Chapter 7

TOWARD A MICROTHEORY
OF STRUCTURING

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THIS CHAPTER REPRESENTS AN EFFORT to reconcile, as best we can, our respective views on microdynamics. As with all such efforts, we have had to negotiate and compromise our formulations somewhat, but the end product can perhaps serve as a stimulus for others to join the debate over the fundamental properties of face-to-face interaction among humans. Collins's (1975, 1981, 1987) work on microprocesses is well known, so we will begin with a review of his basic model of "interaction ritual chains." Turner's (1986, 1987, 1988) approach to interaction processes is more recent, hence it will be used as a supplement to Collins's formulation.

COLLINS'S THEORY OF
INTERACTION RITUALS

For Collins, the basic micro unit of analysis is "the encounter," which is a "shared conversational reality" revolving around negotiation and exchange of resources. Collins visualizes two basic types of resources: (1) Cultural capital and (2) emotional energy. "Cultural capital" consists of such resources as stored memories of previous conversations, vocal styles, and special types of knowledge or expertise. The concept of "generalized cultural capital" denotes those impersonal symbols that mark general classes of resources (for example, knowledge, positions, authority, and groupings), whereas "particularized cultural capital" refers to the memories that individuals have of the particular identities, reputations, and network/organizational positions of specific persons. "Emotional energy" is composed of the level and type of affect, feeling, and sentiment that individuals can, or will, mobilize in a situation.

Interaction consists of individuals using their cultural capital and emotional energy to talk with each other. Such conversations involve

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an investment of capital and energy, with each individual attracted to situations that bring the best available payoff in cultural capital and emotional energy. In particular, people augment their cultural capital and emotional energy whenever they carry on an interaction that results in a sense of group membership. That is, people spend cultural capital and emotional energy to receive in exchange with others a sense of group involvement and inclusion. Indeed, they will spend additional capital and energy if they can increase their position and rights to control the flow of group activity (thereby increasing their cultural capital). Moreover, people try to achieve membership in a group that is powerful and high ranking in the larger society. These processes of negotiating group inclusion may take place by conscious calculation, but more usually they happen unconsciously, by emotional attraction to persons who emit certain kinds of symbols. Thus to the extent that individuals can increase their cultural capital in interaction they will expend emotional energy; and reciprocally, to the degree that conversations produce positive feelings and emotions, they will invest cultural capital.

The critical variables determining the flow of a conversational encounter are (1) levels of inequality in the respective cultural and emotional resources of individuals, (2) degrees of social density among individuals, and (3) the number of alternative persons with whom they might otherwise interact (i.e., their network position). In situations involving power or property, these network relationships also include one's "enforcement coalition," or allies who will back up one's claims.

In general, when the participants' resources are similar, especially with respect to their positions as order givers or takers and cosmopolitans or locals (see Collins, 1975, pp. 73-79), their "conversational rituals" will be personal, flexible, and long-term; these rituals will lead to strong, positive emotions and a willingness to renew the encounter in the future. Conversely, when there is inequality in resources it becomes less likely that strong personal ties will be created or sustained. In fact, under these conditions those with fewer resources may withhold cultural capital and emotional energy because they fear rejection or domination by the other person. On the other side of such inequalities, persons with greater resources in emotional energy and cultural capital are likely to feel little attraction to continuing a shared reality-constructing situation with those who bring them little symbolic status, or no advantage in network alliances. As a result, conversations will be highly ritualized, formal, impersonal, and short term. Social density

variables intersect with these processes revolving around inequality. The more people that are co-present and can observe each other, the more likely they are to interact, even under conditions of inequality. If people can leave the interaction and have other options (through the low densities created by cosmopolitan networks), however, the inequalities are less likely to control the flow of the interaction, since people will simply take their emotional energy and cultural capital elsewhere.

Thus interaction is motivated by a need for a sense of group involvement that, in turn, mobilizes actors to spend cultural capital and emotional energy in order to feel involved and to hold a place in ongoing group activity, and, if possible, to achieve an advantageous position in such activity. The degree of investment of cultural capital and emotional energy to achieve this sense of group involvement varies with network position, density, and inequality.

The mechanics of interaction motivated by these dynamics involve monitoring situations to determine their general nature as "work-practical," "ceremonial," or "social," and then assessing densities, inequalities, and relative network positions in order to determine how much energy and capital should be invested in the conversational exchange. If densities are high, then some capital and energy must be spent to achieve a minimal sense of involvement, but just how much is to be invested will depend upon an individual's assessment of whether or not a profitable return on this investment is likely—that is, whether or not they will receive positive emotions and increased cultural capital. High density situations, though, are socially coercive on the individual; they tend to generate a flow of emotional energy, a shared mood among the participants, and hence to charge symbols with significance for local membership. If people live in, or just episodically encounter, local communities or networks that are omnipresent and cannot be evaded (usually as the result of macrostructural constraints), they will, like it or not, become imbued with the local culture, even if they also possess access to cosmopolitan networks.

For Collins, structure is built by the repetition of conversational exchanges revolving around the above dynamics. As the payoffs become established and as actors come to invest a given level of energy and capital in repeated encounters, structure is built. New symbols are generated whenever people are together sufficiently long, and these symbols become emblems of membership in that particular group constituted by that encounter. Structure thus rests on the stabilization and routinization of exchanges over time, as these exchanges are driven by needs for achieving a sense of group involvement and are shaped by individuals' expenditures of capital and energy under varying network conditions, local densities, and resource levels.

In Figure 1 the basic contours of this model of human interaction and structure are delineated. A model like that in Figure 1 only denotes the variables and their causal paths. It does not indicate the values of each variable. To some extent, these values are determined by macrostructural forces that (1) provide actors with varying levels of resources, (2) influence the density of actors, (3) circumscribe the openness of networks, (4) dictate the nature of the situation as work-practical, ceremonial, or social, (5) shape the kind of talk that can occur, and (6) determine if and when an exchange must be repeated. Collins's general strategy is to translate all of the conventional categories of macrotheory into concepts denoting microbehavior of individuals in situations. For in his view, the macrostructure is itself the accumulated patterning of persons and encounters across time and physical space.

Specifying the links between these levels of analysis remains an unresolved problem for sociology. One possible interpretation is that individuals are less constrained by macrostructural conditions and negotiate the respective payoffs of emotional energy and cultural capital for themselves; or, as is perhaps most often the case, they negotiate and fine-tune the exchange payoffs within the broad constraints of the macrostructure that circumscribes, in general terms, the distribution of individuals in space and their respective levels of resources.

The feedback loops in the model are crucial because they determine, first of all, whether an interaction is likely to be repeated and, second, the form and pattern it will take when repeated (whether voluntarily or by virtue of macrostructural constraints). Thus if conversational exchanges produce positive feelings and augment capital, actors will use their capital and energy during the course of the interaction and they will be likely to repeat the exchange over time. In Collins's terms, they will create "a chain" of interaction rituals. Ultimately, one's emotional feelings and sense of augmenting cultural capital are tied to the feedback arrows flowing into needs for group membership. Thus the sense of augmenting cultural capital is determined by the extent to which individuals feel that they have a favorable position in a group context, whereas the sense of positive emotions is influenced by the degree to which people experience the solidarity produced by conversational exchanges.

Level of augmentation of cultural capital

Reproduction of macrostructural properties

Distribution of resources, options, and individuals

Stabilization of resource transfers

Level of predictability over exchange pay-offs

Exchanging of cultural and emotional resources in conversations

Level of positive feelings and sentiments

Monitoring of situations as work–practical, social, or ceremonial

Use of cultural resources

Use of emotional resources

Nature of position in group

Needs for group involvement

Level of social solidarity

——— strong causal connection

– – – weak to moderate causal connection

Figure 1

We could, of course, trace out further implications of the model in Figure 1, but it is intended to represent a starting point for further theorizing about the microdynamics undergirding structure. As Turner's model is used to supplement Collins's theory, we can comment further on these dynamic interrelations among the variables. But for the present, let us add Turner's views to the model in Figure 1.

TURNER'S THEORY OF INTERACTION

To some extent, Turner's (1986, 1987, 1988) theory of microdynamics adds variables around the conceptual core presented in Figure 1. In Turner's view, Collins does not specify some of the key microprocesses that determine the values for the variables in the model. More specifically, the motive forces behind actors' use of cultural capital and emotional energy are seen as requiring further conceptualization. That is, actors use cultural and emotional resources for meeting more needs than just group involvement. Moreover, the process of signaling with gestures is viewed by Turner as involving more than talk and conversation; indeed, rather than a shared "conversational reality," individuals create a sense of reality through signaling and interpreting with both verbal and nonverbal gestures (words as well as inflections, countenances, bodily positioning, use of physical props, demeanor, and the like). Collins would not deny the importance of these nonconversational gestures, of course. Yet, they are not prominent in his formal theory. Thus we need to conceptualize the modes of signaling and interpreting through which cultural capital and emotional energy are expended and/or invested in an encounter. Finally, the process of stabilizing an exchange of resources is considered by Turner to involve additional structuring processes beyond stabilization of resource transfers.

Figure 2 presents Turner's views on how to elaborate Collins's model. Such an elaboration maintains the core of the model presented in Figure 1, but it adds variables and makes the theory more robust. Collins does not agree with all of these additions, but as we indicated at the outset, this composite model is the product of conceptual compromises.

At the far left of Figure 2 it is argued that people use their cultural resources because they have fundamental needs for material and symbolic gratification. This line of argument is implicit in Collins's theory; hence we are just making the variable more explicit, as it is in all
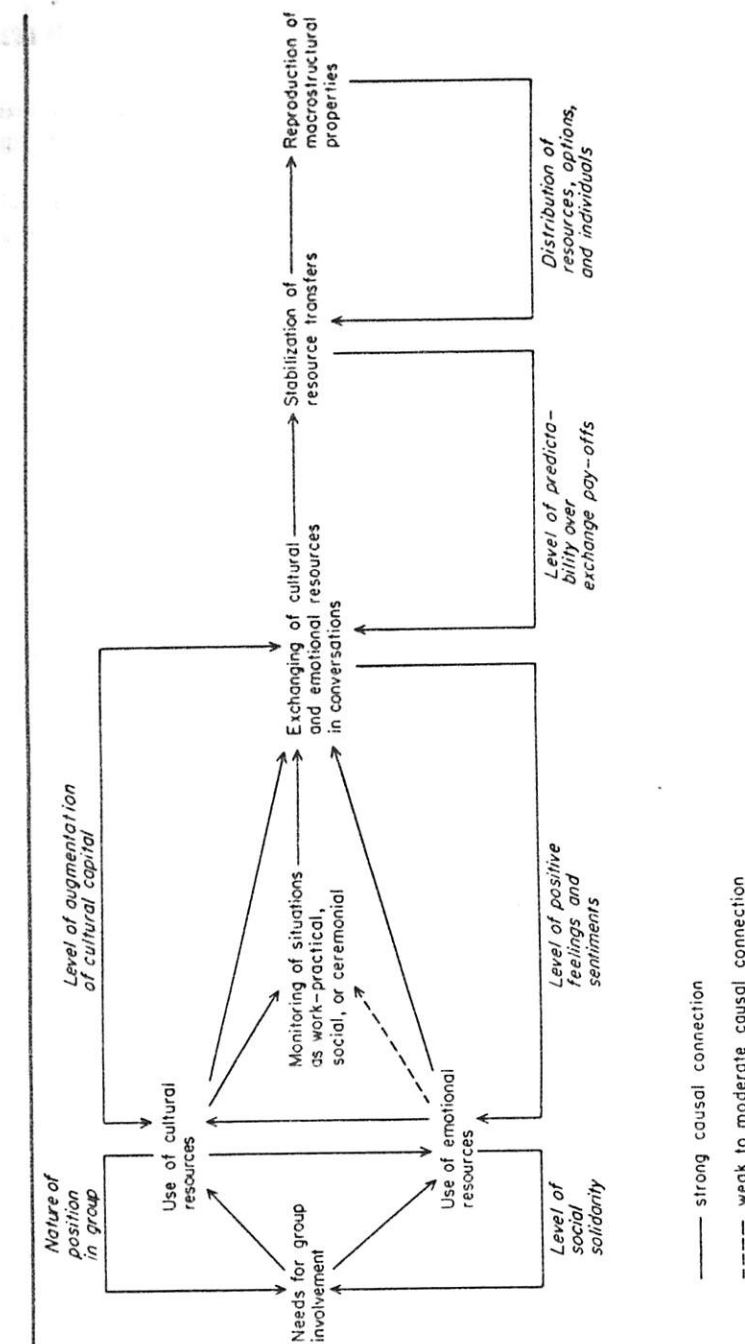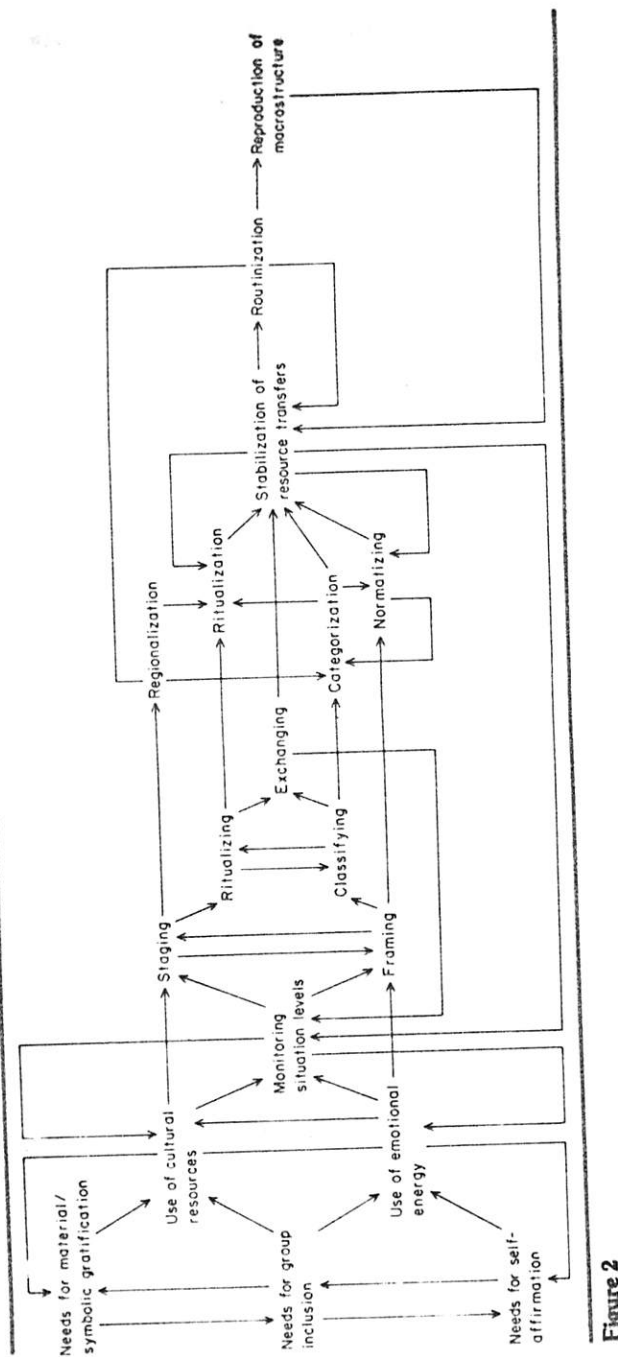
exchange theories. As the arrows from needs for group involvement indicate, people will be particularly interested in receiving the material and symbolic markers of group involvement. In Turner's view, the most imprecisely conceptualized variable in Collins's scheme is emotional energy. Turner argues that the level and nature of emotional energy is influenced by other need states, the most important of which is the need to confirm one's self-definitions in a situation. Turner and Collins disagree over the extent to which people have a pan-situational self-conception (Turner says that they do; and Collins that they do not), but whether or not self is situational and stable across encounters is less important than the proposition that emotional energy is tied to the intensity of needs for self-affirmation. Moreover, as the double causal arrows connecting needs for self-affirmation and group inclusion emphasize, people's sense of self in a situation is circumscribed by their capacity to feel that self-definitions are affirmed in the context of group activity.

Thus people use cultural capital and emotional energy to meet fundamental needs for symbolic and material gratification, group inclusion, and self-affirmation. They do so by monitoring situations, or in Turner's terms, interpreting the situational cues and gestures of others; then they use their capital and emotional energy to signal. As is indicated in the model, they signal in several basic ways: staging, framing, classifying, and ritualizing. At the same time, actors read the staging, framing, classifying, and ritualizing cues of others as they monitor, or interpret, the gestures of others as well as the physical properties of the situation. What is argued in adding these variables is this: The exchange of resources occurs by virtue of the capacity to stage, frame, classify, and ritualize a situation. People try to use props, juxtapositioning, and other physical features of the situation (staging); they also attempt to cognitively enclose a situation in order to delimit the range of relevant responses and emotions (framing); they use opening, sequencing, and closing rituals (ritualizing); and they try to typify situations in terms of their work-practical, ceremonial, and social content (classifying). As the sequencing of these variables and their causal interrelations indicates, staging circumscribes the rituals used in exchanges. Framing is viewed as circumscribing the classification of situations in the sense that, before classification can be achieved, individuals must initially impose a frame. As the arrow from staging emphasizes, one such frame is demographic and/or ecological. That is, individuals must decide on the physical and interpersonal boundaries of

Figure 2

their exchange. Conversely, staging is more effective when a situation is framed, since individuals can better interpret the meaning of relevant staging cues. Similarly, ritualizing and classifying influence each other, for once a situation is classified as ceremonial, work-practical, or social, the relevant rituals in the exchange are more easily determined, while conversely, the use of rituals reaffirms the appropriate classification of an exchange.

Of course, much exchange involves manipulation of frames, stages, categories, and rituals to achieve favorable payoffs of emotional energy and capital. Indeed, one's level of cultural capital and emotional energy determines how much manipulation of stages, frames, rituals, and categories can occur in exchanges with others. Thus whether the manipulation is deliberate or unconscious, it is important to conceptualize the modalities by which signals are sent and received during the course of an exchange.

The critical question in structuring a situation is to stabilize the exchange of resources. That is, if a situation is to be structured in time and space, individuals must be willing to accept a given level of payoff of cultural capital and emotional energy across successive transactions. This level of payoff becomes an expectation, and as long as it is met individuals will create "chains" of exchanges, or resource transfers. The model in Figure 2 seeks to specify some of those forces that facilitate the stabilization of exchanges across time. In Turner's view, these are connected to, and indeed created and sustained by, the staging, framing, ritualizing, and classifying of encounters. Collins would add that there is a crucial link to the shape of the networks that make up enforcement coalitions, and the ecological dispersion of encounters in space (i.e., to the macrostructure).

Regionalization of an exchange involves the structuring of space, props, juxtapositioning, and movements. To the extent that people can agree upon the parameters of space, their relative location in space, their movements in space, and the use and meaning of physical props in space, then the stabilization of resource transfers is facilitated.

The stabilization of an exchange is also dependent upon the emission of standardized and agreed-upon rituals with respect to the opening, closing, and sequencing of gestures. It also depends upon consensus over relevant repair rituals to be invoked if a situation is breached. And, if an exchange is emotionally charged and involves considerable investment of cultural capital, then it is usually totemized in the sense that there are rituals for symbolizing *the* exchange as a special and an

important entity, external to the individuals.

The degree of agreement or consensus itself remains to be explained, in Collins's view. Here the relevant factors may be the social distribution of control over the means of cultural and emotional production. When these are highly concentrated, the overall pattern is stabilized under the cultural control exerted by the dominant social classes. How closely a given society approximates to this state of affairs, of course, is historically variable. In most societies this socially created consensus may be moderate; when it falls to a low level, social conflict and change take place.

Exchanges also require categorization, which is facilitated by an initial classification of the exchange as work-practical, social, or ceremonial, but which also requires more fine-tuned categorization along several additional dimensions, including the degree of intimacy/impersonality, the range of relevant roles, and the standards for evaluating performance of roles. (Collins, by the way, is hostile to conceptualizations of interaction in terms of roles; hence he dissents on this point.)

Categorization, coupled with framing, helps normatize an exchange. While Collins is particularly hostile to the concept of norms, Turner (1988) feels that the stabilization of interactions depends upon developing agreements over rights and duties, schemes for interpreting gestures, and rules for resolving inconsistencies and breaches in the signaling and interpreting activities of individuals. Turner expresses a computational view of norms; they are interactional rules to assemble and constantly reassemble bits of information in actors' stocks of interactional knowledge. Thus we do not need to assert that there are clear and explicit "rules" or "expectations" tied to each status position, as some forms of deficient theorizing once did (Parsons, 1951), but only that individuals negotiate over and construct implicit agreements about their respective rights, duties, interpretative schemes, and procedures for repair and reconciliation of differences. Turner argues that without these normative agreements it is difficult to stabilize resource transfers. Indeed while Collins has doubts about the exchange-theoretic concept of "justice," Turner believes that resource exchanges depend upon some normative standard of "fair exchange" for a given type of situation. Such standards involve a loose specification of the rights and duties of each party as well as the ways to interpret the actions of individuals with respect to an appropriate ratio of resource payoffs for varying investments of capital and energy.

Finally, structuring depends upon routinization, or the immersion of similar sequences of activity in particular types of situations. Thus when resource exchanges become stabilized, individuals do much the same thing, in the same way, in the same place, and often at the same time. Indeed, they often become only semiaware of their activities—unless, of course, the exchange payoffs deviate from what is expected and thereby offend implicit normative agreements over "justice."

As the arrows connecting these structuring processes underscore, they are interconnected. Ritualization is facilitated by regionalization and categorization; categorization is much easier when regionalization has occurred; normatizing a situation is facilitated by prior categorization which specifies the relevant range or pool of rights, duties, schemes, and procedures for repair; and if situations are routinized, then regionalization is encouraged as actors locate themselves and move about in space in habitual ways.

Routinization is also the key link to reproduction of macrostructures. Macrostructures depend, Turner argues, on the routinization of stabilized resource transfers. As people come to accept a given ratio of payoffs and to engage in predictable routines, the macrostructural parameters within which all interaction occurs are reproduced. Conversely, if actors do not accept a ratio of payoffs, or feel injustice or deprivation, routinization is less easily sustained (except by coercion) and macrostructural reproduction becomes less viable.

The feedback arrows in the model in Figure 2 are a crucial feature of the structuring process. Ultimately the structuring of interaction will be tenuous, at least in the long run, when basic needs for group involvement, self-affirmation, and gratification go consistently unmet. Thus to the extent that people's use of their cultural capital and emotional energy deprives them of some modicum of self-affirmation, group involvement, and gratification, the structuring of interaction will prove difficult. Conversely, if the use of capital and energy allows people to meet these needs, then structuring will prove more viable.

Thus the sequence of feedback loops are an important part of our theory. Starting from the far right and moving to the left, we can hypothesize that to the degree that macrostructures stabilize resource transfers and at the same time encourage those processes of regionalization, categorization, ritualization, routinization, and normatization on which stabilization of resource transfers depend, then actors will monitor and interpret situations that, on the one hand, provide guidelines for successful exchanges through their staging, framing,

classifying, and ritualizing efforts and that, on the other hand, enable them to increase emotional energy and cultural capital to levels that meet the basic needs for gratification, group involvement, and self-affirmation. Highly structured situations consist, therefore, of a series of positive values for these feedback loops connecting variables, whereas more unstable structures evidence negative values for at least some, or perhaps, all of the variables in the model. The analytical model of highly structured situations is an ideal type. More typically, it appears, there are substantial negative coefficients for many variables, resulting in the observed condition of strife and change that makes up so much of human history.

CONCLUSION

As has been evident, Figure 2 is a composite model that reconciles somewhat different approaches. We do not offer it as a completed negotiation, but as an open invitation to others who, we hope, will try to rework the model in Figure 2. Too often, theorizing about interaction has been chauvinistic—stressing the presumed superiority of one view over all others. It is far wiser, we assert, to draw from many conceptual viewpoints, synthesizing their useful elements. Such has been our goal, and we hope that others will emulate at least the spirit of our effort.

As is also evident, we have borrowed concepts from many sources that, in closing, we should at least acknowledge. The motivational variables come from what are often considered antagonistic approaches: exchange theory (Emerson, 1972; Blau, 1964; Homans, 1961), interactionism (Gecas, 1982; Rosenberg, 1979), and Durkheimian functionalism (Durkheim, 1912). The emotional energy variables come from a sympathetic reading of psychoanalytic approaches, while the cultural capital variable involves an adaptation of exchange and conflict theories. Several of the interpersonal variables come from Goffman's (1959, 1967, 1974) analysis of staging, ritual, and framing. Others come from Schutz's (1932) analysis of the processes of classification and typification. The structuring variables represent extensions of those interpersonal processes, although Giddens's (1984) analysis of routinization, Freese's (1988) discussion of resource transfers, and Garfinkel's (1967) metaphor of constructing (normative) accounts and schema have also been crucial sources of concepts.

Elsewhere (Turner, 1988 and Collins, 1987) we have explored in more detail the intellectual roots of our respective theories. Here we

simply want to emphasize the eclectic nature of the provisional model presented in Figure 2. This kind of effort offers, we feel, considerably more promise for theoretical growth in sociology than the partisan approaches of those from whom we have borrowed.

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