

## IDENTITY POLITICS

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■ **Abstract** This review presents an overview of research on identity politics. First, I distinguish between various approaches to defining identity politics and the challenges presented by each approach. In the process, I show that these approaches reflect competing theoretical understandings of the relationship between experience, culture, identity, politics, and power. These debates raise theoretical issues that I address in the second section, including (a) how to understand the relationship between personal experience and political stance, (b) why status identities are understood and/or portrayed as essentialist or socially constructed, (c) the strategic dilemmas activists face when the identities around which a movement is organized are also the basis for oppression, (d) when to attribute certain movement outcomes to status identities, and (e) how to link collective action to specific notions of power to help explain the cultural and political goals at which identity politics is aimed. I conclude by recommending some promising avenues for future research.

### INTRODUCTION

The term identity politics is widely used throughout the social sciences and the humanities to describe phenomena as diverse as multiculturalism, the women's movement, civil rights, lesbian and gay movements, separatist movements in Canada and Spain, and violent ethnic and nationalist conflict in postcolonial Africa and Asia, as well as in the formerly communist countries of Eastern Europe. The seeds of these partially overlapping conversations are apparent from the very first uses of the term identity politics in the scholarly journals. In 1979, Anspach first used the term identity politics to refer to activism by people with disabilities to transform both self- and societal conceptions of people with disabilities. Over the next decade, only three scholarly journal articles employed the term identity politics in their abstracts, to describe (a) ethnicity as a contemporary form of politics (Ross 1982); (b) a form of critical pedagogy that links social structure with the insights of poststructuralism regarding the nature of subjectivity, while incorporating a Marxist commitment to politics (Bromley 1989); and (c) general efforts by status-based movements to foster and explore the cultural identity of members (Connolly

1990). By the mid-1990s, references to identity politics as violent ethnic conflict (Meznaric 1993), and nationalism more generally (Alund 1995), emerged.

In addition to using the term identity politics to describe any mobilization related to politics, culture, and identity, scholarly analyses have often elided normative political evaluations of identity politics as a political practice with sociological analyses of the relationship between identity and politics. Brubaker & Cooper (2000) argue that the literature on identity politics has too many protagonists and not enough analysts. Lichterman (1999) calls identity politics “a slippery term” (p. 136), while Bickford (1997) claims that the concept has developed more as a critique of certain political practices than as a coherent area of study. Fraser (1997, p. 113) concludes that “the expression ‘identity politics’ is increasingly used as a derogatory synonym for feminism, anti-racism, and anti-heterosexism.”

This review shows that beneath the normative political claims about identity politics lie competing theoretical ways to understand the relationship between experience, culture, identity, politics, and power. Although I occasionally reference multiculturalism and ethnic/nationalist movements and suggest some benefits to research that crosses these divides, I focus this review on research that views identity politics as the activism engaged in by status-based social movements and do not address those movements based on ethnic/nationalist status.<sup>1</sup>

In the first section, I examine approaches to defining identity politics as a distinct political practice, including neo-Marxist and more general works that distinguish identity politics from class politics; new social movement approaches that differentiate class-based movements from other movements; and postmodern/poststructuralist analyses that view identity politics as political activism rather than cultural activism. This discussion illustrates that substantial disagreement exists over what constitutes identity politics, but it also raises a focused set of research questions that are addressed in the second section. While acknowledging the role identity plays in all social movements, I emphasize research that examines the specific processes that arise when a movement’s identity is, to some extent, externally imposed and forms part of the basis for grievances. These studies examine how to understand the relationship between personal experience and political stance, why status identities are understood and/or portrayed as essentialist or socially constructed, the strategic dilemmas movement organizers face when the identities around which a movement is organized are also the basis for oppression, when to attribute certain movement outcomes to status identities, and how to link collective action to specific notions of power to help explain the cultural and political goals at which identity politics is aimed. Similar processes may operate when other movement identities become the basis for external categorization

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<sup>1</sup>Owing to space limitations, I cannot do justice to the wealth of literature on ethnic/nationalist movements, although in the conclusion, I suggest the benefits of comparing ethnic/nationalist movements with movements organized around other social statuses. For recent reviews of nationalism and nationalist movements, see Calhoun (1993a), Brubaker & Laitin (1998), and Olzak (2004).

and are thus relevant for anyone concerned with explaining efforts to alleviate inequality or with understanding the relationships between identity and politics. Although the term identity politics itself may not be salvageable as an analytic concept, the questions raised in this literature deserve more concerted sociological attention. I conclude by recommending some promising avenues for future research.

## APPROACHES TO DEFINING IDENTITY POLITICS

### Neo-Marxist Approaches to Identity Politics

The approaches to identity politics that I group together in this section are concerned with the macro-level issues regarding what constitutes power and what are the forces of oppression. Although many of the works discussed here are not explicitly Marxist or neo-Marxist, and many of the authors themselves would eschew this label, these works evoke at least one of two key theoretical assumptions associated with Marxist and neo-Marxist theory. First, these views rest on a (sometimes implicit) theory of power that views class inequality as the only real source of exploitation and oppression. Second, many of these works view activists who want to alleviate economic inequality and to challenge the class structure as the primary agents of social change. Because of these theoretical assumptions, identity politics is not seen as a political practice that challenges important relations of power, but is understood in symbolic, cultural, or psychological terms. As a result, this literature sometimes makes normative political claims that dismiss the value of identity politics. Theoretically, these analyses separate culture from institutions, politics, and the economy, rather than view culture as constitutive, structuring, and constraining of institutions (Polletta 2002, Swidler 1995, Williams 2004). As Sewell (1992, p. 3) more generally observes, structure is “thought of as ‘hard’ or ‘material’ and therefore as primary and determining, whereas culture is regarded as ‘soft’ or ‘mental’ and therefore as secondary or derived.” As a result, these accounts do not see class as an identity that has a dynamic cultural or psychological aspect; hence, identity politics is viewed as a distinct political practice in contradistinction to class politics. Similarly, identities based on social rather than economic status are not seen as having institutional or economic aspects, and the intersections between class and status identities are ignored.

**IDENTITY POLITICS AS CULTURAL POLITICS** In contrast to the logic of Marxist and neo-Marxist theory, social movements that emerged in the 1960s and 1970s, such as the civil rights and women’s movements, seemed to be more concerned with culture and identity than with challenging the class structure. With these movements in mind, Kauffman (1990, p. 67) defined identity politics in cultural terms as expressing “the belief that identity itself—its elaboration, expression, or affirmation—is and should be a fundamental focus of political work;” identity politics politicized areas of life not previously defined as political, including “sexuality, interpersonal

relations, lifestyle and culture.” Kauffman is one of the few in this group who distinguishes between cultural claims related to institutions and structures and efforts geared toward personal expression and self-transformation. While seeing some merit to the former, Kauffman (1990) dismisses the latter as irrelevant and self-indulgent cultural activism. Most others who view class inequality as the primary source of exploitation and oppression do not distinguish among different types of cultural activism. Instead, all claims related to social identities are considered to be “cultural politics” and are equated with and dismissed as identity politics (Gitlin 1994, 1995).

Identity politics is assumed to be cultural not only because identity is putatively unrelated to institutional structures and the political economy, but also because these scholars see identity groups as advocating for recognition of and respect for their cultural differences, which derive from their distinct group identities. They assume that activists organized around status identities understand these identities with their associated cultures in essentialist rather than socially constructed terms. Therefore, these scholars are critical of what they view as activists’ equating identity groups with a culture, and they question what forms the basis for that culture. For example, Brown (1995) argues that marginalization forms the basis for the culture of identity groups. She contends that advocating for rights based on marginalized cultural identities will only lead to the increased social regulation of those groups by dominant groups that control the state. Employing language that suggests a normative evaluation, Gitlin (1995) claims that “identity politics” on college campuses is “the recognition of a collective hurt, followed by the mistaking of group position for a ‘culture,’ followed by the mistaking of a ‘culture’ for a politics” (pp. 147–48). Feher (1996) suggests that drawing from identity politics, the political right has also adopted a language of victimhood. Macedo (1995) and Spragens (1999) contend that equating identity groups with a culture is patently false and potentially dangerous because it could lead to the recognition and validation of, for example, white racist groups who portray themselves as defending a denigrated culture.

However, such views rest on untested assumptions about how activists understand their identities, ignoring relationships among identity, institutions, and the political economy. Bickford (1997) argues that this danger of a “subjectivity” rooted in resentment does not characterize most of the political uses of identity, and it ignores feminist theory on identity politics. Philosophers Taylor (1989), Young (1990), and Kymlicka (1995) illustrate that admitting the socially constructed nature of group differences does not preclude organizing around the identities that mark those groups. They acknowledge that cultural differences among groups are socially constructed, resulting from shared histories of oppression. Nonetheless, they contend that these differences create distinct social groups, which justifies demands for group-differentiated citizenship rights and challenges to negative representations. Because these identity groups share a history of oppression, granting them official recognition does not entail also giving such recognition to antidemocratic groups.

Epstein (1995) argues that identity politics' concern with language and representation as well as its challenge to the notion that any one social actor will spark a historical transformation accounts for its association with postmodernism in the academy (e.g., Wrong 2003, Bell 2001, Gitlin 1995). Scholarly and nonscholarly journals as well as the popular press equate identity politics with multiculturalism and "political correctness" on college campuses (e.g., Hollander 1996, Spragens 1999). Epstein suggests that the term political correctness is used primarily as a way to attack racial inclusion efforts and curricular reform on campuses, while at the same time promote a specific set of conservative values. Nonetheless, she contends that identity politics' concern with language and representation tends toward moralizing, which opens it to derision by critics. Smelser & Alexander (1999) see this as a debate between "radical multiculturalists," who identify diversity rather than common values as the highest moral good, and their "traditional values" opponents, who view society as fragmented into multiple identity groups that have undermined the common cultural fabric of American society. Smelser & Alexander (1999) argue that this "discourse of discontent," which indicates widespread crisis and polarization, obscures the integrative processes of institutionalizing diversity that take place in a variety of institutions and are reflected through daily social practices. The essays in their collection (Smelser & Alexander 1999) document how diversity is institutionalized and practiced.

**CONSEQUENCES OF IDENTITY POLITICS** Analysts associate a number of problems with identity politics. They contend that the essentialism of identity politics precludes the articulation of a universal vision for social change, such as the New Left had done, instead making particularistic claims for group-based benefits and leading to the decline of the left. They claim that because identity groups tend to splinter into ever more narrow categories, they cannot agree on or sustain anything but opposition to a common enemy. For example, by targeting white heterosexual men, identity politics leaves them no space to participate politically, which results in an unproductive defensiveness. Such politics leads to an inability to form coalitions that can agitate for progressive or revolutionary social change (Kauffman 1990; Gitlin 1994, 1995; Harvey 1996; Hobsbawm 1996; Piore 1995).

However, these studies generally do not consider other possible explanations for these outcomes. Thus, many of the deleterious outcomes associated with identity politics come from studies that ignore cases in which claiming essentialist differences is a strategic maneuver made by activists rather than an ontological position. These studies also ignore cases in which groups may adopt essentialist perspectives but may nonetheless create a universal vision for social change, form coalitions, and work with white heterosexual men. Furthermore, these studies often generalize from a specific case to make claims about all cases of identity politics.

Bickford (1997) argues that achieving commonality does not depend on a trade-off between commitment to one's group and a commitment to the broader social good, "but rather on acting together in ways that could *create* a democratic commons—one that is plural, egalitarian, and communicative" (p. 124). Ryan

(1997) argues that the crisis over identity politics in the women's movement is overstated because multicultural organizing efforts often recognize the value of separate organizing by groups that face racism, sexism, homophobia, classism, and heterosexism. In short, research on identity politics must consider alternative causal explanations for a variety of outcomes and must not take the public claims of activists at face value.

**CLASS POLITICS VERSUS IDENTITY POLITICS** Although he agrees that identity politics is psychological in nature, Wrong (2003) sees the contemporary rise of identity politics as a product of economic well-being and the lack of viable alternatives to capitalism, whereas Langman (1994) sees it as a misplaced response to rapid social change resulting from economic dislocation. Both Wrong (2003) and Bell (2001) suggest that an economic downturn could provoke renewed attention to class-based politics, which implies that identity politics would decline in the face of "real" issues related to the political economy. For Wrong (2003), the emphasis on diversity and cultural identities is a new incarnation of a pervasive American search for community, particularly in the face of popular culture and consumerism. Piore (1995), by contrast, views identity politics as responding to stigmatization, but, more importantly, "these new groups have also been fostered by governmental and business policies designed [to] escape the constraints of existing social structures, particularly unions" (p. 19). Thus, the claims of identity politics have replaced collective bargaining and have undermined the trade union movement. Because, according to Piore (1995), these identity groups are unrelated to economic structures, they fail to see how the economy constrains the country's ability to meet the group's demands, such as daycare. Once again, claims about the relationship between identity politics and organizing around social class are simply asserted, rather than tested empirically. Furthermore, Piore's (1995) examples of issues targeted by identity groups [daycare and health care (p. 27), for example] imply that some relationship exists between identity groups and the political economy, in contrast to his own assertions.

Some critics argue that the cultural left (a term often used interchangeably with identity politics) has decreased the "sadism" (Rorty 1998, p. 83) of sexism, racism, and homophobia in America. But this view also holds that identity politics has forsaken issues related to exploitation, class, poverty, and globalization that exacerbate economic inequality (Bourne 1987, Gitlin 1995, Rorty 1998, Walzer 1996). For example, Wolfe & Klausen (1997) argue that identity politics' symbolic concerns regarding language and representation lead activists to advocate more open immigration policies to increase the population of a particular ethnic/racial identity group, which undermines the capacity of the welfare state to provide for its members. Furthermore, they claim that affirmative action and racial redistricting inhibit the development of national citizenship by fostering a commitment to the solidarity of subgroups and are thus antithetical to the health of the welfare state.

Neo-Marxist analyses of identity politics have also been challenged on both historical and theoretical grounds. These critics reverse the causal arrow and

attribute the emergence of identity politics to failures of the New Left, arguing that the language of and appeals to commonality by the left are in practice exclusionary. The left has been unable (or unwilling) to adequately address the inequality associated with gender, race, and sexual orientation (Bickford 1997, Lott 1999, Roper 1994, Ryan 2001). For example, Rossinow (1998) examines how conceptions of whiteness and masculinity animated the New Left, and precluded an analysis of inequality that included race and gender. He also argues that state policies led to the New Left's decline. In this view, identity politics is not responsible for fragmenting and hardening the boundaries between groups. Rather, as Rossinow (1998) argues, there are continuities between the quest for authenticity by the New Left and the search for self in identity politics (see also Boggs 1995).

Neo-Marxist approaches to identity politics can also be criticized for challenging the separation of culture from class and the political economy. For example, signifiers of class have an interactional reality that may be just as constructed as status identities and that class manifests in cultural expression (Bourdieu 1984, Calhoun 1993b, Aronowitz 1992). Similarly, sex, race, and other status identities not only have cultural dimensions and meanings but also are linked to concrete material and structural locations (Fraser 1997, Naples 2003). Feminist philosopher Fraser (1997) maintains that the division between a cultural politics of recognition and a social politics of justice and equality, on which discussions of identity politics rest, ignores the interrelatedness of socioeconomic injustice rooted in society's political-economic structure and cultural or symbolic injustice rooted in social patterns of representation, interpretation, and communication. She argues that both race and gender constitute "bivalent" collectivities—that is, groups affected by both the political economy and the cultural-valuational structure of society. For example, race structures the division of labor between low-paid menial labor and domestic work on the one hand and professional-managerial jobs disproportionately held by whites on the other. Thus, capitalist exploitation takes place in gender- and race-specific ways. Yet, Eurocentrism also devalues people of color, and racist stereotypes persist independently of the political economy, although the two types of injustice reinforce each other dialectically. She suggests that redistributive remedies generally necessitate some sort of recognition of groups whom the redistribution will affect and that maintaining nonexclusionary identities would require shifts in the political economy.

These debates raise a number of important theoretical issues, including: How should oppression that is not related to social class be conceptualized? What is the causal role of identity in determining a variety of movement outcomes, such as the ability to form coalitions or the decline of the New Left? In what ways is identity a part of all social movements?

## The New Social Movement Approach to Identity Politics

New social movement (NSM) theory moves beyond the parameters of Marxist frameworks to understand the variety of social movements that emerged in the

1960s and 1970s that were not ostensibly organized around social class. Although NSM theory does not employ the language of identity politics [even if some NSM theorists refer to it as an “identity-oriented” paradigm (e.g., Touraine 1981)], it represents the first concerted theoretical effort to understand the role of identity in social movements, and it ultimately provoked the more rationalist strands of social movement theory, resource mobilization, and political process theory, to attend to issues of identity and culture. Like social movement theory more generally, NSM theory attempted to explain mobilization—that is, why and when people act. By taking this approach, NSM theory displaced the assumption that activism based on anything other than class was epiphenomena or psychologically rooted, raising the possibility of alternative causal explanations for identity politics. NSM theory both challenges and affirms the idea that identity politics is a distinct political practice.

Whereas Marxist and neo-Marxist frameworks distinguish class politics and oppression from other possible sources of politics and oppression, NSM theory distinguishes class-based movements, especially past labor and socialist movements, from contemporary movements organized on the basis of ideology and values, such as the peace, environmental, youth, and antinuclear movements, as well as movements organized around status (Melucci 1985, 1989; see review in Johnston et al. 1994). NSM theory views these movements as historically new forms of collective action resulting from the macrostructural changes of modernization (Melucci 1989) and a shift to a postindustrial society (Touraine 1981). These macrostructural changes produced postmaterial values concerned with achieving democracy rather than with economic survival (Inglehart 1981, 1990). Thus, new social movements were viewed as efforts to regain control over decisions and areas of life increasingly subject to state control, to resist the colonization of the lifeworld, and to transform civil society (Habermas 1985, Cohen 1985, Melucci 1989). NSM theory views these movements as efforts to “fight to expand freedom, not to achieve it; they mobilize for choice rather than emancipation,” and focus primarily on expressing identity (Cerulo 1997, p. 393) to seek “recognition for new identities and lifestyles” (Polletta & Jasper 2001, p. 286). NSMs are said to advocate direct democracy, employ disruptive tactics, and enact the democratic organizational forms they seek to achieve (Pichardo 1997). According to Melucci (1996), NSMs challenge dominant normative and cultural codes, and identity politics in particular evokes the question of how difference is dealt with in a given society. Thus, NSM theory identifies a broader purpose for identity politics and does not dismiss it for being “merely” cultural, symbolic, or psychological.

However, NSM theory continues to separate identity and culture from the political economy. For example, Duyvendak & Giugni (1995) and Duyvendak (1995) argue that movements such as the lesbian and gay movement are internally oriented and follow an “identity” logic of action, so that their goals are realized in their expressive actions, which are aimed simply at reproducing the identity on which the movement is based.



NSM theory has been criticized for ignoring conservative social movements that could also be considered NSMs (Pichardo 1997) because of these movements' concern with identity, culture, and values. Thus, NSM theory edges into normative political evaluations of identity politics. For example, Touraine (1998) makes an ontological distinction between identity politics and NSMs. He does not regard movements such as the women's and lesbian movements as identity politics because they have radical and inclusive tendencies and have themselves criticized identity politics. In contrast, he does consider conservative social movements as identity politics because they respond to economic globalization and the decline of a national culture (Touraine 1998, p. 131) by forming movements based in ethnicity, religion, or nationalism, such as political Islamism or Serbian nationalism. In these cases, the new movement is divorced from both social and economic practices, so cultural values become resources that strengthen communities and "harden communalist policies" (Touraine 1998, p. 136). Thus, for Touraine, identity politics involves movements that have exclusive tendencies, rather than movements that are organized around a variety of status identities that may alternate between exclusivity and inclusivity. In this way, Touraine does not account for why some status-based movements are exclusive and others inclusive and how these orientations may change over time, but rather defines identity politics once again in a normative political fashion.

The validity of the two primary historical and comparative claims on which NSM theory rests—that such movements are a product of postindustrial society and that they differ in fundamental ways from past labor and socialist movements—has been called into question (Calhoun 1993b, Pichardo 1997, Polletta & Jasper 2001, Young 2002). NSM theorists are left the task of finding alternative causal explanations for the emergence of these movements and of reconsidering the distinction between political and cultural movements (Polletta & Jasper 2001). Despite these limits, by underscoring the similarity between movements organized on the basis of status identities and those organized around values and ideology, NSM theory challenges the view that identity politics is a distinct political practice and provides a broader conceptualization of identity politics.

Darnovsky et al. (1995b, p. xiv–xv) argue that the most important questions regarding identity politics are not addressed by NSM theory: "Why has culture become a major focus of movement concern since the 1960s? What is the relationship between culture and politics in the new movements?" Furthermore, NSM theory does not adequately address other key questions raised in the literature on identity politics regarding the relationship between identity, culture, and the political economy; whether and why status identities are understood and deployed in essentialist or constructionist ways; and what is the causal relationship between organizing based on status identities and a variety of movement consequences. To answer these questions, sociologists have drawn on social constructionism, postmodernism, and queer theory.

## Social Constructionist, Postmodernist, and Poststructuralist Approaches to Identity Politics

Postmodernist analyses of identity politics conceptualize power in terms that are starkly different from neo-Marxist and NSM perspectives. In these views, the existence of status categories constitutes a form of regulation. Therefore, any activism in the name of those categories will not alleviate inequality but will reify those categories, which will increase the use of those categories to regulate and dominate subordinate status groups. Thus, identity politics hardens rather than redefines differences in status identities that are the basis for inequality. These approaches view organizing on the basis of those identities as ultimately essentialist. Instead of viewing power in terms of economic inequality, which renders organizing on the basis of status identities as primarily symbolic and cultural activism, understood through postmodern views of power, identity politics appears to be narrow, political, state-centered activism that fails to adequately address the cultural bases of power. Rather than being too cultural, identity politics is not cultural enough (Vaid 1995).

This view of identity politics is both a response to the emergence of “queer politics” in the late 1980s and a function of postmodernist and poststructuralist theories. Embodied in the short-lived group Queer Nation, queer politics was identified by scholars as the antithesis of identity politics: a theory and a politics with which to transcend group categories and to bring diverse groups of marginalized people together under one umbrella (Gamson 1995, Epstein 1998, Valocchi 1999, Warner 2000). Queer politics emerged in response to the lesbian and gay movement’s dominance by middle-class gay white men and single-issue, gay-only politics. These new organizations reframed the discourse around sexual orientation as they employed novel tactics and set out to challenge the very categories of identity that had previously motivated activism. Reappropriating the word “queer” and redefining it to mean anything that contradicts dominant cultural norms, queer activists attempted to form a multiracial, multigendered movement of people with diverse sexualities (Seidman 1993, Epstein 1998).

Observers of queer politics looked to postmodernism, poststructuralism, and Foucauldian understandings of sexuality and identity (e.g., Foucault 1978) to explain these new forms of organizing. Seidman (1993, 1997) suggests that queer politics was an attempt to deconstruct the “hetero/homo” binary. Concerned with the politics of gender, Butler’s (1990, 1993) theory of identity argues that gender identity is realized through the performative acts that constitute gender but do not actually reflect an inner core, in contrast to identity politics, which makes claims in the name of a subject and thus assumes that identity itself has a core. Thus, political activism in the name of a subject obscures and reifies the processes that create woman as subject and sets the conditions of subordination. If the category woman is externally imposed, then the goal of politics should be to challenge, not affirm, such identities with their associated notions of difference. Therefore, Butler (1990) theorizes a politics of performativity as a way to resist the quotidian enactment

of gender. Queer politics is often understood in performative terms as challenging power and deconstructing categories and is a privileged strategy within poststructuralism (Adam 1998, Collins 1998). Within these theoretical frameworks, what seems to be purely expressive action from the purview of neo-Marxist and NSM theories is understood as a fundamental challenge to power.

In contrast to queer politics, advocating in the name of a lesbian/gay subject appears always to result in a hierarchical ordering that marks the homosexual subject as different from and less than the heterosexual subject and will not challenge heteronormativity or systemic prejudices (Dennis 1997, Bower 1997, Halley 1994). Some analysts argue that the movement for same-sex marriage constitutes a move toward normalizing monogamous lesbian and gay couples at the expense of other constellations of intimate relationships (Warner 2000, Walters 2001). In this way, the threat of diverse sexualities can be contained within conventional forms of monogamous commitment. Chasin (2000) contends that in its efforts to normalize homosexuality, lesbian and gay identity politics mistakes niche marketing to white middle-class gays as a sign of social tolerance and acceptance. By redrawing the lines of normalcy, the market exercises power (Alexander 1999) that renders lesbians and gay men of color invisible within the market and substitutes for "transformative" cultural change (Chasin 2000).

Rimmerman (2002, p. 3) assesses whether the lesbian and gay movement "will merely pursue a reformist strategy embracing a narrow form of identity politics" and divides the lesbian and gay movement into two mutually exclusive groups: the assimilationists, who "typically embrace a rights-based perspective and work within the broader framework of liberal, pluralist democracy, fighting for a seat at the table," and the liberationists, who favor "more radical, cultural change, change that is transformational in nature and that often arises from outside the political mainstream" (Rimmerman 2002, p. 2). Viewed through postmodern understandings of power, identity politics constitutes narrow legal/political activism that fails to address cultural sources of oppression.

In addition to failing to challenge "real" relations of power, observers argue that identity politics does not challenge the social construction of status categories, ignores the intersection of identities, forces those with multiple identities to privilege some aspects of identity over others, fails to recognize diversity within groups, imposes a uniform identity on groups that are diverse, and essentializes a group's identity (Ryan 1997, Humphrey 1999, Phelan 1989, Alexander 1999). Others suggest that identity politics' essentialist claims can backfire. For example, Solomos (1998) argues that although appeals to authenticity and difference can be used to justify challenging dominant representations, such claims lead "to a strange convergence in the language of the racist right and of the black or ethnic nationalists, as both infuse categories such as 'race' or 'ethnicity' with essentialist, and supposedly naturally inherited, characteristics" (Solomos 1998, p. 52). Kimmel (1993) suggests that essentialist arguments support conservative claims by antifeminists who root their activism in an understanding of gender differences as biologically based and ignore the ways that gender organizes homosexuality.

These studies evaluate the consequences of identity politics on the basis of the studies' own theoretical assumptions about how power functions. They tend toward making normative political evaluations about identity politics because they do not explicitly identify the causal mechanisms that link identity politics to these purported outcomes, they ignore the possibility that claims to essentialism may be strategic, and they overlook the difficulties in eliminating social categories as a political strategy. For example, Anzaldúa (1987) challenges the idea that identity as an organizing tool is antithetical to fostering a politics of commonality. Her concept of "borderlands" acknowledges the multiplicity of individual identities and shows their connection to fostering broad-based political organizing, thus pointing toward the need to find alternative explanations for movement fragmentation. Garza (1995) challenges the assumption that activists and theorists understand their identities as ontologically prior to their activism and suggests that a performative politics or a politics of deconstruction and decentering will not work for groups whose difference is marked on the body (Garza 1995, Collins 1998).

## INTEGRATIVE APPROACHES: CONTESTING THE TERMS OF THE DEBATE

At minimum, the challenges to neo-Marxist, NSM, and postmodern approaches to identity politics suggest what has become commonplace in social movement theory: that identity plays a role in all social movements (Friedman & McAdam 1992, Hunt et al. 1994, Robnett 1997, Rupp & Taylor 1990, Whittier 1995). In their recent review article, Polletta & Jasper (2001) explore the relationship between a variety of dynamics operative in all social movements and collective identity, defined as "an individual's cognitive, moral, and emotional connection with a broader community, category, practice or institution" (p. 285). In contrast, I emphasize research that examines movements organized on the basis of status identities that are, to varying extents, externally defined, where the identity itself forms a part of the basis for grievances. For example, although environmentalists may share a collective identity as environmentalists, that identity is not generally externally imposed or used as an official basis for categorization. Jasper (1997) differentiates "citizenship" movements that seek inclusion in societal institutions from "post-citizenship" movements whose members are already integrated into society. He also distinguishes collective identity, including status identities, from movement identities such as environmentalist, that can be more easily adopted or discarded. Thus, citizenship movements are linked to collectivities that are defined independently of the movements, although when their goals are more cultural, they can take the form of postcitizenship movements.

I am not arguing that scholars return to the task of distinguishing between movements organized on the basis of status and movements organized on some other basis. However, in attempting to define identity politics as a distinct political practice, scholars have raised important theoretical questions that are only

beginning to be addressed systematically by the social movement literature as it develops analytic strategies for understanding collective struggle over longstanding cultural and discursive assessments regarding who deserves honor (Alexander 2003). These questions include the following: How do we understand the relationship between personal experience and political stance? Why are status identities understood and/or portrayed as essentialist or socially constructed? What are the strategic dilemmas faced when the identities around which a movement is organized are also the basis for oppression? When do we attribute certain movement outcomes to status identities? How do we link collective action to specific notions of power that help to explain the types of cultural and political goals at which identity politics is aimed? Social movements will differ depending on how and to what extent identities are externally imposed. The consequences of that imposition will vary across movements, identities, time, and place.

### Experience, Identity, and Strategy

Bernstein (1997) argues that the concept of "identity" as it relates to social movements has at least three distinct analytic levels: First, a shared collective identity is necessary for mobilization of any social movement (Morris 1992), including the classic labor movement (Calhoun 1993b). Second, expressions of identity can be deployed at the collective level as a political strategy, which can be aimed at what are traditionally thought of as cultural and/or political goals. Third, identity can be a goal of social movement activism, either gaining acceptance for a hitherto stigmatized identity (Calhoun 1994a) or deconstructing categories of identities such as "man," "woman," "gay," "straight" (Gamson 1995), "black," or "white." I discuss these dimensions in turn.

Many studies show that to act politically, all social movements need identity for empowerment (Bernstein 1997) or an oppositional consciousness (Mansbridge & Morris 2001) to create and mobilize a constituency (Calhoun 1994a). Snow & Benford (1988) argue that when movements diagnose problems that need to be addressed, they attribute identities to the social movement, to those responsible for the problems, and to those who should be charged with alleviating them (see Hunt et al. 1994). Klandermans (1992) adds that movements that fail to create an identity from which to mobilize will not be able to produce political claims at all. Taylor & Whittier (1992) argue that social movements develop and maintain a collective identity that is characterized by maintaining boundaries between group members and nonmembers, developing a political consciousness that defines and analyzes interests, and negotiating everyday symbols and actions as strategies of personalized resistance (see Hunt & Benford 2004 for a recent review of this research). Whether the movement in question is organized on the basis of a lesbian/gay identity, a concern for animal rights, or a class identity, the collective identity approach suggests that the processes of maintaining those identities are similar (Polletta & Jasper 2001).

Polletta & Jasper (2001) also argue that activists choose strategies that relate to who they are as activists and that movement identities can become associated with

particular tactical styles (Polletta 2002, Ferber 2004, Taylor & Van Dyke 2004). For example, peace organizations would generally eschew violent strategies. Although this research clearly identifies an important link between collective identity and strategic choices, it does not address how status groups negotiate their designation as a minority based on a particular social status.

Why, given the insights of social constructionism and postmodernism, are identities invoked and/or felt as if they were essentialist (Epstein 1987, Calhoun 1994a, Benhabib 1999)? Calhoun argues that mobilizing essentialized identities is related to the political context and how particular identity categories have been "repressed, delegitimated or devalued in dominant discourse" (1994, p. 18). Valocchi (1999) shows that in addition to being internally defined, lesbian and gay identities have been externally imposed by the normative and coercive institutions of psychiatry and law enforcement. Ray's (1999) concept "political field" explains how the distribution of power and prevailing interaction routines influence whether women's movements pursue pragmatic economic or explicitly feminist goals. Political opportunities (Meyer et al. 2002) and recourse to the law (Katzenstein 1998) also influence the development of collective identity and how much movements emphasize political and cultural goals.

Although often ignored in the social movement literature, the feminist literature on standpoint theory, intersectionality, and materialist feminism draws on Marxist historical materialism (Naples 2003) to conceptualize identity politics as a way to produce knowledge that derives from the material conditions, lived experience, and social location of participants. Activists thus formulate political strategies (Hartsock 1983; Collins 1990, 1998; Mohanty 1992a, 1992b; Haraway 1988) that depend on how power or "the relations of ruling" (Smith 1987) are expressed in everyday life. Although standpoint theory is sometimes portrayed as essentialist (e.g., Benhabib 1999), Naples (2003) argues that people do not translate personal experience into political action in an unreflective, essentialist way. Instead, political analyses are arrived at through collective interpretation and analysis (see Nicholson 1990 and Naples 2003 for the evolution of these debates). In this view, self-definition and the creation of knowledge through the development of a standpoint (Collins 1998) is part and parcel of political activism and does not rely on falsely universal understandings of categories such as race, gender, or class. Through standpoint analysis, the intersection of class and status identity is made clear. Feminist standpoint theory parallels the literature on multiculturalism and critical pedagogy that is premised on the idea that personal subjectivity derived from experiences of oppression can be empowering and provide the impetus for social change (Bromley 1989).

According to Anspach (1979), personal experience with stigma led physically disabled people and former mental patients to engage in identity politics with the goal of altering the self-conceptions of the participants and the negative social representations of the group. Anspach suggests that identity politics challenges deviance theory, which views the labeling process as unidirectional, imposed on the stigmatized, rather than negotiated or contested. Britt & Heise (2000) define

identity politics as a form of emotion work needed to translate isolation, fear, and shame into anger, solidarity, pride, and action, in order to mobilize stigmatized groups. Epstein (1987) views gay, lesbian, and bisexual identities and movements as “reverse affirmations” (Foucault 1978) of social labels that have been used to categorize, control, and stigmatize. Epstein (1987) suggests that, despite the insights of social constructionism, lesbian and gay identities are experienced in ways similar to contemporary ethnicity, and he argues that claiming a minority status is a strategic way to gain access to the American polity.

Pérez (1993) and Sandoval (1991) also see organizing around identity as strategic rather than unchanging and essentialist. Sandoval (1991) argues that U.S. Third World feminists operate under a “differential” consciousness, alternating between viewing their differences “for which they have been assigned inferior status” (p. 12) as invented and false or as real and valid. Phelan (1993) argues that lesbians and gay men know that engaging in the essentialist/social constructionist debate is strategic, but acknowledging the strategic nature of essentialism would undermine any claims based on essentialist arguments.

Accounts of bitter division over group membership are common in feminist and gay/lesbian movements (Echols 1989, Ryan 1992, Taylor & Rupp 1993, Phelan 1989, Bernstein 1997). Scholars of Third World women’s movements and post-colonial movements argue that by organizing on the basis of the category “women,” these movements have ignored differences among women that are based on class, race, and sexual orientation. Thus, these movements have been dominated by the concerns of Western women (Alexander & Mohanty 1997, Narayan 1997, Grewal & Kaplan 1994, Ryan 1997). Similar charges have been leveled at black essentialism for ignoring differences within the category black, which is politically and culturally constructed (Solomos 1998).

Gamson (1997) argues that debates over inclusion and exclusion to decide “who we are” and “who we are not” are fundamentally gendered and shaped by the communicative environment and the audience to be addressed. Movements must not only identify antagonists but also struggle over contested membership. Blee (2002) shows that the concept of “race traitor” helps racist activists set a symbolic boundary to distinguish themselves from whites not in the movement. Examining black gay identities and AIDS, Cohen (1999) argues that the outcomes of these struggles have concrete material effects on how resources, legitimacy, and services are allocated within communities and, according to Gamson (1997), depend on who raises the issue of boundaries and for what political purposes. Such processes may be prevalent in all social movements as activists publicly refute opponents’ claims about their identities and motivations (Einwohner 2002, Bernstein & Jasper 1996), even when they privately affirm opponents’ assessments (Einwohner 2002).

Bernstein (1997) developed the concept of identity deployment to capture the strategic processes that explain how activists deploy their identities for political change. Her formal model argues that activists alternately emphasize similarities to or differences from the norm because of the interactions among social movement

organizations, state actors, and opposing movements, and the model suggests that all social movements go through similar processes. She argues that identities are deployed strategically as a form of collective action to change institutions; to transform mainstream culture, its categories, and values, and perhaps by extension its policies and structures; to transform participants; or simply to educate legislators or the public. As a political strategy, identity deployment means expressing identity such that the terrain of conflict becomes the individual person so that the values, categories, and practices of individuals become subject to debate. For example, in contrast to viewing political action as the result of community identity, Gotham (1999) argues that, in the case of a challenge to the building of a major highway, community identity was a cultural resource strategically deployed. Movements may engage in both identity and nonidentity strategies. The lesbian and gay movement, for example, often couches its claims in terms of universal appeals to social justice and avoids making the content of gay and lesbian identities subject to debate. The political implications of essentialist and constructionist arguments shift over time, altering their strategic value (Bernstein 2002a,b). Armstrong (2002) similarly argues that identity politics, which she defines as a "political logic" whose purpose is to overcome alienation through creating, expressing, and affirming collective identities, is simply one type of politics in which movements may engage. She contrasts an identity political logic with both an interest group political logic that seeks changes in laws and policies and with a redistributive political logic that attempts to transform society's economic and political structures.

Another strategic dilemma occurs when the identity around which the movement is organized is also the basis for grievances. Gamson (1995) contends that deconstructive strategies that loosen categories of identity are better suited to contesting cultural sources of oppression than institutional sources of oppression, whose logic requires the tightening of categories. Whichever way activists decide to go, they face a paradox: Seeking to erase boundaries requires recognizing them, which ultimately confirms them or, in the process of confirming boundaries, underscores that they are, in fact, socially constructed (Lorber 1999). Furthermore, Gamson (1995) questions whether movements aimed at deconstructing social categories will ultimately undermine their own existence. Gamson identifies this as the "queer dilemma," although Lorber (1999) suggests that, with the increased number of people who identify as multiracial, racially based social movements face similar conundrums. Turner's (1999) study of the intersex movement illustrates empirically the difficulties in organizing politically around a social identity while simultaneously acknowledging the social forces that construct the self. By presenting themselves as "hermaphrodites with attitude," intersexed activists adopt a medicalized identity and risk reinforcing the hetero/homo binary. According to Turner (1999), intersexuals organize for recognition of an essential intersexed body, prior to medical intervention, and, by invoking a unique history of oppression, they create themselves as an identity group. However, by choosing a body that is neither male nor female, they refuse the hetero/homo binary and challenge the immutability of heterosexuality itself.



Over time, the content and meaning of identities and the goals associated with movements organized around identities change. Hall (1989) suggests that politics based on ethnicity undergoes two distinct phases. First, groups rediscover their histories and are thus preoccupied with identity. Second, this preoccupation with identity gives way to more complex analyses that make connections across types of discrimination. Stein's (1992, 1997) analysis of lesbian feminism supports Hall's notion of a two-step model, whereas Broad (2002) finds that transgender organizing does not follow the step model, as activists simultaneously build identity and work to deconstruct it.

### Attributing Causality to Identity

Several works find and test alternative mechanisms to account for the relationship between organizing around certain identities and particular movement outcomes. For example, Turner (1999) assumes that essentialist identities inhibit the formation of coalitions, and she claims that focusing on choice of identity enables the intersexed movement (in this case the choice to forego surgery and hormonal treatment for ambiguous genitals) to form coalitions with transsexual activists and with groups opposed to male circumcision and female genital mutilation. However, Bernstein's (2002a) historical analysis of the lesbian and gay movement finds that structural and contextual factors as well as strategic decisions, rather than an essentialist view of identity, account for a movement's emphasis on cultural and political change and the ability to form coalitions (see also Bernstein 2003). Armstrong (2002) argues that it is not the identities of gay white men that produced exclusions of race, gender, and class in the lesbian and gay movement, but rather the reduced viability of multi-issue politics owing to a shifting political environment. Lichterman (1999) suggests that fostering solidarity across identities depends on the ability to freely discuss the identities that activists claim. This "identity talk" in the public sphere is culturally constructed through interactional routines and can exacerbate or mitigate tensions between identity claims. Van Dyke (2003) suggests that external threats provide the impetus for cross-movement alliances and that organizational ideology may have a greater impact than movement identities in forming coalitions.

Bytystydzinski & Schacht's (2001) and Anner's (1996) collections of essays on identity politics show that organizations based on status identities sometimes socialize individuals into activism and make them available to mobilize for a variety of political purposes not directly related to status identities, including class-based organizing. Yet the essays also show that status identities can inhibit the creation of radical coalitions. One approach to understanding the relationship between movement identities and the formation of coalitions across identities and issues is to examine how activists use their identity to legitimate participation in a social movement in which they are not directly implicated. So, for example, women involved in coal mining strikes who are not miners can justify participation on the basis of their relationship to miners, such as mother or wife. The choice of identity affects future activism (Beckwith 1996).

Several studies assume that organizing around status identities leads to the commodification of protest (Kauffman 1990, Lehr 1999) so that consumption itself “becomes a form of political participation, perhaps supplanting other more direct models of participation” (Chasin 2000, p. 24). Rather than attributing the commodification of protest to identity politics, Collins (1998) argues that the state transforms identity politics so that “the *person* is distilled to his or her *image* and becomes a commodity exchanged in the marketplace of ideas” (p. 54) and thus “authentic, essential difference” associated with status characteristics is commodified without any substantive structural change. In this way, books by African American authors such as Maya Angelou or Zora Neale Hurston can be included in college curricula without African Americans having equal access to those college campuses as either faculty or students. The distribution of images is altered, while the structural factors that make race a major determinant of individual life chances are ignored (see also Young 1990). In short, identity politics has been coopted by the state through the commodification of diversity itself. Furthermore, Collins (1998) argues that despite its critiques of commodification, postmodernism’s strategies of deconstruction and decentering also assume that individuals can choose and construct “the different facets of one’s subjectivity,” ignoring structural power (p. 149).

### Identity Politics and Institutionalized Power

Examining how groups are represented in language and images may help explain how beliefs about those groups are constructed (Howard 2000, Monroe et al. 2000, Stryker et al. 2000). In a media-driven culture, such analyses become especially important. In a review article, political scientists Monroe et al. (2000) raise many of the same questions asked by sociologists, such as which categories coalesce into groups and what contexts determine the identifications that will become most salient. They argue that social identity theory can help explain the cognitive and cultural processes involved in fostering group identities and how those translate into prejudice, conflict, and even violence. They suggest that all explanations for group behavior and conflict reflect some underlying psychological assumptions about how much social identity is passively or actively constructed, which in turn influences accounts of intergroup behavior and social change.

Other scholars challenge assumptions that identity politics represents a retreat into culture that does not engage with institutionalized structures of power, and they theorize that inequality based on status is relational rather than categorical (Connell 1987). Young (1990) suggests that identity movements of the left, such as feminism and black liberation, do not organize to obtain recognition of their group’s suffering, but rather seek the ability to participate in social life. She conceptualizes these movements as engaged in collective action, whose goal is not to remedy how material goods are distributed, but to alter how decisions are made, how worth is evaluated, and how labor is divided. For example, Polletta (1994) asserts that “[s]tudent-organizers of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee

(SNCC) saw their task as to mobilize and secure recognition for a new collective identity—poor, ‘unqualified’ southern blacks—in a way that would transform national and local politics by refashioning criteria of political leadership” (p. 85). Identity deployment (Bernstein 1997) in the workplace by lesbian and gay employees is aimed both at cultural goals—challenging and reducing stigma—and at changing concrete organizational workplace policies and practices (Taylor & Raeburn 1995, Creed & Scully 2000). Armstrong (2002) and Staggenborg et al. (1993/1994) find that a movement’s cultural expressions and events provide the backbone for more conventionally political activities and, as in the case of drag performances (Rupp & Taylor 2003), constitute strategic collective action. Thus, demands for recognition are intertwined with material concerns and alter social relations that are institutionally based.

Several studies contest the separation of the political economy from the realms of culture and identity that bifurcate movements into expressive, cultural, and identity-oriented movements on the one hand, and political, instrumental, and strategic movements on the other. For example, Elbaz’s (1997) and Stockdill’s (2001) studies of AIDS activism illustrate that because of the economic position of communities of people of color, many AIDS activists of color prioritized gaining access to the health care system, whereas white AIDS activists were more interested in issues related to treatment. Divisions between women and men centered around what to do about the exclusion of women from clinical drug trials. Women advocated noncooperation with medical authorities, while men opposed such a strategy. Elbaz (1997) claims that such “differences can be traced back both to people’s positioning relative to the economic, cultural and research power structures as well as their individual choices” (p. 149).

Castells (1997) links the identities of social movements to structural changes related to globalization and the development of a network society. In the network society, Castells argues, “the new power lies in the codes of information and in the images of representation around which societies organize their institutions, and people build their lives, and decide their behavior. The sites of this power are people’s minds” (p. 359). Stychin’s (2003) examination of liberal law reform efforts regarding same-sex sexualities in the context of European integration and globalization provides important links between economic inequality and policies regarding sexualities. For example, he illustrates that the economic disparity between Europe’s east and west provides the context for Romania’s desire for European Union accession. But to gain entry into the European Union, Romania first had to decriminalize homosexuality. Globalization also facilitates the emergence of movements organized around status identities as global communication and networks (Keck & Sikkink 1998) enable movements in some countries to emulate the identities deployed and tactics used in other countries. In the case of the lesbian and gay movement, this often means adopting “western” gay identities at the expense of local ways of organizing same-sex erotic behavior (Adam et al. 1998). Identity politics also emerges on the global political stage with demands by indigenous groups for political sovereignty (e.g., Wilmer 1993). The relationship

between globalization, identity, and social movements will become an increasingly important area for future research.

Cultural interpretations of structural political changes are constructed through emotions and discourse on race, gender, sexuality, and nation, and they provide a basis for mobilization (Dobratz & Shanks-Meile 1997, Ferber 2004, Stein 2001, Gallagher 1997). Gallaher (2003) notes that in the case of the patriot movement, the discourse on patriotism deflects class analysis, supports notions of racial superiority, and produces policies that are economically counterproductive to movement members. Blee (2002) suggests that, at least for female racists, the link between the political economy and racist activism is less clear cut. Instead, she shows that cultural expressions of white racists, such as shaved heads, invite social responses that in turn reinforce a racist identity. Thus, the relationship between identity and the political economy varies across movements and possibly across groups within the same movement.

## CONCLUSION: CAUTIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Identity politics is not a theory of social movements analogous to resource mobilization or political process theories because it does not set out to explain the emergence of social movements (in this case, movements organized on the basis of status identities) or other aspects of their development. The first part of this review shows that designating movements organized on the basis of status identities as identity politics emerged primarily through scholars' efforts to identify a particular political practice that is cultural, symbolic, or psychological in nature, distinct from class politics and class movements. Working from different theoretical assumptions, postmodernism reached the opposite conclusion and defined identity politics as reformist political activism rather than transformative cultural activism. Thus, the purpose of the term identity politics is primarily descriptive rather than explanatory. Because of the divergent notions of power derived from competing theoretical traditions, analyses of identity politics are often mixed with normative political evaluations about what constitutes worthwhile collective efforts geared toward social change, rather than toward explaining mobilization, activist strategies, and movement outcomes. Analysts of identity politics make axiomatic predictions about the types of outcomes that will ensue as a result of organizing around status identities (such as movement fragmentation). However, the interpretive understandings and assumptions about causality are taken for granted rather than realized through rigorous empirical analysis. As a result, the term identity politics obscures more than clarifies and, if the term is used at all, its meaning should be clearly defined.

Nonetheless, these efforts to identify a particular political practice called identity politics raise a series of important theoretical questions that I addressed in the second part of this review. This literature moves beyond efforts to decide what

identity politics “really is” to look at the collective identity approach to social movements that examines the role of identity in all social movements in terms of mobilization, strategies, and goals. I then looked more specifically at research that underscores how movements strategically deploy identities that are, to some extent, externally imposed. This section examined how experiences of identity are translated into political action, the strategic dilemmas that movements face when the identity that serves as the source of political organizing is also the basis for oppression, and whether status identities can account for a variety of movement outcomes. This section also looked at the relationship between status identities and institutionalized relations of power, and how identities are deployed to challenge those institutional relations. Yet researchers must avoid several pitfalls when studying the relationship between identity and politics.

First, analysts of identity politics must not take the public claims made by movements organized around status identities at face value. When movements appear to rest on essentialist assumptions, theorists must determine whether that essentialism is strategic, influenced by social, political, and cultural factors, and how activists themselves understand the sources of their identities. The master narratives of both status- and non-status-based movements can be explored through in-depth case study approaches.

Second, careful attention must be paid to developing and testing alternative causal models to explain the relationship between organizing based on status identities and particular movement outcomes. Simply because a certain outcome is correlated with organizing based on status identities is not sufficient evidence of a causal relationship. Careful cross-sectional and historical comparisons of organizing based on the same status identity as well as comparisons across movements based on different status identities will help to clarify causal relationships.

Research on nationalism invokes the language of identity politics and raises similar questions regarding how culture is related to the political economy, how identities are strategically deployed as essentialist, and how outcomes are related to organizing based on status identities. Therefore, I recommend research that compares movements based on nationalist identities with movements based on other status identities (see also Calhoun 1993b). Such systematic and comparative studies of how identities become political might distinguish between identities based on how much such identities are a part of routine social interaction. Tilly (2002) refers to identities not experienced on a daily basis as “detached” identities and calls those identities that are invoked in everyday practices as “embedded” identities. These studies might compare the implications of organizing based on identities that are experienced in daily life, often based on gender, shared language, ethnicity, religion, and culture, from “corporate identity forms,” which are officially recognized by the state and its institutions and confer special rights and privileges. Comparative examinations of the political and social reasons why essentialist identities are invoked and/or felt will also yield more complex analyses.

To facilitate such comparisons, researchers must pay more attention to what can be called the rules of engagement (Bernstein & Armstrong 2003), which build on

Tilly's (2002) argument that the historical, political, and cultural contexts provide the basis for recognizing certain classes of identities as valid political actors. Countries may differ in how much they recognize ethnic minorities as specific groups, for example, through the granting of social welfare benefits, which will influence the categories around which groups mobilize (Soysal 1994). Becoming an environmentalist or a member of a labor movement entails adopting a different kind of identity, depending on whether such movement organizations are banned in a given regime. Over time, as new actors are admitted and old classes of identities lose their salience, the rules of engagement shift. These variations over time suggest the need for social movement theorists to "think bigger." That is, they must take seriously concerns related to fragmentation and to the shifting sets of movement actors that are mobilized, but without falling into normative analyses of these changes or returning to the overgeneralizations of new social movement theory.

Finally, the relationship between identity and social movements in the context of globalization is an increasingly important area of research. For example, how do transnational social movements develop an empowering identity from which to mobilize? How are identities deployed politically to challenge global governance institutions? How does globalization alter efforts to deconstruct status categories or efforts to gain rights based on those status categories? How do status identities spread across nation states? If, in the context of globalization, the nation state declines in political importance, as some argue, will status identities become even more important bases for political organizing? How are changing social policies related to status identities linked to the development of global governance structures?

Research on identity politics raises many important questions that sociologists are only beginning to explore. Sociologists can contribute a great deal to the analysis of the relationship between experience, culture, identity, politics, and power. By taking seriously how conceptions of power inform collective action, sociologists are well positioned to show how activist concerns with representation and recognition are related to both institutional structures and the political economy.

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