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FROM GROUND ZERO TO GROUND HERO: STATUS APPROPRIATION AND THE FDNY

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ABSTRACT

Disasters and emergencies are often characterized by heightened levels of structural ambiguity and uncertainty; conditions which may create an opportunity for symbolic figures or groups to emerge and ascend to a position of acclaim and high status. In the aftermath of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, one group, the Fire Department of New York (FDNY), emerged as an idealized symbol of America at its best. In the face of great uncertainty and unknown risks, firefighters came to be perceived as transcending their instrumental actions and vocations to set a standard of readiness, response, and resolve. Drawing on the micro-processes outlined by Klapp in his work on symbolic leaders and Gusfield's conceptionalization of status groups, a multilevel model is created with three goals in mind: (1) extend the explanatory power of previous work by combining macro and micro levels of analysis; (2) provide a framework for discerning why some groups emerge over others; and (3) offer theoretically-informed empirical model that is both testable and predictive to the extant research on this topic.

In times of crises and disaster, symbolic figures or groups often emerge and ascend to a position of venerated status. In the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attack on the World Trade Center (WTC) in New York City, one group, the Fire Department of New York (FDNY), rose to a position of status dominance. Firefighters emerged as the preeminent symbol of resilience, courage, and fortitude for New York City and all of America. They became the iconic representation of this historic event. As such, firefighters have been indelibly imbued with images of patriotism, heroism, and American resilience in the face of great adversity; images that have allowed them to reside in the very forefront of the public psyche.

Through the development and application of a Status Appropriation Model, this paper endeavors to explicate the processes by which the FDNY achieved status dominance in the wake of the WTC event, parlayed that dominance into appropriative control of significant aspects of the post-event response, and managed to maintain said

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1 This submission is not for public quotation prior to presentation.
dominance in spite of the ever-changing social conditions and the presence of many other competing status groups. The Status Appropriation Model conceptualizes status as the product of dramaturgical processes of interaction; processes that are influenced by, and refracted in, the social, cultural, and structural factors that comprise the context of the event. The model operates predominantly at the meso-level, which affords the opportunity to incorporate and link such macro-level factors as institutional networks, ideology, and hegemonic masculinity with dramatic roles and actions and other micro-level elements.

Definition of Status Groups

Orrin Klapp's "Symbolic Leaders" (1964) represents one of the earliest efforts to explore why certain individuals become a popular image or symbol. By incorporating elements of popular culture and dramaturgy, he sought to illustrate how some individuals become leaders and public figures while others who are similarly capable do not. The present research, while drawing significantly upon the microsociological, dramaturgical, processes outlined by Klapp, conceptualizes status acquisition as a process that is best analyzed at the meso-level, so as to include both macro and micro elements.

Status is conceptualized herein as a symbol or image that emerges through collective processes in times of social or structural ambiguity and crisis. Thus, a status group is one to which a particular symbolic value has been ascribed. Status is a valuable commodity in crisis events; it allows its bearer to construct the relevant definitions and meanings and put their "stamp" on event-related activity. Beyond the confines of the event itself, status can also translate into political and social influence that may be used to increase the social significance of the group over time.

The rise to dominant status is a long and dynamic process that is affected by a wide array of factors. Status, as an image or symbol, transcends the boundaries of mere politics or publicity. At the heart of the status acquisition process is competition. The term "competition" can be misleading, as it seems to connote images of one party trying to "beat out" the other party and win the contest at hand. While we conceptualize dramatic confrontation and overt contestation as being significant to certain components
of the model, neither is seen as characteristic of the status acquisition process as it is
detailed herein.

The status attainment process is unique in its commencement. It begins with the
occurrence of a crisis event and the resultant public need for a particular image or
symbol. There is no whistle, bell, or other obvious signal that clearly demarcates the
beginning and end of the competition. The eventual participants often play little role in
initiating status competition. In fact, potential status groups often do not become aware
that they are in competition until the process is well underway.

In the aftermath of the attacks on the World Trade Center (WTC) many groups
provided essential and lasting contributions to the response activity. Police personnel,
World Trade Center employees, firefighters, doctors, emergency medical technicians,
volunteers, and countless others helped in saving thousands of lives. Although all of
these groups have been lauded for their efforts, and rightfully so, it is evident that
firefighters achieved a disproportionate increase in status relative to other groups
involved in the response activity. The Status Appropriation Model represents an attempt
to explicate the proximate causal elements in the emergence of firefighters as the
dominant symbol of response activity.

**STATUS APPROPRIATION MODEL:**

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    Pre-existing Conditions
      ↓
    Social Structural Conditions
      ↘
    Situational Conditions
      ↙
    Dominant Status Group
      ↘
    Status Maintenance
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The conferral or appropriation of status occurs via status issues, which are venues
that are embedded in the dominant structure and ideology of society. The outcomes of
contested status issues go a long way toward determining the placement of relevant
groups in the status order of our society (Gusfield 1980: 173). Any group seeking to
climb the status order needs to possess a certain degree of cultural resonance; it must be
reflective of the cultural characteristics generally espoused in that society. Thus, in seeking to understand how a particular group achieves dominant status, it is necessary to examine the social structure within which status issues transpire. Social structure represents the first component of the Status Appropriation Model.

**SOCIAL STRUCTURAL CONDITIONS**

In order to understand the achievement of status dominance by a particular group, it is necessary to examine the social structural context in which processes of status attainment are couched. While there are a variety of structural conditions that can profoundly impact status attainment, it seems that some exerted substantial influence in the rise of firefighters to status dominance following the WTC event. These conditions include the existing institutional arrangements, historical frameworks, ideological paradigms, and power distributions.

**Institutions**

Social institutions, as societal cornerstones, have a tremendous influence on the disbursement of status. Orrin Klapp suggests that status is achieved largely by chance; somehow an individual’s actions or symbolism satisfy a collective tastes of the public. While there is a certain degree of happenstance involved, conceptualizing status acquisition as predominantly chance-driven is a faulty assumption; one that ignores the profound impact of social institutions. Gusfield questions Klapp’s reliance on unpredictability and spontaneity, suggesting instead that institutions ultimately shape the collective tastes of the public. “Institutional support of tastes, morals, and other aspects of life styles have consequences for the prestige of persons” (Gusfield 1980: 176). Therefore, institutions create the context in which a dominant status group emerges.

It is unlikely that a group possessing few institutionally ensconced characteristics will achieve a significant measure of status. Institutional arrangements determine what opportunities are to be made available, which group(s) will have access to these opportunities, and which group(s) are able to successfully take advantage of these opportunities. “The actions of government can affect the tangible resources of citizens
but they can also affect the attitudes, opinions, and judgments which people make about each other” (Gusfield 1980: 168). Incorporating social structural factors into the Status Appropriation Model allows us to move beyond Klapp’s (1964) contentions of status as an unstructured and unpredictable phenomenon, thereby demonstrating the role of macro-level factors in shaping the context in which status processes are embedded.

**Hegemonic Masculinity, Nationalism and Institutionalized Racism**

American society and its institutions are constructed around systems of domination that are delineated largely along the lines of race, class, and gender relations. Historically, the workings of capitalism, bureaucracy, industrialization, and democracy are central to American ideology and culture. Unfortunately, many of the occupational spheres have been male-oriented, resulting in the subjugation, if not outright exclusion, of females who seek to participate in these areas. Thus, masculinity, and its myriad manifestations, serves as a mechanism of privilege (Kimmel 1998). American culture favors hegemonic masculinity, a condition by which traditionally male characteristics such as competition, risk taking, fearlessness, violence and the denigration of women (Messerschmidt 1993) are espoused and rewarded. Institutional arrangements in our society value and reinforce the characteristics and actions associated with hegemonic masculinity over those associated with femininity.

The dominant occupational structure provides an excellent example of gendered relations. Certain jobs and tasks, such as schoolteachers, nurses, and childcare workers, are deemed to be appropriate for females, while the ranks of other occupations, such as business executives, police, and firefighters, are disproportionately male. In addition to the disparate wages between the traditionally “male” and “female” jobs, there is also a sharp contrast in terms of the status afforded to these tasks. To a large extent, masculinity is associated with status at the public level (White 1997).

Many issues in national and international politics cannot be fully understood without examining the intimate connections and inextricable links, both historical and contemporary, between manhood and nationhood. The products of this relationship include: construction of patriotic manhood and exalted motherhood, which, in turn, creates icons of nationalist ideology; designation of gendered "places," or roles and
opportunities, for men and women in national politics; the mobilized, sometimes frantic, defense of masculine, racial, and heterosexual privilege in male-dominated nationalistic arenas, particularly those found in military institutions (Nagel 1997). Issues of race in American culture compound these issues of masculinity. American society is also organized around institutionalized racism; it is a Euro-centric culture that values those characteristics associated with whiteness and devalues those associated with everything else (Oliver 1989).

Race, social class, gender, and nation are dimensions of interlocking systems of oppression in which some groups are marginalized while others are brought to the center of our society (Collins 1998). Recognizing the intersections of oppression and the way in which some groups are categorically exalted while others are denied status in our society is important for two reasons: (1) it helps to elucidate why the collective “taste” of the public takes the form that it does; and (2) it highlights the group-possessed characteristics that can facilitate their rise to dominance.

The language used in popular constructions of the September 11th tragedy has obscured the victimization and heroism of females. Victims have been predominantly depicted as fathers, sons and husbands. Wives, mothers, sisters and daughters are mentioned only as an afterthought, as the grieving party, or not at all. This masking of the true gender distribution of victimization implies both that the world of work is male and that the universal man still thrives in our society today. Understanding the intersectionality of oppressions also help us understand the rise of firefighters to the dominant status group. Firefighters are an attractive choice for a dominant status group because they embody hegemonic, heterosexual masculinity both because of the attributes assigned to the job and because this occupation has systematically denied employment to those who do not fully represent the dominant characteristics.

Further, the depiction of the firefighters involved in the September 11th tragedy has been that of “fallen brothers” and the images associated with their heroic acts have excluded females and ethnic and racial minorities. Despite the fact that women and minorities work as New York Firefighters, it is difficult to find representations of them in the popular images and news stories. The dominant portrayals of firefighters in this event have been white and male, which reciprocally reinforces the dominant social structure
and the right of this group to have status. Firefighters, as depicted throughout the coverage of September 11th, represent white, male, middle class, heterosexual, American citizens, further reifying the dominant characteristics in our society.

**PRE-EXISTING CONDITIONS**

The components of the Status Appropriation Model presented on a continuum, from macro-structural conditions, discussed above as masculinity, nationalism, and race, to the dramaturgy of the event itself. Pre-existing conditions are those factors that, although on the periphery of the situation, influence the nature and interactional flow of the event. Perhaps they are best understood as the “extended setting,” or cultural context, in which dramaturgical interactions transpire. There are three core pre-existing conditions that bear direct relevance to the Status Appropriation Model: the general social temperament or mood; archetypical characteristics; and societal “taste.”

**Social mood**

Klapp (1964;39) referred to the social mood as the “psychological weather,” suggesting that popular moods change “from complacency to anxiety, optimism to gloom, austerity to self-indulgence, fun to ‘no nonsense,’ tolerance to scapegoating, without clear demarcation.” Although it is difficult to fully and accurately characterize or measure the general social mood, the value of the concept is that it directs our attention to two key questions: (1) why the need for a dominant symbol might arise and (2) how this need might be satisfied. We contend that the emergence of firefighters following the WTC event can be seen as a product of two things: (1) patriotic decrystalization; and (2) America’s historical relationship with heroes and status figures.

Prior to the WTC event, the United States was in what might best be characterized as a period of patriotic decrystalization. Although America is generally acknowledged as being among the least politically-active industrialized nations in the world, it seems as though political apathy was the norm. Sources of collective political discontent, such as the Bush-Gore election issue and the Clinton impeachment hearings, were still relatively
fresh in the minds of Americans, perhaps leaving many with particularly pronounced feelings of political disenfranchisement.

Heroism, as evidenced by Horatio Alger-type stories and folklore, has been a thematic constant throughout the history of America. However, in recent decades, hero deconstruction has become a particularly rampant feature of American culture. America has, in many ways, become a tabloid culture in which scandal is actively sought, if not created. Prior to the WTC event, the road to hero status was particularly treacherous; the glare of the public was constant and unyielding. Public figures were built up and lauded, only to be shown, with revelry, falling from glory. Thus, the period before the WTC event can be characterized as an antiheroic age. Heroes were there, not to represent cultural ideals or inspire the masses, but, to be debunked, criticized, made human, and brought down to earth.

This is evident in the work of many deconstructionists, revisionists, and other scholars whose works have served to reconfigure public views of many long-standing heroic figures. For example, Christopher Columbus is no longer the vaunted and noble explorer who discovered America; he has been recast as a mass murderer. Thomas Jefferson is now remembered as much for reputedly being an adulterous slaveholder as he is for being a framer of the Constitution. John F. Kennedy’s “Camelot,” once an untouchable bastion of American idealism, has been recast as a den of adultery and political underhandedness. Thus, it can be argued that there was a hero void to be filled.

The hero void, as it were, was exposed by the WTC event. Prior to the events of September 11, 2001, there was not a collectively felt need for a dominant hero. It can be argued that, since hero-worship is an embedded feature of American society (Klapp, 1964), there is a constant, ever-present need for heroes. While this may be true, such heroes rarely, if ever, reach the level of social significance achieved by the dominant status group that emerges in the ambiguous climate of a crisis event. Thus, any underlying appetite for various heroic persons or targets of idolatry has been satiated by a constant stream of transient hero figures. These figures offer something to specific segments of the population. We refer to them as “morning show heroes,” in light of the fact that it is largely the morning news shows aired on network television media that promote these figures or groups and distribute them to the public for consumption.
The point is that these figures fill a temporally specific hero role; they are fleeting in both their appeal and their presence in the spotlight. For example, the courageous athlete who battles cancer and then returns to the field of play can be propagated as “an American Hero” one day and fade from view completely by the next day. Likewise for grieving parents remaining resilient and emblematic of the “American Spirit” in the face of the tragic loss of a child or the heroic passerby who saves a stranded animal from sure demise. The audience need not worry if the particular figure does not satisfy their needs, for a hero of a different variety will be offered for consumption in an upcoming news segment. The WTC event, and the collective need for a dominant, galvanizing hero, changed all of this.

As a consequence of the WTC events, we have gone from the debunking and derision of heroic public figures to a profound need for them. It is a time when perceived physical danger and vulnerability are heightened; there is a collective need for a “strong” and “brave” symbolic figure to provide a sense of protection. The previously serviceable “morning show heroes” and fleeting superstars no longer are able to perform the same functions as before; they often appear as trivial entities in a time of crisis. What is needed is a hero that can serve as a galvanizing force. The public clamors for such a figure. One must emerge, in some fashion. It is imperative.

**Archetypes**

Klapp (1964) suggests that heroes emerge without prototypes; that there is no way of predicting who will emerge as a dominant status group. We contend that, while it is difficult to predict the emergence of particular group with a significant degree of certainty, there are certain thematic constants possessed by many of those who attain status. These common elements often take the form of particular roles, such as the martyr role, the battle/warrior role, the unsung hero role, and the underdog role.

**Taste and “Color”**

Taste is a very important component of status appropriation. In most status competitions, there are several groups that possess similar characteristics, perform similar tasks, and serve similar functions - all of whom are searching for some sort of edge in the
competition. One differentiating factor that accounts for why some rise above the others is public taste. Public taste differs from popular mood in that mood implies a greater degree of generality; it is represented by longer-term trends. Taste, on the other hand, indicates a certain immediacy. It is akin to a craving. In such a climate, the hero becomes a must-have. Klapp (1964; 42) contends that some groups move ahead of others based on public taste: “although not necessarily offering the public better nourishment, they reach its taste buds more effectively.” The presence of pre-existing conditions, such as public moods, archetypes, and public taste, help determine who successfully emerges from the status competitions. However, the question remains: how do particular status groups gain initial entry into the status competitions?

**Status Applicants**

In seeking to understand how someone rises to popular status, we first must ask who is eligible for such status. Status issues become especially pronounced in times of crisis. A group becomes a status applicant often by simply fulfilling their normal institutional roles, with little awareness of any potential status rewards to be gained by doing so.

The occurrence of a crisis event is necessary but it is not sufficient, as any crisis event is likely to have numerous potential status applicants. It often appears, in hindsight, as though the status choice was the “right” choice all along; that the individual or group possesses some inherent qualities that made their ascension a virtual given. This is rarely, if ever, the case. We often neglect to consider the collection of worthy candidates from which the eventual dominant individual or group emerged. As Klapp (1964; 31) suggests, “Once a choice has been made, there are endless learned speculations about his ‘personality,’ ‘magnetism,’ and so on, but usually these views overlook the dozens or hundreds of others with similar qualities who failed to ‘hit’ or ‘sell’.”

What determines who gets to “swing” in order to “hit”? How does a group put itself “up for sale” so as to “sell”? We refer to those who have a real possibility for achieving dominant status as status applicants. The pool of status applicants is not infinite; a number of factors, or initial screens, limit the opportunity for certain
individuals or groups to compete for status. Initial screens represent those factors that immediately preclude certain individuals or groups from entering into the status competition. Initial screens include timing, instrumental capabilities, and symbolic potentiality.

**Timing**

Timing is a crucial factor for entering into the status competition. In order to enter the status acquisition process, one must come into the fray at just the right moment. As we have said, the event alone is not enough to jumpstart the process. There must be a strong collective need for someone to fill a particular symbol or image. One must enter into the situation at "exactly the moment when audience expectation and the plot call for such a part; things have gotten as bad as possible for the victim, and the crisis has been properly developed; suspense and interest are at a maximum, so no one is tired of the situation" (Klapp, 1964; 72). It is important to note that, although the absence of appropriate timing all but assures exclusion from the status application process, its presence in no way guarantees entry.

**Instrumental Capabilities**

Only those with the necessary instrumental capabilities to contribute in logistically meaningful ways to the in-event or post-event response are eligible. Achievement of status dominance will eventually require that the group be indelibly linked to some important role served or aspect of the event. The dominant status group will be the one that best meets the audience’s symbolic needs. The sheer magnitude of the World Trade Center attacks resulted in the immediate preclusion of many groups from the status competition process. The infirm, children, and many others were not on equal footing with other applicants in this instance. They were unable to contribute to the crisis in the same way that others were.

The WTC event and its immediate response requirements were characterized by a need for a variety of workers, including: emergency personnel, volunteers, bureaucrats to organize the long-term response, and political figures to navigate the politically charged
atmosphere. It is apparent, however, that, due to the unique characteristics of the WTC event, emergency personnel had the "inside track" in the status competition.

The WTC event was a disaster in the truest sense of the word. In virtually every way, emergency personnel were required to be in the foreground of the crisis response. They were among the first on the scene; they established a presence very early and maintained that presence because of their instrumental capabilities. Thus, it seems that a key factor in the status acquisition process is establishing and maintaining a presence in the foreground of the response effort and in the public psyche. While this may be true, one cannot overlook the fact that not all emergency personnel groups, despite the important role played by each, were able to lodge themselves in the foreground of the event.

Many specific groups of emergency workers were not as "qualified" as others, largely due to the specifics of the event itself. For instance, hospital personnel, such as doctors and nurses, and emergency medical technicians often play an important role in disaster response. Typically they are charged with the task of drastically reducing the number of casualties through quick response and diligent attention to the injured. However, the WTC attacks presented few such opportunities. The vast destructiveness of the event left only a small group of injured persons; a group whose size paled in contrast to the number of deceased. Thus, hospital personnel and emergency medical technicians were constrained in their ability to contribute to the crisis response in a fashion they were accustomed to. This is not to say that these groups did not contribute to the response. Rather, this demonstrates the situationally-contingent and highly selective nature of entry into status competition.

**Symbolic Potential**

For those groups that possess the instrumental capabilities, their chances of gaining an edge can be further improved by several factors. One such factor, also a third type of initial screen, is symbolic potential. Some groups are simply more appropriate for filling the collectively needed symbol or image than others. This essentially boils down to whether the status applicant has a relatively untainted image. Symbolic potential is informed by factors such as how the group has been perceived by the public in the past.
and how contentious relations between the competing group and political figures has been. The presence of a contentious prior relationship with any persons who direct public sentiment or are prominent in the “public eye” can prohibit entry.

**SITUATIONAL CONDITIONS**

Situational conditions include the event itself, and the dramatic roles and actions that operate within and immediately around the event. As a component of the Status Appropriation Model, situational conditions portray the dramaturgical processes that operate within the broader contexts of the structural and pre-existing conditions. In times of collective crisis, the most dramatic of principles are at work in the environs of the immediate context, or situational conditions.

**The Event**

According to Klapp (1964: 236):

>(t)he time when things are best for playing a hero’s role can be analyzed into two parts. First, the psychological moment, when drama obtains and suspense is at its height; second, a balance of material forces such that a rapid swing from crisis (or looming defeat) to victory is possible. This is the real opportunity: the conjuncture of a dramatic moment with a crisis that can be solved because forces are ready to cooperate with the hero.

Klapp accurately highlights the defining moment, which is the point when a status group can play a role that can propel them to dominance. In the case of the New York Fire Department, the event that leant itself to their emergence occurred on September 11th, 2001 when two commercial airliners were flown by terrorists into the World Trade Center Buildings, which subsequently collapsed.

In defining the event, it should be noted that as part of this attack, planes were crashed into the Pentagon and into a field in rural Pennsylvania. The depiction of the
events of this day, not the objective reality of the events, helps to shape the emergence of the dominant status group. While four plane crashes occurred in three locations, one aspect of the event, the collapse of the World Trade Center Buildings, takes primacy and the others, while included in the tragic tale are not the focal point of attention. Thus, it is not just the objective event, but the interpretation of the event (Edelman, 1988) and the meanings associated with it that comprise the situation and thus the drama begins.

**Dramatic Roles And Actions**

*Instrumental action*

The tremendous loss of life and the enormity of the structural damage are two of the features that make the WTC event so unique and unprecedented. These two factors also played a tremendous role in the status competition process. Recall that only those with the necessary instrumental capabilities to contribute in socially meaningful ways to the in-event or post-event response are eligible to enter the status competition. However, instrumental capabilities that were essential components of the initial stages of response may no longer hold the same relevance that they once did. In disaster events of lesser magnitude than the WTC event, emergency personnel may be vital in the early stages, thereby rendering them worthy status applicants. However, an event's later stages may be drastically different from the earlier moments; the need for emergency workers may diminish, or disappear altogether. Needs may shift to other areas, such as political or bureaucratic functions.

The thousands of deceased and the immense pile of rubble and concrete provided those charged with digging and removing rubble and locating the missing with a relevance that was second to none. Although aided by volunteers and visiting firefighters, the FDNY had come to be the group primarily responsible for performing these tasks. Thus, their instrumental actions had become indelibly linked to the event from the outset, and remained so throughout.
Symbolic Action

Symbolic actions are utilized to elicit certain desired responses from an audience. In contrast to instrumental actions, which are vital in actually completing a task, symbolic actions convey the message that a particular individual or group is the “right one” to do the “right thing” in the “right way.” Effective symbolic action creates a specific reality that is distinctly favorable to the group undertaking such action; a reality that suggests that not only is this group capable of fulfilling the needs of the audience, but that it is the only group with the requisite proficiency to do so. Pondy (1977) refers to this as “niche creation.”

It is useful to think of symbolic acts as forms of rhetoric, functioning to organize the perception, attitudes and feelings of observers (Gusfield 1980: 170). They are persuasive devices that alter the view of the audience in a way that is favorable to a particular status group. In utilizing symbolic images, a group must reaffirm their relevance, demonstrate and solidify their ties to existing institutions and power structures, and increase their social significance. Thus, symbolic actions are a fundamental means by which one group can differentiate itself from competitors.

According to Pfeffer (1981), the effectiveness of symbolic actions is positively correlated with the frequency, variety, and consistency with which they are employed. Quite simply, the more something is repeated, the more likely it is to resonate with the audience. Thus, the most potent symbolic actions are those that have a consistent theme exemplified in a wide array of actions over an extended period of time.

New York City Firefighters engaged in a wide variety of symbolic acts from raising a lowering a flag at the site of the World Trade Center collapse, to meeting with the President of the United States, the Pope and ringing the opening bell for the stock market; tasks that have very little direct bearing on the ability of firefighters to engage in their instrumental actions, such as extinguishing fires, clearing disasters, and rescuing the endangered. Instead, they are gestures located in ideology and the creation of meaning. Many of the symbolic actions of the firefighters served as “gestures of cohesion.” Such gestures appeal to the unifying elements in the society and provide the grounds for legitimacy (Gusfield 1980) of the group with which the symbolic action is associated.
Ceremonies and rituals represent the more common forms of symbolic action. Each is essential in helping to shape audience perceptions and generate a collective appeal for one group relative to others. They are means of continually perpetuating and status and reaffirming group-held values. The properly cultivated image is something that can live on long after the instrumental role has diminished or been supplanted in the limelight. Symbolic action is a way of creating a transcendent image that stands alone from the group and any instrumental actions they undertake. Thus, symbolic action is infinitely more powerful for achieving status dominance than instrumental action.

**Political Support**

Status groups are more likely to obtain dominance if they are able to garner the support of politicians and other powerful leaders. Ideally, the politician is a direct reflection of the dominant attitudes, values, and norms of her/his constituency. Thus, any attention that a politician may direct at a status group is interpreted as the attention that the public is directing at this group. Beyond representation of their constituency, politicians serve to define, direct, and organize the public features of an event. As such, status groups with political support are more able to come to the foreground and become dominant (Klapp 1964). “In seeking to effect their honor and prestige in the society, a group makes demands upon governing agents to act in ways which serve to symbolize deference or to degrade the opposition whose status they challenge or who challenge theirs” (Gusfield 1973: 167).

**STATUS MAINTENANCE**

Once a group has emerged as the dominant symbol or image, steps must be taken to maintain that status in the face of competition from other groups, shifting moods, ever-changing events, and dynamic institutional arrangements. Possession of status is tenuous; there is something to be lost, and one wrong action or word can lead to this loss. The dominant status group must use whatever means necessary to retain and increase already achieved status, as well as distance itself from competitors. Status groups engage
in four types of maintenance work: competition, often dramatic in nature, with other status groups; political symbiosis; married action; and role expansion.

**Dramatic Competitions**

"It is not enough to win the spotlight, however skillfully, unless one does the right thing one is there to maintain it" (Klapp 1964). Multiple groups are eligible for dominant status in the wake of the social dynamic and turbulent period that is the crisis event. Dramatic confrontation between the dominant status group and other participants in the drama is part of the process of maintaining status. "This confrontation puts the prestige of the dominant status group into the scales for a contest or comparison with others" (Klapp 1964).

Overt competition can represent a risky proposition for the dominant status group. By competing with other status groups, the dominant group is essentially placing itself in a precarious position. While success in status competition offers desired rewards, failure in these competitions hazards a substantial decline in status, if not a loss of status altogether. Klapp (1964) outlines several principles that demonstrate the precarious line between success and failure in status competitions, three of which have been adapted for the Status Appropriation Model: (1) the most active status group captures the most interest; (2) the group that starts something is more likely to gain dominance than those who follow; and (3) the group that provides the crowd with a thrill is likely to gain dominant status.

In order to maintain dominant status, a group must take concerted, often aggressive, actions to do so. They must take advantage of opportunities that may arise in interactions or in the institutional framework. "In the struggle between groups for prestige and social position, the demands for deference and the protection from degradation are channeled into government and into such institutions of cultural formation as schools, churches, and media of communication" (Gusfield 1973: 175).

In the case of the New York Firefighters, they were one of the first groups to arrive on the scene of the World Trade Center attack on September 11th. Initially, just doing their job turned into a territorial stake in the geographic region of "ground zero." Other groups, including police, volunteer workers and construction workers were denied
access or were kept away from particular duties in this area because the firefighters vigorously claimed them for their own. This competition became particularly evident when a scuffle broke out between police, who were ordered to close off an area of the disaster, and firefighters, who believed they were in sole control of that space.

**Political Symbiosis**

Once a group has achieved status dominance, maintaining it relies, in part, on the relations it has with other sources of power in society. Thompson (1990) suggests that symbolic forms intersect with power relations. Thus, relations between the dominant status group and powerful public figures are essential in maintaining status. These interactions create symbiotic relationships whereby politicians are able to associate themselves with the dominant status group in a manner that maximizes public support for their present and future political agendas. At the same time, the dominant status group utilizes the backing of the political leader to the increase their status and achieve desired ends. In the context of the drama, relations between status groups and those in power are more than symbolic or expressive; they represent a means by which the influence and dominance of the status group may be expanded. Symbiotic relationships represent “a way of winning a concrete and very real struggle over the distribution of prestige in American society (Gusfield 1973: 180).

The New York City Firefighters engaged in a symbiotic relationship with Mayor Giuliani and President Bush. Although Giuliani and the firefighters had a tenuous relationship prior to the September 11th attacks, afterwards they praised each, participated together in many symbolic gestures and ceremonies and posed together for photos. President Bush also, in his visit to ground zero, closely associated himself with the FDNY. Firefighters were a focal point of his attention, photographs and speeches at ground zero. The activities of these politicians increased their prestige via association with the firefighters while simultaneously reinforcing the legitimacy of firefighters as the dominant status group.
**Married Action**

Married action involves the merging of both instrumental and symbolic action to create a profoundly more powerful image than either type of action can create alone. Instrumental action demonstrates the functional relevance of the group. Symbolic action helps to organize the perception, attitudes and feelings of the audience. Married action is all about adding something new by building on what is already there. Complacency in ones status represents a substantial threat to maintaining the position as the collectively valued imagery. Synthesizing instrumental and symbolic action reaffirms the collective value of the status group to the audience; it assuages any doubts that may arise in the collective psyche. It reaffirms and strengthens the image that has been previously constructed in the acquisition process. Married action is similar to Klapp’s (1964) notion of “gilding the lily,” which involves searching the archive of popular ideas for themes to reinforce and build up the image achieved thus far.

There are many illustrations of firefighters engaging in married action in the aftermath of the September 11th attacks. One clear example involves the removal of human remains from ground zero. Firefighters removing bodies during the recovery effort would drape them in the American flag and create a processional in which several firefighters marched with the body to its destination while their fellow firefighters saluted the processional. The recovery of remains is instrumental action, the use of the American flag, the processional and the salute is symbolic action and the combining of the two extends the status of the firefighters, reinforcing their dominant status and elevating their symbolism to an iconic level.

**Role Expansion**

Klapp (1964) identifies many types of symbolic leaders, including the hero, the incorruptible, the object of desire, popular villains, comic figures, and popular victims. While he does not intimate that these types constitute an exhaustive list, Klapp does suggest that these “classes of symbolic leaders work toward some kind of reassurance to audiences—the dramatic hero by triumph; the incorruptible by standing firm; the villain by being punished;” and so forth (Klapp 1964; 52).
The group that manages to hit the “bulls-eye” of a symbolic type is likely to resonate strongly with the public, thereby aiding the group’s upward ascent on the status hierarchy. However, the value of the types of symbolic leaders outlined by Klapp is limited by the apparent underlying assumption that, while not exhaustive, the types that are depicted are mutually exclusive. We contend that not only may a group possess the traits of more than one type of symbolic leader, but that it may actually be to the benefit of the group to present itself in as many such lights as possible. Status may be more attainable and sustainable if the group is able to encompass a multiplicity of roles or types. For example, a single group may be viewed or depicted simultaneously as the hero, incorruptible and a victim in a given situation. In this way, they are guaranteeing identifiability with the public because the public has more to choose from. The hero may sway those who are not convinced of incorruptibility. Those who are not moved to hero worship may relate to the victim. Further, if the public’s taste were to change, for instance, they have lost their flavor for victims, the status group has the hero type to fall back on.

Firefighters, in the wake of the September 11th attack, embody many types including those identified as the hero, the incorruptible, and the victim. Additionally, two other types emerge: the unsung hero and the martyr. Firefighters were portrayed (and portray themselves) as unsung heroes in this event. They rebuke the hero role, humbly suggesting that they are “just doing their job.” Further, they are martyrs because those who died during the tragedy were seen as giving their life to save others. They are seen as performing their work selflessly, for moderate pay, and without regard to their own well-being. Many depictions produced by cartoonists and the media post-September 11th picture firefighters at the pearly gates of heaven, in uniform but looking saintly with wings and halos drawn in. In sum, firefighters in the wake of this event, have been established them as heroes, unsung heroes, victims of tragedy and martyrs who gave their lives for others. Encompassing multiple roles may expand their mass appeal and provide added longevity to their status dominance.
CONCLUSION

The Status Appropriation Model explains the processes by which one group achieves dominant status in the wake of a crisis event. This work builds upon several theorists in the field of collective behavior, drawing heavily on Orrin Klapp's (1964) work on symbolic leaders. However, we sharply depart from Klapp with regard to our efforts to develop an empirically viable model of the processes and factors relevant to status acquisition; a model that offers explanatory and predictive value to the limited body of literature on the attribution of venerated status upon particular persons or symbols.

By shifting the focus from "popular" individuals to status groups, we offer a meso-level analysis that incorporates both micro-and macro-level factors in the analysis. Furthermore, we question Klapp's reliance on the public psyche and mindset as the primary determinant of whether or not an individual or group achieves heightened status. Rather, we suggest that macro-level factors, such as the social structure and pre-existing conditions shape and constrain micro-level processes involved in the attainment of status group dominance. Thus, we offer a model that incorporates the literature of a variety of disciplines along the micro-macro continuum.

While the dramaturgical approach is located in the micro processes of situations, this model attempts to bring together both micro level and macro-structural factors to explain the emergence of dominant status groups. By understanding the cultural, institutional and structural context that the event is situated in, one may be able to more adequately predict the emergence of a status group following instances of collective crisis. Whereas existing analyses of this phenomenon tend to conceptualize it as spontaneous and unpredictable, we contend that including the broader social contexts allows for the systematical tracing of how and why some groups or individuals emerge over others of similar "qualifications." The Status Appropriation Model puts forth a variety of new or altered frameworks, such as political symbiosis, role expansion, married action, and archetypes, that allow us to better understand many of the complex developments that often transpire in times of crisis and disaster.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


