the participant modified and expanded on my interpretation of their experience:

P: ... and this whole fusion of like God, soldier, and President; you see bumper stickers that say *support--I support our President and our troops*, and it's almost like it's unpatriotic to criticize the President--no, it's un--it's almost like spitting in the face of soldiers if you have a problem with Bush right now. That's almost how I feel like public debate has been cast.

I: **Uh-hm; that's interesting. So for you these things get linked up together like God, soldiers, country, and you know politics and they all get kind of confused as one another so they inhibit you from perhaps criticizing things that you'd like to criticize?**

P: I don't know if they inhibited me from criticizing them. I just know I have like a visceral emotional reaction to what I feel like is a cluster of values that--that the opposing or that--that many people here have that I don't like at all that feel are negative and harmful.

In this case, the participant indicated that my interpretation was not entirely accurate. Moreover, he provides his own interpretation in order to clarify the point he was trying to convey. As Kvale (1996) has notes, these interactions suggest that,

the research interview is an interpersonal situation, a conversation between two partners about a theme of mutual interest. It is a specific form of human interaction in which knowledge evolves through a dialogue. The interaction is neither as anonymous and



neutral as when a subject responds to a survey questionnaire, nor as personal and emotional as a therapeutic interview (p.125)

Within the present study, the interview involves two people interested in exploring salient political situations.

## **Transcribing**

Interviews were recorded and transcribed to facilitate a subsequent analysis of the data. For Kvale (1996), “transcribing the interviews from an oral to a written mode structures the interview conversations in a form amenable for closer analysis. Structuring the material into texts facilitates an overview and is in itself a beginning analysis” (p.168-169). In this case, the transcripts enable me to make comparisons in terms of content and form within as well as between specific interviews.

All interviews were transcribed verbatim, leaving in place such things as grammatical errors and including instances when those involved in the interview sighed, laughed, or produced any sounds relevant to the interview. This form of transcription was a compromise between approaches that focus on the discursive and conversational aspects of an interview (Atkinson & Heritage, 1984; Potter, 1996; Potter & Wetherell, 1987) and a desire to transcribe interviews into a smooth prose that focuses the reader’s attention on content and form rather than grammatical errors. It is especially important to note that the transcription of a research interview already represents an interpretation of what the researcher views as relevant for a particular investigation. Indeed, Kvale (1996) suggests that, “transcriptions are not copies or representations of some original reality, they are interpretive constructions that are useful tools for given purposes” (p.165). For the present project, the purpose of the interview is to uncover those practices that embody an interpretation of political reality.

## Analyzing

With the interviews transformed into text, it was possible for me to begin the analysis. It is important to note that a qualitative approach to data analysis is often very different from the statistical analyses used in quantitative research. Indeed, the *circular* nature of a qualitative analysis is perhaps one of its defining features. For Addison (1999),

analysis is not just one step in a linear progression that comes soon after data collection and sometime before writing up the results. Good qualitative research is always more of a circular process than a linear one. Analysis does not fall outside this circular or spiral form. Analysis is part of a larger interpretive process (p.147).

As I have already noted, interpretation is not simply an additional mental activity contributed by an individual researcher but instead embodies what Heidegger (1962) refers to as a way of being-in-the-world. Within the present project, interpretation is a part of the research question, selection of participants, interview process, transcription, and data analysis. As a researcher, this interpretation is embodied in the actual practice of research as I participate in and challenge the research tradition of phenomenological, hermeneutic, qualitative research. Indeed, in this research practice, I reproduce and transform various aspects of the qualitative research tradition. As Kvale (1996) notes, “a recognition of the pervasiveness of interpretation throughout an entire interview inquiry may counteract a common overemphasis on methods of analysis as the one way to find the meaning of interviews” (p.205). Once again, interpretation need not be viewed as the product of an individual knower but can instead be understood as a practice that lies at the intersection of the individual and his or her immersion within a particular tradition.

Clearly, qualitative research represents an emerging approach to understanding a variety of experiences, discourses, and practices. Within this tradition, a number of texts provide overviews for the analysis of qualitative data (Crabtree & Miller, 1999; Creswell, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Huberman & Miles, 2002; Kvale, 1996; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Pollio, Graves & Arfken, 2006; Silverman, 1993; Wolcott, 1994). As I have noted, the present analysis not

only draws on techniques developed within the qualitative tradition but it also explores alternative ways of approaching interpretation and subjectivity. In the present analysis, I will attempt to articulate as clearly as possible the various stages I traveled through in order to grasp the practices that embody an understanding of political reality. As Giorgi (1975) notes,

the chief point to be remembered with this type of research is not so much whether another position with respect to the data could be adopted (this point is granted beforehand), but whether a reader, adopting the same viewpoint as articulated by the researcher, can also see what the researcher saw, whether or not he agrees with it. That is the key criterion for qualitative research (p.96).

It is important to note that the present analysis is guided by a specific question that has been put to the data. In traditional phenomenological research, the question usually focuses on identifying the invariant features of participants' descriptions of their lifeworlds. These features are used to construct a structure reflecting the essence of the phenomenon under investigation. Moreover, a discursive psychologist, ethnomethodologist, or discourse analysts may focus on very specific features of the dialogue such as turn-taking behavior, pauses, and a variety of other discursive features. The point is that the interviews do not furnish a particular means of analysis but instead assume a particular role within the horizon of a specific research project. In this case, I am looking at the interviews in terms of the practices that embody an interpretation of political reality.

It is also important to note that the present approach to phenomenology is significantly different from transcendental phenomenological approaches. Thus, traditional terms such as the "phenomenological reduction" begin to take on a different meaning when placed in the context of the present project. In *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology* (1982), Heidegger explicitly distinguishes his approach to the phenomenological reduction from that of his mentor. Indeed, he even suggests that the term 'reduction' is itself being adopted in its "literal wording" rather than its "substantive intent:"

For Husserl, phenomenological reduction, which he worked out for the first time expressly in the *Ideas Toward a Pure Phenomenology and Phenomenological Philosophy* (1913), is the method of leading phenomenological vision from the natural

attitude of the human being whose life is involved in the world of things and persons back to the transcendental life of consciousness and its noetic-noematic experiences, in which objects are constituted as correlates of consciousness (Heidegger, 1988, p.21).

Husserl promotes phenomenology as an eidetic science capable of identifying invariant features or essences that can provide a solid foundation for the special sciences. This focus on consciousness makes Husserl's phenomenology epistemological in so far as objects are apprehended by an individual ego. On the contrary, Heidegger's phenomenology is *ontological* so that the phenomenological reduction takes on an entirely different character:

For us phenomenological reduction means leading phenomenological vision back from the apprehension of a being, whatever may be the character of that apprehension, to the understanding of the being of this being (projecting upon the way it is unconcealed). Like every other scientific method, phenomenological method grows and changes due to the progress made precisely with its help into the subjects under investigation. Scientific method is never a technique. As soon as it becomes one it has fallen away from its own proper nature (Heidegger, 1988, p.21).

For the present project, the *Being* that is concealed refers to the everyday practices that embody an interpretation of political existence and it will be the aim of the present project, to the extent that it is possible, to bring these practices into the foreground. This is what it means to view phenomenology as "unconcealment."

Perhaps the most important insight emerging from my initial perusal of the transcripts involves the recognition that people often discussed similar practices, situations, and events when describing concrete political experiences. Thus, it became important to gain a sense of the types of practices that were prevalent in these descriptions. Let me begin with my initial reading of the transcripts.

After all interviews were transcribed, the first step involves reading through the transcripts to become familiar with the interviews as a whole. During this process, I took notes on my reactions to the transcripts. These reactions typically took the form of observations regarding the similarities and differences between specific portions of the transcripts.

In the next step, I read the transcripts again but this time I summarized portions of the text in my own words. This has been referred to as *meaning condensation* which entails,

an abridgement of the meanings expressed by the interviewees into shorter formulations. Long statements are compressed into briefer statements in which the main sense of what is said is rephrased in a few words. Meaning condensation thus involves a reduction of large interview texts into briefer, more succinct formulations (Kvale, 1996, p.192).

Take the following passage from the present study:

P: Yeah; or spectacle may not--not be the correct word, but I don't know--something more honorable, less planned and scripted and fake and--I mean maybe that's what you have to be to win an election these days but I don't know ...

Here the participant wants politics to be “more honorable” or “less planned and scripted.” In this case, I summarized the passage with the phrase “Concerned about politics being planned and scripted.” In this stage, the goal is to condense information into more manageable formulations.

In the next step, I read through the meaning condensations in an attempt to identify similarities and differences. Grouping together similar summaries generated categories under which a variety of summaries could be subsumed. In one sense, this represents an extension of the meaning condensation stage although the purpose of the present stage is to group meaning condensations under larger categories. Because the focus of this research is on the way concrete activities embody an interpretation of political reality, the next step involves interpreting these categories within a practice orientation.

At this point, it is important to make a comment regarding the use of *categories* rather than *themes*. Both terms have a wide variety of meanings and often convey different ideas depending on the context in which they are found. The term *category* refers to the classification of specific concepts. For Strauss and Corbin (1990), “this classification is discovered when concepts are compared one against another and appear to pertain to a similar phenomenon. Thus, the concepts are grouped together under a higher order, more abstract concept called a category” (p.61). For the purposes of the present study, a category simply refers to more general cluster of practices that provide a ground for talking about

specific practices in detail. Indeed, political practices have been arranged according to categories to enable the reader to apply the insights gleaned from the present analysis to other domains.

I have reserved the term “theme” for the initial stage of the analysis where I clarify my own aims and the particular research questions to which the present project is devoted. I have purposely avoided using the term theme in the context of the analysis of transcripts in order to distinguish the present project from traditional phenomenological approaches. Within transcendental approaches to phenomenological psychology, the aim is grasp the *essential structure* of an experience, what has sometimes been referred to as “explication” (Polkinghorne, 1989; Van Kaam, 1969). Indeed, For Polkinghorne (1989), “the term *thematization*, borrowed from qualitative research, has also been used to describe this process; in phenomenological research, it denotes that the search for essential structures involves identifying the constituents or themes that appear in the description” (p.51). The present project is an attempt to move away from a focus on the invariant features of the lifeworld and towards the practices that embody an interpretation of reality, what Heidegger refers to as “being-in-the-world.”

The major categories of practices I identified in the present project are (1) media, (2) conventional political activities and (3) political socialization. Although these observations have been divided into ostensibly discrete categories, in actual practice, all of these activities coalesce into an interpretation of the political.

## **Verifying**

Throughout our discussion of the role of method in scientific inquiry, I have attempted to show that while traditional approaches often focus on the way methodological refinements prevent subjective biases from interfering with an accurate representation of reality, this framework already presupposes a specific relationship between an individual knower and a phenomenon of interest. In

other words, as long as these biases are viewed as subjective interpretations and as long as interpretation is understood exclusively as a form of mental activity, it would seem that we remain grounded in epistemology – an approach the present project has sought to challenge. I have argued that by treating, *in practice*, the knower as discrete from the known, epistemology seems to presume what heretofore it has claimed to demonstrate. In other words, the relationship between the knower and the known that Heidegger’s notion of being-in-the-world is intended to critique turns out to be a fundamental assumption guiding contemporary scientific research. Indeed, the epistemological tradition furnishes social scientists with specific criteria for judging the quality of scientific research. Within psychology, research is typically evaluated by three specific criteria: *validity*, *reliability*, and *generalizability*. Moreover, these criteria are often applied as a standard for determining the veridicality of qualitative research in general. As Janesick (2000) notes, “questions addressed to qualitative researchers are constructed from the psychometric paradigm and revolve around the trinity of validity, reliability, and generalizability ...” (p.393). Although I will discuss the relationship between these criteria and the present project in a moment, I will begin by focusing on issues of *validity*, which I believe are central to tensions between epistemological and ontological approaches to human understanding.

### ***Validity***

In the first chapter, we discussed the work of E.D. Hirsch whose approach to literary interpretation shares a number of similarities with social cognition, transcendental phenomenology, and the entire epistemological project. It is no coincidence that his first major work, *Validity in Interpretation (1967)*, focuses specifically on the way literary theorists can determine whether a particular interpretation of a work can be called its true meaning. As we will recall, Hirsch believes that it is necessary to distinguish between the *meaning* of a text, which he identifies with the original intention of the author, and its *significance* in a

particular cultural and historical context. He concludes that it is only by identifying the meaning of a text with the original intention of the author that we can establish validity in interpretation. For Hirsch (1967),

if a meaning can change its identity and in fact does, then we have no *norm* for judging whether we are encountering the real meaning in a changed form or some spurious meaning that is pretending to be the one we seek. Once it is admitted that a meaning can change its characteristics, then there is no way of finding the true Cinderella among all the contenders. There is no dependable glass slipper we can use as a test, since the old slipper will no longer fit the new Cinderella. To the interpreter this lack of a *stable normative principle* is equivalent to the indeterminacy of meaning (p.46; italics mine).

The original intention of the author as a *stable normative principle* enables interpreters of a text to distinguish valid from erroneous interpretations. In the absence of such a norm, the meaning of a text is indeterminate which means that no single interpretation can claim to be more valid than any other. Indeed, Hirsch argues that if we reject the possibility of objectively valid interpretation, we ultimately succumb to a form of relativism thereby forfeiting our ability to adjudicate between competing interpretations of a text.

Yet it seems that Hirsch's account of interpretation demonstrates something important about the epistemological project as a whole. In this case, we may need to look no further than his Cinderella example. As Hoy (1978) notes,

Hirsch's account does not seem to do a better job in explaining the possibility of the shoe fitting the foot. What guides the explication is the interpreter's "understanding" of the text and, for Hirsch, of the author's intention. To find Cinderella—that is, the version that is really the literary text—we need only find out whom the shoe fits. This seems fine until we ask how we know that we have discovered the author's intention. To this the answer will be, try it on Cinderella. But now we are right back where we started, since the original problem is that we do not know who Cinderella is. Unfortunately the proof for the possibility of objective, valid commentary in Hirsch's theory hinges on the notion of determinacy of meaning, and the proof of the latter depends on the former (p.18-19).

Within an epistemological framework, we need to know what it is that we are looking for to ensure that we have found it, yet if we already know what it is, it is unclear why the investigation was necessary in the first place. Moreover, if we are to adjudicate between competing interpretations, we must already know the



correct interpretation. In this case, we must know who Cinderella is before we can be sure that the shoe fits.

Of course, this is the issue of the hermeneutical circle that we discussed in the first chapter. And as we have seen, the circular nature of interpretation is relevant to issues of validity in textual interpretation as well as in the social sciences. In Hirsch's case, the only way to escape this vicious circle is to develop a stable norm that will introduce determinacy into the interpretive process. Indeed, his thesis on authorial intention is in many ways rhetorical as it seeks to persuade others to adopt the same norm lest we succumb to the misfortunes of relativism.

In this sense, validity becomes a means for distinguishing legitimate from illegitimate textual interpretations. Clearly, validity functions in much the same way within the social sciences. Scheurich (1997) suggests that,

validity became the line of bifurcation for a two-sided map. On one side of the map was that research which had passed the test of validity (i.e., was valid); on the other side of the map was that research which had not passed the test (i.e. was invalid), along with aspects of 'reality' that had not yet been researched. Validity as a set of research practices within the conventional social sciences is, thus, the name for the boundary line separating research that is acceptable from research that is not and from the, as yet, unresearched (p.81).

Further along, Scheurich (1997) argues that, "validity is the name of the *policing practices* that divide good research from bad ..." (p.91; italics mine). Indeed, Eagleton (1996) views Hirsch's focus on authorial intention as a form of policing:

The aim of this policing is the protection of private property. For Hirsch, an author's meaning is his own, and should not be stolen or trespassed upon by the reader. The meaning of the text is not to be socialized, made the public property of its various readers; it belongs solely to the author, who should have the exclusive rights over its disposal long after he or she is dead (p.59-60).

What I am suggesting is that the issue of validity often hinges on *stable normative principles* that embody a form of social practice policing the boundaries of legitimate and illegitimate research. When we discuss validity, we have not transcended the realm of social practice but are instead thoroughly involved in establishing criteria integral to the course of various forms of textual

and scientific inquiry. For Foucault (1977), “discursive practices are characterized by the delimitation of a field of objects, the definition of a legitimate perspective for the agent of knowledge, and the fixing of norms for the elaboration of concepts and theories” (p.199). Indeed, norms are a form of social practice patrolling the boundary of legitimate textual/scientific interpretation. As a social practice, validity is defined by the community of scholars participating in the tradition of textual/scientific inquiry. In this sense, validity cannot be relied on to support forms of social practice, indeed, the criteria that determine validity are themselves embedded in the practices they seek to support. Yet this is not the only problem with introducing validity into the realm of textual / scientific inquiry.

In Hirsch’s approach to interpretation, the aim is to identify those interpretations of a text that correspond to the author’s original intention. In this sense, a valid interpretation is one that matches a text’s determinate meaning. We have already noted several similarities between Hirsch’s approach to interpretation and contemporary research in social cognition. In fact, social cognition’s adherence to a mental representational view of the mind is in many ways congruent with psychology’s view that truth is a matter of *correspondence*. In other words, a construct, insight, schema, measure, representation, observation, etc. is valid to the extent that it corresponds with something that is believed to be valid. In fact, truth as correspondence provides a foundation for much of the effort to standardize psychometrics based on additional measures or observations that are believed to be valid. Furthermore, researchers are often guided by the metaphor of research as an attempt to mirror reality so that research findings will accurately reflect the true state of affairs (Rorty, 1979).

Although a number of theorists have approached truth as a matter of correspondence (Field, 1972; Moore, 1953; Popper, 1972; Russell, 1913; Tarski, 1983), others have proposed alternative theories of truth including coherence (Blanshard, 1939; Joachim, 1906; Putnam, 1981; Walker, 1989; Young, 1995, 2001), deflationary (Field, 1994; Horwich, 1994; Quine, 1970) and identity

theories (Baldwin, 1991; Bradley, 1914; Candlish, 1989, 1995, 1999; Dodd, 1996, 2000). Clearly, outside the field of psychology the correspondence theory of truth is not without its detractors. Given the flexibility with which we can approach issues of validity, what role should validity play within the present project?

A number of researchers have focused on the meaning of validity within a qualitative research project (Cherryholmes, 1988; Gergen & Gergen, 2000; Kvale, 1989; Lather, 1986, 1993, 1995; Lincoln & Guba, 2000; Maxwell, 1992; Mishler, 1991; Scheurich, 1997). Moreover, many of these researchers question the value of applying the concept of validity to research within the qualitative tradition. Most believe that the concept of “validity” is loaded with some of the philosophical assumptions we have already discussed and therefore its utility within qualitative research is inherently suspect. Gergen and Gergen (2000) suggest that,

in the conventional terms by which it has been formulated, the debate on validity has reached an impasse. On the one hand, those pursuing their work as if their descriptions and explanations were transparent reflections of their subject matter lack any rationale for this posture. They are vulnerable to host of deconstructive logics. Yet those who find fault with this tradition are, in the end, without means of justifying their critique. In the very process of deprivileging they are relying on the selfsame assumptions of language as correspondent with its object. Thus, rather than either reinstating the modernist tradition of objective truth or opening the throttle on anything goes, discussion is invited into ways of reconceptualizing the issue (Gergen & Gergen, 2000, p. 1031).

Within the present project, it is important to understand that research findings do not represent a univocal interpretation of the phenomenon under investigation. Alternative interpretations are both possible and encouraged – such interpretations are not viewed as a threat to the sanctity of an immutable interpretation. This is in stark contrast to experimental research where methodological procedures aim to facilitate an unambiguous interpretation of research findings.

Moreover, I believe my approach to issues of validity is congruent with Heidegger’s phenomenological orientation. Given that the present project draws on Heidegger’s critique of epistemology, it seems clear that an adherence to the

correspondence theory of truth would be unwise. Indeed Palmer (1969), argues that even in Heidegger's later work, he specifically rejects the notion of truth as correspondence:

In "Plato's Doctrine of Truth," Heidegger turns to the famous cave allegory. In the overall allegory, there is a suggestion that truth is unconcealment, for one climbs up out of the cave into the light and goes back down into the cave; but the conception of truth as "correspondence" came to predominate over the more dynamic conception of unconcealment. Truth became correct seeing, and thinking became a matter of placing an idea before the mind's eye, that is, it became the proper manipulation of ideas (p.142).

In the present project, I am trying to draw attention to the practices that embody an interpretation of political reality. I attempt to buttress my observations by pointing to portions of the interview that support my interpretations while remaining as forthcoming as possible about alternative interpretations. The present project can be seen as the beginning of a dialogue rather than an attempt to provide a single, unambiguous interpretation of the data. I have tried to draw attention to issues of validity as a form of social practice, one that runs the risk of excluding perspectives that do not share the same ontological commitments. Moreover, I agree with Palmer (1969) who suggests that in the midst of these issues,

the hermeneutical debate goes on. On the one side are the defenders of objectivity and validation, who look to hermeneutics as the theoretical source for norms of validation; on the other side are the phenomenologists of the event of understanding, who stress the historical character of this "event," and consequently the limitations of all claims to "objective knowledge" and "objective validity" (Palmer, 1969, p.65).

Within the present project, the aim is to develop the concept of practice as an alternative to psychology's view of interpretation as strictly an affair of consciousness. I intended to show that a close look at everyday political practices can illuminate the *existential* foundations of interpretation and that such interpretations within the political realm have important implications for scientific research. Indeed, the concept of practice also changes the way we view another common criterion for evaluating empirical research.

## ***Generalizability***

As we have already seen, qualitative researches are hesitant to apply quantitative criteria within the realm of qualitative research. Indeed, it is clear that issues of validity become highly problematic when they are integrated into a critique of epistemology. The same is true of the criterion of *generalizability*. For the most part, research findings are considered generalizable if what has been discovered in a particular context can be extended to other contexts as well. For Lincoln and Guba (1985),

all that is necessary to ensure transferability is to know something with high internal validity about Sample A, and to know that A is representative of the population to which the generalization is to apply. The generalization will apply to all contexts within the same population (p.297).

Internal validity refers to the extent to which researchers are confident that they have identified a causal relationship. In an experimental situation, the more researchers are able to control relevant variables, the greater their ability to assert that the relationship they have observed is a causal one.

External validity (generalization) refers to the fact that this causal relationship can be extended to additional contexts. Burgeoning psychological researchers are often instructed on the importance of procedures for establishing a representative sample of the population under investigation. These procedures ensure that results of a particular study are applicable to segments of the population that did not directly participated in the study. Moreover, researches are encouraged to make sure that experimental situations are as realistic as possible to ensure that findings are applicable to “real world” situations. In each case, generalizability refers to the extent to which findings are viewed as externally valid.

Within the qualitative tradition, issues of generalizability have been particularly pernicious as most qualitative studies focus on a small number of participants in relatively natural situations. This is especially true for case study research where the focus may be on a single individual or event (Donmoyer, 1990; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Kvale, 1996; Schofield, 1990; Kennedy, 1979; Yin,

1994; Stake, 1994, 2000). While the sampling procedures and small number of subjects for the present study make it difficult to generalize results to a larger population in any traditional sense, this study enables us to develop unique insights into the everyday political practices of interview participants. Indeed, Kvale (1996) argues that pioneers in the field of psychology, such as Freud, Ebbinghaus, Piaget, and Skinner, have all used a small number of cases to develop intriguing insights into human behavior and experience:

Quantitatively, each case contained an immense number of observations of single individuals. Qualitatively, the focus on single cases made it possible to investigate in detail the relationship of a specific behavior to its context, to work out the logic of the relationship between the individual and the situation. The specific kind of relationship varied from transference of a psychoanalytic therapy to the reinforcement schedules of learning. What they have in common is the working out of consistent and recurrent patterns through intensive case studies (p.103)

The point is that a focus on a small number of cases is not necessarily a threat to extending understanding beyond the confines of a particular study. Indeed, Schofield (2002) argues that,

most researchers writing on generalizability in the qualitative tradition agree that their rejection of generalizability as a search for broadly applicable laws is not a rejection of the idea that studies in one situation can be used to speak to or to help form a judgment about other situations (p.179).

This is particularly interesting when we note that the experimental tradition in which issues of generalizability arise also encounter their own problems when they try to extend research findings to other contexts. In fact, the emphasis experimental researchers place on establishing causality often makes it exceedingly difficult to extend findings beyond the confines of the laboratory. As Lincoln and Guba (1985) note, “the very controls instituted to ensure internal validity militate against clean generalizations. In the final analysis, results that are acquired in that epitome of the controlled situation—the laboratory—are discovered to be applicable only in other laboratories” (p.297). Thus, it becomes clear that disagreements regarding the relative merits of generalizability have not always fallen along traditional quantitative/qualitative lines. Indeed, quantitative

researchers have sometimes argued that a preoccupation with issues of external validity (generalizability) can draw attention away from what should be a more pressing concern – the ability to identify causal relationships.

Within the quantitative tradition, Mook (1983) argues that it may be unnecessary for researchers to discard experimental results for lack of a representative sample or because the research situation appears to be too far removed from “real-life.” In fact, he argues that while some research may aim to generalize findings to other situations, it is often the case that experiments enable researchers to control situations to such an extent that it is not the specific findings that are generalized but the understanding of causal relationships that can be transferred to other situations. This leads Mook to propose a distinction between generalizing *research findings* and generalizing *theoretical conclusions*:

The distinction between generality of findings and generality of theoretical conclusions underscores what seems to me the most important source of confusion in all of this, which is the assumption that the purpose of collecting data in the laboratory is to *predict real-life behavior in the real world*. Of course, there are times when that is what we are trying to do, and there are times when it is not. When it is, then the problem of EV [external validity] confronts us full force. When it is not, then the problem of EV is either meaningless or trivial, and a misplaced preoccupation with it can seriously distort our evaluation of the research (p.381).

Experimental procedures often enable researchers to contribute to theoretical goals that can be applied in a number of ways and in a variety of situations. For Mook, researchers must not look exclusively at research findings to see if they can be generalized; rather, researchers should reflect on whether findings enable them to generate novel insights into the causal relationship between relevant variables. He suggests that, “it is that understanding that has external validity (if it does) – not the findings themselves” (p.382). In fact, to require experiments to generalize to the “real-world” may be asking them to do something they were never intended to do. In some cases, it is the understanding gained from experiments that generalizes from one situation to another rather than the specific research findings. Indeed, researchers have sometimes used Mook’s position to argue for the adequacy of their own research when issues of external

validity are on the horizon (Altermatt, DeWall & Leskinen, 2003; Chin, 2005; Chin & Taylor-Robinson, 2005; Herbst, Gaertner & Insko, 2003; Hosoda, Stone-Romero & Stone, 2004; Shapiro & Chock, 2003).

It is important to note that Mook's (1983) argument has a number of important implications for the present project as well as for qualitative researchers struggling to defend the legitimacy of their own findings. To begin with, Mook is quite clear that his focus on external validity relies on the hypothetico-deductive method so that what is extended to other situation is not so much the research findings as it is the understanding that emerges from identifying the *mechanisms and processes* that cause people to think or behave in predictable ways. Indeed, when we are dealing with the knowledge of causes, we may not need to justify research in terms of realistic experimental procedures or representative samples. Moreover, it could be argued that the researcher discovering a causal relationship is not necessarily responsible for generalizing this understanding. Instead, a community of scholars must decide whether such understanding is applicable in other contexts. In this way, Mook's view of generalization shares some affinity with the way legal scholars attempt to apply general ideas to specific cases – what the legal community refers to as case law.

The term "case law" refers to that portion of the law that is built up from specific cases rather than from statutes. These specific cases are resolved on the basis of statutes, but interpretations of statutes that are made in each case set precedents for future cases. Thus, *the decisions reached regarding a single case may be generalized to future cases. If decisions are described in terms of general ideas, these ideas may become principles and take on a life of their own.* Though these decisions may be stated with the intention that they be generalized, it is the later court which must decide whether in fact a particular decision generalizes to its own case (Kennedy, 1979, p.672; italics mine).

If we extend legal hermeneutics to the social sciences, it is not the initial researcher who generalizes findings but the person applying this understanding to a novel context that bears responsibility for generalizing the findings. In other words, once understanding has been gained within a particular domain, it is the responsibility of future scholars to decide if this understanding is relevant to other areas. Indeed, Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue that,



if there is to be transferability, the burden of proof lies less with the original investigator than with the person seeking to make an application elsewhere. The original inquirer cannot know the sites to which transferability might be sought, but the appliers can and do. The best advice to give to anyone seeking to make a transfer is to accumulate empirical evidence about contextual similarities; the responsibility of the original investigator ends in providing sufficient descriptive data to make such similarity judgments possible (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p.298).

Mook's suggestion that understanding rather than specific research findings generalize to other situations implies that it is the experimental procedures that must be scrutinized in order to determine the veracity of the understanding. In this case, when researchers are confident that the experiment is internally valid, it is then possible to ask whether this understanding applies to other situations.

Of course, Mook's argument hinges on what he means by *understanding*. And we have already noted that the movement from epistemology to ontology has serious implication for the concept of understanding itself. We should recall Ostrom's (1984) comments regarding the list of cognitive tasks one must perform if he or she is to interpret social reality:

It is staggering, indeed, to realize that these myriad concurrent tasks are compressed into the time it takes to nod understandingly, raise an eyebrow, or fleet a smile. *The motivational, cognitive, and affective mechanisms that allow us to perform them are at present bafflingly complex and poorly understood. Of course, this quest for understanding has always been, and will continue to be, the primary objective of psychology.* It is in the field of social cognition that the full complexity of this task becomes apparent (Ostrom, 1984, p.16; italics mine).

Once again we must ask why *understanding* within psychology has been restricted to identifying the causal mechanisms and processes that exert an influence on an individual's thoughts and behaviors. This is not to say that such understanding is unimportant; rather, the question is why approaches to understanding have been limited to issues of causality.

Ultimately, Mook (1983) concludes that, "what makes research findings of interest is that they help us understand everyday life. That understanding, however, comes from theory or the analysis of mechanisms; it is not a matter of 'generalizing' the findings themselves" (p.386). Indeed, I will go one step further

and suggest that understanding as essentially theoretical and/or mechanical already embodies a specific interpretation of human knowledge and existence. Mook's insistence that scientific understanding is strictly a matter of identifying causal mechanism and processes embodies an interpretation of what it means to understand. Moreover, this narrow view of understanding is embodied in the practices of researchers who see qualitative research as somehow lacking the scientific sophistication of more quantitatively oriented approaches.

Thus, while I agree with Mook (1983) that a dogmatic adherence to generalizability may obscure other important aspects of scientific research, I do not agree that the concept of *understanding* should be restricted to identifying causal relationships in a controlled experimental situation. Perhaps part of the aim of not only the present project, but of qualitative research in general, is to draw attention to forms of understanding that are not restricted to issues of causality. But if we can agree that causality is but one form of understanding, what can be said about psychology's near exclusive focus on causal mechanisms and processes?

For Habermas (1971), the empirical-analytic sciences are oriented towards a desire for technical control, which he views as but one possible "knowledge-constitutive interest." His observations are especially relevant to Mook's equating of understanding with mechanical causality:

In controlled observation, which often takes the form of an experiment, we generate initial conditions and measure the results of operations carried out under these conditions. Empiricism attempts to ground the objectivist illusion in observations expressed in basic statements. These observations are supposed to be reliable in providing immediate evidence without the admixture of subjectivity. In reality basic statements are not simple representations of facts in themselves, but express the success or failure of our operations. We can say facts and the relations between them are apprehended descriptively. But this way of talking must not conceal that as such the facts relevant to the empirical sciences are first constituted through an *a priori organization of our experience* in the behavioral system of instrumental action (Habermas, 1971, p.308-309; italics mine)

While Habermas views the “a priori organization of our experience” cognitively, it is equally plausible, as I have argued throughout this discussion, that this organization is embedded in shared practices rather than individual mental activity. Moreover, the understanding that emerges from traditional empirical methods can be viewed as but one type of practice embedded in the broader view of the nature of understanding itself.

All of this leads us to what Palmer (1969) refers to as, “a more comprehensive conception of understanding” (p.227). In this case, understanding is not *restricted* to the identification of mechanism and causally related variables nor is it located with the mind of an individual knower:

According to Heidegger, understanding is not some faculty among others that man possesses; *understanding is his fundamental mode of existing in the world*. Through understanding we are able to have a sense of the way we are placed, we grasp meaning through language, and something like world can come to be the horizon in which we exist. If we start with subjectivity, then understanding will seem to be a faculty of man; if we start with the facticity (Faktizität) of the world, however, understanding becomes the way in which the facticity of the world is presented to man. Heidegger takes this latter approach, and therefore understanding is seen as grounded not in the autonomous reflexive activity of man but in the act of the world, the facticity of the world, on man. Understanding is then the medium by which the world comes to stand before a man; understanding is the medium of ontological disclosure (Palmer, 1969, p.227-228; italics mine)

For Mook, research should not be discarded simply because it fails to live up to a scientific community’s demand for external validity. On the contrary, scientific understanding proceeds by identifying specific mechanisms and processes that are causally related to a particular phenomenon. Yet Mook’s view fails to recognize that such an approach to understanding functions in much the same way as the general concept of validity – to police the border of legitimate research. The aim of the present study is not to identify variables that are causally related to subjective interpretations of political reality. Instead, it focuses on the political practices that participants discuss when asked about political situations.

Moreover, these practices are viewed as neither antecedents nor consequences of an interpretation but instead embody an interpretation of political reality.

### ***Reliability***

Thus far, we have discussed the role issues of validity and generalizability play in both the present project and qualitative research in general. I have argued that because this project represents an attempt to tease out the implications of viewing understanding ontologically rather than epistemologically, traditional verification criteria become highly problematic. This is no less the case with issues of *reliability* (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Kvale, 1996; Janesick, 2000).

Within quantitative research, reliability refers to the stability or consistency of a particular measure. For Lincoln and Guba (1985), reliability is usually tested by replication, as, for example, the odd-even correlation of test items, or the test-retest or parallel forms correlation. Reliability is threatened by any careless act in the measurement or assessment process, by instrumental decay, by assessments that are insufficiently long (or intense), by ambiguities of various sorts, and a host of other factors (p.292).

In other words, if a measure is to be judged reliable, it should be able to measure the same phenomenon either at different points in time or at the same time as other measurements are being gathered depending on the specific correlation procedures (ex. split-half, test-retest, interrater, etc.) used by the researcher. Moreover, measures of reliability must contend with the extent to which the phenomenon under investigation is viewed as a stable characteristic. Within psychology, human intelligence is often regarded as a stable characteristic such that researchers focus on developing precise tests to measure this characteristic. On the other hand, an individual's mood is generally regarded as mutable so that a measure may not yield the same results when it is given on different occasions. In this case, the flexibility of the measure can be used to draw attention to the fact that an individual's mood is indeed a relatively unstable characteristic, though it may fluctuate in predictable ways.

Clearly, the reliability of much of the present project can be challenged. To begin with, one may ask whether research participants are likely to discuss the same political situations, in the same way, if asked the same question on a different occasion. If the same participant discusses the same situations, the research question would appear to elicit something stable from the participant. This stability would be an indication that the research question was a reliable measure of salient political situations.

Moreover, by asking multiple participants the same research question, one could ascertain the extent to which different participants discussed similar experiences. Indeed, phenomenological approaches often look to these similarities, what they refer to as invariant features, as an indication of an *essence* or *structure* – something general that links specific cases to one another. The phenomenologist then presents these features in such a way as to describe what he or she believes to be the essence of a particular phenomenon. As we have already noted in the first chapter, this view of essence was common to Husserl's transcendental phenomenology, Hirsch's notion of determinacy of meaning, and social cognition's attempt to discern invariable mental rules that govern specific interpretations of social reality.

One may also question whether both my selection of specific aspects of the interviews and my interpretation of these passages are reliable. Asked in this way, the question concerns whether my interpretations are merely a reflection of individual biases or whether there is something more in these interpretations that transcends individual subjectivity. To mitigate the deleterious effects of subjectivity, researchers sometimes enlist the help of several "judges" to ensure that individual interpretations are shared – what is often referred to as interrater reliability.

The focus of the present project is to identify political practices that people discuss when asked to talk about salient political situations. I have selected segments of the interviews that provide a good example of the political practices I identified during my analysis of the interviews. Often, several participants

discussed the same practice and I have tried to indicate when this was the case. For some, the fact that participants often discussed the same situations may be viewed as an indication of reliability while others may view it as an indication of a phenomenological essence. Whatever the case, the issue of reliability, as with each of the other types of verification criteria, ultimately resides within the realm of rhetoric and common social practices. I leave it to the reader to decide if he or she finds both my selection of quotes and my interpretation of those quotes convincing.

At this point, it is clear that the epistemological focus on consciousness and subjectivity is not merely an auxiliary aspect of contemporary empirical research. Indeed, at each point in the journey towards verification, subjectivity has been reproached as a source of destructive prejudices. If we are to continue to challenge the division of subject and object, as our move towards ontology seeks to do, we must realize that traditional verification criteria both reflect and reproduce the very tradition upon which they are grounded. Indeed, Schofield (2002) argues that within the qualitative research tradition,

the goal is *not* to produce a standardized set of results that any other careful researcher in the same situation or studying the same issue would have produced. Rather it is to produce a coherent and illuminating description of and perspective on a situation that is based on and consistent with detailed study of that situation (p.174).

For the purposes of the present study, the aim is to identify the concrete practices that constitute an interpretation of political reality.

## **Reporting**

After the interviews are collected, transcribed, and analyzed, it is time to report the findings to those interested in the topic under investigation (or those who have agreed to be on a dissertation committee). In many ways, this represents the culmination of the entire project, a time to evaluate the fruits of the research process and to reflect on how this understanding can be applied in new directions. For Kvale (1996),

the aim of a report is to inform other researchers and the general public of the importance and the trustworthiness of the findings. The report should contribute new knowledge to the development of a field, and be cast in a form that allows the conclusions to be checked by the reader. The interview report is the end product of a long process; what is worth communicating to others from the wealth of interview conversations is to be conveyed in the limited number of pages of an article or a book, presenting the main aims, methods, results, and implications of an interview inquiry (Kvale, 1996, p.256).

For the present project, the next chapter is organized according to the categories I identified during the analysis of the transcripts. These categories organize the practices that embody an interpretation of political reality. I have made extensive use of segments of the interview in order to support my interpretations of these practices. I have also sought to connect these interpretations with relevant theoretical and empirical research. The last chapter of this project explores some of the implications of this analysis for areas such as psychology, sociology, and political science.

It is clear that the writing style in this analysis is somewhat different from traditional approaches to scientific writing. I have tried to make it clear that I am not merely a researcher encountering a distant phenomenon but that my own horizons are intimately involved in the production of this work. Kvale (1996) suggests that the style and aim of an interview research report typically falls somewhere along the continuum between a direct reporting of the results and a mixture of literary and artistic innovation. Indeed, an interview report, “should ideally be able to live up to artistic demands of expression as well as to the cross-examination of the court room” (Kvale, 1996, p.259). To this end, I concur with William James (2003) who warns that,

to foreshadow the terminus of one’s investigations is one thing, and to arrive there safely is another. In the next [chapter], abandoning the extreme generalities which have engrossed us hitherto, I propose that we begin our actual journey by addressing ourselves directly to the concrete facts (p.46).

For the present project, these “facts” are the practices that embody an interpretation of political reality.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **ANALYSIS**

In the preceding chapters, I have repeatedly referred to “the practices that embody an interpretation of political reality.” I have offered this as an alternative to the view that interpretation is strictly a mental activity or that phenomenology must restrict its focus to consciousness and subjectivity. I argue that traditional phenomenological approaches remain well within the realm of epistemology and that our exploration of an alternative conception of phenomenology cannot make use of concepts such as mental representation or essence so long as we treat understanding ontologically. In other words, I am using the term *practice* to highlight our practical everyday engagement (being-in-the-world) in political reality. Moreover, viewing traditional concepts as practices also prevents the analysis from prematurely succumbing to either subjectivism or objectivism – that is, from reducing our analysis either to individual consciousness or systematic constraints.

Clearly, I have also tried to highlight the way researchers engage in and reproduce their own research practices. Indeed, I have tried to show that contemporary research, especially in psychology, may benefit from exploring the understanding researcher’s exhibit when they conduct research without any necessary recourse to mental representations. Yet I am well aware that such a proposition will sound unusual to those who have been trained to focus on individual consciousness as the basic unit of analysis.

At the same time, I do not want the fact that the movement from mental representation to practice appears strange to detract from the aims of the project as a whole. In fact, I believe that the movement from epistemology to ontology may entail an additional shift away from knowledge as it has been traditionally conceived and towards what Rorty (1979) refers to as edification or, “the attempt to reinterpret our familiar surroundings in the unfamiliar terms of our new inventions” (p.360). Indeed, the following analysis may at times seem unusual as I avoid identifying antecedents, moderating variables or even themes or essences.



Yet I believe this is consistent with Rorty's suggestion that, "edifying discourse is *supposed* to be abnormal, to take us out of our old selves by the power of strangeness, to aid us in becoming new beings" (p.360). Indeed, Rorty's views on edification are especially appropriate given the present project's focus on human understanding as ontological.

As we will recall from the chapter on methods, I implored the reader to explore the possibility of viewing the researcher as a traveler rather than as a miner of data (Kvale, 1996). I argued that shifting our research metaphor enables us to see understanding as a creative process, something that is made rather than found. Moreover, I argued that the correspondence theory of truth is inadequate to such a task. Indeed, Rorty (1989), makes a similar observation:

As long as we think that there is some relation called "fitting the world" or "expressing the real nature of the self" which can be possessed or lacked by vocabularies-as-wholes, we shall continue the traditional philosophical search for a criterion to tell us which vocabularies have this desirable feature. But if we could ever become reconciled to the idea that most of reality is indifferent to our descriptions of it, and that *the human self is created by the use of a vocabulary* rather than being adequately or inadequately expressed in a vocabulary, then we should at last have assimilated what was true in the Romantic idea that *truth is made rather than found* (p.7; italics mine).

In other words, we must realize that our practices do more than shape the way we understand a particular issue. These practices embody an interpretation of what it means to be; that is, human subjectivity and existence can already be found in the way we talk about the individual. This is particularly relevant to psychology as the individual is, for the most part, taken as the basic unit of analysis. Yet in contemporary psychology, the individual has come to be regarded as a collection of mental representations and basic psychological processes. My attempt to conceptualize human subjectivity as a collection of practices (and therefore prior to the division of subject and object) is an attempt to change the dominant vocabulary of the modern individual.

To speak of social practices rather than mental representations or essences involves, "changing the way we talk, and thereby changing what we want to do and what we think we are..." (Rorty, 1989, p.20). Indeed, I believe it may be

useful for phenomenologists, social psychologists, clinicians, and literary theorists, among others, to talk about traditional topics in their respective fields in terms of social practices as the concept of practice recognizes the ongoing participation of a group of individuals in a dynamic, linguistic, cultural, and social system. In other words, to talk about traditional psychological issues in terms of practices is to open new worlds of human understanding. As such, I beg the reader's indulgence as I focus on some of the practices that embody an interpretation of political reality

## **Media**

Looking up from this paper, one is sure to find him or herself in the midst of various forms of media, from television and movies, to books, posters and compact discs. Moreover, the majority of media we encounter today did not exist as recently as one hundred years ago. It is surely no exaggeration to say that today we inhabit a society thoroughly saturated with mediated messages and images (Gergen, 1991). The abundance of media has produced a tremendous amount of research into the way people's lives have changed as their world becomes increasingly populated by technological innovations designed to deliver messages and images whether they are in their homes, cars, or places of work (Croteau & Hoynes, 2003; Fiske, 1987; Graber, 2006; Norris, 2000; Thompson, 1995). This research has been conducted within a variety of disciplines including psychology, sociology, political science and in interdisciplinary areas such as media studies, communication studies, and cultural studies.

Of particular importance to the present study is the role media plays in our everyday lives. Thompson (1995) suggests that although some view the profusion of mediated images and messages in people's daily activities as inducing a paralysis that prevents people from organizing this information in any coherent way, it is equally plausible to see various forms of media as enabling individuals to assimilate information in new and creative ways. He claims that,

the problem that confronts most people today is a problem of symbolic dislocation: in a world where the capacity to experience is no longer linked to the activity of encountering,

how can we relate mediated experiences to the practical contexts of our day-to-day lives? How can we relate to events which take place in locales that are remote from the contexts in which we live our daily lives? And how can we assimilate the experience of distant events into a coherent life trajectory that we must construct for ourselves (Thompson, 1995, p.209)?

In other words, when we experience mass media, we not only encounter people and events far removed from our immediate locale *but the encounter itself constitutes a new and unique form of practical engagement*. Indeed, the relationships we forge with others through media represent an increasingly technologically laden form of encounter. Before we discuss the role of media in political experience, I would like to make several observations regarding the relationship between media and practice.

To say that our encounter with media constitutes a particular practice is to say at least two things. First, when we encounter media in its various forms this experience is necessarily different from face-to-face interactions. Thompson (1995) refers to this new type of encounter as a *quasi-interaction*. A quasi-interaction,

creates a certain kind of social situation in which individuals are linked together in a process of communication and symbolic exchange. It is a structured situation in which some individuals are *engaged primarily in producing symbolic forms for others* who are not physically present, while others are involved primarily in *receiving symbolic forms produced by others* to whom they cannot respond, but with whom they can form bonds of friendship, affection or loyalty (Thompson, 1995, p.84-85, italics mine).

This form of interaction gives certain segments of the population access to powerful tools for providing particular interpretations of reality, interpretations that may be disputed or accepted by the masses as they encounter these interpretations.

For Thompson, such interactions are not inherently positive or negative. In some circumstances, quasi-interactions enable one to encounter people it would be difficult to encounter in any other way. Indeed, with the advent of mass media, relationships are no longer bounded by spatial and temporal restrictions. People are free to form a relationship with any of a number of figures that they

are unlikely to ever encounter in a face-to-face situation. Yet, because these relationships are inherently monological, one need put forth only minimal effort to maintain a relationship with the people, issues, and messages that we encounter through media.

Since mediated quasi-interaction is non-dialogical, the form of intimacy established through it is non-reciprocal in character. That is, it is a form of intimacy which does not involve the kind of reciprocity and mutuality characteristic of face-to-face interaction (Thompson, 1995, p.219).

While this may provide individuals with an opportunity to participate in an increasing number of relationships, it is not clear what role such relationships play in contemporary society. Indeed, quasi-interaction *as practice* may have a number of implications for the way people interpret social reality.

Our relationship with mediated information can also be viewed as a practice since mediated information is often drawn upon as a topic of conversation in our daily face-to-face interactions. We often talk to others about events that are occurring around the world, from the latest celebrity news to the progress of a war in a distant land. Moreover, we evaluate how well events such as international conflicts are being conducted based on information gained almost exclusively from the media. In other words, while our face-to-face encounters may be significantly different from mediated, quasi-interactions, it is often the case that face-to-face encounters are permeated by information gained from such mediated encounters. This is particularly important in the case of media portrayals of politicians, issues, and events as the members of a society may take up the interpretations provided by the media unreflectively. Indeed, as people begin to integrate certain forms of political discourse into their social interactions, these discourses may exert a significant influence on the way we interpret political reality.

When asked to describe concrete political situations, participants in the present study sometimes discuss the role the media plays in their political experiences. Generally speaking, these experiences can be categorized as either

focusing on politics as a *spectacle* or looking at the way the media presents the political as a *spectrum*.

### ***Spectacle***

The second edition of *The Oxford English Dictionary (1989)* defines a spectacle as:

(1) A specially prepared or arranged display of a more or less public nature (esp. one on a large scale), forming an impressive or interesting show or entertainment for those viewing it or (2) a person or thing exhibited to, or set before, the public gaze as an object either of curiosity or contempt, or of marvel or admiration (Simpson & Weiner, 1989, p.164).

A spectacle is a public display prepared in advance for a particular audience. Moreover, spectacles have the power to elicit contempt or awe depending on the way an audience views a particular display. Finally, spectacles can help people see things that would otherwise be blurry and distorted. They have the ability to turn ambiguity into precision or the strange into the familiar.

For some participants, there is a sense that while a political reality does exist, the media often present a very specific view of this reality. In other words, participants are concerned that people and situations are being presented in ways that are geared to elicit specific reactions. As one participant observes,

... you see this stuff so much more now especially with them trying to court the younger--the younger voting population. I just--you know this image keeps popping up of me--or me seeing Clinton--he was on like the *Aresenio Hall Show* or something playing the saxophone and I don't even know if I saw that--I've seen clips and so maybe, but just that kind of stuff. I think--I'm wondering if I was charmed into that sort of stuff and that you know because maybe I was--I was certainly uninvolved and uneducated at that point in politics and I still feel fairly ignorant in a lot of ways but I wonder if I was sort of charmed by--by silly little things like that--like well this guy is cool, but he is--you know he's playing the saxophone, he's laid back; this guy doesn't seem like some stiff in a suit who doesn't understand me or know anything about me or sort of--he's cool.

Here the participant is questioning why he feels a certain way about a particular politician. He understands that politicians may present themselves in certain ways that enable them to have a strategic advantage. As a result, he is

apprehensive that his affinity for a particular figure may not be genuine. Indeed, his concern is that he may have been “charmed” into believing things about a candidate that may not be true. He shares with other participants a concern that the political figures he is responding to are merely a media representation designed to elicit a strategic response.

Further along, the participant explores in greater depth the way politicians are portrayed in the media. This leads him to question the authenticity of the people he encounters via mass media:

... and I think--I think in some respects I still hold onto that--that element of being a kid where you idolize people you know growing up and like teachers are not normal people and you're like shocked the first time you see your high school or your middle school and grade school teacher at the grocery store or something. And it's the same sort of thing when you grow up seeing all these politicians and people on TV; it's--it's hard to remember if they're real people. And I think that you know--I think that's part of the problem when I talk about sort of absolutes in voting it's like these are real people. They have the same sort of internal struggles that I have on the issues. I can't possibly believe that you're so resolute on this but--and that makes it feel fake like they're up there selling this idea and then how do you really have faith in the fact that idea is going to stick around, that they're not going to be motivated by all the money and everything that gets thrown at them? I don't know ...

In this case, he draws attention to the experience one has of encountering an authority figure in an unusual situation. In most cases, a teacher plays a particular role in the classroom. When teachers encounter students in a context, such as a grocery store, that does not provide established norms for how the interaction should proceed, it can be extremely uncomfortable for both parties. Indeed, such an experience can foreground the extent to which our interactions are guided by the adoption of a particular social role (Goffman, 1959). For this participant, although we rarely encounter politicians in a non-mediated context, our awareness of the way people often put forth a particular persona calls into question the certainty politicians often exhibit in their political beliefs. This leads the participant to reflect on the extent to which the image of the politician is “fake” and is only being used to “sell” a particular idea.

Another participant expresses her dismay that media coverage of the 2004 Presidential Election often seemed closer to a sporting event than a political activity. She notes that watching the election coverage,

... was almost like a sports commentary turned into something a little different. It felt very unofficial and more like you know just a sports game--very American(ized), which I know it's an American election, but there's you know the commentator for one side and the commentator for the other and at they're the--you know the Bush Headquarters and the Kerry Headquarters. It seemed really circus-like, so in any event making it more of a spectacle and less of something that's respected. I think the media had a lot to do with that.

Further along she suggests that,

... spectacle may not--not be the correct word, but I don't know--something more honorable, less planned and scripted and fake and--I mean maybe that's what you have to be to win an election these days but I don't know; it doesn't seem like what you learned about politics like when you were a kid and you read the--the history books and you read--you know you take your--your American politics class and it's all like splendor and majesty and you know these--these shining people that we looked up to and you know you're taught to look up to and then now it's kind of all right, this is--this is what it's all about? And maybe it's just perspective from being alive now and--but these are our politicians. I mean it could have always been like that; it just seems like there's a discrepancy in what's going on and what was taught.

This participant is concerned with the extent to which media coverage of politics has become “fake” and “scripted”; more of a “circus” and a “spectacle” than something that can be looked up to. She also focuses on the discrepancy between what she learned about politics as a child – something filled with “splendor”, “majesty”, and “shining people” – and her experience with the 2004 Presidential Election.

Another woman notes that the media often keep a story fresh in the public's mind in order to present a particular view of political reality. Recounting the media coverage of a political scandal in a Texas gubernatorial race, she suggests that the media,

... kept it in front of everybody's face, absolutely ... Because to me politics, I mean it's a strategy right--it's a chess game. Every single thing you do has a part in it right, so in that

moment [*Laughs*] he made a comment--he moved a pawn, wrong pawn to move; killed the game.

Further along, she claims that,

... when I think of politics I always think of someone like screwing up because that's all that gets--that gets blown up, to me anyway because I don't really follow politics closely because I've just kind of given up on the whole thing. So I hear what the media really pounds on and--and so the next thing you think of is Clinton and his you know--was he with his Assistant, was he not with his Assistant, blah-blah, you know the blatant lie, *I did not have sexual relations*--I mean do we know that quote? Why do we know that quote; because the media repeated it over and over and over again. Did he have a great strategy to overcome it; yes. Why was that; because of his charisma. He somehow--he was able to overcome what could have been really bad. I would love to go back and see what the media strategy on that was because I guarantee there was somebody behind the scenes making sure that every--every release beyond that was to improve his home situation or make his home situation look better...

Once again, we see that politics is being viewed as a "game" in which the media plays an important role. Through repetitive coverage, the media can focus attention on a particular issue while politicians can challenge the way the media has defined a situation. Other participants also express the sense that media coverage involves keeping something in front of everybody's "face". Moreover, several participants suggest that in the relationship between media and politics, certain people and events remain "behind the scenes". As one participant notes,

... you see people reacting to all the stuff that's behind the scenes, the man behind the curtain, to me then it's all emotional.

Another participant makes an interesting observation regarding media coverage of political events:

Just all--I mean all the crap in--in the media and everything about who did this and who said what and--and it--it--you know that's what's reported and that's what we see. I'm sure there's a lot of stuff going on constantly that's important and is making a difference and these are important decisions and people are working and doing a ton of stuff but you don't--you don't hear about that as much as you hear about all the--you know the stuff that's going on behind the scenes and you know it seems like every other week it's another Senator or--or something like that who's you know got some sort of case brought against him or--or something like that. And it's like why don't you talk about something that you



know means a little more than this instead of just making some sort of witch hunt trial to go on TV all the time.

Several participants share a similar sentiment regarding the deterioration of news coverage of political issues. It was quite common for individuals to express dissatisfaction about (a) the type of issues that were being covered (ex. a proposed law in Texas to outlaw sexually-suggestive cheerleading) and (b) the way these issues were being portrayed in the media. Moreover, participants sometimes discuss their sense that the line separating entertainment and politics has become increasingly blurred.

### ***Spectrum***

While participants often discuss the way politics appears to have become a spectacle, they also explore the relationship between the media and particular political beliefs. In other words, they view media representations of politicians and political events as falling along a certain point of the political *spectrum*.

Several participants focus on the issue of *media bias*. At times, they make a distinction between *facts* which they believe should be the primary focus of news organizations and *editorial* which they feel interferes with “objective” and “neutral” reporting of “the news”:

The media is supposed to report the--it's supposed to report on politics and--and in different, you know not just there's--you know there's commentary, you know editorial and then there's stories. I mean they--they report to us; they're supposed to be you know our link of information, too. That being said, not a mouthpiece for [*Laughs*] ...

In this excerpt, the participant is making a distinction between news reports that are geared towards “commentary”, and “editorial” and those that focus on news stories. He suggests that while the media should be our “link” to information, it is sometimes the case that media coverage of politics becomes a “mouthpiece” for certain political positions. Moreover, the participant notes that,

... when you're reporting on a situation it is more informational, more--more fact-based, okay. Who--the who, the--the where, you know--those--you know kind of fact-based information; editorial, yeah there's--I'm saying this is the feeling I got there. This is you know--this is--this is what I think about it--fair enough, you know. But there are certain

things that we can all agree on you know. It's getting to that; I think there's a difference in that.

“Reporting” means providing “fact-based information” whereas “editorial” conveys something else. Moreover, he says that “there are certain things we can all agree on” indicating that it is at least *possible* to provide an unbiased account of political issues.

Another participant notes that newspaper articles in a local paper were very often “biased” towards a particular candidate during the 2004 Presidential Election.

... even the [local newspaper] is very biased--extremely biased in the articles that they publish and without--I mean if--if someone doesn't read that objectively there automatically swayed one way. Ninety-percent of those articles sway you against Bush, and it should be--that newspaper should be 50/50 or it should be--they should be under *Letters to the Editor*, and I think a lot of people read that and say oh this is what I should believe. This is what people around me believe. This is what I'm going to do. And they never make --their own independent decision.

This participant is suggesting that if someone does not remain “objective” when they are reading a local newspaper, they may inadvertently be “swayed” to adopt a particular political position. It is not clear if her belief that newspaper coverage of an election should be “50/50” refers to the idea that readers should receive equal positive/negative stories for a single candidate or if positive/negative coverage of one candidate should be balanced by positive/negative coverage of another candidate. In any event, this ambiguity is avoided by arguing that coverage presenting a candidate in a particular light should be restricted to a section of the newspaper called “Letters to the Editor”. If newspapers fail to do this, it may prevent readers from making “their own independent decision.”

The distinction between news and editorial brings issues of media bias into the foreground. Many of the participants who discuss the relationship between media and politics are concerned that news reports often seemed designed to support particular ideological positions. Discussions of media bias sometimes focus on the relationship between particular news networks:

And I think a lot of us just hear the news--the news is also very biased. I can flip between two channels--*Fox* and *Channel 5*; there's no doubt in my mind who they're supporting and I don't think that's--I mean I guess you can choose what station to watch but knowing as little as I know I could watch one station and be persuaded and I think that's a fault of the media, but at the same time politics.

Another participant discusses the way ideology influences media coverage of political events:

... I'm a liberal, so I listen to NPR and I think that that's the right way to look at things and I watch Fox News and I think that's the wrong way to look at things. And I would hope that there would be something in the middle that would at least present like just issues, and I'm sure that you know that's an objective of you know like news or--or whatever. But even then you know [local] News that comes out of a conservative town's-- mostly Republicans in office, you know; even the news coverage has shifted. So I think -- that affects how a lot of people think... there wasn't that much of an option given to be purple [*Laughs*].

Both participants are aware of differences in the way news organizations cover political issues. The first participant recognizes that people are free to watch any channel they like, but she is also concerned that those who are unaware of the political affiliation of a particular news organization may mistake ideological rhetoric for objective news reporting.

The second participant also recognizes differences in media coverage but suggests that her political beliefs help her distinguish between a station whose reporting is "the right way to look at things" and another station whose reporting is "the wrong way to look at things". Moreover, she is concerned that there are no news organizations "in the middle" that are capable of presenting "just issues", what she refers to as "news."

The participant's comment that there was not "much of an option given to be purple" refers to the fact that during the 2004 Presidential Election, news organizations identified Republican leaning states as *red* while those states leaning towards Democrats were identified with the color *blue*. Her concern is that media representations of politics contribute to our inability to find any middle ground on important issues – a middle ground that would be a mixture of red and blue. Indeed, this participant feels that media representations of

candidates, whether Fox News or NPR, fail to encourage people to evaluate political issues outside of traditional ideological boundaries. Participants are sometimes frustrated that media organizations report political conflicts in either/or terms – a situation that seems to limit their ability to deal with the nuances of a political issue. The same participant who notes that there were no options to be “purple” continues to explore the way the election was “portrayed” in the media:

I always think about like how everything has to be red or blue; I mean that was--that was really big in this election because it was very polarized, one side or the other, red states, blue states, you know the states that weren't real white. So the way that they really portrayed it like you have to be all red or all blue and I think that's maybe a new development in the last little while ...

Further along she suggests that,

... it was always--one or the other and I think that that's maybe something that shouldn't happen so much in politics. You should be able to have a combination-- conservative/liberal or liberal/conservative or however you want to say it, but I didn't see any options presented because of the way the--the media portrayed that... it seems like they should present every side of the issue and you know all information that they can give the public so that they can make some sort of decision based on their values or how they see the candidate and not how so and so presents it or so and so else does.

Once again this participant is concerned with the way political issues have become either all red or all blue – that is, one must take the side of either the Republicans or the Democrats. It is clear that she does not simply believe that this is the way political reality works but instead focuses on the way the “media portrayed” politicians and political issues. In this sense, she is saying that the political reality of the American two-party system is intimately related to the way the media covers politics.

She also notes that the media should “present every side of the issue” in the form of “information” that they “give the public”. Such reporting will allow people to make their own decisions instead of being persuaded to adopt a particular view because of the way a news organization “presents” political issues.

Indeed, participants are sometimes concerned with the extent to which media organizations are able to shape public opinion. As one participant notes, the idea that we can form political opinions about people and issues when we don't have all the facts, like we--like we know now that Bush had bad intelligence about Hussein, you know like--but we didn't know that at the time and--and sometimes you--sometimes you hit and sometimes you miss, and I'm not saying that's okay or that what we're doing--whether or not sometimes the name of the game changes when you're over there; you know what I mean. And I'm not saying that--that didn't happen but I just think that sometimes people are forming opinions just on what the press tells you--just what is not public--yeah, public knowledge, like what is allowed to be put out there.

Another participant discuss the powerlessness she experienced regarding a school board election to allocate property tax funds to an impoverished school district. For her, the media played a decisive role in influencing the outcome of a policy that she feels directly influenced her education. In this case, she perceives the media to be complicit in the powerlessness she felt over the whole situation:

And to me I see politics as this monstrous thing that the media has commentary power on and but it's pretty much untouchable for you, the voter ...

In many cases, participants view the media as exerting an *inhibiting* influence on their political activities. It is to some of those activities that I would now like to turn.

### **Conventional Political Activities**

For those concerned with the future of democracy, it is of paramount importance to explore the extent to which members of democratic societies participate in political activities. This concern has generated a tremendous amount of empirical research in a variety of disciplines including psychology (Cohen, Vigoda & Samorly, 2001; Finkel & Ernst, 2005; Morrell, 2005), sociology (March, 2005; Merelman & Franz, 2004) and political science (Letki, 2004; Pratchett, 2004; Skocpol, 2004). While each of these disciplines focus on different aspects of political participation, nearly all share a concern that citizens in democratic societies often fail to participate in political activities. As Crotty (1991) observes, "political participation or, more accurately, the nonparticipation

of significant numbers of its citizens in its political life, is one of the more severe and intractable problems the United States faces” (p.viii). Given the importance of political participation in the democratic process, it is important to understand how social scientists have traditionally conceptualized such activities.

While there are a number of ways to define ‘political participation’, we will begin with several definitions that provide a foundation for contemporary research into the issue. McClosky (1968) defines political participation as engaging in,

those voluntary activities by which members of a society share in the selection of rulers and, directly or indirectly, in the formation of public policy... These activities typically include voting, seeking information, discussing and proselytizing, attending meetings, contributing financially, and communicating with representatives (p.252)

This definition is similar in many ways to Verba, Nie & Kim’s (1971) view that political participation is,

the means by which the interests, desires, and demands of the ordinary citizen are communicated. By political participation we refer to all those activities by private citizens that are more or less directly aimed at influencing the selection of government personnel and/or the decisions that they make (p.9)

In both cases, political participation is viewed as a means for allowing the members of a society to elect representatives who will carry out their wishes. Kaase and Marsh (1979) offer a similar definition of political participation as, “all voluntary activities by individual citizens intended to influence either directly or indirectly political choices at various levels of the political system” (p.42) while in Brady’s (1999) estimation, political participation, “requires *action* by *ordinary citizens* directed toward *influencing* some *political outcomes*. All four elements—actions, citizens, influence, and political outcomes—are necessary for political participation” (p.737). In each of these definitions we see that political participation involves a concerted effort by citizens of a democratic society to enact change within their representative government. In this sense, political participation is dependent on citizens having a means of enacting change within their government.

Political scientists sometimes distinguish various forms of democracy (Parry, Moyser & Day, 1992). Two of these forms are particularly important for the present analysis. In the first form, democracy flourishes when a large number of individuals are participating in the political process. In what is commonly referred to as *participatory democracy*, the citizens of a democratic nation are actively involved in the shaping of policies and laws. The citizen who is a part of a participatory democracy not only votes in regular elections but also is involved in other activities including signing petitions, communicating with designated representatives, attending political demonstrations, and forming groups that exert political pressure on these representatives. For Parry, Moyser & Day (1992), a modern participatory democracy will be one in which citizens avail themselves of these modes of activity to a high degree. An idealized picture of such a polity would portray a populace interested in politics, turning out in numbers to vote in national and local politics, attending electoral meetings, forming groups to campaign for shared objectives, contacting representatives and officials. The interest in politics could be expected to ensure that many issues and problems would take on a political dimension and that their solution would be sought through political action (p.4).

In a participatory democracy, citizens are actively involved in decisions that have an impact on their lives. While voting is an important part of a participatory democracy, citizens also engage in a wide range of other political activities designed to influence public policy. Indeed, within a participatory democracy, governments are structured to encourage these activities within the populous. This encouragement ensures that the government is functioning in such a way as to maximize the influence citizens have on the policies that affect their everyday lives.

While some believe that a participatory democracy represents the ideal form of democracy, theorists have been forced to concede that this form of democracy is rarely found in actual practice. Indeed, some argue that political participation is most effective when it is restricted to the election of political representatives. In this “realist” theory of democracy, individuals are not expected to actively participate in the affairs of government. Instead,

democracy is distinguished by political competition between groups of leaders for the support of the population which is expressed at periodic elections. The victorious group, a political party, receives authority to govern for a term of years. Between elections, citizens have little part to play. They may criticize, but they are not expected to seek to govern... The citizens place checks on leaders at elections. They are 'controllers' rather than 'participants' (Parry, Moysen & Day, 1992, p.5).

The "realist" approach to democracy does not view frequent political participation as the expression of a flourishing democracy but focuses on the way regular elections ensure that citizens have a socially sanctioned means for choosing representatives who share their particular interests. Within this view, political participation outside of elections is seen as interfering with the smooth functioning of government

Researchers also explore some of the reasons why people choose to participate in political activities. Perhaps the most obvious reason is that people feel that political activities provide a means for bringing about certain desirable goals. In other words, people become politically active for *instrumental* reasons so that, "participation is intended to promote or defend the goals of the participants with the minimum of costs and the maximum of effect" (Parry, Moysen & Day, 1992, p.9). Indeed, much of the research on political participation focuses on the way political activities enable individuals to control the outcome of a particular situation (Barnes & Kaase, 1979; Parry, Moser & Day, 1992; Verba & Nie, 1972).

Another theory of political participation suggests that individuals do not always participate in political activities to further their own ends but are instead motivated by a sense of identification with a particular community. From a *communitarian* perspective,

one motive, or justification, for taking part in politics is not an instrumental calculation of benefit to oneself, but a concern for the community of which a person is a part. At the core of a great deal of participatory democratic theory, at least since the time of Rousseau's Social Contract (published in 1762), is the view that where people are highly integrated into the local community, and where they identify strongly with it, participation would be greater. In these circumstances, people have a more detailed



understanding of local needs and problems and recognize that these needs are often shared with their neighbors (Parry, Moser & Day, 1992, p.12-13).

In other words, political participation draws people together in order for the *community* to achieve concrete political goals. While there is a sense that the community is striving to achieve specific aims, the emphasis is on the community rather than the individual. Moreover, this sense of community need not be restricted to a relationship with people in one's immediate locale. A sense of belonging to a certain trade, class, or religion can motivate people to engage in particular political activities. While these activities may be designed to achieve a particular goal, communitarian theories of participation emphasize the way these activities strengthen the relationship among members of a community.

Yet another approach suggests that people become politically active because they believe that such activities are an *expression* of their "political identity" (Parry, Moser & Day, 1992). In other words, political participation is a symbolic process enabling individuals to explore certain forms of self-expression. Within American society, such expression may take the form of reciting the pledge of allegiance, saluting the flag, or singing the national anthem (Conway, 1985; Parry, Moser & Day, 1992). In other cases, people may have a desire to take part in events such as a war protest in order to express their solidarity with others or out of a desire to participate in an important historical event:

In these cases, however, the expressive and instrumental elements become more difficult to distinguish. If one takes part in a civil right march or in a demonstration over political prisoners outside the embassy of a country notoriously impervious to outside pressure, one may merely be registering one's presence, or identify. But there is usually some hope of adding one's tiny voice in order to create a clamour, however unrealistic this is seen from some instrumental perspectives (Parry, Moser & Day, 1992).

While the symbolic aspects of political participation may enable citizens to express their political identity, such expression may also further instrumental ends. Indeed, the differences among instrumental, communitarian, and expressive forms of political participation represent a difference in emphasis rather than divisions defined by discrete boundaries.

It is clear from the interviews that participants often describe situations in which they participated in some form of conventional political activity. Two of the most salient activities were (1) voting in an election and (2) attending a political protest. We will begin by discussing participant's experience of voting in an election.

### ***Voting***

For many citizens of democratic societies, voting is the primary means for ensuring that their views are represented at all levels of government. Nearly every year, citizens have the opportunity to choose from a variety of candidates and issues and ultimately to cast a vote in a direction of their own choosing. Yet there is a real concern that members of democratic societies often choose not to participate in local, state, and national elections. Crotty (1991) observes that, "the United States has one of the weakest levels of political participation, as measured by the vote, of any major industrial democracy" (p.1) while Kornbluh (2000) expresses concern that American democracy is increasingly vulnerable to what he calls the "demobilization of the mass electorate" (p.xiii). Others point out that this dire situation should be dealt with by trying to understand the characteristics and experiences of the ever fluctuating mass of "non-voters" (Doppelt & Shearer; 1999). Clearly, a thorough understanding of the voting experiences of citizens in a democracy is in order.

For a number of participants, voting in an election gives them an opportunity to reflect on their political beliefs and to determine the extent to which a political party's platform is congruent with the way they view a political issue. In other words, participants often view an election as a time to pick the candidate who shares their political beliefs. One participant discusses the first time she voted in a national election:

Okay, the first time I voted I waited in line for about five hours to vote on campus. It was my freshman year; I had never really talked about politics in my house. I knew what my beliefs were and what my morals were but I didn't necessarily know you know who that was tied to. So I found out a little bit about you know the candidates and realized that I--I

definitely wasn't a Republican. I really didn't think I was a Democrat either and so yeah, I went Green Party and got yelled at by all my friends, who all voted for Gore. [Laughs] But I mean I--that felt like the closest to what I thought at the time and I didn't really think about it in terms of you know being practical and saying okay would I rather you know-- these two people are the people that I have a choice from. Would I rather put in my word for one or the other; so that kind of stood out later I guess.

What stood out to this participant was the fact that voting required her to select a candidate from a particular party who shared her beliefs. Despite her friends' misgivings, she ultimately chose to vote for a more marginal political party. She did not feel that the choice she made was based on any concern for being "practical." Despite the overwhelming odds against a Green Party candidate winning the Presidential Election, she felt compelled to select that party because the Green candidate shared more of her beliefs than any of the traditional political parties. This event was political for her because, as she notes:

I was engaged in politics; I mean I was--I was voting and I was with a bunch of other people that like me had probably just turned 18. I mean I was in the--in the freshman dorm, so I knew at that point that I was in a conservative town but--I mean you can't wear anything that has a candidate's name on it or anything in the place. So you--so you like hear a lot of people talking and stuff and I think that the big thing was I--I was alone. My friends waited in line with me for a while and then they like [Laughs] just opted out. I guess they wanted to go out or whatever and I--I waited alone for like two and half or three hours, and I had a book but I was really just like kind of listening to what everybody else was saying and--and I realized that I was--I was the only one [Laughs] in that group at least that wasn't voting red or blue; so, I was physically alone and voting alone; so ... And I knew I was alone voting. [Laughs] I mean my friends waited for a while, but I wasn't a part of the group apparently.

Here the participant develops an intriguing insight into the nature of her voting experience. The friends that ridiculed her for voting for a marginal political party ultimately decided not to vote, leaving her alone in line. Moreover, the conversations she heard from the strangers around her indicated that she was the only one voting for the Green Party candidate. She was alone both in the fact that her friends had left her and in her choice to vote for the Green Party.

**Another participant reflects on his ambivalence in voting for the Green Party in a recent presidential election:**

Yeah; well and I used to feel more empowered. I used to vote green because I--my one vote was never going to determine which way the State and Senate's electoral votes and I felt like the Democratic Party was slipping to the right so if I vote green that's a message that they lost--they're going to count--out of the number of votes that went green and they're going to say we're losing two percent of our constituency because we're going too far to the right. And that might be a way to bring them back in a very, very small way ... And I felt--so I could see how my vote would make a difference. But then when I do feel like Ralph Nader cost Gore the election in what was it--2000, and I feel bitter about that because I respect what Ralph Nader is saying but I think this country was hurt by his actions, and so I can't support him anymore. So I've just been voting Democrat since then and I don't--and here there's only 40 percent of the state that voted Democrat so it--I guess I added a statistic but it didn't--I don't think that it made much difference at all. So I did feel pretty disempowered voting.

Although this participant's political views are aligned more with the Green Party's platform, he is concerned that voting for the Green Party candidate ultimately cost the Democratic candidate the 2000 Presidential Election. He initially viewed his vote for the Green Party as a means of steering the platform of the Democratic Party though he concedes that this may have backfired. Because of this situation, he generally does not feel "empowered" when he votes. Moreover, because he lives in a state that traditionally gives its electoral votes to Republican candidates in the Presidential election, he does not feel that his vote "made much difference at all."

Participants sometimes look at voting as the final stage of the political process. As one participant notes:

... it's difficult too because when you've cast that vote it's almost like you're certainly not like stoic and decided this is--this is how I feel about this issue. And that's not going to change but when you cast that vote it's kind of like [*Claps*] it's cemented. And it's like okay that's my political ideology in a fucking hat for--for [*Laughs*] forever or for the next four years when it may shift. I might start to understand things differently or have some insight into something new and it's like I don't--I didn't agree with that but what's done is done and that's--that's how I felt you know at that moment and so I'm sort of stuck with that now.

While voting in an election requires people to choose between the platforms of various political candidates, the act of voting itself is sometimes experienced as “cemented” in so far as it does not make room for shifting opinions and tends to simplify many of the nuances in political thought. When one casts a vote, “what’s done is done,” so that whatever the outcome of the election, one is “stuck with that now.” Further along, the participant describes,

... that element of apathy of like am I just going Presidential Election to Presidential Election you know and it’s like okay I cast my vote. There’s nothing I feel like I can do now for the next four years. We’ll just wait until the next one and see what--see what my choices are then and it’s kind of--it’s sort of damned if you do and damned if you don’t kind of feeling.

For many participants, voting remains the primary socially sanctioned means for participating in politics. Indeed, once one has cast his or her vote, there is a sense that the process is complete and the next opportunity to be politically active emerges when the election cycle begins again. For this participant, the situation encourages “apathy” and a feeling that in these circumstances, you are, “damned if you do and damned if you don’t.” Moreover, he suggests that,

... it’s frustrating in that--in that fact because it’s like I mean my views are changing and fluctuating all the time and I learn new things and everything like that and it’s--you’re asked in one moment to sort of seal your--your political views into one vote and that seems pretty impossible. And you get--I mean I think it would be really interesting to sort of go back in and look at like the main points of people’s platforms before elections and--and then chart the people that got elected and look how much of what they said and what they did or how much of what they said turned into something they actually did and how much you’re just getting sold on these ideas that--that end up being a whole bunch of nothing. I guess that’s a frustrating thing, too is--it’s hard you know I guess I’ve talked about this earlier a little bit but it’s just hard to feel like that vote means a lot because you don’t know what the hell they’re going to do once they’re in. And the--the political process and the way the government functions it seems like it’s just a big mess ...

Here there is a sense that even though voting is the principle way to be involved in politics, it is not all together clear how much influence individuals have once their vote has been cast. Not only do elections require one to “seal” his or her “political views into one vote,” but it is also “hard to feel like that vote means a lot

because you don't know what the hell" a politician is going to do once he or she is elected to office.

Another participant notes how the 2004 Presidential Election changed the way people interacted with one another:

Like the election was over and [my boyfriend] and I stopped fighting about it; and the election was over and a bunch of my theater friends and I stopped fighting about it. Like it just--it was the most bizarre thing I--one of the few--most bizarre things I had encountered at college, you know at that--up to that point where it was just this phenomenon of everyone had an opinion and everyone thought this about this and well you read that here? Well I read this here. And--and it wasn't even--because I think that when it's not Presidential there's a lot of bickering between Democrats and between Republicans, but like I said you get an issue or you get a situation or an event you know like electing our President and everyone is a staunch--you're a Republican or you're a Democrat or you're liberal or you're conservative. And so it was just amazing that I knew there were people that were on the fence about certain subjects and just all the sudden they were on one side or the other.

Once again, participants see voting as the final stage of the political process.

Especially during an election, people who may ordinarily possess complex political ideas begin to identify and relate to one another in terms of available political parties. Indeed, once the election is over, people become less polarized.

Further along, the participant suggests that,

... the most odd thing was that it really did just vanish. We had a new President and it was over, you know. And it felt very anti-climatic because [*Laughs*] I don't know--just like I--I guess I saw so much, like I saw so many really heated debates and so many of my friends just like so certain that he wouldn't get reelected and it just felt very like--you know like just totally like peak and then it's gone. Like not even it peaks and plateaus or peaks and dips back down; it just peaked and disappeared. Like it was bizarre; I was just like you mean there's no bloodshed, there's no gun you know shot heard around the world--nothing? Like it really felt like you could feel the tension, the--the closer you got to Election Day. You could feel--every time there was an argument or a debate the stakes got higher. You could hear it in their voices that this was more--the argument or the side being presented was more desperate because it was so close and what you were saying and who you were backing was about to be decided if they were going to win or not, and you could just feel the energy rising. I don't know; and to have it just all the sudden--be

nothing--not just go--not just dip or drop out or it just disappeared. It was mind-boggling

...

Several participants noted that political debate simply “vanished” after the election was over. For this participant, there is a sense that tension increased as the election approached until it reaches a “peak and then it’s gone.” She makes it clear that the tension and frequency of her friend’s political debates did not “peak and plateaus or peak and dip back down” but that ultimately it just “peaked and disappeared.” For the participant, this experience was “mind-boggling” as one felt the “energy rising” only to have it “all the sudden – be nothing.”

It is also interesting to note that when people did discuss voting in an election, it was almost always a national election. The general sense was that local politics were of minor importance. While some participant’s did talk about local politics, it was more often the case that descriptions of their participation in an *election* were restricted to national politics, especially Presidential Elections. As one participant notes:

... that element of well then I don’t pay attention to the state level stuff or the local--the local stuff and I can certainly be involved with that you know during the time period between Presidential Elections but that’s blown up so much that--that’s almost when you think about voting and politics that’s all you think about or all I think about is the national level stuff.

This participant senses that he may become more politically active if he begins to focus on both local and national political activities. At the same time, he notes that the fact that he is likely to move after he graduates from school contributes to his,

... being in flux, being in a place where I don’t think I’m going to stay as long, it seems like I--maybe that’s part of it, like maybe once I get to a town where I think I’m going to settle down and stay for a while I might find that I start paying a lot more attention to local level stuff because I could maybe see that affecting me for a much longer period of time. I don’t know if that’s part of the reason or if that’s part of the evolution of like I’m sort of a novice in--in government and politics and--and you know your--your introduction to that is as a kid almost more--you clue in much more on the national level President Elections; that’s what you know. And--and as you--you grow older, you get more involved, you get more nuanced, maybe local and state level stuff starts to become more a part of the picture.

Here the participant hopes that his lack of interest in local politics stems from the fact that his current residence is not where he ultimately wants to “settle down.” Once he sets up residence in a place where he feels he will live for an extended period of time, he may become more interested in local political activities. He also notes that his focus on national politics may be a result of socialization. He suggests that, as a child, “you clue in much more on the national level Presidential Elections” and that as one grows older, “local and state level stuff starts to become more a part of the picture.” I will have much more to say about the relationship between politics and socialization in a moment.

For the most part, participants were not particularly enthusiastic about casting a vote in an election. Voting was largely experienced as an obligation instead of an exciting part of being a citizen in a democratic society. Those participants who talked about voting were often frustrated because they did not believe that their vote would have much of an impact on the outcome of elections. As I have already noted, descriptions of electoral experiences were almost always restricted to national elections. When participants discuss local politics, they usually do not describe actually casting a vote in those elections.

### ***Protesting***

For a number of participants, protesting provides either an alternative or a compliment to what they view as more conventional forms of political participation. Parry, Moyser and Day (1992) suggest that,

clearly, it is of some significance to understand the prospects of democratic institutions to establish how far such ‘unconventional’ forms of participation constitute another distinct mode of action performed by a category of protestors ... or whether it is indeed the case that some forms of protest are really part of the ‘conventional’ political world (p.18).

While political theorists focus on electoral politics, it may be fruitful to explore the relationship between “unconventional” and “conventional” forms of political participation. This is all the more important when we begin to reflect on the very meaning of being a member of a democracy. For those advocating participatory democracy, it is clear that democracy,



is dependent upon participation rather than upon the mere existence of a set of procedures that facilitate a properly monitored open electoral system. Advocates of participatory democracy, therefore, recognize that a democratic system depends upon people having the opportunity to engage in social and political activity, in an ongoing way, not just at election time (Todd & Taylor, 2004, p.10)

Within a participatory democracy, elections may be an important part of the political process but they are not the only means of political participation. While alternative political activities may be viewed by some as a distraction from the party politics or elections that enable citizens to exert a significant influence on their representatives, “unconventional” forms of political activity may also signal a change in the structure of contemporary politics. Indeed, Weinstein (2004) argues that,

the rise in new social movements and direct action politics is often contrasted with the decline in political parties. It is clearly the case that the rise in new social movement activities has allowed for a different possibility of ‘doing’ politics—one that was widely regarded as being far more attractive to young people (Weinstein, 2004, p.185).

This has led a number of researchers to focus on the way demonstrations and political protests operate both within and outside the boundaries of more conventional forms of political activity (Jenkins & Klandermans, 1995; Teske, 1997; Todd & Taylor, 2004). Such research can benefit from understanding how people experience these “unconventional” forms of political activity and how these activities are distinguished from more conventional forms of political participation.

A number of participants note the difference between their experience of protesting and their experience of voting in an election:

Voting just felt like a--I don't really want to say a responsibility but just something that was a little more natural and everybody votes and it's--I mean I guess not everybody votes, but it's organized. It's--it's part of the process and I feel like I'm--I'm taking part in the process of you know politics, but then when I'm protesting it's almost like I'm--I'm arguing against it. I mean it's--it's you know less organized, more raw. And when you're voting nobody knows who you're voting for; I mean it's all undercover and secretive and oh this is my view but nobody knows. So I felt more--yeah; I felt like I was really doing something even though it probably counted less than my measly vote ...

Here she explores the possibility that protesting is a *reaction* against conventional political activities, such as voting, instead of another type of socially sanctioned political activity. For her, voting is “part of the process” while protesting is an activity that is “arguing against” conventional political activity. While voting is “organized”, protesting is “raw”. Moreover, voting is largely a private affair – “undercover and secretive”—so that “nobody knows who you’re voting for.” On the other hand, protesting make her feel like she is doing something unconventional and public, something in stark contrast to casting a vote in an election. Finally, even though she clearly prefers protesting to voting, she is concerned that her participation in a protest “probably counted less than my measly vote.”

Another participant describes the contrast between voting in a national election and taking part in a war protest in Washington D.C.:

Well just--I just remember being so excited to go do this thing, and I--it was like you--you look like at the--you know Vietnam era and all the protests and--and it seemed like everybody was alive and a part of it and there was a voice and you’re actually heard and it was that sort of excitement about like I’m doing something. I’m actually--I’m actually going to try to be a part of this and try to--maybe somebody will hear this and I’ll actually feel like I did something as opposed to just casting this vote that sort of goes away into Neverland that doesn’t really mean--it--it means something and--and you know when it’s accumulated, but it--it still feels almost sort of like a meaningless action in a lot of ways--voting--to me still. But going and actually being a part of it felt like the closest thing I could to protest to actually like running for something and trying to actually be a part of the--the governmental process as far as being an elected person ...

This participant notes the similarity between his participation in a protest to prevent the Iraq War and protesting in the sixties against the war in Vietnam. In both cases, people are more “alive” in their struggle to “to be a part” of something that can change the course of political events. Many of the participants who discussed participating in political protests mentioned this sense of being a part of something important. Indeed, many felt that when they protested, they had a “voice” in shaping the course of events. The experience of protesting was radically

different from voting in an election where one's vote "goes away into Neverland," a "meaningless action in a lot of ways."

Another participant describes her experience of participating in a political protest in the town where she attends school:

I had never really felt connected and overtly political about anything in terms of national politics. I mean I--I've stated my opinion and I think that people generally know where I fall but I had never done anything about it. I never contributed; I never you know--you know monetarily or physically or anything. So I guess that was the first time that I had really felt like I belonged to one side or another and I felt like I--a unity of people around that were you know expressing the same thing and making their voice heard.

Before protesting, she had "never really felt connected" to political events on the national level. Although she had discussed political issues with people in the past, she notes a difference between having a political position and *doing* something about that position. Indeed, she suggests that,

... it was interesting because I had never experienced that before. I mean it was a--a new experience for me and I mean it was exciting and I--I felt good about myself for--for having you know voiced my opinion especially in a town whose opinions for the most part is opposite. So it was nice to hear people honking because I didn't expect that. And it--it did feel like the--there was a real like unity and understanding among the people that were there. I mean we all shared the same opinions for the most part even though we may come from different backgrounds. That was, you know a concrete example of when I was--I felt involved with politics I guess. I haven't--I mean I haven't been involved otherwise. I voted and I've you know made my voice heard but I've never contributed or really kept up with much more than--it's just on the surface.

Many of these participants describe a sense of belonging and a "unity" they do not experience in other political activities. Moreover, participants often talk about the way protests give them an opportunity to make their "voice heard." In sharp contrast to voting, participants referred to the sense that protesting was very much a shared experience. There also seems to be a feeling of *commitment* in protesting that is lacking when participants talk about voting in an election.

Returning to a participant who describes his experience of protesting in Washington D.C., it is clear that protesting is an extremely powerful experience:

I think one of the coolest things for me was just being around so many people that you know I'm not so naïve to think that they all have the same views as me or anything like that but feeling part of a cause and--and being in that march and sort of walking around the buildings and going past the White House and sort of just stopping and standing and looking at this thing and it seems, it's--it really is like this TV world, you know that I just see and it's happening. I'm--I'm watching; I'm not participating and actually being there in the flesh and seeing these buildings for real made them so much more real and tangible to me and--and it--you know I keep saying alive I think but just being in that place, I think--I think that's that the alluring aspect of--of Washington, DC is--for--is like being there and seeing--and seeing these places and being a part of that environment.

What is especially significant about this excerpt is the role setting plays in the entire experience. It is clear that the setting in which this protest took place was intimately connected to the experience as a whole. The monuments and buildings are particularly salient as the participant marches through the streets. Clearly, he is more accustomed to seeing these buildings and monuments through the media, so much so that the experience “really is like this TV world.”

Just walking around and seeing all the monuments and everything and--and the Vietnam Wall, you just can't help sort of feeling sort of mesmerized by it and--and walking around late at night the first night we got there when it was just really quiet and--and there's nobody out and going up to the Capitol House, you know it's probably--I don't know like nine--ten of nine and it's just dark and it's kind of--kind of chilly and it's just really quiet and sort of just standing there and then the building is lit up and it just felt so--it was just so fascinating to actually be there.

This participant distinguishes the way he encountered these buildings in the past—a “watching”—from his present encounter with them in the protest—a “participating.” All of this makes it difficult for him to believe that these structures are actually “real,” that he is really “there in the flesh.” Indeed, he describes his encounter with the Vietnam War Memorial as mesmerizing.

Despite the fact that most participants who discussed political protests preferred protesting to voting, some express frustration that although they felt like they had a “voice” and a sense of “unity,” they still were not sure that these protests had any significant impact on political issues.

But [*Sighs*] you know this should be the part where I talk about that was what really got me interested and--and then I really started getting into these things and trying to--to be

involved but it sort of just kind of went away. I don't know what happened; I don't know what was motivating that and why I wanted to be so involved, but part of it was that they went ahead and passed the Bill anyway. And so it was like oh yeah this doesn't really matter. You can do this and you know nothing is really going to come of it.

Here the participant is referring to a time when he and his classmates organized a protest against a bill designed to loosen the restrictions on gun control. His frustration stems from the fact that, despite the protest, the legislation ultimately passed. Although he explains elsewhere that he enjoys protesting more than voting, he is concerned that his failure to make an impact on political issues has led to apathy regarding political participation. Indeed, he connects this early experience of protesting with his experience of protesting in Washington D.C.:

... it's still really frustrating to see that many people do something and feel a part of something and then have the exact opposite of what you were hoping to achieve come from it.

Several participants express concern that while protesting enables them to express themselves in exciting ways, the activity itself did not seem to bring about the desired instrumental outcome. Similarly, participants often discuss the way their vote failed to make any lasting contribution to the political process, despite the fact that voting is perhaps the most conventional form of political activity.

Another participant expresses concern that her friends attended a protest but failed to participate in an election that she believes could have really made an impact:

Like you know a couple friends of mine that I know didn't vote went to a demonstration in Washington, DC and I'm like you had your chance. What are you doing? Why are you marching on the--on the lawn? Who cares; he doesn't--he's elected and maybe he wouldn't have been if you--I mean I know [our] county went for Kerry so they were probably like well it wouldn't have made that much of a difference. But I'm just like but you're one of hundreds of thousands that thought that way; my county is going to go this way it doesn't really matter or my state is going to go this way; it doesn't really matter. Maybe it does--maybe it does; if you're--if you're one person that feels that way but votes anyway maybe there's other people out there that are like well it doesn't matter but I'll vote anyway and it totally changes the--I mean it totally changes the outcome.

In this case, the participant is frustrated by the fact that some of her politically active friends chose to participate in a political demonstration instead of voting. She recognizes that people may not vote because the electoral system is set up to give the votes of an entire region to a single candidate; yet she is adamant that if individuals truly believe that they can make a difference, it may be possible for them to do so. Her experience is a combination of frustration that people do not participate in activities that may actually change the course of important events and optimism that if people were to realize this, things can be changed. Further along she suggest that,

... I think there are very few times that I've experienced a defeatist attitude and just seeing that before the decision was even made and then now it's been made and there's nothing--I mean we're not going to impeach him, we're not going--I mean the decision has been made. You didn't show up and so now--you're late ... Where were you last November? Where were you? You're late now; I don't care. You know and so it just--it didn't feel hypocritical; it felt [*Sighs*] superfluous. Why are you going? You could have--you could have done something about it; you didn't ... I'm really not sure that demonstrations get that much accomplished anymore especially if you're not accompanying that with going to the box.

Once again, she is frustrated by the fact that people will participate in a political protest but fail to vote in a presidential election—an activity she believes has the power to make a difference. She shares with many participants the feeling that voting is the end of the political process where “a decision has been made.” She also notes that her friends are not so much “hypocritical” as their actions were “superfluous.” Clearly, this participant views voting as the primary means for bringing about social change. Indeed, she is disappointed that some of her politically active friends attended a protest at the expense of voting in a national election.

Finally, she reflects on what it means to be “radical” and the way this is fused with political activism.

I don't know; it's just--it felt very poser to me, like oh yeah you've got all these you know really radical ideas and so and so but you're not turning it into anything, so what's the point of being radical except to maybe be accepted by a demographic in college? Like oh your radical; me too. You know like--I mean it just--it felt really silly and I wasn't like--I

wasn't angry. It was just one of those things that you like observe and you're like that's ridiculous. Like I know for a fact you didn't vote and I don't know why you're showing up now.

She is concerned that the label "radical" has lost its original power and that it is now simply a way to identify oneself within the social milieu. Instead of being labeled a radical because of the activities you engage in, it is now possible to mimic these activities in such a way as to be labeled a radical. In this sense, the participant is concerned that people sometimes engage in certain political activities to fit in with a certain group rather than for genuine political reasons. To be a radical, she feels that you have to take "radical ideas" and turn them into concrete activities, such as voting, that can ultimately make a difference within the political arena.

## **Political Socialization**

Up to this point, we have focused on both mass media and conventional political activities as practices that embody an interpretation of political reality. It is also clear from the interviews that participants found issues surrounding *political socialization* particularly salient. A few words are in order regarding the meaning of this category.

While a number of researchers focus on the way individuals become part of a political system, a shared definition of political socialization has not always been forthcoming. Greenstein (1970) suggests that,

the confusion about political socialization begins with the very meaning of the phrase ... and some of the contestation on the general merits of political socialization inquiry appears to be of the blind-men-and-the-elephant variety, with the debating parties disagreeing on the implicit referents of their terms rather than on empirical grounds (p.970).

For Gimpel, Lay and Schuknecht (2003), "political socialization is the process by which new generations are inducted into political culture, learning the knowledge, values, and attitudes that contribute to support of the political system" (p.13). In this definition, political socialization is viewed as a means for bringing people into contact with a particular political culture. Indeed, Tarrant

(1989) suggests that ultimately, “to socialize someone is to introduce them to a particular way of life” (p.40). Moreover, this process is symbiotic as the political socialization of the individual serves to maintain the existence of a specific political culture. Greenstein (1970) argues that political socialization is sometimes understood as

the way the prevailing norms of a political system become the norms of the new members of that system. Here the usage parallels one of the meanings sociologists give to the more general term “socialization.” The political subset of socialization is also sometimes called “politicization.” In any event, the focus is on the acquisition of norm-consistent behavior (p.971).

In this case, political socialization is viewed as the transferring of “norm-consistent behavior” to individuals previously lacking such behaviors. In this definition, the focus is on the “norms” of a political system and the individual’s internalization and/or application of such norms.

Clearly, one of the central concerns for political socialization researchers is the relationship between individuals and the political systems of which they are a part. Marsh (1971) suggests that,

the major impetus directing interest towards the field and also the major assumption in that field is that the study of the process of political socialization in a nation can help explain, in some measure, the operation of that political system. The implication stated simply would seem to be that an understanding of the conditions under which attitudes change or remain stable will help us to understand and perhaps predict stability and change with the political system” (p.454).

From this perspective, understanding an individual’s political attitudes and beliefs is of paramount importance if researchers are to explain the prosperity or decline of specific political systems. On the other hand, researchers also focus on the way political systems influence the thoughts and behaviors of the individuals that make up these systems. In other words, political socialization researchers are interested both in how political systems encourage people to think and behave in particular ways and how such thoughts and behaviors influence the functioning of political systems.



As we have seen, the movement from epistemology and individual consciousness to ontology and practices is intended to critique the traditional view of interpretation as exclusively a form of mental activity. In our discussion of political socialization, we risk going in the opposite direction such that political systems are given priority over individual consciousness. In such a situation, political structures delineate the boundaries of human agency and political systems determine a subject's individual experiences. The point of focusing on practice is to insure that these issues are neither reduced to the level of individual consciousness nor strictly identified with more macro-level ambitions. It is particularly important for our discussion of political socialization to stress that the following categories represent practices that emerge at the intersection of the agent and the political system.

### ***School***

Many participants discuss political situations that occur within an academic context. This is particularly interesting as schools are one of society's earliest and most pervasive institutions for conveying norms and values to its newest members. Lea (1982) notes that even as far back as Aristotle,

education is of fundamental importance in developing the distinctive human abilities of reason and speech and in providing the training for various crafts and jobs. But he was eminently clear in saying that the most important purpose of education was in creating the proper citizenry for a city-state ... Individuals have to be trained and have their habits formed for their polity. To Aristotle, the constitution and way of living of a people were one and the same, involving all the relationships, values, and meanings of a political culture" (p.119).

For Aristotle, schools are integral to producing citizens who will remain active within a particular political system. Moreover, the *form* as well as the *content* of education plays a powerful role in the education of the members of a political system. For Gimpel, Lay and Schuknecht (2003), "because all schools are organized hierarchically, with clear governing structures, rules, and enforcers of those rules, there are ample reasons for believing that a child's first encounter with authority outside the family is in school" (p.145). Miller (2002) goes even

further in suggesting that schools, as state institutions, “attempt to construct how citizens understand their proper roles in society and how they think of themselves” (p.4).

A number of participants encountered politically saturated situations in high school. Some of their initial encounters with politics involved politically oriented student organizations. One participant notes that,

... politics have never seemed fair to me ... I was on the Student Government and the only reason--I felt like the only reason I was a representative was because I was well known and for whatever reason--freshman year--I was like Student Council--that sounds like fun and yet there's nothing like I hadn't done it in middle school; I had no you know experience but I got it because I was well known by people from my middle school. And so--and it didn't strike me as odd then but I look back on it now and I'm like really the only reason I ever got started with Student Council is because it sounded like a good time and then I was you know well known enough to get elected.

Here the participant suggests that politics often seems unfair. She connects her sense of this with a high school experience where students, including herself, were elected to positions of power simply because they were “well known.”

Although she did not feel uniquely qualified for the position, her popularity and interest in the position were sufficient to get her elected to student government.

Another participant discusses his difficulty in expressing his reason for voting for a particular political candidate. He ultimately compares this ambivalence with an experience from high school:

It's actually weird; I was just thinking that as I was talking about it. I don't have--I don't remember like--like examining his platform or something like that and saying okay I--this--I really agree with his sort of--of points of view and--and the things he talks about wanting to do and I think they're important and I think these are something that's important and I think these can help me out and help people ... now I don't even know why--I know now why I voted for him, but I don't know then if it was more than just kind of like well this guy is liberal. I know he--he's more like me or he--I think more like him than this other person. And so it was fairly--it was a fairly general sort of feeling that this is who I want to vote for. And now where I pay attention to what they're going to do with Social Security or something like that and I--and I can maybe understand the ramifications of--of what they're--the way they want to take the government, the direction

they're--they're hoping to go. So it was more--it almost--it almost has a feeling of like--like high school like student government, like popularity election kind of shit.

In this case, the participant has a sense that his preference for a candidate was motivated more by his identification with a candidate than by specific political issues. He suggests that he voted in a particular direction because he had, “a fairly general sort of feeling that this is who I want to vote for.” He contrasts this with another experience where it was the specific issues (i.e. social security) that led him to focus on a particular candidate. He compares the first experience with high school student government, which he aligns with, “popularity election kind of shit.” Indeed, he continues by discussing his own experience of participating in high school student government:

I was in the student government in high school and just having the word government it seemed--I think that--my--I think when I talked about like sort of being silly and--and sort of a popularity contest and the same because you didn't do anything. I can remember--this makes me sound like such a bad person--one of the--the things that I had on my platform was *Meals on Wheels*. I don't know if you've heard of this program; it takes food to--to people that can't get out of the house and stuff like that, and that was one of the things that I wanted our senior class to be able to fund and--and maybe to get students to start doing that. And it seemed like a really cool idea. But you know once you got in and elected and like nobody did anything; it was just--you got out of--it was a way to get out of class and I [laughs]--I wonder sometimes if it's just like is that what all these folks up in DC are doing? It's just a way to get--you know they're elected and they can make a lot of money and they--you know when they retire they get a ton of money forever and you know all these luxuries; are they just getting out of class for you know an hour? Is it that same kind of thing?

In this passage, the participant explicitly connects his own experience of high school student government with his concern regarding the motivations of professional politicians in contemporary society. In high school government, “once you got in and elected ... nobody did anything ... it was a way to get out of class.” He uses this to reflect on whether politicians are, “just getting out of class for you know an hour? It is that same kind of thing?” In other words, his experience of participating in high school student government provides a means for questioning the motives and behaviors of today's elected officials.

Other participants focus on concrete political issues that emerge when they were in high school. For this participant, the issue of school funding was particularly salient:

I don't know; I felt like for a while in Texas like school funding was a big issue and we would talk about that and like you know should we give--talking about--I don't even remember what it's called--giving children money that don't have good public schools to go to a private school, like school vouchers. I don't think that's what it's called but along those lines. And I really like--I did a project on it and I got really well-versed in it and three months later the issue died down. And I was like this is like the one thing I could talk about or really know--really knew a lot about because I had to. And then schools weren't the issue anymore and it was--for Houston it was public transportation or it was road systems and--and that was just on the State level. Like I attacked a small little thing on the State level and then to think of how many issues on the national level you know rise and fall and rise and fall.

Here the participant expresses concern that her dedication to learning the intricacies of a single issue ultimately fail to have any lasting impact. Political issues come and go and by the time she feels competent to deal with the issue, final decisions have already been made. Moreover, she suggests that this issue was, "just on the state level" and that the situation must be even more complex with issues at the national level that, "rise and fall."

For another participant, her encounter with an unfamiliar historical event is a particularly salient political situation. She notes that when,

... I was in high school and we were learning about how the--the Japanese were interned during World War II. I remember reading about that and just being like completely confused. I was like this actually happened and interrupted the teacher and he was getting--you know talking about it, and I was like wait; this actually happened in America? And he was like yes; this actually happened, and then other people in the class were almost like astonished that I didn't know and I was like how could I have you know--how could I be you know 15 and not have heard about this before? And you hear about people who you know don't believe in the Holocaust and things like that. I wonder like where did their--where did their history come from and I--I don't know. I wonder if I even am getting like a liberal point of view because I was learning about it in California but I've talked to other people in Tennessee after I started school about it and some

people still didn't know that the Japanese had been interned. So I thought that was really interesting.

In this passage, the participant is surprised that she was unaware of what she takes to be a pivotal event in American history. She also discusses the way others fail to recognize other pivotal events and what this says about the social origins of history. Finally, she reflects on the origins of her own knowledge and the way this knowledge is shaped by a particular point of view.

Another participant suggests that it was in high school that he began to reflect on different political points of view.

I think in high school I began to understand maybe a little bit better what all that kind of stuff was about, you know like what--what were the implications in a sense of--of different political views, you know what--what that meant about what you think about economics and--and social structure and you know class relations all of those sorts of things--race relations, religion, all of that kind of stuff.

In this case, high school serves as a context for a wide range of political issues to come into focus. Indeed, this participant feels that in high school he began to see important issues in a different light.

Sometimes, participants discuss the underlying power dynamics that they encountered in high school. One participant notes the resistance she encountered while trying to navigate some of the bureaucratic aspects of early graduation:

I'm thinking I guess how like the school systems works, like I was trying to graduate high school early and I had to go through certain people that knew certain other people; so I guess more the politics of being connected to the right people ... I had to get it approved by the County Board; so I had to approve it through my Principal but he wasn't exactly the most in-favor at the time. So I went through the Vice Principal instead because she knew so and so and whatever and the whole community kind of ran the same way, like if you knew the right person well then you can get things done. And if you didn't--then you couldn't.

For this participant, politics involves "being connected to the right people." In order to graduate early from high school, it was necessary to navigate a number of bureaucratic hurdles. In this case, she was successful in so far as she knew the right people. Indeed, this situation was not restricted to her high school as, "the

whole community kind of ran the same way, like if you knew the right person well then you can get things done.”

Several participants discuss the importance of knowing the right people in order to bring about a desirable outcome. In some cases, this insight was gleaned from participating in particular high school activities. For one participant, her attempt to land a role in a high school play brought these issues into focus.

I did theater in high school and parents that weren't on the you know--Parent Theater Booster Club--those kids wouldn't always get the better roles even if they were better suited for it. And that always really bothered me. I didn't come into high school with theater connections, so it took me two years as a talented actress to even get on the stage and I don't know--that really bothered me. And I don't know why there's this--I have this desire for things to be fair. I don't know if we all feel that but I--I just feel like politics was always the one--not always the one but always an element to quickly remind me that the world wasn't fair.

This participant notes that it was necessary to have connections in order to bring about a desirable goal. This realization brings issues of equity into focus. Indeed, she expresses concern that things are not always fair and it is politics that sometimes brings that to her attention. She notes that ultimately, it is the connections that one has that determine whether one is able to “get on the stage” at all.

For several of the younger participants, the experience of being in high school during the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks stands-out as a particularly salient political situation. As one student notes,

I was in DC in high school when 9/11 happened. I mean my--so in school like you know that day I was actually really, really glad I didn't come to school you know because like chairs were thrown, windows were broken, like people went--like--like some stuff went down just because people freaked out so much. I'm from a military town so like everyone's parents worked at the Pentagon and like everyone was like at Andrews Air Force Base which is where Air Force One flies out of and they were so afraid it was going to get hit there, you know. You know the next day I come back to school and you know--I almost feel like the conversations in class--like I feel like I'm being blamed for everything--we have a very, very small like Middle Eastern population there. And I was always the outwardly like--I'm Lebanese; this is where I come from; I'm very outspoken about my politics, so I felt like almost--like I was blamed for like what happened and then you know

I mean like my house was vandalized after that, which like I was--we were--I was home alone. It was egged and toilet papered and my car was covered in human shit like smeared on there, and so it was like the front door and the front window was like--I mean there was that. I mean my car was vandalized like in the parking lot that day you know.

For this participant, the terrorist attacks had a dramatic effect on her relationship with her peers and with the community at large. In this sense, her cultural heritage becomes figural both for her and for others in the wake of the attacks.

Another participant shares a similar experience:

The very first experience that I was thinking of was when--I was like--[*Sighs*] I guess I was like 16 or so when September 11<sup>th</sup> happened and my brother was in like second grade and he came home from school the day after and someone had called him a “towel head” and I didn’t even know what that meant but that was my very first like experience with it because the teachers didn’t do anything about it and then like my mom had to go into the school and have a talk with someone about it, be like you know this is why this is wrong. And when they were explaining it to us I found it really--I don’t know; I just--I had never really thought about it that like people would be biased against me. I thought--I’ve heard about people being biased against like you know racist or sexist but I had never really thought about like--like no, I’m an American. Why would anyone have anything against me or my siblings; so--? That was really interesting.

Previously, this participant had reflected on racial and sexual bias but the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks brought forth an entirely unexpected intolerance – a bias against a person’s national origins. It is clear that the participant was completely unprepared for the reactions of her teachers and peers. For her, it seems incomprehensible that someone would hold anything against her or her family as a result of the attacks. For both of these participants, school became a symbol or a microcosm of the intolerance surrounding the events of September 11<sup>th</sup>. Indeed, these events brought their cultural heritage into particularly sharp focus.

Up to this point, we have focused on high school situations where people are particularly aware of politics. For some the participants, their transition from high school to college brought forth a number of interesting political situations. Several participants discuss how moving away from high school friends and encountering a whole new group of people played a decisive role in their college experiences. One participant notes that,

I don't think it was until I got to college that other people thought--not--not--didn't think differently from me but thought differently from me because they perceived things differently from me--I never saw that.

Further along, she suggests that,

it was coming to college the first time that I really was just open to seeing not only other people's point of views but the perspective that it comes from, you know that it's--they're not all coming from my neighborhood and my family, my high school, my this-that and the other thing; that they're all coming from different places and that they've arrived at their opinions for different reasons than the reasons I've arrived at mine. We haven't all gotten the same information.

For this participant, the transition from high school to college brought her into contact with a host of new people who came from a variety of backgrounds and who had, "arrived at their opinions for different reasons than the reasons I've arrived at mine." While she cultivated relationships with people in her neighborhood, family and high school, her experience of entering college put her in the midst of a whole new group of people. Another participant notes that,

... after high school ended like--like a lot of my friends died. A lot of my friends went to college elsewhere so there was a kind of an--an exodus there--like people going just all over the place and what happened was that you know I basically didn't have that group anymore--that sort of core group of people that I was trying to align political views with or that I felt like had some sort of particular political view and I kind of adopted it and--and believed it in some senses, you know--maybe not wholesale believed in it, but adopted it at least to maintain friendships with those people. And then in college, you know you're pretty much making new friends, and so at that time I think it became more important to me or more significant to me to think about what are my views really, you know and how did I go from there [*Do-Do-Do-Do*] to here kind of thing? So that's--that's the difference there, the kind of--of change that I saw happening, yeah. [3.11.7-3.11.17]

For a number of participants, the transition from high school to college brought them into contact with a variety of new people. In this experience, they not only are cultivating new relationships and experiencing new surroundings; they also are transforming the nature of their relationships with family and friends – people who previously constituted their entire social world. As this participant notes he, "didn't have the group anymore – that sort of core group of people that I was trying to align political views with ..." In the transition from high school to



college, he began to reflect on his own views and the way these views related to the people around him. In this sense, it was the movement from the *familiar* to the *strange* that became an occasion to reflect on political beliefs.

Participants sometimes discuss their political experiences with a particular emphasis on the new people they encountered while attending college. One participant notes that,

... in college it--it felt more equal and I definitely started hanging out with more liberals. I didn't hang out with the same people in college that I hung out with in high school. All my friends in high school you know joined sororities and fraternities and that has never interested me. And so I just was--I was exposed to different kinds of people than I was exposed to in high school, and so I feel like it was more equal--well now it's a lot more liberal but like I said before, I think I needed drastic change to have seen both sides and go well you know these guys seem to understand this or have this viewpoint or this. And I would have to say that I'm more middle of the road on a lot of--because I think extreme on one side or the other is just ridiculous.

In this case, the participant discusses the impact of "being exposed to different kinds of people than I was exposed to in high school." Moreover, she sees the transition from high school to college as a "drastic change" that enabled her to grasp multiple perspectives on an issue and ultimately led her to a political position she feels is, "more middle of the road."

For other participants, their interactions with college faculty emerge as particularly salient political situations. One participant describes the difference between her interactions with faculty as an undergraduate at a private, liberal arts school and as a graduate student at a large, state research university. She notes that she,

didn't really see politics because I went to a private undergrad which you would think being--it's a liberal arts school; you would think kind of liberal academia, but at the same time private school we've got these rich little preppy kids that are driving SUVs, so there was kind of controversy between the professors and the students and that made for interesting conversations when you'd see all these Bush stickers. In that case, the professors never said anything, but if you went and talked to them they're actually--they were actually very neutral on how they--they would not give--give away which way they believed, which is not what I've seen at [my current university]. Maybe it's private versus

state--I don't know; but those professors actually could have a conversation and a debate and defend both sides.

It was the professors' ability to remain neutral while discussing political issues that this participant found particularly impressive. Despite the potential for conflict between the personal political views of faculty and students, she felt comfortable talking with professors about her own political views. She was particularly impressed that her professors, "actually could have a conversation and a debate and defend both sides." Indeed, she describes the experience of such an interaction in greater detail:

I talked to a social psychologist there that was--she was a social psychologist but she was a professor and for the life of me I can't tell you what she thinks. But we would sit in her office and just debate--we would literally debate different political issues and one day she would defend something and the next day she would defend something else. And she would--she had every--she could back things up but she never really told me what she was thinking, which I think is good because I was her student and it was--it got me to think about both sides and encouraged me to be more open-minded compared to the situation I told you earlier with the professor that flat out says I'm this and if you don't believe me you're wrong.

Clearly, this participant appreciates the style of conversation she experienced when particular political views were not forced upon her by an authority figure. In being unable to identify the political position of one of her mentors, she felt a sense of freedom in the to and fro movement of political debate. She notes that the experience, "got me to think about both sides and encouraged me to be more open-minded ..." This experience is in stark contrast to an interaction she had as a graduate student at another university. She notes that this experience,

... it's going to reinforce the belief when someone--when this professor ... says well you're wrong, it just reinforced my belief, and gave me negative thoughts about him, which I've carried over the past year. I--so politics have influenced the relationship that I have with this professor. He is not as respected by me; I just think that he has no regard for other people's emotions or feelings or thoughts or opinions and he showed--he showed that in a political way you know through politics and other religious issues. He told me it doesn't matter--I mean he doesn't care what I think at all.

In this situation, the participant feels as though the political views of an authority figure have simply been imposed on her. Indeed, she feels this imposition has structured the way she interacts with this professor. In this case, politics are viewed as a topic where individuals can agree and/or disagree on a variety of issues. Moreover, politics are also viewed as something that structures the relationship between people, in this case, between a faculty member and a graduate student.

In other cases, participants discuss specific issues and assignments that emerged within their college courses. One participant discusses her experience of reading a book for a particular class:

... the biggest thing that I was talking about to you earlier was the World Civilizations Class. It's just interesting because like the first one we read a book--*Guns, Germs, and Steel* by Jarred Diamond and that to me more explained [*Sighs*] the politics--like politics over time that it--it reinforced that life is not fair that the people that got to call the shots were the ones with metal, artillery, and germs and disease and the ones that didn't were you know peaceful--but it was also interesting because it--it highlighted how I think I had bought into the fact that the other people didn't make it because they were less civilized--that's not true, you know ... I mean it also for me parallels like now if you're born in the right family, the right--if you're born in America you can run for President. You know like there are a lot of advantages that people can have and--and sometimes that's why they get to where they needed to be.

Here a book assignment for a class encourages her to reflect on a range of political issues. Moreover, she relates this knowledge to some of her concerns regarding the direction of contemporary politics. She ultimately concludes that, "there are a lot of advantages that people can have and--and sometimes that's why they get to where they needed to be." Once again, issues of equity are particularly salient.

For another participant, a writing assignment for a political science course provides him with a context to reflect on his political views.

... in college I took a political science class with this guy ... and he was really good and he had us write a paper that basically you know talk about your life--in a sense write like a short autobiography and then talk about your views--your political views on some particular hot topic these days, you know like abortion or something like that. And then

the third part of the paper was--was sort of--well how do you see your life experiences or what you chose to talk about autobiographically as perhaps influencing your political opinions, you know? And so in doing that paper, I like--I ended up writing like a really long autobiographical section and I think after finishing that though, it kind of--it gave me a sense of more coherence to my political views.

This assignment encourages the participant to reflect on the course of his life and the relationship between his life's trajectory and his own political views. It give him an opportunity to focus on a particularly controversial political issue and to reflect on how his life experiences contribute to the way he understands this topic. Moreover, he suggests that this experience, "gave me a sense of more coherence to my political views." Further along, he notes that in doing the writing assignment,

... it seemed like--like it made sense that I believed what I believed in terms of my life experiences. Whereas before I hadn't really thought about my life experiences as influencing my politics; I thought about it more in terms of my politics in a sense giving me a connection to others. And so it was kind of a reversal; it was a different way of using politics. Before when I was using politics, I was using politics to connect to other people that I wanted to be friends with. Then in college it was suddenly like oh, I'm beginning to realize what my political views are and how my life experiences have influenced those; so there--it was--it was a different type of--I mean I guess either way you could say it's coherent but there--there is more of a trajectory for me in--in understanding like past life experiences leading up to current life political views or current life views about whatever—about anything.

In this case, the participant makes a distinction between his high school experience where he used politics to "connect to other people that I wanted to be friends with" and his college experience where he began to "realize what my political views are and how my life experiences have influenced those." For this participant, politics seems to serve a different purpose in high school than it did in college. Clearly, the participant views this assignment as a particularly valuable means for exploring his understanding of the political.

## ***Family***

Although modern academic institutions play a pivotal role in political socialization, family practices also embody an important interpretation of political reality. Zuckerman (2005) notes that Aristotle, “defines the family as the nucleus of the polity, a claim that resonates through centuries of Christian political thought. Even a cursory look at these literatures finds the family at the heart of personal and collective life” (p.xvii). Lea (1982) argues that the family experience, “begins the process of establishing political consciousness. Most families, to the degree they are an instrumental and ideological part of their culture and social system, transmit that culture’s general social view, its operative theory of human nature and dominant view of reality and knowledge” (p.74). Moreover, she argues that, “there is no doubt that the family continues to be the dominant carrier and/or teacher of cultural values” (Lea, 1982, p.78). Finally, Jennings, Allerbeck and Rosenmayr (1979), suggest that, “to understand fully the nature of how change and continuity are occurring in advanced industrial societies we need to look at what is going on within the crucible of the family” (p.450). All agree that the family plays a central role in the process of political socialization.

We have already discussed several instances where participants identify the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks as a salient political situation. Those participants note that these attacks occurred as they were attending high school and they are particularly aware of the way people at school dealt with this tragedy. At the same time, participants also explore the meaning of these attacks in the context of their *family* and their shared cultural heritage. One participant notes that,

... the first time that politics stood out to me was September 11<sup>th</sup>. I guess I--I thought about topics I guess in the role of politics before but never really thought about like our government. Like when I was younger my parents talked a lot about it because I’m half Palestinian and they talked a lot about Arabs and politics that you know--associated with that, but I didn’t really get it until the attacks happened. Right away there was like this big animosity towards Arabs like in the country; so it was the first time that like my brother went to school and people like made fun of him and I actually was thinking about like our government and their reaction to people in the Middle East ...

In this case, the terrorist attacks brought her cultural heritage into sharper focus. While her parents shared with her some of their ideas regarding culture, race, and politics, she, “didn’t really get it until the attacks happened.” In the wake of the attacks, her cultural heritage and her relationship to her family come into focus.

For another participant, the story of her parent’s immigration to the United States is a particularly salient political situation. She notes that,

... growing up I grew up in a--well both of my parents are Lebanese and I was born there and we came here. I guess we came here with like \$30,000 in our pocket and that’s it. Like that’s how we were going to survive in America. So like I hear my parents tell their story of how we got here. You know my father was held at gunpoint at the Syrian Border because we were trying to get out of Lebanon because we could fly out of there because the Civil War was happening. You know like we--my dad almost didn’t make it out of Lebanon and then we got here and we--we were living with my grandparents for a long time just because we couldn’t-- we couldn’t afford rent or whatever and ended up finding a place and like now my parents--I mean both of them were college graduates when they came here. My mom had a Master’s Degree and like that just wasn’t enough; like no one would hire them because you know--like my mom was an English Major. It’s not even like there was a barrier or anything. There was--I mean my dad on the other hand, he didn’t speak a word--but like I mean I guess just their--their struggle of like--they were revolutionaries like back in Lebanon and they--they were very, very involved in everything that was happening and they --they needed to leave because they just needed to not be involved anymore you know with a daughter.

Clearly, this is much more than a story of how her family came to reside within the United States. In this story, she discusses issues of racism, poverty, injustice, war, and revolution. She sees her family’s struggle as thoroughly infused with politics. She is not just the daughter of Lebanese immigrants but also part of a family that has had to endure a host of trials and tribulations. Their struggle did not end when they finally arrived in the United States. Even within this new context, her family’s cultural heritage remained an obstacle to settling into an American way of life.

A number of participants explore the extent to which their family discussed political issues as they were growing-up. One participant notes that his family didn't seem particularly interested in political issues:

My--my parents weren't-- [*Sighs*]-they may have--may have been interested in politics but I didn't see it; they didn't talk about it. It wasn't like we discussed what was happening in the government or anything like that. I was pretty much raised in a home where it wasn't discussed; at least nobody seemed interested in it. And so it wasn't a particularly important thing to me at all. I feel like that was sort of a wasted opportunity as far as learning about politics. But I didn't really care then.

In this case, the participant discusses his family's lack of interest in political issues. Moreover, he sees this as a, "wasted opportunity." Further along, he explores the contrast between his families general disregard for political issues and his experience of spending time with his friends and their families.

Well I was just trying to think--like my--my family, it's really weird because I think--like I had--I had friends in high school that were much more interested in politics and then we'd go to their house and their parents would be talking about stuff that was going on and they were involved in things, and my--you know my family was pretty--pretty much un--uninvolved in--in that sort of stuff or they didn't--they didn't discuss it with us. It wasn't something we were brought up thinking about it and it's something I wish would have been different. And a lot of my family is fairly conservative, and so it was always--it was like if I wanted to start talking about something or I disagreed with something, I knew that a lot of people wouldn't agree with me. So it was--there--there wasn't open discussion; I wish there had been more because I think--I think it would have gotten me interested in stuff a lot sooner.

This passage contains a number of interesting insights into the role of politics in everyday family life. To begin with, he notes the discrepancy between his family's lack of interest in politics and the political discussions he encountered when he was around his friend's family. Moreover, when politics were discussed in his family, people often took fairly conservative positions on particular issues; he therefore felt unable to express his views on these issues. Indeed, it was the absence of "open discussion" that he believes contributed to his initial lack of interest in politics.

For other participants, it was their parent's participation in political activities that made a lasting impression. One participant notes that his,

... mom became part of the Ross Perot campaign which was kind of funny. And so she was going around like--like putting these Ross Perot pamphlets and all of this stuff together and putting signs in people's yards ... that was like one of the first times in my life I had ever seen my mom like get that--just intense about politics, about any sort of political anything, because in a sense we weren't really you know all that political of a family. I mean there were--you know there were--there were some things. You know we were--we tended to be rather liberal, you know. My grandmother loves Jimmy Carter, you know--just absolutely thinks Jimmy Carter is like the best ever. But otherwise, you know we weren't extremely political. We weren't like--like donating money to campaigns or--or campaigning for anyone.

Here the participant notes that while he was not raised in a particularly political family, his mother's participation in a political campaign was a particularly salient political situation. Indeed, it is the contrast between being raised in a family that was not politically active and his mother's interest in campaigning for a particular political candidate that is figural in this experience. Furthermore, he notes that his mom is,

... really into this you know stuffing envelopes and--and all this, you know and Ross Perot--that little pipsqueak, ah. And so I found that kind of interesting, you know. Here's my mom doing something that--that at the time could be considered kind of outside of the mainstream even though it wasn't really. But it was outside of that traditional dichotomy between the--the Republicans and the Democrats you know or what's perceived to be a dichotomy anyway. And so just the amount of energy and the amount of time that she put into that really impressed me, you know. I thought that was--that was a really neat thing. And so in seeing her do that, that also got me thinking about you know where do I fit in--in this political spectrum ...

The fact that his mother is campaigning for a candidate outside the traditional two-part political system makes a significant impression on this participant. Although he has reservations about referring to his mother's activities as, "outside the mainstream," he is still impressed with the amount of effort she expends campaigning for this particular candidate. In other words, the participant is impressed that his mother's political views are, to some extent, outside the political mainstream and that her activities demonstrate a dedication



to those political views. Indeed, the participant notes that, “in seeing her do that, that also got me thinking about you know where do I fit in--in this political spectrum.” Once again, we see participants viewing political positions as falling along a political “spectrum.” In this case, his mother’s participation in politics outside the two-party system gives him an occasion to reflect on his own political beliefs. Further along, he says that

... it was just that--that she went from not being political at all--I’m not even sure if my mom voted in that Reagan/Mondale election you know or--or the one--what was it--the one in ’88 you know. I’m not even sure if she--if she--if she voted in those elections but then all of a sudden, you know here comes Perot and my mom is like just all about Perot. And what impressed me was--was the dedication or the amount of energy that--that she put into that. It wasn’t necessarily the--the views, you know; it wasn’t necessarily the--the complexity of the views or--or you know what--what she had hoped to accomplish by those things, but it was--it was really the--the focus that she had there--the--the energy that she had that impressed me most of all--that something motivated her like that I found--I found really neat, you know.

Here it seems that the participant is impressed more by the form of his mother’s political participation than by its actual content. In other words, regardless of his mother’s specific political views, “it was really the--the focus that she had there--the--the energy that she had that impressed me most of all--that something motivated her like that...” Clearly, the participant was impressed with his mother’s dedication to a particular presidential candidate.

Another participant describes her experience of watching her mother participate in a political event:

... the way I say politics has touched my life is that whenever I was--I remember when I was younger, my mom was part of the Republican Women’s Convention and she brought us to election events where we tried to get news coverage and--and things like that. It’s pretty interesting; I mean you’d have--you’d rent out a hotel room or a hotel convention area and you’d bring the--the nominee in there and you’d have him speak and you’d hope--you’d invite the news coverage and you’d hope they’d show up and then at the same time you have posters and everyone is standing there and even if the room is a quarter full you make sure the camera looks like it’s all--all the way full ...

For this participant, watching her mother participate in a political event is an occasion for her to learn more about the political process in general. She discusses the steps one takes in organizing a political event including inviting political supporters and the news media, renting a room, and ensuring that the event is portrayed in such a fashion as to be maximally beneficial to a candidate.

Several participants discuss the way some of the interactions between members of their family seem political in nature. For the following participant, the politics she encounters in her place of work are similar to experiences she had interacting with her own family.

... well I'm on--I'm standing on the outside observing a lot of these situations. Like I said, I'm trying to not get caught up in it because I just want to do my job and I really just want everybody to get along and then in a lot of ways it's interesting because that's how I felt in our family growing up--always in the middle, between mom and dad when they would argue about stuff and I would always be trying to figure out who is right; who needs to do something to fix this? What do they need to do kind of thing?

Here the participant draws a parallel between a politically charged situation at work and her own efforts as part of a family to sooth the tensions between her parents. For her, it is especially important for, "everybody to get along," and when she does find herself in the middle of a political situation, her primary concern becomes figuring out a way to "fix" what she experiences as broken.

For another participant, family conflicts also emerge as salient political situations. In her case, the focus is on the way political discussions can be disruptive when family members do not share the same political beliefs. She notes that,

... the first instance that comes to mind is family conflict as--my parents have one view and one of my mom's sisters has a complete different view. And Thanksgiving dinners, Christmas dinners--it comes into a very heated debate, which I think is part of the reason why I think what I think--and I followed my dad's beliefs.

A number of participants note that events that bring family members together such as holidays, reunions, or even daily interactions at the dinner table often became politically salient situations. In this case, the participant describes the

way certain family members interact when conversations turn to political matters:

It starts with my dad, a Republican, joking and not being--joking about both parties--just kind of joking about politics in general and my aunt who is a very, very strong Democrat and works with that--for that party up in Maryland takes personal offense. And so it's one person who kind of jokes about it and doesn't really take personal offense versus someone who it's 98 percent of her life and can't have a neutral conversation, can't discuss and debate without it becoming emotional ...

In political conversations, the participant notes a distinction between someone who can joke about political issues and maintain his or her composure and an "emotional" person who fails to recognize the levity surrounding a person's offhanded remark. Moreover, the participant refers to her aunt's inability to have a "neutral" conversation. For her, a neutral conversation is thwarted when participants in an interaction become excessively "emotional." In other words, she is concerned that her aunt's emotions prevent her from being able to participate in a "neutral" political conversation. She explores this experience further:

The first time I saw it--it was just kind of interesting, kind of--it was like watching a ping pong game, you know just kind of interesting to watch it go back and forth and then as I learned more and became more educated I started forming what I thought was right which is leaning more towards my dad's views just because I've heard those more and so I would join into the conversation as--and joined as the debate was interesting to me--debating back and forth was interesting however she couldn't be--she couldn't state her opinion and state her belief without getting emotional.

In this case, the participant views political debates within her family as similar to a "ping pong game" where people take up political issues and "go back and forth." She also notes that as she learned more about politics, she began to develop her own views, though these views tend to coincide with her father's political views. She is particularly aware of the fact that while she enjoys "debating back and forth," she feels as though emotions sometimes interfere with the free exchange of ideas.

A number of participants note the conflict they experience within their family when they express divergent political views. Indeed, this situation is so

pronounced at times that *explicit rules* are invoked to prevent family members from engaging in heated political debates. One participant notes that,

It happens a lot with my dad and this particular sister. And mom has five sisters and all the other ones--she's kind of like the black chicken, completely different, but any time they get--it's now become a rule that politics can't come up when the two of them are in the same room, and that--that gives me a negative connotation on politics because even though it's his sister-in-law, they can't get along and he'll say things about her when she's not there--I mean condescending things due to this political belief. So to me it's caused--not that it's really disrupted the family but it's caused some sort of barrier; like the two of them will never be able to be in a room without having some sort of argument I don't think. And I--I blame that on politics.

In this situation, the participant experiences politics as a “barrier” that prevents two members of her family from being able to discuss political issues. She notes that, “it's now become a rule that politics can't come up when the two of them are in the same room, and that--that gives me a negative connotation on politics ...” Here, political issues seem to interfere with the relationship between two family members. Indeed, the desire to introduce some measure of harmony within the situation leads *the family* to introduce explicit prohibitions against discussing certain political topics. The same is true for another participant who notes that,

... I have been banned from talking politics at the table, you know. I--I felt like--I've had my mom tell me before this last election, don't, don't--just don't bring up politics at the house [*Laughs*] you know when I come home for Thanksgiving. That's bullshit; that's bull-shit, huh--never again.

Once again, an explicit prohibition is invoked in order to prevent family members for engaging in political arguments that disrupt the harmony of the family structure. Further along the participant suggests that

... we just you know--we disagree on certain things; we disagree on certain things. They trust George Bush. George Bush is their guy, you know and--and not even so much as that but they still voted for him; they're voting for him, you know. It's like ... if you vote for him; I really don't understand that--I really don't. So--yeah; I don't know--banned from talking politics.

What is interesting about these cases is that within the structure of the family, members are not simply discouraged from discussing divergent political views

but explicit rules are actually created to inhibit such interactions. In these cases, politics are not a means for uniting people under a common cause but instead are an obstacle to maintaining harmony within the family structure.

Clearly, the way family members relate to one another is a potent source of salient political situations. Time and again, participants focus on both the form family interactions take and the specific content of these interactions. In both cases, participants recognize a variety of political issues. Moreover, participants sometimes focus specifically on the role parents play in shaping their children's political attitudes and beliefs. As one participant notes,

... I think that's why our parents probably play a huge part at least in setting the stage for how we experience politics, because you're--as--as a child you just sort of take in this is what it is and you don't really--I mean it's that sort of--just the cognitive process of realizing that there's a different way to look at things and finally getting sort of advanced enough in your own thinking to--to say oh I can go--I can go ahead and feel differently now about this and there's no problem with that.

Here the participant discusses the impact of being a member of a particular family. He notes that, "as a child you just sort of take in this is what it is ..." In other words, the reality one is born into is taken for granted as simply given – as simply the way the world works. Yet, the participant notes that as one gets older, he or she may begin to recognize that "there's a different way to look at things," that what was once indubitable can now be viewed as flexible or contingent. Indeed, he compares this experience with another salient aspect of his family experience:

But it's sort of similar to religion, you know. Like I grew up going to a Lutheran church and kind of you know there is a God and these are things that--that I felt to the core just because that's what I knew and--and that--it--it almost didn't allow room for any new ideas or different ideas and you know in some respects you know obviously your developmental levels and everything like that and moving away to college, you're starting to think more abstractly and analytically and things like that. And so new ideas and opportunities open up but I think getting out of that structure of that family does some of that, too. And--and I certainly know that I'll--I'll be much more open and--and frank when I disagree with things with my parents and--and they're fairly liberal in a lot of ways. It's not like I grew up with really conservative--in a really conservative family or

anything like that. They're very--very liberal in a lot of ways but you know disagreeing openly with them and--and trying to have a discussion is sort of like a newer thing and it's kind of interesting. But yeah that just sort of--you're--you're in that environment and that's all you know

Here the participant relates his experience of growing-up in a family with certain *political* views and his experience of being raised in the context of a particular *religion*. In fact, it is quite common for participants to draw parallels between politics and religion. In this case, the participant's early views were shaped by, "what I knew" and this knowledge left no room for alternative ideas. Moreover, he sites "moving away to college" as a pivotal event in the formation of his own beliefs. He notes the importance of "getting out of that structure of that family" and how this experience enables him to interact with his family in a novel way. Finally, he relates this experience to his experience of being a citizen of a particular country:

And it's almost the same thing like being American; you're just raised and you go get your fast food and do this and do that and go play baseball and that's what you're going to do and then you realize there's this--you know a slew of other places to live that--that function, that have managed to survive just as long as we have and--yeah, I don't know; it's just interesting sort of how--how it just sort of kind of has crept into my mind kind of the same way.

Clearly, the participant recognizes a similarity that connects politics, religion, and citizenship. He notes that as an American, you are raised in the context of similar activities – you, "go get your fast food and do this and do that and go play baseball and that's what you're going to do..." Ultimately, the participant recognizes that people living in other places participate in different activities and that these activities may be no better or worse than the activities in which he participates. Indeed, it is once again a sense of *flexibility and contingency* that permeates his experience.

### ***Friends***

Beyond the way politics operates within the structure of the family, participants also discuss salient political situations involving friends and peers.

Some participants note that the relationships they maintain with their friends gives them a sense of connection such that they feel included within a particular group. Sometimes this inclusion is experienced as political. One participant, recalling his childhood friends, suggests that,

... it was a sense of connection to other people who ostensibly had the same kinds of beliefs that I was adopting at the time. So you know you have all these anarchic little kids banding together you know. Most of them are pretty affluent white you know kids but at the same time they're like buying the line of the--of the--you know the--the British punk guy on the dole kind of thing and partly because it's cool and partly because it--it gives them a sense of connection with each other. And so that's kind of what I was aware of--was--was the friends I was making, the--the kinds of senses--sense of connection that I--that I was getting from participating in that kind of--of social environment--that kind of social group.

This participant feels a sense of connection with others whom he believes shares common beliefs and goals. Elsewhere, he discusses the way this connection is expressed through similar tastes in music, clothes, and other culturally relevant symbols. Moreover, he discusses the way his inclusion within a particular group became salient when divergent groups came into contact with one another:

And so the animosities there while there were sort of racial groupings of people, it was mainly white cowboys, you know. And--and so I mean there were some fights. There were some kind of things that would go on between them and the punks and them and the--the Asian kids and them and the--you know and it's just--and then the jocks and the--and then there was all of that kind of stuff going on like subdivided categories. And so it was during high school that I think I began to align myself even more so with a kind of--of punk rock [*Laughs*] kind of--kind of political view, you know. Not necessarily anarchic but I would say more libertarian in a sense, which at the time I hadn't even thought about like how fucking Republican libertarians tend to be, you know at least economically and stuff like that.

In a sense, the divisiveness of certain groupings encourages the participant to select one group to identify with at the expense of others. He notes that some groups are united by race (white, Asian) while others align themselves according to specific activities (jocks). In this case, he identifies with a, "punk rock ... kind of political view." Further along, he suggests that,

... I started to align myself more and more with--with that kind of--of idea, and a lot of it was you know very much being like my friends. You know sort of adopting similar views as my friends, and you know we have a band at the time and stuff like that. So it--you know I'd write these songs for the band that were all like *Fuck War, Fuck This, Fuck That*, you know--that kind of thing. And so yeah, I'm--I'm basically articulating this political view, which is basically copying the stuff that--that I'm getting from--from listening to like punk rock records and hanging out with the punk rock kids and all that kind of thing and I started to realize though that--that can kind of get really oppressive like I--I was--I got into that because I wanted to be in a sense free; I wanted something to rebel against and in rebelling against it, feeling a sense of freedom.

Clearly political ideas and social relations are intimately related at this point in the participant's life. Emulating his friends entails sharing similar political views which are expressed, in this case, in the form of music. Here music and political ideas fuse to create an identity distinct from other groups but still connected to a select group of people. At the same time, he begins to realize that this identification with a particular group also has some "oppressive" aspects. Indeed, although the political view he was espousing represents an affront to dominant systems of power, he begins to realize that group membership also has certain restrictive aspects as well. He notes that,

... I just remember in high school like progressively realizing that--that there is a very conformist kind of attitude there at times, like--like even in that group of--of people that consider themselves rebels or consider themselves sort of the--the--the marginal people or the peripheral people. There's--there's very much a conformist attitude within that group. I mean even to the point as--as to--to what you wear and how you do your hair and--and all of this kind of stuff, which is just like what you'd get in mainstream America--it's just a different kind of thing, you know. Piercing one's nose is kind of a thing these days, you know or--or all the different body piercing(s) and stuff like that, but it's still--it reflects a kind of conformist attitude and I--I wanted to escape that. You know I didn't want to deal with that. And I wanted to find a place where I could just kind of be me without having to fucking do that kind of thing.

In this case, he recognizes both the enabling and restrictive aspects of group membership. In identifying with a particular group, he came to recognize, "a very conformist kind of attitude" even though the original impetus for group inclusion revolved around issues of freedom. Ultimately, it was this conformist attitude



that he wished to “escape” so he could, “find a place where I could just kind of be me.”

Several participants share his concern that group membership can deteriorate into a form of unreflective conformity. One participant discusses his experience of driving his car to a particular group activity:

... at a meditation retreat--two cars--we had a nice little station wagon and then an old sports car that pollutes like mad. And my station wagon was broke down so I drove my sports car to the meditation retreat and left it in the parking lot and that is--it's really not a good progressive Buddhist earth-first car because it pollutes like mad and it's all flashy and it's--it just--it's part of something else. So I was just aware of--like that; a lot of people looked at it. Somebody even asked me *is that your car?* So people on the retreat were trying to figure out who didn't conform; who drove that and didn't conform?

Here the participant recognizes an incongruity between his own “progressive” beliefs and the environmental implications of driving a particular type of car. Perhaps more importantly, his peers recognize the incongruity, so much so, that he is asked to own up to the fact that it is indeed his car. He recognizes this experience as an instance where members of a group seek to maintain a definition of what makes the group distinct from others, in this case, via conformity. Further along, the participant describes a similar experience:

Another time I was at a Grateful Dead concert and I happened to be dressed in like slacks and a button-up--button-up shirt, I forget why, and--and I thought I'd kind of idealize the hippies. Oh they thought--they like everybody; they're totally accepting and I got so many glares just like if I had dreadlocks at a rodeo.

This experience is very similar to the previous participant who noted that his affiliation with an “anarchist” group at times seemed paradoxical given some of the specific practices he engaged in to maintain group membership. In this participant's concert experience, he recognizes that people often view “hippies” as stereotypically “accepting” yet his attire drew glares from people as if he had “dreadlocks at a rodeo.” Clearly, group membership becomes problematic when those groups espouse characteristics such as “freedom” and “acceptance” while simultaneously requiring compliance in ways that make group membership salient to the individual's involved. Moreover, he suggests that,

... you identify with your political in-group and you feel like oh I'm safe there; these are people I like. I like they; they like me; they accept each other and we--we all accept each other and it's like this--this sense of unity. And then if you--if I break one of those norms that I don't necessarily care about like how I dress or which car I drive, at that time I feel that no, it's not that simple and that I'm accepted because I conformed. It's not just fundamental acceptance; it's easy for me to think that my in-group is just better and they just are fundamentally accepting people ...

For this participant, being a member of a group includes a feeling of safety and unity. Indeed, to be in a group is to be accepted by others who share your beliefs on a variety of issues. Yet he also recognizes that his acceptance by a group is conditional and that ultimately, "I'm accepted because I conformed." This is in contrast to what he calls a "fundamental acceptance" where one's acceptance within a group is unconditional. This insight leads him to question the extent to which, "it's easy for me to think that my in-group is just better and they just are fundamentally accepting people ..."

Another participant discusses an instance when his desire to interact with a particular group came into conflict with his political views.

There are certain things that I enjoy and one of them being Starbucks Coffee or coffee in general but--but Starbucks is everywhere. So and--and--and I know that Starbucks is a shitty company. I know that they rip people off--that they rip off the coffee farmers. I know all these things but yet I still buy their coffee; I still and go hang out at that particular Starbucks at the corner there at the Kroger because it's there and I like the people there and I know the people--I know some of the people that work there. So--so there's kind of--there's a sense of affiliation that I have with the people that work there you know. I have some current student like ... and then you know former students that work there and stuff like that. Now you know I know people that go there [*Laughs*] and so it--it's kind of like I feel a sense of connectedness to people and the product happens to be Starbucks and I know the company is shitty. So I feel like I compromised myself in that way. You know I feel like--like it's a self-indulgent kind of compromise that I make and it's perhaps not a right one. It's one that--that in the ideal I don't believe is right; so I'm in a situation in my life where I actually live in a somewhat different way than I politically believe is right and--and sometimes that's weird. Sometimes that--that's a weird kind of contradiction that happens.

On the one hand, this participant holds some reservations regarding the questionable business practices of a national retail coffee business. On the other hand, he shares a certain affinity with the employees and customers that frequent this establishment. In this case, his feelings for his friends usurp his devotion to a particular political view. Moreover, he experiences some discomfort in making this choice such that, “I feel like--like it’s a self-indulgent kind of compromise that I make and it’s perhaps not a right one.”

Participants also note difficulties they had in accepting all the beliefs of a particular group. They often feel as if their support of one issue requires them to adopt a wide range of other beliefs. Indeed, it can become a major point of contention when participants feel forced to identify with a particular political party. In these cases, they find themselves defending a variety of issues related to a particular political platform – issues they had not originally intended to defend. For example, while a person may feel that abortion is wrong, he or she may not adopt other political beliefs associated with such a position. In this sense, participants find themselves defending beliefs that are associated with a particular political platform (Republican, Democrat, Green, etc.). These difficulties sometimes spill over into their relationships with family and friends. As one participant notes,

It’s very stereotyped groups, you know you’re automatically giving somebody a label and even though I give my family a particular--the Republican label there are still views that they don’t agree with, so it’s kind of a gray area, but you’re not allowed to have that gray area and--and if you don’t claim independence, you’re not allowed to have--you know you’re one or the other and I think that’s another reason why it becomes heated arguments.

For this participant, political disagreements sometimes occur because people taking a particular stance are often called on to defend a host of other issues that have become associated with a single issue. Indeed, she sees political debate as lacking a “gray area”, a phrase often repeated by participants in this study.

### ***Other Cultures***

While it may seem out of place at this point to discuss participant's experiences of another culture, it is clear that these experience often brought many background practices they took for granted into sharper focus. In many cases, the experience of encountering another culture enables participants to reflect on the contingency and flexibility of the way they view the world.

Participants often discuss the way visiting another country or another culture brought aspects of their own culture into focus that had previously remained in the background. For the following participant, a visit to the Middle East serves as a particularly potent reminder of the differences she experiences in the two cultures:

... when I was in the West Bank, politics--like American politics, I guess mostly traveling a lot--people were very biased towards Americans and I hadn't really thought about that before and their reaction to our country ... you're thinking from a very central opinion of like this is you know my government, but then when you're somewhere else you're thinking about like America kind of from a second perspective.

In this case, traveling to a foreign country became an occasion to reflect on what it means to be an American citizen. In encountering a bias towards Americans, the participant notes that she, "hadn't really thought about that before..." Indeed, she suggests that, "when you're somewhere else you're thinking about like America kind of from a second perspective." In other words, her visit to another culture brought her own national origin, something that usually remains in the background, into sharper focus. Further along, she suggests that,

... I guess it definitely was a--a--very surprising I guess that I didn't realize--I thought America was like you know this--supposed to be the big, greatest ever and we used to do everything right but in reality we're not and other countries are doing things better than us, and I--I hadn't really realized that when I was little; but as I grew up like I'm realizing all the different things that are good--like bad points and good points about the country.

Once again, we see a contrast between what one understands as a child being raised in a certain culture and the insights one develops as he or she ventures into other cultures. The participant singles out an experience that is particularly salient in this regard:

I was walking around--my family was in the City of Jenin, so I was walking around in there and there were people walking around with like giant guns and I was thinking about it and I mean for American politics I'm--I'm very like anti-guns, but I was thinking about it and I--I never really thought about like why or why that they--you know that civilians would need guns in a different country but it's to protect themselves from their own government, which I thought was really interesting. So I thought about it definitely then and I guess the whole setup of the country and how—I didn't really think about how much our government protects us and in other countries they don't get that same protection; so that was interesting.

Here the contrast between her experience in America and her experience in the Middle East is particularly salient. In encountering people openly carrying weapons in the city of Jenin, she reflects on her own views on guns and how these might be different given certain circumstances. This leads her to think about “the whole setup of the country,” and ultimately, how much the American government, “protects us and in other countries they don't get that same protection.” She also discusses her experience of passing through security checkpoints in the Middle East:

When I got to Checkpoints our license plate was colored for--for Palestinians, like they get different license plates than Israelis do, so we were held there but it was kind of interesting because our--your passport is kind of like your Green Card to--to get around the country. It's like your--it's like your credit card to get through to any place--was I don't know; in America you really don't think about it as much like how lucky you are, but I mean compared to the other Palestinians who were going to get held for like an hour at the Border, you know the Border Patrol, we showed our American passports and they were like *oh, they're American*; so it gave us like an--an added--an advantage on everyone else which I hadn't really appreciated before.

In this case, she reflects on the way people are treated differently as they pass through a security checkpoint. She also notes that in contrast to traveling within the borders of America, she was required to produce specific documentation in order to pass from one area to another in the Middle East. Moreover, she comes to recognize her American citizenship as an asset in passing through security checkpoints, something that she, “hadn't really appreciated before.”

For another participant, traveling outside the United States and interacting with people in another country also brings certain aspects of her own culture into sharper focus.

And I don't know; what's amazing is like I was telling someone this the other day--I've only traveled out of the country once and like you leave and you just realize like what a crazy American perspective it can be sometimes. Like, our perspective of the world is--can just be crazy ...

She continues by focusing on a specific situation:

... I had befriended this guy in Costa Rica and he and I were talking one day... and I don't know--I was--I was curious because you always--not you always hear, but I've heard that European men whatever--you know foreign to us--American--men find American women very attractive. My inter--you know interpersonal relationship side of my head just started worrying like why? You know like just--it just enthralled me. I was just like okay; so I was like okay I'm intrigued. Like what--what is it about American women because he and I had kind of joked about America--like oh your American, you know da-da-da. And I was like okay why?

While visiting another culture, she encounters an opportunity to investigate the origins of a generalization about non-American being especially attracted to American women. She notes that her foreign companion responds to her queries by discussing,

... the air of confidence that we have. Like he goes everyone I've ever met thinks she's the most beautiful thing ever. And I don't perceive myself that way but he was like you know I can see it in you and I can see it in--in just about everyone I've ever met. And so I was just like do our women lack like [*Laughs*] an element of not modesty but yeah--like humility? Do we not--but it's so--and I'm not saying that other countries aren't competitive but we're so competitive like we have to have that bravado of just like I'm the shit. Right; I mean you've got to believe it you know and like it was just amazing that he could even pick up--like he goes I can't--even the women that come here that look Central American you can tell when they're American. And it just--I mean it just boggled me that it's so prevalent that someone could just look at you and go you're an American, you know.

In this case, she is surprised that her behavior as an American may express something salient to the members of another culture. Indeed, she notes that, "it just boggled me that it's so prevalent that someone could just look at you and go you're an American ..." Here, it is the experience of interacting with another

culture that enables her to develop an insight into the behavior of people within her own culture.

Another participant discusses his ambivalence regarding whether he should move to another country:

Yeah; and--and one of the biggest things I'm trying to deal with in trying to decide whether to live here or in Portugal is do I--on the one hand I could put it like this; do I stay and fight for what I believe is right or do I leave and give up and say *fuck it*? But another way to look at it is do I live in a country where I feel alienated from the values around me and sickened by it and--and also feel those values creeping up on me and feel myself internalizing these values that I don't like or do I go and choose to live someplace among people with values that I feel like I resonate with more--that I'm more comfortable with where I don't have to be on-guard for these values that I think are sick creeping into the very way I see the world and feel about things?

This participant views the decision to remain in the United States or move to Portugal as a choice to either, "stay and fight for what I believe is right," or give up and move overseas. He is particularly concerned with this decision because in his current position, he feels, "alienated from the values around me and sickened by it and--and also feel those values creeping up on me and feel myself internalizing these values." In other words, he feels as if he has to decide whether to try and change cultural values that he experiences as encroaching on his personal beliefs or move to a culture whose values are more congruent with his own. Indeed, he discusses the fact that at present he notices,

... materialism in myself, like homophobia in myself, racism in myself and in some ways I don't feel responsible for all that. I mean I know that I am, but I feel that the more I live in an environment where that is the way the world is seen, the more I will take those in. Just like when I was in India there were different religious beliefs and I--that started to help me change my religious beliefs just being around people that look at the world in a different way. It helped to loosen up my religious beliefs; likewise, when I'm surrounded by people who feel like--they might not say it but who really feel like one of my primary motivations is to make a whole lot of money it's easier for me for that motivation to creep into me.

What is particularly important about this passage is the way experiencing another culture enables this participant to "loosen up" his own beliefs. In other words, the

contingency or flexibility of his own beliefs come into focus as he recognizes other possibilities, other ways of “being-in-the-world.” Another participant also took note of this apparent flexibility when he reflects on the possibility that a close friend may be moving out of the country.

It was really weird talking to--talking to--to my buddy about you know he may potentially move ... and it's just weird to think of--of moving out of this type of government and you know and into a different--a different country. I'm trying to figure out where I'm going with this. I don't know if this--I guess this is sort of like nationalism and stuff like that--like I think growing up I never thought about the idea of--you know you live in America and you're raised in America, you're always going to be an American. You're an American. And the idea that I can go somewhere else if I'm not happy with the way things are run ...

In this case, the participant comes to realize that his inclusion in a particular group, in this case as an American citizen, is something much more flexible than he previously imagined. As a child, “you live in America and you're raised in America, you're always going to be an American.” Yet recognizing that a close friend may leave the country to reside elsewhere brings the contingency of his own American citizenship into focus. Moreover, he relates this experience with other flexible practices:

... it's almost--it almost feels in the same way kind of the experience of--of growing up in a religious family and then--and then sort of moving you know away and sort of starting to develop these ideas that oh there's a whole different way to look at these things and understand these things,.

As before, he recognizes a similarity between living in a particular country and participating in a particular religion. Furthermore, he talks about the experience of, “sort of starting to develop these ideas that oh there's a whole different way to look at these things.” He continues by discussing his experience of nationalism:

... it's almost a similar experience with nationalism and like--oh there's you know some 200-odd, 300-odd other countries that are very different from this that--that I could go to and--and find a whole different process. And it's--it's kind of exciting and--and different and it's--it's just I don't know; it's something that lately I--I find this sort of floating around in my head and I don't really know what to make of it or do with it, but it seems kind of interesting that there's so much out there. And I don't think that was sort of on my radar as far as like what can you do if you don't--you don't like the way things are now and you feel like you aren't a part of this? Would--would a different form of government



or--or you know just anything like that--would that give me an opportunity to feel differently or do something differently?

Both participants seem to recognize the contingency of any one way of approaching reality. There is a tension between the beliefs of their culture and what they take to be their own beliefs on a variety of political issues. Indeed, the insight they develop revolves around their choice to remain in their country of origin or to move to a culture whose norms and values are more congruent with their own beliefs.

For the participant trying to decide whether he wants to move out of the country, an experience of traveling around Europe is particularly salient:

Well one thing was walking around Europe right after--I think it was after 9/11 and before the War on Iraq and seeing all of the anti-American graffiti and just realizing because Bush was elected and because of the way our foreign policy has been people throughout the world and the countries that I am in hate my country and personally have a reaction to me--have a reaction to me as a person. And maybe I can get them over that, but that's--that's my starting point of where they think of me and our--my personal relationship with them is affected by what my country is doing.

By interacting with people from another culture, the participant begins to reflect on his relationship with his own country, and the way that relationship influences his interactions with people from another culture. He notes that, "people throughout the world and the countries that I am in hate my country and personally have a reaction to me--have a reaction to me as a person." Here the tension between being a member of a country and being an individual is particularly salient.

Another participant discusses his experience of participating in a student exchange program in the early 90's. In this case, he had an opportunity to spend time in the Ukraine in the midst of its split from the Soviet Union.

And the family I lived with both of them were nuclear physicists and there was a big nuclear site there in the town, and I think the Soviet Union had broken up maybe not quite a year before that and it was a program that where they worked was funded by--by Moscow. And so when they broke up all that funding stopped. And so the family I was living with, these two nuclear physicists, clearly very intelligent, the mom was out of work and the dad had started fixing cars in a--like a--what would be--it was a garage but it

would essentially be like when you'd go to the storage facilities in town you know and you've got the roll up sort of doors and that's what he was doing. That's what they had been doing; that was the only income they had because they had no funding coming in.

Here the participant has an opportunity to witness first-hand the changes occurring in a country as it goes through a time of tremendous social, economic, and political transition. Because of these changes, two highly educated individuals are forced to switch occupations to fit the emerging needs of the community. He continues by noting that,

... you had an entire community that was without money and--and so sort of--sort of seeing that nuance of okay, yeah; you know thinking that oh communism is bad in the Soviet Union and you know how they're sort of controlling all these other countries, you know out of Russia--that's bad. But then you see, well there's nuances and maybe these people didn't want that to happen because that's their livelihood and so your political views and your desire to keep living sort of clash and how do you deal with that?

In this case, the participant recognizes a tension between his understanding of another culture's economic system and the concrete impact the upheaval of this system has for people with whom he is personally involved. Thus, while it may be easy from a distance to overlook some of the "nuances" of a particular situation, directly witnessing these events brings a number of issues into focus. He continues by noting that,

... just seeing all those people struggling, it was--it was very eye opening. And then going the last--I think for the last three days of the trip we--we went up to Moscow and the--the White House there was still black and tanks and stuff like that and standing in the middle of the Red Square in the Kremlin it was--it was just so--so amazing because you hear about you know this--this terrible country, you know. It's all the propaganda we get, you know Russia and everything like that and standing in the middle of that was just--it was a lot like--it was--it was a lot like being at the mall in DC except it was sort of the opposite. It was like--in DC I felt like okay I'm in it; this is--this is part of my identity. I'm in the--I'm in the seat of--of the government of America and--and there it was like wow; I'm in the sort of foreign--I'm in the middle of their government area, but it was just a very--it was a similar feeling but very different.

Here he recalls his experience of standing in the Red Square in Moscow. He notices the buildings surrounding him and the history with which they are imbued. He discusses what he refers to as the "propaganda" surrounding what he

was taught about the Soviet Union in the West. Moreover, he compares his experience of being in the Red Square with his experience of being in the Mall in Washington D.C. Interestingly, he notes that these experiences were both similar and opposite. Being among the monuments in Washington D.C., his identity emerges in such a way as to bring his affiliation with America into sharper focus while his identity emerges within the context of the Red Square in such a way as to highlight his sense of being foreign to his surroundings. He suggests that,

... the thing I mainly came out of that was sort of you know you get all the propaganda here that--it's wonderful that they broke up and--and in a lot of ways it was a lot of good that came out of that but seen on the--on the local level, you know just talking about how those massive changes affect everybody in very different ways, you know--people maybe in Western Ukraine who weren't being funded through Moscow, you know--it may not have been a very great thing for them and maybe it will eventually end up being a really good thing but you know pretty much most of the countries that came out of the Soviet block are bankrupt and people are struggling...

While the West's reception of the fall of communism was overwhelmingly positive, the participant notes that actually being in the Ukraine and witnessing these changes first-hand had a profound affect on the way he views his own countries understanding of political issues. Indeed, he suggests that events "on the local level" may seem very different from what people understand when they approach something from a more distant perspective.

Indeed, another participant notes a profound change in her perspective when she read a book that challenged her understanding of American foreign policy.

... I took a World Civilization class last semester and we read *Blow Back* by Chalmers Johnson and it talks about--all I had ever heard is basically like our bases in other countries are helping them--that it's like this is giving them--it's helping their economy basically and that--and that's it--that's the only--that's the only real solid like pro-having bases in Okinawa and all those other places--that's the only side I've ever really heard that I was like okay yeah I can see that. And we read this book and it just talked about how--I mean how--how many incidents of crime that they've having because of the soldiers, like they're raping Okinawan women; they're--they've killed people with the--with the trucks or the Hummers or what--you know what I mean like hit and runs and--and they're not

tried in the country; they're taken back to America and given a slap on the wrist and sent back somewhere else to maybe commit the same crime all over again.

In this case, the participant notes that reading this book gave her a novel insight into the role America plays within the international community. She suggests that before reading this book, she only understood one "side" of the issue and she now feels as if she has a better grasp of the situation as a whole. She continues by noting that the book

... talked about how in the school like there are so many thousand hundred planes landing and taking off out of Okinawa every day and these are jets. I mean these are really loud and how--that it disturbs the community, it disturbs the people that live there, like that there was--that there was a day like a landing or a flying hiatus one day so that these Okinawan students could take their entrance exams to universities. That's how much of an issue it is that it's obviously disturbing them so they'd at least acknowledge it enough to go okay we'll hold off on them for a day so you can take your tests. You know like--so clearly that's a problem and so reading this stuff it was just all the sudden ...

Here she notes that American military presence in a foreign country may not always be entirely altruistic. Indeed, she begins to recognize that this presence may sometimes disrupt other communities and that her previous understanding of America's role in the international community may need to be revised. Further along, she attempts to express the depth of this insight:

Reading this all the sudden it was just like oh my gosh there really are two sides of this coin. You could really argue it either way and I--and reading it I felt myself--because the argument, the ultimate argument was that we're empire--empire and we just don't say it-- America is an empire and we just don't say it. Why are we still in these countries? They're not really threatened by Communism, but if we left they would be. You know like it was just--and I understand that it's a really radical, really extreme, liberal point of view, but I think I needed it to be that extreme to trump my upbringing ...

For this participant, encountering the perspective of another culture enables her to see that there really are, "two sides of this coin." Even though she gains this insight from a book rather than traveling to Japan and experiencing the issues directly, she still feels that a specific clash between two cultures enables her to see something that she was unable to see before. Moreover, she suggests that while

this perspective may be a, “really radical, really extreme, liberal point of view,” it may have, “needed it to be that extreme to trump my upbringing...”

## **Reflections**

While I have made a number of observations throughout this analysis, I would now like to focus on several aspects of the interviews that relate to the practice orientation I outlined at the beginning of this project. In other words, I would like to make a few general observations regarding the intersection of phenomenology, politics, and practice. These observations are not an attempt to identify an essential structure that connects each of the interviews to one another. Instead, the focus on political practice is meant to foreground the intersubjective foundations of political experience. I will have much more to say about this in a moment.

We may recall that I presented each participant with the following research question: *Can you tell me about some times when politics stood out to you?* This question enables participants to talk about the political situations that they find particularly salient. After reading all of the transcripts, I organized relevant passages into three general categories: (1) media (2) conventional political activities and (3) political socialization. Within each of these categories, I tried to give the reader a sense of the variety and breadth of these experiences. Moreover, I tried to demonstrate that participants’ salient political situations can be understood as a collection of practices that coalesce into an interpretation of political reality. This interpretation does not reside within the minds of individual knowers but is instead embodied in the political practices that reproduce and transform collective activity. Furthermore, the preceding analysis enables readers to reflect on the extent to which these political practices are congruent with his or her own. Several observations may facilitate this process.

Clearly much of the political information we encounter comes from various forms of media populating our world. Indeed, one would be hard pressed to draw attention to a contemporary political issue that was not initially

encountered in some form of media. Whether participants view media representations of politicians or political issues as far removed from their everyday reality or as presenting a specific definition of a situation, they are certainly concerned that the media do not necessarily present an accurate picture of reality. In fact, participants often discuss the way they experience their encounter with these images as somehow *unreal*. In other words, there is a sense that while the media provide images that are purported to be representations of reality, there is something suspicious about these representations – something that gives participants the sense that what they are encountering is to some extent distorted. While this may be relatively unimportant when relying on the media for entertainment, it becomes more disconcerting when information crucial for making political decisions is presented in a similar fashion. Moreover, participants often view these distortions less as accidental omissions and more as *systematic distortions*. That is, they often see the media as not simply being in error but instead as furnishing specific definitions of politicians and political situations.

It should therefore be of some concern that media representations are often the primary source for making important decisions on a number of political issues. Increasingly, technological innovations are enabling politicians to define political situations in very specific ways. With the mediated encounter becoming one of the fundamental points of “contact” between political figures and citizens, it is important to understand the role media plays in contemporary democracy. Yet the *content* of media images and messages should not be the only concern of social scientists. It is also important to understand how the intersection of media and politics provides a unique understanding of the political process. Thus, it is not simply the content but the practice of “interacting” with these mediated images and messages that should be a further topic of investigation.

It is also important to understand the various ways people experience conventional political activities. For the participants in the present project, voting and protesting were particularly salient political situations. Yet it is also clear that

voting and protesting were experienced in significantly different ways. While voting seems to amplify a sense of fragmentation, protesting engenders a sense of being a part of a collective activity. Indeed, the tensions between individual and collective activity are especially acute at the intersection of these two practices. A few words may help clarify this situation.

It is clear that many participants see voting in an election as the primary means for participating in the political process. In this practice, each individual makes his or her own choice with the aggregate of choices deciding who will be elected to public office. For Taylor (1983), voting,

carries with it certain standards, of valid and invalid voting, and valid and invalid results, without which it would not be the practice that it is. For instance, it is understood that each participant makes an independent decision. If one can dictate to the others how to vote, we all understand that *this* practice is not being carried out. *The point of it is to concatenate a social decision out of individual decisions.* So only certain kinds of interaction are legitimate. This norm of individual independence is, one might say, constitutive of the practice (p.62-63; italics mine).

In this sense, the practice of voting already presupposes a specific relationship between the individual and the group. It is the individual in an election that ultimately must choose a particular candidate. This ensures that all the citizens of a democracy are able to make a decision ostensibly free from coercion or force. In an election, groups emerge as a political force only to the extent that they are viewed as an aggregate of individuals who share the same beliefs, attitudes, and desires. Yet it is also clear that the practice of voting already embodies an interpretation of social reality. Within contemporary society, voting is a symbol of the freedom enjoyed by every citizen of a democratic nation. But if this is the case, why do the vast majority of participants have such a negative appraisal of voting? Moreover, why did participants have such a positive view of protesting, an activity that many of them acknowledged as having little direct influence on the political process? One possibility is that voting and protesting highlight the difference between individual and collective political activity. Indeed, this experience may call into question the legitimacy of viewing collective political activity as the aggregate of individual activity. As an alternative to the “atomist

theory” of political participation, Taylor (1983) recommends a “republican model” of political participation:

From this standpoint the atomist theory is ignoring one of the most crucial dimensions of social life, viz., the degree to which the society constitutes a political community, that is, the kind and degree of common meanings. A society in which all goals were really those of individuals, as they are portrayed in the atomist scheme, would be an extreme case, and a degenerate one. It would be a society so fragmented that it was capable of very little common action, and was constantly on the point of stasis or stalemate (p.71).

Focusing on a community bound by shared practices rather than on an aggregate of individuals has profound implications for the way we view social and political reality. Social reality is not a collection of solitary information-processors but represents a community that provides a background of shared practices against which certain forms of subjectivity emerge. Moreover, the fact that these participants overwhelmingly prefer protesting to voting suggests that protesting enables participants to do more than achieve instrumental ends. Protesting focuses attention on the group or community such that it inherently challenges the atomizing of society into individual subjects. As such, protesting may be viewed as a challenge to the fragmentation citizen’s experience when they perceive voting as their primary means of political expression. Yet to move from the individual to the community requires a radically different way of understanding the political process. For Taylor (1995),

the very definition of a republican regime as classically understood requires an ontology different from atomism, falling outside atomism-infected common sense. It requires that we probe the relations of identity and community, and distinguish the different possibilities, in particular the possible place of we-identities as against merely convergent I-identities, and the consequent role of common as against convergent goods (p.192).

Indeed, it is here that the theoretical task outlined in the first chapter directly intersects with the analysis of the practices that embody an interpretation of political reality. Much as the movement from consciousness to practice requires a radically different conception of social reality, understanding citizens as primordially embedded within a political community requires us to reflect on the



utility of considering the individual as the foundation of research into the political process.

Clearly, participants often embrace opportunities to participate in political activities that bring them into contact with others. This has important implications for the way we understand the functioning of a democracy. Indeed, Todd and Taylor (2004) argue that it would,

be wrong to attribute the crisis of representative democracy solely to a lack of interest in political matters. Active citizens are also turning against traditional political institutions and are finding new ways to express themselves. This can be traced, in part, to mistrust in the existing system, to the lack of choice between the main parties and to the changing needs of the citizen body (p.7)

Thus, a protest may not only enable citizens to voice their opinion on a particular political issue – as a practice it represents a challenge to more conventional forms of political activity. Protesting allows citizens to emphasize issues that may have been neglected by traditional forms of democratic participation. When combined with media coverage, protesting allows a community to promote an alternative definition of a political situation.

The distinction between voting and protesting enables us to understand the difference between practices that focus on the individual or on the community. Conventional political activities express more than the desire to achieve concrete political goals. Political protests become sites for challenging what constitutes conventional political activity and the role of the individual in the political process. The analysis of political socialization indicates that political subjects always emerge against the background of concrete political practices – from attending school to participating in a family and community. In political socialization and education, it is not an individual who develops only a technical understanding of the political process but a tradition that involves a community in the reproduction and transformation of a way of *being*. Indeed, Oakeshott (1962) notes that,

political education is not merely a matter of coming to understand a tradition, it is learning how to participate in a conversation: it is at once initiation into an inheritance in which we have a life interest, and the exploration of its intimations ... long before we are

of an age to take interest in a book about our politics we are acquiring that complex and intricate knowledge of our political tradition without which we could not make sense of a book when we come to open it. And the projects we entertain are the creatures of our tradition. The greater part, then – perhaps the most important part – of our political education we acquire haphazard in finding our way about the natural-artificial world into which we are born, and there is no other way of acquiring it (p.129).

To acquire a political tradition is to participate in the practices embodying that tradition. These practices cannot be reduced to the functioning of individual consciousness but reside at the intersection of a community oscillating between the reproduction and transformation of a particular form of life.

It is also clear that times of transition were particularly salient when it came to discussing concrete political situations. These times gave participants an opportunity to reflect on the different practices that they encounter as they made the transition from one community to another. Indeed, participants often talk about the move from one school to another, the transition from their hometown to college life, and the differences and similarities they encounter among their family, friends, teachers, students and coworkers. These transitions sometimes enable participants to understand the political in novel ways.

For some participants, the boundaries of the political were drawn around their transformation from being a child in a particular community to being a citizen able to vote in that community. In fact, the time when a citizen is allowed to vote in an election corresponds with a host of other changes, the most important of which for these participants is moving away from home to attend college. In this experience, participants left the familiarity of the community in which they were raised and encountered a host of other people who were in the same situation. In a sense, they formed a new community and in many ways *became different people*. In doing so, the practices that they had previously taken for granted came into view.

This foregrounding of practices also emerges when participants travel to a foreign country. In these situations, the practices that make participants part of a particular tradition come into focus as they encounter the practices of an alien

culture. For many participants, visiting another country and being immersed in the activities and customs of an 'other' shed light on the contingency of their own way of being-in-the-world. Activities that they had taken for granted were now seen in a new light. Indeed, Oakeshott (1962) argues that, "to investigate the concrete manner in which another people goes about the business of attending to its arrangements may reveal significant passages in our own tradition which might otherwise remain hidden" (p.132). Thus, the movement from the familiar to the strange encourages critical reflection on ordinary activities and practices. This may be the most crucial insight to be gleaned from the present project.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

This project began by critiquing the view that *interpretation* is a mental process capable of being made fully explicit in terms of discrete rules and procedures. I offered the concept of practice as an alternative to the epistemological focus on consciousness and individual minds. Moreover, I suggested that Heidegger's critique of transcendental phenomenology calls into question psychology's adherence to subjectivity as the basic unit of analysis. While the theoretical portion of this project argues that a phenomenology focusing on shared practices rather than subjectivity has a number of implications for political research, it is also clear that *practice* and *politics* share something that deserves further attention. I would like to conclude this project by exploring this relationship in greater detail.

The movement towards practice, especially in the twentieth century, has had a tremendous impact on the way social scientists view the relationship between the individual and the group. Various scholars have focused on the practices that lie at the intersection of human agency and structure or lifeworld and system. Indeed, Taylor (1985) notes that theorists such as Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and Wittgenstein, "see the agent not primarily as the locus of representations, but as engaged in practices, as a being who acts in and on a world" (p.169-170). For these theorists, practices provide a background against which anything like a subject can emerge; it is therefore impossible to see such practices as the possession of an individual consciousness.

As we have seen, the contemporary focus on disinterested knowledge already embodies a particular interpretation of social reality – an insight that has gained momentum through Heidegger's emphasis on *comportment* rather than intentionality:

The tremendous contribution of Heidegger, like that of Kant, consists in having focused the issue properly. Once this is done, we can't deny the picture that emerges. Even in our theoretical stance to the world, we are agents. Even to find out about the world and formulate disinterested pictures, we have to come to grips with it, experiment, set

ourselves to observe, control conditions. But in all this, which forms the indispensable basis of theory, we are engaged as agents coping with things. It is clear that we couldn't form disinterested representations any other way (Taylor, 1995, p.11).

Thus, it is not a disinterested stance that grants us access to the nature of reality but our practical dealings that provide a foundation for all claims to knowledge. Indeed, this observation has been made time and again by theorists such as Heidegger, Wittgenstein, Merleau-Ponty, Dewey, Ryle, Rorty, Taylor, Dallmayr, and Oakeshott. In their own way, each theorist calls into question epistemology's separation of subject and object. Moreover, we have seen that many of these theorists are especially critical of the representational theory of knowledge that underlies much of contemporary psychological research. For Taylor (1995),

we can draw a neat line between my picture of an object and that object, but not between my dealing with the object and that object. It may make sense to ask us to focus on what we believe about something, say a football, even in the absence of that thing, but when it comes to playing football, the corresponding suggestion would be absurd. The actions involved in the game can't be done without the object; they include the object. Take it away and we have something quite different – people miming a game on the stage, perhaps. The notion that our understanding of the world is grounded in our dealings with it is equivalent to the thesis that this understanding is not ultimately based on representations at all, in the sense of depictions that are separately identifiable from what they are of (p.12).

The movement towards practice encourages us to reflect on the origins of the separation of subject and object. It suggests that such a separation is itself grounded in the activities of a community – activities that cannot be reduced to the thoughts or behaviors of individuals. At this point, it is clear that the focus on practice is not simply an insight one applies to political phenomena. Instead, political activities are fundamentally practical activities, that is, activities that cannot be reduced to the cognitive processes of individual minds. As such, it is important to understand the role *intersubjectivity* plays in the way we navigate political reality.

By focusing on the practices that embody an interpretation of political reality, I want to draw attention to the intersubjective foundations of political action. Such action should not be understood simply as the result of a prior

mental activity. Emphasizing the intersubjective foundations of political activity, Taylor (1995) suggest that,

these actions are constituted as such by a shared understanding among those who make up the common agent. Integration into a common rhythm can be one form this shared understanding takes. But it can also come to be outside the situation of face-to-face encounter. In a different form it can also constitute a political or religious movement, whose members may be widely scattered, but who are animated together by a sense of common purpose (p.172).

Indeed, participants repeatedly referred to political activities as embedded within particular groups, from the political protest to their parents and peers. In these cases, the focus is largely on community and collective action. For Taylor (1995),

the background understanding we share, interwoven with our practices and ways of relating, isn't necessarily something we partake in as individuals. That is, it can be part of the background understanding of a certain practice or meaning that is not mine but ours; and it can indeed be "ours" in a number of ways: as something intensely shared, which binds a community; or as something quite impersonal, where we act just as "anyone" does. Bringing in the background allows us to articulate the ways in which our form of agency is nonmonological, in which the seat of certain practices and understandings is precisely not the individual but one of the common spaces between (p.77).

Focusing on the practices that embody an interpretation of political reality highlights the communal and intersubjective foundations of political action. It suggests, as Arendt (1958) notes that, "no human life, not even the life of the hermit in nature's wilderness, is possible without a world which directly or indirectly testifies to the presence of other human beings" (p.22). Indeed, the intersubjective foundation of political action calls into question a focus on individual mental activity and cognitive processes:

It is not just that the people in our society all or mostly have a given set of ideas in their heads and subscribe to a given set of goals. The meanings and norms implicit in these practices are not just in the minds of actors but are out there in the practices themselves, practices which cannot be conceived as a set of individual actions, but which are essentially modes of social relation, of mutual action (Taylor, 1977, p.119)

Thus, political activity should not be understood as the convergence of individuals who share similar goals – as an aggregate of individual minds – but as a concrete activity grounded in the practices of a particular community.

To highlight the intersubjective foundations of political action, Taylor explores the way understanding functions in political negotiations. He suggests that negotiations draw attention to the way an individual's beliefs and attitudes are embedded in the intersubjective understanding of a collective:

The actors may have all sorts of beliefs and attitudes which may be rightly thought of as their individual beliefs and attitudes, even if others share them; they may subscribe to certain policy goals or certain forms of theory about the polity, or feel resentment at certain things, and so on. They bring these with them into their negotiations, and strive to satisfy them. *But what they do not bring into the negotiations is the set of ideas and norms constitutive of negotiations themselves.* These must be the common property of the society before there can be any question of anyone entering into negotiation or not. Hence they are not subjective meanings, the property of one or some individuals, but rather intersubjective meanings, which are constitutive of the social matrix in which individuals find themselves and act (Taylor, 1977, p.119; italics mine)

While it may be possible to translate individual beliefs and attitudes into explicit rules, as social cognition would seem to suggest, it is clear that such rules are intelligible only against the background of a tradition in which such a rule-discourse resides. In other words, subjective beliefs and attitudes are predicated on the intersubjective understanding of a community. For Taylor (1977),

convergence of belief or attitude or its absence presupposes a common language in which these beliefs can be formulated, and in which these foundations can be opposed. Much of this common language in any society is rooted in its institutions and practices; it is constitutive of these institutions and practices. It is part of the intersubjective meanings. To put the point another way, apart from the question of how much people's beliefs converge is the question of how much they have a common language of social and political reality in which these beliefs are expressed. This second question cannot be reduced to the first; intersubjective meaning is not a matter of converging beliefs or values. When we speak of consensus we speak of beliefs and values which could be the property of a single person, or many, or all; but intersubjective meanings could not be the property of a single person because they are rooted in social practice (p.120).

A political activity such as a negotiation is not simply the end result of deliberation but is itself a practice that enables something like deliberation to occur in the first place. Once again, the aim of the present project is to draw attention to the political practices that are not the end result of a mental activity

known as interpretation but instead embody an interpretation of political reality. This has a number of implications for the way we understand social reality.

As we have seen, there is a tendency within contemporary psychology to view intersubjectivity as the collective activity of a group of individuals. Thus, a phenomenon such as culture is conceptualized as a possession of individual minds, another variable capable of explaining particular interpretations of social reality. Yet our focus on practice would seem to call into question the way psychology has heretofore integrated culture into its explanatory matrix. Indeed, the present analysis suggests that culture is not something we possess – a collection of mental representations that govern our interpretations of social situations. *Culture is something that we are and it is through our practical activities that we reproduce and transform who we are.* In this way, the focus on practice and intersubjectivity should encourage psychologists to explore how their interpretation of culture is embodied in the practices of a scientific community that treats individual cognitive processes as their basic unit of analysis.

The present project also has implications for the way we view the concept of ideology. As we have seen, social cognition would have to view ideology as a collection of mental representations that govern particular interpretations of political reality. In this sense, an ideology is a cognitive bias – a lens that colors the world in one way for a conservative and in another way for a liberal. Moreover, this view of ideology is implicit in the methods psychology relies on to investigate its subject matter. Such methods are designed to methodologically distance the researcher from what he or she is investigating. This ensures that subjective biases do not prevent the research community from understanding social reality as it really is. In this sense, methods ensure that scientific research will not succumb to the ideological convictions of an individual or community.

Yet the discussion of practice has important implications for such a view. If interpretation is no longer seen exclusively as a mental activity, where are we to locate ideology? The shift to practice suggests that the activities of a community



already embody an interpretation of social reality. Thus, ideology may reside within the practices of a particular community. This calls into question the division of science and ideology. Indeed, it suggests that methodological procedures do not simply extirpate ideology from scientific investigation but that the latter may represent a pervasive ideological practice – one that fails to recognize its own ideological commitments.

Because practices embody who we are as a community, it is often difficult to bring them into focus. In other words, the very familiarity of these practices prevents us from becoming aware of the role they play in our experience. The present project is an attempt to draw attention to the practices that embody an interpretation of political reality. To do so, I have tried to *make our familiar practices strange*. The German playwright Bertolt Brecht refers to this process as “estrangement” or *Verfremdung* – a process whereby the contingency of our ordinary thoughts, beliefs, and activities comes into view. Indeed, Jameson (1998) notes that in Brecht’s method of “estrangement” (*Verfremdung*),

the familiar or habitual is reidentified as the ‘natural’, and its estrangement unveils that appearance, which suggests the changeless and the eternal as well, and shows the object to be instead ‘historical’, to which may be added, as a political corollary, made or constructed by human beings, and thus able to be changed by them as well, or replaced altogether (p.40).

What I have tried to demonstrate in this investigation is that phenomenology, far from serving as a foundation for social cognition research, may in fact call into question some of psychology’s most cherished notions regarding the nature of social reality. By viewing phenomenology ontologically, the intersubjective foundations of psychological and political understanding can be brought into view. In doing so, the familiar aspects of our experience can be seen in a unique way.

Among other things, the present project is an attempt to draw out the implications of a practice orientation for phenomenological research. By focusing on shared practices, I hope to draw attention to the intersubjective foundations of political phenomena. It is therefore important to understand the role psychology

can play in such an investigation. Since the move towards practice unsettles both the individual as the basic unit of analysis and the primacy accorded to such an individual as a knower, it could seem that the movement towards practice is entirely destructive. In other words, psychology cannot afford to reflect on the “practice turn” lest it undermine the premises vital to its legitimacy. Yet it is also possible to see the movement to practice as beckoning for a new psychology that recognizes itself as a form of social practice contributing to a wide array of interesting debates.

The philosopher Richard Rorty (1979) once wrote that a critique of the epistemological view of interpretation is an attempt, “to prevent education from being reduced to instruction in the results of normal inquiry. More broadly, it is the attempt to prevent abnormal inquiry from being viewed as suspicious solely because of its abnormality” (p.363). While the present project may seem strange to those accustomed to viewing interpretation strictly as a mental activity, I believe it is important to treat this strangeness not as a hindrance to this investigation but as a sign of epistemology’s grip. The transition to a practice orientation represents a radically different way of understanding social reality. For Gadamer (1981),

practice is conducting oneself and acting in solidarity. Solidarity, however, is the decisive condition and basis of all social reason. There is a saying of Heraclitus, the “weeping” philosopher: The *logos* is common to all, but people behave as if each had a private reason. Does this have to remain this way (p.87)?

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## **VITA**

Michael Arfken was born on May 8<sup>th</sup>, 1976 in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. He grew up in Houston, Texas and eventually attending college at Texas State University in San Marcos where he graduated from the Honors Program with a major in Psychology and a minor in Philosophy. After a brief hiatus from school, Michael attended The University of Tennessee where he received a doctorate in Psychology. He is currently an Assistant Professor of Psychology at The University of Prince Edward Island.