Figure 6.1. Injustice and adversarial frames.

they who are perpetrating the injustice at our expense – or it may not. Nor does an adversarial frame necessarily imply an injustice. The adversaries may have competing interests that bring them into conflict without acting in ways that arouse moral indignation.

Nevertheless, there are good theoretical reasons for expecting groups that use an injustice frame in understanding an issue to include adversarial elements in the package as well. An injustice frame makes the injured party collective, not individual. What one has suffered personally is shared by some implied we. Righteous indignation without a they at which to direct it is difficult to sustain. It is frustrating and confusing to be angry and not know whom to be angry at. An adversarial frame helps to resolve this tension by interpreting and directing the emotional component of an injustice frame. Hence, we should expect them to be correlated.

As Figure 6.1 shows, there is a strong overall relationship. When injustice frames appeared in issue conversations, almost two-thirds (64 percent) used an adversarial frame as well; this figure dropped to 25 percent in the issue conversations that lacked injustice frames ($p < .001$). On issues such as nuclear power and Arab–Israeli conflict, in which injustice frames were rare, adversarial frames were equally rare; on affirmative action, where injustice frames were widespread, so were adversarial frames. And even when the issue is controlled, adversarial frames tended to be more common in those discussions of affirmative action and troubled industry that also used injustice frames.
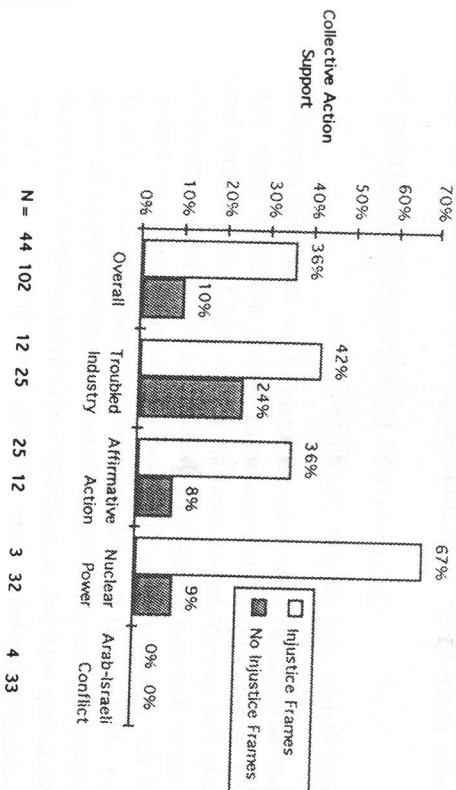
Figure 6.2. Injustice and collective action support.

Injustice and support for citizen action

Again, there is no necessary reason why the adoption of an injustice frame requires sympathetic discussion of citizen action on these issues or vice versa. One may feel an injustice while being unaware of grass-roots efforts at change or, if aware, may think them misguided or futile. One may be sympathetic to antinuclear protesters because they keep authorities on their toes without postulating any unfairness or working up any righteous anger.

But again, there are good theoretical reasons for expecting a connection. If an unfair situation is regarded as immutable, it is not likely to lead to moral indignation; an injustice frame implies the possibility of change. Collective action by ordinary citizens may not be the best way of achieving it, but at least such people are making an effort. Indignation exerts a push toward action and predisposes a sympathetic response to those who attempt it.

As Figure 6.2 shows, the hypothesized relationship is clearly there. More than a third of the conversations with injustice frames contained some sympathetic discussion of collective action on the issue; only 10 percent of the groups without an injustice frame included such positive attention ($p < .001$). One should not make much of the differences on nuclear power, since there were only three instances of injustice frames, but on affirmative action and troubled industry as well, groups with injustice frames were

6

Talk and action

Talking about politics with friends in someone's living room, at the behest of academic researchers, is many steps removed from action. Imagine that these conversations on nuclear power, for example, were occurring in a community where an application was currently pending for the construction of a new nuclear reactor. Imagine further that there were active antinuclear groups who were demonstrating against it and threatening to occupy the site. Action contexts of this sort dramatically change the salience of collective action frames by making them immediately and personally relevant.

Political consciousness, as many students of social movements have observed, is forged in the process of collective action. Fantasia (1988), for example, shows how "cultures of solidarity" are constructed by workers while interacting with each other over time in concrete action settings. Ideas emerge and change, and are subjected to scrutiny and negotiation as events and conditions are interpreted and reinterpreted. He contrasts this with "the belief of many academics and radical activists that it is necessary for people to have an intellectual grasp or 'correct line' on society before they can change it." Similarly, Marshall (1983, 272) challenges "the widely held belief among academic observers that it is somehow necessary for men and women to encompass society intellectually before they can attempt to change it."

The view that consciousness precedes and causes action may be implicit in much writing on working-class consciousness, but few if any observers of social movements would accept it. The emphasis in most of the social movement literature of the past fifteen years has been on consciousness, commitment, solidarity, and collective identity as processes that develop simultaneously, mutually influencing and reinforcing each other. No one should expect working people to use collective action frames extensively when they talk about political issues divorced from any meaningful action context.

The appropriate context brings nascent elements to life if they are there.

The most likely action context is a threat to the pattern of people's daily lives – a plant closing, the siting of a nuclear plant or toxic waste facility, a call-up of military reserves, and the like. There is nothing automatic or certain about how people will respond to such events. Any threat or deprivation can be interpreted in different ways. The ease with which fully developed and integrated collective action frames are constructed depends on the extent to which people already share the elements of these frames.

It is difficult to construct them from scratch. If people already share a sense of moral indignation and injustice, think of themselves as a we in opposition to some they, and have shared models of people like themselves acting to change conditions, the raw materials are in place. If one or more of these factors is absent, the process will take longer and is more likely to be aborted at some point.

Collective action frames are not merely aggregations of individual attitudes and perceptions but also the outcome of negotiating shared meaning. Examining their elements as they are constructed in talk does not bring us closer to an action context, but conversations are a *collective* product. The dynamics of opinion leadership and the normative pressures that arise in groups are not distractions from what people really think but are a natural part of the collective process in which political consciousness is negotiated.

Clearly, the elements of collective action frames were more in place for some groups than for others and on some issues far more than on others. However, full-fledged collective action frames that integrated all three elements were rare indeed. To be more precise, this happened in 22 percent of the conversations on affirmative action, 5 percent on troubled industry, and not at all on nuclear power or Arab–Israeli conflict. Combining these elements is part of the business of constructing collective action frames over time. Although it rarely happened in these conversations so divorced from action, we can learn more by analyzing how the three elements that have so far been treated separately were joined by some groups on some issues.

Injustice as the key

Injustice and adversarial frames

There is no logical necessity that an injustice frame also be an adversarial frame. People can be treated badly through stupidity or lack of awareness by those pursuing their own selfish interests or by institutions and programs that reflect misplaced priorities. The injustice may include a clearly defined

substantially more likely to include supportive discussions of collective action.

Adversarial frames and support for citizen action

The use of adversarial frames to understand an issue was completely independent of sympathetic discussion of citizen action in these conversations. Only five groups never used an adversarial frame on any issue, but three of these five had supportive discussions of collective action on some issue. Of the fifteen groups that used adversarial frames on two or more issues, an identical 60 percent had sympathetic discussions. On troubled industry and nuclear power, there were twenty-one discussions in which collective action was supported, but only three of these also used adversarial frames; furthermore, one of these three failed to link the two ideas in a common package.

Only on affirmative action discussions in black groups was a common link made between adversarial frames and support for collective action. Almost half of the conversations (47 percent) integrated sympathetic discussion of black civil rights efforts and an adversarial frame in a common package that approximates the model of a full-fledged collective action frame.

Conclusion

The injustice component of a collective action frame facilitates adoption of the other elements. It increases attentiveness to social movements that attempt to rectify the injustice and encourages sympathy toward their efforts at collective action even when people are not ready to join. It promotes personal identification with whatever collectivity is being wronged and the search for targets who are responsible for the undeserved hardships that members of the recipient group suffer. Hence, it is the key to integrating the three elements of collective action frames.

II
How people negotiate meaning

The process of negotiating meaning about public issues is broader than that of constructing collective action frames. I focused on the elements of these frames in Part I because of my interest in the kind of political consciousness that is most relevant for social movements. Part II steps back from this immediate concern to address more general questions about how people make sense of the news.

Chapter 7 explores the resource strategies they use. To what extent do they use media discourse as a primary resource versus the knowledge they have gained from their personal experiences and popular cultural wisdom? To what extent do they integrate these different resources into a shared frame on different issues?

Chapter 8 explores the importance of cultural resonances in enabling people to integrate different resources. To what extent do resonances between issues frames and broad cultural themes and counterthemes contribute to their ability to use multiple resources in making sense of an issue?

Chapter 9 explores the complicated connection between how interested and engaged people are in an issue and how it affects their everyday lives. To what extent can issue engagement be stimulated by media discourse independently of any direct experience of the consequences? To what extent does the intensity of people's interest in an issue affect the resource strategies they use and their success in integrating different resources?

Part II is an attempt to understand the general process of how people construct meaning about public issues. The answers ultimately have important implications for the presence or absence of collective action frames. Chapter 10, the concluding chapter, brings the two parts together, showing how frames that successfully integrate different resources in the process of constructing meaning are more likely to be injustice frames.

Conclusion

Resource strategies among working people are heavily issue specific. They use a combination of experiential knowledge, popular wisdom, and media discourse in framing issues, but the particular mix varies. For some issues, media discourse and popular wisdom are the primary resources, and they generally do not integrate experiential knowledge in the framing process. For other issues, they generally begin with experiential knowledge and popular wisdom. Sometimes they also bring in media discourse in support of the same frame, but sometimes they ignore this resource. Nuclear power and Arab–Israeli conflict exemplify the former kind of issue, and affirmative action exemplifies the latter; troubled industry falls somewhere in between, but it is rare for people to ignore media discourse in framing it.

There are theoretical reasons for expecting that frames based on the integration of all three types of resources will be more robust. They enable people to bridge the personal and cultural and to link issue frames to broader cultural themes. If this is true, then we should expect the framings of affirmative action and troubled industry to be especially robust, since the majority of groups follow an integrated strategy in constructing them. Nuclear power and Arab–Israeli conflict, where the majority of groups use media discourse and popular wisdom but not experiential knowledge, should be more subject to fluctuations in the prominence of different frames in media discourse.

Are college-educated people different in their resource strategies? Probably they are more likely to attend to the media spectacle and to rely on it more heavily as a primary resource. Perhaps they are also less likely to draw on popular wisdom and experiential knowledge and, therefore, to use integrated resource strategies in the framing process. If so, this suggests the intriguing hypothesis that they are more likely than working people to be affected by shifts in the dominant media frames on an issue. But this is a topic for another study.

I have said relatively little about the nature of the popular wisdom that people use in understanding these issues. What they choose to emphasize is especially important because of its ability to tie issue frames to broader cultural themes. Issue frames gain plausibility and seem more natural to the extent that they resonate with enduring themes that transcend specific issue domains. As we see in the next chapter, the popular wisdom used on these issues has a strong adversarial and oppositional character, giving it a special relevance for collective action frames.

8
Cultural resonances

Not all symbols are equally potent. Some metaphors soar, others fall flat; some visual images linger in the mind, others are quickly forgotten. Some frames have a natural advantage because their ideas and language resonate with a broader political culture. Resonances increase the appeal of a frame by making it appear natural and familiar. Those who respond to the larger cultural theme will find it easier to respond to a frame with the same sonorities. Snow and Benford (1988, 210) make a similar point in discussing the "narrative fidelity" of a frame. Some frames, they write, "resonate with cultural narrations, that is, with stories, myths, and folk tales that are part and parcel of one's cultural heritage."

The resonance concept focuses on the relationship between the discourse on a particular issue and the broader political culture of which it is a part. Both media discourse and popular wisdom have such resonances. Through their link to the same cultural themes, they are brought together in support of a shared frame and promote an integrated discourse strategy.

Themes and counterthemes

I prefer the term *themes* to the more commonly used *values* for a particular reason. My argument emphasizes the dialectic nature of themes: There is no theme without a countertheme. Themes are safe, conventional, and normative; one can invoke them as pieties on ceremonial occasions with the assumption of general social approval, albeit some private cynicism. Counterthemes typically share many of the same taken-for-granted assumptions but challenge some specific aspect of the mainstream culture; they are adversarial, contentious, oppositional. Themes and counterthemes are paired with each other so that whenever one is invoked, the other is always present in latent form, ready to be activated with the proper cue. In referring to the challenging member of this pair, *countertheme* seems a clearer term than *countervalue*.[1]
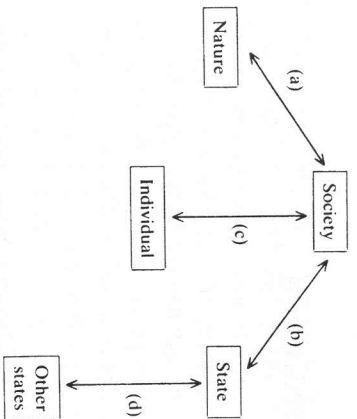
Figure 8.1. Dimensions of cultural themes: (a) technology, (b) power, (c) dependence, (d) nationalism.

The analysis here focuses on the four dimensions of cultural themes indicated in Figure 8.1.² The technology dimension focuses on the relationship between society and nature; the power dimension on society and state; the dependence dimension on individual and society; and the nationalism dimension on the relationship between one's own state and other states. Each dimension becomes engaged in media discourse on a variety of issues, and each has a central theme and a countertheme with deep historical roots in American culture.

1. Technology themes: Progress through technology versus harmony with nature. Few would question the appeal of a "technofix" for a wide variety of problems in American society. "American emphasis upon efficiency has consistently impressed outside observers," Williams (1960, 428) comments in his discussion of American values. " 'Efficient' is a word of high praise in a society that has long emphasized adaptability, technological innovation, economic expansion, up-to-dateness, practicality, expediency, 'getting things done.' " The inventor is a cultural hero: Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Edison. Mastery over nature is the way to progress, know-how, problem solving.

This theme is reflected in a view of politics that treats issues as problems that are susceptible to technical solution. How can we solve the problem, how much is it going to cost, and is it worth it? "There isn't a Republican and a Democratic way to clean streets," argued the Progressive era advocates of nonpartisan municipal government. Overtly nonideological, this theme presents itself as pragmatic, willing to try whatever is needed to do the job. Issues present themselves as technical problems to be solved, and one

ought to get the best expertise available to help overcome the problems that the country faces.

Alongside this theme, a countertheme exists that is more skeptical of, or even hostile to, technology. Harmony with nature rather than mastery over nature is emphasized. Schumacher (1973) writes of "technology with a human face." "In the excitement over the unfolding of his scientific and technical powers, modern man has built a system of production that ravishes nature" (293). Our technology must be appropriate and in proper scale. There is an ecological balance to maintain.

To quote Emerson, "Things are in the saddle and ride mankind." The more we try to control nature through our technology, the more we disrupt its natural order and threaten the quality of our lives. Lovins (1977) argues for "soft energy paths" that "respect the limits that are always with us on a little planet, the delicate fragility of life. . . . We need, like Faust, to refashion hubris into humility; to learn and accept our own limits as a fragile and tenuous experiment in an unhospitable universe" (1977, 218 and 170). Illich (1973, 84) calls for a technology of responsibly limited tools since "a tool can grow out of man's control, first to become his master and finally to become his executioner." Ellul (1964, 14) warns us that "technique has become autonomous; it has fashioned an omnivorous world which obeys its own laws and which has renounced all tradition." Goodman (1970, 193) points to the absurdity of "desperately relying on technological means to solve problems caused by previous technological means."

Winner (1977) calls this countertheme *autonomous technology* and traces its long roots in political thought. He underlines its challenging nature by describing the defensive overreaction he received from many scientists, engineers, and managers with whom he raised apparently innocuous questions implying possible negative effects of technology. "You're just using technology as a whipping boy," he was told. "You just want to stop progress and send us back to the Middle Ages with peasants dancing on the green."

Much of popular culture reflects the countertheme: Chaplin's *Modern Times*, Huxley's *Brave New World*, Kubrick's *2001*, and countless other films and books about mad scientists and technology gone wild, out of control, a Frankenstein's monster turning on its creator. All of this nature-ravishing technology carried on in the name of "progress" — with quotation marks to indicate the irony. In the words of the Joni Mitchell song, "Paved paradise, put up a parking lot."

2. Power themes: Interest group liberalism versus popular democracy. Interest group liberalism is Lowi's (1967) term for the American public's

philosophy by which the decisions of government are guided and justified. I prefer it to *pluralism* because it sharpens the contrast with the countertheme and is less vague, focusing on political rather than a broader social pluralism. In this view of the American polity, "the most important difference between liberals and conservatives, Republicans and Democrats . . . is to be found in the interest groups they identify with. Congressmen are guided in their votes, presidents in their programs, and administrators in their discretion, by whatever organized interests they have taken for themselves as the most legitimate; and that is the measure of the legitimacy of demands" (Lowi, 1971).

The elaborate bargaining game among interest groups supposedly provides a variety of benefits. With a sufficiently large number of competing groups, no one group can dominate. Coalitions are fluid and impermanent, formed more or less de novo for each issue. Furthermore, issues divide groups in different ways so that many groups not in a present coalition are potential coalition partners on subsequent issues. "Because one center of power is set against another," Dahl (1967, 24) writes, "power itself will be tamed, civilized, controlled, and limited to decent human purposes, while coercion, the most evil form of power, will be reduced to a minimum."

Interest group liberalism encourages a political culture of self-restraint and moderation. In popular wisdom, half a loaf is better than none. The polity will "generate politicians who learn how to deal gently with opponents, who struggle endlessly in building and holding coalitions together, who doubt the possibilities of great change, who seek compromises" (Dahl, 1967, 329).

Abuse of power by an autocratic state is only one of the demons that interest group liberalism hopes to exorcise. Drawing inspiration from de Tocqueville, it promises protection from the "tyranny of the majority" by keeping political participation by the masses indirect. "At least since de Tocqueville," Wolfe (1977, 305) writes, "intermediate associations have fascinated political observers, who view them as central to the stability of democratic society. In theory, mediating mechanisms work to the degree that they temper the excessive demands on the citizen and the authoritarian needs of the state, producing the happy compromise known as pluralism."

Interest group liberalism is distrustful of direct participation, opting for the controlled negotiation among leaders of interest groups with a stake in decisions. "How could a mass democracy work if all the people were deeply involved in politics?" Berelson, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee (1954) wonder. "Lack of interest by some people is not without its benefits. . . . Extreme interest goes with extreme partisanship and might culminate in

rigid fanaticism that could destroy democratic processes if generalized throughout the community." Dahl (1967) heralds it as a compromise "between the political equality of all adult citizens on one side, and the desire to limit their sovereignty on the other. As a political system, the compromise, except for one important interlude [the civil war], has proved to be durable. What is more, Americans seem to like it."

Just how much they like it, of course, is challenged by the countertheme of *popular democracy*, which emphasizes direct participation. Many writers recognize the tension between theme and countertheme and make it central to their analysis. "The history of politics in capitalist societies," Wolfe (1977, 9) writes, "is the history of the tension between liberal and democratic conceptions of the state." Weaver (1981, 281) sees their collision reflected throughout newspaper and television journalism in America – a collision between "the populist notion that the people should rule directly in their own felt interests, and the republican notion that established institutions should rule in behalf of the public interest under the scrutiny of the electorate."

The countertheme emphasizes the elitist nature of the American political system and its departure from a more egalitarian ideal. Pole (1978, ix) traces the idea of equality in American history, making a strong case for its challenging position: "Only at comparatively rare – and then generally stormy – intervals has the idea of equality dominated American debates on major questions of policy. Equality is normally the language of the underdog."

A good contemporary expression of the countertheme is found in Wolin's (1981, 2) editorial in the founding issue of the journal *Democracy: A Journal of Political Renewal and Radical Change:*

Every one of the country's primary institutions – the business corporation, the government bureaucracy, the trade union, the research and education industries, the mass propaganda and entertainment media, and the health and welfare system – is antidemocratic in spirit, design, and operation. Each is hierarchical in structure, authority oriented, opposed in principle to equal participation, unaccountable to the citizenry, elitist and managerial, and disposed to concentrate increasing power in the hands of the few and to reduce political life to administration.

The countertheme emphasizes how little elections change anything, since, regardless of who is elected, the rules of American politics favor the rich and powerful few at the expense of the many. It is the people versus the interests, the power elite, the ruling class, the military–industrial complex. Or as the populist governor of Kansas, L. D. Lewelling, put it in an earlier era, "the plutocrats, the aristocrats, and all the other rats" (quoted in Canovan, 1981, 51).

3. *Dependence themes: Self-reliance versus mutuality.* "The 'success story' and the respect accorded to the self-made man are distinctly American, if anything is," writes Williams (1960). "The ideal individual struggles successfully against adversity and overcomes more powerful forces.... 'Self-made' men and women remain attractive, as do people who overcome poverty or bureaucracy," writes Gans (1979, 50) about values in the news.

In this theme, the best thing we can teach children is how to stand on their own two feet. The people to admire are those who start at the bottom and work hard to get ahead, relying on their own judgment and resources rather than on others. Striving, risk taking, achieving, independence. To try hard and overcome difficult obstacles is creditable. To fail because of lack of effort when success is possible is reprehensible. Calculated risk taking is frequently necessary to overcome obstacles and, indeed, is part of striving. One cannot expect everything to go one's way, and bad luck is simply an obstacle that one must overcome – not something to whine about.

Starting out poor is a special case of bad luck. The truly admirable are those who, by striving, are able to overcome the obstacles of humble birth and go on to achieve fame and fortune. The self-made man or woman embodies all of these ideals – a person who has pluck and resourcefulness, tries hard, makes use of the opportunities that come along, is not thrown off or demoralized by the bad luck or evil encountered, learns by mistakes and improves, until material success is finally achieved.

The nineteenth-century popular novelist Horatio Alger parlayed this formula into his own worldly success. He used some variation of it in about 120 novels, estimated to have sold at least 17 million copies. He was, to quote Fink (1962, 30), "a major pump station on the pipe line that carried the American dream."

Alger's heroes were not selfish individualists, who believed in every man for himself and the devil take the hindmost. They had character traits that kept them on the path of righteousness and made them deserving of their success. Typically, they found a rich patron to help them along. His villains were also lucky and shrewd, but their character flaws ultimately led to their downfall. The Alger hero, "Ragged Dick," thinks of his best friend as he watches his bootblacking days disappearing behind him: "'I wish Fosdick was as well off as I am,' he thought generously. But he determined to help his less fortunate friend, and assist him up the ladder as he advanced himself" (Alger 1962, 215). There is no tension, then, between the idea of charity toward the less fortunate, or noblesse oblige, and the *self-reliance* theme.

It is independence, not selfishness, that is challenged in the *mutuality* countertheme. Mutuality assumes more reciprocity and equality of status

than is implied by charity. The central issue is whether we recognize our interdependence and mutual need for others and treat them accordingly, or use other people as a means to personal advancement.

In the countertheme, striving for individual success is an ego trip. One achieves self-actualization not through individual achievement but by creating a decent and humane society in which people are sensitive to the needs of others and mutually supportive. The best thing we can teach children is to need and care about other people. The people to admire are those who are more concerned about being true to their friends and the welfare of the group than about getting ahead. The beloved community. The Woodstock nation.

"It's easy to produce examples," Slater (1970) observes, "of the many ways in which Americans try to minimize, circumvent, or deny the interdependence upon which all human societies are based. We seek a private house, a private laundry, self-service stores, and do-it-yourself skills of every kind. An enormous technology seems to have set itself the task of making it unnecessary for one human being ever to ask anything of another in the course of going about his or her daily business." In the words of the poet Donne, "No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main."

4. *Nationalism themes: Global responsibility versus America first.* World War II produced a reversal in the status of theme and countertheme. *Global responsibility*, until then a countertheme in public discourse, became official doctrine, embraced by both major political parties as political elites found consensus in the repudiation of a discredited isolationism.

America first, even during its years as a dominant theme, always represented a limited form of isolationism: It meant separation from the conflict among European powers and the avoidance of specifically political entanglements. Active involvement in the affairs of other countries in the Western Hemisphere and in international commerce were taken for granted. George Washington's Farewell Address not only declared "It is our true policy to steer clear of permanent alliances with any portion of the foreign world" but also exhorted the nation to "Cultivate peace and harmony with all." Thomas Jefferson's inaugural address called for "Peace, commerce, and honest friendship with all nations – entangling alliances with none."

This kind of isolationism was never incompatible with expansionism in what was regarded as U.S. turf. The Monroe Doctrine, in telling European powers to stay out of this hemisphere, managed to affirm both a pan-American isolationism *and* U.S. expansionism. The (then) countertheme of global responsibility was reflected in the idea of America's international

mission as a light unto nations. "Behold a republic . . . which shakes thrones and dissolves aristocracies by its silent example," intoned William Jennings Bryan in 1900.

As long as America's international mission was a matter of setting an example and its expansionism was limited to the Western Hemisphere, there was no real challenge to the dominant theme. It was only with the expansionism of the late nineteenth century that global responsibility emerged in political discourse as a genuine countertheme. The most influential voice was that of the naval historian Alfred Thayer Mahan, who advocated an expanded navy that would enable the United States to become a true global power and not merely a regional one. Gunboat diplomacy, for Mahan, was not a matter of pursuing selfish national interests but a more active way of achieving America's international mission. The expansion of American influence in the world would bring enlightenment to backward peoples and confer upon them the bounties of Christianity and American political genius.

With the advent of World War II and the cold war, public discourse fully embraced the global responsibility theme. American withdrawal from the world after World War I and its failure to support the League of Nations were treated as tragic errors, to be contrasted with support for the United Nations and the idea of collective security after World War II. The concept of no entangling alliances with European powers was defined as a historical anachronism, inappropriate for the modern world. A bipartisan consensus embraced a dominant U.S. role in the creation of political–military alliances, not only in Europe but in other regions as well. No more Fortress America: one world. Think globally. What Franklin Delano Roosevelt had declared in 1937 in a contested discourse now seemed an obvious truism: "The U.S. must, for the sake of their own future, give thought to the rest of the world."

Neither theme nor countertheme has a monopoly on nationalist and patriotic symbolism. The global responsibility theme can be invoked without using such symbolism as it is in ideas of common security and ecological interdependence among nations. But the United States as the leader of the free world, as fulfilling its international mission of defending and spreading political liberty and free markets to the benighted, allows for plenty of flag waving.

Popular wisdom and cultural resonances

Popular wisdom, as I argued earlier, is simultaneously a cultural and personal resource. On the one hand, it encapsulates the lessons of commonly

shared life experiences and has a concrete reference point in people's direct or vicarious experiential knowledge. On the other hand, these maxims and analogies to everyday life events frequently resonate with broad cultural themes.

Not every bit of popular wisdom is tied to some larger theme. Much of it is situational. "He who hesitates is lost" and "There will always be human error" suggest no larger theme in the abstract, but put in the context of an issue, they may invoke cultural resonances. "He who hesitates is lost" can be used to suggest that failure to proceed with nuclear power now will cost a future generation the energy it needs for continued economic growth. Put in this context, it invokes the progress through technology theme. Similarly, "There will always be human error," put in the context of the dangers of nuclear power, invokes the autonomous technology component of the countertheme.

The rules of thumb and analogies to everyday life in popular wisdom are specific devices for expressing cultural themes. They concretize and condense the themes in the same way that a particular metaphor or catch phrase expresses a frame on an issue. Media human interest stories of people who respond to plant closings by trying harder and taking initiative instead of giving up invoke the self-reliance theme in the same way that readjustment stories in conversations do. Each forum has its own ways of tapping cultural resonances in framing an issue.

When the resonances of widely used popular wisdom on an issue are the same resonances invoked by a media frame, it is easy for people to make a connection between this frame and popular wisdom. If the same popular wisdom can then be linked to experiential knowledge on an issue, this becomes integrated into the frame as well. Hence, common cultural resonances are a key mechanism for linking resources in an integrated resource strategy.

All four of the issues considered here engage at least one of the themes. Sometimes the most prominent resonances in media discourse correspond to those invoked by popular wisdom, but this varies from issue to issue, as does the dialectic between theme and countertheme. Again, to understand how the general process operates, it is useful to examine each issue in detail.

Troubled industry

Media discourse on this issue engages both power and dependence themes. Self-reliance enters the discourse in a complicated way. Two of our critical discourse moments centered on large corporations seeking government

help to avoid bankruptcy. As described in Chapter 3, many commentators were intrigued by the central irony that apostles of free enterprise were seeking government handouts. "Socialism for the rich and capitalism for the poor" conveyed it in a catch phrase. Implicitly, the government bailouts of Lockheed and Chrysler were framed in the context of a broader discourse on welfare.

The resonances of the self-reliance theme on this issue function mainly to embarrass and discredit the proponents of the loan who are politically allied with opponents of the welfare state. The proponents of the loan would decouple this issue from the self-reliance theme by framing it as irrelevant. No double standard is involved because one is talking about apples and oranges. In the various versions of the PARTNERSHIP frame, the issue is the relationship of state and market, not individual and society. The relationship between government and business has nothing to do with people being able to stand on their own two feet. Hence, the self-reliance theme is viewed as a red herring.

In contrast, the FREE ENTERPRISE frame calls attention to the central irony. There are not apples and oranges here, but two varieties of apple. Individuals compete in a labor market, whereas companies compete in a commodity market, but in either case, it is the natural forces of the market that weed out the weak from the strong. Harsh as these forces are, they reward the virtues emphasized by the self-reliance theme.

FREE ENTERPRISE is not the only frame that appreciates the central irony. One can be critical of the double standard but favor a welfare state or a more radical reorganization of the economy. The CAPITAL FLIGHT frame invites the government to intervene, not to guarantee loans to Lockheed or Chrysler, but to encourage employee ownership and involve the workers and communities affected in decisions about the flow of capital. However, this frame was invisible in the media discourse at these moments.

The net result is that even though the commentator who invokes the central irony of "welfare for the rich" may not advocate the FREE ENTERPRISE frame, this is the frame that gets a boost. The combination of its strong resonances with the self-reliance theme and its much greater visibility compared to CAPITAL FLIGHT make it the major beneficiary of invoking the central irony.

If the PARTNERSHIP frame is hurt by the self-reliance theme, it has other cultural resonances working in its favor. Regardless of whether government or industry is the senior partner, this frame resonates with the interest group liberalism theme. Business, government, and labor are the organized interests involved in the bargaining game. The agreements that emerge from this negotiation among public, industry, and union officials

represent compromises that should provide the broad base of support that enables them to work. Guaranteed loans to Lockheed and Chrysler are part of the bargaining game, a chip that the government offers in return for concessions from the other players. They cannot be judged outside of the context of this larger game. Opposition to compromise, in this frame, comes from zealots who do not accept the power sharing that is part of our pluralist system.

Finally, the America first countertheme is invoked by a FOREIGN INVASION frame that is prominent at some critical discourse moments. Its symbolism suggests a continuation of the World War II military conflict with Japan, and the countertheme is invoked by the catch phrase "Buy American." The MacNelly cartoon (Appendix B, Cartoon 3) expresses it well.

In sum, prominent packages in media discourse resonate with the self-reliance and interest group liberalism themes and, in some periods, with the America first countertheme. Another countertheme, popular democracy, resonates with a CAPITAL FLIGHT frame, but since this frame is invisible in media discourse, so is the resonant countertheme.

Chapter 3 described the strong tendency of media discourse to blame the Japanese for the problems of the steel industry. Of twenty-seven blaming attributions, some 63 percent focused on Japan or other countries as the primary culprits. But this FOREIGN INVASION frame had very low prominence during other critical discourse moments.

Resonances in conversations

There is a recurrent bit of popular wisdom that came up in more than half of the groups discussing troubled industry. Although it is put in somewhat different words in different groups, the essence of it is that whatever happens, the rich somehow manage to get richer and the poor people are hurt. Overall, some version of this sentiment was expressed on this issue in more than half of the total groups and in more than 70 percent of the black groups. Its characteristic use is illustrated in the following two examples.[3]

Characters:

Lil, a nurse, in her forties.
Chris, a nurse, in her forties.
Linda, a nurse, in her twenties.
Nora, a nurse, in her forties.
Judy, a dental assistant, in her thirties.
Marie, a nurse, in her forties.

[Responding to the facilitator's question of whether the issue of troubled industry has affected anyone personally.]

Lil: Well, my father worked down at Quincy Shipyard for many years, so I can identify with that; I was born and brought up in Quincy for quite a number of years, and I know how much the city relies on the shipyard.

[Later, in response to the facilitator's question of whether larger groups stand to gain or lose.]

Cris: All right, the Quincy Shipyard, now. [Real estate developer] Flatley's gonna take that over. It's like everybody – it's almost like it was planned. Ya know, all of a sudden it's closed, and all of a sudden Flatley is right there to make his millions, you know. He'll build his condos and his hotels and, ya know –

Linda: – so he'll gain while other people lose.

Cris: Yeah.

Nora: The bigger, bigger industries will gain....

Judy: Yeah, money goes to money. It always seems to follow suit that money goes to money, and the poor guy that's honest and goes in there and he does his job –

Marie: It always affects the working class.

Lil: – the lower-income and the working-class families.

Characters:

Duane, a machinist, in his thirties.
Barbara, a teacher in an after-school program, in her thirties.
Lucy, a human service worker, in her thirties.

[They are responding to the PARTNERSHIP cartoon, no. 1, Appendix B.]

Duane: I think that this cartoon is full of it.

Lucy: I think this cartoon is a cartoon.

Facilitator: Can you say more?

Duane: The government really don't care too much about its part because it's going to get his. And the businessman, I can take him or leave him. It's the labor person, in the long run, that's gonna be left out.

Barbara: That's the one that's the most poor, and he's not getting anywhere.

[Later, in response to the FOREIGN INVASION cartoon, no. 3, Appendix B.]

Lucy: The United States has put itself in a predicament – I mean, they have caused poverty to be happening in this country. The rich

are getting richer and the poor are getting poorer. They don't see to it that the poor are fed. This is supposed to be the land of the free and the home of the brave and the land of opportunity, equal opportunity. But I don't see anything equal about it. When there are rich folks over here, across the way from me, who have more than what they need, and right around the corner there are places like Rosie's Place [a shelter for the homeless]. And they don't have enough to eat or folks sleeping on the streets.

[Later, in response to the CAPITAL FLIGHT cartoon, no. 4, Appendix B.]

Duane: [They say] that we all need to pull together as one in order to keep this company above water. And then going back in the office, sitting up there calling somebody out there in California, saying, "Well, hey, you know I just told a man, 'Hey, we all pull together, everything is going to be all right.' But I'm telling you, man, hey, we're going to move out. We're going to shut down this department, and that department, and we're going to ship the things down to Haiti. Because all we've got to do is pay them people thirty-seven cents an hour where I'm paying somebody up here ten dollars an hour to run the same machine." And they leave us, and what do they do? They leave the worker standing still.

The only other resonances embodied in popular wisdom on the troubled industry issue invoke the self-reliance theme, but this occurred in only 14 percent of the groups. It took the form of emphasizing a loss of job as one of the facts of life; being able to bounce back from such misfortune instead of falling apart is a measure of one's character. The event itself is treated, in such discussions, as the result of natural market forces beyond human agency. This bit of popular wisdom shares the cultural resonances of the FREE ENTERPRISE frame.

None of the other themes invoked by media frames received any visibility in the discussions of troubled industry. The interest group liberalism theme was, if anything, repudiated in frequent assertions that the partnership idea is fraudulent, since labor inevitably gets the short end of the stick. Nor did the America first theme receive more than token support through the occasional invocation of the "buy American" slogan. Expressions of anti-Japanese sentiment were rare, with the Japanese typically given credit for the discipline of their work force and their spirit of cooperation, in invidious comparison to American workers and companies. Nor are Third World workers blamed for their willingness to accept lower wages, since they are widely regarded as too desperate to have a choice. The frames that invoke

these themes fail to connect with any popular wisdom that shares the same resonances.

I argued earlier that the use of popular wisdom that shares resonances with media frames helps to promote an integrated resource strategy. There is some support for this hypothesis in the troubled industry conversations. More than two-thirds of the groups that utilized popular wisdom resonating with the popular democracy countertheme also were successful in using an integrated resource strategy; only one-third of the groups that omitted such popular wisdom used an integrated strategy ($p < .05$). Furthermore, three of the five groups that used popular wisdom invoking the self-reliance theme also achieved an integrated resource strategy in constructing a shared frame.

The predominance of the popular democracy theme in these conversations stands in sharp contrast to its virtual invisibility in media discourse. The result is that the CAPITAL FLIGHT frame, in some version, is the dominant one in these conversations among working people in spite of being so rarely displayed in national media discourse. Duane's parable of the boss who privately tells his confederate that the company is moving to Haiti is all the more remarkable for this absence. Whatever its source, Duane's understanding and use of the CAPITAL FLIGHT frame cannot rest on this idea's having been relentlessly pounded home in media discourse.

The driving force in these discussions is not the media but an experientially based popular wisdom that resonates with the popular democracy countertheme – in spite of its lack of prominence in media discourse. Nor is the prominence of the self-reliance theme in media discourse reflected in a similar prominence in these discussions, coming up in only 14 percent. For the overwhelming majority of the groups in this sample, the policy debate between advocates of PARTNERSHIP and FREE ENTERPRISE frames was largely irrelevant. And the PARTNERSHIP frame, in particular, seemed to find no resonances for its interest group liberalism theme among these working people.

In sum, the popular wisdom of working people in discussing this issue leads to a very different set of resonances than the ones invoked by the dominant media frames. The countertheme of popular democracy is all but invisible in media discourse but is clearly the most important theme in popular discourse. The version of CAPITAL FLIGHT that appears in these conversations lacks the coherence and developed argumentation of the version in public discourse. With little or no help from the media, people on their own produce a less sophisticated populist version, sharing the same underlying frame and cultural resonances. One can only speculate

about the prominence of the CAPITAL FLIGHT frame in these conversations, given a media discourse that made it more culturally available.

Affirmative action

On this issue, rival frames compete with each other for the resonances of the self-reliance theme. The battleground centers on the symbol of equal opportunity: All packages lay claim to it. The self-reliance theme assumes equality of opportunity. With resourcefulness and a few breaks, even a poor bootblack can become a millionaire, but only if he is given a fighting chance to succeed.

For the REMEDIAL ACTION frame, affirmative action programs are necessary to achieve true equality of opportunity. "In order to get beyond racism, we must first take into account race," wrote Justice Harry Blackmun in his opinion on the Bakke case in 1978. "And in order to treat some persons equally, we must treat them differently." Institutional racism is not a thing of the past but a present reality.

NO PREFERENTIAL TREATMENT frames are equally adamant in their invocation of equality of opportunity. The core concept of justice poses equal opportunity for all individuals against statistical parity for government-approved groups. "A quota is a divider of society, a creator of castes, and it is all the worse for its racial basis, especially in a society desperately striving for an equality that will make race irrelevant" (Bickel 1975, 133).

During the 1960s, demonstrators for civil rights frequently carried signs reading "Equal Rights for All Americans." In the contest over affirmative action, this catch phrase no longer differentiated among competing frames, as all sought the cultural resonances invoked by equal opportunity. No other cultural themes are engaged by the media discourse on this issue.

Resonances in conversations

Racial differences in the framing of affirmative action overwhelm any easy generalizations to be made about cultural resonances on this issue. Black and white groups differ radically in what they take for granted and in the starting point for their discussion. Everyone is in favor of self-reliance and the equal opportunity it implies, but alternative ways of framing the issue make this theme relevant in different ways.

As I argued in Chapter 5, blacks and whites alike partake in what Carbaugh (1988) describes as a discourse on the person as an individual. Persons as individuals have rights, and social groups are moved to the back

of this discourse. Although the term *equal opportunity* could apply to the claims of a group as well as those of an individual, the discourse privileges the rights of individuals and makes the articulation of collective claims problematic.

In white and interracial groups, it is universal in discussions of affirmative action for one or more people to claim that everyone should be judged as an individual, but the same assertion is made in the majority of black groups as well. This belief is as much a part of African-American culture as it is of the culture of other groups. Black groups, then, must contend with the formidable appeal of an anti-affirmative action frame that emphasizes completely color-blind policies.

The popular wisdom used in 88 percent of the black groups assumes or makes explicit the continued existence of disadvantage and discrimination in the lives of black people; blacks remain, as in the past, a have-not group, and no one argues that affirmative action has changed this fundamental fact of life in America. For close to half of the black groups, affirmative action fails to provide truly equal opportunity and, at the same time, stigmatizes blacks and causes resentment among whites.

About half of the black groups neutralized the resonances of NO PREFERENTIAL TREATMENT by emphasizing the continuing absence of equal opportunity for blacks and other minorities. The others continued to wrestle with the dilemma it presents. They expressed sympathy for poor whites who are also struggling for economic survival and anger at how affirmative action programs set poor whites and blacks against each other. In the symbolic contest between NO PREFERENTIAL TREATMENT and REMEDIAL ACTION over the meaning of equal opportunity, the former holds its own quite well even in black groups.

Among white and interracial groups, however, it is a different contest. Again, there were two patterns of about equal frequency, both endorsing the idea that people should be judged as individuals. Half of the groups did not acknowledge the existence of present-day discrimination against blacks; for them, equal opportunity exists, and there is no excuse for race-conscious programs. The other half of the white groups and all of the interracial groups acknowledged that blacks and other minorities continue to operate at a disadvantage, in spite of affirmative action programs. Acknowledging that full equality of opportunity has not yet been achieved forced them to wrestle with a dilemma and neutralized the resonances of the NO PREFERENTIAL TREATMENT frame.

In sum, two separate symbolic contests were going on in the black and white groups over the resonances of the self-reliance theme. In the black groups, where continuing discrimination is taken for granted, the appeal

of color blindness created a dilemma for people. In the white and interracial groups, where the appeal of equal opportunity for all individuals is universal, the knowledge of continuing disadvantage for blacks created the dilemma.

Nuclear power

This issue most obviously engages technology themes, but political power and nationalism themes also have some secondary relevance. The dialectic between the progress theme and countertheme on technology is reflected in direct competition between frames. I noted earlier the images of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, which are never far from the surface in discourse on nuclear power. Such images of vast destruction inevitably resonate with the countertheme.

The PROGRESS package on nuclear power handled the potential tension between nuclear power as a symbol of technological progress and the image of a technology that might destroy its creator through a dualism about nuclear energy. During the period in which it reigned supreme, "atoms for peace" was an uncontested symbol that invoked the progress through technology theme, and the countertheme was safely compartmentalized in the nuclear weapons discourse.[4]

Nuclear dualism broke down during the 1970s, even among many of the keepers of the faith. With the advent of the Carter administration, proliferation of nuclear weapons became a presidential priority issue. To deal with the proliferation problem, Carter tried to promote stronger international control over the spread of nuclear technology, including reactor technology. Although a strong supporter of nuclear power generally, he turned against the breeder reactor lest the plutonium it produced be diverted to weapons use. Atoms for peace and atoms for war no longer appeared to be separate paths. Subliminal mushroom clouds had begun to gather over even official discourse on this issue.

At the same time, dualism was being undermined by the emergence of the safety issue. If a serious accident that releases large amounts of radiation into the atmosphere is possible at a nuclear reactor, then the destructive potential of this awesome energy is not confined to bombs. The additional problem of disposing of radioactive waste from nuclear reactors completed the breakdown of the compartmentalization that earlier had relegated the countertheme to the discourse on nuclear weapons.

Two frames on nuclear power offer strong resonances with the harmony with nature countertheme, but only one of them has significant visibility in media discourse. The environmental wing of the antinuclear movement,

epitomized by Friends of the Earth, offers a SOFT PATHS frame. Nuclear power, in this frame, is a symbol of the wrong kind of technology: highly centralized and dangerous to the earth's sensitive ecology. By changing our careless and wasteful way of life to conserve energy as much as possible and by developing alternative sources of energy that are ecologically safe and renewable and have a "human face," we can become a society more in harmony with its natural environment. Split wood, not atoms.

A second frame, RUNAWAY, resonates strongly with the autonomous technology subtheme. Its signature metaphors draw on familiar ones to symbolize a technology that has taken on an independent life of its own. Nuclear power is a genie that we have summoned and are now unable to force back into its bottle, a Frankenstein's monster that might turn on its creator. In a religious version, humans have dared to play God in tampering with the fundamental forces of nature and the universe. He who sows the wind reaps the whirlwind.

Prior to the accident at Three Mile Island (TMI), this frame was invisible in our media samples except for cartoons, but after TMI and Chernobyl it became the single most prominent frame in every medium. In sixty-seven cartoons after TMI, for example, it was represented in two-thirds of them, with the nearest competitor at under 20 percent. In contrast, SOFT PATHS scored under 10 percent in every media sample, with a single exception: It reached a high water mark of 14 percent in opinion columns after TMI. But RUNAWAY and SOFT PATHS complement each other rather than compete in jointly raising the countertheme. Together, they make it much more prominent in media discourse after TMI than the progress through technology theme.

The popular democracy countertheme enters media discourse through the resonance of the NO PUBLIC ACCOUNTABILITY frame. On the one hand, we have the nucleocrats who run the industry and their buddies in government agencies who are supposed to represent the public but, in fact, act as promoters of the industry. On the other hand, we have the people who suffer the consequences in the form of higher electricity costs and risk of life and limb. Nuclear power is a classic case of the "people" versus the "interests."

After TMI, NO PUBLIC ACCOUNTABILITY received quite a bit of media prominence, second only to the RUNAWAY frame discussed earlier. Television is its best medium, where it appeared in 35 percent of the utterances that imply some frame on nuclear power; even among cartoons, where RUNAWAY dominated the discourse, it is the frame of choice in almost 20 percent of them. These figures dropped considerably in our post-Chernobyl sample, however, where it was displayed mainly by invoking

comparison between Soviet officials hiding the magnitude of the Chernobyl accident and earlier official dissembling in the United States at the time of TMI.

Finally, there is one pronuclear frame that resonates with the America first countertheme. The ENERGY INDEPENDENCE frame draws a pronuclear meaning from the Arab oil embargo of 1973. The lesson is how dependence on foreign energy sources makes the United States vulnerable to political blackmail. Nuclear energy offers a practical alternative to imported oil. "Do we want to be dependent on the whims of Arab sheiks?" it asks. Nuclear energy, by ensuring independence, allows the United States to control its own destiny.

The ENERGY INDEPENDENCE frame had some visibility in media discourse, particularly in opinion columns, prior to TMI, but it became invisible after that point except in opinion columns, where it was displayed in some form in slightly over 10 percent. The weakness of this frame, then, makes the America first countertheme insignificant in media discourse on nuclear power.

In sum, the most important media resonances on nuclear power are with counterthemes, especially harmony with nature and popular democracy. Resonance with the progress through technology theme remains important, but supporters of nuclear power who would invoke it face the prospect of simultaneously invoking its countertheme. Since the countertheme is now more prominent in media frames on the nuclear power issue, any attempt to make use of technology themes by proponents is likely to backfire.

Resonances in conversations

Many discussions of nuclear power reflect the tension between the progress through technology theme and the harmony with nature countertheme. Overall, the countertheme is more dominant in the thinking of most groups about nuclear power, but some groups reach no working consensus on the issue or waver back and forth between frames. Finally, the popular democracy countertheme comes up in a significant minority of the groups.

The most widely used popular wisdom about nuclear power centers on the inevitability of human error. People understand that the safety of nuclear power depends on official regulations being carried out by ordinary working people like themselves. They frequently exchange stories whose lesson is the gap between official regulations and what actually happens on the work site. In addition, many are skeptical about the willingness of the companies that run the plants to give safety priority over saving costs and increasing profits. Fully one-third of the groups explicitly generalized

How people negotiate meaning

this popular wisdom in the form of some maxim about the inevitability of human error. The following example is from the same group that discussed affirmative action in Chapter 5.

Characters:

Billie, a delivery van driver, in her fifties.
Anne, a cleaning woman, in her thirties.
Debbie, a bus driver, in her thirties.
Linda, a temporary worker, in her twenties.

(*Discussing the initial, open-ended question on nuclear power.*)

Billie: I think of all the yo-yos that are around that there just might be one, just one (*pop*) —

Anne: Guess what I read the other day. Of all professions — now, this will curl your hair real good — (*laughter*) nuclear power plant workers have the highest rate of alcoholism, which tells me that they're going to work probably half-pickled. (*laughter*) I mean, it's frightening.

Debbie: That's scary — when you think in terms of what could — what a nuclear power plant — it's terrifying.

Anne: You know, I stopped going to carnivals for the most part for the same reasons — that's my thought on nuclear power plants. I tell my kids — if there's an amusement park that is there permanently, that's one thing. You kind of know it's secure. But you don't know what person set up this ride today. What they were doing last night. (*laughter*) They could have been loaded or high as kites and put the thing together this morning. And I think that about nuclear power plants too.

Linda: It would be nice if, before they decided how we're going to run our lights and get our homes heated, that they would consider human lives a priority. How this is going to affect human lives. But that's the system we're under. They — it's motivated by greed, still.

Debbie: Or even if they do consider that — that human error just gets in the way. I mean, they may not have terrible motives — but then again too, excuse me, I think they're really necessary because we obviously need the energy that they generate. But I think they have to find a way to make them a lot safer than they are.

Billie: Part of it is the conditions in the world — the stress that people are under — which means that it's kind of scary. You don't know if they had a fight in the morning with their wife or if the coffee was

too hot. It doesn't take very much for people to get out of control. It really doesn't.

This popular wisdom resonates with the autonomous technology part of the countertheme. As we saw earlier, groups tend to begin their discussions of nuclear power by drawing on media discourse, and the examples they use lead them to this popular wisdom. Both the Chernobyl accident and the *Challenger* explosion had occurred earlier in the year; hence, both nuclear and nonnuclear examples were salient and were frequently used to make the point.

The result is that 80 percent of the discussions developed some version of the RUNAWAY frame on nuclear power, although not necessarily as the only or consensual package. Note that even in the preceding discussion, Debbie takes time out from building the shared RUNAWAY frame to note that she considers nuclear power plants necessary, and Linda attempts, without response, to introduce an alternative theme centered on the greed of the nuclear industry. The appeal of the RUNAWAY frame is only one part of the story.

There are other bits of popular wisdom that were used in about one-fourth of the groups that became part of a pronuclear PROGRESS frame — as either a rival package developed by a subgroup or, in one case, as the exclusive and uncontested frame. The popular wisdom here emphasizes the naturalness of risk as part of life and part of the unavoidable cost of progress. Nuclear power is, implicitly or explicitly, not a different order of risk than we have accepted with other technologies. The following example is from a group we encountered in Chapter 5, discussing troubled industry and affirmative action. On nuclear power, they fall into opposing subgroups, with Michael and Marlene arguing for nuclear power and Marie and Sally arguing against it.

Characters:

Michael, an office manager in a computer company, in his thirties.
Marie, a cashier in a supermarket, in her twenties.
Sally, a clerk at a dry cleaners, in her twenties.
Marlene, a bookkeeper, in her twenties.

(*Discussing the initial, open-ended question on nuclear power.*)

Michael: I just want to say something about what Marie said about cancer and all this stuff. As I was walking down Charles last night, it was pitch black, and I said, this is a good place to get mugged and killed. And I suddenly thought to myself (*laughter*) — and I suddenly thought to myself, you know, (*laughter*) whenever you die,

that's your destiny. Whether or not somebody jumped out and mugged you or you die from a spill, I mean, you're going to die. I mean your time was labeled and you were going to die. Right? I think nuclear power is *great*. The thing that *isn't* great about it is the waste. Now see, this waste, as I wrote on my [questionnaire] there, this is 1986. I'm sure marvelous scientists can put guys in outer space and stuff –

Michael: – and have them blown up too –

Marie: – there must be a way to utilize this waste.

Sally: Whenever there is a leak, it's always passed down the line: "you're responsible, you're responsible, you're responsible –" "You know, what about these people that are hurt from it, and their families that are dead, and so forth. So, we'll send them a card. We're sorry –

Marlene: Well, I think the greatest example of really how bad the media can be, there's the Chernobyl accident. I mean, when they had that, the *Boston Herald* and the *Boston Globe* on the *front page*, before they had any official reports at all, said, "Thousands of people killed instantly." Now, nuclear power don't kill you in-stantly. So, first of all, they were very wrong in that instance. They had everybody in the United States in a panic, literally.

Sally: What's the difference if they died instantly or they died? Thousands of people *did* die because of a mistake that happened there.

Marlene: Look at how many plane crashes there have been. Look at how many people have *died* on planes. That's like saying, let's do away with planes, then, too. And let's do away with cars because thousands of people get killed in cars. More people get killed in car accidents than people dying from nuclear power explosions or leaks a year.

Marie: So far.

Marlene: So far.

Theme and countertheme are put forth by different advocates in the preceding discussion, but a more common pattern is for groups to assert the importance of technological progress while decoupling nuclear power from this theme. They do this by declaring it to be of a different order than these other risks while applying the theme to alternative technologies. The same arguments that Michael uses in the previous discussion about "marvelous scientists [who] can put guys in outer space" are used to argue for developing solar energy or other safe and renewable energy sources as

practical alternatives. The appeal of a technofix is still present in many discussions that reject nuclear power as the means of providing it.

About one-sixth of the groups used popular wisdom that resonates with the popular democracy countertheme. Linda's comment about the system's being run on greed suggests this idea, although it failed to become part of a shared frame in her group. Nuclear power, in this frame, is another example of powerful interests pursuing profit with little or no regard for the public interest. The following group is the same one used to illustrate Marjorie's moral indignation about spending money for nuclear power while children are starving in America (Chapter 3) and an especially explicit class discourse on troubled industry (Chapter 5).

Characters:

Paul, a tire changer, in his thirties.
Daniel, a mover, in his thirties.
Marjorie, a waitress, in her forties.

(Discussing the initial, open-ended question on nuclear power.)

Paul: We don't need 'em. Big business don't give a shit about nobody else.

Daniel: We don't need them. The bottom line, make money.

Paul: We could burn, um, tires – junk tires. There's a way to do tires now – it's clean enough to do, but they won't do it because –

Marjorie: The money.

Daniel: That's why.

In sum, there is a close correspondence between the resonances in media discourse and conversations. The countertheme of harmony with nature – but primarily its autonomous technology subtheme – is the dominant one in both. The mainstream theme of progress through technology is decoupled from nuclear technology more often than it is invoked in support of it. A second countertheme, popular democracy, has a much more second-ary importance but was present in about one-sixth of the conversations. As with troubled industry, counterthemes provide the most important res-onances with the most frequently used popular wisdom.

Arab–Israeli conflict

The dialectic between global responsibility and America first is engaged on Arab–Israeli conflict, and it is the countertheme that wins decisively in

media discourse. The theme is strongly reflected in the STRATEGIC IN-TERESTS frame. This takes for granted the U.S role as a global power with major geopolitical interests in the Middle East. This region is one theater of major power competition, a battleground of the Cold War. The regional participants, in this frame, are strategic assets for the superpowers. It would be unthinkable for the United States to withdraw from the Middle East – a return to a Fortress America mentality that is incapable of dealing with the realities of the twentieth-century world.

The countertheme, America first, resonates with a rival frame, FEUD-ING NEIGHBORS. The Arab–Israeli conflict, in this frame, is somebody else's quarrel. The reasons the Arabs and the Jews are fighting are no more relevant than those of the Hatfields and the McCoys. Each new outrage creates a new grievance that produces retaliation and keeps the feud going. U.S. military aid and involvement only make matters worse, providing ever more powerful weapons that simply increase the devastation of innocent bystanders.

In the dyadic competition between these two frames, FEUDING NEIGHBORS easily wins in media discourse (see Chapter 3 and Figure 3.1). STRATEGIC INTERESTS was important from the 1950s through the mid-1970s, when many commented on the flow of oil and the Soviet role in the Middle East. But from the 1977 Sadat visit to Jerusalem to the present, this frame no longer offered any serious challenge to FEUDING NEIGHBORS in media discourse. With the Soviet Union relegated to a minor player and oil anxiety transferred to the Persian Gulf, the STRA-TEGIC INTEREST frame lost its prominence in framing Arab–Israeli conflict. The collapse of this frame means that, with respect to cultural resonance, it is the countertheme of America first that increasingly dom-inates media discourse on Arab–Israeli conflict. The ending of the Cold War is likely to reinforce this dominance even further.

Resonances in conversations

More than one-third of the groups converged on the same popular wisdom in understanding Arab–Israeli conflict. It rests on an analogy to conflicts within their personal experience – particularly fights between siblings, spouses, and neighbors. Depending on which analogy they choose, there are some differences in emphasis but also some common lessons. First, the fight has its own dynamic and is more about itself than about the ostensible object of the conflict; second, outsiders should remain above the battle and not take sides.

Cultural resonances

Applied to the relationships between one's own country and other countries, this popular wisdom has a strong resonance with the America first countertheme. Everyone endorses a peacemaker role if there is one, but military intervention of any sort is likely to make matters worse in this frame. Basically, the United States is an outsider that can do little and should mind its own business. The following group provides a typical example of how a group uses popular wisdom in constructing a frame on this issue:

Characters:

Charlotte, a bookkeeper, in her thirties.
Floyd, a printing technician, in his thirties.
Dori, a secretary, in her thirties.
Wilma, a kitchen worker, in her twenties.
Alvin, a roofer, in his twenties.

(Discussing the initial, open-ended question on Arab-Israeli conflict.)

Charlotte: Who cares?

(laughter)

Floyd: I think the United States should mind their business. I mean, it's like the religion between them two.

Dori: That's right.

Floyd: They're fighting over religion or whatever. But that's a way of life for them. I think they like it that way. They wouldn't know how to deal with it if they wasn't fighting, so I think they should leave them alone, and may the best man win.

Wilma: Think of it as the Hatfields and McCoys.

Charlotte: It'll go on.

Alvin: Didn't we get messed up enough times with a couple of wars? I'll say that and I'll leave my nose out of this.

(laughter)

Dori: You said, yeah – he's right. Sticking our nose in where it is not welcome. I'm sure they do not welcome the U.S. sticking their nose in there.

Wilma: They only welcome their money. (laughs)

[Later, after the cartoons.]

Charlotte: They're using America and they're using Russia too.

Alvin: Think about it. These people are smart because they can play on our emotions so bad that we don't know what side we want to be

on. You see my point? They can go to the Russians and say, "We want to get this," and the other side say to the Russians, "We want to get this," and they do the same thing with us. Now, when they first started this war, I'm sure we had nothing to do with it. Neither did the Russians. The second one or the other had something to do with it, then everybody wants to get in the bang bang. Like a fight between two little kids. Your bigger brother comes up and helps you out, and their bigger brother comes up and help him out. It ends up being a big cluster for nothing – over a skate board, and it's just what it's breaking down to.

Slightly more than 10 percent of the groups used some version of a STRATEGIC INTEREST frame in understanding the U.S. relationship to Arab–Israeli conflict, and in several other groups people made passing reference to the relevance of oil or superpower competition, with no development of this idea in the conversation. But only in the following group is there any invocation of the global responsibility theme that is part of this frame.

Characters:
Arlene, a bookkeeper, in her forties.
Maggie, an office worker, in her fifties.

(Discussing the initial, open-ended question on Arab–Israeli conflict.)

Arlene: I don't know, my interpretation, I might be way out. I never read and I don't know too much about anything outside my house, and that's the truth –

Facilitator: Hey, you've got a lot of ideas about this stuff.

Arlene: But foreign policy, from what I understood, is you have to have allies. To get your way in this or that or whatever, and live in this world, you gotta have friends, allies, or what have you. So to me, they try to pick out the one that's going to be most beneficial to us. Let's be realistic. We're not – I used to think the United States was wonderful, perfect, it didn't do anything wrong. That's not true. What we did here with the Indians and everything. I mean we were just as malicious as whatchacallit. So we're not wonderful and we're not perfect, and it's very realistic that we want to survive in this world. So we do this for this guy, it's like "wiping" or whatever – (laughter) One hand washes the other. Just like when

we did this thing [the bombing of Libya] with the terrorists or what have you, the only one that stood behind us was Canada –
Maggie: – the Israeli, Canada, and British people, that was it. That's all.

The use of popular wisdom that draws on an analogy to familiar family and neighborhood conflicts seems to help groups achieve an integrated resource strategy. Almost 40 percent of the thirteen groups who used such popular wisdom linked experiential knowledge and media discourse in a shared frame, whereas less than 10 percent of the other groups used an integrated resource strategy ($p < .05$).

Compared to the one faint invocation of the global responsibility theme in the need for allies, the America first theme echoed through the discussion of close to half of the groups. In general, then, the countertheme dominates the theme in the popular wisdom used by working people to understand Arab–Israeli conflict.

Conclusion

Themes are normative and counterthemes are oppositional, but it is the counterthemes that dominate these conversations among working people on three of the four issues examined here. On two of the four – nuclear power and Arab–Israeli conflict – the counterthemes invoked by popular wisdom are the same as those invoked by the most prominent frames in media discourse. On these two issues, as noted in Chapter 7, media discourse tends to be the first resource used. It is plausible to argue that the prominence of the relevant frames in media discourse stimulates people to bring in popular wisdom with the same cultural resonances.

On troubled industry, however, the prominence of the popular democracy countertheme occurs in spite of, not because of, media prominence. People find supporting examples from the media discourse in spite of the invisibility of the CAPITAL FLIGHT frame that supports their popular wisdom. They find their way first to the countertheme through their experiential knowledge and popular wisdom, and only then to media discourse that supports their emergent frame. Furthermore, on two of the four issues (troubled industry and Arab–Israeli conflict), there is evidence that the explicit use of popular wisdom that supports counterthemes helps a group to formulate a frame that integrates personal experience and media discourse.

The net result is that, for these working people, resonances with counterthemes are central in their understanding of three of the four issues.

The popular wisdom used rarely supports frames promoted by officials that invoke the dominant cultural themes. The strong resonance of counter-themes in these conversations suggests considerable receptivity to critical frames and an entry point for collective action frames with the same resonances. But before turning to such connections, I consider one final question on the relevance of people's varying degrees of engagement with the four issues.

9

Proximity and engagement

Some issues are very close to people's lives, whereas others seem remote. When I first began analyzing media discourse on policy issues, I sought variation on this dimension. Without giving it a great deal of thought, I reasoned that troubled industry and affirmative action were relatively proximate issues, whereas nuclear power and Arab–Israeli conflict were distant ones.

The matter of what is proximate, however, turns out to be more complicated. It should not be confused with the use of experiential knowledge. The fact that people are able to apply their knowledge of how the world works from their own experiences does not necessarily make an issue proximate, since these experiences are typically more general than the issue domain. People may know from their own work experiences, for example, that official safety regulations are often ignored by themselves and their fellow workers without having had any experience with nuclear power plants. The use of experiential knowledge and popular wisdom involves extrapolating from the familiar to issues that are not necessarily proximate.

By the *proximity* of an issue, I mean the degree to which it has direct and immediate consequences for one's personal life. Journalists often reduce this meaning to economic consequences, using such terms as *pocketbook* or *bread-and-butter* issue. There is an implicit assumption here that their pocketbook is what people really care about and, hence, that these are more "real" than abstract issues such as nuclear power and Arab–Israeli conflict. There is a kernel of truth here, but it turns out to be seriously misleading and ultimately indefensible.

Since issues can be framed in multiple ways, it is possible to frame almost any issue as, in part, a pocketbook issue. Much of the affirmative action conversation focuses on jobs and economic opportunities. Nuclear power conversations frequently contain references to people's electricity bills or to property values in nearby towns with nuclear reactors. In talking about