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TITLE: THE CULTURAL AFFORDANCES OF PERSONAL  
COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES: EMERGENT CULTURAL  
STRUCTURES AND THE CHANGING CHARACTER OF  
MOBILIZATION\*

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## ABSTRACT

Recent research has noted changes to the quality and character of mobilizations in which a significant number of participants use personal communication technologies (PCTs). Unlike past mobilizations where social movement organizations (SMOs) use collective action frames in efforts to construct a collective identity and sense of solidarity among participants, these mobilizations are not organized through SMOs, participants take part for personal reasons linked to much broader movement themes, and they are connected to each other through loose, ephemeral social ties. Scholars have pointed to the high use of PCTs among participants as a key factor in explaining these changing characteristics. Yet little is offered to explain why. Drawing on data from blogging in the wake of hurricane Katrina and cultural sociology's strong program, we suggest that it is the cultural communication afforded through PCTs that help explain the relationship among participants and the changing nature of mobilization. In so doing, we also identify key forces in the development of cultural structures and culture's causal powers.

## INTRODUCTION

Scholars examining the intersections of communication and social movements have noted changes in the character of large-scale mobilizations attributed to the widespread use of personal communication technologies (PCTs), such as Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr and personal blogs. Typically, social movements are organized according *collective action logics*, where movement leaders and organizations use collective action frames in efforts to establish frame alignment (Benford and Snow, 2000) and convince potential participants to identify with an ideology or group (class, party, union, etc.). However, recent research is noting that mobilizations organized through PCTs are characterized by *connective action logics*, where participants rely on personal action frames that they link to broader movement themes and ideas (e.g., fairness, justice, liberty). These mobilizations tend to be larger in participant size, flexible, non-hierarchical, easily transferable to other locations and composed of participants who are connected to each other through loose, ephemeral social ties (Bennett and Segerberg, 2012).

Questions on the nature of interactions, relationships and mobilizations based on organizing logics of connective action pose a fruitful area of scholarship. Indeed, there is a growing literature on affordances that highlights how digital communication technologies (DCTs) enable different types of communication, interactions, and relationships, and their implications for organizing and contentious actions (Earl and Kimport, 2011; Authors' Names Removed). Among other things, the literature has noted the low cost, ease of use, and lack of hurdles posed by time, space, and place limitations as key affordances. Yet, PCTs are distinct in that they cater directly to the individual user and allow for personalized expression and communication. As such, PCTs foster unique affordances that cannot be generalized under DCTs. Further, scholarship on affordances tends to focus on the mechanical qualities of these technologies and their implications for collective action. Ignored are the cultural qualities, the moral and emotional communication afforded through various PCTs and their implications for collective behavior. What is the *cultural work* afforded by PCTs that might help explain the relationships among participants and the changing character of these mobilizations? We believe cultural sociology's strong program (Alexander, 2003) provides a promising theoretical lens to address this gap and help us better understand the changing character of mobilizations.

Briefly, at the core of cultural sociology's strong program is a focus on meanings and feelings, that, when interpreted and performed collectively foster the development of a cultural structure with causal power. Moralities and emotions are key to this system of meanings and feelings, as they provide the deep cultural understanding of right and wrong, and the bodily energy to act in relation to them. We argue that PCTs allow people to communicate a system of morals and emotions to others in ways that foster the growth of loose and temporal networks

built upon shared meanings and feelings. At the individual level, these moralities and related emotions are expressed in the personal stories that people narrate through PCTs and the personal action frames that are fundamental to mobilizations organized according to logics of connective actions. At the collective level, the sharing of personal stories through PCTs help users create a shared emotionally-laden, moral discourse that informs a cultural structure with causal power. This discourse is rooted not so much in ideology, party, church, union, or some other social organization that traditionally serves to mobilize participants through collective action frames, but instead through personal action frames linked to broad and generalized themes of justice, fairness, safety, and liberty. We argue that PCTs afford a level of personalized moral and emotional communication that when shared helps foster loose and ephemeral social bonds and networks that manifest a temporal cultural structure with causal power. We contribute to the growing literature on the intersections of culture, communication and social movements by highlighting the cultural communication that informs the development cultural structures in ways that reflect connective action logics, helping us better understand both the changing nature of mobilization and culture's causal powers.

### **Social Movements and Digital Communication Technologies**

Research on the relationship between collective actions and digital communication technologies has flourished over the past decade. There now exists a sizeable literature spanning a variety of disciplines investigating this phenomenon. Early questions focused on the effects of digital media on civic engagements and social movements. Having discovered that such media effects are contingent, complex, nuanced, and varying, scholars are now turning

their attention toward other questions (Tufekci and Forlorn, 2012). Among other things, they are focusing on specific digital media formats (Earl, et al., 2013; Bruns, et al., 2013) and the social processes that turn individual users into collective agents (Authors' Names Removed). Coupled with a growing appreciation for "soft determinism" scholars are also examining how digital communication technologies afford certain types of information flow and communication, and therefore favor certain types of interactions and relationships (Haythornthwaite, 2005; Earl and Kimport, 2011; Authors' Names Removed). Among other things, this research has noted that DCTs remove the need for physical co-presence between users for effective communication, they allow users to integrate text, audio, and [tele]visual into a single message, and reduce the barriers to access due to heightened cost of media production and distribution. Further, with digital media, communication is immediate and typically allows for one-to-many communication with many-to-one feedback. These affordances introduce significant implications for the relationships users establish and the collective actions they form (Authors' Names Removed).

Recent scholarship on large-scale, national and transnational social movements where many participants use PCTs are beginning to show signs of organizing logics informing mobilization practices that differ from the past (Bennett and Segerberg, 2012). Mobilizations staged throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century are typically organized according to *collective action logics*. Here, formal organizations rooted in ideology or group identity (church, party, union, class, etc.) seek to organize and activate membership according to collective action frames. Through a process of frame alignment (Benford and Snow, 2000) movement organizations and leaders seek to align "individual orientations, values, and beliefs [with the] activities, goals, and

ideologies of social movement organizations [resulting in] a fit between the collective action frames of an organization and that of an individual” (Stekelenburg, Klandermans, and van Dijk, 2009: 819). Aligning individual frames with collective action frames increases the likelihood individuals will identify with the movement and participate. However, recent scholarship on large-scale, national and transnational mobilizations is beginning to recognize the emergence of a second organizing logic, especially among younger participants using PCTs (Bennett and Segerberg, 2012). This top-down model of mobilizing through collective action frames and organizing logics of collective action is gradually making way for bottom-up models that emphasize personal action frames and organizing *logics of connective action*.

Connective action logics involve the personalization of involvement in mobilizations and are characterized by a broadening of mobilizing frames and the filtering of involvement through personal lifestyles. Here, people engage in a variety of different causes broadly framed and loosely organized around personal lifestyle choices and values. With their broad frames on such things as justice, fairness, and liberty, these mobilizations lower the barriers to identification and incorporate a diverse array of individuals with a “rainbow of reasons to act” (Bennett, 2012: 29). Connective action networks may vary in terms of stability, scale and coherence. They are typically far more individualized and bypass the requirement of collective identity framing and frame alignment among movement leaders, and they reduce the organizational resources often seen as necessary to effectively mobilize resources, respond to grievances, and take advantage of opportunities (Bennett and Segerberg, 2012: 750).

Mobilizations rooted in personal action frames and logics of connective action differ from those based on collective action frames and logics. They are more flexible, transferable to other

locations, larger in size, and are more quickly mobilized than those organized by social organizations such as churches, unions, parties or peace groups (Bennett Breunig, and Givins, 2008: 270). Further, participants are linked through loose, voluntary social ties in non-hierarchical relationships (Bennett, Breunig and Givins, 2008: 271), and their involvement may be fleeting and shift easily from mobilization to mobilization. Digital media makes it easier for activists to sustain multiple engagements in different protest events and different movement organizations (Walgrave, Bennett, Van Laer, and Breunig, 2011), and helps explain the growing heterogeneity of discussion networks and activities in social life (Kim, Hsu, and de Zuniga, 2013).

Research on the psychology of collective action offers further explanation on these changes. Traditionally social movement scholarship has found that people participate in mobilizations in an effort to influence key decision makers, and that social movement organizations frame contentious issues and mobilize support towards this goal. However, people take part in mobilizations for a variety of reasons including the need to express their values and attitudes (Hornsey, et al., 2006). This is particularly the case for those participants who lack an identity with other members of a social movement organization or other mobilizing collective. These are precisely the kinds of participants who take part in mobilizations for more personal reasons resonating with broader movement frames. Indeed, while with due caution, Hornsey, et al. (2006: 1716) argue that “nonmembers have less of a group orientation leading them to focus more on broader concerns (e.g., influencing third parties) and individual concerns (e.g., value expression).” This might be partly due to the fact that nonmembers typically are unaware of the long-term, group struggles, but are drawn to participate due to more immediate

considerations, such as expressing one's values. Based on their research on mobilizations in Australia, Hornsey, et al., (2006: 1717) suggest that organizers looking to recruit nonmembers might find broad frames, such as "Have your say" and "send a message to all Australians" as more effective than specific claims such as "stop war" and "Ban nuclear weapons."

These changes in organizing logics and mobilization characteristics reflect changes occurring in late-modern societies. As globalization separates the individual from traditional bases of solidarity, group loyalties dwindle and individuation becomes the modal social condition (Bennett, 2012: 22). Expressions and the mechanisms for organization become more personalized as people seek less binding and more flexible social relationships. Social networks organized through PCTs such as Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Tumblr, and personal blogs foster processes of organizing and mobilizing in ways that reflect individuation and emerging logics of connective action. Participants connect with each other not through a club, party, or a shared ideological frame, but rather, as we argue, through the personal emotionally-laden morality stories of pain, suffering, fear, anger, excitement and joy that they tell through PCTs and across digital networks. These are the cultural affordances of PCTs and a strong program in cultural sociology has much to offer this aspect of the scholarship.

## THEORY

### **Cultural Sociology and Collective Action**

A 'strong program' in cultural sociology emphasizes meanings, and their linkages with moralities and emotions. When collectively internalized and expressed, these moralities and associated emotions foment a larger, emotionally-laden moral discourse (Alexander and Smith,



1993). When enacted and performed they fuel the emergence of a cultural structure with causal power. This is cultural power as conceptualized through a strong program in cultural sociology. PCTs enable a certain level of cultural power because of the moral and emotional communication they afford, and the types of bonds, networks, and cultural structures they foster. These are the cultural affordances of PCTs and they help explain changes in mobilizations and organizing logics.

### *Morals, Emotions and Cultural Power*

Moralities and emotions are fundamental to culture's causal power. Moralities are senses of right and wrong, "prescriptive judgments of justice, rights, and welfare pertaining to how people ought to relate to each other," (Turiel, 1983: 3—cf. Haidt and Graham, 2007: 379) the violations of which resonate with different emotions and fuel motivated action. Recent advances in moral psychology, namely moral foundations theory (Haidt, 2012), offer promising findings that when combined with a strong program in cultural sociology, can provide insightful contributions to our understandings of cultural powers and both contentious and non-contentious mobilizations of varying sizes and intensities. Integrating cultural relativism with cultural universalism, moral foundations theory (Haidt, 2012) is finding that there exist approximately six wide-spread moral foundations upon which different cultures construct virtues, narratives and institutions. Placed along a continuum of binary oppositions, these moralities include care/harm, fairness/cheating, liberty/oppression, loyalty/betrayal,

authority/subversion, and sanctity/degradation<sup>1</sup>. Moral foundations theory captures both the universalism of shared moralities with the cultural relativism that underscores their different activating contexts and referents. These moral foundations are wide-spread in the sense that they appear as important normative beacons in numerous cultures across the globe. Yet, they are culturally variant in the value, activation and practicing of each morality. That is, while many cultures seem to celebrate these moral foundations, they do not necessarily attend to each one equally, at the same time, for the same reasons and with the same levels of intensity (Haidt, 2012; Graham, Haidt, and Nosek, 2009).

Consistent with cultural sociology's strong program, moral foundations theory resonates with Durkheim's emphasis on social integration and regulation as fundamental aspects of human beings living together (Haidt and Graham, 2007). Thoughts, actions and motivations constructed and interpreted as threatening to this social cohesion are undesirable social pollution; thoughts, actions and motivations that strengthen this cohesion, as desirable and sacred. Yet, moral foundations theory captures not only the collective, social actor, but also the self-interested individual as these tensions coexist as part of civil society (Alexander, 2006). In fact, factor analyses that reveal the foundations of fairness and harm running together and constituting "individualizing" foundations, while authority, in-group loyalty, and purity run together and constitute "binding" foundations (Haidt and Graham, 2007) that help strengthen group ties. Yet, culture's causal power cannot be understood as composed of moralities alone.

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<sup>1</sup> Haidt and colleagues have since reduced this from six to five, removing the liberty/oppression foundation while remaining cautious and open to debate regarding its removal. We leave it in, as liberty is fundamental to civil sphere theory and the cultural sociology upon which processes of civil inclusion and exclusion operate, and it emerged as an important morality in our data.

While moralities offer the reasons for action, emotions provide the deep drives that energize human behavior<sup>2</sup>.

Emotions refer to feeling-states and the affective condition of consciousness. Scholars have spent decades devising different classification systems and identifying different types of emotions (Thamm, 2007). For example, activating emotions, such as anger, fuel behavior and encourage action as a means of adaptation. Deactivating emotions, such as depression and apathy, drain energy. Some emotions are quick to arise and quick to subside (e.g., surprise). Others take time to develop and are more lasting (e.g., love, hate, trust, respect). Further, emotions can be both directed at the self, such as guilt, or at others, such as contempt, anger and disgust (Prinz, 2007). Emotions are triggered by different sets of signs (Shweder, et al., 1997; Stekelenburg, Klandermans, and van Dijk, 2009). They're related to morals in the sense that different moral violations typically resonate with corresponding emotions. For example, signs of suffering and distress might trigger the care/harm foundation and activate compassion. Cooperation or deception might trigger the fairness/cheating foundation and activate anger, gratitude or guilt. Challenges and threats to one's group might trigger the loyalty/betrayal foundation and activate group anger (Haidt, 2012: 146). These emotions provide the motivating forces that help lead to individual and collective action (Goodwin and Jasper, 2007; Jasper, 2011).

By integrating moralities and emotions, a strong program in cultural sociology offers promising insights for social movement scholarship. Indeed, it can help explain recent changes

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<sup>2</sup> There is debate regarding whether moralities inform emotions or emotions inform moralities. Our own inclination is that this is a reciprocal relation. Our discussion on the relationship between moralities and emotions will reflect this reciprocity.

to the quality and character of mobilizations organized through PCTs and in accordance with connective action logics. In a strong program of cultural sociology, moralities direct both individual and collective attention and emotions fuel individual and collective behavior. Individuals communicate and frame their personal grievances to others in ways that resonate with various moralities and emotions as they construct a shared discourse in need of repair. The collective action that materializes from this discourse constitutes culture's causal power. By using a theoretical framework rooted in cultural sociology, scholars can investigate how people use PCTs to communicate personal emotionally-laden morality stories, their development into a larger discourse, and how this discourse informs the growth and quality of social ties, networks, and cultural structures that are mobilized for various purposes.

These are the cultural affordances that are largely ignored in the research on communication and social movements. Indeed, we believe a strong program in cultural sociology can help explain the connective action logics that characterize recent changes in mobilizations (size, flexibility, loosely tied, non-hierarchical). It can help scholars answer such question as: What types of meaning systems do people communicate through PCTs? What larger, collective discourses emerge from their personal communication? What types of social ties, networks and cultural structures does such communication foster? Integrating a strong program in cultural sociology, recent developments in moral foundations theory and emotion-driven theories of action with the literature on communication can offer insightful and nuanced contributions to our understanding of the changing nature of mobilizations, and the workings of culture's causal powers.

## METHODS AND DATA

The data upon which we base our analysis and argument comes from an ongoing project on blogging in the wake of hurricane Katrina. For this paper we draw primarily from interviews with bloggers and qualitative content analysis of their blog posts. We conducted 27 interviews with individuals who considered themselves independent bloggers (not associated with a larger organization) and who blogged on civic, political and public affairs in the wake of hurricane Katrina (e.g., not included are hobby bloggers and bloggers who write primarily on family issues or sports). Many of these bloggers considered themselves “Katrina bloggers” and took part in any number of organizing or mobilizing activities in the months and years following the flood. Interview data collection went through two rounds. The first 17 interviews were conducted between September and November 2010. The second 10 interviews were conducted between July and November 2012. This two-step process of data collection allowed us to address concerns and incorporate new insights that arose during the initial round of interviews. The interview data provides insight into the moral and emotional forces that gave reason to and fueled people’s blogging and the personal experiences that give voice to these moralities and emotions. Interview data allowed us to assess the moralities underlying people’s decision to start and continue blogging. It also helped us generate a sense of the quality and strength of relationships they developed with other bloggers and blog readers. This data helped us understand the strength of their social ties with each other and how they emerged through the use of PCTs.

We recruited initial interview participants from the annual *Rising Tide* conference. *Rising Tide* is a local conference organized by Katrina bloggers and other users of social media. We

attended this conference for three consecutive years (2010-2012), recruiting most participants from here. We also relied on snowball sampling, asking interviewees to suggest other bloggers who might be willing to sit for an interview. Most participants referred individuals we had already spoken with or were planning on contacting. Some did suggest participants outside of this network. Interviews lasted between 1:15 and 3:00 hours, with most lasting approximately 1:30 hours, and participants were paid \$20 for their participation.

Our interview sample reflects similar demographics found in national surveys on internet use and adoption (Pew, 2011), They were mostly white, middle-aged, middle class, with most holding at least a Bachelor's degree and some with advanced degrees (typically law degrees). Male and female bloggers were divided fairly equally<sup>3</sup>. We provide further information on our sample in Table 1.

[INSERT TABLE 1 HERE]

In addition to our interview data, we also draw on qualitative content analysis of blog posts. We examined the blogs written and maintained largely by the same group of “Katrina bloggers” we interviewed and got to know over a four-year period of research. We examined blog posts because they helped us understand and recognize the way moralities and emotions are expressed through blogging in the form of personal action frames. Further, data from blog content helps verify interview data, providing narratives that indicate the personalization of involvement, and reveal the cultural affordances of blogging. We treated the paragraph as our unit of analysis, and as of this writing have examined 2,234 units associated with seven blogs. Like our interview data collection process, our analysis of blog posts also went through two

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<sup>3</sup> Indeed, the specific demographics of our sample have implications for how they experienced the flood and the mobilization processes they took part in.

stages. This allowed us to incorporate new insights and analyses into the later stage that we had not recognized as important during the initial stage. For example, we did not investigate the comment sections during our first round of analysis, but after recognizing the amount of communication and development of relationships through commenting, decided to incorporate it into the second stage.

The first stage of blog post data was collected between December 2012 and April 2013 and the second was collected between December 2013 and April 2014. The first stage consisted of collected data from blog posts written between January 2007 and December 2007. We chose this date range because it was the peak year for newly created blogs in the New Orleans area and because a number of collective civic actions (Sampson, et al., 2005) in which our bloggers participated were organized during this year, including the *March Against Crime*. This first round allowed us to collect data on the digital conversations occurring in the lead up and aftermath of these events, seeing how moralities and emotions regarding them were expressed and packaged. Here we analyzed four blogs, treating the paragraph of each post as our unit of analysis. The second round of analysis coded blog posts written between August 15, 2005 (roughly two weeks before the flood) and December 2006. It built upon this first round but included an examination of additional emotions and analyses of the comment sections of each post. We also reorganized our categorizing of emotions. This was particularly the case for anger. Instead of treating it as a single emotion as we did in the first round, we treated it as a broad emotion category encompassing a range of anger-emotions (disappointment, frustration, indignation, outrage). We also included the emotions of sympathy and empathy (collectively part of compassion) in this second round, as upon analysis of the first round of data we

discovered these bonding emotions as important to the development of social networks and mobilizations.

Qualitative content analysis is beneficial in that it provides for a deep, contextual, thick reading of content, and helps us recognize the nuanced relationship among variables. This allowed us to better recognize the expression of moralities, emotions and the figures they were linked to, as well as how certain moralities and emotions evolve and emerge over time. For example, one might first be surprised at a particular event, then disappointed and then indignant over time and as different interpretations of the event arise; or, one might first feel outraged, and shift his/her moral interpretation of the event over time while continuing to feel outraged. Qualitative content analysis helps researchers capture these nuances. Yet, it is also challenging in that sometimes content can seem to be relevant to multiple coding schema. While this is a challenge for researchers, it reflects the complex, dynamic and nuanced nature of text and therefore is a necessary challenge in such research. Nonetheless, we sought internal homogeneity and external heterogeneity in our coding schema (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Tesch, 1990). We believe our Krippendorff's Alpha inter-coder reliability score of .84 reflects our efforts at consistency and therefore an acceptable level of credibility and validity of our research.

Our sample of blogs to analyze was chosen from a pool of the 27 bloggers we interviewed plus another 11 that other bloggers identified as important blogs<sup>4</sup>. We chose these blogs because they reflected the core blogs and bloggers who were most important in the

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<sup>4</sup> Through several rounds of internal grants we were able to fund several undergraduate research assistants who helped us code this data. Their competence and hard-work has helped to improve this project immensely. Their names and the internal grants are presently absent for the sake of anonymity.



development of a blogger network and the mobilizations they took part in. Our analysis of blog content is both time-consuming and ongoing. For this writing, we have analyzed a total of seven different blogs, with one overlapping across both sampling periods (*LipsRap's Lament*).

Between the numbers of blogs, the date-range of blog posts, and the 2,234 units of text we analyzed we believe we are able to examine enough data to recognize the existence of a larger, emotionally-laden moral discourse that spans individual blogs and that helps cultivate the emergence of a cultural structure with causal powers.

Data collection processes that evolve over time have the benefit of incorporating new insights and processes that help researchers better analyze and understand certain social phenomena. While this is beneficial to research it is also problematic, as the evolution of research design commonly means not all data are subject to the exact same analysis and investigation. Therefore, where appropriate we will draw on data collected from both rounds, such as our discussion of moralities and some emotions. Yet, when it seems less appropriate we will draw only on one round (typically the second), such as our discussion of comments and the emotions of sympathy, empathy and anger. Most research on digital media and networks ignores these cultural dimensions, but they are key in the formation of mutual trust, social relationships and collective actions, and they help explain culture's causal powers.

While the bloggers in our sample organized and took part in a variety of other collective civic actions, we focus on the *March Against Crime* and the *Rising Tide* conference. We chose to examine the *March Against Crime* because it most closely resembles the contentious, protest events that have been the subject of research on logics of connective action. While a newly emerging area of scholarship, most existing work focuses on large-scale, national and

transnational mobilizations (Bennett and Segerberg, 2012). However, our investigation focuses on a smaller, localized mobilization. While there may be important distinctions between the two, they're similar in the fact that PCTs use also characterized those in our sample, and the composition of the protest resembles mobilizations organized through connective action logics. Like past work on large-scale mobilizations, those in our sample used PCTs (primarily blogs) to personalize their involvement and mobilize in ways that characterized connective action logics. They used blogs to tell their personal stories, interact with others, network and organize their mobilizations, much like those participating in larger, national and international mobilizations. Further, their mobilizations were rooted less in collective action frames associated with party, church, union or some other group, and more in personal action frames that emphasize broad issues of justice, fairness, safety, and change.

We chose to examine the *Rising Tide* conference because this is an event organized almost completely by bloggers and other users of social media, and it was initially organized in under a month. Further, there was no mobilizing structure that organized this conference and organizers/participants are less focused on a particular identity or group membership than they are on broad themes of fairness, safety, and justice. Given these similarities, we believe our analysis provides insightful information on mobilizations organized through PCTs, particularly regarding the cultural communication and personalization of participation they afford. We believe these characteristics help explain the development of loose and ephemeral social ties organized around broad themes of justice, fairness, and safety, among a variety of different mobilizations. That is, despite the difference in size, their similarity in communication technologies, frames, and uses can yield important findings that can help us understand a

variety of different mobilizations and their changing characteristics. Future research examining the cultural affordances of PCTs among different mobilizations can either confirm or disconfirm these claims.

### **A Brief Return to Theory:**

There are a number of concepts that help us understand the cultural affordances of blogging and explain the changing characteristics of mobilizations. As a foundation, we turn to cultural sociology's strong program, and then draw on recent work in moral foundations and emotions to explain 1) the reasons for and motivations behind people's decisions to start blogging, and 2) the content of their blog posts. From here, we can better understand the development of a loose and ephemeral network of sympathy and empathy (compassion) organized around broad themes of justice, fairness, safety and change, that was activated for different mobilizations.

A strong program in cultural sociology attributes a relatively autonomous causal force to culture. It is relatively autonomous in the sense that while informed and influenced through dominant discourses and power structures it cannot be reduced to them. As a causal mechanism, culture draws on shared emotions and their relationship with shared moralities to explain both the motivation and reasoning of collective action. We draw on moral foundations theory and recent scholarship on emotions to argue that PCTs afford a certain form of cultural communication that is infused with moral meanings and emotional expressions. When collectively expressed this cultural communication foments a larger emotionally-laden moral discourse, and cultivates the growth of a cultural structure rooted in loose social bonds and networks of empathy and sympathy that are mobilized in ways that reflect connective action logics.

## THE SETTING:

The systematic levee failure that flooded over 80 percent of New Orleans in the wake of hurricane Katrina displaced over 246,000 city residents, reducing the city's population by half. Almost 200,000 homes were destroyed and much of the city's infrastructure was ruined. In the context of the flood, people needed news and information. First, they needed to know what happened to loved ones, their homes, friends and neighbors and neighborhoods; later they wanted to know more details about what actually happened, why and how to fix it (Authors' Names Removed). The national news was little help, national reporters did not know much about the city's neighborhoods nor did they venture far from the Central Business District, particularly the Superdome and the Convention Center to report information useful to city residents. The local daily newspaper, the *Times-Picayune* miraculously still published a paper, but distribution was difficult and they could only report so much. It was in this context of heightened need for information and growing dissatisfaction and anger with the national media that we witness the growth of *a* local blogosphere<sup>5</sup>. This New Orleans' blogosphere grew considerably in size and stature in the weeks, months, and years following hurricane Katrina. In the 28 months following the flood, we recorded the creation of 149 new blogs on or about New Orleans; 58 were created in 2005 (31 before the flood and 27 after—in the last four months of the year), 56 new blogs were created in 2006, and 66 were created in 2007<sup>6</sup>. As of 2011 there

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<sup>5</sup> We emphasize “a” rather than “the” local blogosphere to acknowledge that there may exist multiple blogospheres related to a particularly area. While our research indicated that the blogosphere we examined was certainly significant there may indeed be others, as such phenomena are porous and constantly fluctuating.

<sup>6</sup> This data is based on the date of first post.

were 254 active New Orleans blogs<sup>7</sup>. The hurricane and its lingering collective traumas (i.e., social and cultural trauma) were key forces that help explain the rapid growth of this local blogosphere. The incompetence and corruption of federal, state, and local authorities, as well as private contractors in the ongoing response, recovery and rebuilding work (social trauma), and the degrading, disrespectful, and insulting national media coverage of the city and its residents in the wake of the levee failure and subsequent flood (cultural trauma) both served as important forces that gave reason to and motivated a number of geographically dispersed residents to seek news online and start blogging (Authors' Names Removed). Through their blogging they helped organize and took part in a number of collective civic actions (Sampson, et al., 2005). They started new organizations from scratch and participated in pre-existing ones, and they took part in both contentious and non-contentious actions (Authors' Names Removed). This included a massive, city-wide protest that these bloggers helped publicize but was organized elsewhere, and the creation of an annual conference designed to critique and debate ongoing recovery work and media attention, and to serve as a launch-pad for subsequent action (i.e., a blended social action). PCTs were key resources that participants used to help publicize and organize these mobilizations.

We draw on these examples for three reasons. First, they're mobilizations in which many of the participants organized their involvement through their use of PCTs (namely blogs). Second, the *Rising Tide* conference did not rely on a pre-existing mobilizing organization utilizing collective action frames to encourage participation. The *March Against Crime* was much larger and organized by a group called *Silence is Violence*; yet, our bloggers organized

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<sup>7</sup> Active blogs were defined as blogs with at least one post within a month of the date we visited.

their participation through their blogging<sup>8</sup>. Third, like mobilizations characterized by logics of connective action and personal action frames, the mobilizations we examined were less tied to specific group ideology and instead to broader themes of justice, fairness, betrayal, safety and change. Our bloggers felt they were being betrayed and cheated by authority figure and private contractors regarding the response, recovery and rebuilding work, and by the national media in the way it was representing the city and its residents to the rest of the nation. They were also concerned for their safety given the rates of violence in the city as residents were moving back. Residents wanted local authority figures to recognize their approaches to crime and violence were not working. However, rather than emphasize specific strategies as might be more common in mobilizations organized according to collective action logics, most in our sample just wanted authority figures to do something different. These themes of justice, fairness, betrayal, safety and change resonate in bloggers' interview data underscoring the reasons they started blogging, and they're expressed both directly and indirectly in the personal stories they tell through their blogging. As such, the bloggers we spoke with, the blogs we analyzed and the mobilizations we examined all reveal interesting features that can help scholars better understand the changing characteristics of mobilizations more broadly.

In emphasizing the cultural affordances of blogging we argue that PCTs allow for the expression of emotionally-laden morality stories that foster the development of social networks based on empathy and sympathy that when collectively experienced and performed materialize into a cultural structure causal power. We draw on moral foundations theory (Haidt, 2012) and

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<sup>8</sup> Bennett (2012) notes that logics of both collective and connective action existed among the mobilizations he examined. His claim, however, is that more recently mobilizations are increasingly showing signs of connective action logics.

recent scholarship on emotions to highlight the meanings informing people's actions and the feelings that motivate them. This combination of moralities and emotions provides valuable theoretical insights for cultural sociology by helping us better understand the development of cultural structures and the workings of culture's causal powers. Further, by highlighting the cultural affordances of PCTs we contribute to recent social movement scholarship by uncovering what it is about PCTs that help explain the changing character of mobilizations and organizing logics of connective action.

#### THE MORALITIES AND EMOTIONS OF POST-KATRINA BLOGGING

Our respondents began blogging (and continued to blog) for two primary reasons; to *vent their frustrations* and *correct misconceptions* commonly associated with the national media's coverage of the city and its residents; local, state and federal authorities' incompetence and corruption in the recovery and rebuilding efforts; and private industry (e.g., contractors and insurance companies) disregard for the city's architecture and exploitive practices. These reasons for blogging resonate with the care/harm, loyalty/betrayal, and fairness/cheating dimensions of moral foundations theory, and with the emotional state of anger. People wanted to correct unfair representations of them in the national media and felt betrayed, harmed and cheated in the rebuilding and recovery work. This made them angry, and blogging provided an outlet to not only correct misconceptions but also vent their frustrations regarding these perceived moral violations. For example, touching on senses of betrayal and cheating associated with the national media's coverage and the related feeling of anger, *NoItsJustMe* started blogging because "it was...a way to vent. This was the first anniversary of Katrina, I was just

pissed off at media coverage and misinformation, the negative reporting and...it was like constant Katrina specials..." Likewise, *Patrap* (a former Marine) touches on senses of betrayal and anger at the hands of people he saw as casting New Orleanians as outsiders, as "others" (Seidman, 2013). He stated, "but as far as the blogging goes, I mean, I got, I literally got mad when people would call us "them people" and stuff like that. I just jumped in [started blogging], and...I've been doing it ever since..." Finally, *GBitch* hints at senses of cheating, betrayal, and harm associated with the incompetent, callous and secretive nature of the city's recovery efforts and the outrage she feels from this. With a school aged child, her blogging focuses heavily on the city's changing education system. In discussing why she continues to blog, *GBitch* stated, "Outrage [laughs a bit]...there was this 'Oh! It's a new day. We're going to start all over...my outreach kind of centers on the logic, the stupidity of politicians, um the lack of information, and kind of almost secretive nature of information, say about the schools."

Here we see moralities associated with betrayal, cheating, and harm informing the reasons people started blogging. The national media's coverage of the city and its residents was seen as unfair and even harmful as it might affect relief efforts. The response and recovery work first by federal and later local authorities, as well as by private contractors was seen as incompetent and corrupt, fostering a sense of betrayal, harm and cheating. These were the moral violations that gave reason for many residents to start blogging. They provided direction and a place to focus attention. Yet, the emotion of anger is what energized their movement forward. Anger is an activating emotion; it is a negative feeling-state that fosters action as a means of adaptation. It is a base emotion (Ekman, 1994; Izard, 1977; Kemper, 1987; Turner, 2000; Schieman, 2007), one that most people can clearly distinguish from other emotions.



People were angry with the national media and public and private responses and recovery work. Blogging provided an outlet for them to vent their frustrations and correct misconceptions. Their moralities and emotions were largely expressed in the telling of personal stories through blog posts. As this blogosphere grew and local bloggers found each other and continued to interact their collective moral-emotional expressions would foment into a larger emotionally-laden moral discourse. This discourse, and the meanings and feelings upon which it exists would support an emerging cultural structure with causal powers that would manifest in a variety of different off-line mobilizations and collective civic actions. We now discuss the expression of these moralities and emotions in blog content and the emergence of a larger emotionally-laden moral discourse.

#### MORALITIES AND EMOTIONS OF BLOG CONTENT

Blogging served as an outlet for people to direct their emotional energies and voice their senses of moral indignation. Angered over feeling cheated, betrayed and put in harm's way in the wake of the flood, a number of New Orleans residents started blogs as a means to express themselves. They started out blogging as scattered individuals, but were to find each other and establish digital networks by listing each other on their blogrolls, hyperlinking to each other's content and commenting on each other's blog posts. This network would grow over the weeks, months, and years after the flood, as controversies surrounding the rebuilding and recovery work continued and became more localized. While as individuals with distinct lives and experiences, many used their blogs to tell stories that were similar in their moral and emotional packaging. As this blogosphere grew and people continued to write and network with each

other, a larger, collective moral-emotional discourse emerged. This discourse would serve as the backbone for the cultural structures that developed and the collective behaviors in which they took part.

### **Moralities and Blog Content**

Blogging provided an outlet to express moral sensibilities in the form of personal storytelling. In total we recorded 2,181 moral expressions in the blog content data. The most common were harm (n=690), care (n=560), cheating (n=231) and betrayal (n=228). Table 2 provides the numerical frequencies of each of the moral foundations we recorded.

[INSERT TABLE 2 HERE]

The sources of these moral violations were typically the national media, private contractors and public authority figures. For example, *Oyster*, of the blog *Your Right Hand Thief*, highlights a sense of being cheated by private contractors, “After fighting with insurance companies for over a year, Lisa hires a contractor to fix her house, and he promptly screws her over to the tune of many thousands of bucks” (Things have been bad, 06/12/2007) Cliff of *Cliff’s Crib* uses a personal story of his grandmother to illustrate his sense of betrayal at the hands of the U.S. government<sup>9</sup>. “It’s hard not to feel anger towards America when I can’t get FEMA to cremate the remains of my grandmother who drowned in her AMERICAN home that she worked to pay for behind a flood wall that the government of AMERICA designed” (Day Three, 02/02/2006). Finally, *Dambala*, of the blog *American Zombie*, reacts to an anonymous statement posted by

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<sup>9</sup> It was not uncommon to find our bloggers making comparisons between the US’s handling of the flood and its involvement in Iraq, Afghanistan and the War on Terror. Bloggers typically used this comparative narrative to illustrate what they saw as a double-standard, the US investing heavily in another country or global region, but neglecting its own citizens.

someone on his blog about his ongoing investigation of then director of the city's communication program Greg Meffert<sup>10</sup>. His post highlights senses of cheating (in Meffert's corrupt actions) and harm (in the consequences of those actions).

Meffert is smarter than me? You must be sucking his dick too, huh? Meffert was so smart he scuttled the DOJ grant because he was trying to force the bidders to kickback cash to you fuckers. How many people died in this city as a result of his corruption? How smart is that? Ask yourself that...fuckmook. As long as Nagin holds this office, I'm coming after his crooked ass and anyone involved in unethical or illegal activity. You bastards have destroyed this city for too long. (Bring it On Bitch!! 02/27/2007)

In the context of hurricane Katrina and the lingering collective traumas that people experienced, senses of betrayal, harm and cheating were key moralities that informed the reasons many started blogging and much of their blog content. Having identified and highlighted the various moralities that underlie the reasons our bloggers started blogging and the content of their blog posts, we now turn to a discussion of emotions.

### **Emotional Expressions in Blog Content**

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<sup>10</sup> Meffert has since been convicted on a number of corruption charges for his behavior before and after the flood, with *American Zombie* uncovering much of the early evidence before the city's major daily newspaper, the *Times-Picayune*, and other news outlets picked up the story.

As seen in the aforementioned excerpts anger was a common emotion expressed in the interview data and a motivator to begin and continue blogging. It was also the most commonly expressed emotion we recorded in the blog content. We recorded a total of 2,355 emotional expressions underlying the 2,334 units of text we examined within the seven blogs we coded. In round one we coded for 12 different emotions<sup>11</sup>. In round two, we coded for 30 different emotions. Table 3 provides a visual representation of the frequency of each emotional expression we recorded in round two.

[INSERT TABLE 3 HERE]

Recent scholarship argues that anger is a broader emotion, within which different levels of anger severity exist. These include disappointment, frustration, disgust, and outrage (Schieman, 2007). This conceptual distinction is reflected in our data collection. In round one we treated anger as a more severe emotion, similar to outrage or indignation, and conceptualize disappointment and frustration as related but separate emotions. In round two, however, we treated anger as a broader emotional category encompassing the more specific emotions of disappointment, frustration, indignation and outrage.

Despite these differences in coding, we believe these treatments of anger can be merged. In total, anger accounted for 944 of the 2,355 emotional expressions (or roughly 40%). In round one we found 526 expressions of anger and its varieties (frustration n=216, disappointment n=183, and the broader and more severe emotion that we conceptualized as simply anger, at n=127). In round two, we treated anger as a broader category and found 418

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<sup>11</sup> These included fear (n=26), anger (n=127), joy (n=15), sadness (n=77), surprise (n=56), disgust (n=195), frustration (n=216), disappointment (n=183), pride (n=23), embarrassment (n=35) respect (n=17) and resignation (n=13)

expressions of anger, broken down into disappointment n=70, frustration n=193, indignation n=98, and outrage n=57. We also found sympathy n=147 and empathy n=96 (together constituting compassion) as commonly expressed emotions. The frequency and co-presence of both anger and compassion (sympathy and empathy) are important for understanding the development of cultural structures and mobilizations as anger is an activating emotion and compassion is a social bonding emotion. Together, these help explain people's collective movement and the quality of their ties and networks.

The fact that anger represented so much of the total emotional expressions recorded in blog content was not surprising as we would expect that senses of betrayal, harm, and cheating to resonate with feelings of anger. This can be seen in the following post by *Dambala* from *American Zombie*. Here, he expresses his frustration with city leaders and their inability to adequately address the city's crime problem. Calling out then mayor C. Ray Nagin and police super intendant Warren Reily, he writes,

I don't know about the rest of you....but I feel incredibly frustrated with our city's leadership and their utter failure on so many fronts, violent crime being the most obvious...The blog community is obviously outraged, as is I suspect, the community in general. In the same week Nagin and Riley are publicly stating that we're making progress....we have almost twice as many New Orleanians murdered than American soldiers in Iraq...(A War against Tourism??, 01/ 06/2007).

Next we highlight what became a famous post among our bloggers as it captured their shared senses of cheating, betrayal and harm, and feelings of anger. Blogger *Ashley Morris* can be understood as a collective character (Fine, 1991), he had a charisma and writing style that allowed him to effectively communicate his emotions, fostering a sense of solidarity and networks of empathy and sympathy. Bloggers circulated this post widely. We offer it here in its entirety so as to capture the raw emotions and moral violations that so many of the bloggers in our sample noted.

Fuck you you fucking fucks.

I don't give a damn what the hell you Yankees/Texans do, do it in your own yard, and shut the fuck up. We don't care what you do, and we don't want your damned PVC sided beige square houses uglying up our town. Go home, and quit looking at my home as simply a chance to line your wallets.

I'm so glad all you Chicagoans have figured out exactly how to fix New Orleans. Look at your own nasty city and explain why you can't deal with the snow other than to throw tons of salt on the road, and why you can't buy a beer for under \$5. Fuck you, you fucking fucks.

What about you fucks that don't want to rebuild NOLA because we're below sea level. Well, fuckheads, then we shouldn't have rebuilt that cesspool Chicago after the fire, that Sodom San

Francisco after the earthquakes, Miami after endless hurricanes,  
or New York because it's a magnet for terrorists.

And fuck Kansas, Iowa, and your fucking tornados.

Fuck you, San Antonio. You aren't getting our Saints. When I get  
to the Alamo, I'm taking a piss on it. You probably go to funerals  
and hit on the widow. Classless fucks.

Fuck you Houston and Atlanta. No matter how many of our  
residents you steal, how many of our events you pilfer, you still  
ain't got no culture. One of our neighborhoods has more  
character than all of your pathetic cookie-cutter suburbs laid end  
to end. Fuck you, fuck you all.

Fuck you Tom Benson. I hate you on so fucking many levels, but  
the main one is this: they aren't your Saints, they're ours. The  
NEW FUCKING ORLEANS Saints. All you had to do was say that you  
were coming back. But you didn't. You had to fuck around to try  
to get more money. Fuck you, you greedy bastardo. Don't think  
we haven't noticed that you have phased out all of the  
merchandise that has the state of Louisiana on it. Don't think we  
haven't noticed how hard it is to get some Saints merchandise  
that actually says "New Orleans" on it. Fuck you, Fuck San

Antonio, Fuck your whole fucking family. And if you and Rita think

that anybody is going to patronize your car dealerships, then you got another thing coming, fuckface.

Fuck you New York. You lose a neighborhood and get scads of federal aid. We lose an entire FUCKING COAST, and the freespending W administration finally decides to become fiscally responsible. And fuck you all for [taunting the New Orleans Saints fans](#), who have to deal with playing a home game in the Meadowlands. Fuck you, you classless motherfuckers. New Orleans donates a fire engine to the FDNY after 9/11, and you give us shit. Fuck you, fuck your town, fuck your residents, fuck your politicians. You. All. Suck.

Fuck you governess Blanco. Get your act together. Get a clue, or at least hire somebody who does.

Fuck you army corps of engineers. You are so full of yourself, and you don't have clue fucking one. Building levees on jello. You should be tried and convicted of treason, or mass murder. Fuck you all, let's give our money to the Dutch – they seem to have this shit figured out.

Fuck the Bush administration. Putting Mike Brown in charge of FEMA, you clueless fucking scalawag. You said "we will do what it takes". Then do it.



Now.

Bitch. (Fuck you, you fucking fucks, 11/27/2005)

*Ashley Morris'* post captures the many sources of betrayal, cheating and harm that city residents felt in the aftermath of the flood; outsiders who see the flood as an opportunity to line their wallets while “uglying” up the city, politicians and a broader public that doesn’t want to rebuild the city, cities that are eyeing the New Orleans professional football team and the team owner’s (Tom Benson) lack of loyalty to the city, Governor Blanco’s incompetence, George W. Bush and Michael Brown’s incompetence, the Army Corp of Engineers and the harm they caused in the levee system they constructed and maintained to protect the city from flooding. These are the multiple sources of moral anger that many bloggers recognized and experienced. Much of their writing would focus on these topics, and though it would shift to more local issues over the following months (e.g., city-wide crime, Mayor Nagin), the moral violations of harm, cheating and betrayal would remain strong foci in their writing.

So far we’ve highlighted the moral foundations and related emotions that informed people’s decision to start (and continue) blogging, and their expressions in blog posts. In so doing, we draw attention to the cultural affordances of PCTs in allowing people to express personal, emotionally-laden morality tales through blogging. Yet, the cultural affordances of PCTs like blogs do not stop there. The moralities and emotional expressions that the bloggers in our sample communicated through their blogs were not isolated, static incidences. While each blogger certainly had his or her own individual experiences, they all shared experiences related to the levee failure, flood, media attention, response, recovery and rebuilding work. Because of

these shared experiences and the bloggers' work in constructing shared interpretations (Ostertag and Ortiz, 2013) these individual expressions were to foment into a larger emotionally-laden moral discourse (Alexander and Smith, 1993). This becomes evident when we combine the specific excerpts and examples we highlighted above with the frequency of moral and emotional expressions that we found when coding blog posts (see Tables 1 and 2). We can reasonably claim that, while each blogger communicated experiences unique to him or her, they collectively experienced the flood and its aftermath and communicated these experiences by posting personal stories on their blogs that were infused with similar morals and emotions. As more and more people began to blog and interact with each other online, a local blogosphere emerged that permeated a collective emotionally-laden moral discourse. A number of moral foundations grounded this discourse (loyalty/betrayal, fairness/cheating, care/harm) and corresponded most closely with the emotional state of anger and its varieties of disappointment, frustration, indignation and outrage.

Yet, PCTs such as blogs are not static, they allow for ongoing expression and reciprocal communication, helping capture the temporal order of emotional development and expression. This quality allows for other emotions to develop. Returning to Table 3, while anger was a commonly expressed emotion, sympathy and empathy (what we collectively consider compassion) were also widely expressed. This was the case in both blog posts as well as the comments sections of blog posts. Recalling the frequency of moralities identified in Table 2, three of the most common moralities are associated with pollution (harm, cheating and betrayal). Yet, one is not—care (n=560). This is important as care likely resonates with the emotion of compassion. Compassion is an “other-focused” emotion. It requires a subject feeling

the same emotions as and/or expressing sorrow for the suffering of another. It is related to anger in that one may grow angry at the moral violations others suffer, or another's anger may activate feelings of compassion. Either way, the point is that compassion and anger are related and help explain culture's collective powers by highlighting how activating (anger) and bonding (compassion) emotions work together around shared moralities. The one-to-many, many-to-one feedback quality of PCTs like blogs as well as the ability to communicate over extended periods of time enable the expression of anger and development of compassion. Together, these shared expressions constitute a larger, moral-emotional discourse that emerged in the wake of the flood through blogging. This discourse was conveyed largely in the personal stories people narrated and shared through their blogging and the comments readers left on their blog posts. This helped to cultivate a loose, temporal social network grounded on moral violations and that was fueled by anger and bonded by compassion. This network would then be activated for a number of different contentious and non-contentious mobilizations organized according to connective action logics.

#### BLOGGING, MORAL-EMOTIONAL DISCOURSE AND NETWORKS OF COMPASSION

Like anger, compassion may be understood as a broader category of emotion encompassing both empathy and sympathy. Empathy and sympathy are relational emotions. Empathy refers to either "taking the 'attitude' or role of another, envisioning the other's perceptions and likely responses" (Schmitt and Clark, 2007: 469) or a person actually feeling the emotions of another (Stets and Turner, 2007: 4). Sympathy involves "feeling sorry, genuinely or otherwise, for another's plight" where the other can refer to an individual or collective (e.g., the poor)

(Schmitt and Clark, 2007: 469). Compassion is a relational emotion in the sense that it reflects one's ability to care about and feel for others. As such, it fosters the development of social bonds between subject and object that may form into larger social networks. Compassion is special however, in that it's an emotion that either develops out of or allows for the development of other emotions. It is an attempt to either feel or feel sorry for another's emotional state. Through this, it may register and resonate with other emotions, such as anger or joy. Indeed, empathy in particular provides the background interpretations, comprehension and associated feelings of sadness, indignation, or alarm that serve to help construct and foster sympathy and compassion (Schmitt and Clark, 2007: 469). When sufficiently constructed through language and other symbols, compassion (and displays/performances of) helps cultivate and strengthen social bonds and networks rooted in trust, love, respect (e.g., emotions that develop over time). Through its ability to resonate with other activating emotions (such as anger) compassion can help foster the emotional energy necessary for individual and collective action.

Yet, compassion is an unstable emotional state, as it is typically dependent on continued successful constructions, and senses of "appropriate" reciprocity and beneficence. These dimensions identify the tension between the individual and collective/normative that characterize social life (Alexander, 2006), and their fragility helps explain the temporal nature of social bonds and networks of compassion. Within the framework of cultural sociology's strong program, if sympathy is not properly constructed through genuine and honest narratives or if it is not sufficiently reciprocated, emotional energy diminishes, bonds weaken, networks dissolve and the likelihood of collective action dwindles. Different modes of communication foster the

development and maintenance of compassion and the bonds and networks that might follow. As Schmitt and Clark (2007: 471) state, the internet, blogs, and podcasters make possible the instantaneous transmission of information that molds sympathy. In the construction of sympathy through interpretive framing, the internet (PCTs in particular) allow collective actors with collective character (Fine, 1991), like *Ashley Morris* among our NOLA bloggers, to take part in carrying activities (Ostertag and Ortiz, 2013) in which they encourage favored interpretations of events, issues, and people. In so doing they foster shared emotions of anger directed toward the immoral actions of authority figures, private companies and contractors, and the national media, but also feelings of empathy and sympathy directed toward themselves and other caring, fair, and loyal New Orleanians who had been morally wronged through no fault of their own. With our analysis of blog content we recorded 147 expressions of sympathy and 96 expressions of empathy. Like with anger, we situate these specific emotions within a broader categorical emotion of compassion N=243. As a social-relational emotion, many of these expressions were found in the comments sections. Bloggers would post personal stories expressing their anger over immoral actions and commenters would express their sympathy and empathy for the blogger as well as others suffering from similar immoral actions.

As more and more people began blogging over the following weeks, months and years, this compassion would shift from a larger national and international context to a more localized context. As such, the types of mobilizations would shift as well. At first, readers from different cities, states, and countries expressed their compassion and their interest in mobilizing people to donate food, money and other supplies, either as individuals or through relief organizations

(e.g., *The Red Cross*). For example, Anonymous commented on *GulfSails* post titled “Coming Back to you LIVE and In Color” with the following,

You probably don’t realize that you are becoming a minor celebrity on the net with people all over the world watching and wishing you well...We are in Australia and following what is going on with you...Stay safe and please keep writing so we know you are ok...And to everyone that is reading this [www.redcross.org](http://www.redcross.org)  
DONATE NOW. (09/01/2005)

Over time and as people established some level of stability more locals started their own blogs. They wrote of their experiences and created blogrolls of other local bloggers whom they would read and comment. Coupled with the gradual diminishing of national media attention and the growth of a local blogosphere, comments were increasingly posted by local bloggers and blog readers who were undergoing similar experiences with the response, recovery and rebuilding work. Further, bloggers were posting more material on their own blogs that expressed their compassion for others who suffered from hurricane Katrina and its aftermath. For example, *Ashley Morris* expressed compassion in referring to some of the children affected by Katrina, “when you hear these stories [hyperlink], when you hear these children [hyperlink], you realize we have to do something” (“Draw the line, now,” 04/28/2006). Likewise, a commenter on *LipRap’s Lament’s* blog stated,

My heart goes out to everyone down there plugging away to make it better – gave a lot of our money and time to the relief effort put together by our church, and I hope it helped even in a

small way. I guess I'll never understand how you guys down there can deal, but I admire the heck out of you (No Title, 12/20/2006).

The compassion that emerged through bloggers' and blog readers' continued ability to either envision others' suffering, to feel it themselves or to feel sorry for others informed the bonds and connections that developed among bloggers and blog readers/commenters (Ostertag and Ortiz, 2013; Ortiz and Ostertag, 2014). *Maitri of Maitri's VatulBlog* touches on this connection, "like we needed friends and kinship at that time, and we needed to vent our bile (chuckles) as well and our anger you know..." *Liprap's Lament* agrees, "It gets disgusting after a while...and it helps to be able to really talk about it with other people, which is where the whole connection with the other bloggers comes in." These connections rooted in anger and compassion would have implications for the quality of networks (loose, flexible and temporal) and mobilizations that would arise (broad focus, non-hierarchical, lack of SMOs).

PCTs, such as blogs, allowed these individuals to share their personal, emotionally-laden morality stories to others with similar experiences, fostering the development of a moral-emotional discourse and loose social networks of compassion across a range of people without the need for a larger movement organization, collective ideology, or co-presence in time and space. Their continued moral and emotional communication would cultivate a shared sense of solidarity, though not one rooted in ideology or mobilizing organization as would be expected with logics of collective action. Rather, participants would see themselves as sharing in their experience with and understanding of the flood and as "Katrina bloggers" writing about it (Ostertag and Ortiz, 2013; Ortiz and Ostertag, 2014). This network was activated (with varying levels of involvement and intensity) for a number of different contentious and non-contentious

mobilizations that were loosely organized around the broad themes of fairness, safety and change. We focus on two, the *March Against Crime* and the *Rising Tide* conference.

#### CULTURE'S CAUSAL POWER: ACTIVATING NETWORKS OF ANGER AND COMPASSION

We can see how these moralities and emotions, through their expressions in blogs and personal stories, foment loose social networks of compassion that were mobilized in a number of ways.

This is culture's causal power, and it's rooted in a shared moral-emotional discourse that is collectively narrated and performed. These mobilizations took a number of forms, but the *March Against Crime* and the creation of the annual *Rising Tide* conference are two of the most significant for illustrating our point. These mobilizations were possible largely because of the collective cultural power of city residents, itself informed by their mutual senses of immorality (betrayal, cheating and harm), and its resonance with both activating (anger) and bonding (compassion) emotions. Because PCTs, such as blogging, were fundamental to organizing and participating in these mobilizations, they also tend to take on the characteristics of those organized according to logics of connective action.

#### **Contentious Mobilization: *March Against Crime***

On January 11, 2007, city residents took part in what was to be the largest demonstration in the city's history. Concerned with rising crime and violence, and sparked by the recent murder of two well-known and liked city residents in the end of December and early January, over 5,000 people marched on city hall on January 11, 2007. Bloggers were not key to this mobilization as it would have taken place without their participation. Nonetheless, bloggers helped publicize it,



posted personal stories on the city's violence on their blogs, took part in the demonstration and helped maintain an ongoing narrative after. This mobilization was characterized by a number of qualities found in other contentious actions organized according to connective action logics with high rates of PCT use among participants. These include a diverse body of participants connected with each other under broad themes (e.g., safety) and taking part in a large-scale mobilization that was organized quickly. In his January 12, 2007 post (one day after the *March Against Crime*), Schroeder, of *PeopleGetReady* captures all of this.

The citizens' *March Against Crime* was the largest and most diverse demonstration of community solidarity in New Orleans history. Every neighborhood, every race, every age, every class, streamed out of their homes, schools, and businesses, joining into a Cat 5000 *régiment* of discontent. The unified cry of anguish: our public officials have failed us, miserably! The individual messages varied: "Silence is Violence"; "Enough!"; "Out of Iraq into New Orleans"; "Thou Shalt Not Kill"; "Where's Ray?" The expression of anguish after the murders of Dinneral Shavers and Helen Hill was more than just the grief felt at their deaths, it was a popular rage against all of the injustices that have been perpetrated on New Orleans citizens over the last year and a half by elected officials at all levels of government....Tired of the routine of public officials going behind closed doors to emerge with platitudes in front of a photo shoot, citizens seized the podium at the seat of New

Orleans government, and held *their own* press conference. They tore down the statue of the king, beheaded the government nobility, and renamed the square, “Place de la Révolution.” Yes, it was a Bastille moment. (Laissez la revolution rouler, 01/12/2007)

Note the diversity of participants at the crime march (“Every neighborhood, every race, every age, every class”) and the variety of movement themes falling under the broader rubric of safety and change (“Silence is Violence”; “Enough!”; “Out of Iraq into New Orleans”; “Thou Shalt Not Kill”; “Where’s Ray?”). Among others, local bloggers spoke at the event and while some offered specific solutions the overall concern was with safety and the message was about change. Residents wanted city authority figures and the police superintendent to recognize that their approaches to the heightened violence was not working and to do something different. These sentiments were to be mobilized into what was the largest march on city hall in the city’s history, and it was organized in just a week.

### **Non-Contentious Mobilization: Rising Tide Annual Conference**

These bloggers also created a conference called *Rising Tide*. Unlike the *March Against Crime*, blogging was fundamental to the creation of this conference. Roughly one year after the city’s levee failure and subsequent flood, bloggers activated their digital networks to create the first of what would become an annual conference. In discussing the creation of the annual *Rising Tide* conference and the cultural powers that fueled it, blogger *Dangerblond* highlights the shared senses of betrayal and cheating associated with the myth of New Orleans, the levee failure and city residents that she felt was being constructed through the mainstream press.

She also highlights the passion and emotional drive to organize and work together in an effort to confront this myth.

...we did have this kind of shared trauma and then we also had this shared knowledge that a lot of misinformation was getting out about the place where we lived. We knew the truth, so we had that whole you know, persecuted people have to stick together kind of thing because we knew that lies were getting out and we all were real serious about trying to get um, trying to stop the history of what happened here from becoming ahh a myth rather than what really happened. So we did have kind of a shared passion that helped to bring us together.

*Oyster*, of the blog *Your Right Hand Thief* worked to mobilize this digital network in an effort to organize the first *Rising Tide* conference. Notice how rapidly it was organized (in under one month), the broad and open frames around which it was organized, the lack of a pre-existing mobilizing structure or SMO, and the hint at the emotional energy such a conference would generate among participants who would then presumably continue to generate that energy through their blogging and repeat their offline organizing the following year (this conference is now on its 8<sup>th</sup> year).

Katrina Bloggers Activate!

Form of... a convention in New Orleans!

Think of it: bloggers from all over could get together, and talk

about the Katrina aftermath, and blog, and argue, and party, and

CENTER FOR CULTURAL SOCIOLOGY AT YALE  
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share information, and podcast, and effect political change, and meet each other in person, and have a "work day" in a flooded neighborhood, and actually *do something*, and have panels and guest speakers and t-shirts and stickers, and we could get some press and everyone would leave feeling really good about their experience in New Orleans, and would blog about it, and want to do it again...

I'm thinking the August 26 and 27 weekend, just prior to the 1 year anniversary of the storm.

But who cares what I think--- what do YOU think? What are your thoughts and ideas about this proposal? Additions, subtractions, crazy off the wall stuff, criticisms... go for it, you won't hurt my feelings. Weeks ago, [Scout Prime](#) floated the idea of a blogger convention in N.O. and I'm sure it could work, but plans would need to be made quickly. So if you suggest a good idea, be prepared to help realize it, and "make it work".

Let's brainstorm a bit in the comments here. Guest speaker ideas? Promotional ideas/links? "Work-day" ideas? Suggestions about venue and lodging and technical details? Who will coordinate? How much will we have to charge?...Be constructive. Unless a proposal is a real sandtrap, I'm not anxious to hear at length why it won't work. (Katrina Bloggers Activate! 07/05/2006)

The idea was well received, with suggestions and assistance offered in the comments section, "I'll webcast.....name panel on time and place....i have video production and webcast in hand (*Bayoustjohn*); "A blogger summit! I like the idea, so you can count me in on this one. At the very least, I can help out with some aspects of the PR, with promotional items (t-shirts, stickers and more) and possibly with artwork and with wrangling some entertainment, once we have some kind of budget and plan (*Dambala*). Typical questions the followed, can we get it done it time? How organized should this be? Will we just hang out or have panels and speakers? How do we reach others with this news? This is when blogs became too cumbersome and face-to-face communication became the preferred next step. Shortly after, on August 05-06, 2006, these bloggers would host the first of what would become an annual conference. This would probably not have happened if these bloggers didn't have an already established social network of compassion and anger rooted in their shared experiences, moral understandings and emotional states. PCTs and the cultural communication it affords were key to the development of these collective civic actions and the cultural power they reveal.

#### DISCUSSION: PCTs AND CULTURAL STRUCTURES

These mobilizations would not have been possible without the social bonds and networks that individual bloggers created with each other and with their readers. They were to materialize into a loosely organized, temporary cultural structure with causal power that manifested itself in a number of different mobilizations and collective civic actions. Individuals, scattered throughout the country in the wake of hurricane Katrina and the city's systemic levee failure returned to the city and started blogging. They did so because of the social and cultural traumas

they experienced from the national media's coverage of the city and its residents and from federal, state, and local authorities and private businesses (insurance companies and outside contractors). This collective trauma resonated with certain moral foundations, namely harm, cheating and betrayal (Haidt, 2012). Blogs served as tools to address these traumas. They allowed people to find trustworthy, accurate, and reliable information and they provided an outlet to communicate news, voice their anger, and highlight success stories (Ostertag and Ortiz, 2013). Such content was commonly conveyed in the form of personal stories, packed with moral meanings and emotional feelings. The sharing of stories and the growth of a local blogosphere would cultivate a larger, emotionally-laden, moral discourse revolving around the flood and its aftermath. Through continued interaction with each other around shared moral understandings and emotional states these bloggers established bonds with each other and a collective network rooted in feelings of anger and compassion and a sense of solidarity. When mobilized, this network and the moralities and emotions that ground it constituted a cultural structure with causal powers. Yet, this cultural structure and the network and bonds that form it are unstable as their quality and strength are very much organic and dependent on ongoing moral and emotional constructions, trust and reciprocity. The mechanism fostering these relationships may change and people's interpretations of events may change, affecting moral understandings and emotional experiences. People may no longer generate the emotional energy needed to continue their work (Collins, 2004), and other demands of life may be prioritized. Like a rainbow, such a cultural structure is ephemeral and only emerges when the conditions are right.

The cultural affordances of blogging as a communication technology were fundamentally important to the emergence of this cultural structure. They allowed people to communicate their personal, emotionally-laden morality stories to broader audiences, serving as carrier agents and fostering a shared meaning and feeling system (Ostertag and Ortiz, 2013). Blogging and blogs allowed people to not only network and communicate with each other, but to do so in a way that allowed for the telling of personal stories, the communication of moral transgressions and the construction of emotional experiences. This type of communication allowed for the cultivation of social bonds and larger networks rooted in the activating emotion of anger and bonding emotion of compassion related to the moral foundations of harm, cheating, betrayal (for anger), and care (for compassion). It is the quality of the networks that was fundamental to the cultural structure that arose among those in our sample and the mobilizations they took part in and helped organize, and blogging afforded the features of communication necessary for their development and character.

#### CONCLUSION: CULTURAL SOCIOLOGY, PCTs, AND CHANGES TO MOBILIZATION

Scholars have recently noted significant changes to the quality of mobilizations in which a sizeable number of participants use personal communication technologies to organize their involvement. Characterized by logics of connective action, these mobilizations tend to be larger in size and more flexible and transferable than traditional mobilizations organized according to logics of collective action. Participants who take part in these mobilizations also tend to be linked through loose and ephemeral social ties and they're participation is rooted in broad issues of justice, safety and fairness rather than more specific group ideology or membership.

Scholars argue that the increasing use of PCTs helps explain these changing characteristics (Bennett and Segerberg, 2012). With PCTs, participants express their grievances through personal action frames in the form of personalized stories that resonate with broad movement themes. Yet little is known regarding why or how PCTs might explain these different organizing logics and mobilizing characteristics. We argue that it is the cultural affordances of PCTs (in our study, blogs) that help explain these changes. PCTs allow for the personalization of involvement in mobilizations through the communication of personal stories. These stories are infused with moral meanings associated with moral foundations theory (Haidt, 2012) and emotional expressions associated with activating (e.g., anger) and bonding (compassion) emotions. In their capacity as carrying mechanisms, PCTs allow individuals to construct collective meaning and feeling systems rooted in shared moral understandings and emotional experiences. When collectively expressed and communicated through PCTs these collection of individual stories manifest a larger, emotionally-laden, moral discourse. This ongoing discourse fosters the development of loose, flexible and ephemeral social bonds and larger social networks rooted in shared interpretations around broad moralities, and the emotions of anger and compassion. When activated, this network constitutes a cultural structure with causal powers that manifests characteristics associated with connective action logics and helps explain the changing nature of mobilizations that scholars have recently noticed.



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Table 1  
Demographic Data on Blogger Sample

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Gender		
	<i>Male</i>	13
	<i>Female</i>	14
Race/Ethnicity		
	<i>White</i>	21
	<i>African American</i>	4
	<i>South East Asian</i>	1
	<i>Other</i>	1
Age		
	<i>29 and under</i>	2
	<i>30-39</i>	8
	<i>40-49</i>	9
	<i>50 and over</i>	8

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Education

*High School or less* 2

*College* 11

*Graduate School* 14

Household Income

*\$40,000 or less* 6

*\$40,001-\$80,000* 4

*\$80,001-\$120,000* 6

*\$120,001 and above* 2

*Declined to answer* 7

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N 27

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Table 2  
Frequency of Moralities in Blog Content  
N=2181

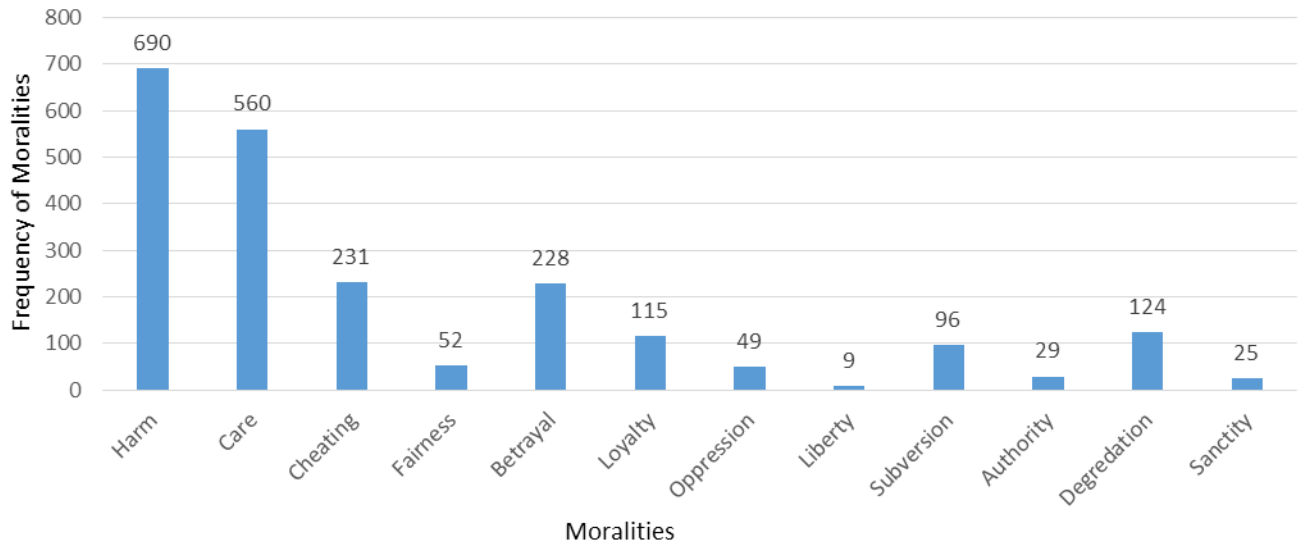


Table 3  
Frequency of Emotions in Blog Content  
N=1,372

