Clothes Make the Person? The Tailoring of Legitimating Accounts and the Social Construction of Identity

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Abstract
We empirically explore the legitimating accounts for and against policies precluding workplace discrimination against gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people, focusing on how agents working at both the national level and within organizations use broader cultural accounts in building their legitimating accounts in local settings. The diffusion perspective in institutional theory has portrayed how agents import "ready-to-wear" cultural accounts. In contrast, translation theory depicts how agents interpret and adapt cultural accounts as they fashion them into legitimating accounts for a local setting. An alternative would theorize accounts that are neither strictly borrowed nor idiosyncratically tailored. We advanced a third perspective, drawing on frame analysis as it is used in social movement theory. Framing theory attends to both the importance of cultural building blocks and the embedded ways in which agents relate to and shape systems of meaning and mobilize collective action to change social arrangements. We find that legitimating accounts are intertwined with the construction of social identities, which serve to legitimate, on the one hand, an account maker's participation in the discourse and set of claims, and on the other hand, the involvement of proponents and crucial audiences. We suggest that the mobilizing potential of legitimating accounts rests in part on their messages becoming "auto-communicational," so that listeners identify themselves with the message.

(Legitimating Accounts; Framing Processes; Social Identity; Sexual Orientation; Workplace Nondiscrimination; Gay Rights; Institutional Change; Agency)

Introduction
The past decade has seen many attempts to probe the strategic and political processes that give rise to, sustain, and transform institutions (e.g., Brint and Karabel 1991, Scully and Meyerson 1996). Much of this work has focused on the nature and scope of institutionally embedded agency. For the most part, where agency has appeared in institutional theory, it has been institutionally authorized and constrained; social actors enact constitutive, institutional scripts that link their identities to prescribed behaviors and broader logics of action (Scott 1994, 1995). In this paper, we empirically explore, and attempt to extend, an alternative perspective that emphasizes the complexity and uncertainty of institutional reproduction in a social world made up of multiple potentially conflicting systems of meaning (Friedland and Alford 1991). This perspective argues that agency entails reinterpreting and applying established cultural schemas across contexts to mobilize both people and cultural resources in new and different ways (Emirbayer and Mische 1998).

Fliedstein (1997b) argues for a renewed focus on social and political interactions in institutional fields and on the role of "institutional entrepreneurs," actors who have the ability to motivate cooperation by providing the "common meanings and identities" that make undertaking and justifying strategic action possible (p. 398). He theorizes a number of critical social skills for institutional entrepreneurs, including the ability to understand the social location and to "imaginatively identify" with the states of others in a way that enables finding and maintaining a collective identity (1997b, p. 398; 1997a). Although it is reminiscent of trait-based theories of leadership, such a skill-based picture of embedded agency offers a contrast to institutionalist pictures of programmed practical action or bounded discretion (Seo and Creed 2002). However, in terms of the emerging picture of agency as reinterpreting and deploying established cultural schemas, it still...
leaves us with an abstract picture of the process of meaning-making. It does not answer, for example, the question: What does providing common meanings and identities look like or involve?

We explore this question, focusing on legitimating accounts as an instance of institutional meaning-making likely to yield evidence of the creation of common meanings and identities. During the past decade, our understanding has begun to shift away from a view of legitimating accounts as imported cultural scripts, rigorously reproduced in local settings by constrained agents to justify their practices and social arrangements (Strang and Meyer 1993). Sometimes referred to as the organizational perspective, this view has emphasized organizational isomorphism, linking legitimating accounts to the diffusion of identical organization structures and logics of action (DiMaggio and Powell 1983, 1991). It suggests that legitimating accounts are "ready-to-wear" recitations of "established cultural accounts" (Meyer and Scott 1983, p. 201).

The emergent view depicts legitimating accounts as translations of ambiguous "translocal ideas"—a concept that includes conceptual models, organizational structures, institutionalized logics of action, and cultural accounts—that can never be reproduced identically in local settings (Czarniawska and Joerges 1996). This perspective implies legitimating accounts might inevitably be more reinterpretations than recitations of cultural schema. However, with its emphasis on the idiosyncratic nature of translation, it leaves open the empirical questions of how institutional entrepreneurs frame the common meanings and identities that motivate collective institution-building. To fill this gap, we further integrate insights from the social movements literature on collective action frames and the mobilization of participation into our theories of institutional change (Scull and Segal 1996, 2002).

Following Fligstein (1997a) and Clemens and Cook (1999), the challenge is to advance a political theory of legitimating accounts. We attempt to show how legitimating accounts reflect the ways that social actors use their knowledge of cultural logics and institutional settings to provide the common meanings and identities that mobilize local participation in sustaining or changing institutional arrangements. We perform a frame analysis of the legitimating accounts used by advocates and opponents of gay-friendly workplace practices to justify their positions and win support. (These practices can include adding sexual orientation to equal employment opportunity policies, including sexual orientation in diversity training, and offering domestic partner benefits.) Based on our analysis, we pose four questions. (1) What frames do the institutional entrepreneurs use to build their legitimating accounts, and how do these frames define, diagnose, and motivate action around the issues? (2) What are the cultural building blocks—that is, the meaning systems, cultural accounts (master frames in the parlance of frame analysis), institutional logics, and deeper cultural themes—used in building these legitimating accounts? (3) What are the explicit and implicit identity attributions about protagonists, antagonists, and the audience embedded in the frames that make up the legitimating accounts? (4) Do these legitimating accounts suggest how institutional entrepreneurs provide common meanings and identities, and if so, how?

We find that opponents and proponents embed attributions about their own and their opponents' social identities in their legitimating accounts. These attributions are integral features of conflicting claims about the meaning of particular institutionalized systems of belief and about whether or how these cultural logics apply to certain types of people. For example, advocates of nondiscrimination legislation invoke a civil rights logic, asserting their standing as citizens entitled to, but denied, equal protection under the law. At the same time, opponents assert that gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender (GLBT) citizens do not and should not constitute a protected class and that they are simply immoral people. Thus, legitimating accounts are intertwined with the construction of social identities, which serve to legitimate an accountmaker's participation in the discourse and set of claims, and also to mobilize the involvement of proponents and crucial audiences. The mobilizing potential of legitimating accounts rests in part on how well they enable listeners to identify themselves in the landscape of the message.

The Complexity of Legitimating Accounts

In the following sections, our goal is to situate our four central research questions theoretically. We point to a nexus of interrelated questions concerning how institutional entrepreneurs legitimate and motivate collective participation in building institutions. The multiplicity of and contradictions among institutional logics direct us to ask how any one system of meaning emerges as dominant and persists or subsides (Clemens and Cook 1999) and how agents deploy these alternative logics in institution-building. Arguments about the links between social identity, access to cultural resources, and agency suggest that a valid model of institutional change needs to consider how the presence of multiple institutional frameworks
and social identity are implicated in the construction of legitimating accounts.

Below we discuss the implications of multiplicity and contradiction for the act of constructing legitimating accounts. We then analyze the diffusion perspective, translation theory, and frame analysis as it is used in social movement theory, in terms of how they understand the nature of legitimating accounts, the cultural building blocks used to construct legitimating accounts, the mechanisms of that construction, and agency. We discuss how institutional entrepreneurs create new common meanings, the link between legitimating accounts and identity, the implications for the institutional entrepreneur’s creation of new shared identities, and the implied possibility of institution-building and change. Table 1 provides a summary of this analysis.

**Multiple, Contradictory Cultural Accounts**

One of the most widely cited assertions of institutional theory is that “organizational legitimacy hinges on the extent to which the array of established cultural accounts provide explanations” for organizations and their practices (Meyer and Scott 1983, p. 201). Several scholars have emphasized, however, that the institutional environment is full of multiple, contradictory cultural accounts (e.g., Friedland and Alford 1991). Although these cultural accounts are known by a dizzying array of interchangeable labels—institutional logics of action, structures, schemas, cultural resources, and systems of meaning—three common themes emerge in discussions of the implications of this multiplicity. First, contradictions affect the process of social reproduction.

Structures, then, are sets of mutually sustaining schemas and resources that empower and constrain social action and that tend to be reproduced by social action. But their reproduction is never automatic. Structures are at risk, at least to some extent, in all of the social encounters they shape—because structures are multiple and intersecting, because schemas are transposable, and because resources are polysemic and accumulate unpredictably (Sewell 1992, p. 19).

Second, the dialectic of lived contradictions is the source of institutional transformations (Seo and Creed 2002). Some available systems of meaning legitimate the local status quo and some legitimate changes to it: “... both managers and politicians, each within their own particular systems, are similarly faced by a variety of conflicting rules of conduct, all legitimate and plausible, but, often, none with obvious superiority” (Whittington 1992, p. 705). Conflicting cultural accounts vary in their fit with local institutional arrangements and in their power to legitimize practices that are candidates for diffusion (Strang and Meyer 1993).

Third, agency in institutional change involves exploiting these contradictions in the process of meaning-making: “Agency arises from ... the capacity to reinterpret or mobilize an array of resources in terms of schemas other than those that constituted the array. ... The transpositions of schemas and remobilization of resources that constitute agency are always acts of communication with others” (Sewell 1992, pp. 20–21). At the same time, social identity is implicated in agency. Whittington (1992) argues that managers’ capacity to access and deploy cultural schemas and resources across settings stems from having multiple social identities and an understanding of the social identities of influence targets. These three themes suggest that social setting and social identity affect the choice between and use of available cultural logics in ways that have bearing on the construction of legitimating accounts.

**Legitimating Accounts: Ready-to-Wear, Custom-Tailored, or Mobilized?**

The Diffusion Perspective. Traditionally, institutionalists have pointed to the constitutive primacy of cultural accounts, which are the cultural building blocks for constituting actors and organizational logics of action. From this perspective, legitimating accounts are not “assembled patterns of local interaction,” but “ideological edifices of institutionalized elements that derive their authority from more universal rules and conceptions” (Meyer et al. 1994, p. 24). Scott has borrowed evocative language to capture this notion: “... for the most part, we get our worlds ready to wear.” (Brown 1978, p. 375, cited in Scott 1991, p. 170). In other words, legitimating accounts are local recitations of broadly available cultural accounts.

This view is at odds, however, with most empirical depictions of legitimating accounts either as post hoc, locally adaptive strategies that justify organizational practices and protect against the loss of organizational legitimacy (Elsbach and Sutton 1992, Elsbach 1994) or as prospective applications of institutionalized rhetorics used to shape programs (Zbaracki 1998). In addition, conceiving of legitimating accounts as “ideological edifices” rather then as locally adaptive discursive strategies conflates structure and action, as the structural image of the “edifices” metaphor itself attests. Cultural accounts and local accounts are rendered nearly indistinguishable. This conflation has fostered the picture of highly programmed practical action that has contributed to institutional theory’s difficulties in explaining institutional building and
Table 1  Comparison of Theoretical Understandings of Legitimating Accounts and Institution Building

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Diffusion Perspective</th>
<th>Translation Theory</th>
<th>Framing (Social Movement Theory)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Building blocks:</td>
<td>An “array of established cultural accounts” (Meyer and Scott 1983); Cultural accounts = descriptions of what can and can not be.</td>
<td>Translocal/virtual ideas; Master ideas and higher-order cultural accounts that provide dominant logics of action in local settings</td>
<td>Cultural narrations and myths, dominant assumptions, inherent ideologies, “master frames”</td>
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<td>cultural resources</td>
<td>Importing of “ready to wear” accounts;</td>
<td>Interpretation and materialization of virtual ideas;</td>
<td>Negotiation of shared meanings of a problematic situations, of who or what is to blame, of alternative arrangements, and the who, how, and why of corrective action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reproduction/recitation</td>
<td>Expression of new ideas in terms evocative of higher-order cultural accounts or master ideas</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Mechanisms</td>
<td>Post-hoc justifications; Ideological edifices of institutionalized elements, not assembled patterns of local interaction</td>
<td>Evocative local translations of new logics of action; Unpredictable constructions of reality that can transform practices and agents</td>
<td>Culturally resonant, action-oriented sets of beliefs and meanings that “inspire and legitimate” action (Benford and Snow 2000)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implied nature of</td>
<td>Programmed practical action, authorized and constrained by institution logics</td>
<td>Idea selling through presenting ideas in local terms</td>
<td>Diagnosing, prognosticating, and mobilizing; Linking interests and interpretations to the frames of constituents and resource providers</td>
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<td>legitalizing accounts</td>
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<tr>
<td>Picture of agency</td>
<td>Minimal capacity</td>
<td>Creation of common meanings essential to the translation process</td>
<td>Framing = active engagement in production and maintenance of meaning for constituents, antagonists, and bystanders (Snow and Benford 1988).</td>
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<td>Inherent identity processes—framing situates relevant actors in time and space, attributes characteristics, specifying relationships and lines of actions (Hunt et al. 1994).</td>
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<td>Implied capacity for</td>
<td>Institutional scripts confer identities that are linked to prescribed logics of action; Identities condition institutionalized behavior.</td>
<td>Identity and social location condition attention to new ideas and ability to translate; New ideas can create new actors.</td>
<td>Change is realized through mobilization of collective action, which is contingent on the mobilizing potency of action frames.</td>
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<td>creating new common meanings</td>
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<td>Role of identity and</td>
<td>Limited explanation of mechanisms behind institutional change</td>
<td>Change possible if idea merchants can persuade others to participate in the “chain of translations” (Czarniawska and Joerges 1996, p. 29).</td>
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<td>implied capacity for</td>
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<td>creating new shared identities</td>
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<tr>
<td>Implied possibility for</td>
<td>Legitimating accounts (ideological edifices) indistinguishable from cultural accounts; The impact of local interaction on the construction of legitimating accounts is unexplained.</td>
<td>Mechanisms behind participation in a collective translation process unclear; How the dominance of a master idea is maintained or challenged is unexplained.</td>
<td>Focal problem is the ongoing politics of signification; Empirical questions of how frame resonance and frame alignment is accomplished in a manner that mobilizes people and resources</td>
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<td>institutional building and change</td>
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<td>Problems</td>
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change (DiMaggio 1988). With its emphasis on received meanings, this perspective implies that agents have little or no capacity for creating new common meanings and common identities. Instead, meanings are scripted and identities are authorized and conditioned by institutional logics of action.

Translation Theory. As an alternative, translation theory distinguishes between cultural accounts and locally instrumental legitimations, and theorizes on the link between accounts and institutional change. In translation theory (Czarniawska and Joerges 1996), the building blocks are ambiguous “translocal ideas” (institutionalized...
structures, cultural accounts, logics of action). Such ideas are virtual, “floating in the translocal organizational thought-worlds,” until they gain substance through their translation in local settings (p. 16). Translation occurs in two stages. During interpretation, people align the new idea with words, images, and values they already know. This alignment is necessary because our perception is “biographically determined,” both by our personal position in time and space and by the “purpose at hand” that determines the relative salience of the images (Schutz 1973, p. 9, cited in Czarniawska and Joerges 1996, p. 28).

During materialization, people enact the idea in concrete actions and structures.

... ideas become quasi-objects ... becoming “disembedded,” in Giddens’ (1990) terms. We watch them again, landing in various localities, becoming “re-embedded,” materialized in actions, and—when judged successful—becoming institutions, only to occasion anew the generation of ideas (Czarniawska and Joerges 1996, p. 23).

However, as a mechanism, translation is unpredictable: “Unknown objects appear, known objects change their appearances, practices become transformed” (Czarniawska and Joerges 1996, p. 20).

For Czarniawska and Joerges, the translation metaphor is a better vehicle than the diffusion model for understanding organizational and institutional change. Even though we approach a new idea in terms of our existing knowledge and social location, a new idea can confirm, disconfirm, or rearrange our beliefs and purposes as we translate it, creating “a new idea and a new actor” (Czarniawska and Joerges 1996, pp. 28–29). A critical question remains, however: “[There are] many other people who have to participate in the process if the idea is to materialize. How can they be persuaded to continue the chain of translations?” (Czarniawska and Joerges 1996, pp. 28–29).

The tentative answer to this question is that knowledgeable “idea merchants” enable change by framing newly translated ideas, structures, or practices in terms of the higher-order cultural accounts that have provided the existing logics of action in the local setting (Czarniawska and Joerges 1996, p. 36).

Although [these legitimating narratives] need not be evoked in their entirety, they give rise to a multitude of master ideas, blueprints, paradigms, which dominate a given period (with many others present, waiting their turn) ... an idea can not catch on unless it already exists for some time in people’s minds, as part of a master-idea in translocal space/time (Czarniawska and Joerges 1996, p. 36).

While translation theory goes much further than the diffusion perspective in explaining institutional change, two aspects remain unsatisfactory. In translation theory, legitimating accounts are local products of an embedded translation process rather than mere ideological edifices. In addition, even though social location and identity affect local interpretation and enactment of virtual ideas, the unpredictability of the translation process leaves room for the creation of new ideas and new actors. Yet, despite its emphasis on aligning translations with local “master ideas” to persuade participation in a collective translation process, the theory does not adequately explain the political process behind translation, and in particular how some paradigms become and remain dominant or how contenders models “waiting their turn” actually get their turn. Hoffman and Ventresca (1999) argue that which logics of action prevail is determined by the success of political and cultural claims to dominance. The theory also leaves unexplained the link between translation and the purposeful entrepreneurial creation of common ideas and identities.

Frame Analysis in Social Movement Theory. Frame analysis as it is used in social movement theory provides an important complement to both these perspectives. Research on framing processes in social movements seeks to understand the cognitive bases for collective action, focusing in particular on how activists produce “mobilizing and countermobilizing ideas and meanings” to frame the legitimating accounts for their activism (Benford and Snow 2000, p. 613). Frame analysis models for us an integrated theory of legitimating accounts that attends to the importance of cultural building blocks—as do the diffusion and translation perspectives—but views both institutional logics and legitimating accounts as the outcomes of historically embedded political processes. In probing the construction of cultural claims to legitimacy and dominance, it also considers the link between accounts and the social location and identity of account makers. Social movement scholars have addressed these issues by considering how meaning-making, the mobilization of collective action, and the construction of social identity are intertwined. We will discuss each of these points in greater detail.

The literature on framing in social movements looks at the ways social actors produce and maintain “action-oriented sets of beliefs and meanings that inspire and legitimate” action and mobilize resources in the interest of a movement’s goals (Benford and Snow 2000, p. 624). Called “collective action frames,” these coherent interpretive structures are designed to mobilize action by accomplishing three tasks. The first, punctuation, defines a given problem or injustice and its importance. The second, elaboration, identifies who or what is responsible for
the problem (diagnosis) and proposes the objectives, means, and responsibility for corrective action (prognosis) (Snow et al. 1986). Finally, in social movements, the objective of ideational activity is to motivate people to take action.

Framing processes are strategic processes—deliberate, utilitarian, and goal directed—and an action frame’s mobilizing potency is a strategic accomplishment: “Frames are developed and deployed to achieve a specific purpose—to recruit new members, to mobilize adherents, to acquire resources, and so forth” (Benford and Snow 2000, p. 624). In general, action frames that resonate with potent shared beliefs or that have “narrative fidelity” with the experience of the audience will be more powerful mobilizers (Gamson 1992). The literature on framing has had much to say about how the variable features of frames and the dynamics of the framing process lead to potency and resonance. (For a recent review, see Benford and Snow 2000.) “Frame alignment” is the process whereby activists make their interpretations, activities, goals, and ideologies appear congruent with the beliefs and values that orient the influence targets. There are four basic alignment processes: frame bridging, frame amplification, frame extension, and frame transformation (Snow et al. 1986).

For our purposes, the distinctions among these four types of alignment are not so important as is the core insight that an action frame’s efficacy in legitimating and mobilizing action stems from the social construction of congruence between the activists’ interpretations and goals and those of the target audience. However, one of the four (frame amplification) bears further explication because it works much like the notion of idea-selling put forward in translation theory. Frame amplification involves tapping into “existing cultural values, beliefs, narratives, folk wisdom, and the like,” in a way that embellishes, clarifies, or invigorates those values and beliefs and resonates with the potential constituents (Benford and Snow 2000, p. 624). In addition, frame amplification is “particularly relevant to movements reliant on conscience constituents who are strikingly different from the movement beneficiaries (Paulsen and Glum 1995) and to movements that have been stigmatized because their beliefs and/or values contradict the dominant culture’s core values” (Berbrier 1998)” (Benford and Snow 2000, p. 624).

Much of institutional theory emphasizes the constitutive character of cultural accounts and the ways in which legitimating accounts are derivative justifications that stabilize social arrangements. However, the literature on framing processes emphasizes understanding the link between existing cultural accounts and legitimating action frames as they pertain to efforts to change social arrangements. In addition, the social construction of reality is seen as a contested political process, rather than as a simple act of importation/recitation, as in the diffusion perspective, or market-savvy selling, as in translation theory.

Some social movement scholars suggest that social identity should also be understood as an ongoing accomplishment of framing processes. This differs from the dominant understandings of social identity in the institutional literature. For the most part, institutional literature has linked social identity to legitimating accounts only indirectly, despite widespread consensus that institutions confer identities and that, in modern organizations and polity structures, actors are themselves constructed institutions (Jepperson 1991). Translation theory suggests that social identity affects the translation process because interpreting translocal ideas involves assigning familiar labels and identities to unfamiliar objects, events, ideas, and actors. And as noted, social identity informs managers’ capacity to access and deploy cultural schemas. To a degree, both of these perspectives present social identity as somehow antecedent to and determinative of how agents reinterpret and mobilize cultural resources (although Czarniawska and Joerges 1996 suggest that the discovery and translation of an idea can create a new agent).

In contrast, the social movements literature suggests that social identities are not merely antecedents that condition the framing of legitimating accounts, but that they are also the product of these accounts. Indeed, identities and accounts may be intertwined and even mutually constitutive. This idea has some precedence. Scott and Lyman pointed out that every accounting involves the underlying negotiation of identities: “Identity assumption and ‘altercasting’ are prerequisites to the presentation of accounts, since the identities thus established ‘set’ the social stage on which the drama of account is to be played out” (1968, p. 58). More recently, however, Hunt et al. argued that the construction of social identities is inherent in the production of collective action frames and, we would suggest by extension, in the rendering of legitimating accounts:

"... identity constructions, whether intended or not, are inherent in all social movement framing activities. Not only do framing processes link individuals and groups ideologically but they proffer, buttress, and embellish identities that range from collaborative to conflictual. They do this by situating or placing relevant sets of actors in time and space and by attributing characteristics to them that suggest specifiable relationships and lines of action (Hunt et al. 1994, p. 18)."

As this quotation suggests, framing defines the social
arena, including the players and their interests, how players and interests are related to particular problems and institutional logics, and how these problems and players should be dealt with.

According to Hunt et al. (1994), claims about relevant actors cluster around three socially constructed sets of identities; protagonists, antagonists, and an audience of uncommitted but potentially mobilized supporters of a course of action. Actors are constructed as protagonists if they “advocate or sympathize with movement values, beliefs, goals, and practices, or are the beneficiaries of movement action;” as antagonists if they are opposed to the movement’s goals and values; and as an audience if they are “neutral or uncommitted observers, even through some of them may respond to or report on the events they observe.” They conceptualize these as “identity fields because the identities within each category overlap and hang together, and because the categories are elastic and expand and contract across time.” (p. 186).

In sum, the social movements literature on framing provides a lens for addressing questions about the links between legitimating accounts and the creation of new shared meanings and identities that are not adequately accommodated in existing institutional perspectives. For our purposes, the framing literature is doubly useful, because the concept of the frame serves both as the basis for a theory of political action and identity construction (framing accounts that legitimate action and constitute players) and as a method of analysis (frame analysis of how discourses legitimate, link to shared systems of meaning, and mobilize). In the next section, we describe frame analysis as a method, present our data, and describe our analysis.

Method, Data, and Analysis

Frame Analysis as a Method. Drawing on Goffman (1974), Gamson (1992) has described frames as internally coherent interpretative schemas that render events meaningful, organize experience, guide behavior, and motivate action. By extension, frames are the underlying structures or organizing principles that bind and give coherence to the diverse arrays of symbols and idea elements that make up such packages of meaning. Gamson elaborates: like a picture frame, a frame directs our attention to what is relevant; like a window frame, it determines our perspectives while limiting our view of the world; like the frame of a house, it is an invisible infrastructure that holds together different rooms and gives shape to the edifices of meaning. Thus, as the unifying structures employed in constructing meaning, frames are properties of texts, where texts are broadly conceived.

Frame analysis, as a technique for approaching texts, asks how particular idea elements are linked together into packages of meaning, potentially encoded into sound bites or signifiers, and deployed in situated discursive activity (Creed et al. 2002). Two features make frame analysis broadly useful for institutional analysis, both as a method and as a theory of political action. First, its focus on content allows us to look for similarities and differences between higher-order cultural accounts and local legitimating accounts and to identify linkages across levels of analysis (as well as the relationship between accounts operating at the same level of analysis). Second, it presents a way of integrating a needed political dimension into our understanding of the linkages between cultural accounts and legitimating accounts. Legitimating accounts appear neither as simply imported discourses or as serendipitously translated ideas, but as discursive strategies for mobilizing participation, either in the sustaining or challenging of institutional arrangements, accomplished through the alignment of legitimating accounts with resonant cultural accounts.

Because frame analysis enables moving across levels of analysis—from local legitimations of emergent organizational practices to deeper institutionalized cultural accounts and back again—it can help macrotheorists consider how environments provide the discursive building blocks of organizations and logics of action, and how agents deploy and alter these building blocks. Thus, we employ frame analysis to examine the content of the systems of meaning brought to bear on the issue of workplace nondiscrimination on the basis of sexual orientation.

Data. Our data are composed of three sets of texts from several different types of sources: public testimony, media accounts, position papers, and interviews with workplace activists from the gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender communities (workplace advocates). Because each of these texts, in their entirety or in part, was meant to affect policies concerning employment nondiscrimination, it is reasonable to assume that each contains legitimating accounts for the frame-sponsors’ preferred policy positions. Our data allow us to explore how actors on both sides attempt to legitimate their stances on policies that would prohibit workplace discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation in different social arenas.

Our first set of texts comes from transcripts of the U.S. House of Representatives hearings on the Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA or the Act), which took place on July 17, 1996. The House testimony includes statements from representatives of the Human Rights Campaign, legal scholars, human resources executives
benefits and issues pertaining to nondiscrimination more broadly.

Analysis. Benford and Snow (2000) have pointed out that despite the proliferation of scholarship employing frame analysis, methodologies for conducting frame analysis remain relatively unrefined and diverse. For this reason, we adapt one of the most basic and highly accessible ways of approaching frame analysis to fit our empirical concerns. We lay out a “signature matrix” to sort specific idea elements of a given text into such categories as catchphrases, depictions, roots, consequences, and appeals to principle (Gamson and Lasch 1983). This enables the analyst to (1) sort the idea elements so that connections among them can be discerned, (2) identify and distinguish among the different unifying structures or frames that hold them together, and (3) discover how diverse idea elements are deployed in integrated ways. Some categories of idea elements, such as catchphrases or sound bites, serve to accentuate a frame, making it memorable and easily communicated. Idea elements such as roots, consequences, and appeals to principle offer causal attributions and the bases for judging a situation, event, or position. We are interested in the idea elements that serve as argumentative devices to legitimate the speaker’s preferred perspective and to identify responsible parties.

We began by identifying the diverse idea elements in each text, focusing on those that serve as argumentative devices—problem definitions and elaborations (diagnosis, prognosis, and motivations) as suggested by Snow et al. (1986). By asking what unifying concept(s) hold these elements together as a coherent package of integrated idea elements, we provisionally identified the distinct unifying structures that held idea elements together. We developed provisional labels for each frame and constructed intermediate display matrices matching these frame labels and associated idea elements. The three authors, separately and collectively, iteratively compared these emergent matrices and frames with our data to determine if an apparent frame was in fact a discrete frame or a subframe of another frame. Based on the identified relationships among idea elements and unifying frames, we then answered the four central questions of this research.

Tables 2–4 summarize the results of our analysis in the form of an adapted frame matrix. In our frame matrices and in our narrative presentations of selected frames, we have attempted to enhance the validity of our analyses by presenting the frames in ways that would be recognizable to the frame sponsors. Wherever possible, we quoted actual catchphrases from the texts, e.g., as the label for a frame, and opened each narrative presentation with a quotation that captures the essence of the frame. The left
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Action Frame</th>
<th>Civil Rights Not Special Rights</th>
<th>Basic Employment Fairness</th>
<th>Simple Remedy</th>
<th>Enlightened Companies Competitive Advantage</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Examples of idea elements: symbols, images, illustrations, catchphrases, etc.</td>
<td>Allusions to the Bill of Rights; the civil rights movement; the Emancipation Proclamation; personal stories of discrimination; Romer v. Evans</td>
<td>A &quot;level playing field&quot; for all who &quot;play by the rules&quot; and do their jobs; the right to make a living and contribute to society; real stories of harassment and discrimination</td>
<td>Personal stories of how not outlawing discrimination fosters hostile and dangerous workplaces; details show ENDA is &quot;nothing radical or even questionable.&quot;</td>
<td>Images of progressive HR policies enhancing corporate reputations; testimony from executives at leading companies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Problem definition</td>
<td>Civil rights protections have not been extended to GLBT employees, who are being discriminated against.</td>
<td>Most Americans are unaware that GLBT employees are not yet legally protected from discrimination.</td>
<td>GLBT employee discrimination is a real and serious problem. ENDA is a simple solution that will correct the problem.</td>
<td>World-class companies realize competitive advantages by already treating all employees with dignity and supporting ENDA.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Problem elaboration: diagnosis, prognosis, and motivation</td>
<td>Americans believe employees should be judged on their merits, not prejudice. ENDA protections are fundamental rights, not special rights.</td>
<td>Without ENDA, managers who choose to can, and some actually do, discriminate with impunity. Fair policies benefit both employees and employers.</td>
<td>Employers that have changed their EEO statements prove that ENDA will be a cost-free, effective way to to provide a healthy, productive work environment.</td>
<td>&quot;Responsible corporate citizens&quot; go beyond what the law requires. Employers that do not treat all employees fairly will lose out to &quot;employers of choice.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Inferred master frame(s)</td>
<td>Civil rights</td>
<td>Good for business, civil rights</td>
<td>Good for business, civil rights</td>
<td>Good for business, civil rights</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Cultural building blocks: schemas, systems of meaning</td>
<td>American ideals of equal protection under the law and narratives of the rights of historical injustices</td>
<td>Americans' &quot;intuitive&quot; beliefs that fair play and equality are right and that &quot;discrimination is simply wrong;&quot; land- of-opportunity narratives; doing what is good for business and society</td>
<td>American beliefs in equal protection under the law; beliefs about efficiency and the fostering of employee commitment</td>
<td>Belief that responsible citizenship and business success can go hand-in-hand; deeper narratives of enlightenment and progress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Protagonist identity implications</td>
<td>Victims of discrimination who have yet to win the constitutionally guaranteed rights others take for granted.</td>
<td>Loyal workers looking for a fair treatment and to make a contribution</td>
<td>Two classes of protagonists: victims of real discrimination and companies that create better work environments</td>
<td>Two classes of protagonists: committed, productive workers, treated with dignity and respect and &quot;employers of choice&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Antagonist identity implications</td>
<td>People driven by animosity to discriminate against GLBT people</td>
<td>Misguided managers and employees who let prejudice cloud judgment and create hostile work environments</td>
<td>Creators of hostile work environments, who falsely depict ENDA as radical and complex</td>
<td>Out-of-step executives, afraid of being trendsetters and unable to live up to fundamental principles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Audience identity implications</td>
<td>Any American who believes in equality and wants to be part of the &quot;great tradition of civil rights&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;Fair-minded&quot; and &quot;enlightened&quot; Americans who intuitively know discrimination is wrong</td>
<td>Opponents of discrimination who are also concerned for sensible legislative solutions</td>
<td>People who want to follow the lead of enlightened, corporate citizens</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Frame amplification: tapping cultural values/beliefs to create common meanings and identities?</td>
<td>Common commitment to civil rights and equal protection; common identity as believers in equality regardless of political affiliations</td>
<td>Intuitive sense of right shared by the fair-minded and the unfairly treated; common identity as enlightened, fair-minded people, concerned for the good of society</td>
<td>Shared concerns for freedom from discrimination and workable solutions; common identity as fair-minded people, also opposed to radical government intervention</td>
<td>Shared commitment to fair treatment, responsible citizenship, and business success; common identity as enlightened, responsible people</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
column of each table lists those features of the frames that pertain most directly to our empirical questions. Because of space constraints, we discuss in detail only the two or three frames uncovered in each set of texts that in our judgment best illustrate our findings regarding our central questions.

Results

1. Supportive Frames from the Hearing on the Employment Non-Discrimination Act

Our analysis of the congressional testimony (presented in Table 2) identified four collective action frames used by proponents of the Employment Non-Discrimination Act (the Act): (1) civil rights, not special rights; (2) basic employment fairness/level playing field; (3) simple remedy; and (4) enlightened companies’ competitive advantage. We will discuss in detail the first and last of these.

The Civil Rights, Not Special Rights Frame

None other than the Supreme Court of the United States has shown the “special rights” rhetoric to be empty, meaningless, false—and driven by animosity (testimony of Elizabeth Birch, Executive Director, Human Rights Campaign, July 17, 1996).

Problem Definition and Elaboration (Research Question 1). According to this frame, the problem is that civil rights laws have not been extended to gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender citizens. This is despite the fact that, as one testimony noted, even conservative icon Barry Goldwater has argued that “there is no gay exemption to the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness in the Declaration of Independence.” In elaborating this diagnosis, the frame relies on two common beliefs: that people have the right to be judged on the strength of their work, and that no one should be “deprived of their livelihood because of prejudice.” To emphasize its link to “the great tradition of civil rights,” ENDA was designated H.R. 1863, the year of the Emancipation Proclamation. Invoking the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, the executive director of the Human Rights Campaign argued that while they were not originally understood to be articulating the rights of women and nonwhites, these documents have proven to be “machines of truth” that undergird the promise of equality.4

Cultural Building Blocks (Research Question 2). Arguing that the protections proposed under the Act are recognized as fundamental to American democracy, this frame draws on a civil rights master frame, which in turn invokes deeper cultural themes of equality and equal protection under the law. Its allusions to emancipation, and so to Lincoln, invoke American mythology about leadership in righting historical injustices. By defining the problem as civil rights, it implicitly targets opponents’ use of cultural logics regarding reverse discrimination and special rights.

Identity Attributions (Research Question 3). The protagonists in this frame are vulnerable citizens, who have yet to win legal protections for the rights that should be guaranteed them under the Constitution. The antagonists are people who, “driven by animosity,” make false claims and attempt to deny citizens who are not heterosexual their rights (Elizabeth Birch, July 17, 1996, in testimony quoting Romer v. Wade). While the immediate audience includes those at the hearing, the media, and anyone exposed to media coverage, by extension it also includes any American who believes in equality and who wants to be part of the “great tradition of civil rights.” Specific references to women, nonwhites, the Supreme Court, and Barry Goldwater offer a spectrum of identities with which an audience member could identify when acting on behalf of the Act.

The Enlightened Companies’ Competitive Advantages Frame

In keeping with our statement of company values, in particular, respect for the individual, we have included sexual orientation in our nondiscrimination policy since 1986. . . . In the 10 years since we included sexual orientation in our policy. . . . We believe it has affected our bottom line for the better. All of our employees understand that fairness and nondiscrimination remain as fundamental values in our workplace (testimony of Michael Morley, SVP and Director of Human Resources, Eastman Kodak Company, July 17, 1996).

Problem Definition and Elaboration (Research Question 1). This frame argues that the Act is needed because not every executive has the vision or courage to live up to the principles of fair treatment modeled by the most progressive, best-managed and enlightened companies in the United States. Such exemplary companies recognize that their competitive edge is tied to the fair and enlightened treatment of their employees. The underlying principle—repeatedly articulated in the testimony by quoting the belief statements of leading corporations like IBM, Xerox, or Grand Met—is that “responsible corporate citizens” are willing to “go beyond what the law itself demands” because of the “fundamental belief” that all people have “the right to be treated with dignity and respect.” Living up to these principles enables employees to perform to their full potential and makes such companies
“employers of choice” for “all right-thinking Americans.” The problem is that some executives fear being trendsetters, despite the soundness of these principles. Ultimately, those out-of-step companies will lose the best employees to the more progressive employers, but in the meantime, employees vulnerable to discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation still need legal protection.

**Cultural Building Blocks (Research Question 2).** The underlying logic—that employers benefit when they treat employees with respect—relies on the *good for business* master frame. The frame also invokes, less directly, the *civil rights* master frame in its depictions of responsible corporate citizens recognizing everyone’s right to dignity and respect. We see several underlying cultural themes about individual rights and equality, as well as beliefs in the legitimacy of competitive business practices and corporate civic responsibility. Still deeper are cultural narratives regarding enlightenment and progress.

**Identity Attributions (Research Question 3).** This frame offers two distinct categories of protagonists: enlightened corporate citizens, and all others who benefit when their “right to be treated with dignity and respect” is acted upon. The antagonists are fearful, out-of-step executives and anyone who would deny employees respectful and fair treatment. The audience is composed of legislators, the media, and citizens who want to do what is responsible and good for business.

**Discussion of Frames from the ENDA Hearings**

Our analysis suggests that legitimating accounts from congressional hearings rely on two cultural accounts or master frames that are at times competing, at times complementary. In Table 2, we see in Rows 4 and 5 that in three of the four frames, proponents weave a hybrid of the *good for business* and *civil rights* master frames to render legitimating accounts evoking such American cultural beliefs as fair play, equal protection, responsible citizenship, and hard work, as well as institutionalized business logics linking respectful human resource management practices to organizational effectiveness. Many of these frames make strong justice claims, while presenting the Act as simply another needed step in parallel trajectories of American progress toward freedom, justice, and economic well-being.

Rows 6, 7, and 8 show clear patterns of identity construction across these frames. The protagonists in the debate are both the hardworking citizens who, because of their sexual orientation, lack legal protections most Americans take for granted, and the enlightened employers who recognize that respecting the dignity of all workers is good for business and simply the right thing to do.

The antagonists are people who, out of animosity, misrepresent the Act and its advocates to protect their discriminatory practices. The audience comprises fair-minded people—almost soldiers in the “great tradition of civil rights”—who both oppose discrimination and recognize the business and societal benefits of defending civil rights.

Row 9 also reveals clear patterns to the dynamic of frame amplification—that is, the production of collective action frames that tap into existing values and beliefs and resonate with potential constituents (Benford and Snow 2000). We look at this frame amplification for the answer to our fourth research question—evidence of institutional entrepreneurs’ creating common meanings and identities. We find that ENDA advocates embed definitions of American culture and attributions regarding American character—all of almost mythic proportions—in their legitimating accounts. Meaning and identity are built of the same stuff: commitments to fairness, equality, and responsible action, and a balanced and enlightened understanding of problems and solutions. Advocates use these shared values to construct a common identity as just-minded Americans, even when the audience’s and protagonists’ identities may clearly diverge in terms of sexual orientation and whether or not they will directly benefit from ENDA.

**2. Frames Opposing Nondiscrimination Policies: The Family Research Council**

In Table 3, we present the five action frames opposing the Act (and more broadly nondiscrimination on the basis of sexual orientation) found in the data from the Family Research Council. These frames include: (1) *same rights, not special rights*, (2) *no one has to be gay*, (3) *anti-religious rights*, (4) *threat to family*’s *shield for pedophiles,* and (5) *bad for business/quotas and red tape*. We will discuss only the second and third of these in detail.

**The No One Has to Be Gay Frame**

The “once gay, always gay” fiction has persuaded more than a few Americans to support so-called “gay rights” out of a misdirected sense of compassion... . . . Today’s message is very simple: No one has to be “gay” (Family Research Council 10/10/96).

Civil rights laws were enacted to offset discrimination against African-Americans, but homosexuals can claim no such victim status as an oppressed, poor minority. They are trying to hijack a movement for their own advantage (Family Research Council 7/30/96).

**Problem Definition and Elaboration (Research Question 1).** This frame argues that the problem with the Act
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action Frame</th>
<th>Same Rights Not Special Rights</th>
<th>No One Has to Be Gay</th>
<th>Anti-Religious Rights</th>
<th>Threat to the Family</th>
<th>Quotas and Red Tape</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Examples of idea elements: symbols, images, illustrations, catchphrases, etc.</td>
<td>Depictions of the intended purposes of EEO laws; claims re: homosexuals' privileged social status; illustrations of misdeeds and retaliation by homosexual employees</td>
<td>&quot;Hijacking&quot; of civil rights rhetoric by people who, far from oppressed, make misleading bids for compassion; testimonials from ex-gays freed from &quot;bondage to homosexuality&quot; and sodomy</td>
<td>ENDA is a &quot;mighty weapon&quot; that puts &quot;biblically based businesses&quot; in the &quot;cross-hairs of homosexual activist lawyers.&quot; Moral opponents are persecuted as &quot;intolerant bigots&quot; and subjected to workplace diversity &quot;re-education.&quot;</td>
<td>Images of parents unable to protect their children because pederasts and pedophiles will be able to teach legally in schools or live next door</td>
<td>ENDA is a &quot;Trojan horse;&quot; a &quot;Pandora's Box with the seeds of quotas;&quot; images of &quot;red tape&quot; and litigation used to harass employers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Problem definition</td>
<td>ENDA adds &quot;an unprecedented behavior component&quot; to EEO laws, creating divisive special rights for a privileged, politically powerful group.</td>
<td>Compassionate Americans have been falsely persuaded by people seeking their own advantage that homosexuality is an unchangeable characteristic, rather than a learned, dysfunctional behavior.</td>
<td>ENDA infringes on the constitutionally guaranteed freedoms of religion, association, and speech. People of conscience should not be forced to employ people with morally offensive sexual proclivities.</td>
<td>The &quot;homosexual agenda&quot; seeks to impose an immoral sexual ethic on society and so threatens the traditional family.</td>
<td>Advocates have misrepresented ENDA as a simple bill. It is a &quot;radical step&quot; and a &quot;bureaucratic nightmare&quot; that will prove bad for business.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Problem elaboration: diagnosis, prognosis and motivation</td>
<td>ENDA unfairly shields &quot;any bizarre sexual behavior&quot; from employers' valid concerns for moral comportment. Homosexual employees will use ENDA to harass employers with false allegations.</td>
<td>Homosexuals have misappropriated civil rights rhetoric to play on the sympathies of Americans. This privileged group does not constitute an oppressed group.</td>
<td>All major religions condemn sodomy; ENDA seeks to silence moral condemnation by people of religious conscience through an unwarranted expansion of federal power. ENDA discriminates against people with traditional moral values.</td>
<td>No housing or employment policies should send the unhealthy message that homosexuality is a valid lifestyle or put children at home or in school at risk of sexual abuse.</td>
<td>Experience with EEO laws teaches that ENDA will likewise result in unfair quotas, affirmative action for homosexuals, and harassing litigation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Inferred master frame(s)</td>
<td>Civil rights, sexual morality</td>
<td>Civil rights, traditional religious morality</td>
<td>Civil rights, traditional religious morality</td>
<td>Sexual morality, responsible parenting, and homosexual menace</td>
<td>Good for business, civil rights</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Cultural building blocks: schema, systems of meaning</td>
<td>Beliefs about equal rights, sexual morality; deep cultural narratives about the homosexual as dangerous predator</td>
<td>Judeo-Christian themes of sin and punishment; recovery and self-help narratives; legitimate opposition to race and gender discrimination</td>
<td>American ideals of equality and notions of fundamental rights and freedoms; deeper narratives of religious persecution, reverse discrimination, and totalitarian reeducation</td>
<td>Beliefs about appropriate sexual behaviors and the care of children, coupled with deeper narratives about the fear of homosexuals as sexual predators</td>
<td>Anti-regulation ideologies; deeper racist and sexist themes are evident in references to quotas and affirmative action, which are evocative of narrations of legitimate backlash.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Protagonist identity implications</td>
<td>Two classes of protagonists: Americans for equal rights and employers with valid moral concerns who should be free from retaliation</td>
<td>Two classes of protagonists: Misguided compassionate people, who should support recovery from homosexuality, and ex-gays and their support networks</td>
<td>People of moral conscience subjected to religious persecution; the victims of reverse discrimination</td>
<td>Concerned, responsible parents who want to protect their children</td>
<td>People opposed to red tape, quotas, and reverse discrimination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action Frame</td>
<td>Same Rights Not Special Rights</td>
<td>No One Has to Be Gay</td>
<td>Anti-Religious Rights</td>
<td>Threat to the Family</td>
<td>Quotas and Red Tape</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Antagonist identity implications</td>
<td>A wealthy, powerful, vindictive, and sexually reprobate group of people</td>
<td>Hijackers of civil rights rhetoric who have exploited misplaced compassion and fail to struggle against homosexuality</td>
<td>Two classes of antagonists: a dangerous, immoral, un-American special-interest group that persecutes and vilifies its opponents; big government</td>
<td>Purveyors of an immoral sexual ethic; sexual deviants who prey on children</td>
<td>Special interest group (enemies hidden in a Trojan horse) using government for unfair advantage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Audience identity implications</td>
<td>Opponents of special rights and the legal protection of immoral behavior</td>
<td>Compassionate and moral Americans who believe in civil rights, but who need to know the truth about homosexuality</td>
<td>Defenders of traditional moral values, fundamental freedoms, and states' rights; people of religious conscience</td>
<td>Defenders of children, the traditional family, and sexual morality</td>
<td>Opponents of unfair quotas, radical legislative interventions, and red tape that would be bad for business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Frame amplification: tapping cultural values/beliefs to create common meanings and identities?</td>
<td>Shared beliefs in equal, not divisive and special, rights and that homosexuals are immoral and represent a powerful threat; common identities as defenders of morality and equality.</td>
<td>Shared opposition to special rights and moral or religious misgivings about homosexuality; common identity as compassionate but morally troubled people</td>
<td>Belief in fundamental freedoms and in importance of Christian morality in maintaining the well-being of society; common identity as guardians of children's moral and physical well-being</td>
<td>Common beliefs in the sanctity of the traditional family and parental control; common identity as opponents of regulation, quotas, and reverse discrimination</td>
<td>Common beliefs that regulation harms business and EEO leads to unfair advantage for some people; common identity as opponents of regulation, quotas, and reverse discrimination</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
as a purported piece of civil rights legislation is that homosexuals as a group are bound together by nothing more than the common practice of sodomy and so should not be protected by civil rights laws. According to the no one has to be gay frame, homosexuality is a learned, dysfunctional behavior. The solution is that people should struggle against “bondage to homosexuality [and become] freed to pursue a fuller life” (Family Research Council 10/10/96). This frame is supported by testimonials from members of the ex-gay movement and a Council-sponsored support group, Parents, Family and Friends of Ex-Gays, both of which are meant to offer hope to people who are “struggling with homosexuality.”

The no one has to be gay frame is the critical companion to the same rights, not special rights frame (presented in Table 3), which argues that the Act would add an “unprecedented behavioral component” to equal employment opportunity laws. Such laws were designed to protect minority groups with a history of “political powerlessness, economic deprivation, and unchangeable characteristics,” such as race and gender. According to the same rights, not special rights frame, not only does sexual orientation fall outside these intended purposes, but homosexuals do not meet any of the criteria for protection: Most homosexuals cannot honestly report that they have been discriminated against, and as a group, homosexuals are economically privileged, politically powerful, and have undue influence on the media. By further delegitimizing what frame sponsors see as homosexuals’ misappropriation of civil rights rhetoric, the no one has to be gay frame attacks a core feature of every one of the nondiscrimination advocates’ legitimating accounts.

Cultural Building Blocks (Research Question 2). The no one has to be gay frame relies on cultural source materials that seem to legitimate moral condemnation of, if not discrimination against, homosexuals. Opponents of the Act see it as a historically and religiously rooted perspective, which we label the traditional religious morality master frame. This frame also reflects a complex interplay of deeper cultural themes: the emphasis on the practice of sodomy, coupled with the image of thralldom to homosexuality, evokes deep Judeo-Christian themes of sin and punishment. At the same time, notions of recovering from dysfunctional behavior combined with the creation of a family support group draw on psychological, self-help, and traditional family cultural narratives.

Identity Attributions (Research Question 3). This frame offers two classes of protagonists: people who see homosexuality as an issue of moral behavior rather than as an unchangeable feature of individual identity, and homosexuals who can free themselves from a destructive and unhealthy lifestyle. The antagonists are dysfunctional sodomites who are hijacking a movement instead of struggling against homosexuality. The implicit audience includes goodwilled but misled people who should redirect their misplaced compassion and oppose laws that codify special protections.

The Antireligious Rights Frame

What at first glance appears to be a harmless gesture of “tolerance” toward homosexuals in the workplace actually is a mighty weapon to be used against employers, other employees who believe that homosexuality is wrong, and against the freedoms of association, religion, and speech (Family Research Council 7/30/96).

Problem Definition and Elaboration (Research Question 1). This frame argues that the Act infringes on the rights of religious people of conscience who should not be forced to employ or work with people with morally offensive sexual proclivities. Thus, the real issue is discrimination against people who hold traditional values. Because all major religions teach that sodomy is wrong, passing ENDA will infringe on religious liberty. The frame offers several examples: Workplace diversity training is tantamount to “reeducation,” chilling free speech and religious expression. Those who voice their moral condemnation of homosexuality are persecuted as “intolerant bigots.” The frame also depicts the Act as an unwarranted expansion of federal power because it disregards the fact that a majority of the states have outlawed sodomy. Thus, the Act is a “mighty weapon against employees and employers who believe homosexuality is wrong” that puts “biblically based” businesses and business people in the “crosshairs of homosexual activist lawyers” (Family Research Council 9/5/96).

Cultural Building Blocks (Research Question 2). The claim that the Act assaults the freedoms of religion, speech, and association invokes the civil rights master frame and the deeper cultural themes of equality and freedom. It also invokes the traditional religious morality master frame to legitimate condemnation of homosexuality and to support claims regarding religious freedom.

Identity Attributions (Research Question 3). This frame’s protagonists are victims of religious discrimination, of vilification as bigots, and metaphorically of violence (e.g., in the crosshairs of hostile activists). It uses evocative images such as reeducation, silenced moral condemnation, crosshairs, activist lawyers, and unwarranted expansion of power to cast the antagonists—homosexuals and other supporters of the Employment Non-Discrimination Act—as repressive, immoral victimizers. This casting infuses the antireligious rights frame with
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action Frame</th>
<th>Nondiscrimination</th>
<th>Cost-Benefit</th>
<th>Organizational Resource</th>
<th>Value Congruence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Examples of idea elements: symbols, images, illustrations, catchphrases, etc.</td>
<td>The concepts of fairness, equal pay vs pay inequity, personal stories of harassment and discrimination delivered in 1-on-1 conversations</td>
<td>The idea that changing the EEO is cost-free; cost and usage date from companies with DPBs. Predictions of low increased employee loyalty, enhanced recruitment, etc.</td>
<td>Predictions and specific instances of empowered, openly GLBT employees offering unique perspectives that enhance organizational effectiveness.</td>
<td>References to publically espoused values, mission statements, and CEO speeches; demonstrations or expressions of commitment to organizational values and success</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Problem definition</td>
<td>The lack of GLBT-friendly policies fosters discrimination, from harassment to unfair human resource policies and pay inequity.</td>
<td>The misperception that gay-friendly policies are costly prevents executives from adopting changes.</td>
<td>If GLBT employees are afraid to be themselves in the workplace, organizations lose a valuable human resource.</td>
<td>Companies that fail to honor GLBT workplace issues often fail short of stated organizational values and mission.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Problem elaboration: diagnosis, prognosis, and motivation</td>
<td>Omitting sexual orientation from the EEO statement signals that anti-GLBT discrimination is acceptable. Without explicit policies, GLBT employees will more likely suffer under managers who feel free to discriminate with impunity.</td>
<td>GLBT-friendly policies are most useful as signals that companies respect and value employees. The cost of DPBs is negligible because few employees will actually utilize them.</td>
<td>Respected employees working in welcoming and safe environments can contribute more to company goals. GLBT-friendly policies contribute to employee well-being and empowerment.</td>
<td>Espousals of fair treatment, ethical action, innovation, and respect for all employees are hollow if these principles do not extend to GLBT employees.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Inferred master frame(s)</td>
<td>Civil rights, good for business</td>
<td>Principally, good for business, indirectly, civil rights</td>
<td>Good for business</td>
<td>Good for business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Cultural building blocks: schema, systems of meaning</td>
<td>American ideals of meritocracy, fair play, and equality; principles of human resource management and employee empowerment</td>
<td>Business notions of added value for incurred costs; belief that everyone has value and the right to respect</td>
<td>Business values of effective HRM, the valuing of diversity, and effectiveness; broader social values of tolerance</td>
<td>Business ideals of being true to a corporate mission; ideals of corporate citizenship; the ills of hypocrisy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Protagonist identity implications</td>
<td>Ordinary employees, with personal stories of discrimination in the workplace and of bad management practices</td>
<td>GLBT employees are reduced to cost items, but behind the argument, the right of GLBT employees to respect and fair treatment is maintained.</td>
<td>Multiple protagonists: empowered employees, effective companies, better-served customers</td>
<td>Organizational insiders whose actions signal commitment to shared goals, values, and corporate citizenship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Antagonist identity implications</td>
<td>Managers who discriminate with impunity and people who create hostile work environments</td>
<td>Explicitly, cost-conscious executives worried about the cost of GLBT benefits; implicitly, executives who are more concerned about costs than fair treatment.</td>
<td>Two classes: coworkers and managers willing to put personal prejudice before the good of the company; companies that fail to value and empower employees</td>
<td>Hypocrits and outsiders willing to put prejudice before shared organizational values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Audience identity implications</td>
<td>Good managers who need to be aware that discrimination exists</td>
<td>Decision makers who will be swayed or reassured by cost/benefit analysis and information about other companies' experiences</td>
<td>Sympathetic and savvy executives who understand that valuing employees leads to competitive advantage</td>
<td>People committed to and responsible for living up to organizational values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Frame amplification: tapping cultural values/beliefs to create common meanings and identities?</td>
<td>Common beliefs that discrimination is wrong and harms employees and organizational effectiveness; common identities as ordinary people who want to do a good job and believe in fair treatment</td>
<td>Common understanding of the cost/benefit rhetoric as central to managerial policy discourse; common identity as prudent decision makers but divergent identities as more people or less committed to fair treatment</td>
<td>Common understanding of the multifaceted importance of valuing diversity and respecting people; common identity as employees who are both ethical and practical</td>
<td>Common understandings of values and organizational integrity; common identities as people willing to act in accordance with the espoused values of respect for human dignity, corporate citizenship, and mission</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
the tension of other deeper cultural narrations (un-American activities vs. patriotism, sinfulness vs. moral righteousness) and frames the audience as defenders of biblically based morality and freedom.

Discussion of Frames from the Family Research Council
As with the supportive frames, many of the opposing frames rely on the good for business and civil rights master frames. Examining Row 4 in Table 3 reveals, however, that in three of their five frames, opponents hybridize the civil rights frame with traditional religious and sexual morality master frames. Cultural accounts not found in the supportive frames. Only in the quotas and red tape frame do they combine civil rights with good for business. Finally, in the threat to family frame, opponents make no use of the civil rights frame. In contrast, all of the supportive frames we identified employ the civil rights frame in some manner.

Importantly, opponents draw different implications from the good for business and civil rights cultural logics in defining the problems posed by the Act. When using the civil rights master frame, opponents emphasize reverse discrimination, infringements on the basic freedoms of religious people, and big government, rather than the grand traditions of justice emphasized by proponents of the Act. In addition, opponents’ frames define a narrow scope for civil rights protections: preventing race and gender discrimination. This narrow definition is essential to the set of accounts legitimating opposition to the Act (and more broadly, opposition to the “homosexual agenda”) because it dovetails with an important feature of the identity constructions in those frames. Equal protection before the law, in the form of civil rights and equal employment opportunity protections, should not apply to homosexuals, because homosexuality is a behavior, not an unchangeable aspect of identity.

This construction is most strikingly seen in the no one has to be gay frame, but an examination of Row 7 reveals a pattern across all the frames. The antagonists in this debate are a powerful hidden enemy (seen in the Trojan horse image in the quotas and red tape frame)—sexually immoral by choice and apparently vindictive and predatory by nature. As a group, they do not warrant legal protections. In contrast, the protagonists (Row 6) are unjustly vilified protectors of morality, traditional family values, and children, persecuted for their acts of conscience, if not also their religious beliefs. The audience (Row 8) is constructed as compassionate, moral Americans who believe in equality and individual rights; once disabused of homosexual misinformation they will defend basic principles, moral traditions, and children from ominous, radical assaults. Given that these frames are embedded in Council press releases and position papers, the immediate audience could be any media consumer, subscriber to Family Research Council publications, or religious conservative, but the media is the arena for larger political and cultural contests, so politicians and like-minded voters are as much a part of the target audience as legislators were for the advocates at the congressional hearings.

Regarding our fourth research question, our analysis of the frame amplification evident in these frames (Row 9) suggests that opponents create a very different set of common meanings and identities than the American culture/American character constructions found in the advocates’ frames. In four of the five frames we uncovered, opponents of the Act create common ground between the protagonists and audience by tapping into a shared moral condemnation and the belief that righteous Americans need to guard against a homosexual threat.

3. Legitimizing Accounts in the Organizational Interviews
Our analysis of legitimizing accounts used by employee advocates of nondiscrimination policies within organizations uncovered four collective action frames, presented in Table 3: (1) the nondiscrimination frame, (2) the cost-benefit frame, (3) the organizational resource frame, and (4) the value congruence frame. We will discuss in detail the first and last of these.

The Nondiscrimination Frame
I would say that the [gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender employee] task force was emphasizing the fairness concept. You know, it’s the right thing to do. The concept that all employees should be treated equally in terms of the benefits available to them (activist at a regional industrial company, June 1996).

Problem Definition and Elaboration (Research Question 1). This frame’s central argument is that the lack of nondiscriminatory employment policies fosters various forms of harassment and pay inequity. Omitting sexual orientation from a company’s equal employment opportunity statement sends the message to both current and potential employees that discrimination against gays and lesbians is acceptable. Without a clear policy statement to the contrary, victimized employees will have no remedies within the workplace and managers may feel they can discriminate with impunity. To support these claims, frame sponsors, often in one-on-one encounters with potential allies among executive decision makers, related personal experiences of harassment and discrimination (Creed and Scully 2000). The frame prescribes voluntary...
codifying of nondiscriminatory policies, holding employees accountable for discriminatory behavior, implementing fair pay practices such as domestic partner benefits, and finding ways to make the workplace safer and more inclusive.

Cultural Building Blocks (Research Question 2). This frame appears to draw heavily on cultural accounts regarding fair treatment, evocative of the civil rights master frame, but frame sponsors seemed to focus not on the deeper principles of equality so much as on how real people experience discrimination and hostility in the workplace. However, advocates' personal stories of discrimination—claiming the right to offer highly personal legitimating accounts—may be as important an instantiation of the civil rights master frame as the direct use of civil rights rhetoric. The emphasis on discrimination with impunity implicitly deploys the good for business master frame by highlighting practices bad for business.

Identity Attributions (Research Question 3). This frame offers a refutation of familiar depictions of immoral, threatening sexual predators and deviants by creating a protagonist with a human face—coworkers facing discrimination and harassment. The antagonists are harassing coworkers and managers that discriminate with impunity. The audience comprises executive managers and potential allies who find harassment and discrimination morally wrong and want to make the workplace safe and productive.

The Value Congruence Frame

If you are using [your framing of arguments] as a tool to help teach people how to do things differently or how to react, the important thing is to understand the corporate culture of the organization that you are in (activist in a Fortune 500 company, June 1996).

Our company mission is to be the preeminent provider of culturally sensitive and culturally competent patient care, medical education and research (activist in a regional healthcare organization, June 1996).

Problem Definition and Elaboration (Research Question 1). This frame appeals to core organizational values such as fair treatment, ethical action, innovation, and an espoused respect for all employees' human dignity. For example, advocates at one HMO argued that the mission of providing "culturally sensitive and culturally competent patient care" demanded dealing with the concerns of nonheterosexual patients and employees. They pointed out how particular current practices fell short of the organization's ideals. The subtle subtext of this frame is that failure to honor these employees' issues would run counter to the organization's own espoused mission in a counterproductive and even hypocritical way.

Employee advocates also used symbolic action to make this frame. Activists often voiced strong organizational commitment, for example, through the names they chose for their groups, and were respectful with executives as they actively lobbied them. They embraced company values, for example, through active participation as out-of-the-closet employees, in company-sponsored community service projects. In the Twin Cities, where corporate citizenship norms are especially strong (Galaskiewicz 1991), such volunteerism reflected value congruence with the broader community as well. Frame sponsors drew on their insiders' knowledge to argue that inclusive and affirming policies would make an organization more effective by enabling employees to give more and by creating an atmosphere that is consistent with deeply held organizational values.

Cultural Building Blocks (Research Question 2). While this frame uses the good for business master frame, it harkens both to the civil rights master frame and to the cultural narrations of responsible corporate citizenship and respect. The value congruence frame also makes subtle and unusual use of cultural narratives regarding the ills of hypocrisy as it balances good for business and good for society narrations.

Identity Attributions (Research Question 3). The protagonists in the frame are loyal employees who are committed to the core values of the organization. This frame tacitly counters antagonists' opposition by standing ready to discount it as the stance either of outsiders or of insiders uncommitted to the organization's values. The audience is executives who support corporate values and citizenship.

Discussion of Frames from the Organizational Interviews

Our analysis suggests that organizational advocates took for granted that the good for business and the civil rights master frames coexist in uneasy tension in the workplace. For this reason, organizational advocates drew more directly on the good for business master frame—creating legitimating accounts that resonate with their organization's market strategies (e.g., serving minority market segments), corporate cultures (e.g., providing culturally sensitive health care), concern for cost containment, reputation, and sense of corporate citizenship. Unlike advocates at the congressional hearings on the Employment Non-Discrimination Act, they rarely used the civil rights frame explicitly.

Nonetheless, civil rights created a master framing for
the social and historical significance of the issues and inspiration for the cause. The civil rights frame went unquestioned, if unspoken. It made its way only indirectly into the advocates’ proactive legitimating accounts in a manner that extended the compass of the master frame to an excluded group. In short, in most of the organizational frames, advocates manage the tension between the idealism of the civil rights and the instrumentality of the good for business master frames by deploying tailored renditions of the good for business frame.

There were two reasons for this. First, employee activists felt they were being asked—or compelled—to provide a business case for nondiscrimination because decision makers feared both increased costs for benefits, and backlash. Second, many advocates felt that leveraging their insiders’ knowledge of corporate values and identity was the best way to win support (Meyerson and Scully 1995). Tactically, this parallels advocates’ use of American culture/American character constructions in the congressional hearings. In both settings, such tactical renderings of legitimating accounts are consistent with the notions of “idea merchants” knowing their markets (Czarniawska and Joerges 1996) and of managers and politicians making situated choices between conflicting but plausible systems of meaning (Whittington 1992).

Discussion: Contested Legitimating Accounts and the Creation of Agents

In our closing discussion, we attempt to link our four research questions to our larger goal: moving toward a political theory that addresses how social actors use cultural building blocks to construct legitimating accounts that mobilize participation in sustaining or changing institutional arrangements. What do the structure and deployment of these frames tell us empirically about the role of multiple, contradictory systems of meaning in the creation of shared meanings and the rendering of legitimating accounts? How do institutional entrepreneurs construct shared social identities to effect institutional changes?

The Role of Multiple, Contradictory Cultural Accounts. Our first two research questions focused on the cultural building blocks used in framing the legitimating accounts concerning nondiscriminatory workplace policies. We find that institutional entrepreneurs use multiple cultural accounts. However, they make contested claims about what available cultural accounts and institutional logics “really mean” and to whom they should or should not apply. In addition, they combine cultural accounts, selecting companion accounts both for their resonance with the target audience and for how they potentially interact to alter each other’s meanings in a manner designed to advance a frame sponsor’s worldview and problem definitions. Thus, the meaning of institutional logics appears more as a consequence than a determinant of legitimating accounts. Politically motivated processes of bricolage drive what Strang and Meyer have described as the transformation of a cultural logic from “theoretical formulation to social movement to institutional imperative” (1993, p. 495). However, how an ambiguous cultural logic will be interpreted and instantiated appears to be a function of how account makers manage the tension between it and other systems of meaning.

The challenges of managing this tension can be seen in the contest over the legitimacy of the Act. In a legitimacy contest, an account-maker’s “basic strategy is to invoke the resonance of deeper cultural themes and counterthemes on behalf of one’s preferred frame and to neutralize the potential resonances of the most important rival frames” (Gamson 1998, p. 74). But cultural themes and counterthemes share many assumptions; as a result, “whenever one [theme] is invoked, the other [countertheme] is always present in latent form, ready to be activated with the proper cue” (Gamson 1998, p. 74). Some potent cultural logics can be used to stabilize and to challenge the same institutional arrangements.

In the contest over the Employment Non-Discrimination Act, the themes and counterthemes pertain to the nature of moral order and its implications for the structuring of society. Supporters invoked such deep American beliefs as: the ideal of enlightened, civic responsibility; the role of government in protecting individual liberties and providing remedies; and the vision of America as a country where constitutional principles are the ultimate standard. The common thread in these themes is democracy—the deep American narration regarding the natural rights of the individual, guaranteed by a pluralistic constitutional morality (Kaplan 1997, Darsey 1997). Opponents invoke such deep beliefs as: the danger of federal intrusion on the rights of local communities; a conservative model of family and of sexual morality; the view of the homosexual as dangerous, subversive, sinful, and predatory; and the righteousness of people persecuted for their religious beliefs. The apparent thread tying these themes together is that of an absolute, religiously based moral order that citizens should abide by and defend. At the same time, neither side can afford to neutralize the potential resonance of the civil rights master frame, even if it is the most powerful institutional logic in its opponents’ hands; instead, each side reinterprets it through the lens of its own moral vision (e.g., civil vs. special rights, discrimination vs. reverse discrimination). That both supporters and opponents could invoke and adapt to their
pursues the same civil rights master frame, while relying on opposing visions of moral order and the just society, returns us to the important notion of "loose coupling" (Meyer and Rowan 1977) between local practice (here the rendering of legitimating accounts) and institutional prescriptions. This reveals the limitations of any overly deterministic theory of legitimating accounts.

Legitimating Account and the Construction of Identities. Our third and fourth research questions focused on the identity constructions embedded in legitimating accounts. In the political contests over the meaning and jurisdiction of institutional logics, account makers construct their own and their audience's identities in ways that enhance their interpretations of and claims to the logics in an attempt to create the conditions for the collective, ongoing social construction of the institutional logic. In the debate over the Act, the contest over the civil rights master frame illustrates this because it involves nested contests over social categorization and social identity. The discourse of rights is fundamental to the history of American democracy and deeply integrated in Americans' collective sense of self. As a result, both sides attempt to lay claim to the civil rights master frame and its underlying cultural resonance and to employ it in framing a legitimating account that carries narrative fidelity for a targeted audience. Identity construction figures in the claiming and the tailoring of legitimating accounts.

In the contest for the civil rights master frame, opponents depict gay and lesbian people as a privileged elite and try to undercut any claim to a bona fide group identity that could be the object of antidiscrimination laws. In addition, opponents make their own identity claims as people of religious conscience and victims of a form of reverse discrimination. In contrast, proponents identify gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people as victims of real and enduring discrimination, like women and African-Americans, initially excluded from the embrace of constitutional guarantees of equality. At this level, at stake in these various identity claims is the right to make legitimating claims using the civil rights frame.

This contest over the meaning of civil rights as a system of beliefs is anchored at a deeper level that entails conflicts over the nature of identity, the relationship between sexuality and identity, and the relationship between moral order and democratic principles (e.g., to whom they should apply). This deeper contest suggests that the construction of social identity may be at once both an antecedent to and a critical outcome of the framing of legitimating accounts, especially as they pertain to the human jurisdiction of institutional logics and systems of meaning.

Perhaps the more important construction of identity in legitimating accounts, in terms of mobilizing support, goes beyond justifying a claim to a master frame like the civil rights frame—to the construction of a common identity between the protagonists and the audience. We find embedded in legitimating accounts messages as to what it means, in terms of who we are, to support or oppose a position. For example, proponents of the Act depict themselves and their allies as right thinking, and detractors as wrongheaded and prejudiced. Broms and Gahmb erg (1983) refer to such messages as "autocommunication."

Broms and Gahmberg contrast two models of communication in cultural groups, be they small groups, organizations, or societies. In the sender-receiver model (Jakobson 1972), a sender increases a receiver's knowledge. The quantity of information transferred is the central issue. A congressional report containing statistics on workplace discrimination could, at one level, be understood in terms of this model. In contrast, in the autocommunication model of communication (Lotman 1977), there is a qualitative change that transforms the original message into a new one. In a sense, the receiver adds a code to the message so that he or she becomes both the sender and the receiver. The message then speaks to the self and can even lead to a reconstruction of the inner self.

In autocommunication, a piece of information is taken up and a second autocommunicational code is added to it; then the information gets a new content, a mythologically enhancing, make-believe content. The first code, we could call the "usual" one. When someone reads a congressional report and understands it as a congressional report, he then uses the first code. If he starts feeling great about it and relates it to his present situation, then he is using a second code.

... When we use any text as [autocommunicational] code, we say to ourselves, "This touches me, this is meant for me." In fact, we then take up the text as a personal challenge, or identify ourselves with it... we say, "This could be my life" (Broms and Gahmberg 1983, p. 486).

Although institutional theory has always linked legitimating accounts to rationalized myths, legitimating accounts have been depicted principally as scripted explanations designed to enhance or preserve legitimacy. This kind of message—"You should see us as legitimate because we do this"—seems more in line with what Broms and Gahmberg call the usual code, whereby a sender informs a receiver. Our inquiry into how legitimating accounts provide common meanings and identities points beyond this "usual code" to the question of how accounts become autocommunicational.

For example, all the frames supporting the Act call for
outlawing discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. At one level, these frames appear to be in the usual code; listeners receive a quantity of information about discrimination, the policies of certain companies, and the features of the proposed legislation. At another level, the drama and rhetoric of the hearings were designed to win over and mobilize not only legislators empowered to vote on the Act (very few of whom were even in the hearing room), but also to mobilize what proponents have depicted as “right-thinking Americans.” Individuals’ stories put a human face on abstractions about discrimination. Members of the audience were called on to imaginatively identify and empathize with these experiences. Supporters are depicted as enlightened and fair minded. The apparent goal is for the audience to take on an auto-communicational message that to support the Act is to be a heroic participant in the grand tradition of civil rights.

Alternatively, the Family Research Council sends “usual code” portraying the Act as a dangerously vague piece of legislation and depicting the struggles of ex-gays against homosexuality. At the same time, the Council uses frames concerning responsible parenting, the protection of vulnerable children, traditional religious morality, and the threat of the homosexual menace, to supply the material for a different auto-communicational message: To support their cause is to be a Christian soldier.

In summary, we find social identity to be linked to the rendering of legitimating accounts in several ways. First, institutional entrepreneurs are more than market-savvy idea merchants who tailor resonant translations. They are builders of identity. Their legitimating accounts construct social identities to enhance the institutional entrepreneur’s claim to a resonant cultural logic, if necessary by undercutting a competitor’s claim through delegitimizing altercasting. In addition, these legitimating accounts adapt cultural accounts and exploit deeper cultural themes to trigger auto-communication. Legitimating accounts create the participants for collective institution-building if their messages transform listeners’ identities by successfully framing what it means when a person supports or opposes a cause or perspective. Thus, even as cultural texts confer identities and create agents, agents recreate texts and in the process create themselves and others as social actors.

**Conclusion: Kleider Machen Leute**
The institutional literature has historically pointed to how taken-for-granted beliefs, rationalized myths, and professional norms constrain individuals’ capacity to innovate in behavior and meaning-making. To a degree, institutional frameworks may come ready to wear, but if the logical contradictions between cultural determinism and agency are to be reconciled, we need to study these frameworks in use (Brown 1978). To do otherwise would be to accept a view of people as “cultural dopes,” all dressed up with nowhere to go, rather than as the active, skilled users of culture whom we actually often observe (Swidler 1986). Contrary to diffusionist notions of ready-to-wear institutional prescriptions, we find a process in which the interpretation and instantiation of cultural accounts is intertwined with social identities in a dualistic process of social construction.

*Kleider machen Leute*, the German analog to the English aphorism that “clothes make the man (sic)” is reflexive; it translates as either “clothes make people” or “people make clothes.” This reflexivity offers a corrective and a moral challenge to the image of ready to wear institutional logics. It resonates with the reciprocal connections among cultural accounts, legitimating accounts, and social identity. The social construction of identity has figured prominently in the history of Western cultural institutions—from the ancient Judeo-Christian scriptures that define and redefine what it is to be a chosen people to Western political institutions that define the boundaries of national identities and frame individual rights. Such cultural accounts of identities—whether seen as mysterious or unequivocal—are nonetheless the ambiguous tribal texts with which people continue to build their individual and collective claims to selfhood and definitions of otherness. It should come as no surprise that these cultural narratives play a role in contests over the social construction of organizations and people’s standing within them. In challenging his own assertion that we receive our worlds ready to wear, Brown pointed to our shared moral challenge: “We all create worlds. The more we are able to create worlds that are morally cogent and politically viable, the more we are able, as workers and as citizens, to manage or to resist” (Brown 1978, p. 378). Even as institutions are described as adamantine constraints, institutionalists themselves see a crack in the edifice. Implicit in the Western cultural claim that the individual has distinct moral standing is an invitation to participate in the political project of changing social institutions.

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**Endnotes**
1 Obtained at (www.hrc.org) in 1997; text available from the authors upon request.
With the exception of Broadus (1997), all texts were obtained in 1996-1997 at <www.frc.org>; full texts are available from the authors upon request.

See Creed et al. (2002) for a discussion of frame analysis in organizational research and of issues of “validity” in interpretive research.

As the label civil rights, not special rights suggests, this frame rebuts an opposing frame, the same rights, not special rights frame (presented in Table 3), which argues that the act would codify special rights for a group that is not a bona fide minority.

The employee group at one consumer products giant called itself [Grandma]’s Family, a reference to the marketing icon who appears on the company’s baking products and chose the motto, “There is a little of [Grandma] in all of us.”

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