

MOBILIZATION FORUM: AWKWARD MOVEMENTS

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Several years ago, Gay Seidman complained in an article in *Mobilization* that scholars of the South African antiapartheid movement had so ignored the role of armed struggle as to leave the impression that the movement and its most famous leader, Nelson Mandela, were non-violent in the Gandhian mold. In fact, Mandela was the first military commander of the African National Congress. He owed his popularity among black South Africans in part to his close identification with the armed wing of the movement. Seidman's goal was not only to set the record straight. She argued that ignoring the movement's use of violence foreclosed important questions about the relations between popular mobilization and guerilla campaigns. It also left unchallenged social movement scholars' tendency to treat violence as something that is done *to* protesters, or, when it is done *by* them, as a symptom of movement decline rather than as sometimes boosting popular morale (Seidman 2001).

Sociologists have written about the methodological and ethical difficulties of studying movement groups that are illegal, violent, inaccessible, or ideologically unappealing (e.g., Blee 2003; Esseveld and Eyerman 1992; Kriesi 1992). Seidman's piece suggested that groups that are ideologically appealing pose challenges of their own. But it also made central the theoretical consequences of neglecting what I think of as awkward movements, ones whose composition, goals, or tactics make them difficult to study or theorize.

Scholars may avoid certain movements, groups, and dynamics for obvious reasons. Groups that use illegal means are often difficult to gain access to, and even when researchers do not fear for their own safety, they may worry about endangering the people they study. Many of us study progressive social movements because we embrace their aims: indeed, some of us straddle worlds of academia and activism. It is hard to spend time and energy on groups that one finds ideologically noxious. But movement groups may also be *conceptually* awkward. They are uncomfortably close to something else that is not a movement. Groups like the Promise Keepers may seem too close to self-help groups; those like the American Legion or the Veterans of Foreign Wars may seem too close to interest groups; those like the American Jewish Congress may seem too close to denominational groups.

Of course, we have to draw some lines between movements and phenomena that are not movements. Conceptual boundaries serve an analytical purpose. But I suspect that the lines separating movement groups from, say, interest groups, charities, terrorist organizations, unions, nongovernmental organizations, and self-help groups often reflect the idiosyncrasies of how subfields have developed rather than anything intrinsic to the phenomena themselves. Yet, casual classifications of this type have real import for our theories of mobilization. As Dave Snow (2004) observed several years ago, a tendency to treat as paradigmatic movements that are targeted to the state has made it difficult to theorize the many movements that are not targeted to the state: movements for reform within the Catholic Church, for example, or movements aimed at transforming cultural understandings and identities. Should one simply look for a parallel to political opportunities to account for the emergence of these

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movements or do they call for alternative theories altogether? Or—still another possibility—might such movements alert us to dynamics that operate even in the paradigmatic movements? One of the most intriguing findings in recent research on protest in science, religion, education, and the military is that institutional *insiders* have played key roles in fostering protest (Binder 2002; Katzenstein 1999; Moore 1998). But such insiders may be just as important in state-targeted protest—this despite our tendency to treat challengers and authorities as separate and opposing groups. In other words, awkwardness may be less a problem to be solved than the source of new perspective on old theoretical problems (see also Andrews and Edwards 2004; Burstein 1998; McAdam et. al 2005 for discussions of the conceptual topography of movements and related phenomena).

Other reasons for avoiding awkward movement groups are less obvious, or less easily acknowledged. Some groups are uncomfortably dogmatic or irritatingly zealous. Others are so unambitious in their aims or moderate in their tactics as to be boring. Or they are made up of old people. Or they are too nice to seem real challengers. Certain phases in the lives of movement groups seem too depressing to study intensively; certain conflicts within organizations seem too idiosyncratic to probe. These kinds of avoidance surely have impact on our theorizing too, but in ways that have not been much explored.

It is with these thoughts in mind that I asked Gay Seidman and Dave Snow, along with Kathy Blee, Janice Irvine, and Belinda Robnett to write about awkward movements. Each scholar is well known in the field for superb research on mobilization: Seidman on labor movements in South Africa and Brazil; Snow on Nichiren Shoshu Buddhists and homeless activists; Blee on the 1920s Ku Klux Klan and contemporary racist hate groups; Irvine on right- and left-wing contenders over sex education in public schools; and Robnett on women in the Southern civil rights movement. But it was the keen insight with which each has written about the research process—their own and the process more broadly—that made me think their reflections on this question would be provocative.

I asked each essayist to be personal and prescriptive—in other words, to talk about what he or she has struggled with and to say how we as a discipline might do better. No small task: as Robnett observed, why should solving the problem of the racially exclusive character of academic scholarship be any easier than solving the problem of racism? Still, each essayist rose magnificently to the challenge. The stories they tell are candid and poignant; the conclusions they draw compelling.

Let me flag a few striking features of the essays as a group. Together, they take the notion of awkwardness and turn it on its head. They make clear that there is nothing intrinsically awkward about any movement, group, or tactic. Awkwardness is in the eye of the beholder, or, as Snow puts it, it is a feature of the relationship between researcher and research object. This means that by paying attention to what seems awkward, we can begin to probe what seems, by contrast, natural. We can begin to uncover the assumptions and conventions that constitute the normative. In this vein, Blee, famous for studying abhorrent groups, argues that the challenges she has faced in her research on white supremacists and neo-Nazis have their parallel in research on mainstream, nonviolent, progressive, egalitarian groups. Just as we would be wrong to think that Nazis are not motivated by moral beliefs, Blee warns, we may be too quick to see progressive activists' participation as motivated only by moral beliefs. No less than neo-Nazis, they may be motivated by serendipity and drift rather than a prior commitment to the cause. In other words, where our relationship to our subjects is marked by comfort rather than awkwardness, we may fail to ask certain questions, taking at face value what we would like to believe about ourselves.

I am struck by the distinctly emotional burdens of scholarship on movements that don't fit into the usual categories. Blee feared for her life; Seidman feared arrest; Irvine feared being publicly attacked by evangelicals, and Robnett by academics. Essayists describe experiences of anger, shame, and hurt. But positive emotional attachments were equally problematic. Take loyalty. It is no great revelation to say that scholars of movements have to

balance allegiances to the movement they study (and often sympathize with) and to the scholarly community. But in her essay, Seidman makes clear just how difficult that balance is. She tells a story about researching the antiapartheid movement that she has told many times before. Then she tells us what the story leaves out. They are details, perhaps, but in exploring her motivations for omitting features of the struggle between antiapartheid activists and the government, Seidman renders those motivations at once completely understandable and analytically problematic. Certainly, one can smooth out a group's rough edges without detracting from the point one wants to make. But the more we cast admirable movements as pure, that is, as unmotivated by personal gain or political payback, the more we as audiences expect that of all admirable movements. The miscast movements of the past become standards for how other movements are evaluated.

Years after the end of apartheid, Seidman recognizes that she can tell a fuller story without putting her loyalty to the movement she studied in question. Robnett cannot. As a Black woman studying gender relations in the civil rights movement and postmovement black politics, her loyalties are routinely questioned. (White) feminists criticize her for only focusing on black women; (male) civil rights scholars for celebrating women leaders at the expense of male ones; (Black) activists for exposing sore points in the movement's history. Robnett's essay suggests that there may be awkward movement scholars as well as awkward movements: people whose identity, like the movements they study, cannot be comfortably aligned along familiar oppositions (Black/White, man/woman, activist/scholar, and so on). They provoke discomfort whether they conform to expectations or breach them.

Note that Robnett's critics argued not that she was disloyal but that her scholarship was flawed. Scholarly truth is inevitably, intrinsically political, her essay makes poignantly clear. The other essayists also take up the point. Each was determined to tell the truth in his or her research. But telling the truth is not as simple as being honest, fair, and objective. Seidman was never dishonest in how she told her story, but she recognizes now that her omissions may have had political consequences that she barely recognized. Blee never whitewashed her portrayal of racist groups. But she still found her earlier work proudly displayed by supremacists, since scholarship, no matter how it contradicted supremacists' self-portrayal, was publicity for the cause. Again, telling the truth can have unintended political consequences. Irvine's essay on studying battles over sex education is especially interesting here. At a time when the religious right had little political power, she observes, it was easy to render sympathetically the religious right activists who mobilized against sex education. After all, they believed in their cause just as much as their opponents did, even if they used more extreme measures to promote it, including deception, shoddy, and *ad hominen* attacks. But the danger of sympathetically rendering positions in a debate about what is true is that it equates the two sides. It makes it seem as if truth lies almost exactly in the middle. But in this case the truth did not lie in the middle. Irvine thus shows how the even-handed, fair-minded, balanced stance that is promoted in social scientific research may misrepresent the truth in the interests of fairness.

So truth and politics are not easily separable. But they are separable. A fourth continuity in the essays is their use of analytical tools from a range of fields to make sense of just how awkwardness is constituted, that is, how certain ways of knowing are made conventional. Irvine shows how social scientific norms of objectivity sometimes undercut the very goals to which they are harnessed. In a similar vein, Robnett draws on the notion of binary oppositions to show how analytical possibilities are systematically obscured. If the experience of white women is taken as universal, then it is indeed difficult to understand how black women in the civil rights movement felt simultaneously liberated and subordinate to male leaders. In her use of a personal story to capture the politics of scholarship, Seidman shows how narrative's very form discourages audiences from asking questions about causation. We expect stories to omit details and we expect that the details they omit are irrelevant to the central causal thread. Insofar as much movement scholarship involves recounting past events, that scholarship may subordinate causality to familiar plot lines.

Snow's essay is especially valuable in likening the problem of awkward movements to that of all field research. Discomfort is familiar to most ethnographers, he points out. As a feature of the researcher's relationship to the group being studied rather than a feature of the group itself, it is also variable and intermittent, and can be the source of important insight. Rather than treating our experiences of irritation, embarrassment, or anxiety as failures of personal poise, we should mine them for what they reveal about our assumptions about how movement groups should behave (see also Kleinman and Copp 1993). I would go even further. What is going on when we do *not* experience the kinds of discomfort the essayists here describe? If studying uncomfortable movements is emotionally so taxing, then I wonder how much work the rest of us do to ensure that the movements we study remain within the bounds of the theoretically conventional—and emotionally comfortable.

At its best, reflexivity in scholarship is not navel gazing. Instead, it takes personal experience as the starting point for an investigation of the cultural norms and unspoken logics that shape experience. This is what these essays do so well.

FORUM: CAN WE LEARN FROM RACISTS?

*Kathleen M. Blee**

I had spent a lot of time cobbling together a list of racist groups to ensure a diverse sample of white supremacist activists, so I was caught off-guard by a letter from Tanya (pseudonym), one of the country's most infamous racists, demanding an interview. Tanya's group wasn't on my list—too scary, I'd thought. Its leaders were in federal prison for a string of crimes, including assassinating an opponent. How should I respond to Tanya's letter? I could insist that it was my research project and I had to make the decisions, but Tanya was clearly holding the cards here. If initially it was too scary to interview Tanya, now it was equally scary not to do so. If I refused to talk to her, she could spread the word that I was hostile, even a government spy.

As it turned out, I never interviewed Tanya. Right before leaving for her isolated "compound," I received a letter ("summons" might be a more accurate word) demanding that I provide her—"immediately!"—with the details of my political philosophies, religious affiliation, and family life. When I responded with an embarrassingly vague description of myself as someone committed to "pluralism," Tanya abruptly cancelled our meeting. It wasn't long before her publishing press was advertising a new booklet on the dangers of "academic race traitors" to the white power movement. Once again, Tanya was in charge.

"Awkward" may be too tame a term for the virulently racist and anti-Semitic movements I have studied, which range from the 1920s Ku Klux Klan to contemporary white supremacist and neo-Nazi groups (Blee 1991; 2002). Although some racist groups want to appear open to public scrutiny, most deliberately style themselves as dangerous to outsiders, including researchers. This is particularly true of groups that see themselves as part of an international pan-Aryan movement that is poised to fight an apocalyptic race war against Jews and nonwhites. But even less overtly violent-seeking racist groups tend to promote an image of themselves as dangerous in order to deter casual joiners, infiltrators, and observers and generate fear and a sense of vulnerability among those they regard as their enemies (Blee 1998; 2003). Researchers who are perceived by racist activists as nonwhite, Jewish, or linked to police, antagonistic racist leaders, or monitoring groups like the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith or the Southern Poverty Law Center are particularly at risk, but even unaffiliated and non-Jewish white researchers can be targeted as threatening to the interests of racist activists and groups. Racist movements are difficult, scary, and, in this sense, awkward objects of scholarly inquiry because they violate an implicit sense that the groups we study will be receptive, or at least benign, subjects of our inquiry.

In a broader sense, what makes movements like organized racism awkward is that it is risky or impossible to study them using principles of inquiry that have proven useful for researching less confrontational and more politically acceptable social movements. For example, much scholarship on contemporary social movements relies on access and understandings that are possible because scholars are personally sympathetic or involved in a movement. Moreover, principles of rapport, obligations of reciprocity, and emotional empathy that

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have proven so important in recent qualitative interviewing and observational studies of social movement groups assume some commonality of interest or identity between the scholar and participants in the movement (Blee 1993). Not only is such commonality unlikely when studying racist movements, but the standard ways that scholars try to reciprocate their informants (e.g., monetary payments; producing accounts that highlight the contributions of a movement) might violate the ethical obligations of sociologists to use knowledge for the public good (American Sociological Association 2006).

The study of movements like organized racism poses other awkward ethical issues as well. Those who research what Nigel Fielding, a scholar of the British National Front, terms “unlovable groups” (1981: 7) confront complicated moral entanglements that rarely arise in studies of less offensive groups. In general, professional standards prohibit scholarship that could harm a subject. But might it be ethical, permissible, even perhaps compulsory, to conduct research with the intent of undermining the movement being studied, as by probing the finances of a racist group or the criminal backgrounds of leaders of an anti-Semitic movement? Would scholars even be justified in cooperating with antagonists of the movements they study—anti-racist groups, for example, or the police?

Not only can it be tricky to figure out how to study racist movements, but they also can be conceptually awkward. As Doug McAdam and his colleagues (McAdam, Sampson, Weffer, and MacIndoe 2005) argue, the defining template for modern social movement analysis, as distinct from collective behavior studies, was forged in studies of the U.S. new left, civil rights struggles, and second wave feminism. Progressive social movements of the 1960s and 1970s were, in effect, normalized by social movement studies that considered them to be reasonable responses to grievances, opportunities, or cultural shifts. These movements came to be seen as rational collective actors. Casting progressive movements within the boundary of rational action, however, also made it difficult to see very different kinds of political protest as part of the same category (Lamont and Molnar 2002). Social movements that differed significantly from the canonical progressive movements seemed to violate a sense of what a social movement *is*. For example, the assumption that social movements involve “claim making by disadvantaged minorities” (McAdam, Sampson, Weffer, and MacIndoe 2005:2) contrasts sharply with the focus by racist groups on preserving and extending the privileges of white persons. Similarly, against the assumption that activism stretches the boundaries of civic participation, racist groups encourage their supporters to become involved in civic life to curtail what they regard as the “Zionist Occupation” of the federal government by Jews and the racial minorities they are said to manipulate.

The circumscribed template of modern social movements may be why, until recently, research on racist movements rarely used the analytic frameworks of social movement studies. Instead, these generally were explained as aggregations of individual pathologies of racial hatred, prejudice, and displaced anger, long after such explanations lost favor in other social movement arenas. Although racist group scholars now commonly take advantage of the theories and insights of social movement scholars, the influence has generally been in one direction only. Social movement scholars have rarely paused to consider what lessons they might draw from studies of awkward movements. Yet, several issues that appear starkly in the study of white supremacist groups might be instructive for scholars of more sympathetic groups. These might be considered issues of methodology or ethics or maybe both. What links them is the concern with scholarly stance: How do—and might—we judge what to believe about a social movement? How should we stand as scholars vis-à-vis the social movements we study? And how might using the lens of racist group scholarship illuminate the analysis of less destructive and awkward movements?

Many issues that are raised in the study of awkward movements like organized racism involve questions of credibility. It is not difficult to recognize credibility as a problem with racist groups. They are easy—perhaps, too easy—to regard with suspicion. Their members flaunt hateful and violent images of racial, ethnic, and religious groups, images that others in

white society have learned to disguise or disavow (Bonilla-Silva 2003). They make odd and unsubstantiated claims, such as the frequent assertion that whites are the victims of more powerful groups like African Americans or nonwhite immigrants (Berbrier 2000). And, increasingly, they use a conspiratorial logic that forecloses any possibility for challenge or even rational argument, such as the insistence that their inability to point to specific Jews who are said to control world banking, the United Nations, or global media is sufficient evidence that Jews are so omnipotent that they can obscure their exercise of power (Blee 2002). Too, many racist groups cultivate an image of deceit, illogic, and extremism as a means of intimidating their opponents and warding off close scrutiny.

The loathsome ideas and actions of racist movements can easily cultivate a sense of these as a conceptual Other, so different from other movements that they cannot be understood with the same categories or logic of analysis. Yet, to understand the appeal of history's most abhorrent movements, researchers need to account for the similarities of these to mainstream motivations and agendas. For example, scholars are accustomed to thinking about egalitarian movements like civil rights in the 1960s as based on a framework of moral commitments. It is difficult, but essential, to probe how similar values, emotions, and commitments—albeit in a disturbing, even distorted way—may underlie extreme antiegalitarian groups. In her study of pre-World War II Germany, *The Nazi Conscience*, Claudia Koonz does just that, demonstrating the extent to which the mobilization of ordinary persons for German Nazism was based on appeals to ethics and morality rather than intergroup hatred: “What outsiders saw as ideology, Nazis experienced as truth” (2003: 2).

If it can be difficult to accept racist groups as credible, the challenge of credibility for less awkward movements is the opposite: it can be too easy to accept expressions of beliefs, motives, and patterns of behavior with which we are sympathetic because these appear intrinsically plausible. For example, when a participant talks of joining a peace and justice group because of a desire to “take a stand” against social injustice or inequality, this narrative is comfortable for many scholars, especially those with progressive activist commitments. It seems to make sense on its face. Might we then fail to pose the probing questions or use the same level of analytic scrutiny with this narrative that we would do one generated by members of with awkward groups?

A related issue of credibility concerns the participants in social movements. Racist groups are notorious for being infiltrated by police agents, criminals acting as informants for the police, antiracist activists seeking to monitor or undermine the racist movement, and adherents to competing racist groups trying to cause trouble or obtain information. Scholars have no way of identifying such infiltrators, so knowing exactly who is being interviewed in a study of racist activists is puzzling and frustrating. But this may not be a problem only for extreme and awkward movements. The increasing surveillance of social critics, in the United States and elsewhere, may indicate the need to ponder such issues even when studying much more mainstream movements, especially those that are regarded as challenging by state authorities (Cunningham 2004; Donner 1981). There is no obvious solution for this issue of credibility, but the likelihood of such complications in the study of state-opposing social movements suggests the need for caution in such scholarship.

Thinking about awkward movements also might help us think about how scholars bestow credibility on those we study and the implications of this. Again, this is an issue that appears starkly in research on racist groups. Leaders of racist groups often express pleasure at even explicitly negative or critical scholarly works, seeing any attention as an indication of their importance and a means to further publicize their message. This was brought home to me when I found copies of my earlier work on the 1920s Klan proudly displayed in the homes of current neo-Nazis members and reproduced as propaganda on racist websites. To them, my research affirmed that they were operating in a long tradition of organized racism. Obviously, scholars need to be cautious about the implications of studying racist movements. Extensive replication of interviews or speeches of racist leaders and detailed reports of the intricacy of

racist beliefs, for example, might be particularly likely to be used as propaganda by a movement that finds it difficult to publicize its ideas to mainstream populations.

The concern about extending credibility to social movements might be usefully raised in a different way for less awkward movements. Scholars who study social movements that fit their political sensibilities—at least in a general way—might not worry too much about the power of academic scholarship to publicize and strengthen what they study. It is possible that there is a disproportionate attention of social movement scholars to some kinds of movements—the “new-left movement family” in the early years of social movement theorizing; today, perhaps antiglobalization or queer/LGBT movements operating in the global North, often in urban and campus locations where many scholars reside. Might this provide, in the aggregate, academic credibility to these movements and not others as the primary harbingers of change and social progress? Might it be the case that we affect not only social movement theories, but also—at least in a limited way—the possibilities and direction of social change by which movements we study and which movements we neglect? Might we privilege the activism of those most like us, to the relative neglect of movements whose demographic composition or political sensibilities make it difficult for us to gain access or develop deep understandings, such as movements against drugs in working-class neighborhoods or against gangs in violent urban slums, movements for interracial Christian fellowship, or conservative movements to reduce taxes or social services?

Finally, studying movements—awkward or not—brings up difficult questions about the vulnerabilities that our subjects face by the very fact of being studied. Again, work on organized racism might be instructive since these groups are typically quite aware that information collected about them could be used against them by scholars, the media, antiracist groups, and the police. Groups for which we have greater political affinity, however, might be less sensitive to the risks they face as objects of scholarly inquiry. When we promise confidentiality to those we observe or interview, we imply that we can protect our subjects from harm although social scientists have no way to safeguard data against certain legal challenges (Blee 1999). When I was researching racist groups, I was highly attentive to the possibility that my research products could be seized by the police. In my new study, a comparative ethnography of seemingly nonviolent social movement groups in Pittsburgh (Blee and Currier 2005), I had few such concerns. Yet, in the spring of 2006, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), in response to a lawsuit from the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), released documents indicating that their efforts to monitor Pittsburgh peace and anti-Iraq war activism included placing an informant (ACLS 2006) in a group I had been studying. Over two years, I had engaged members of this tiny group in a number of structured and informal discussions about themselves and their group, conversations that provided information to the informant as well as to me. It is sobering to realize that this may have aided government intrusion of a group whose goals and activities I heartedly support.

That we can talk about awkward movements is both a commentary on how far social movement studies has come and a challenge about where it might go. Social movement scholarship has made great strides in identifying the boundaries around and commonalities among social movements that make these feasible for comparative analysis (Ragin 1992). We can now distinguish, by scholarly instinct if not always exact precision, social movements from such forms of collective life as civic groups, crowds, states, and serial collectivities (Young 1997). Now, we are poised to look around the edges of social movements and social movement studies and think about what we might learn from that those that still seem awkward.

SYMPATHY CAN BE AWKWARD TOO

*Gay Seidman**

When sociologists talk about studying awkward movements, they often mean movements whose goals or strategies seem unpalatable and activists are dislikeable. But even when movement goals are admirable, and when their activists are likeable, they may have awkward aspects. This is especially true, perhaps, when movements use strategies that involve violence, but it may come into play whenever movement tactics seem deceptive or manipulative. Scholars of movements operating in repressive regimes may worry about protecting informants exposed to arrest or violence, but I suspect that many more scholars than openly admit it are concerned not only with protecting movements from direct repression but also with protecting their images, avoiding depictions that will discredit a movement while still trying to represent the basic dynamics with as much honesty and openness as they can.

Striking that balance may be tricky. Few movements are perfect, and few activists are without guile. If you identify with a movement's goals, and respect its activists, how should you as a researcher discuss activities or aspects that are less than admirable? I want to illustrate this dilemma with a story I often tell, drawn from my fieldwork experiences in South Africa, at the height of the State of Emergency, when activists faced arrest, torture or even death for participating in ordinary demonstrations, let alone for activities tied to the illegal networks that were involved in armed struggle.

But now I want to tell it twice: first, as I would normally tell it to a public audience, using it to make some points about labor and social movements in a repressive context; and then again, adding in a few details that I usually leave out—details that will not undermine the validity of the analytic points I've made, but might alter your view of the entire episode.

One Wednesday afternoon in Johannesburg in mid-1987, I took a bus downtown to an appointment to interview a unionist at the headquarters of the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), a slightly run-down building downtown. When I got off the bus and walked around the corner, I stopped: riot police with dogs on leashes were blocking off the street, so that no one could enter or leave the COSATU building. This was in the middle of a long railway workers' strike, so I was not completely surprised: tensions over the strike had been running high, and it was, after all, during a State of Emergency, when army helicopters regularly flew over the city as they headed off to patrol Soweto, and thousands of activists were being held in detention without trial. But I had been hoping for a long-scheduled interview with an official from the Metalworkers' Union, and stood on the corner, not sure whether to give up and go home. A friend ran by, and pulled me along to a different building on a parallel street, where the offices of a labor-related NGO looked out over the entrance to COSATU House.

It was late on a winter afternoon, and as the lights were on, we could see clearly into all the rooms in the front of COSATU House. We watched as the riot police went methodically from floor to floor, arresting some 400 unionists, beating many of them as they took them off through a gauntlet of security police, loading them onto buses to take them to the notorious Security Branch headquarters, John Vorster Square. We were sure we were watching the end

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of the labor movement—and when I tell this story today, I always make sure to point out that even as a dedicated researcher, I was definitely more upset about the impact of the arrests on the antiapartheid movement than I was at their potential impact on my dissertation topic. Sometimes, I also mention that the police noticed us watching, and that I nearly got arrested as part of an ongoing crackdown on foreign journalists. But the next day, to all our amazement, the police released all the unionists: it turned out that throughout the night, the government had been barraged with angry phone calls from the country's major employers, who warned that if all the unionists were in jail, the country would explode in wildcat strikes and employers would have no one to negotiate with. Within a day or two, COSATU House was functioning again almost as usual.

A week later, COSATU House was raided again, and once again the government was forced to release union leaders almost immediately, further underscoring the power of the labor movement. Even though COSATU House itself was destroyed by a rightwing bomb a week later, most unionists came to view the entire episode as an indication of the movement's strength, and the regime's insecurity.

In the last twenty years, I have told this story in public from time to time, usually to make two analytic points and a personal one. The first served as a cornerstone of my thesis. The fact that the union leaders were released the day after the raids illustrated the extent of disagreements between manufacturing employers and the state over how to manage labor militancy. In contrast to early periods in South African history, where mining and agricultural employers could replace striking workers easily, industrial employers in the mid-1980s viewed negotiation with striking workers as a more viable option, and were willing to challenge state policy in order to ensure they had worker partners with whom to negotiate.

The second point concerns influences that shape movement structures. Given South Africa's repressive climate and the high vulnerability of union leaders, why did COSATU put all the union offices in a single building? The answer underscores a key silence in social movement theories that draw primarily on the experiences of advanced industrial countries. Poor people in developing countries, especially when they organize in opposition to the country's elite, are often dependent on resources from foreign donors, but those resources may come with strings reflecting not local conditions, but the experiences of the international donors. According to South African unionists, one of the major European union federations had offered to pay the rent for the federation's headquarters, as long as all the union offices were housed in a single space. The donors' vision was apparently to bring the unions together, both to allow coordination between unions and to create a kind of "liberated zone" in downtown Johannesburg. Like many third-world social movements, COSATU's strategies were shaped in part by demands that stemmed from a very different context, and COSATU accepted the conditions despite warnings that the decision made the union headquarters more vulnerable to attack.

At a much more personal level, of course, the story tells my listeners just how gutsy I am: the story clearly illustrates just how risky my field experiences were—in a way that I certainly hope avoids self-aggrandizement, but which I secretly trust most listeners can't possibly miss.

But what does the story leave out, and do the silences alter or invalidate any of those larger points? Here are the four details that I almost always gloss over, and you can judge for yourself what they add to the way you understand the original anecdote.

First, in all the times I've told this story publicly over the years, no one has *ever* asked why the police invaded the union building. It is a natural question, since obviously this wasn't a daily occurrence, but perhaps audiences don't like to display ignorance of some specific moment, or perhaps they just assume I have no answer. But I do: the raid took place in the middle of a six-week railroad workers' strike, a vicious conflict in which a militant union had stopped trains across the country. The details are now somewhat murky in my memory, but I believe that the day before the COSATU House raid, striking railway workers had killed several scabs near a railway station in a small town near Johannesburg. The police took over

the local union offices, and in retaliation, a group of striking workers had set off from the downtown COSATU House earlier that morning to defend their small-town office. As the group went down the road, they met three policemen, who tried to stop them. In the ensuing fracas, the policemen were beaten, badly; as I recall, one policeman may have been killed. Ironically, in contrast to the way we would normally view a South African conflict, much of the violence in this story began with the strikers and the union. While this detail might not excuse the police behavior during the raid, it might alter audiences' views of those heroic unionists facing police repression: were the police simply retaliating for an attack on their comrade? Would that perhaps cast the union movement in a slightly less heroic (or at least, less innocent-victim) light?

Second, there are facts about clandestine networks that might raise eyebrows about union strategies. A week or two before the COSATU House raid, I interviewed a leading official in the railway workers' union. He was in hiding, but a friend with ties to the labor movement arranged for the interview. He was remarkably candid, most surprisingly, telling me that he had slipped outside South Africa illegally several months before, to meet with ANC leaders to discuss strategy for the railway workers' strike.

For years, even long after the unbanning of the ANC and Nelson Mandela's election to South Africa's presidency, I have been reluctant to reveal information that might link specific individuals to participation in illegal activities. Mostly, my silence is a matter of habit: at the time I conducted my fieldwork, unionists were already at serious risk of torture, detention, or assassination, and I still feel uncomfortable making a decision to reveal names without checking back with the specific individual. Even though many of these activists have long since identified themselves, I remain unsure about my ethical obligations to protect their anonymity. In fact, when I wrote an article for *Mobilization* in 2001 on the links between the above-ground antiapartheid movement and the clandestine underground, I found myself using illustrations from other researchers who had already described illegal activities in their published work. In this particular case, my silence seems absurd: the railway workers' unionist emerged as an ANC activist immediately after the organization was unbanned, and subsequently left the union movement to become the rather antiunion personnel manager for a large Johannesburg mining conglomerate.

But my silence was also about protecting the labor movement more broadly: the labor movement always insisted that it was independent from the ANC underground. In the 1980s, this information could have served as the evidence the state needed to substantiate its oft-repeated claims that the labor movement was closely allied with the illegal ANC—or, in the words of the Internal Security Act, “furthering the aims of a banned organization”—which could have led to COSATU itself being outlawed. But was I also concerned to protect the international image of the labor movement? My silence probably made no difference to the attitudes of the South African security police, but it might have mattered overseas. As a researcher, I knew full well that tying the labor movement to a guerrilla struggle risked discrediting it in the eyes of foreign audiences, donors, and diplomats. Since the mid-1980s, the Reagan administration had listed the ANC as a terrorist organization. Would any confirmation of union-guerrilla links also have tainted the South African labor movement?

Third, when I tell the story, I generally avoid mentioning my own cowardice—notably, the terrible moment when, faced by police who thought I must be a foreign reporter taking illegal photographs of police action, I told the police my own name and address. South African activists generally lied whenever confronted by police—but as an American, I didn't even consider lying. I suppose I could excuse my misplaced honesty by claiming I wanted to be able to demand access to the consulate, but the truth is, I was terrified, and definitely wasn't thinking straight one way or the other—hardly the gutsy fieldworker. Fortunately, a truly courageous labor lawyer happened to walk into the NGO office at that moment to challenge the police arrests, and the police lost all interest in me.

There is one final detail that I always leave out: a week after COSATU House was destroyed by a security police bomb, a huge explosion rocked Johannesburg. The next day, black activists in the union movement insisted that the ANC had bombed Johannesburg military headquarters. Most of the white activists I asked called that version unlikely, and the press, of course, was blocked from covering the story by strict censorship laws. But after 1990, when the negotiated transition to elections began and illegal organizations were unbanned, it became clear that probably the rumors were true: the ANC had responded to the COSATU House bombing with its own armed attack, although I'm still not sure what the target was.

In this case, I don't know what difference this detail makes. Would it alter audiences' view of the role of armed struggle in South Africa or their understanding of how democratic or transparent the labor movement was? Would the different perceptions of black and white activists undermine the labor movement's claims to nonracialism, or would these differences simply demonstrate something we already know—that South African society was deeply racially divided, in ways that made it hard even for nonracial activists to transcend division?

Perhaps defensively, I insist that these additional details do not change the conclusions that I drew from version I have told in public (except, I admit shamefacedly, for my own courageous self-presentation). But I realize that they do, perhaps, change the way American audiences might think about the labor movement, in ways that could erode listeners' sense that the labor movement was the heroic, nonviolent, nonracial social movement that, in fact, it was.

But this is where I started. I undertook the research because I was interested in how labor movement could emerge in a context of such repression; and like most researchers, I began with a strong sense of sympathy for the movement's goals. In a context of very real repression, what are the researcher's obligations to protect an informant? A strategy? A movement's image? What guidelines tell a researcher which details are unimportant, merely slightly changing the shading, and which would significantly alter the picture presented in the research?

All social movements have goals, and all have embarrassing aspects as well as heroic aspects one. To some extent, all researchers face the same problem: all movements are awkward. No movement is perfect, or perfectly coherent. Most have blurry edges, and I suspect that most researchers make choices about how to present the movements they describe. In repressive contexts, that awkwardness may assume even greater proportions, but even in safe settings, researchers inevitably make choices that will shade their audiences' response to the movement, as well as to the research.

The question, I think, is how to tell when protective shading slides over into dishonesty, and leads to active misrepresentation of the character of social movement activism. In retrospect, I think I and other researchers should have been less squeamish in describing the anti-apartheid movement. Without including details that might have endangered individuals, I now think that I could have described issues and behaviors that would show the movement as less than purely noble. Reality has few clear edges: few social movements are always well behaved. Instead of holding activists up to some ideal standard, perhaps we should recognize that no movement is perfect. Perhaps if sympathetic researchers were willing to write more openly about grey areas, we would develop a more realistic understanding of the messy reality in which broad social movements operate, and perhaps we could accept the ambiguities of protest without losing sympathy for the movement's goals.

FORUM: NEITHER HERE NOR THERE—AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN AS SUBJECTS AND AUTHORS

*Belinda Robnett**

My adult son telephoned the other day to apologize for previously failing to grasp the stress I encounter in academic life. The call was precipitated by his discovery of a nasty review of my 1997 book, *How Long? How Long? African American Women in the Struggle for Civil Rights*. To his dismay, while casually looking for my book on Amazon.com, he discovered that a scholar had taken the time to post an unflattering review of the book. Knowing that scholars routinely write reviews for scholarly journals, my son couldn't fathom why someone would spend valuable time trashing my book on a commercial site. Delivering what my son perceived as devastating news, he repeatedly consoled me with the knowledge that there were only four copies of the book left. Apparently, the negative review hadn't hurt sales. In my world, this is a relatively benign occurrence. To be sure, we all encounter criticism, for better or for worse, but emotionally charged attacks are not uncommon to those who inhabit the borderlands. We women of color sociologists are neither here nor there, because our perspectives do not always fit neatly into current academic boxes.

My work on the participation of African American women in the civil rights movement is a site of struggle, as is my present work on their post-civil rights political participation. The topic, African American women, resides on the border between research on women (generally white women), and work on race (generally ungendered). It also provides a designated insiders' outside view of a slice of African American life. As an African American female academic, I am a designated insider but, in many ways that I will elaborate upon shortly, I remain on the outside of Black life. So, not only is the topic uniquely positioned, but I am as well. This unique positioning of topic and author challenges existing understandings of gender, race, and community. It is from these three locations that my work and I struggle for space and place.

Who is Authentic? Are You Black or Are You Feminist?

One's authenticity as Black and as feminist are often at odds. My personal authenticity as an African American feminist scholar is wedded to the reception of my academic work; and the conceptual approach, empirical data, and theoretical conclusions of my work reflect on other's perceptions of my authenticity as Black and as a feminist. The community of scholars working on gender issues, largely comprised of White women, has been generally receptive to my work on African American women in the 1960s civil rights movement, as well as my work on their role in post-1960s politics, but sometimes conceives of it as not inclusive or feminist enough. My first paper was submitted to a journal dedicated to gender issues. Not unexpectedly, I was asked to revise and resubmit the paper; but what was surprising was the nature of the comments. The reviewers were unhappy because I'd failed to include White women as the subject of the empirical analysis. The focus of my work, African American

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women, apparently serves as an insufficient subject. It is difficult to imagine the reverse scenario in which an author addressing a topic such as women's suffrage or second-wave feminism would be taken to task for his/her omission of women of color as subject. Moreover, my conclusion, based on interviews of women activists in civil rights movement organizations, that African American women experienced feelings of liberation in spite of sexism within the movement, was attacked. The women activists, the reviewers claimed, were suffering from a false consciousness. My conclusions seemed to them riddled with contradictions. But the contradictions were a feature of these women's experiences. African American women in the civil rights movement simultaneously experienced, sexism, liberation, unprecedented power, and leadership roles. Unwilling to change my conclusions or to include White women as subject, I never resubmitted the paper to that journal, but I understood that my authenticity as feminist was in question. Rather than squarely situated in feminist space, I straddled the border that includes race.

In many ways, my work on African American women has proven more of a challenge to my authenticity as Black than it has to my authenticity as feminist. Since the 1980s, the work of Patricia Hill Collins, bell hooks, and other women of color has stretched the boundary of feminism to include the experiences of nonwhite women. However, Black authenticity remains constrained by ideology and racial theories centered on Black collective identity that is implicitly male. In recent years, a few scholars have challenged the class biases in current understandings of collective identity. Confronted with evidence of working-class African Americans' lack of racial consciousness, they have suggested that the problem may lie rather in the fact that standards of racial consciousness are defined by the middle class (Reed 1999). In similar fashion, I have argued, the gendered character of collective identity should be recognized. The way in which African American men and women experience racism, as well as Black institutions such as the church and the political process, merit closer attention. Are "Black interests" the same for men and women? To what extent does the male dominated Black elite, intelligentsia, political leadership, and Black clergy define these interests? There is the assumption that both Black history and African American contemporary issues can be analyzed in a genderless fashion. All too often, empirical research on African Americans that takes account of gender is met with resistance by both men and women African American scholars. Before I continue, however, I want to emphasize that I have enjoyed a tremendous amount of support from several African American scholars. However, there are those who believe analyses of gender contribute to racial divisiveness. This ideological trajectory emerged during the late 1960s with the rise of Black nationalism. While it is beyond the scope of this essay to discuss this at length, the influence remains, rendering gender issues as "White women's issues." What such proponents fail to grasp is that the divisions already exist, as is evidenced by the separate Million Man Marches and Million Woman Marches, with their substantively different emphases and tenors. Such divisions must be addressed to forge greater solidarity.

My earliest experience of resistance to analyses of gender occurred just after I'd completed my dissertation proposal to analyze the position and contributions of African American women in the civil rights movement. My first interview was with a fellow academic, who refused to discuss her role in the movement because gender was not an issue during the 1960s. There is certainly merit to this argument, but I believed then as I do now, that the legacy of African American women's participation in the civil rights movement needed to be documented and analyzed. Still, many of my eventual interviewees expressed concern that the study not be influenced by a feminist agenda. Although I personally identify as a feminist, I was committed to uncovering their perspectives, and drawing conclusions as they emerged from the data.

As I concluded in my book, women served as bridge leaders who connected the local masses to the larger movement. Subsequently, I presented these findings during a job interview at a northeastern university. Much of the audience was comprised of African American

professors from various departments. In the middle of my talk, one African American male scholar jumped to his feet, slammed his hand on the table and exclaimed that I was “knocking” the legacy of Dr. King for my own advancement. Unfortunately, as history shows, Dr. King was not particularly open to the leadership of African American women. This is not surprising given the times, and my conclusion was based on archival materials, autobiographies, and interviews of women who participated in the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. My authenticity as “Black” was immediately at stake. My light complexion has always cast doubt on my racial identification and, thus my authenticity, despite my roots in Black South Central Los Angeles and Compton, but my approach, and the conclusions drawn only served to stamp me as “Whitened”. I was a “sell-out” to White feminism. This is particularly ironic because, as mentioned earlier, I’d received reviewer and editor comments from the feminist journal suggesting the conclusion was not feminist enough. Collectively, the group of African American scholars boycotted the rest of the interview process, choosing to avoid having meals with me or to show me around town. Needless to say, amidst the profuse apologies by the White chair of the department, I did not receive a job offer. He could not hire me given the response of the Black faculty, he explained. Such ostracism has not been singular in nature.

Several years ago, I was invited to attend a conference devoted to Black politics, where I presented results of my post-1960s civil rights movement African American politics project. I discussed a political and ideological disjuncture between working-class African Americans and the middle class, arguing that the former is much more conservative than the latter. I quoted examples of African American working-class ideology that was indistinguishable from much of the White conservative Christian right. The findings, I suggested, may be explained by rhetoric and discourse surrounding the Million Man March, and much of the political focus of Black male religious leaders who emphasize self-help as opposed to government remedies. This disjuncture, I argued, was also gendered in that the Million Woman March strongly focused on opportunities, wages, childcare, and other governmental support in addition to self-help. My conclusions were met with hostility and denial. Blacks have always been conservative, conference participants argued, and men and women do not significantly differ on their support of race-based programs. Yet, scholars have repeatedly found significant class differences in political ideology and political participation. Moreover, analysis of interviews I conducted with a regional sample of middle class, working class, and poor African Americans and of survey data reveals significant gender differences in feelings of common fate, political participation, and ideology. Yet, my work was summarily dismissed by the group, and I was ostracized at the dinner which followed. My former editor also attended the session and was dismayed by the resistance I encountered.

Such resistance, however, is not only endemic among African American scholars, but the academy in general, and social movement scholars are not an exception. As I discussed at length in a 2001 article, “Intersections of Race and Gender,” ironically, in a field charged with the task of studying societal inequality, the academy reproduces a similar institutionalized gendered racial/ethnic hierarchy in which sociological scholarship in the more highly ranked journals less often includes work by and about women, and rarely includes the scholarship by and about women of color. Even feminist journals largely publish the work of White scholars that includes theory primarily derived from research on White women or White men. The segregation of scholarship produces theoretical blinders that stymie intellectual exchange and knowledge. It also produces boundary policing that exacerbates the racial/ethnic gender divide in scholarship.

In the area of social movements, those of us straddling the border often find it difficult to find space and place for our work and our selves, but instead remain in the borderlands. Studies that are noninclusive of Whites but focus exclusively on groups of color are presumed to be theoretically nongeneralizable. With every project, colleagues repeatedly suggest that I conduct research on Whites as well. There is the presumption that studies of Whites lend

greater validity to the results. Rarely do scholars question the generalizability or validity of studies that exclusively study Whites. It is widely known that the racial composition of the United States of America is rapidly changing. With the influx of immigrants, the Bureau of the Census (2001 P-20-535) predicts that by 2050, Whites will comprise a numerical minority (see also Day 1996; Yancey 2003: 2). So how accurate are the findings that focus only on Whites?

Resolution of this problem is not simple. It requires a concerted effort by editors and reviewers to stretch the boundaries of the field to include interdisciplinary work, and to understand that research on only Whites is no more generalizable and valid than is research on only nonwhites. Given that much of the research and scholarship about nonwhites and women is segregated into ethnic studies and feminist venues, then evaluations of work about women of color must be understood as inherently interdisciplinary. Such efforts will not only increase the representation of work by and about women of color but will expand the intellectual breadth and enhance our knowledge of collective behavior and social movements.

SEX, LIES, AND RESEARCH

*Janice M. Irvine**

The sociological imagination values nuance, complexity, and paradox. The movement I studied, comprised of conservative Christian evangelical activists, insists that its perspective is Truth. Sociologists value negotiation and flexibility. The activists I studied take a no-compromise position. When I began writing about the battles over sex education in this country, I never realized that those differences would prove so difficult.

When I embarked on field research in 1990, it was a very different political climate than now. Culture wars raged over issues such as pornography, sexuality in the media, multiculturalism, school prayer, and sex education. At the dawn of the Clinton era, however, the political activists engaged in those battles—those of the Christian right—garnered little serious attention as anything other than marginalized extremists.

Initially, I envisioned examining two “sides” of this culture war over sex education—one a religious and political movement, the other an aggregate of professional advocates. However, during my years of field research, I noticed that, on both the national and local levels, conservative religious activists were significantly more powerful than sex education advocates. In terms of infrastructure, they were bigger, better organized, and richer. Beyond infrastructure, the disparity in the two sides’ rhetorical opportunities was palpable. Opponents of comprehensive sex education had access to a much more culturally powerful repertoire of negative sexual language and images. They relied heavily on sexual fear, shame, and stigma in crafting strategies to galvanize supporters and build a movement. They seemed to be capturing the terms of national debate over sex education by successfully triggering volatile emotional battles in local communities throughout the country. It was a powerful strategy, and because sex-averse language trumps our barely existent language of sexual affirmation, it was a strategy that was unavailable to sex education advocates.

I found several consistent patterns in Christian right movement strategies across the four decades of sex education conflicts I examined. Conservative religious opponents of sex education relied on inflammatory and stigmatizing language (like “pornography,” “sodomy curriculum” or “mental molestation”) as a way to discredit their opponents. They lied or purposely distorted the programs they were attacking by strategies such as inserting pornographic images into curricula under public review. They personally attacked sex educators as a way to discredit programs. These attacks usually, but not always, entailed sexual stigmatization (calling them communists, sexual deviants, pedophiles). They threatened sex educators/advocates by lawsuits or terrorizing tactics such as slashing tires and leaving death threats on answering machines. Finally, they displayed contempt for mainstream scientific practices and evidence by ignoring or lying about research that refuted their own positions (one abstinence-only curriculum advised students who insisted on being sexually active to wash their genitalia with Lysol as a way to avoid infection!). By the 1990s, they were creating their own institutes and journals as a way of bypassing mainstream peer-review.

In a sociological context, arguing that a social movement lies can sound naïve. However, these were not occasional episodes I discovered, but rather systematic national strategies of deception and demonization. Moreover, they have been enormously successful; although

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public opinion polls show consistent support for comprehensive sexuality education, the scope of sex education remains very narrow in most public schools and the development of the field has been stunted.

As my research progressed, I found the sheer magnitude of the right's duplicity and viciousness to be overwhelming. Although this affected my life in many ways, I will focus on several layers of "awkwardness" in writing this book. First, I was afraid. Having written about the right's use of lawsuits as a mechanism of intimidation, I became preoccupied with my own vulnerability to being sued. Having written about the use of sexual stigmatization to discredit opponents, I worried about the ways I might be personally attacked after the release of my book. The insight that, as researcher, I had perhaps identified with, and taken on the anxieties of my sex educator subjects did little or nothing to alleviate these fears, since, it turned out, colleagues and friends of mine who wrote about sexuality were ruthlessly attacked by conservatives. In mainstream press interviews, prominent right-wing activists attacked a friend who published a book about childhood sexuality, calling her an "academic pedophile" and comparing her book to *Mein Kampf*. She received several death threats.

Second, the aggressive strategies of religious conservatives affected my analysis and in the end the book is somewhat more moderate than I had earlier anticipated. I was not critical of mainstream sex educators—who themselves became more pedagogically conservative over the years in response to attacks on them—in a way I might have been had I not begun to sympathize so much with them.

Third, my biggest challenge was one of "tone." How could I accurately convey these ugly tactics in an academic narrative without simply sounding biased? The conservative activists I studied were not putting on white hoods and burning crosses. It was easy to think of them as a stigmatized minority who were attempting to influence the political process like any other civic group. I had the common field research experience of civility—almost without exception, the right-wing activists I spent time with welcomed me graciously, fed me coffee cake, generously handed over reams of their files to me, and displayed enormous sincerity as they discussed with me their hopes and fears about social change. As my journalist friend Judith puts it, "Everyone is nice in their own living room." Their personal charms faded in the harsh public spotlight of political strategizing. How is one to say they wish to impose biblical doctrine in the public schools of the U.S. and describe the destructive tactics they have used to do so?

Those who have written about right-wing or fascist movements have always had to negotiate the tension between activists' often benign personal presentations of self and their insidious political activities, a tension captured so powerfully in Hannah Arendt's notion of the banality of evil. During the Clinton years, however, politicized evangelicals were not even on the radar screen for many people, and to others they seemed a vocal but contained political presence. It was extremely difficult to write the story about their political tactics, in the ways I felt I had experienced it in my research, when some people thought of these religious conservatives as banal and few people even considered them problematic. They were certainly not evil, in the sense that Arendt evoked in her coverage of the Nuremberg Trials. They did, however, wish to implement public policies based on religious doctrine, which would result in widespread discrimination against women and sexual minorities.

In my early drafts, my narrative swung between my depiction of right-wing activists as Ozzie and Harriet types, and then spawns of Satan in the next day's revisions. In order to achieve some distance, I employed specific ameliorating strategies: letting the data tell the story as much as possible; using their voices rather than mine; avoiding adjectives and adverbs; relying on quotes from others, especially journalists, who voiced some of what I felt I could not. I had friends and colleagues read the manuscript specifically for tone.

However, I remain ethically and politically uncomfortable about one of my writing strategies; in the final version of the book, I retreated to the dubious safety of euphemism. When, for example, conservatives called sex educators "pedophiles" and made claims that

schools taught “sodomy” and that gay people eat feces, I called their rhetoric “emotionally evocative” rather than “inflammatory.” Conservatives regularly lied about success rates of their programs and repeated medical inaccuracies such as their discredited claim that condoms have large holes in them that allow transmission of the HIV virus. Instead of calling a lie a lie, I called it “misrepresentation.” I emphasized that religious conservatives justified a practice they called “mental reservation,” which is the practice of holding back truthfulness in service of their religious politics. At the time, I believed my muted tone would sound more objective.

Meanwhile, with the 2000 election conservative Christians took to the national stage. Soon, a number of troubling political strategies became the primary operating modes of the George W. Bush administration. First, administration officials relied on inflammatory and stigmatizing language as a way to discredit their opponents. Second, they lied or purposely distorted the programs they were attacking. Third, they personally attacked and threatened opponents, even those in their own political party. Fourth, they displayed contempt for mainstream scientific practices and findings by ignoring or lying about research that refuted their own positions, while creating their own institutes and journals as a way of bypassing mainstream peer-review.

In other words, the strategies I had seen in my field research, it turned out, were not unique to sex education debates. A broad politics of deception soon became nationally visible and worrisome. By the time the paperback version of my book was released in 2004, public concern about government integrity had spiked as a result of allegations involving lies and distortions by the Bush Administration concerning issues such as the war in Iraq, the economic impact of deep tax cuts, and a wide range of domestic and foreign policy initiatives and failures. The Union of Concerned Scientists criticized the Bush administration for politicizing science by altering reports on issues such as global warming. Many of us, as progressives, are now struggling with how to make visible a series of strategies employed by a cohort of religious conservatives working to impose biblical doctrine in all public institutions of the U.S., most visibly of late in the Supreme Court.

As my book neared completion, I had set up various protections for myself. I joined the National Writers Union for support and legal protection, should I need it. I enlisted assurances of support from colleagues at advocacy organizations like the American Civil Liberties Union. Friends advised me to unlist my telephone number.

My academic options felt murkier. Anthropologist Gayle Rubin once said that when there is polarization, there is an unfortunate tendency to think that truth lies in the middle. She’s right. In sociological writing, it is still difficult to call a lie a lie. Let me be clear that I am not advocating one-dimensional portraits that demonize right-wing activists. I strongly believe that nuanced research on the multiplicity of right-wing subjectivities and the complexities of their political strategies is essential both as an intellectual and political project. Most of us believe that there is not one universal ethnographic interpretation of a culture or movement, any more than there is an absolute Truth. And in the end, I think my narrative is both faithful to my field observations and complex in its interpretations.

Still, I worried that the very narration of this absolutism would read as an absolutist narrative. I was committed to telling what I felt was the truth of my story—an overwhelming strategy of systematic attacks and purposeful lying compared to the relative absence of such tactics on the other side. But I always felt in tension with certain sociological conventions of evenhandedness, as though I should be saying that both sides engaged in comparable if not entirely equivalent tactics. What if reviewers, including those for my professional promotion, found the book “unsociological?” What if my book were simply dismissed as “too political?” My anxieties escalated when one of my publisher’s anonymous reviewers criticized an early manuscript, saying that religious activists would likely not agree with my interpretations. Indeed, I have recently heard two senior sociologists claim that the mark of good social movement scholarship is when opposing sides agree with the narrative. A more contemporary

version of this standard is the dismissal of critical scholarship by women and sexual minorities as “advocacy.”

I had never taken seriously a mainstream view that the yardstick of good analysis is a middleground interpretation with which all parties would agree. It harkens back to an illusion of objective sociological truth in which bias can be avoided by holding to the middle. But it did give me pause that such an outdated standard still circulates within sociology. After all, the very definition of an absolutist religious movement is that it recognizes only one version of truth—it’s own. Just as George Bush refuses to admit (to take just one example) the deception in his claim that Iraq was pursuing a nuclear weapon and purchasing uranium in Africa, it is extremely unlikely that the religious activists I studied would have accepted the accuracy of my analysis of their lies for political gain. In retrospect, as I reflect on the extensive public record of deceit perpetrated by the Bush administration, one might say that verification of my analysis came in the form of the events of the last six years since the social movement I studied came into political power.

ARE THERE REALLY AWKWARD MOVEMENTS OR ONLY AWKWARD RESEARCH RELATIONSHIPS?

*David A. Snow**

There are at least three issues/questions that immediately came to mind in response to Francesca Polletta's inquiry about a symposium on "awkward movements." The first has to do with the conceptualization of a category of movements as "awkward" and whether such a designation is of any analytic utility. The second concerns the theoretical consequences of insufficiently studying movements that may be conceptualized as awkward because they are difficult to study or objectionable. The third concerns the derivative question of whether some movements may be too popular and the implications of concentrated study of those movements. To raise these questions is not to imply that Polletta or my fellow essayists subscribe to the idea of awkward movements as a category; rather, it is to critically unpack and assess the utility of the concept.

Conceptual Ambiguity

When I began thinking about the idea of "awkward movements," I was initially struck by the awkwardness of the concept. I found myself wondering which, if any, of the movements I have studied might be construed as awkward, and from whose vantage point? Was the Japanese-based, culturally transplanted Nichiren Shoshu Buddhist moment (now called Sokagakkai International), which I studied as a participant observer for a year and a half from early 1974 to mid-1975 (Snow 1993), an awkward movement? And what of NIMBY movements opposed to the proximate development of facilities for the homeless, like a new Salvation Army shelter?

During the course of our field study of homelessness in the Austin, Texas metropolitan area in the mid-1980s (Snow and Anderson 1993), Leon Anderson and I noted, among other things, escalating tension between neighborhoods and the city and its efforts to build and relocate a new Salvation Army facility. The existing facility was not only much too small to help meet some of the needs of the city's expanding homeless population, but it also was located on property that was coveted by developers associated with the glittering redevelopment of booming downtown. Consequently, there was a need for a new facility in a new location. The relocation effort proved particularly contentious, however, as it wended its way through one neighborhood after another, engendering at each prospective site strident, organized community opposition that constituted a variant of the "not in my backyard" movements commonly referred to by the NIMBY acronym. One of the central features of these defensive neighborhood movements in Austin was the portrayal of the neighborhood and its residents as being severely threatened by the proximate relocation of the Salvation Army. This was not a simple framing task, however, since the Salvation Army was identified with the values of Christian charity and outreach. Thus, a more negatively evaluated target of opposition was needed, which was provided by the growing numbers of transient homeless men who had migrated to Austin and were served by the Salvation Army. As one neigh-

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neighborhood activist revealed: “Everybody believed we couldn’t fight the Salvation Army because it is good. But you can make anything look bad. So we focused on the transients, and emphasized how they threatened neighborhood residents, particularly women and children.” And that was, indeed, what the neighborhood activists did, repeatedly framing the homeless as criminally inclined, drunken, sex-crazed men who would infiltrate their neighborhoods and “rob their homes” and “rape the women.”

So was this particular NIMBY movement, however short-lived, an awkward one? Certainly not in the sense of being uncommon or inaccessible, as NIMBY movements seemed to have surfaced in abundance in the U.S. in the 1980s as the residents of urban and suburban neighborhoods found themselves threatened by the proximate location of facilities for “undesirables,” such as group homes, halfway houses, restitution centers, and shelters and soup kitchens. But it might be argued that the Austin NIMBY movement in question was in a rather morally awkward position in trying to parry the Salvation Army relocation efforts by demonizing its clients. But demonizing, or what might be thought of as the negative personification of adversaries (Shibutani 1973), is commonplace in most movements, including those reported on by Blee and Irvine. If so, then the negative personification of others hardly makes a movement awkward.

What such “other” personifications may do, however, is make the researcher uneasy in the sense of finding such framing practices morally or politically objectionable. And, in turn, this discomfort may lead to ethical ambiguity and anxiety about what practices to accent or downplay in the final analytic narrative. Certainly such tensions can make the researcher feel awkward, but I would argue that that awkwardness is not so much a property of the movement as it is a result of the researcher’s moral or political stance vis-à-vis the movement’s goals and rhetorical practices. In such cases, which appear to include the Blee and Irvine experiences as well as my relationship to the above NIMBY movement(s), it is questionable whether any of the movements per se can be categorized as awkward.

That would seem to hold as well for the South African labor movement that Seidman studied. In her case, there were two elements of awkwardness: generalized sympathy for the movement and its goals; and the resultant inclination to overlook or sideline certain unseemly movement behaviors or actions, such as the tactical use of violence. But neither of these elements strikes me as sufficient conditions for categorizing a movement as awkward. Sympathy, just as the contrary sentiments of disdain or dislike, says as much or more about the holders of such sentiments than it does about the object of elicitation.

And I think we have to be equally careful about designating a particular movement practice or characteristic, like the use of violent tactics, as a central defining feature of movements? Isn’t it more reasonable to argue that most movements slide on a continuum of non-violence at one end to violence at the other, and that where a movement is located on that continuum at any point in time depends on a cluster of factors, including how it is framed and responded to by one or more external sets of actors? As Turner and Killian emphasized in their now rarely consulted text, “the course and character” of movements “are shaped by external relations, including the way [they are] defined by external publics and the kinds of external support and opposition [they] encounter” (1972: 252). Furthermore, since these relations are seldom stable, the tactical actions of movements are likely to vary over time, as McAdam’s research on “tactical innovation” (1983) makes abundantly clear. The point, then, is that there may be more or less awkward moments in the careers of many movements, but such moments alone do not seem to warrant a broad bush categorization of movements, as historical actors, as awkward.

A final consideration that might push a movement into the awkward category for some observers concerns the relative difficulty of studying some movements. Is there conceptual or analytic logic for labeling as awkward movements that are hard to study, or at least more difficult than other movements, such as the ones featured in Blee’s *Inside Organized Racism* (2002)? I don’t doubt that some movements are more difficult to study than others, but

classifying them in terms of such methodological issues is a tricky matter because of the host of factors that can affect the relative ease or difficulty of studying any particular social entity or setting, ranging from matters of the personal characteristics of the researcher, membership criteria of the object of study, issues of access, how the group deals with disengagement, and so on (For a detailed discussion of these factors, see Lofland, Snow, Anderson, and Lofland [2006], especially chapters 2 and 4.).

I don't have a settled opinion as to which criteria, if any, should be used in categorizing a movement as "awkward." Nor do I have a less awkward term for movements that might be classified as such. It is worth noting however, that some scholars have used other terms when discussing some groups that could be classified as movements. So, for example, William Kephart and William Zellner (1991) use the term "extraordinary groups" as the title for their book on such groups as the Oneida community, the Father Divine movement, and the Jehovah's Witnesses. And Zellner, in a later book (1995), clusters such groups as skinheads, the unification church (Moonies), Ku Klux Klan, the Church of Scientology, and Survivalists as "counter cultures." I am not suggesting that these terms provide better conceptual handles, but they push us to consider that finding the right handle is a tricky business, such that employing a conceptual category without sufficient conceptual care or safeguards may bias our understanding of such groups in ways not considered.

Consequences of Not Studying Movements with which We Are Uncomfortable

Whatever the conceptual terminology used to get a handle on groups with which we are uncomfortable or find awkward to study, it is important to consider the consequences of insufficiently studying them, or their defining characteristics, for our understanding of social movements more broadly. If we don't study such movements as routinely as we do movements with which we sympathize or identify, then there is really no way of establishing the range of types of movements and of knowing if some movement types are more commonplace or modal than others. And, as a result, our theoretical presumptions and empirical generalizations are likely to be skewed and thus misguided. I have suggested as much in an earlier discussion of the conceptual and empirical dangers of linking too closely the study of social movements to a particular institution, such as the polity or state (Snow 2004). One questionable consequence of this tendency, for example, has been the relative paucity of studies of religious movements by students of social movements, and the corresponding failure to incorporate into our theoretical ruminations studies of religious movements by students of religion. Because of this tendency, research on so-called political movements and religious movements has usually floated by each other like two ships on a fog-shrouded night. It is partly because of such concerns that Sarah Soule, Hanspeter Kriesi, and I included a chapter on religious movements in the *Blackwell Companion to Social Movements* (2004).

Consequences of Studying Movements that are PC or "Too Popular"

The third and final issue concerns the derivative question of whether some movements may be "too-popular" among scholars because of sympathy with movement objectives and its orienting values and principles. If some movements are unpopular because of their positions and objectives, and thus are seen as awkward to study, it is reasonable to assume that other movements may well be objects of identification and valorization. Examples might include the civil rights movement, the women's movement, and the labor movement; all movements with which I suspect the vast majority of social movement scholars are sympathetic.

The issues posed by this question are essentially the flip ones of those posed by the questions raised by insufficiently studying awkward movements. My concern with the relative

popularity of some movements hinges on the extent to which those movements are treated as the standard-bearers or prototypical cases from which key theoretical presumptions and/or empirical generalizations are derived without having established some reasonable rationale for granting them such a prototypical status in the first place. If we assume, for example, that the civil rights movement was more of an anomaly than a typical movement, then relying on the large body of literature it generated as the basis for some of our key conceptual and theoretical ideas may be more misleading than illuminating.

Concluding Observations

That students of social movements may sympathize or identify with some movements while finding others distasteful and even objectionable is hardly peculiar to the study of social movements or other forms of collective action. Rather, such contrasting sentiments are commonplace among students, particularly field researchers, of all variety of social settings and aggregations. As noted in the most recent edition of a longstanding guide to qualitative field research:

Field researchers' emotions or feelings toward their informants and the settings they study can be arrayed on a continuum ranging from extreme distance at one end to complete engulfment or identification at the other end, with feelings of loathing, marginalization, sympathy, and identification manifesting themselves between the two extremes. Although some researchers' modal feelings over the course of a study might be skewed in one direction or another, it is probably accurate to presume that, on average, most field researchers vacillate between these extremes, thus experiencing a range of feelings (Lofland et al. 2006: 56-57).

Such a summary observation underscores my contention that awkwardness is a relational property that is nested in the nature of the research relationship between the researcher and the movement being studied rather than a property of the movement per se. As well, it also suggests, consistent with the earlier cautionary observation about categorizing a movement as a particular type based on a particular moment in its career, that the feelings, including awkwardness, associated with researching any particular movement up close are likely to vary over the course of the research. If so, then experiencing some awkwardness may not be such a bad thing methodologically, so long as one doesn't become fixated in that moment or state.

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