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Social Norms in the Institutional Culture of the German Federal Parliament

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Abstract

The empirical study of the institutional subculture of the German Federal Parliament, conducted together with Friedrich Weidhardt, aimed to identify and describe the content and formal characteristics of informal social norms relating to the behavior of deputies. Most prominent are norms relating to solidarity behavior in the parliamentary party group. Legislative performance, in contrast, is presented as guided more by cognitive expectations. These norms have the function of stabilizing behavior, and are positively motivating. Informal norms specific to the parliamentary system are distinguished from functional norms, but cannot necessarily be interpreted in functional terms.

Social Norms in the Institutional Culture of the German Federal Parliament

Renate Mayntz

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Die gemeinsame mit Friedrich Weidhardt durchgeführte empirische Untersuchung der Parlamentskultur im Deutschen Bundestag zielt darauf ab, auf das Verhalten von Bundestagsgewählten bezogene informelle Normen zu identifizieren und sowohl inhaltlich wie bezogen auf ihre formalen Merkmale zu beschreiben. Am stärksten ausgeprägt sind informelle Normen, die sich auf das solidarische Verhalten innerhalb der Fraktionen und die legislative Tätigkeit beziehen. Die legislative Leistung wird dagegen stärker von kognitiven Erwartungen geleitet. Diese Normen haben die Funktion des Stabilisierens des Verhaltens und sind positiv motivierend. Informelle Normen spezifisch für das parlamentarische System werden von funktionalen Normen abgegrenzt, können aber nicht unbedingt funktional interpretiert werden.

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Abstract

The empirical study of the institutional subculture of the German Federal Parliament, conducted together with Friedhelm Neidhardt, aimed to identify and describe the content and formal characteristics of informal social norms relating to the behavior of deputies. Most prominent are norms relating to solidary behavior in the parliamentary party group. Legislative performance, in contrast, appears to be guided more by cognitive orientations. Prevalent normative expectations have the formal character of complex evaluative algorithms, and are basically restrictive (rather than positively motivating). Informal norms specific to the parliamentary arena clearly reflect the institutional context, but cannot necessarily be interpreted in functionalist terms.

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Die gemeinsam mit Friedhelm Neidhardt durchgeführte empirische Untersuchung der Parlamentskultur im Deutschen Bundestag zielte darauf ab, auf das Verhalten von Bundestagsabgeordneten bezogene informelle Normen zu identifizieren und sowohl inhaltlich wie bezogen auf ihre formalen Merkmale zu beschreiben. Am stärksten ausgeprägt sind informelle Normen, die sich auf das solidarische Verhalten innerhalb der Fraktionsgemeinschaft beziehen. Die legislative Tätigkeit der Abgeordneten scheint dagegen stärker von kognitiven Orientierungen gelenkt zu werden. Die sozialen Normen schreiben selten Verhalten konkret vor, sondern haben oft den Charakter komplexer Kalküle; sie sind außerdem eher restringierend als motivierend. Offensichtlich prägt der institutionelle Kontext die empirisch gefundene Parlamentskultur, die sich deshalb jedoch nicht funktionalistisch erklären läßt.

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One important step in the direction of terminological specification has been the analytical distinction between social system and cultural system which has become a hallmark of the Parsonian tradition of thinking. When Kroeber and Parsons advocated this distinction, they did so in contrast to a view prevalent among cultural anthropologists for whom societies are sociocultural systems in which social and cultural elements are inextricably intertwined, forming one integrated whole (Kroeber/Parsons 1956). The analytical distinction between culture and social system (or

* This paper has been presented at the Third German American Theory Conference in Bremen, June 23-25, 1988. Revisions benefited from the discussions at Bremen and especially from comments by Richard Münch and Neil Smelser. A book publication of the conference contributions is planned.

1. Concepts of Culture and the Object of this Study

Wherever a group of sociologists meet to discuss culture, as happened in Bremen at the third German-American Theory Conference, or again later in 1988 at the joint meeting of the Austrian, German, and Swiss sociological societies in Zürich,¹ it becomes quickly apparent that there is (still) no agreement about the meaning of this core term of sociological analysis. At one time or another, myths, values, eating and dressing habits, scientific theories, social norms, novels, and situational definitions have all been treated as elements of culture. The challenge "... to narrow the concept of 'culture' so that it includes less and reveals more" which Keesing posed (Keesing 1974) is still being met in different ways by different schools of thinking.

One important step in the direction of terminological specification has been the analytical distinction between social system and cultural system which has become a hallmark of the Parsonian tradition of thinking. When Kroeber and Parsons advocated this distinction, they did so in contrast to a view prevalent among cultural anthropologists for whom societies are sociocultural systems in which social and cultural elements are inextricably intertwined, forming one integrated whole (Kroeber/Parsons 1958). The analytical distinction between culture and social system (or social structure) excludes observable behavior patterns from the concept and characterizes culture as an

¹ The theme of this meeting was "Culture and Society".

idea (or ideational) system. Such systems, however, can still be conceptualized and circumscribed in different ways, for instance with respect to the emphasis placed on the ideas in peoples' heads or on collective representations such as myths or doctrines, or with respect to the (relative or even exclusive) emphasis on symbolic, cognitive/interpretive, or evaluative elements. As Michael Schmid points out in his paper (1989), not even Parsons himself was consistent in this, and has emphasized different elements on different occasions.

Regardless of these unresolved conceptual issues, the Parsonian distinction between cultural and social systems has the big advantage of directing attention to the relationship between them. Two sets of questions are thus raised, one referring to the causal linkage between both systems, the other to the delimitation of the social basis (or scope) of a culture. Both issues are familiar. While in Marxist orthodoxy the ideational superstructure is determined by the socio-economic basis, Parsons ascribes a regulative function to the cultural system. The major issue in debates over the scope of cultural systems is whether and to what extent sub-systems of society can be said to possess a culture of their own.² One answer has been that cultural differentiation is a correlate of social differentiation, and that it is hence meaningful to speak for instance of different regional, ethnic,

² This homogeneity - differentiation issue should be clearly distinguished from the coherence - incoherence issue; see the paper by Neil Smelser (1989).

class, and professional cultures within a given society. But where the integrative function of culture is stressed, social sub-systems have instead been viewed as societies en miniature, and attempts have been made to identify the manifestations of the encompassing cultural system of the society at large in the smaller unit. This has been true for local communities as well as for organizations (e.g. Arensberg 1954; Lammers/Hickson 1979). Of course, these views are not mutually exclusive. Subcultures may well have specific or even unique traits and manifest a wider societal culture at the same time.

In the sociology of organizations, both of these analytical routes have been pursued. Efforts have been made to identify how different national cultures affect the structure and functioning of organizations (Hofstede 1981), but likewise to prove the existence, and explain the genesis of an endogenous "organizational culture" that is specific to individual organizations (Allaire/Firsirotu 1984; Ouchi/Wilkins 1985). In this literature it is assumed that organizational cultures develop in the course of an organization's history and are heavily influenced by organizational leaders and particularly by the experience of successful mastery of an important challenge.³ It is also interesting to note that myths, legends, and shared cognitive maps are emphasized much more than evaluative and especially normative elements - occasionally to the virtual exclusion of social norms from the

³ This comes out very clearly in Dierkes' (1988) survey of the literature; see particularly also Schein (1983).

concept of organizational culture (e.g. Smircich 1983). This tendency is probably related to the critical function served by the concept of organizational culture in the context of a research tradition which has long focussed on aspects of structure and their normative underpinning in the form of rules and regulations.

Empirical studies of organizational culture have mostly dealt with industrial firms or business corporations, but the same questions can obviously be asked with respect to any other organized social group, including political institutions such as legislatures. In fact, scientific interest in "political culture" is fairly widespread. True, most studies of political culture are concerned with orientations of the population at large (e.g. Almond/ Verba 1965); here politicians enter the picture only as objects of popular orientations. But there is growing interest also in the specific values and beliefs of policy-makers impinging upon policy formulation (Sturm 1985; Feick/ Jann 1989). In much of this particular literature, elements of political culture are inferred from the observed characteristics of specific policy decisions. Where the orientations of policy-makers - politicians and higher civil servants - have been investigated directly, this has mostly been done in the form of attitude and opinion surveys of categories of social actors (e.g. Aberbach et al. 1981), rather than in studies of institutional subcultures. An exception are occasional analyses of informal social norms in legislative bodies (e.g. Crowe 1983; Kornberg 1964; Loewenberg/Mans 1988; Matthews 1960). The research on which

the following discussion is based belongs to this small group of studies. Though unique for the German federal parliament, the research did not aim at comparison with other legislatures, but pursued a set of more theoretically oriented questions about the existence and nature of a parliamentary subculture.

2. The Institutional Culture of the German Bundestag: Research Questions and Methods

Legislatures are problem-solving and decision-producing organizations with a high degree of institutionalized internal conflict and a high turnover rate of their members. According to Wilkins and Ouchi (1983), the growth of an organizational culture is encouraged by a long history and stable membership, frequent interaction among members, and the absence of exposure to contradictory sets of expectations. None of these conditions is met in the case of the German Bundestag (see section 3 below); this should impede the emergence of an institutional subculture. On the other hand it could be argued that the very instability and tension-ridden nature of the setting should increase the need for shared beliefs and social norms which regulate the behavior and mutual relations of deputies. Similarly, the role characteristics of deputies might engender the need for strong in-group ties to balance status insecurity and role stress (Mester-Grün 1979: 10), and then again the extreme competitiveness of the milieu might militate against the development of shared values and meanings. In view of such coun-

tervailing tendencies (or at least contrasting hypotheses), the existence and substantive content of a parliamentary subculture, over and beyond the formal rules guiding the behavior of deputies and the cognitive and evaluative orientations they might share by virtue of their social origin and general political socialization, is an interesting empirical question. This question has as yet not found a conclusive answer. Thus, Wahlke and Eulau (1962) found a relatively low degree of consensus among American state legislators with respect to the 42 subjectively held norms they identified. On the other hand "... research on non-American legislatures has frequently discovered that the party loyalty of legislators is structured by clear norms of a sort rarely found in the United States ..." (Loewenberg/Mans, 1988: 157).

The empirical investigation which the author conducted together with Friedhelm Neidhardt among members of the German Bundestag aimed, first of all, to identify - and describe the content and formal characteristics of - informal social norms relating to the behavior of deputies. In doing so, we intended to use any evidence of a variance in normative beliefs not simply as a measure of group consensus or dissensus, but also to inquire more deeply into the structure of such norms. A second major question in which we were interested is the relationship of such informal norms as we might find to the institutional context of parliament. This question raises the issue of the forces shaping a subculture. Another aspect of the same question is the extent to which subcultural norms are unique to the institution investigated or reflect more general cul-

tural standards. Finally, it was hoped that even though our data referred directly only to perceptions and beliefs, it might be possible to interpret them in the question about the relationship of subcultural norms to observable behavioral practice. In structural-functionalism, or more generally among theorists following the normative paradigm, there is a tendency to emphasize the guiding effect of shared beliefs and social norms on behavior, whereas the influence of situational constraints tends to be played down if not neglected. In contrast, actor-oriented approaches often insist that it is the opportunity structure of action situations which is decisive for the choice of behavioral alternatives (e.g. Crozier/Friedberg 1977), so that the elements of culture serve mainly a legitimating rather than a guiding function.

While these questions may sound ambitious, the study itself was small and exploratory. The data base are 30 intensive interviews with a stratified sample of deputies, and written sources such as biographical material and newspaper articles.⁴ Our analytical categories

⁴ The sample was stratified by sex, party affiliation, and length of service in the Bundestag. Of the 30 interviews, all but 8 were conducted by Friedhelm Neidhardt and myself, the remaining ones by Peter Stadler, a part-time collaborator on the project whose main job was parliamentary assistant. The interview period extended over 22 months, with most interviews being conducted between the summer of 1986 and the fall of 1987. The sample included a few deputies we knew personally; not surprisingly, these interviews tended to be especially informative. All interviews were guided by the same interview schedule, though the questions were not necessarily put in a standard sequence and were sometimes varied in the exact phrasing. In order to undercut the defenses of interview partners as highly skilled in impression management as

highlighted selected aspects of group structure and culture, while we were less interested in the process of legislative decision-making. As for the parliamentary culture, we emphasized norms over shared cognitive maps of deputies, and focused on intra-institutional behavior and relations. In contrast, we did not attempt to go deeply into substantive policy orientations and political ideologies, questions about legitimating beliefs (e.g. representation versus trusteeship), and norms referring to relations with constituents, the party organization, the bureaucracy, and organized interests. It is evident that such a selective approach can uncover only a relatively small segment of the totality of an institutional subculture in the wide sense of such a term. This holds particularly for all taken-for-granted elements of shared interpretive frames, such as ethnographers and ethnomethodologists might find through patient observation. The strong, though not exclusive emphasis on normative beliefs also precludes any attempt to approach the (often neglected) issue of the internal structure of cultural systems on the basis of this particular study.

parliamentarians are, we used no pre-formulated statements but only open questions and avoided to ask for the verbalization of prescriptions. Instead, we asked for proscriptions and sanctions (from general disapproval over open criticism and withdrawal of support to ostracism) and discussed the reactions to well-known "scandalous" incidents and the irritations caused by the behavior of "green" deputies, in order to get at the normative expectations underlying them.

3. Features of the Institutional Context

With 520 members who, when parliament is in session, are expected to be present and even together in one room during plenary meetings, the German federal legislature is a very large face-to-face group. Internally, this group is segmented along party political lines, as the German Bundestag is formally organized into parliamentary party groups (Fraktionen). These party groups do not only have an elected leadership (Fraktionsvorstand) who controls the parliamentary activities of deputies, assigns tasks, distributes resources, and tries to ensure party discipline, but there is also an elaborate system of permanent committees which meet on a regular basis to prepare for the work in the corresponding parliamentary committees. The German Bundestag is known to be more a "working" than a debating parliament. Of course, there are debates (nearly 610 hours of debate during the 139 plenary meetings of the 8th legislative period), but in terms of parliamentary decision outcomes, relatively little depends on them.

A number of formal rules regulate the status of deputies: some paragraphs of the constitution, the election law, a section in the general procedural rules of parliament, and the Abgeordnetengesetz of 1977.⁵ In substantive content, these rules refer to the nature of representation (deputies represent the electorate at large and are not bound by imperative mandates),

⁵ Gesetz über die Rechtsverhältnisse der Mitglieder des Deutschen Bundestages, passed on February 18, 1977.

indemnity and immunity, financial matters (salary, pension rights, other benefits), and permitted or prohibited economic activities, additional gainful employment, contractual relations, etc.. The purpose of most of these formal rules is to safeguard the independence of the deputy in his legislative engagement. The "allowances" (Diäten) of federal deputies are today a - relatively high - salary, their activities being legally considered a full-time profession (or job).

Though being extensively, if quite selectively regulated, the general status of deputy is much less salient for the individual than membership in one of the parliamentary party groups into which the German federal parliament is formally organized. Deputies hardly perceive a "deputy role" separate from their role as "deputy of party X", and the assembly as a whole is an arena rather than an integrated social group. Plenary meetings and even the equally frequent meetings of parliamentary committees are carefully prepared encounters of groups; only committees may over time achieve a certain amount of social integration across party lines, a process supported by their often small size, relatively low turnover in membership, and by official travels of the whole committee or of committee delegations. For most deputies, "their" parliamentary committee is in fact the most important arena of participation in the legislative process - it is the main locus of meaningful activity and of productive work while in Bonn.

Outside of plenary and parliamentary committee meetings, the deputies of different party groups do not interact much. There exist inter-parliamentary associations (German-British, German-American, etc.) to which deputies of different parties belong, the Parliamentary Society, a kind of club where deputies can meet informally, some bars which, though mainly frequented by members of one specific party, also serve as informal meeting place across party lines, and of course receptions at embassies and similar occasions, but most of these have at best a tenuous group character and do not constitute an arena for serious debate and concerted action.

The parliamentary party group is for these reasons the deputy's most important reference group in Bonn. Its own social integration, however, is impeded by ideological diversity (the different intra-party currents) and above all by strong internal rivalry. Such rivalry is the result of competition for membership in important committees, for elective offices, for speaking time in plenary debates, and for a number of important resources and material rewards which the leadership of the parliamentary party group can distribute; above all, there is competition for publicity, for chances to increase one's visibility to all those upon whose support the deputy's political career (at least: his return to office) depends. As competition both contributes to and is reinforced by ideological differences (or at least differences of views on specific policy issues), in-group conflict tends to grow through self-reinforcement. At the same time, of course, party opposition generates a strong pressure

for intra-party solidarity. It is the resulting coincidence and permanent tension between strong forces making for group solidarity and equally strong competitive impulses which characterize the parliamentary party group. In this way, a spirit of conflict pervades the whole parliamentary arena and makes task-oriented cooperation in the fulfillment of legislative functions, i.e. problem-solving rather than confrontation, difficult to maintain.⁶

The imperative of securing reelection as necessary prerequisite of any further "success" is probably the most important situational constraint for deputies, though its absolute weight differs with individual life plans. Deputies with a personally satisfying alternative - a profession or job, a family to raise - are obviously less subject to the pressures of this imperative, but these deputies tend to become increasingly a minority with the ascendance of the professional (career) politician who lives not only for, but first and foremost off politics. The reelection imperative implies dependence relations which differ according to the primarily local or primarily national orientation of deputies. For deputies who have a "safe" district and/or are genuine district candidates, firmly rooted in the local party organization, a different kind of performance spells success than for deputies who owe their reelection to the national (or regional) party organization. The parliamentary arena thus has a different significance for them, and

⁶ For this distinction of decision styles and their implications for decision outcomes see Scharpf 1988.

this will influence their social identification with the Bundestag and their sensitivity to the rewards and punishments distributed there. For most deputies, incidentally, the parliament in Bonn and their local constituency are both salient reference points, and the weekly travel back and forth between these two different worlds seriously strains the chances of social integration in Bonn.

4. Informal Social Norms in the Bundestag: Empirical Observations

Informal expectations may relate to different areas of behavior, or different aspects of the deputy role, such as task performance, intra-group relations, inter-group relations, etc.. One such area is the behavior expected of a deputy as member of the political elite. More specifically it might be asked whether the recognized need to respond, for the sake of the legitimacy of the political constitution, to normative expectations of the electorate concerning the behavior of deputies, is reflected in a special emphasis on conformity with middle-class norms concerning alcohol consumption, sexual behavior, and financial comportment. Maybe surprising to an American, this is definitely not the case. More precisely, there is no normative expectation among deputies that as deputy, one should conform to middle-class norms of sexual behavior and alcohol consumption, and there is no readiness to criticize, much less to sanction infringement of such norms by colleagues. The only norm that does

exist and which is felt strongly and violated rarely is that the infringement of such middle class norms should not be made public. This means both that deputies must take care not to be publicly observed in their irregular behavior, as this may harm the public image of their party, and that such "private sins" are not to be used as an instrument in the political struggle, a norm which covers members of the parliamentary opposition as well as those of one's own party. Remarkably, the norm to keep silent about the "private sins" of politicians is also shared by journalists, and to deviate from this norm means for a journalist to renounce the claim to an esteemed professional status.

The situation is somewhat different with respect to irregular financial behavior. While getting into debt is a "private sin" and treated as such, using the political office for personal enrichment is not. As already mentioned, to prevent such abuse is one of the purposes of existing formal rules. Since, however, deputies enjoy legally a number of material privileges and have a number of legal opportunities for economic gain, there exists a "grey zone" where formal rules are not sufficient to distinguish the permissible from the unacceptable. It is in this zone that informal social norms might be looked to for guidance. In order to get at the corresponding normative expectations, we discussed some well-known cases of financial misdemeanor with our respondents. The degree of consensus in judgment which we found was high - surprisingly high in view of the fact that our respondents were unable to formulate in positive terms specific injunc-

tions with respect to the financial behavior of deputies.

One of these cases concerned a high-ranking member of the Christian Democrats, former minister and president of the federal parliament (a prestigious formal position without much political power), who had to step down from this office under pressure from his own party when a well-paying contract he had concluded with a legal firm became publicly known. In terms of existing legal norms Barzel, himself a lawyer by training, had done nothing wrong, so he must have violated an important informal norm to be sanctioned so severely - unless, of course, the incident was only being used to get rid of an incumbent for other reasons. In fact, considerations of this kind may have been a reinforcing contextual condition, but the vast majority of our respondents agreed that Barzel's behavior in this particular matter had been decidedly objectionable. To draw financial or generally economic advantage from one's political position - one's prestige, public visibility, acquired expertise, and personal relations - is acceptable up to a certain point, but constitutes a norm violation when a threshold is passed. The problem is to define this threshold. Apparently, this cannot be formulated generally, but must be established case by case by a complex reckoning up of several factors. In the case of Barzel, it was felt that he had obtained a high additional income out of proportion to the service actually rendered, i.e. an unjust advantage in exchange terms, cashing in on his political prestige alone. What made things worse was that he himself had been inclined to moral-

ize, i.e. a discrepancy was felt to exist between his own behavior and the normative standards he publicly espoused; apparently the cut-off point between acceptable and unacceptable behavior varies with the moral aspiration level of the actor himself. But it was not only violation of an informal norm regarding financial behavior which had brought Barzel down. In addition, he had also violated a norm referring to the proper relationship of a deputy to the party group leadership: he had not informed them of this contract when he had asked their help in a situation of economic insecurity.

If, in this particular case, legally correct behavior constituted deviance from informal social norms, the reverse is also possible. A second case we discussed with our respondents concerned a widely diffused but legally doubtful practice in fund-raising for political parties which had become a scandal when attention was publicly called to it while its post hoc legalization was sought - unsuccessfully, so that eventually even some high-ranking politicians had to appear in court. In spite of the recognized fact that this practice had been illegal, most deputies (except for a few reacting in terms of moral convictions rather than in terms of a social norm) agreed that here no social norm had been violated, as everyone had thought that practice to be acceptable, possibly because it was in the interest of the party organization and not in the economic interest of individual politicians.

Norms related to group membership concern the correct behavior of a member as member, i.e. the individual -

group relation, as well as the interaction between members. The most prominent of these norms, while shared at the level of the parliament, refer not to parliament as a whole but to the parliamentary party group. Normative expectations with respect to the deputy - party group relationship are specifications of a general norm of group solidarity, or more precisely of the expectation that the deputy should support his party in the struggle with the parliamentary opposition. Formulated negatively this means to avoid behavior harmful to one's party, a norm which is even explicitly stated in party constitutions and serves as a basis for formal procedures of ousting members. The point is again how this general maxim is operationalized, and once more there is relatively high consensus on the kinds of behavior that help or harm a party group. One important expectation is support of the party group's position on legislative issues, both when it comes to voting in a plenary meeting, when talking to the press or when talking to constituents. There are also some interesting specifications, as for instance the expectation to avoid making pronouncements on issues where the party has not yet established its position, so as not to restrict its room for action.

The motives to deviate from these norms are strong because they restrict the deputy's manoeuvring space in the public assertion of his individuality - his personal judgment, his values, his engagement for certain causes etc. - and hence in the pursuit of his career. The strong informal expectation to vote with one's party group (Fraktionsdisziplin) even stands in

contrast to the constitutional norm of independence of the deputy who is formally only bound by his conscience (and existing laws). This strong tension between the (uncontested) need for group solidarity and personal career interests apparently leads to a tempering of normative standards by including in the formulation of norms the conditions under which they definitely ought to be respected, or of acceptable forms of deviating from them, if pressure to do so becomes very strong. For instance, not to vote with one's party group is particularly objectionable where the margin of majority is small and/or the issue attracts much publicity, and where the deputy has not informed the party group's leadership of his intention to defect beforehand. Similarly, taking a personal stand on an issue becomes increasingly acceptable as the centrality of the issue to basic party values decreases. On the other hand defection is particularly objectionable if the party group's official position has been reached with difficulty, and represents a compromise with party ideals. To behave like the ideological purist in such a case means trying to win personal acclaim at the expense of making one's party group look bad; it is this conjunction of elements which constitutes the offense.

Another interesting feature of the norms of party group solidarity is that they often refer specifically to representational aspects, i.e. the public, or front-stage, part of behavior. If intra-group dissensus cannot be avoided, as it obviously cannot, it is important to demonstrate unity in the face of the opposition. Thus, one should not inform outsiders

about dissensus within the party group. There is also an informal rule that one should avoid receiving applause from the opposition benches in plenary meetings. While contributing to the highly polemical character of parliamentary debates, this serves as demonstrative affirmation of group integration and group membership.

In the relationship between deputies of the same political party, fair play norms restricting intra-group rivalry are prominent. One shared and fairly straightforward expectation is respect for the legitimate substantive or policy domain of party colleagues. Many deputies reported instances where they themselves had - often unwittingly - invaded another's domain, e.g. by making a public statement on some matter, and where this had not only brought forth criticism, but also stronger sanctions. A second important expectation is that deputies should not monopolize opportunities for positive self-presentation or seek publicity at the expense of colleagues; where this can be done at little personal cost, they should even help junior or lower ranking colleagues in their quest for a positive public image, e.g. in their constituencies; this highlights again the focal importance of the public dimension of political action. In contrast, attempts to obtain a bigger share of the common pool of material rewards (office space, assistance, attractive invitations, etc.) were rarely mentioned as a kind of objectionable behavior.

The norm restricting attempts to increase one's public visibility was repeatedly formulated in another ver-

sion, not as proscription to monopolize scarce opportunities but as injunction not to "overdo" the search for publicity and a positive public image. This variant of the norm is interesting insofar as it is again a "threshold norm" where the cut-off point needs to be defined - and can obviously only be defined with respect to specific cases and situations. As in the case of the norms of group solidarity, such a norm seems to reflect the presence of strong forces making conformity difficult because what is at issue here is a basic condition of individual career success.

Though what one might call solidarity norms clearly predominate with respect to intra-group behavior, there is also evidence of some other normative expectations, notably with respect to deference. Obviously, the prerogatives of the elected party group leadership and of committee chairmen should be respected, but this is a formal rather than an informal norm. However, deference is also expected from newcomers towards their elders. While they are still new to the job, deputies should avoid attempts to occupy center stage, to claim superior competence in some area, or to compete for highly valued assignments. "Lie low, learn, and build up a reputation of competence and trustworthiness" is how one might summarize the advice which experienced deputies would give the newcomer wanting to "make it" in Bonn. But the fact that deference rules were mentioned in the context of an "advice to newcomers" - question rather than among the informal rules one should observe to avoid censure by colleagues indicates that these are norms of a relatively low moral intensity. To violate deference rules is a strategic

mistake rather than a misdemeanor met with moral indignation.

Moving from the parliamentary party group to parliament as a whole, what is at stake are the basic rules of the game in a situation of interaction of all parliamentary party groups. There exist, of course, many formal rules of procedure instructing deputies how to behave in debates, at question time, when taking votes, etc.. These formal norms are hardly controversial and there exist apparently no strong forces making for deviance, but they give only the answers to easy how-to questions. The entry of the Green party into the federal parliament and the general irritation caused by the unorthodox behavior of Green deputies provided a good opportunity to get at the more implicit normative expectations forming part of the parliamentary culture. Again, the perception of the implicit norms violated by the Greens is widely shared among deputies, even including the Greens themselves. The Greens' widely publicized unorthodox way of dressing (tennis shoes, jeans, and never a tie), bringing flowers and knitting to parliament, and generally behaving very informally, were considered to be relatively unimportant deviations per se. They were partly resented because they made the well behaved majority look like Philistines, but they provoked fierce objections only when it was feared that by making the parliament as a whole look ridiculous, the Greens would seriously damage the image of the parliament - the famous "dignity of the House" (Würde des Hauses), which in fact needs visible demonstration in the face of a skeptical electorate. The most severely judged

norm infringements of the Greens refer to rules upon which the parliamentary system as such is based, e.g. the readiness to abide by majority decisions, acceptance of the state's legitimate monopoly on the use of force, and tolerance for minority views. In addition, we also found resentment of the moralizing stance of the Greens who keep voicing obvious, but unattainable ideals as if they alone believed in them. This reflects an implicit expectation of realism or pragmatism, a widespread view that politics is the art of the possible, and that dream dancers make poor deputies. Related to this is the criticism that the Greens claim credit for initiatives and popular positions which they were not the first to take, thus stealing other party groups the show. Understandably, this was felt most strongly by Social Democrats whose ideological proximity to certain Green positions is known. In criticizing the Greens for this, what was being invoked is a fair play norm similar to the one found at the party group level, but judging from what is everyday practice in the interaction between party groups, this does not appear to be a strongly supported norm at the level of the parliament.

As for informal norms restricting conflict between majority and opposition parties and securing their cooperation in the legislative process (which, after all, takes place for the majority of draft proposals coming before parliament), we have found surprisingly little evidence. Thus, there seems to exist no informal norm restricting polemics in plenary debates. Parliamentary polemics arise from a combination of individual motives and situational features which make

for an intensely antagonistic style of verbal exchange between deputies of the governing and the opposition parties, such as is rarely found in normal professional life. There does exist a formal rule about insults sanctioned by formal reprimanding, the reprimand being even entered into the official record. The formal rule is applied, but it does not carry informal censure with it, and this in spite of the fact that many, if not a majority of deputies find these polemics at times painful and know that the electorate listening to them on radio or TV consider them offensive. Discussions in the parliamentary committees are mostly much less polemical, though here, too, the style of interaction seems to be more often confrontational than cooperative. Even at the committee level, however, the lower level of expressed antagonism between deputies belonging to different parties is hardly the result of a strongly felt norm of inter-group solidarity. For one thing, some of the situational factors inducing polemics in plenary debates, such as the presence of the mass media (especially TV), is absent in committee meetings. Most importantly, the parliamentary committees are task oriented groups, which means that in committee meetings, the logic of task-related cooperation suffuses the logic of political opposition. Not surprisingly, therefore, we were told repeatedly of instances of tacit cooperation as well as of informal pre-meeting contacts across party lines. But such task-related cooperation does not seem to follow specific normative expectations to this effect; it is rather guided by strategic considerations and a very general do ut des norm, i.e. the rationality of fair exchange.

5. The Nature of the Parliamentary Subculture: Conclusions

The results of this inquiry into the institutional subculture of the German federal parliament has, first of all, confirmed the existence of subcultural norms. Behavioral expectations which the deputies themselves designated as "informal rules of the game" are widely shared: While the formulations often differed, there was a high degree of substantive consensus about such rules, irrespective of the age, sex, rank, length of experience, and political affiliation of deputies. This finding has a high validity since no checklist of normative statements was used, so that deputies produced what actually came to their mind when we discussed specific instances or asked what might discredit a deputy in the eyes of his colleagues.

The informal behavioral norms which this study has found are evidently related to the group structure of the German parliament. The most highly emphasized norms have the parliamentary party group as a reference point or refer to relations among its members. This dominance of solidarity norms referring to the parliamentary party group reflects both the high subjective salience of party group membership for the individual deputy, and the much higher interaction density within than between party groups - two factors which derive from the specific institutional context. In contrast, there is strikingly less emphasis on solidarity among deputies of different parties and with reference to parliament as a whole. The result is a clear differentiation between "in-group" and "out-

group" directed behavior: acts which are proscribed within the party group are permitted against (deputies of) party groups to whom one's own party is (currently) in opposition.

Of course, this does not go to say that parliament as a whole lacks cultural integration. A number of the expectations we found are in fact attached to the role of deputy in general, e.g. the expectation to overlook "private sins" and the normative beliefs articulated in analyzing the irritation caused by the behavior of the Greens. It is quite likely that in addition, deputies of all political parties share basic political values which, it should be remembered, were not explicitly touched in the interviews. But ideological and social integration evidently do not go together - at least in the case of the German Bundestag.

What is striking about the most prominent of the behavioral expectations we found is, of course, not only their social reference point, but also their specific content. The normative expectations which deputies are particularly conscious of are rules restricting intra-group competition and the uninhibited pursuit of individual career goals. They thus constitute a kind of "social contract" which stems the disintegrative forces of personal rivalry and makes the party group able to confront opposition from other parties. In contrast, performance-related norms, if they exist at all, seem to possess such a low priority that they did not come to the mind of our respondents when we discussed with them at length the kinds of behavior that discredit or bring approval to a deputy in the eyes of

other deputies. Even though, as pointed out before, no attempt was made in this study to ferret out all sub-cultural norms referring to different activities, relations, etc., this substantive selectiveness of the norms we did find is in all likelihood not a methodological artefact. In fact, this finding of a selective emphasis on group-related norms is corroborated by a conclusion which Loewenberg/Mans (1958: 157-158) draw from existing research, which has "... demonstrated the existence of norms governing the personal relationships of legislators to each other, but showed fewer traces of norms to promote the transaction of legislative business". Of course, lack of prominence does not mean non-existence. There is, for instance, occasional reference to the norm of reciprocity which is not only applied to career-related favors but also to task-related interactions among deputies, even across party lines. In general, however, it seems that legislative performance, the task fulfillment of deputies is structured more by shared cognitive orientations, including knowledge about strategies, than by social norms.

There is, for instance, virtual unanimity among deputies in their perception of the strategic prerequisites of success in promoting policy initiatives. Deputies share the view that success is here a matter of collective effort, so that coalition formation and consensus building are generally and explicitly recognized as the preeminent conditions of securing desired policy decisions. Another generally perceived prerequisite of the successful promotion of an issue is the possession of widely acknowledged expertise on the

matter in question. Expertise thus has an instrumental value for the deputy. In fact, to acquire expertise in a field which is both substantively promising and not yet overcrowded is a piece of advice which deputies would consensually give to a newcomer wanting to know the secret of success.

An important formal characteristic of the subcultural norms we found is their lack of specificity. That norm specificity is a variable and tends to decrease with increasing status is generally accepted in role theory, but low specificity may in fact be a general characteristic of normative expectations which refer to membership roles rather than to task roles (i.e. positions in a functionally differentiated system). General maxims such as "do not damage the public image of your party group" or "do not exaggerate in seeking public visibility", do not provide clear instructions how to behave in concrete situations - and yet they apparently permit the widely shared evaluation of specific instances. As has been shown, they do this because the general maxim is fleshed out with more specific conditions of its applicability, turning it into conditional prescriptions or proscriptions. The transformation rule turning a general maxim into specific injunctions takes the form of a statement of relaxing or intensifying conditions (i.e. the norm is applicable unless ... or definitely applicable if ...) or - which is basically the same - of a threshold beyond which a tolerated behavior becomes objectionable. Thus normative expectations assume the character of a more or less complex evaluative algorithm, which may even involve difficult causal judgments concerning

the fulfillment of a limiting condition (e.g. whether or not a specific action will harm the party). In this way, it also becomes possible to apply the norm to different arenas, different types of interaction partners etc., since specific situational features can be accommodated among the set of applicability conditions; this may be one reason why, among others, we did not find arena-specific norms. As it is difficult to establish exact cut-off points and to balance mitigating and exacerbating conditions objectively, this internal norm structure opens the way to negotiations about the fulfillment of the applicability conditions or the location of the threshold. As a form of social discourse, this must obviously take place post hoc, i.e. when a decision has to be reached whether or not a given instance violates a norm, but in the form of an inner monologue it may also precede action. In any case, where the applicability of an injunction is negotiable this makes for flexibility both in behavior and of the norm itself.

Most of the behavioral maxims of the parliamentary subculture seem to be avoidance rules (or proscriptions) rather than prescriptions. They serve mainly to curb spontaneous behavioral tendencies, rather than inciting to action. What motivates behavior in the parliamentary situation are not internalized norms, but individual drives, personal interests, and possibly values on the one hand, and the incentives implied in the institutional context, i.e. the opportunity structure on the other hand. The majority of the deputies we interviewed appear to be motivated first and foremost by individual political success, which can

mean both the achievement of a position and/or the shaping of policy, where "leaving a trace" is important per se and the specific area in which this occurs is only of secondary importance. This kind of generalized power motivation, which corresponds well with the notion of a specific kind of political rationality which aims at power as an end in itself, is a likely outcome of self-selective tendencies to the career of politician, of the lessons learned while climbing up the career ladder, and of the institutional setting characteristic of parliamentary democracies with multi-party systems. It would require a separate discussion to establish whether power per se can also be called a subcultural value. We have found hints that striving for power for oneself and one's group is accepted among deputies, while he who confuses politics with a morality play is looked at with suspicion and ridicule. But vis-à-vis the electorate and when the public looks on, it is still necessary to display a primary policy orientation and to convey the impression of working for the common welfare. Besides, one should not discount completely the effects of the disappointment which deputies, strongly motivated to shape some aspect of reality, experience invariably when they realize that individually attributable success in policy matters is virtually impossible. This disappointment may not only sensitize them to the de-facto prerequisites of exerting influence on policy; it may also lead to a displacement of the criteria defining success from policy to power.

Whether power can be called a subcultural value or not, the behavioral norms of which deputies are most

conscious serve to control and restrain behavior instead of motivating it positively. This contrasts sharply with the "oversocialized conception of man" implied in much of role theory (Wrong 1961), where internalized norms are seen as the driving forces of social action. The basically restrictive character of informal behavioral norms in the Bundestag is underscored by the observation that even very strongly felt injunctions are continuously violated in the everyday interactions among deputies, which seems to detract in no way from their validity, as indicated by the fact that such violations continue to be sanctioned.⁷ The permanent tension between strong personal motives and strong restrictive norms, together with the uncertainty about the exact location of the dividing line between the permissible and the impermissible, turn everyday behavior in the parliamentary arena into a "tightrope walk", as one respondent expressed the feeling shared by many.

Yet again, however, a word of caution should be added. This study has been able to uncover only such elements of a common culture of deputies of which our respon-

⁷ The cutting edge of available social sanctions, incidentally, aims precisely at that type of deputy who is under the strongest pressure to infringe the norms curbing desintegrative tendencies, i.e. the career politician who wants to "make it" in Bonn. Within a parliamentary party group, task-oriented cooperation and special resources cannot be withdrawn without harming the effectiveness of the group, as both are to a large extent functionally determined. Other sanctions such as publicly reprimanding or ousting a member would be to the direct advantage of the opposition. What remains is above all the withdrawal of support in seeking offices and in reelection - the very core of the careerist's striving.

dents were fairly conscious. It is plausible that norms which conflict with personal interests and spontaneous inclinations and which are noticeably sanctioned are registered more consciously than for instance basic interpretive schemes, world views, and values which have in fact become part of one's own motivational structure. The only legitimate conclusion is therefore that the easily reproducible norms which are part of the parliamentary subculture tend to be restrictive in nature; the same cannot be said of this subculture as a whole.

The focus of this study has been the nature rather than the genesis and functions of subcultural norms. Nevertheless, in conclusion the two latter issues may be briefly touched.

In the beginning, the general question of the link between a subculture and the encompassing culture of the society at large has been raised. The empirical case under review here has shown both evidence of a close linkage and of specific subcultural traits. In many cases, subcultural norms appear to be situationally specific variations on a common cultural theme; examples were the expectation of reciprocity (mutual help), but also the norms of group solidarity. Whereas reciprocity and solidarity norms are fairly ubiquitous, we also found evidence of more specifically national cultural traits. Thus the rather strict separation between "private sins" that are irrelevant and not to be sanctioned in the parliamentary arena on the one hand, and deviations from standards considered binding for parliamentarians on the other hand, may

well reflect a cultural tradition of separation between the private and the public sphere which has no counterpart in the United States for instance.⁸ In contrast, the extremely high sensitivity to the public visibility of behavior is an arena-specific aspect of the parliamentary subculture. In the case of "private sins", public visibility itself constitutes the norm violation; in cases of deviance from subcultural norms it is an aggravating circumstance, and in the case of the expectation of a demonstrative in-group/out-group difference in behavior (in public one must applaud deputies of one's own and criticize or denigrate deputies of the opposition party) visibility even becomes the basis of a behavioral norm. In all of these cases, the arena-specific elements of subcultural norms are clearly shaped by the institutional context - e.g. the reelection imperative, the related need to present a favorable image to the electorate, etc..

This last observation immediately raises the issue of functionality. In the Parsonian tradition of thinking, the cultural system fulfills essential integrative and adaptive functions by controlling and coordinating social action. As is also evident in other contributions to this conference, the assumption of a general cultural functionality has often been challenged - without therefore denying the directive effects of culture on human behavior. In studies of organization-

⁸ This cultural difference is time and again experienced by Europeans in contact with Americans whose immediate and direct inquiry into matters considered private and therefore to be raised at the utmost by close friends they consider indiscret and difficult to deal with.

al culture, there is likewise no general assumption of functionality: organizational cultures can also obstruct change and the necessary adaptation to new situations (e.g. Bate 1984). In the light of the empirical evidence here presented it does appear that the subcultural norms reflect the needs of political survival and political success in the given institutional context. But these are power-related needs of individuals and social groups, which may conflict with the prerequisites of an optimal fulfillment of legislative functions. In this respect, we have seen that norms which would contribute to such task performance are absent or possess a low priority; this holds both for performance-related norms and for norms assuring cooperation in legislative work across party lines. Some of the strong norms we found, on the other hand, can be disfunctional in this regard. This is true, for instance, of the norm of demonstrative antagonism to the out-group which results - at least from time to time - in obstruction of legislative procedures for the sake of obstruction alone, instead of sound substantive reasons. Though on the basis of the available evidence it cannot be said definitely whether or not the high level of individual competition and the normatively supported antagonism between party groups affects the inherent quality of legislative performance, such as the timeliness, innovativeness, and problem-solving capacity of policy decisions negatively, this study throws at least some doubt on the functionality of the parliamentary subculture for effective legislation. What this implies is that subcultural norms might generally respond more to the imperatives of system maintenance than to those of system performance.

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