Speaking culturally about
personhood, motherhood and career*

Michael Berry

ABSTRACT

This paper discusses some aspects of the interwoven relationship between the meanings of *equality, responsibility, autonomy/independence* and *choice* and the coding of identity among Finnish female students of business when they talk about personhood, motherhood and career. The Finnish speech produced by extensive classroom discussion about the speech of Joanna Kramer in the Oscar award-winning film *Kramer versus Kramer* (*KVK*) forms the basis for the discussion. The Finnish student coding of personhood (being) and sociation (being with) is compared with that of university-educated, middle-class American women. As these women from two different cultures responded to a gender-related identity crisis and other critical incidents they used different cultural conceptions of personhood and sociation, and each of these conceptions of personhood and sociation positioned social identities of gender differently. These findings are based on one research experience and reflect one interpretation but they suggest the importance of developing ways to grapple with the relationship between gender, role and cultural identity. The Finnish and American female students spoke about the tension that women experience when striving to be a "good" person, a "good" woman, a "good" mother and a "good" career person. These tensions exist in both societies but the talk about the nature of the problem and possible solutions were different.

*All my life I've felt like
somebody's wife, somebody's
mother, somebody's daughter
... and that was why I had
to go away to California. I
think I found myself, and
I got a job*

Joanna Kramer in
Kramer versus Kramer

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*Why didn't she just go
out and get a job?*

Finnish female student
of business

*None of the Finns ever really
understood what Joanna meant when
she talked about "finding herself."*

American female exchange
student in Finland

English is often used as an international language when decisions are made in multinational organizations and academic research is reported for global audiences. Native and non-native speakers of English often fail, however, to understand the extent to which they speak and listen culturally when using English. Often there is the appearance of carrying on a dialogue, e.g. on gender, with the same language and the same vocabulary while operating with different culturally defined concepts of identity. The convergence across cultures of partially shared meaning can easily distract attention from that which is not shared. The symbolic coding of meaning related to basic values that are taken for granted in one's own culture contributes to communication within that speech community but it also constitutes a hidden barrier to communication across cultures.

This paper explores some aspects of how the cultural meanings of *equality, responsibility, autonomy/independence*, and *choice* are interwoven with the coding of identity among Finnish female students of business and the ways they talk about personhood, motherhood and career. The Finnish speech produced by extensive classroom discussion about the speech of Joanna Kramer in the Oscar award-winning film *Kramer versus Kramer* (*KVK*) forms the basis for the discussion. The film tells a story about a family, a young couple, a young child, a divorce, a legal

battle for custody, and tension between the pull of family and workplace in a modern urban environment. Many of the events in the film could be placed in another cultural setting but the meanings attributed to the events, as well as to the explanations for personal conduct, would vary from culture to culture. Joanna Kramer gives the same explanation for her conduct in each showing of the film but each audience responds culturally.

Student responses to Joanna Kramer's identity crisis were also compared with responses to other exercises and social dramas. This approach provided examples of patterned cultural speech by the same persons across a variety of decision-making contexts. Here patterned cultural speech can be understood as coherent patterns of meaning in the responses of the same individuals to a variety of decision-making contexts and patterns of meaning that were shared by most of the female students in this study. The voice of one Finnish female business student is used below to illustrate speech and views that were shared by most of the approximately fifty female business students who have participated in a broad range of exercises during the past seven years. The voice of Joanna Kramer serves to illustrate cultural speech that resonates in parts of middle-class, university-educated American society (Philipsen, 1992) and was echoed by approximately fifteen American female exchange students during their extensive interaction with Finnish students.

To understand Finnish speech as some middle-class, university-educated Finnish female understand it and to understand American speech as some middle-class, university-educated American females understand it is to understand some of the motives used in each culture to organize and interpret social experience. To use Donal Carbaugh's framework in *Situating Selves* (1996) we can understand better who Finns and Americans are by listening to the way they narrate their lives in situated cultural scenes or narrate their responses to social drama that they identify with and subconsciously situate in their own cultural landscape. When Finns and Americans talk about the same mediated text (*KVK*) and the same social drama (an identity crisis) their talk reveals two cultural models of identity and explanations for how those models are played out in two different cultural settings.

To use the terminology of Michael Ager (1996), the ethnographer discovers "rich points", i.e. speech or acts that bring awareness of cultural

differences to the surface. S/he then "frames" the new knowledge so that it starts to become a part of a system of coherence, and eventually validates and modifies the frame by introducing new "strips" of experience and ethnographic data. This process of "frame resolution" can lead to an understanding of a coherent system of meaning that members of the speech community rarely reflect on and outsiders rarely comprehend. This approach is neither "deductive" nor "inductive" but "abductive." Abduction is about the development of frames via testing and modification. The goal is a better understanding of rich points that have been discovered in everyday practices and speech. The cultural subjectivity of the author, the discovery process that led to the writing of this essay and the research methodology are introduced in Appendix 1.

One of the findings of this approach to research was a system of coherence in the cultural coding of *equality, responsibility, autonomy/independence* and *choice* in situations that involved discourse related to personhood, motherhood and career. These findings have indirect but rather important implications for any discussion of gendering organization topics. Organizations are embedded in cultural landscapes, and the persons who create and work in organizations bring practices (ways of organizing, acting and communicating) from everyday life into the organizations even if the organizational culture differs in some ways from the settings in which the persons live (Carbaugh, 1996; Joynt and Warner, 1996; Aaltio-Marjosola, 1994; Acker, 1994; Czarniawska-Joerges, 1994; Hofstede, 1991; Jacobson, 1991; Freeman, 1990; Gallos, 1989; Gerson, 1985; Child, 1981; Geertz, C. 1973). Three articles in *Gendering Organizational Analysis* (Mills & Tancred, 1992) and an introduction to an ethnographic approach to cultural communication by Gerry Philipsen and Donal Carbaugh provide a point of departure for this essay.

CULTURALING THE GENDERING OF ORGANIZATION TOPICS

Joan Acker emphasizes in her contribution to *Gendering Organization Analysis* that "gender-neutral organizational theories reflect [the] gender-neutral rendering of organizational reality" (1992: 257). She points out that the "disembodied worker is a manifestation of the universal 'citizen' or 'individual' fundamental to the ideas of

democracy and contract," and she adds that "the most fundamental abstraction in the concept of liberal individualism is," in the words of Carole Pateman (1988: 8, 223), "the abstraction of the 'individual' from the body ... [the universal individual is] constructed from a male body so that his identity is always masculine." Acker concludes that "even with the full rights of citizens, women stand in an ambiguous relation to this universal individual" (1992: 258).

Acker's point that even the "full rights" of citizens fail to provide a basis for the full rights of women probably holds true across cultures. Her focus on "gendering organizational theory" is to the point, and her reference to the "disembodied worker," the "universal citizen" and "liberal individualism" are also appropriate because the organizational theory that she criticizes has been greatly influenced by the culture of economic and political liberalism (as Acker used the term and as it is understood in Europe).

Citizenship is a culturally coded concept. It is universal in that citizens have rights and obligations (or obligations and rights) but the institutional arrangements that give concrete meaning to citizenship and models of identity in society, within the family and at work differ from culture to culture. Identity is constructed differently, and the discourse about identity is also different. Consequently, ways of talking about gender and appropriate solutions for gender inequality will inevitably differ from culture to culture.

Scholars such as Acker have made important contributions to female and male awareness of the limits of theory based on a "disembodied" individual who turns out to be masculine. A gendered approach to society and organization has provided and will continue to provide a perspective that benefits scholars and citizens alike. A question remains, however: to what extent do readers of Acker's chapter on gendering organizational theory understand that "a poststructuralist strategy for developing a theory of gendered processes" is possible only if the development also takes place outside the parameters of liberalism, in other words, in other cultural landscapes?

Acker understands that gender is constructed differently over time and across space (see, e.g., Acker, 1994) but a fundamental issue is at stake here. Her article was "written especially as an 'end piece'" for *Gendering Organizational Analysis,* and it was introduced as "both a useful overview of developments within feminist organizational analysis and a thought-provoking poststruc-

turalism strategy for developing a theory of gendered organization...[as well as] a chapter [that] should be read ... more as a beginning to a new series of feminist theorizing than as a closure to debate". Assigning this role to a final chapter entitled "Gendering Organizational Theory" is problematic when the cultural limitations of gendering organizational theory are left implicit. To focus on gender-related issues without giving adequate attention to the cultural limits of, for example, liberalism is to run the risk of implicitly universalizing a genderized version of organizational theory along with the liberal assumptions with which it is often associated in North America organizational theory.

Inquiry into what it means when the model of personhood is masculine can benefit from being coupled with reflection on the cultural coding of personhood (being) and sociation (being with). In some societies, perhaps in many, the liberal model of the "disembodied" person as a "universal individual" can be as problematic from a theoretical, societal, organizational and cultural perspective as the model of the "universal individual" whose "identity is always masculine." An approach that grapples with the relationship between gender and culture can provide a gendered approach that reveals nuances in areas of convergence and divergence across cultures.

The strength and the universality of unifying threads of shared gender approaches across cultures is dependent on explicit recognition and demonstration of convergence and divergence with the unifying threads that hold cultures together. No theory or fabric of meaning is sustainable without understanding how both the warp (e.g., a gendered approach) and weft (e.g., a cultural approach) come together to create interwoven patterns of gender and cultural identity.

Marta Calas and Linda Smircich provide an explicit cultural focus to suggest that "the world is more complex than "women's" voices often believe it to be" (1992: 232). They reject "the notion of an essentially 'male' or 'female' reality or structure, [and point] instead to how these purportedly 'natural' oppositions are culturally constituted categories, products, and producers of particular social and material relations" (1992, 226). By questioning traditional theoretical approaches to the production of knowledge, they raise questions about the cultural production of knowledge.

Calas makes explicit the discursive limits of management knowledge in her article "An/Other Silent Voice? Representing "Hispanic Woman" in

Organizational Texts" (1992). "Disciplinary research and theory is a form of writing, which mediates the kind of knowledge that is/could be produced: what is said, how it is said, and by whom it is said.... More important, it is this limited written/discursive form that is presented (published, talked about) as knowledge" (1992: 204). Calas concludes that "we will not be able to represent any other knowledge until we understand how what so far passes as "knowledge" becomes a very limited and interested rhetorical production" (1992: 205).

Calas calls for an ethnographic approach to knowledge – an approach that would distance the object of study from any category that might have been constituted outside the local cultural landscape. To take this approach, "it is necessary to consider that producing knowledge is an activity that is not about 'truth' but about culture" (1992: 216). Calas points to cultural blinders that scholars have when interpreting practices in distant and different cultures, and she reminds "voices of the West" that "dominant modes of organizational research and theorizing ... [easily] obscure and limit the "voices" of studied populations" (1992: 202, 219).

The Finnish cultural speech in the discussion below illustrates the relevance of Calas's point within the industrialized and individualistic West where cultural differences are greater than North-South or East-West comparisons might suggest.[1] The issues raised by Calas and Smircich point to the ethnography of communication and to a discussion of the cultural meaning of *equality*, *responsibility*, *autonomy/independence*, and *choice* in talk by female Finnish business students about personhood, motherhood and career.

AN ETHNOGRAPHIC APPROACH TO CULTURAL COMMUNICATION

The approach to an understanding of the deeper meaning of cultural communication in this essay is based on the ethnographic and theoretical contributions of Gerry Philipsen (1975,

[1] A recent article in *Yliopistotiedot*, a publication of the University of Turku, referred to the benefits of international cooperation in women's studies but it also noted the negative side of instruction and research/publication in English. It interferes with development of Finnish language terminology and can inadvertently place women's studies in an Anglo-Saxon research tradition. Naistutkimus vahvistaa asemiaan yliopistossa. *Yliopistotiedot* (26.9. 1997).

1976,1987, 1989, 1992) and Donal Carbaugh (1988, 1988/89, 1992, 1993, 1994, 1996), both of whom acknowledge an intellectual debt to Dell Hymes (1962, 1972). The underpinning philosophy of this approach is simple but comprehensive: wherever there is communication, there is a system; wherever there is a system, there is cultural meaning; and wherever there is cultural meaning there is social organization. Consequently, communication is constitutive, at least in part, of socio-cultural life (Carbaugh, 1994).

Codes of speaking are learned and communal conversation is played out in speech communities. A code of speaking enables a member of a speech community to appeal to others and to understand others within the same speech community. In this way cultural communication serves to maintain a balance between the forces of individualism and community and to provide a sense of shared identity within a speech community. "When code and community jointly meet ... the full power of culture is most strongly experienced" (Philipsen, 1992: 14).

Philipsen and Carbaugh's approach to the ethnography of communication can lead to the discovery of basic dialectics in actual situated practices – an "inevitable tension between the impulse of individuals to be free and the constraints of communal life" (Philipsen, 1987:245 & 1989; Carbaugh, 1988–1989, 1994). To locate a culture on an axis that is pulling towards communal and individual polls is to reveal partial insights into the nature of the culture. To recognize movement on the axis is to appreciate the dynamic nature of the culture.

Dialectic tension, e.g. between a person and community or between a person and social hierarchy within a community, brings together social and cultural foundations of language use. Socially there is a basic tension between the separation and union of people. This tension is worked out within the parameters of culturally accepted ways of speaking and acting. Agnostic interplay or discourse activates models of personhood and sociation that are common across social scenes and social roles within the culture. One of the challenges facing the ethnography of communication and cultural pragmatics is the detection and understanding of possible links between "the interactional accomplishments of social identities" and "cultural premises and models ... in which the social kind is sensible and appropriate" (Carbaugh, 1996). For example, how are the meanings of the social identities of a woman who is also a wife, a mother and a career woman linked

to cultural premises or communal models of what a person is, can or should be? Functions and structures of the agonistic form may exist in most, if not all cultures, but some of the meanings will vary from culture to culture (Carbaugh, 1988/89).

The coding of dignity and honor

Carbaugh presumes cultural notions of personhood and a system of social identities in every communicative system. When people communicate they are situated in or assume a social context, and they reveal some aspect of their social or cultural selves by positioning themselves relative to others (Carbaugh, 1996). To perform and talk about "being a mother," "being a career woman," being "both a mother and a career woman" is to symbolize a social identity and to symbolize a system of social or cultural practices. The symbolization of these systems of practices is often interwoven with myths about the development of western civilization, which Berger (1974) associated with the rise of "dignity" and the decline of "honor". "Myth" is an abstraction, a super-story of a people. The elements and plot lines of myths are used, however, in individual ways to communicate within speech communities. Gerry Philipsen has built on the concepts of honor and dignity to discover links between the coding of speech and cultural myths in two American speech communities.

The coding of honor

In the code of honor, society is prior to the individual and individual identity is found in social role. As Berger put it, "in a world of honor the individual is the social symbols emblazoned on his escutcheon. The true self of the knight is revealed as he rides out to do battle in the full regalia of his role" (1974: 90). In the culture of honor, communication is between characters with different roles (Philipsen, 1992: 108–109). This communication takes place with the use of conservative rhetoric that is premised on hierarchy, memory and status. To be convincing, communication should appeal to historical precedent and expectations associated with the social roles of the interlocutors.

In ethnic, working-class Teamsterville near Chicago a "real man" assumes hierarchical relationships between men and women: men should be assertive and protective; women are the guardians of the home and morality (Philipsen, 1975, 1976, 1992). In Teamsterville teenage boys tease neighborhood girls about the likelihood or actuality of uncleanness, for example, having flies or maggots on their mouths. The girls participated in this exchange through defense and counter-attacks. Philipsen, who often heard these exchanges while taking Teamsterville children on long trips, interprets this exchange between long-time friends and potential marriage partners as an effort on the part of the boys to remind the girls to remain "clean." A woman should be virtuous and not too talkative. Otherwise, her talk or conduct might force her husband or brother to defend her honor, and by extension his honor. In Mayor Richard Daley's Chicago, loyal members of the traditional community, e.g. a "fine young man", a "decent Chicagoan" raised by a "fine, Polish-American mother", should be appointed to public positions over individuals certified as more competent by institutions external to the community, e.g., universities that are considered "places for agitation and hatred against this government and this society" (Philipsen, 1992: 43–61).

In his analysis of Daley's cultural speech and the communication of Teamsterville boys Philipsen suggests an important connection between cultural speech and the religious and national heritage of Teamsterville. There is a striking resemblance between Philipsen's ethnographic findings and those of the anthropologist Robin Fox who discovered stories about ancient Ireland in which gender, place and honor were important cultural motifs: men are supposed to fight to defend honor, women are supposed to be pure, and mothers are supposed to intervene to prevent men from destroying themselves in the defense of honor. In this cultural landscape identity is closely linked to social role, each role is important to the proper functioning of the community and relationships are organized hierarchically (Philipsen, 1992). A woman's identity is closely linked to being a daughter, a sister, a wife and a mother.

The coding of dignity

Dignity, according to Berger, "relates to the intrinsic humanity divested of all socially imposed roles or norms. It pertains to the self as such, to the individual regardless of his position in society" (Berger, 1974: 89). In contrast to the concept of honor, the concept of dignity "implies that identity is essentially independent of institutional

roles.... It is precisely the naked man, and even more specifically the naked man expressing his sexuality, who represents himself more truthfully" (Berger, 1974: 90).

Philipsen juxtaposes the myth of "honor" (a preference for "hierarchy", "tradition," and "precedence") in Teamsterville speech with the myth of "dignity" (a preference for "open" procedures offering "equality of opportunity" based on individual competence and experience) in his cultural analysis of Joanna Kramer's identity crisis *Kramer versus Kramer.* As Joanna Kramer talks about escaping history (role) and place (going across space from New York to California) to find herself she speaks in terms of the myth of dignity. We do not know, however, that she is celebrating the myth of "dignity" unless we also hear her rejecting the myth of "honor."

Without the voices of women like Joanna Kramer we cannot know about the devaluing of women in the myth of honor. What we can hear in Joanna Kramer's cultural speech, if we are willing and capable, is an escape from the prison of "honor" to the freedom of "dignity." It is a woman's voice speaking about confining experiences as a daughter, wife and mother – experiences that denied her opportunity to be herself and to make her own choices.

TWO COHERENT SYSTEMS OF CULTURAL MEANING

The American and Finnish cultural speech below about personhood, motherhood and career reveals two different systems of coherence in which *equality, responsibility, autonomy/independence,* and *choice* derive their meanings from the interwoven relationship between models of personhood and sociation, public myths, the coding of physical and social space, and institutional arrangements. It is important to emphasize, however, that the "weaving together" of this relationship differs from person to person and from subgroup to subgroup within a speech community. Not all university-educated, middle-class American females would consider Joanna's story plausible or acceptable nor would all university-educated, middle-class Finnish females respond to Joanna's identity crisis in the same way. Nevertheless, the speech in this study revealed two coherent cultural systems of meaning that are common in their respective cultures.

Joanna Kramer talks about her identity crisis

Joanna tells her story in three different parts of the film. In her first letter to Billy after leaving home, Joanna wrote: "I have gone away because I must find something interesting to do for myself in the world. Everybody has to do so. Being a mommy was one thing but there are other things too, and this is just what I have to do."

After Joanna returned to New York and met Ted for the first time to explain herself and to justify her decision to seek custody of Billy she had "a whole speech" prepared. Part of her explanation was: "All my life I've felt like somebody's wife, somebody's mother, somebody's daughter – even all the time we were together – and that was why I had to go away to California. I think I found myself, and I got myself a job, a therapist and I feel better than I have in my whole life. And I've learned a great deal about myself."

During the custody proceedings Joanna told the court that she had held a job before getting married and wanted to continue to work after she was married but, as she put it, "Every time I talked to Ted, my ex-husband, he wouldn't listen. He refused to discuss it in any serious way. I remember once he said that I probably couldn't get a job that paid enough to hire a baby sitter for Billy."

Joanna also revealed, with the help of her lawyer, that she had a better paying job than Ted, that she loved her child "very much." She also said that she had "needed somebody" during the marriage but that Ted "just wasn't there for" her: "... because of his attitude towards my fears and his inability to deal with my feelings I had come to have almost no self esteem. I was scared, I was very unhappy, and, in my mind, I had no other choice but to leave. At the time I left I felt there was something terribly wrong with me and that my son would be better off without me. And it was only after I got to California that I realized, after getting into therapy, that I wasn't such a terrible person. And just because I needed some kind of creative or emotional outlet other than my child, that didn't make me unfit to be a mother."

At the end of the questioning from her lawyer, Joanna summed up her appeal to the court: "I have worked very, very hard to become a whole human being. And I don't think I should be punished for that. And I don't think my little boy should be punished. Billy is only seven years old. He needs me.... I'm his mother, I'm his mother."

KVK as plausible American social drama

Joanna's story can be heard as a social drama that arises from a conflict situation (Turner, 1980; Philipsen, 1992). The story that Joanna tells is about a person who confronts a problem – a husband who does not "communicate" with her and who denies her "choices" related to working and a healthy concept of "self." This person – Joanna – finds some kind of solution. She goes away to find herself. The telling of this story – Joanna's explanations for her conduct – what she did, why she did it, where she went, how she became a new person, and why she wants custody of Billy – reveal salient features in parts of mainstream American culture. The real "self" is above all social roles that society might impose. The individual has a "self" and "rights" and makes "choices." By acting on "rights" and making "choices" it is possible to free one-"self" from the constraints of "society" and "institutions," and to "grow" (Carbaugh, 1988).

One Finnish creation of a plausible alternative social drama

Woven together, Finnish female responses to Joanna's identity crisis tell a different story. It is a story about a person who confronts a problem but the problem is self-imposed limitations due to Joanna's failure to put her foot down and to act as an equal to her husband from the beginning of the marriage. According to this Finnish version of the social drama Joanna found an illusionary solution: rather than going out and getting a job, she ran away from responsibility, she thought she had become a new person, and she believed that she deserved a second chance in a position of social responsibility. In this Finnish version of Joanna's identity crisis, "Joanna did not deserve a second chance just like that" because she had acted "irresponsibly" (as a "weak" and/or "selfish" person) when she left Billy. "If she ran away once, she might do it again". A common explanation for her failure to solve the problem of motherhood and career on the spot was that "she had no sisu". Sisu is a Finnish cultural concept that is difficult to define but it can be understood in this context as a combination of guts, will and determination in which one recognizes the hard facts but does not give up. The necessary energy will somehow be found to do what has to be done in the appropriate place and at the appropriate time even if it seems impossi-

ble in that place at that time. As Finns often put it, sisu is the ability to go through gray granite.

The Finnish telling of this social drama uncovers features in Finnish culture that stand in contrast to American culture. These Finnish responses suggest that Joanna could have been an equal to Ted, that she could have had autonomy within the relationship and that she could have created more choices by acting as an equal and responsible partner in the marriage. The "real self" – to use the American concept – is autonomous within a larger social entity. Choices and personal growth are possible within these parameters as long as there is fairly extensive equality, respect for autonomy, responsibility to others and social support from society.

The story of divorce is emotionally compelling. It is a problem that can be heard across cultures, but Joanna's acts and especially the telling of her story often fell on partially deaf Finnish ears. Her emotional reference to personal feelings and personal development, especially her reference to recovery via therapy, carried little weight with Finnish female students of business when determining an important issue such as the custody of a child. Finns expect factual and non-emotional value-added discourse in such situations (Berry and Nurmikari-Berry, 1997; Berry, 1997a, Carbaugh, 1995).

The coding of space and place in the cultural myths of frontier opportunity and sisu

Fundamental to the coding of equality, autonomy/independence, responsibility, and choice is the cultural coding of physical and social space. To discover convergence of speech in the form of a personal story and in the form of a myth is to discover a common code within a culture (Philipsen, 1992) or part of the glue that holds a culture together (McNeill, 1986). Joanna's personal stories could be credible, plausible and perhaps emotionally powerful in an American setting because they are supported by the American public myth of frontier opportunity – a myth of opportunity in which an individual breaks with role and group and moves across space to find new beginnings (Berry, 1995b, 1995d, 1995e; Robertson, 1980). This myth is powerful because it entails the essence of American identity in a New World founded and populated by courageous individuals who fled the oppression of the Old World (Berry, Maude, and Schuchalter, 1990; Lipset, 1996).

Joanna's personal story found support from this public myth. Even American female students who questioned Joanna's conduct and who would not have granted her custody had no difficulty listening to and understanding her line of reasoning. Part of the explanation is the story of frontier opportunity that they had heard many times over (see Appendix 2). This does not mean that public myths override deeply ingrained moral values but it does suggest how powerful cultural narratives can be even when one deplores a particular act. Joanna played out the role of the hero who went west, found self via new opportunities, returned a "whole" person who was now capable of being the good mother that Billy needed. The myths of motherhood and opportunity converge to give the oppressed individual, Joanna, a second chance.

Finnish female students found little support for Joanna's story in Finnish public myths related to the cultural coding of geo-symbolic space (Berry, 1995b, 1995d). Indeed, the corresponding Finnish cultural myth of *sisu* associated with place and frontier experiences sends just the opposite message. Finns have been preoccupied with carving out a zone of survival and comfort in a hostile arctic climate on the Russian border. The peasant hero in Finnish cultural myth of *sisu* turns the rocky and marshy forests into farmable land, he goes east to defend the border and returns home, if he survives, to build a social democracy. Opportunity is not over the next horizon; it is where you are if you can solve your problems on the spot and defend your turf. There is little scope for easy alternatives, new beginnings and a second chance in the myth of *sisu* (Berry, 1995b).

American and Finnish cultural myths converge in their celebration of development away from social hierarchy and oppression but the coding of geo-cultural space in this evolution is fundamentally different. For Americans progress comes with development over time as new resources and opportunities are made possible by expansion over space: "we are here now, we used to be somewhere else and we expect to be in yet another place in the future." For Finns progress comes over time as societal place is defended and societal resources are redistributed: "we have occupied this place in the past and we will occupy it in the future as long as we can develop and defend it." Americans talk about "time and space"; Finns talk about "time and place".

These differences in cultural myths and the coding of geo-symbolic space were made explicit by Finnish students in their group discussions, their open-ended diary entries, their final papers and, in the case of some students, a recorded interview. The quotes below are taken from the speech of one female student, Minna Suomalainen, to illustrate how her coding of *equality, responsibility, autonomy/independence* and *choice* formed a system of coherence that reveal some of her views on personhood, motherhood and career. The patterns in Minna's speech generally represent those of the fifty female business students in the study.

When asked whether the film would be believable if it had been in Finnish and situated in Helsinki, Minna replied that "in a Finnish film Joanna would take Billy with her." The interviewer then summarized some of the points Minna had previously made in the interview: "You said she should have put her foot down earlier [Minna: 'ya'], and she, within that framework, could have developed herself [Minna: 'ya'] but now you've added another dimension. In order to be believable she should have taken Billy with her. Where would she have gone to be believable? (long pause) Would she have gone far away?" Minna responded: "No, I don't think so. When I think what might have happened in a Finnish film maybe she would start with going back to her parents or to a friend for a start and from there tried to work things out..."

Female Finnish business students did not believe that a Finnish court would have granted custody to Joanna. As Minna put it, "I saw her escaping from her 'prison' (quotes communicated nonverbally), and I couldn't sympathize with her... Joanna was not a fighter. She was more a loser... Joanna had every right to try to change the situation. But why did she have to wait for five long years for that? If she needed professional help, why didn't she look for it there in New York?... Why did she need to disappear to California for two years. ...It's amazing! All the time [that] I'm blaming [Joanna] there's a small voice in my head saying 'but what if he [Ted] didn't listen to her? What if she was so paralyzed that she couldn't act anymore?' And a stronger voice that says 'she should have been able to do so. There's no excuse'."

Minna also referred to Finland's experience during the Second World War "when Finnish soldiers didn't surrender to Russians, but managed to make possible out of impossible. ... I think maybe this is one of those reasons why I see Joanna a little bit like a failure. She didn't fight at all. She escaped. She wanted to have a second chance when she returned. But why should she

have got it? She could have done it all again."

Different cultural myths of nation building and survival produce and reinforce different models of personhood and sociation. The convergence of terms and story lines across American personal and public stories and across Finnish personal and public stories revealed evidence of the cultural coding of a person's relationship to time and to place/space. One American assumption is that problems can often best be solved by developing physical distance from the problem and the social relationships associated with the those problems. One Finnish assumption was that problems should be solved in the social environment where they exist. If Finns had gone elsewhere when there were problems with the Russians there would be no Finland today (Berry, 1994a, 1995).

Differences should not be overstated. American female students often agreed, on reflection, with Finns who stated that problems should be solved where they are, and Finnish students usually agreed, on reflection, with American students that distance from a problem can help. Initial responses tended, however, to be different. One fundamental difference was, in the words of an American female student, that American students "assumed more inequality between the sexes", and American students assumed that Joanna had tried everything possible to get Ted to listen to her about getting a job. Consequently, "she had no choice but to leave". Stories about breaking with social group and moving far away found support from narratives about American history.

The Finnish students often agreed that the marriage was doomed at the point where the film began. Ted had not been a very good husband but Finnish students tended to assume rather extensive gender equality within the marriage and, therefore, assumed that Joanna had not tried hard enough to communicate her determination to work. For most, it made little sense to "find oneself" in a new environment and to return to pick up where one had left off. Cultural models of conduct and communication in cultural myths and everyday practices helped the interlocutors fill in the larger picture (see Appendix 2).

Patterns in cultural systems of meaning

Responses to Joanna Kramer's identity crisis revealed assumptions about *equality, autonomy/independence, responsibility* and *choice* but systems of cultural meaning can be tested and verified only by listening for patterns in responses to a variety of situations. This approach corresponds to a frame resolution process (Ager, 1996) and a cyclical investigation process (Carbaugh and Hastings, 1992).

A brief description of some exercises can illustrate the scope of exercises, each of which required students to make a decision and to explain reasons for the decision in a diary entry. Every exercise was followed by group discussions in which students exchanged views on their responses to the exercise. Many of the discussions were recorded, and in some cases students based their diary entries on listening to a recorded session that they had participated in. Making decisions, responding to the decisions made and reflecting on those decisions, often in a multicultural group, eventually revealed cultural patterns in implicit assumptions about individual and social identity and acceptable ways to talk about social issues. This approach to learning to learn and to learner autonomy provides the teacher-researcher with a wealth of insights into models of personhood, sociation and communication norms (Berry, in press a, in press b).

One exercise that was adapted from an international management textbook (Harris and Moran, 1991: 271) involved the interpretation of communication between a manager and a subordinate. It revealed convergence in student responses to Joanna Kramer's conduct and appropriate relationships between managers and subordinates. Students were given the actual verbal exchange between a manager and a subordinate. They were then asked to give their interpretation of what was said and understood by the boss and subordinate. After completing this exercise students read the attributions of the manager and the subordinate as reconstructed by a psychiatrist who had apparently been consulted to explain the break down in communication between the boss and the subordinate. Students are then told that the boss was an American and the subordinate was Greek. During the group discussion students often discovered that they had placed the boss and subordinate in their own culture, and had written a partial cultural definition of how a boss and subordinate should interact.

Nearly every Finnish student assumed autonomy for the subordinate and a rather egalitarian relationship between the boss and the subordinate. Given the assumption of autonomy and a rather egalitarian status for the project, they

placed responsibility for completion of the task on the shoulders of the subordinate, and tended to consider the subordinate responsible for the misunderstanding. Even if the boss is responsible in the end for any project, a project delegated to an autonomous subordinate is responsibility delegated for the project. The subordinate could have and should have gone to the boss if he had any problems. American students were very critical of the subordinate and considered him a "worthless" person who was "lazy" or who failed to take the "initiative", but the American students did not refer, as many Finns did, to the failure of the subordinate to take "responsibility".

The exchanges between Finnish and American students revealed different understandings of "autonomy". For the American students, as is the case in American management literature, autonomy is associated with independence from institutional constraints, and it increases as one moves up the corporate ladder. Finnish students did not associate autonomy with high-level organizational status. Some did argue, however, that higher organizational status brings more responsibility and therefore tends to limit rather than enhance the autonomy of the high-level manager. No American agreed with this perspective on autonomy. Students from both cultures agreed, however, that there was little scope for autonomy when there is extreme inequality.

In another exercise students were asked to discuss which leadership styles they considered essential to a good working relationship between a boss and a subordinate. A very large percentage of Finnish students listed autonomy-delegation as the most or one of the most important leadership styles. No American student ranked autonomy-delegation as one of the most important leadership styles. Exercises adapted from the grid-group theory of Mary Douglas (see Figure 1 below) and from research by Andre Laurent revealed that most Finnish students had a rather strong egalitarian profile with different degrees of hierarchical and individualist input, and American students had a strong individualist profile with different degrees of hierarchical and egalitarian input.

When answering the questions "who am I, is my identity tied to group or society?" and "what should I do, should I act according to prescribed social roles or on an *ad hoc* basis?" most Finnish students rejected the legitimacy of extensive social hierarchy but considered long-term group/societal identity important. American students, in contrast, rejected both extensive social hierarchy and long-term group/societal identity. American and Finnish students rejected a social hierarchical concept of structure in organizations as defined in the Laurent study (Laurent, 1981, 1983, 1986) and expressed a strong preference for an instrumental approach to work but Americans talked in terms of loyalty to the task and Finns talked in terms of loyalty to the group that was performing the task. These results, which dovetail with current research on American and Finnish managers, suggest that Finns and Americans tend to reject hierarchical concepts of structure that are acceptable, for example, to the French (Laurent, 1981, 1983, 1986) but divide over whether instrumentalism should be constrained by group considerations (Berry, 1994b, 1994c). They also divide over whether rejection of social hierarchy leads to individual identity inside or outside group parameters.

Excerpts from Minna's diary and interview illustrate the existence of a system of cultural coding of *equality, autonomy, responsibility* and *choice* in her responses to all these exercises. This coding was common among female business students. During the past two years approximately thirty female students, fifteen of whom were business students, have read a more extensive reproduction and analysis of Minna's speech than is presented in this essay (Berry, 1995a). Most of these students have disagreed with some parts of Minna's views (and the analysis of those comments), e.g. "I would not say it quite that way", but they have also expressed rather strong agreement with most of Minna's speech (as well as the analysis of her speech) and they have all considered her views common.

Minna read the excerpts from her cultural speech and the interpretation of that speech in an earlier version of this essay. After I made one modification Minna voiced agreement with the interpretation of her speech. By bringing Minna's voice back to her for confirmation and to other female business students after they had done the exercises, I have attempted to confirm the accuracy of my interpretation of Minna's speech and to test the extent to which Minna's voice resonated with Finnish female students studying business. Many Finnish students identified rather closely with Minna's responses even if there were some differences in female and male responses to Joanna Kramer's identity crisis (see Appendix 1).

From Minna's perspective, Joanna could "have gone to work if that was what she really wanted.... it was just so strange that Joanna was so kind of weak and so dependent on others." When

Minna was reminded during the interview that Joanna had complained how she had been a daughter, a wife, and a mother all her life, Minna replied "ya" in a very loud voice, and continued "but I think that a person should take responsibility to grow independent."

At that point the interviewer read an excerpt from Minna's class diary related to the leadership style and the boss subordinate exercise. "With autonomy-delegation I keep getting back to privacy. I think people should be given enough space to do their jobs and give them the chance to succeed. I also believe that with autonomy when people can choose their own ways to finish the job they are much more committed." After reading the excerpt the interviewer said "this seems to imply there are limits to what you can do but you are free to do the job in your own way within those limits ['ya, ya' Minna replied]. Do I understand correctly?" Minna then repeated "ya" and added that when she did the leadership style exercise she thought that "it almost always came back to kind of solidarity to group. Some responsibility to group."

The interviewer then read the end of the same diary excerpt: "If you have autonomy you also have to take a responsibility and that tells you that somebody is counting on you and that you are trustworthy. I think you can also link autonomy and responsibility with equality. If you give or receive autonomy you can feel some kind of equality as a framework. Somebody is trusting you and believes you and both can respect each other as equals."

In the Finnish cultural landscape autonomy is independence that recognizes limits. It enables a person to be a self-bossed individual within the parameters of a larger framework. Autonomy is a core, perhaps the core, value in Finnish culture. It has been a foundation of Finnish national identity as well as individual identity within families and organizations. Autonomy within communitarianism that is rather egalitarian by international standards provides a frame for personal identity and development (Berry 1992, 1994b; Nurmi and Uksvärav, 1994). It should not be confused with the American cultural reading of autonomy, which implies in everyday speech independence from societal and institutional limits.

When asked if equality was necessary for autonomy, or simply better for autonomy, Minna replied: "I think it is better but you can have a certain amount of autonomy without equality but if you want an ideal situation then you have to combine those quite strongly in order to get it to

work." Minna was then asked to describe the degree of equality or inequality she had assumed in the manager-subordinate exercise. "Well, I kind of take it for granted at least at the beginning that they were equal and could act according to that.... He [the subordinate] didn't take the responsibility as the whole, he didn't discuss with the boss even if he had this problem."

In response to a question about possible similarities between her response to Joanna Kramer and the Greek subordinate, Minna replied "ya, I found, or I think that Joanna didn't take the responsibility. Because, well...." When asked "responsibility to do what?" Minna replied "In growing, kind of, well, she was too dependent on others and ... I think that deep in herself, she didn't know what exactly she wants from the life as a whole.... first was ... her mother and her parents, then it was Ted should take charge of the situation." Minna mentioned later in the interview that "they [Joanna and Ted] could have been equal, and she, well, she just didn't take the responsibility and be independent and go to work. I don't find any reason why."

Minna, like most of her fellow Finnish students, had been assuming Finnish institutional realities while talking about Joanna Kramer's conduct. When the interview turned to the question of the choices that an university-educated woman makes and whether "there is anything about the way Finnish society is organized that perhaps makes it easier for a Finn to talk the way you [have talked]?" Minna replied with emphasis, "ya, of course, because here it is socially acceptable that both parents work and all these kindergartens and, well, the day care it's much better and you have actually quite much choices to make."

When asked, "what do you mean by quite much choices to make?", Minna referred to social support for working mothers, "well, you can be at home and still you get some money from the state, that you are not totally dependent on your husband and you can stay home for from one to three years, and you can use the private system for day care or the public system." Minna recognized problems in the Finnish system. In response to the question "Do you see institutions or society as somehow constraints on choice or opportunity?" Minna said "Well they can be, for example, nowadays when the work situation is quite bad you have these social pressure, for example, to go to work if you want to get better jobs. It can happen that, well, in reality that you don't have the choice to spend, e.g., three years with your child. You have that but then you lose

something. Or in some communities they have some difficulties in ordering these."

A comparison of the voices of Joanna Kramer and Minna Suomalainen reveals two different concepts of the role of social support systems. Given the economic downswing in Finland prior to and at the time of the interview, Minna and many other Finnish female students expressed the view that a decline in social support for mothers had narrowed the options open to women who wanted to have long maternity leaves and still continue their careers. No American student in the study described constraints and problems this way. American students were usually concerned with the ways that government support systems limit choices open to individuals. From a Finnish perspective, Joanna Kramer's choices were limited by a concept of equality of opportunity based on private initiative and competition rather than on a concept of equality of condition based on social support systems.

Joanna and Minna's speech also demonstrates the limits of reference to the myths of honor and of dignity when comparing the American and Finnish cultural speech in this study. Minna Suomalainen's voice and the other students who she tends to speak for in this essay send a message about the devaluing of social responsibility in the myths of liberal individualism and frontier opportunity. If we are willing and capable, we can hear in Minna Suomalainen's cultural speech rejection of an understanding of dignity that places the individual above group and society. In Minna's cultural landscape, honor is based primarily on responsibility within the group/society and dignity is based on autonomy within group/society. The pioneering work of Mary Douglas provides a framework for illustrating some aspects of convergence and divergence in American and Finnish cultural speech.

WHO AM I AND WHAT SHOULD I DO?

Social science literature often describes dialectical tension on a one-dimensional axis. Likewise, the literature on cross-cultural comparisons focuses on differences between traditional social hierarchy and modern individualism or individualism and collectivism/communitarianism. This one-dimensional construct is prominent in Inkeles & Smith's (1974) analysis of modernity, in Kluckholm and Strodbeck's (1961) work on values, in Triandis's work on attitudes (Triandis et al., 1986, 1988; Triandis, McCusker and Hui,
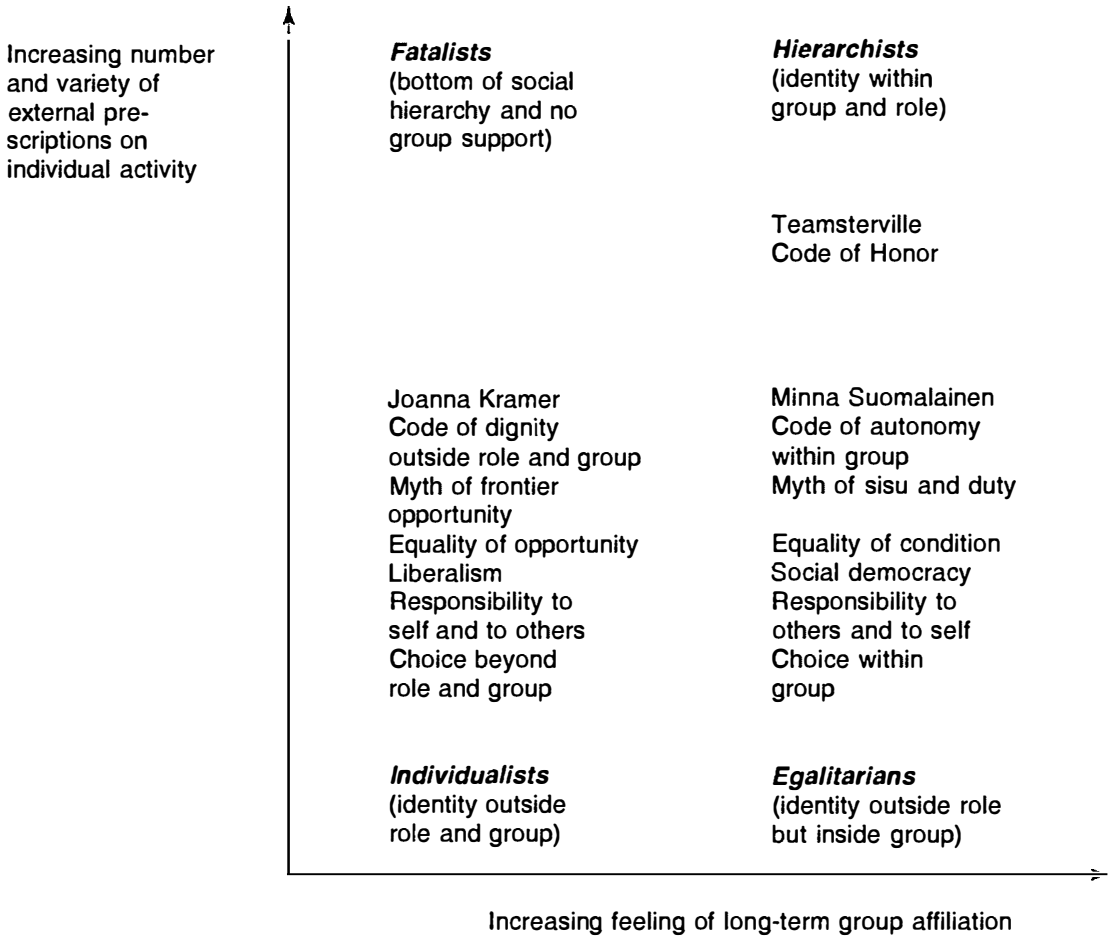
1990), in Schein's work on organizational culture (1991) and Lodge's (1988) work on government/business relations. These one dimensional comparisons, often between culturally distinct places or historically distant times, constitute important contributions to understanding differences between individualism/collectivism and hierarchy/individualism but they provide only limited insights into different models of personhood and sociation within contemporary western cultures.

Cultural theory developed by Mary Douglas and Aaron Wildavsky (Douglas, 1975, 1982; Douglas with Wildavsky, 1982; and Thompson and Ellis with Wildavsky, 1990) provides a typology for illustrating how the agonistic form (Carbaugh, 1988/1989) is played out differently in Finnish and American cultural settings (see Figure 1 below). Douglas and Wildavsky place values and their role in the context of social structure. "Cultural bias" (culture as ideals) and "social relations" (culture as social structure) combine to produce "ways of life." Four different "ways of life" emerge from answering two questions: "who am I" (do I define myself with reference to group) and "what should I do" (do I act according to prescribed roles). These "ways of life" – four culturally biased patterns of social action – are located in the context of "grid" and "group." "Grid" refers to degree of social role and hierarchical constraints on individuals; "group" to strength of group affiliation.

A hierarchical way of life is a combination of strong grid-strong group; members are ranked as well as incorporated. The egalitarian way of life also entails strong group identity but rejects social hierarchy; members are externally bound but internally leveled. The individualist way of life is neither bounded nor differentiated; identity is not tied to social role or to group. Fatalists are subject to social constraints but outside the domain of group support; life is a lottery beyond their control.

Each way of life involves preferences for particular patterns of social relations. These social relations develop supporting justifications or "cultural biases". Ways of life serve as models for understanding the physical world, human nature, appropriating blame, making ends meet and managing risk. To the extent that a way of life corresponds to reality, adherents to that model are able to demonstrate a link between existing social relations and their cultural biases. Whenever reality diverges from the model, adherents to another way of life that is more in tune with the new emerging reality will find things going

Figure 1
Ways of Life

Increasing number
and variety of
external pre-
scriptions on
individual activity

Fatalists
(bottom of social
hierarchy and no
group support)

Hierarchists
(identity within
group and role)

Teamsterville
Code of Honor

Joanna Kramer
Code of dignity
outside role and group
Myth of frontier
opportunity
Equality of opportunity
Liberalism
Responsibility to
self and to others
Choice beyond
role and group

Minna Suomalainen
Code of autonomy
within group
Myth of sisu and duty

Equality of condition
Social democracy
Responsibility to
others and to self
Choice within
group

Individualists
(identity outside
role and group)

Egalitarians
(identity outside role
but inside group)

Increasing feeling of long-term group affiliation

their way. Each way of life is grounded in myths of physical nature, human nature, and management strategies for reconciling needs and resources.

Adherents to these ways of life act rather consistently with respect to their preferences but "rational choice," which is consistent within each way of life, does not necessarily produce similar choices nor similar results in other ways of life. Consequently, the codes and myths that contribute to effective communication within one way of life also constitute obstacles to communication between different ways of life.

The typology in Figure 1 suggests a distribution of tensions along two dimensions, and distinguishes between three basic modes of identi-

ty: (1) a concept of personhood that accepts social hierarchy (identity within social hierarchy), (2) a concept that assumes long-term group identity but rejects social hierarchy (identity within group), and (3) a concept that rejects both group identity and social hierarchy (identity outside of role and group). Few individuals or cultures, if any, fall on any fixed position on this typology. Every person consists of different as well as shifting and overlapping combinations of different predispositions, and every culture consists of different as well as shifting and overlapping combinations of persons or groups with hierarchical, egalitarian, individualist and fatalist predispositions.

Persons and the cultural landscapes they inhabit are too complex to be satisfactorily de-

2

scribed on these two dimensions. Nevertheless, the distinction between identity *primarily* outside of group and role and identity *primarily* within group but outside role facilitates illustration of some of the meaning in American and Finnish cultural speech. American female students assumed that marriage should be long-term but they emphasized identity outside long-term group affiliation for other social relationships. For Joanna and American female students the "agon" is primarily between a person and society/institutions/group. Minna and Finnish female students took group and limited role identity for granted. For them the "agon" is primarily between a person and extensive social hierarchy within society/institutions/group. Consequently, perceptions of the problem and of the solutions reflected different cultural expectations about proper and improper conduct.

Personhood and gender

If we return to Acker's article and its role in *Gendering Organizational Analysis* (Mills and Tancred, 1992), we have a focused essay on dimensions of reality and possibility that has long been ignored, denied or rejected to the detriment of male and female citizens and scholars. Focus is, however, a double-edged sword. I have noticed in my teaching and research that any discussion of a decision-making situation that begins with explicit reference to gender relations, e.g. gender in society, marriage or the workplace, often prompts Finnish female students of business to talk about *equality, responsibility, autonomy/independence*, and *choice* in terms of gender equality or gender inequality.

When the discussion is limited to conditions in Finland, female students will usually talk about gender "inequality", the "irresponsibility" of men or male-dominated organizations/society/families, "the absence of autonomy/independence" for women, and the "limited choices" that women have. If, however, the discussion moves towards a comparison of Finnish women with women outside the Nordic countries the discourse tends to emphasize gender equality in Finland. In both cases, to introduce a societal or organizational issue as a gender issue is to get a gendered response from many, if not most, Finnish female students of business.

When social drama is introduced without reference to gender, discussions tend to evolve around questions of "equality or inequality"

among persons, "responsible or irresponsible" persons, the existence or absence of "autonomy/independence" for persons, and the existence or absence of "choice" for persons. Finnish female students were primarily concerned about flaws in the liberal model of personhood and tended to emphasize the need to embody the person in society/family/organization rather than the need to give a female as well as masculine identity to personhood.

They know that there are problems of gender inequality in Finnish society. As university-educated students of business they do not accept inequality but had, nevertheless, great difficulties accepting Joanna's personal arguments because Joanna spoke with the tongue of liberalism and acted as the disembodied individual in the American frontier myth of opportunity while retaining the rights of motherhood. Finnish female students assumed the ideals of social democracy and social contract rather than the ideals of political democracy and contract. Their concept of personhood was framed by legitimate group and role limits. Within these parameters considerable equality is assumed to exist between husband and wife.

The Finnish responses were also premised in part on the assumption that a decent society has maternity and child-care arrangements that permit any educated woman to work if she wants to. Differences in reproduction, i.e., procreation and caring for children, exist but some institutional arrangements of a social welfare society, e.g. maternity leave and day-care facilities, equalize the male-female role somewhat. The private sector puts commitment to job ahead of commitment to family but society tends to put family and community ahead of commitment to the organization. From a Finnish perspective, the absence of social support systems limited Joanna's choices.

Finnish female students were critical of Joanna Kramer because they assumed that she had equality within the marriage but gave it up; she had the choice to maintain her equal status and to work if she wanted but she failed to act on that choice; and she had responsibility to her child but she ran away from it. Quite simply, Joanna was a weak individual who escaped from her responsibilities and brought on her own problems. Consequently, she denied herself the possibility to be a mother and to have a career. Ted was a lousy husband but it was Joanna who broke with social space (family/child) and physical space (New York to California) in order to be independent of social and institutional constraints so that

she could find herself. This made little sense to the Finnish students who generally assume autonomy within social relationship and institutional constraints and who communicate using rhetorical resources from the myth of *sisu* and social democracy. Problems are solved within traditional social and physical space or they are never solved. Autonomy and equality make it possible to develop oneself within institutional parameters.

In contrast to Joanna Kramer and American female students who emphasized "rights", Finnish female students often referred to "responsibilities". Many Finnish female students talked about how Joanna Kramer used Billy to promote her own interests. No American student made this kind of explicit reference, and most American students talked about the importance of "finding oneself". Filtered through the prism of liberalism, the Finnish responses often sounded to the American students like acceptance of social constraints within the family and society.

Finnish students assumed that a "bill of rights" must function within the institutional framework of a "bill of obligations". They also assumed that society had an obligation to promote equality of opportunity through social support systems. Finnish female students responded from the perspective of values of Lutheranism and social democracy and used rhetorical resources from the myth of *sisu* and social democracy– a powerful combination of responsibility and relative equality of condition (Berry, 1995a, 1995c). The stronger a student's egalitarian profile in the exercise adapted from Mary Douglas's grid-group theory, the greater the criticism of Joanna Kramer and the subordinate in the manager-subordinate exercise. The few Finnish students who had strong individualist profiles tended to agree with much of what Joanna said and did.

At the beginning of the film Ted Kramer talked about commitment to the company and to "bringing home the bacon". This corresponds to Acker's description of the abstract worker transformed into a concrete worker. His work is his life and his wife takes care of everything else. He takes care of the public sphere and his wife takes care of the private/family. She has the child and stays at home. This permits Ted to be committed to his work, to move up the corporate ladder and to be an even better provider for the family. By bringing home the bacon, Ted takes care of his commitment to his family but a successful career requires full commitment to his work. By taking care of everything else Joanna makes this

possible. Only after Joanna's departure did Ted begin to question this set of assumptions. University-educated American women often hear Joanna escaping from this bundle of assumptions. As Joanna put it, she had no choice but to leave. She had to break away from the role of mother/housewife forced on her by her husband who was committed to his work and unwilling to communicate with her as an equal and to give her the opportunity to make her own choices.

American women in this study heard a woman courageous enough to break away from oppression. To find herself Joanna acted and talked according to the model in the myth of dignity and the American myth of frontier opportunity. She broke with role and group and went west, she found a new beginning for herself and she returned to New York as a "whole" person. She had her dignity confirmed by the custody ruling of the court – a ruling made possible by playing upon the myths of motherhood and frontier opportunity and, at the same time, demonstrating that she could bring home "more bacon" than Ted could. Freed from any responsibility at home, Joanna could have the proper commitment to her work, and Ted, now committed to the home, did not have proper commitment to his work. Not only had Joanna escaped oppression; she successfully turned the tables on Ted in the court. In the film and in the responses of American women in this study Joanna Kramer symbolized the oppressed woman who was struggling for "liberation" (see Appendix 1).

The findings in Sarah Jacobson's perceptive doctoral dissertation (1991) on American and Finnish female bank managers dovetail in many ways with the discussion above. She demonstrated how American female bankers talked about making a choice between motherhood and career or juggling the two and how they never referred to public day care as a way to help them combine motherhood and career. As she put it "'jugglers' apparently wish to convey the impression that they accept and acclaim individual responsibility for their lives" (Jacobson, 1991:176). The voices of Joanna Kramer and most of the American female students in this study echoed the views of the American female bankers in Jacobson's study. Finnish female bankers, some of whom were Swedish-speaking Finns, talked in terms of combining motherhood and career and about the supportive role that the welfare system played in making this possible. Their views on a "balance" between family and work differ little, if at all, from those of Finnish female stu-

dents of business. Day care and maternity leave are considered normal ways to promote equality within Finnish society and gender equality within the family.

CONCLUSION

The American speech in this study revealed: (1) A coding of physical and social space which holds that problems can often be solved by creating physical distance from the problem and the social relationships associated with the problem. This *coding of space* could be heard in implicit and explicit use of the cultural myth of dignity (Berger) and frontier opportunity (Berry) which held that there is opportunity over the horizon for the courageous individuals who break away from group and hierarchical oppression. (2) A coding of societal institutions which preferred liberal arrangements (as the concept is understood in Western Europe). (3) A coding of "equality" which assumed that "equality of opportunity" was fostered best when the state is generally limited to enforcing contract and keeping societal and institutional restrictions on individuals to a minimum. (4) A coding of "responsibility" which began with responsibility to "self"; without a healthy concept of "self," it is difficult to be responsible to others. (5) A coding of "independence" which assumed that the real "self" was above all social roles that society might impose. (6) A coding of "choice" that assumed an abundance of "choice" if the individual is not constrained by society and institutional arrangements.

In contrast to the American speech, the Finnish speech in this study revealed: (1) A coding of physical and social place which held that problems must be solved on the spot within existing social relationships. This *coding of place* could be heard in implicit and explicit use of the cultural myth of *sisu* which held that one must "go through gray granite" to solve difficult problems. (2) A coding of societal institutions which held that social democratic arrangements such as day care and maternity leave were considered normal and good. (3) A coding of "equality" which considered "equality of condition" a prerequisite for "equality of opportunity". (4) A coding of "responsibility" which began with responsibility to others and ended with responsibility to oneself. (5) A coding of "autonomy" which assumed the legitimacy of societal and institutional limits but

"independence" within those parameters. (6) A coding of "choice" that assumed an abundance of "choice" as long as "autonomy" was respected and society provided support for an adequate degree of "equality of condition."

The speech of American and Finnish female students in this study rejected the legitimacy of extensive social hierarchy but differed over the legitimacy of long-term group identity. Their speech also revealed a shared concern about gender inequality but rather fundamental differences over acceptable solutions to the problem. The Finnish and American female students spoke about the tensions that women experience when striving to be a "good" person, a "good" woman, a "good" mother and a "good" career person. These tensions exist in both societies but the talk about the nature of the problem and possible solutions were different. The American students tended to see Joanna Kramer as a trapped woman who had to escape from an impossible situation in order to be "independent" and to "find herself". The Finnish students tended to describe Joanna as a person who gave up her "autonomy" and status of equality in the marriage rather than acting on her desire to combine motherhood and work.

As the students responded to Joanna Kramer's speech, they tended to universalize the legitimacy of institutional arrangements in their own cultures, they spoke and were heard within their respective speech communities via different cultural myths and they assumed different models of personhood and sociation. These cultural responses positioned social identities of gender differently. This suggests that being a person is not the same for these students. Consequently, perceptions of being a woman who is a mother and has a career are not the same, and solutions to the challenges posed by being a mother and having a career/not having a career are different.

As scholars develop new approaches to studying persons in organizations as well as the relationship between the persons' lives inside and outside the organization, progress towards gendering organization theory and organization topics can benefit from an additional focus on cultural speech. An ethnographic approach to cultural communication offers one uncharted path to discovery of the unexpected when attempting to come to grips with some of the complex relationships between speaking and listening as a "woman", as a "man" and as a "cultural person".

APPENDIX 1

Note on the methodology of the ethnographic discovery process, research results and the author's cultural/ideological perspectives.

The research method was one of ethnographic discovery in which students were introduced to strategies for discovering and understanding themselves as cultural beings. This essay is the outgrowth of several interrelated projects. Specifically, it reports a discovery by the teacher-researcher who first interpreted student responses through the prism of gender expectations and eventually began to understand that the responses that he was capable of hearing and interpreting were motivated more by cultural than by gender. The origins of this essay date from a decision to use the film *Kramer versus Kramer* as a basis for discussion about American society in conversational English classes. During the first session most of the Finnish male students were critical of Joanna Kramer. The female students, who are often more talkative than the male students, remained rather quiet. I interpreted the male responses to be typical of men but remained puzzled by the female responses.

Intrigued, I decided to continue the discussion the following week. At that point several Finnish female students voiced very strong criticism of Joanna Kramer – much stronger than the criticism of male students. Something significant had happened but I did not yet know what I had stumbled upon. The next new group of students included several Americans and students from central and southern Europe. We watched the film and focused on the actual explanations that Joanna Kramer gave for her conduct. Over a period of three or four weeks I listened intently to the evolution in the discussions that moved beyond the film but often returned to explore reasons behind the different responses to Joanna Kramer's identity crisis.

The student responses fell into three general, albeit overlapping, categories with different views on social and spatial relationships and assumptions of gender equality/inequality: (1) Many of the Finnish students, male and female, found it difficult to listen to Joanna Kramer's explanations for what she did, couldn't understand why she "ran far away from responsibility" when she was "in a position to shape up her husband", and considered her "weak", "irresponsible" and "selfish". (2) The American students had no difficulties following Joanna's arguments regardless of

whether they thought she should get custody of her son. In contrast to the Finnish students, American students assumed inequality in the marriage and seemed to be saying that Joanna had no choice but to distance herself from an oppressive environment. (3) Female students from central and southern European countries with a strong Catholic tradition heard Joanna's story, but only to the extent that she was oppressed by inequality in the marriage (see Appendix 2). They assumed that the mother should get custody but they could not understand why Joanna went so far away from family and friends. By the end of this series of discussions I knew that an intriguing discovery process was underway. Subsequent research has confirmed the categories described above.

Impetus for pursuing the discovery process also came from outside the classroom. When I told several American female professors of communication and management about my preliminary findings, I noticed that they were all surprised. As one put it, "I thought Finnish women were liberated." These responses from intelligent and respected scholars convinced me that a "rich point" discovered was a point that could not be ignored. Barbara Czarniawska-Joerges (1994) wrote in the editorial to a special issue on gender in the *Scandinavian Journal of Management* that "the way gender is constructed obviously differs from one country to another." Perhaps that which is obvious in one setting or at one level of understanding is not quite as obvious elsewhere or at another level of understanding.

Method, sample, results

More than two hundred Finnish students have participated in exercises related to the *Kramer versus Kramer* film and have responded to other decision-making exercises during the past seven years. The objective of the exercises is to help the students develop strategies for detecting cultural patterns in the ways they talk and act. In this way students contribute significantly to constructing the meanings that form the "data" for the interpretation of their cultural speech (Carbaugh and Hastings, 1992; van Manen, 1990; Berry 1997b, in press a, in press b). English was the language of communication but Finnish was used whenever necessary for controlling the cultural meanings of abstract concepts.

The students come from the fields of business, political science and humanities in five different

Finnish universities in southern and central Finland. No attempt has been made to determine regional variations in cultural speech but analysis of student speech has not yet revealed any significant regional differences related to the coding of *equality, responsibility, autonomy/independence* and *choice*. Some students from Savo in the northeast and from the west coast of Finland seemed to hear parts of the myth of frontier opportunity better than other students because of the late stage in the settlement of Savo and access to the sea on the west coast; but these students did not associate movement across space to find new beginnings with an American concept of individual identity. Approximately half the sample is female, and approximately half of the female sample consists of business students.

An explanation for the focus on Finnish female business students is in order. First, I selected the speech of female business students because they are the closest to Joanna Kramer and university-educated American females in terms of gender, and they are generally more sympathetic to American society than students in the humanities and social sciences. This approach minimizes possible expression of negative responses to Joanna Kramer from a sample of students who have an above average negative attitude towards Americans. Observation of student attitudes towards the United States is based on more than twenty years of teaching Finnish students with a variety of social, economic and ideological backgrounds. Second, despite the general ideological difference between business students and students in the humanities and social sciences, preliminary analysis of data has not yet revealed any significant differences between female business students and other Finnish students. There is a spectrum of views in every category of students but the variations in the coding of *equality, responsibility, autonomy/independence* and *choice* is rather similar within each category whether the category is (1) male or female students, (2) students of business, political science or the humanities, (2) married or unmarried students, (3) students under twenty-five years of age or open university students in their thirties and forties or (4) a small sample of Swedish-speaking students.

Perhaps the most significant difference in the student sample is between female and male students. Female students believe that equality and autonomy should be emphasized and insisted upon whenever necessary. Male students are less likely to emphasize equality and autonomy but most accept and agree that equality and autonomy are important for women and men. Ongoing analysis of the male student speech suggests that (1) male students take for granted that which female students know comes only with persistence and vigilance, (2) there is a male preference for some hierarchical role in marriage but male students also want to marry a clever woman and recognize that many university-educated women will not accept inequality and (3) male students tended to assume that it is women rather than men who are problematic when discussing gender-related issues.

Male expressions of these views were often implicit; female expressions were often explicit. These differences between Finnish male and female students fade, however, when their views on gender equality are compared with those of American students and European students outside the Nordic countries. The divisions among students generally evolved according to culture rather than gender. Finnish male and female students had more in common and American male and female students had more in common during group discussions than was the case for the male or female students from those countries. A small minority of male and female Finnish students did identify, however, with parts of Joanna Kramer's speech and acts. Most of those students either had very high individualistic profiles on the exercise adapted from work by Mary Douglas and Aaron Wildavsky or they had experienced a very unequal and unsuccessful relationship.

The sample of American female exchange students is small, only about fifteen, but their speech generally confirmed Gerry Philipsen's (1992) cultural analysis of Joanna Kramer's speech and acts. The public myth of finding new beginnings elsewhere out west seemed to enable Americans to listen to Joanna Kramer even if they condemned her conduct. Significantly, no American student advocated a Finnish-type system of social welfare or maternity leave and state-sponsored daycare for middle-class mothers during class discussions or in their diary entries. They often expressed appreciation of the rather extensive gender equality in Finland but little interest in having a more extensive social support system in the United States to foster gender equality. A government role for one acceptable program would involve a role for many unacceptable programs.

Four factors have emerged during the study to explain different aspects of Finnish female responses to Joanna Kramer's identity crisis: (1) A

powerful emotional experience, e.g. an unsuccessful marriage, can override any initial cultural response. (2) The existence of public myths influences the extent to which students are willing to listen to or capable of following the personal account of another person's acts. (3) The speech and the acts of a person from another culture are often interpreted via cultural models of personhood and sociation. (4) Institutional arrangements in one culture influence responses to the speech and acts of a person in another culture. The preliminary results of a two-year cooperative project in Austria suggests that these four factors are also fundamental to understanding the responses of Austrian business students to Joanna Kramer's identity crisis. The Austrian cultural myths, models of personhood and sociation, and institutional arrangements differ, however, from those in Finland and the United States.

Cultural subjectivity of the author

I grew up in different parts of the United States, am married to a Finn, have lived in Finland since I came in 1975 as a Fulbright professor of American History and International Relations. I consider myself a partial insider/outsider in American and Finnish cultures and a participant-observer in the research process. I have done research on cultural aspects of international management and comparative political economy, on Finnish-American diplomatic relations and on the symbolic role of the image "Finland" in American cultural speech and the image "America" in Finnish cultural speech.

My approach to history has provided a basis for integrating the insights of the ethnography of communication into my teaching and research. My ideological preference is somewhere between the Nordic concepts of social liberalism and social democracy. I consider gender inequality a burden for men and women but recognize that women carry the more obvious and often the heavier part of the burden. I consider gender equality for well-educated women important but not as important as equality among human beings. I do not know whether these views reflect the male or the egalitarian in me, perhaps a little of both.

Most of my teaching and research currently focuses on creating learning environments in which students and businessmen can develop strategies for becoming aware of themselves as cultural beings. This awareness process has proven to be pedagogically sound (Berry, in press a, in press b, 1997b), and has revealed insights into values and social practices that impact on cultural identity and intercultural communication. A person who listens carefully to the speech of others as they respond to different situations is well positioned to gain insights into cultural models of personhood and sociation – both his/her own and those of others. This essay is a partial result of the learning process that I have experienced as a teacher, consultant and researcher.

APPENDIX 2

Two American voices and a southern European voice

The voices below speak about themselves while explaining their perceptions of Finnish responses to Joanna Kramer's identity crisis.

American voice I: Sally

In all our class exercises we have discussed the idea of group vs. self.... In reacting to Joanna's explanations, I sympathized with her negative feelings of self-worth. Because I have always been taught that every individual needs self-esteem, I could understand her feelings. Although I didn't agree with her decision to "find herself" in California, it didn't seem like that unusual of a thing to do because I have lived in California and heard people talking about such things all the time.... Just because I didn't find it odd, however, I didn't have to agree with it. As a matter of fact, I found her justifications of leaving unacceptable. I believe that her primary responsibility was to her family.... My reaction to the myths was similar.... In school I was always taught how important individual opportunity and freedom are to the American people. We were taught to admire the "rugged individuals" who helped pioneer the American nation. My history teachers seemed to make it sound like every "real" American held individual rights as their most important cultural value."

I found most Finns in my group felt...a little sympathy towards Joanna, but didn't support her. Some Finns, however, were not even able to sympathize with her or even listen to her arguments. They could not comprehend why a person might think about leaving group ties. This is

where our discussion of the Finnish and American myths of frontier helped us understand these reactions. Because the Finnish myth of frontier emphasizes sticking together to overcome obstacles, those Finns who could not listen to Joanna were highly influenced by this Finnish tradition of "sisu".

American voice II: Mary

... the true concept of Joanna's "finding herself" was never truly understood by the non-American members of the group. Through the concept is quite difficult to explain, it has very little to do with "maturing" or "becoming adult" or "becoming able to take care of Billy." These are examples of possible ways the non-Americans understood the concept. However, it has more to do with inner searching and metal health and growth, which then *allowed* Joanna to mature, become an adult, or become able to care for Billy. The concept and the distinctions are very hard to explain, but even more difficult to grasp for members of another culture.... The Finnish myth of Sisu was equally difficult to non-Finns to comprehend, and put similar strains on the communication process.

It became clear that due to the assumed equality between men and women, Finns were more apt to see Joanna as equally responsible for the problems in the marriage. In addition, by not standing up to Ted and instead choosing to flee the situation, Joanna was the suitable one to carry the blame for the failure of marriage. Of course personal opinions varied and not all of the Finns subscribed to this, yet based on a cultural assumption of equality, Joanna was more apt to be seen as the weaker person by the Finns. This contrasts a pervasive attitude among cultures with less equality that Joanna was a 'victim' of the situation; therefore her leaving was the product of the environment and she should not be blamed for it or labeled as a failure.

Americans [in the course] clearly see women and men as unequal.... This assumed inequality allows Joanna to escape much of the blame in the eyes of the Americans, and is seen much more as a victim of the situation. The Finns, on the other hand, seem to start from a position assuming much more equality between individuals and the sexes. For this reason Joanna was criticized for her lack of Sisu, for giving up trying to communicate with Ted, for not being stronger and fighting harder.

A southern European voice: Patricia

The question in the *Kramer versus Kramer* analysis from which I learnt most was the custody matter. We were asked to tell to whom we would have given custody ... it seemed an irrelevant question to me as it was obvious that I would have done like in the movie, given custody to Joanna.... I was very surprised to find out in the discussion group that [Jane] from the U.S. and I were the only ones who would have done so.

While in Finland I found out that my culture is very hierarchically structured.... This kind of structure is typical for countries with a Catholic background.... It's everybody's duty to maintain this structure.

Last week on my way to school I saw a man hanging children's laundry on the clothesline. My first reaction was: "How sweet." My second reaction: "Poor him." and my third reaction: "Why did I even notice this?"

I remember there was a Finnish girl in my discussion group who was totally against Joanna. According to her, Joanna was a bad woman and a bad mother and there was no doubt that the girl would have granted custody to Ted. I first was shocked by the girl's behavior, I didn't understand her at all. I thought she completely denied Joanna's rights as a woman. I wondered why an "emancipated Finnish woman" like that girl could think this way? Now I understand that this girl simply had another starting point than me. There was no need in the girl's opinion to "protect" Joanna, what I was doing. I felt some kind of female solidarity with Joanna. In the girl's eyes Joanna WAS equal to Ted. Joanna was stupid enough not to behave as an equal but being minor to Ted during their whole marriage. The girl thought that Joanna should have had a backbone and taken her chances of equality instead of leaving her husband and, even worse, her child. My starting point was the opposite, to me Ted was "the hierarchical stronger one" in their relationship who misused his power and didn't give Joanna any chance to bloom. For me Ted was guilty, whereas for the girl Joanna was.

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