

COLLECTIVE IDENTITY AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

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■ **Abstract** Sociologists have turned to collective identity to fill gaps in resource mobilization and political process accounts of the emergence, trajectories, and impacts of social movements. Collective identity has been treated as an alternative to structurally given interests in accounting for the claims on behalf of which people mobilize, an alternative to selective incentives in understanding why people participate, an alternative to instrumental rationality in explaining what tactical choices activists make, and an alternative to institutional reforms in assessing movements' impacts. Collective identity has been treated both too broadly and too narrowly, sometimes applied to too many dynamics, at other times made into a residual category within structuralist, state-centered, and rationalist accounts.

INTRODUCTION

Recent trends both inside and outside the academy have revived interest in collective identity. In the 1980s, battles over college curricula, multiculturalism, and affirmative action were both justified and attacked as "identity politics." Among gay and lesbian and feminist groups and movements for ethnic and racial justice, efforts to contest cultural representations and to celebrate alternative identities vied with more traditional strategies such as litigation and lobbying. Collective identity was hard to miss, and its prominence in contemporary movements encouraged sociologists to assess its role in all movements, new and old.

Sociologists of social movements have also been attracted to collective identity as a response to gaps in dominant resource mobilization and political process models. Those models sought to counter earlier collective behaviorist views of protesters as irrational individuals propelled into protest by crowd contagion or system strain. Mobilization and process theorists focused rather on the structural shifts that gave collective actors the resources to act collectively on longstanding grievances. But their emphasis on the how of mobilization over the why of it, their focus on the state as target of action, and their dependence on rationalistic images of individual action left important issues unexamined.

In response to these limitations, scholars turned to collective identity to answer four kinds of questions. One was why collective actors come into being when they do. Resource mobilization and political process theorists cut their teeth on the American civil rights movement, where the fact that insurgents had grievances was not particularly mysterious; the challenge was rather to explain how they secured the resources to do something collectively about those grievances. But in other movements, the very fact that a group formed around an issue demanded explanation. For example, why has abortion provoked such intense mobilization in this country and not in Europe? Focusing on identity seemed a way to explain how interests emerged rather than taking them as given. By examining the formation of collective identities, scholars would shed light on the macrohistorical context within which movements emerge.

A second challenging question had to do with people's motivations to act. Even with an acknowledged interest in an issue, of course, people often opt to free ride. But those who do participate usually do so in the absence of selective incentives or coercion, Olson's (1965) solutions to the free-rider dilemma. Collective identity seemed to capture better the pleasures and obligations that actually persuade people to mobilize. Identity was appealing, then, as an alternative to material incentives.

A third question neglected by mainstream models had to do with movements' strategic choices. If people choose to participate because doing so accords with who they are, the forms of protest they choose are also influenced by collective identities. Models of strategic choice that had movement leaders selecting among strategies, tactics, and organizational forms by instrumentally assessing environmental opportunities and constraints missed the fact that strategic options may also be intrinsically appealing. They reflect what we believe, what we are comfortable with, what we like, who we are. Collective identity thus responded to the inadequacies of instrumental rationality as an explanation for strategic choice. Finally, collective identity has been a way to get at the cultural effects of social movements. Dominant models of collective action have been better at measuring movement outcomes such as policy reform or expanded political representation than at gauging impacts outside the formal political sphere. But movements also transform cultural representations, social norms—how groups see themselves and are seen by others. Changes in collective identity captured movement impacts beyond institutional reform.

The questions that prompted social movement scholars to theorize about collective identity are important, and they have generated strong claims about the role of collective identity in movements' emergence, trajectories, and outcomes. Indeed we argue that collective identity has been forced to do too much analytically. The term has been used to describe many different dimensions and dynamics of social protest: the social categories predominating among activists (say "women" or "animal rights activists"), public representations of social categories (what Johnston et al 1994 refer to as "public identities"), activists' shared definition of their situation, the expressive character of all action, the affective bonds that

motivate participation, the experience of solidarity within movements, and others. As a result of this definitional catholicity, key questions have been obscured. To what extent are collective identities constructed in and through protest rather than preceding it? Is the identity a group projects publicly the same one that its members experience? Are collective identities imposed on groups or invented by them? Do individuals choose collective identities to maximize their self-interest or do interests flow from identities? How is collective identity different from ideology? From interest? From solidarity?

To avoid overextension of the concept, we have defined collective identity as an individual's cognitive, moral, and emotional connection with a broader community, category, practice, or institution. It is a perception of a shared status or relation, which may be imagined rather than experienced directly, and it is distinct from personal identities, although it may form part of a personal identity. A collective identity may have been first constructed by outsiders (for example, as in the case of "Hispanics" in this country), who may still enforce it, but it depends on some acceptance by those to whom it is applied. Collective identities are expressed in cultural materials—names, narratives, symbols, verbal styles, rituals, clothing, and so on—but not all cultural materials express collective identities. Collective identity does not imply the rational calculus for evaluating choices that "interest" does. And unlike ideology, collective identity carries with it positive feelings for other members of the group.

There is another problem common in recent analyses. In relying on collective identity to fill the gaps in structuralist, rational-actor, and state-centered models, that is, to explain the processes those models miss, scholars have sometimes neglected the role collective identity plays in the processes those models foreground. They have turned identity into a kind of residual category, describing what happens outside structures, outside the state, outside rational action. We are not arguing for simply reversing the causal arrow, so that collective identities as cultural constructions determine interests, relations, and structures [a claim made by some post-structuralist analyses, for example, by Laclau & Mouffe (1985) and Joyce (1994)]. The best recent research, we believe, avoids a priori assumptions about causal mechanisms and allows for a number of different relationships between cultural and discursive practices on the one hand, and legal, political, economic, and social structures on the other. The analytical challenge is to identify the circumstances in which different relations between interest and identity, strategy and identity, and politics and identity operate, circumstances that include cultural processes as well as structural ones.

In the following, we examine the role of identity in four phases of protest: the creation of collective claims, recruitment into movements, strategic and tactical decision making, and movement outcomes. Because the scholarship that bears on collective identity and social movements is huge and spans numerous disciplines (sociology, political science, psychology, law, anthropology, women's studies, queer theory, and others), we concentrate on sociological treatments except where work in other disciplines promises to fill gaps in sociological models.

We omit discussions of class and national identities (for treatments of these, see Calhoun 1993, Cerulo 1997, Hanagan 1994, Krinsky 1999); as well as discussions of the relationship between personal and collective identities (see Goffman 1959, Holstein & Miller 1990, McCall & Simmons 1978, Jenkins 1996; for reviews of identity and social movements generally, see Johnston et al 1994, Hunt et al 1994, Krinsky 1999, Snow & McAdam 2000, Snow 2001). We try to address a range of movement dynamics in which identity may operate rather than covering every important work in the field.

MOVEMENT EMERGENCE: IDENTITY AND INTEREST

Why do movements emerge when they do? In the 1970s, resource mobilization and political process theorists stopped asking why people felt frustrated enough to engage in collective protest rather than organize through conventional political channels, and instead asked when and how they secured the resources to combat their exclusion from those channels. Collective actors' "interests" were implied by the very formulation; they lay in gaining access to the stable structure of political bargaining (Gamson 1975, Tilly 1978, McAdam 1982). Collective interests were taken to be longstanding: The model presumed an already-existing collective actor able to recognize the opening of political opportunities and to mobilize indigenous resources for political purposes.

That presumption was challenged by scholars of the "new social movements," the protests around peace, nuclear energy, local autonomy, homosexuality, and feminism that seemed to be displacing class-based political mobilization in Western Europe in the 1970s and 1980s (Touraine 1981, 1985, Melucci 1985, 1989, Offe 1985, Castells 1997, Laclau & Mouffe 1985, Cohen 1985, as well as Laraña et al's 1994 overview). New social movement theorists argued that participation in such movements could not be predicted by class location. Nor were participants seeking to gain political and economic concessions from institutional actors, to further their "interests" in conventional terms. Rather they sought recognition for new identities and lifestyles.

New social movement theorists saw a profoundly changed social formation behind these novel forms of collective action, variously dubbed "postindustrial," "programmed" (Touraine 1981), "information" (Melucci 1996), or "network" (Castells 1997) society. In Melucci's (1996) account, "modernization" has required that people be capable of processing the informational resources on which societies now depend, but expanded individual autonomy has been accompanied by strong pressures toward normative conformity. Social control has come to operate simultaneously through self-regulation and through the increasing penetration of standards of instrumental rationality into people's biological and emotional lives. As a result, protestors have been less likely to seek a redistribution of political power than to seek to change dominant normative and cultural codes by gaining recognition for new identities (see also Pizzorno 1978).

New social movement theories proved better at raising questions about the sources of movement identities than at answering them. Their explanations for

how shifts in material production have affected social movements were not entirely clear and sometimes risked tautology, with new social movements taken as both evidence and consequence of a new social formation (see Touraine 1981 and Cohen's 1985 critique). Empirically, moreover, most new social movements have combined political goals with more culturally oriented efforts. However, new social movement theorists' arguments were provocative, and they did encourage sociologists to highlight identity-construction processes in older, class-based social movements—if only to rebut the claimed novelty of their successors (Calhoun 1995, Plotke 1990, Buechler 1990). Sociologists sympathetic to political process approaches also began to use collective identity to explain “how structural inequality gets translated into subjective discontent” (Taylor & Whittier 1992:104; see also Morris 1992, Mueller 1992).

Other scholars have agreed with new social movement theorists' claim that efforts to define, celebrate, enact, and deconstruct identity are more important in recent movements than they have been in the past, but have sought different explanations for that fact. Jasper (1997), for example, points to legal inclusion as a key distinction. Unlike the civil rights and early labor movements, which pursued full inclusion as citizens, post-citizenship movements are peopled by those who already enjoy most or all of the normal rights of citizens, including the ability to mobilize legally and to put pressure on political decision makers. Participants in these movements do not usually have an identity imposed on them by the political and legal systems; accordingly, they have more freedom to engage in creative reformulations of who they are.

New social movement theorists' determination to historicize a contemporary repertoire of protest has also encouraged efforts to account in macrohistorical terms for the construction of contentious identities. Some authors have looked to large-scale processes such as industrialization, urbanization, and state consolidation, as well as to the ascendance of new cognitive paradigms, to explain how particular identities become the basis for exclusion and/or discrimination but also for mobilization. For example, D'Emilio (1983) traces the emergence of a “homosexual” identity to the processes of urbanization and industrialization that made possible an autonomous personal life. Same-sex sex has always existed and, indeed, has often been severely punished, D'Emilio points out, but it was only at the beginning of this century that it became not just a deviant, immoral, illegal act but a deviant identity. A homosexual was a person whose nature—acts, feelings, personal traits, even body type—was sharply distinguishable from “normal” heterosexuals. That shift, aided by a new psychiatric model of homosexuality, made possible both heightened repression (one could now be fired or prosecuted as a homosexual whether or not one had engaged in sex), and the creation of a homosexual collective actor.

In a comparable dynamic, the legal institutionalization of racial privilege in the United States and South Africa generated severe and pervasive inequality and eventually provided the basis for demands by blacks for legal equality. By contrast, the absence of legalized racial categories, agencies, and statistics in Brazil impeded black mobilization (Marx 1998). Tilly (1998) attributes the rise of identity politics in nineteenth century Britain—the eclipse of local identities like spinner,

neighbor, or tenant of a particular landlord by broader identities such as “citizen” and “worker”—to the increased salience of the national state in people’s lives and the new patterns of claimsmaking that resulted. Rather than appealing to a powerful patron or unleashing their rage directly on the object of their dissatisfaction, claimsmakers increasingly made public demonstrations of their numbers and commitment to bid for participation in a national polity. “They declared ‘We exist and have a right to exist. We have strength, coherence, and determination. National politics must take us into account’” (1998:14). Together, these analyses challenge views of race and homosexuality as transhistorical “natural” identities.

To explain the creation of mobilizing identities, several authors have turned to network analysis. They argue that such identities come not from fixed categories like race, class, gender, or nation, but from common positions in networks, whether networks of patronage (Gould 1998), urban residence (Gould 1995), or political affiliation (Mische 1996). For example, Gould (1998) argues that the leaders of the 1794 Whiskey Rebellion in Western Pennsylvania differed from other members of the political elite in only one respect: At a time when power was shifting to federal authorities and the eastern establishment, these power brokers sought to preserve their relationships with both western clients and eastern patrons. By leading an insurgency, even one likely to fail, they communicated to clients their willingness to champion their interests, even while suggesting to eastern elites that they were trying to stave off even greater civil war by assuming the leadership of a band of angry farmers. “Political identifications are not merely constrained by networks of social ties, in the sense that network position helps to determine which of a variety of exogenously available self-understandings an individual might embrace; in this instance, at least, the relevant identification was defined *in terms* of the network” (38).

Other authors have focused instead on the institutional contexts within which new identities are forged. Concepts of “submerged networks” (Melucci 1989, Mueller 1994), “halfway houses” (Morris 1984), “free spaces” (Evans & Boyte 1986), “havens” (Hirsch 1990a), “sequestered social sites” (Scott 1990), and “abeyance structures” (Rupp & Taylor 1987) describe institutions removed from the physical and ideological control of those in power, for example the black church before the civil rights movement (Morris 1984) and literary circles in communist Eastern Europe (Johnston 1998). Such institutions supply the solidary incentives that encourage movement participation, but they also represent a “free space” in which people can develop counterhegemonic ideas and oppositional identities. Why do such sites facilitate the development of oppositional identities? Some authors suggest that it is simply their distance from the physical coercion and ideological control of those in power (Hirsch 1990a). Others suggest that it is rather the belief systems that are institutionalized in such sites that are important (Polletta 1999).

The latter dovetails with perspectives that give culture an independent role in constituting the collective identities around which people mobilize. In other words, what emerges from “free spaces” may not match up with “objective” categories of

structurally derived interests. What “worker” or “citizen” or “African American” means, and what behavioral expectations it entails, are partly a function of the vocabularies, stories, and images available. Somers & Gibson (1994: 67) argue that people’s experiences as workers, for instance, “were inextricably interconnected with the larger matrix of relations that shaped their lives—their regional location, the practical workings of the legal system, family patterns—as well as the particular stories (of honor, of ethnicity, of gender, of local community, of greed, etc.) used to account for the events happening to them.” (See also Somers 1994, Steinberg 1996.) The categories that emerge from such processes make for diverse movements. For example, labels such as “worker” or the “working class” have promoted more pugnaciously anti-bourgeois labor movements than have labels like “citizen” or “the people,” which encourage cross-class alliances (Sewell 1980).

Rather than reading off interests and identities from allegedly transparent structural positions, recent works have (a) revealed the historical construction of what seem “natural” identities such as “working class,” “black,” and “homosexual;” (b) advanced more sophisticated models of how the social, economic, and political relations in which people participate generate mobilizing identities; (c) recognized the independent role of culture in shaping the collective identities on behalf of which people make claims; and (d) identified the political conditions in which identity claims are likely to be prominent in movements.

Once movements have emerged, complete with organizations, organizers, and recruitment campaigns, strategic efforts to craft mobilizing identities become important. Even identities that are familiar, longstanding, and enforced by law and custom frequently need to be re-imagined by movement activists. At the very least, they must be integrated with a *movement* identity, i.e. a collective identity based on shared membership in a movement. We now turn to these efforts.

RECRUITMENT AND COMMITMENT: IDENTITY AND INCENTIVE

Why will people join collective efforts when they don’t know whether their presence will do any good and they do know that they can ride free on the efforts of others? Sociologists have devoted a great deal of attention to this question, posed first by Olson (1965). He argued that shared interests are simply not enough to motivate individual effort in the absence of selective rewards that go only to participants. But as Fireman & Gamson (1979) and others have pointed out, individuals share prior bonds with others that make solidaristic behavior a reasonable expectation. “A person whose life is intertwined with the group [through friendship, kinship, organizational membership, informal support networks, or shared relations with outsiders] . . . has a big stake in the group’s fate. When collective action is urgent, the person is likely to contribute his or her share even if the impact of that share is not noticeable” (22).

Activists are not the isolated, atomistic individuals sociologists once took them for. In many movements ranging from the French commune (Gould 1995) and

the Russian revolution (Bonnell 1983) to Nichiren Shoshu Buddhism (Snow et al 1980) and the 1964 Mississippi Summer Project (McAdam & Paulsen 1993), recruitment has taken place primarily through preexisting solidarities (see also Marwell & Oliver 1993, Oberschall 1973, Tilly 1978). In these cases, prior ties motivated participation through norms of obligation and reciprocity. "Collective identity," for some authors, is shorthand for the affective connections one has to members of a group that oblige one to protest along with or on behalf of them.

However, this "loyalty" formulation raises a number of questions. First, what is the content of those ties? Does collective identity consist mainly of moral obligation, altruism, and personal loyalty, or can it be self-interested concern with the opinion of others? Instead of affective obligations, Chong (1991:50) argues that self-interested "reputational concerns" motivate participation. Since "people expect consistency from us, we tend to oblige by forging and living up to our reputations. And as Socrates advised, the easiest way to maintain a reputation is to become the person you want others to think you are." Participation is a rational bid to gain the benefits that accrue to those who share a collective identity. Friedman & McAdam (1992) similarly connect collective identity to self-oriented rational action. Highly regarded roles within communities may come to be linked with activism in a way that makes participation a requirement of that role. In the early civil rights movement, activism was linked with—normatively required of—churchgoers; in 1960, *student* became linked to activist, became a "prized social identity" which supplied the selective incentives to participate. But arguments like these, designed to show that cultural meanings and emotions are not logically incompatible with rational-actor models, yield convoluted causal pictures: We try to become an altruistic person because it is in our interest to seem one, yet it is hard to seem one without actually being one. Why not simply admit the emotional satisfactions of collective identity (Jasper 1997:23–29)?

Teske (1997:121) mediates between the loyalty and self-interest models, arguing that we err in seeing self-interested and moral action as opposed. Activism for many people is a way to construct a desirable self. They decide to participate "neither primarily on a quasi-quantitative calculating of costs and benefits, as in the rational choice approach to politics, nor on altruistic impulses Rather, identity construction points to the qualitative concerns and the desires activists have that certain qualities be instantiated in their actions and lives" (see also C. Taylor 1989). Lichterman (1996) makes a similar argument but historicizes it. Lacking the connection to unifying ideological traditions like the revolutionary left or religious radicalism, post-1960s activists turned instead to a "personalized politics" in which the individual self is the arbiter of moral choices. This isn't narcissism, Lichterman insists: a self-oriented politics can nurture rather than curb civic engagement. An activist collective identity, these models imply, can be a satisfying aspect of personal identity.

A second question for the loyalty model is whether collective identities necessarily precede mobilization. Some movements seem to attract participants even

in the absence of prior identities and networks (Jasper & Poulsen 1995). "Moral shocks" produced, for example, by a photograph of a tortured animal or the disaster at Three Mile Island can mobilize people who do not know each other or the organizers (Jasper 1997). Participants may share demographic or economic traits—they tend to be middle class, say, or are mostly men—but these do not add up to a perception of the preexisting "groupness" of collective identity. Their political activity itself provides that kind of solidarity: We are student radicals, we are people who care about the environment, we are caring, critical citizens. These "movement identities" may come to serve much the same function as a preexisting collective identity [Jasper 1997; Klandermans's (1997:95) concept of "commitment," Hirsch's (1990b) of "solidarity," and Buechler's (1990) social movement "community" seem functional equivalents of movement identity]. Minkoff (1997) argues that many collective actors such as women, the elderly, gays and lesbians, and the disabled have initially lacked the institutional infrastructures that have put members of other groups into regular day-to-day contact. In the absence of such infrastructures, movement organizations have generated the collective identities that then created network ties.

Since mobilization does not always require preexisting collective identities, activists' efforts to strategically "frame" identities are critical in recruiting participants. "Frames" are the interpretive packages that activists develop to mobilize potential adherents and constituents (Snow et al 1986, Gamson 1988, Snow & Benford 1988, Benford 1993, Tarrow 1998). When successful, frames make a compelling case for the "injustice" of the condition and the likely effectiveness of collective "agency" in changing that condition. They also make clear the "identities" of the contenders, distinguishing "us" from "them" and depicting antagonists as human decision makers rather than impersonal forces such as urbanization (Gamson 1988, 1992, also Hunt & Benford 1994, Hunt et al 1994, Klandermans 1997). Organizers often try to build a movement identity on another, independent collective identity [which may come from prior activism as well as from racial and other ascribed identities (Jasper 1997:ch. 8)]. ACT UP, for instance, sought to convince lesbians and gay men that protest around AIDS was an essential expression of their gay identity.

While organizers use considerable creativity in inventing new identities or attaching new behavioral requirements to old ones, such processes may also occur independently of organizers' strategic efforts. Polletta (1998a,b) found that the *stories* told by student protesters in the 1960 lunch counter sit-ins helped to forge an action-mobilizing collective identity. Students' accounts turned unfamiliar and potentially disturbing events into familiar epics of overcoming, with frightened students becoming triumphant heroes (see also Hirsch 1990b and Fantasia 1988 on how collective identities are developed in and through protest).

Beyond recruitment, identity work is crucial to sustaining solidarity and commitment. Taylor & Whittier (1992) show how boundary-setting rituals and institutions that separate challengers from those in power can strengthen internal solidarity; they call this solidarity "collective identity." But there are liabilities

to strong and exclusive formulations of identity. Many groups are torn between asserting a clear identity and deconstructing it, revealing it to be unstable, fluid, and constructed (J. Gamson 1995; see also Epstein 1987, Seidman 1993, Phelan 1989, Fuss 1989). Where some members may see destabilizing a collective identity as an important goal in and of itself, with ramifications beyond the group, others may understandably see it as a threat to group unity or as confusing to the public (we return to this issue in our discussion of identity as a strategy of social protest).

If identities play a critical role in mobilizing and sustaining participation, they also help explain people's exodus from a movement. One of the chief causes of movement decline is that collective identity stops lining up with the movement. We stop believing that the movement "represents" us (the term suggests an expressive dimension as well as a strategic one). In some cases, cross-cutting identities come to the fore, just as the women's movement came to grief partly on the shoals of class and race [Echols 1989; Robnett (1997) shows, however, that cross-cutting identities are not inherently contradictory]. In other cases, people begin to see their identities as sufficiently represented in conventional political or nonpolitical arenas.

In sum, any social movement group must continually manage its collective identities, and even identities predating movements are subjected to reconstruction. Organizers often concentrate on recasting constituents' identities to include participation as one of the responsibilities or benefits of group membership. Identities need to be integrated with injustice and agency frames so as to clearly distinguish "us" from opponents and bystanders. Finally, sustaining participants' commitment over time requires ritualized reassertions of collective identity and efforts to manage, without suppressing, difference. But in addition to identity management as an internally directed tactic, movement leaders use identity in a number of tactics oriented toward the world outside the movement, as we now examine.

TACTICAL CHOICE: IDENTITY AND STRATEGY

How do activists choose from among the strategies, tactics, targets, organizational forms, and deliberative styles available to them? Early resource mobilization and political process accounts tended to rely on a classically rational model of decision making to answer that question: activists adapt strategies to environmental constraints and opportunities on the basis of a cost-benefit calculus (Barkan 1979, Kitschelt 1986, McAdam et al 1988). Critics have pointed out, however, that activists also choose options that conform to "who we are," as pacifists, say, or women, or revolutionaries. Making decisions on the basis of collective identity has been treated accordingly as an alternative to relying on instrumental criteria; it reflects an expressive rather than a strategic logic. There are two other ways of relating strategy to identity, however. Rather than viewing it as at odds with strategy, making identity claims can be seen *as* a protest strategy. And rather than viewing an instrumental logic operating exclusive of identity concerns, we can see that instrumental calculation often depends on the collective identities that are

widely associated with particular strategies, tactics, organizational forms, and even deliberative logics. We take up these three approaches in turn.

Collective identities can supply criteria for making decisions that compete with instrumentally rational ones. For example, members of the antinuclear Clamshell Alliance saw themselves both as an "opponent" of the atomic-industrial establishment, dedicated to stopping nuclear power, and its "opposite," seeking to eradicate domination within their own operation (Downey 1986, Epstein 1991). The latter identity was responsible for the Clamshell's distinctive strategies of consensus decision making and nonviolent civil disobedience, as well as for the organization's eventual demise as the increasingly heterogeneous group was paralyzed by the requirement of consensus. But to suspend the consensus requirement would have been, for many, to destroy the group's identity. For the "Green" environmental activists that Lichterman (1996) studied, sustaining the organizations that made up the movement was not of paramount concern. They would rather see an organization collapse than compromise their overriding commitments to democratic process. None of these activists abjure considerations of instrumental efficacy; they seek rather to balance them with the principled commitments that define who they are. Strategic choices are not simply neutral decisions about what will be most effective, in this view; they are statements about identity (see also Kleinman 1996).

People develop a "taste" for certain tactics, partly independently of their efficacy in attaining formal external goals (Jasper 1997). Some may enjoy staying within the bounds of legality, others stepping outside them. Some may pride themselves on their moderate demands and tactics, others on being avant-garde or radical. They may develop collective identities based on those tactical tastes. Tactical and organizational identities often coincide, as organizations embody forms of action. "Organizational forms may be a source of shared identity," says Clemens (1997:50). "The answer to 'who are we?' need not be a quality or noun; 'we are people who do these sorts of things in this particular way' can be equally compelling." Important to understanding tactical choice within movements is the operation of numerous identities, with varying salience. Activists may identify primarily with a movement organization, affinity group, style of protest, or degree of moderation or radicalism. Jasper (1997), for instance, distinguishes among "activist," "organizational," and "tactical" identities. The first involves a history of political activity that is usually broader than a specific movement. An organizational identity involves loyalty to a single organization and its fellow members, even something as small as an affinity group. Those with tactical identities may define themselves as on the cutting edge, or they may be proud of particular styles of action such as nonviolence or civil disobedience. Such identities may exist alongside both movement identities and preexisting collective identities, interweaving with them in complex ways. An individual might identify herself as a nonviolent feminist, ecological activist, and member of the affinity group "Matrix," each of these labels carrying an identification with some broader collectivity. In a similar scheme, Gamson (1991) distinguishes between solidary, movement, and organizational identities.

Tactical tastes may originate in collective identities that exist outside and prior to the movement (Ennis 1987) or within it. Whittier (1995) describes “micro-cohorts” in the women’s movement of Columbus, Ohio: groups who entered radical feminist organizations together every year or two. Their experiences before they entered the movement and within it provided a collective identity and frame of reference for their understandings of feminism and politics, and a basis for their strategic preferences. Other accounts of the Clamshell Alliance have attributed its decline not so much to the “egalitarian/instrumental” tension that Downey describes as to an old guard/new guard conflict whereby newer members of the organization bid for status within the group by challenging veterans’ commitment to fully democratic practices (Cohen 1988). In this case, as in Ross’s (1983) description of battles in Students for a Democratic Society over organizational structure, tactical preferences and the collective identities they expressed originated not in newcomers’ prior experiences but in and through a shared experience of marginality in the organization.

In a second approach, sociologists have shown how activists construct, deconstruct, celebrate, and enact collective identities as strategies of protest. For East German challengers to the Honecker regime in 1989, calling themselves “the people” not only inspired greater participation than if they had used some other label but prevented a regime that also associated itself with “the people” from attacking them as outsiders. It may also have discouraged police repression (Pfaff 1996). In this case, insurgents’ public construction of their identity limited the actions that their opponents could take.

Activists may define their identities in different ways depending on the strategic situation. If they are representing their group to a public audience, they may cast themselves as more unified and more homogeneous than they would in a setting of fellow activists. Pulido (1996) found that nonwhite environmental-justice activists routinely invoked “people of color” as a primary identity when targeting the state or a polluter but narrower racial and ethnic identifications in their internal movement deliberations. Their identities, she concludes, were “situational” (see also Lichterman 1999). Another factor in determining how a group strategically constructs its identity may be the kind of opposition it confronts. Bernstein (1997) found that gay and lesbian activists campaigning for antidiscrimination statutes deployed strategies of “identity for critique,” in which they castigated the homophobic practices of mainstream society, when they faced organized opposition and when they were led by exclusive organizations uninterested in coalition-building. By contrast, movements with strong organizational infrastructures or access to political decision makers tended to seek policy change and emphasize their similarities to the majority, using less controversial strategies of “identity for education,” in which they suppressed rather than celebrated their differences from the mainstream.

As Bernstein’s work indicates, movement leaders must strategize not only against single opponents, but within a “multiorganizational field” of allied, competing, and oppositional movement organizations, authorities, media, and funders (Hunt et al 1994, Gamson 1988, Klandermans 1997). What is the relationship

between this organizational context and the identities that operate within it? Carroll & Ratner (1996) argue that certain broad identities, for example that of a victim of materially grounded injustice, are able to link diverse organizations. Does it work the other way? Are organizationally diverse movements better able to develop encompassing identities? Ferree & Roth's (1998) study of a failed strike by German day-care workers shows that the organizational insularity of potential coalition partners such as unions, women in the governing legislative coalition, and grassroots feminists led them to see day care workers as "difficult and different" (643) from their usual constituencies rather than as offering an opportunity to develop new allies. The predominance of "exclusionary" identities discouraging a coalition, in turn, resulted from the lack of organizational linkages to other movements (see also Gordon & Jasper 1996). The same kind of dynamic can operate within a movement group. Roth (1998) found that the existence of a feminist caucus within an ACT UP group effectively "compartmentalized" women's issues to the caucus because no one else would deal with them. Tarrow (1998:ch. 7) argues that movements at the end of protest cycles (presumably, any movement with dwindling appeal) often compensate for their lack of membership, allies, and broad appeal by defining their identities narrowly and rejecting alliances as "selling out" (see also Gitlin 1995). Such exclusiveness can help to sustain the commitment of the remaining stalwarts.

How successfully groups frame their identities for the public thus affects their ability to recruit members and supporters, gain a public hearing, make alliances with other groups, and defuse opposition. The studies we have cited indicate that how a group frames its identity (exclusive or inclusive, involuntary or chosen, challenging or conventional) depends on the setting and the audience to which it is speaking, the kind of opposition it confronts, and the organizational linkages it has to other groups and movements.

A third approach to the relations between identity and strategic choice breaks with a view of activists trying to juggle strategic imperatives and identity concerns by pointing to the ways that identity informs even the most self-consciously strategic calculation. Collective identities are already embedded in strategies, tactics, claims, organizational forms, and deliberative styles, and they influence how such options can be used. "Embedded in" can mean different things, though. For example, activists seeking legal change on behalf of women and minorities often struggle to decide whether to play up or down the differences on which their disadvantages rest. Discrimination cases brought by women have been limited by the implicitly male standard to which they must analogize their own situation. "Difference," whether it is the biological capacity to get pregnant (Scott 1988) or a dislike for high-pressure sales jobs (Scott 1988, Milkman 1986), is seen as "deviance," and activists must decide between the equally unacceptable alternatives of trying to be "like" men or to justify "special" treatment with its implications of inferiority. Groups' strategic efforts are thus constrained not only by their own perceived identities but by the definitions contained in not very objective but legally enforced definitions of equality: male, white, able-bodied, heterosexual, and so on (Minow 1990, Crenshaw 1990).

Clemens (1997) depicts a less formal process. Certain organizational forms have been widely seen as “appropriate for women” or “middle-class,” in a way that influences who may legitimately use them. More broadly, our very conceptions of what is instrumental, strategic, efficacious, and political rest on the identities with which they are associated. For example, Bordt (1997) shows how collectivist styles of organization came to be seen in the 1970s as feminist in a way that made their adoption by new feminist groups a matter of common sense. Earlier, the same forms had come to be seen as white in the southern civil rights movement and, for that reason, had become increasingly unappealing to African Americans (Polletta 1997). This line of inquiry meshes with recent neo-institutionalist theorizing on organizations’ propensity to mimic organizational forms that are widely seen as cutting edge (DiMaggio & Powell 1991). The question that neoinstitutionalists have not adequately answered, also relevant to strategic innovation in social movements, is whether such imitation benefits the organization strategically or whether the innovation is assumed to be strategic in the absence of any compelling evidence.

In sum, recent identity arguments reject the commonplace opposition between identity as expressive and strategy as instrumental in order to demonstrate that activists deploy identities strategically and that strategic options have meaning by reference to the groups with which they are identified.

MOVEMENT SUCCESS: IDENTITY AS OUTCOME

How successful are movements? And how do they affect individuals, groups, and broader structures? In accounting for movement outcomes, theorists have tended to treat identity under the heading of cultural impacts rather than institutional ones. Yet there are many kinds of movement impacts—institutional and extra-institutional—in which identity plays a role. In some cases, the impact is intended, in others, a byproduct of other aims.

First, changing identities is often a primary movement goal. This may be clearest in religious or self-help movements, but many movements have it as one goal alongside others. The development of group pride is a form of identity work. Identity talk within movements may be aimed not only at building solidarity but also at changing selves and relationships in ways that extend beyond the movement (Lichterman 1999, Breines 1989, Epstein 1991).

Second, participation usually transforms activists’ subsequent biographies, marking their personal identities even after the movement ends, whether or not this is an explicit goal (McAdam 1988, Fendrich 1993, Rogers 1993, Andrews 1991, Whalen & Flacks 1989, Taylor & Raeburn 1995, Whittier 1995). This is not only true of people whose active participation was of long duration or high intensity, but also of many casual participants. Mansbridge (1995), for instance, argues that being a feminist does not require membership in a feminist organization, but only a sense of accountability to an ideal of feminism. Its behavioral requirements differ across social and historical contexts, but the core collective identity continues to shape an individual’s sense of self.

Outside of public institutions, identity work within small circles of like-minded people is critical to sustaining “abeyance structures” during periods of limited political opportunities (Taylor 1989, Whittier 1995). Identities nurtured within these networks contribute to the spillover effect from one movement to another (McAdam 1994, Meyer & Whittier 1994, Tracy 1996). Broad identities such as radical pacifist or anarchist can also be preserved in popular cultural materials rather than organizations, thus becoming available for subsequent waves of protest (Eyerman & Jamison 1998).

Of special interest because it challenges the tendency to separate identity and power orientations (Rucht 1992), demanding recognition for a new or changed identity can both secure concessions and permanently change the terrain of political conflict. Putatively black, or women’s or Green interests now have to be reckoned with by policymakers (Mueller 1987, Costain 1988). The formation of women’s caucuses, centers, programs, and support groups within mainstream legal, medical, economic, religious, and military institutions has been an enduring outcome of the women’s movement (Katzenstein 1998). Scientists in the 1960s who struggled to square their identities as activists and as nonpartisan truth seekers founded public science organizations like the Union for Concerned Scientists and the Center for Science in the Public Interest that continue today (Moore 1996). Collective identities developed within movements may have lasting impact on institutional political arenas and organizational forms.

In another kind of impact, a movement’s association in the eyes of the public with a particular strategy, tactic, organizational form, or style can influence subsequent uses of it. When pro-life activists sing “We Shall Overcome,” or sit-in at abortion clinics, they benefit from the popular identification of those tactics with the civil rights movement (Eyerman & Jamison 1998). No progressive group today would appropriate the goose step or the swastika. A feminist group that adopted a bureaucratic style of organization would be interpreted as signaling its departure from 1970s feminism—perhaps in its ideological commitments as well as its organizational form (Bordt 1997). Symbols and strategies resonate with the identities of prior users.

Finally, the creation of a strong movement identity usually leads to a backlash, as those portrayed as the enemy may be angered or frightened into counterorganization. Sometimes the countermobilization outstrips the original protest movement. For instance, several years of publicity and victories by the animal rights movement pushed the biomedical community into forging a new (and very effective) public identity for itself, emphasizing aid to sick individuals, especially children, rather than the abstractions of scientific progress (Jasper & Poulsen 1993). The American nuclear power industry, too, began fighting back once it realized it was under attack by a national movement (Jasper 1990:ch 7).

Rather than viewing collective identity exclusively as a kind of cultural movement impact, separated from the domain of institutional impacts like legal reform and policy change, these analyses point to the ways in which newly prominent or reformulated identities can transform the institutional political playing field.

CONCLUSION

What is collective identity? How do collective identities matter to social movements? And what don't we know yet? We conclude with one more cut at these questions.

Collective identity describes imagined as well as concrete communities, involves an act of perception and construction as well as the discovery of preexisting bonds, interests, and boundaries. It is fluid and relational, emerging out of interactions with a number of different audiences (bystanders, allies, opponents, news media, state authorities), rather than fixed. It channels words and actions, enabling some claims and deeds but delegitimizing others. It provides categories by which individuals divide up and make sense of the social world.

What is *not* collective identity? Collective identities are in constant interplay with personal identities, but they are never simply the aggregate of individuals' identities. If collective identity describes what makes people occupying a category similar, personal identity is the bundle of traits that we believe make us unique. Nor is collective identity coextensive with culture; there are many cultural meanings that do not imply images of bounded groups. Collective identity is not the same as common ideological commitment. One can join a movement because one shares its goals without identifying much with fellow members (one can even, in some cases, despise them). Likewise, people can develop collective identity on the basis of their distinctive know-how or skills, but such know-how and skills can have influence even in the absence of collective identities around them. Those skilled in explosives may favor bombing as a protest tactic, but this does not necessarily give them a shared collective identity. Movements contain, symbolize, and ritualize all kinds of people and attributes; only some of them are collective actors. Collective identities are one particular form of culture, although they may be built on other forms.

How does collective identity matter to social movements? Paying attention to the causes and consequences of collective identity can move us beyond some theoretical impasses. The proliferation of work on the topic suggests that many sociologists realize as much. But too often collective identity has been invoked simply to fill gaps left by structuralist, state-centered, or rational choice models, in the process reproducing the very dichotomies the concept is supposed to challenge. Specifically, we should not assume that identity is the opposite of interest (with identity-oriented movements opposed to interest-based ones), that it is the opposite of incentives (with self-regarding action contrasted to altruistic action), that it is the opposite of strategy (with expressive criteria for choosing strategies contrasted with instrumental ones), or that it is the opposite of politics (with movement impacts on individual selves contrasted with those on institutional politics). Instead, the work we have highlighted here shows that structural interests are often recent in origin; that we may engage in moral protest to develop the kind of self we want; that what is considered a good strategy is often based on what groups it is symbolically associated with; and that movements promote new identities

as a way to gain power as well as transform selves. The most interesting recent work on identity has inquired into the macrostructural processes by which new collective identities develop and into the micro-interactional processes by which people come to see themselves as obliged to protest. It has emphasized organizers' capacity to redefine old identities and create new ones, and the pressures on them to do so.

That said, there is still a lot that we do not know about collective identities. We have little evidence about how individuals sort out and combine different sources of identity, or about the psychological mechanisms behind collective identities. People have a range of groups, roles, and positions available to them, and we know little about how they juggle and choose among them; the relationship between personal and collective identities is a staple of social psychology that students of social movements have yet to incorporate (Tajfel 1981, Stryker 1980, Burke & Reitzes 1991). In addition, we know little about the emotions that accompany and shape collective identity. Collective identity is not simply the drawing of a cognitive boundary; it simultaneously involves a positive affect toward other group members (Jasper 1998).

Taken as a whole, the literature on collective identity still leaves fuzzy the relations between identity and an individual's calculus of self-interest. Is identity or interest the bedrock of individual choice? This question underpins several of the broader issues we have addressed, and scholars have answered it both ways. For some, individuals choose identities that will maximize their preferences. In Gould's (1998) account, for example, some Western Pennsylvanian elite brokers chose to identify with a cause that would gain them allies whether they won or lost. For Chong (1991), acting solidaristically is a way to improve one's reputation and the benefits that flow from it. For other authors, identities set the very terms of individual and strategic calculation. Pizzorno (1986) argues that the category of interest is meaningless without that of identity, in other words, without recognition of the self doing the rational choosing. "Circles of recognition" not only validate actions on behalf of already established interests, but help to constitute new identities and the interests that flow from them (see also Emirbayer 1997, Calhoun 1991). In a sense, the debate can be seen as a kind of sociological chicken and egg question akin to whether individual or society comes first. However, an alternative tack asks whether interest or identity is more salient in different contexts. Along these lines, Ringmar (1996) argues that actions driven by identity rather than calculations of interest are especially likely when political, economic, or social change has destabilized prior identities. During such formative moments, one acts—and "one" can be nations as well as persons—in order to reassert who one is.

We still know little about the cultural building blocks that are used to construct collective identities. Laws and political status have been studied as a source, but we should learn more about how intellectuals and group leaders use nostalgia and other elements of collective memory to construct a past for a group. What are other tools and raw materials of identity work? How important is place for example?

What about bodily differences and bodily needs? To what extent are metaphors and images created originally through nationalism central to other collective identities?

Finally, more attention to historical and non-Western movements would expose us to different understandings of the relationship between self and other, and to different dynamics of collective identity formation and contestation. Not least, they should help us move beyond simply asserting the constructedness of identities by showing the variety of forms that identities take and the very different behaviors they require. Like the other gaps we have noted, this one should spur us to better specify our concepts and questions, and to begin testing competing answers.

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