



Shifting Symbolic Boundaries: Cultural Strategies of the Animal Rights Movement¹

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How do activists create cultural change? Scholars have investigated the development and maintenance of collective identities as one avenue for cultural change, but to understand how activists foster change beyond their own movements, we need to look at activists' strategies for changing their targets' mindsets and actions. Sociologists need to look at activists' boundary work to understand both the wide-sweeping goals and strategies that activists enact to generate broad-based cultural changes. Using data from participant observation and interviews with animal rights activists in France and the United States, and drawing on research on ethnic boundary shifting, I show how activists used two main strategies to shift symbolic boundaries between humans and animals, as well as between companion and farm animals—(1) they blur boundaries through focusing and universalizing strategies and (2) they cross boundaries physically, discursively, and iconographically. This study contributes a new theoretical and empirical example to the cultural changes studied by scholars of social movements, and it also provides a useful counterpoint to studies of symbolic boundary construction and maintenance in the sociology of culture.

KEY WORDS: animal rights; culture; ethnic boundaries; social movements; social problems; symbolic boundaries.

INTRODUCTION

Social movements typically face both political as well as cultural challenges. Activists in new social movements who work to change cultural beliefs and codes (Melucci, 1996) face myriad constraints from dominant culture. For example, animal rights activists in both France and the United States face the

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dominant cultural beliefs that humans are allowed to use animals, that using animals is part of the status quo, and that animal rights is radical and extreme. These beliefs, in conjunction with the widespread use of animals and their targets' ignorance of animal issues, provide a structure of similar challenges to the movement in both countries (Cherry, 2008).

On the surface, these cultural constraints may merely look like similar repertoires of beliefs rather than a real structure, but these similar challenges originate from a structure underlying not only French and U.S. beliefs toward human-animal relations, but also much of Western thought—symbolic boundaries between humans and animals. The similarities in cultural challenges stem from the fact that nonactivists hold a worldview in which humans are superior to animals, a view that shapes their relationships with animals. How do animal rights activists combat these cultural beliefs? What strategies might activists develop in their attempts to create cultural change?

Comparative studies of animal rights movements in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia have explored the movements' political challenges (Garner, 1998) and development of animal rights as a social problem (Munro, 2005); however, France and the United States make good cases for this comparative cultural study for two reasons. First, Munro (2005) posited that animal protection is an "Anglo-American tradition" since the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia differ culturally from mainland European countries. Further, all three began enacting animal protection legislation in the late nineteenth century, before many of their European counterparts. Thus France and the United States provide a greater contrast for this study since they differ culturally and do not both fall in the "Anglo-American tradition" of animal protection.

Second, and of greater interest here, is the striking similarities in the two movements' historical trajectories. Both movements began with animal protection, moving to early vegetarian societies, and then to a first wave of animal rights activism that focused on hunting, fur, and cosmetic testing. However, a significant change occurred in the mid-1980s, when activists began focusing their efforts on farm animals and veganism. With this move to what I call second-wave animal rights activism, the French movement faltered, while the U.S. movement flourished—U.S. animal rights organizations count over twice as many members than they do in France, and the United States has nearly eight times as many vegetarian stores and restaurants than does France. One would think this might mean the core strategies of the movements differed significantly, and that the two movements had begun to pursue different goals. However, this is not the case. In this article, I explore the surprising similarities between these two movements—both movements seek to shift the symbolic boundaries between humans and animals as a core goal and strategy.

Social movements scholars have emphasized the development of collective identities as one strategy for generating cultural change (Polletta and Jasper, 2001). Developing a collective identity, especially for previously ignored or devalued identities, is one way activists enact the cultural changes they wish to

see in the world, but identity politics do not encompass all the broad-based cultural changes activists attempt to engender. Cultural and lifestyle movement activists also create cultural change on a personal level—living one's life in a certain way may be considered a manifestation of the movement's goals, as well as a strategy for achieving that goal in the broader society (Haenfler, 2004).

Activists also seek external recognition of their collective identities, and while they encourage others to make changes in their own lifestyles, we still primarily define these movements by their activists' own actions—that is, it is mainly activists who enact the changes they strive to promote. To understand how social movements foster cultural change, we also need to look at activists' strategies for changing their targets' mindsets and actions. Activists may use framing (Snow et al., 1986) as one such strategy, but the act of framing does not represent a cultural goal in itself. Framing may be a tool for achieving cultural goals, but the act of framing a social problem rarely represents a movement's primary or terminal goal. Sociologists need to look at other processes to understand the wide-sweeping goals and strategies that activists use to generate broad-based cultural changes.

Boundary work is both a strategy and a goal for new social movements that seek cultural change. Cultural sociologists have largely focused on the cultural strategies, content, and outcomes of creating and maintaining symbolic boundaries (Bourdieu, 1984; Bryson and Davis, 2010; Epstein, 2010; Lamont, 1992), and social movement researchers have shown how such boundary work may create social problems (Eder et al., 1995; Gamson, 1997). It is primarily within ethnic studies that scholars have looked at how dismantling, shifting, or blurring symbolic boundaries might combat social problems. In this article, I apply the work of these ethnic studies scholars to culture and social movements processes, showing how animal rights activists in France and the United States used two main cultural strategies to shift the symbolic boundaries between humans and animals, as well as between companion animals and farm animals.

After showing how activists use identity politics and boundary work as strategies for creating cultural change, I briefly outline the symbolic boundaries between humans and animals and between companion and farm animals. I then present the shared boundary work strategies of French and U.S. activists, primarily focusing on the human-animal divide, but also providing examples of the companion-farm animal divide. I conclude by showing how activists in other social movements employ these strategies in their attempts to create cultural change and combat social problems.

COLLECTIVE IDENTITIES AS BOUNDARY WORK

The cultural turn in sociology coincided with an increased attention to social movements, especially so-called new social movements. New social

movement activists opposed dominant cultural meanings and values by embodying the changes they strove to enact, especially through developing collective identities (Melucci, 1995; Taylor and Whittier, 1992). Collective identity became a strategy as well as a goal in itself. Activists pursued internal goals of developing collective identities (Armstrong, 2002) as well as external goals of the recognition of those identities by movement outsiders (Bernstein, 1997).

In addition to the development and recognition of collective identities, new social movement activists also sought to change symbolic and cultural codes (Melucci, 1996; Swidler, 1995). These broader goals of fighting for “symbolic and cultural stakes, for a different meaning and orientation of social action” (Melucci, 1984:827), however, have continued to be understood as external goals of recognition of collective identities (Polletta and Jasper, 2001). These recognition claims may be one way to right cultural injustices and create cultural change (Fraser, 1997), but beyond collective identities, sociologists have paid much less attention to these broader cultural goals and outcomes of social movements (McAdam, 1994).

One way to broaden our understanding of the symbolic and cultural goals and strategies of social movements is to look at these movements’ boundary work. Collective identities play a part in such boundary work, as the formation and deployment of collective identities implies the creation of community boundaries, of in-groups and out-groups (Eder et al., 1995). Activists may deploy collective identities strategically, choosing when to “celebrate” or “suppress” identities in order to emphasize differences or similarities with their targets (Bernstein, 1997).

Rather than claiming that new social movements have already moved beyond collective identity to momentary struggles for subjectivity (McDonald, 2002), in this article I focus on the broader cultural changes brought about through boundary work. The blurring and shifting of symbolic boundaries is implicit in much of the work of new social movement activists. While queer activists fight to create and maintain collective identities, such work subverts binary gender boundaries. Environmental activists simultaneously disrupt the nature-culture boundary by positing the environment as a social actor. Outside social movements, ethnic studies scholars have shown how immigrant and minority groups have worked to shift ethnic boundaries by taking on aspects of the “host identity” and reconstructing the “group identity” (Zolberg and Long, 1999), but this work still primarily focuses on collective identity and not on broader cultural patterns. Looking at symbolic boundaries beyond activists’ own collective identities will provide additional insight to symbolic boundaries and boundary work processes.

Animal rights activists provide a perfect case study for this analytic move. Animal rights is a new social movement (Jasper, 1997), but collective identity is not the primary means or goal of the movement. Collective identity is not even strong enough to maintain commitment to the movement’s basic tenets such as veganism (Cherry, 2006). Scholars typically use collective identity to explain how activists subjectively understand structural inequality (Taylor and

Whittier, 1992), but this cannot fully explain the actions of conscience constituents such as animal rights activists—people working to change the lot of others, and not just themselves. Thus looking at how animal rights activists shift the symbolic boundaries between humans and animals, as well as between companion and farm animals, helps illuminate transformative cultural goals and strategies of new social movements.

SYMBOLIC BOUNDARIES AND SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Boundary work can be used to create or combat social problems. Social scientists originally viewed shared symbols and symbolic boundaries as tools that promote social solidarity, provide mechanisms of social control, and maintain social order (Turner, 1967). In foundational anthropological works on symbolic boundaries, the focus largely rested on boundary maintenance in two opposing senses. On the one hand, scholars saw violating or crossing symbolic borders as “pollution” to be avoided (Douglas, 1966). On the other hand, some believed that social actors breached symbolic boundaries purposefully, as in religious rituals, with a goal of reinforcing those barriers (Durkheim and Mauss, 1963). Thus nearly any social action toward a symbolic boundary—avoidance or transgression—merely served to preserve the boundary.

More recent cultural sociologists have moved away from this emphasis on social solidarity and have highlighted the role of symbolic boundaries in maintaining differences between groups. The creation and maintenance of these symbolic boundaries is “a necessary but insufficient condition” for the creation of social problems (Lamont, 1992:178). Only when a society widely affirms symbolic boundaries do they become social boundaries, or “identifiable patterns of social exclusion or class and racial segregation” (Lamont and Molnar, 2002:169). For example, cultural practices and consumption (Bourdieu, 1984), as well as moral boundaries and status symbols (Lamont, 1992), distinguish classes from one another. Race, culture, and language have likewise been used to create and maintain boundaries between ethnic groups (Alba, 2005). Symbolic boundaries between humans and animals, or between companion animals and farm animals, follow these patterns. Scholars and animal rights activists agree that humans generally do not separate companion animals from farm animals to celebrate companion animals’ status as “honorary humans” (Fiddes, 1991); they do so in order to demarcate which animals they love, and which animals they love to eat.

Social movement scholars have paid more attention to activists’ efforts to create and maintain collective identities and symbolic boundaries than to the attempts—and reasons—for dismantling them (e.g., Gamson, 1997). Within ethnic studies, scholars have begun to explore how people break down boundaries to combat social exclusion by showing how ethnic minorities attempt to blur and shift symbolic boundaries to include themselves in the ethnic majority

(Alba, 2005; Wimmer, 2008a,b; Zolberg and Litt Woon, 1999). While these studies have expanded our understanding of boundary processes, they characterize much of this boundary work as strategies and not also as goals in themselves. To understand animal rights, as well as other new social movements with cultural goals and strategies, we need to understand how and why activists seek to dismantle symbolic boundaries as simultaneously a goal and a strategy. Just as immigrants and ethnic minorities seek to overcome oppressive ethnic boundaries, so, too, animal rights activists seek to dismantle the symbolic boundaries between humans and animals.

Understanding the different facets of boundary work is important for sociologists since the processes of creating, maintaining, blurring, and dismantling symbolic boundaries can all cause or solve social problems. Boundary work processes that resemble each other in means may lead to very different ends, and vice versa. For example, when people see others as part of an undifferentiated mass, they erase boundaries and emphasize similarities, and thus they may create or maintain social problems. This can be purposive, as when sexists assume women are more nurturing than men because of some essentialist natural characteristic, or it can be inadvertent, as when whites see “color-blindness” as a solution to racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2003). Conversely, feminists, antiracists, and other activists may emphasize difference rather than subsuming aspects of their identity to these monolithic categories (Richards, 2004). It is precisely these universal understandings that postcolonial feminists attempt to dismantle when they call for contextualized, historicized studies of third-world women (Mohanty, 1991). In these cases, creating or maintaining symbolic boundaries to emphasize differences actually works to combat social problems.

We understand how symbolic boundaries may create and preserve distinctions and inequalities (Bourdieu, 1984; Lamont, 1992). Symbolic boundaries may not necessarily translate into structural inequalities, but to those in the out-group, exclusionary definitions—such as “womyn” to the transsexual activists banned from the Michigan Womyn’s Music Festival (Gamson, 1997)—may be seen as creating or maintaining certain social problems. Thus in this article, I investigate the processes that directly counteract such discriminatory boundaries. I use insights from ethnic studies scholars on boundary blurring and dissolution to understand the boundary work of the animal rights movement. Dismantling symbolic boundaries should not primarily be seen as creating social problems, but as a cultural goal and strategy for activists wishing to combat injustices.

METHODS AND DATA

My data came from in-depth interviews and participant observation with activists in the animal rights movements in France and the United States, as well as from documents produced by these movements. The organizations and

activists I observed and interviewed would be considered mainstream in comparison to the radical flanks of the movement such as the Animal Liberation Front.³ There was diversity, however, within this mainstream. While all groups shared an end goal of total animal liberation, they used varying levels of shocking to mundane tactics to achieve those goals. Organizations such as PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals) are known for their guerilla theater-style tactics, and they use moral shocks (Jasper and Poulsen, 1995) to gain attention from the public and the media. Grassroots organizations such as Vegan Outreach, in contrast, go about their business more quietly, preferring to spread the word through distributing heavily documented leaflets on college campuses around the nation. Although the various organizations I studied within this mainstream differed in their preferred tactics, they all engaged in similar boundary work strategies.

To observe activists during the decision-making process and in action, I conducted fieldwork with grassroots and national organizations in both countries. I observed planning meetings, the events themselves, and the targets' and activists' reactions to the events, which included conferences, protests, tabling and leafleting events, among others. The U.S. fieldwork included participant observation over an 18-month period, primarily with one grassroots organization in the southeastern United States. I also conducted participant observation for 10 months in France, primarily with four different grassroots groups in Paris, Lyon, and Toulouse.

Complementing this fieldwork are interviews with 35 U.S. activists from 10 organizations, and 37 French activists from 13 organizations. I use quotation marks around the pseudonyms of activists who chose confidential rather than public participation. With the exception of four native English speakers, all the French interviews were conducted and transcribed in French. All translations are my own. I also gathered and analyzed documents including flyers, posters, t-shirts, and buttons produced by animal rights social movement organizations in both countries. These texts' primary audiences were the nonactivist targets of the movements.

This article is part of a larger project in which I analyze the differences between the two movements, but in comparative research one must also explain the similarities (Ragin, 1987). Given the different successes of the second-wave animal rights movements in the two countries, one would expect them to employ different strategies. Thus here I investigate the similar boundary work strategies of the two movements. The boundary work strategies emerged while analyzing the data from both countries, and I explored these themes using grounded theory (Charmaz, 1994; Strauss and Corbin, 1998). Through a constant comparative method I found that both within and between countries, activists attempted to dismantle the symbolic boundaries

³ Those familiar with animal advocacy will note the variety of organizations' philosophical orientations and their ability to be classified as animal "rights," "welfare," or "abolitionist" organizations. As my argument concerns these organizations' similarities rather than their differences, I use the term "animal rights" throughout the article for the sake of clarity.

between humans and animals in surprisingly similar ways. The different cultural contexts sometimes affected the content of the strategies, but not the strategies themselves.

ANIMAL RIGHTS AND SYMBOLIC BOUNDARIES

Symbolic boundaries between humans and animals are so fundamental to our notion of “humanity” that they arguably comprise part of the dominant culture. Relatively permanent, deeply embedded, and difficult to change, such boundaries are often supported not only by cultural beliefs, values, or norms, but also by institutional and structural relations (McAdam, 1994). These cultural codes are so hidden and embedded in cultural and social structures that they seem more normal than differences based on race, gender, or sexuality. For instance, aside from incest and cannibalism (“mere” human-human boundaries), bestiality is one of the most common taboos worldwide. Yet using animals for all sorts of other purposes is one of the oldest, most common, and most widespread habits of humankind.

The vast majority of human societies throughout history have founded their social relations with nature on a nature-culture divide, viewing humans as superior to nature, which included animals (Lawrence, 1995). Animal rights activists were not blind to these social forces, and cited this rift between humans and animals as a challenge to their work.⁴ Although activists and environmental sociologists largely consider “nature” to be a social construction (Latour, 1993), many nonvegetarians view nature and all its trappings as quite real. And while humans seeing nature as real and in danger aids the work of environmental activists (King, 1995), this conception proved harmful to animal rights activists when their targets used “nature” to justify humans’ mistreatment of nonhuman animals. This use of the concept of nature prevailed so much in France that Yves Bonnardel, a founder of the animal rights movement in France, wrote the tract “Doing Away with the Concept of Nature,” and many animal rights flyers critique the idea of nature.

Animal exploitation is founded on the idea that other species are inferior to human beings, that they are nothing but a product. Their death is a necessary evil, it is part of the “natural order.” But this natural order does not exist. This notion excused and continues to excuse all discriminations—those of race, of sex, of gender, and of species! Where nature put differences, culture put inequalities. It is “natural” to kill in order to eat just as it is natural for women to know better than men how to raise children. Being vegetarian is against nature just as being homosexual is against nature. (Vegan Day flyer from the Collectif Antispéciste de Paris)

⁴ Animal rights philosophers also address the human-animal divide (e.g., Singer, 1975), and some attribute this divide to the “property status” of animals—that humans view and legally codify nonhuman animals as property rather than sentient beings (e.g., Francione and Garner, forthcoming). Animal rights activists’ boundary work strategies resembled these authors’ philosophical arguments in the sense that both seek to dismantle the human-animal boundary, but the activists I interviewed and observed did not attribute the origin of their boundary work strategies to their familiarity with this animal ethics literature.

The concept of “naturework” (Fine, 1997) helps us understand this situation. Humans give meaning to the environment and situate themselves in it through naturework, the technique social actors use to understand and express their relationship to the environment. Nonactivists engaged in such naturework when they saw animals differently from humans not because of biology or cognitive ability, but because they considered animals as part of nature, and humans as outside that natural world. To them, humans were to culture as animals were to nature. Thus animal rights activists focused their attention on one specific form of the nature-culture divide—symbolic boundaries between humans and animals.

Animal rights activists also attempted to dismantle symbolic boundaries between companion and farm animals. What people see as food in one culture may be seen as inedible in another (Douglas, 1966). Thus in the United States and in France, people see dogs as companions, as “honorary humans” symbolically unfit for consumption (Fiddes, 1991:34). In contrast, in parts of China and Korea, people raise dogs for human consumption. Despite animals’ ability to use significant symbols (Irvine, 2004), humans create and enforce these symbolic boundaries. It is not the family dog who implores his family to eat a pig rather than eating him; humans create and maintain the boundaries between companion and farm animals.

BOUNDARY-SHIFTING STRATEGIES

Jasper and Nelkin (1992:169) previously noted that animal rights activists were “committed to the belief that there are no significant boundaries between humans and other animals,” but did not clarify what this belief meant nor how activists might achieve that goal. I contend that a central goal of animal rights activists is to dismantle the human-animal boundary, a process scholars have called “boundary shifting” (Wimmer, 2008a). Here, activists encourage the “lumping” (Zerubavel, 1996) together of humans and animals, or of companion and farm animals, as fellow sentient beings rather than “splitting” them apart because of species barriers. Ethnic studies scholars have grouped boundary shifting together with other strategies of boundary work, but here I argue that boundary shifting is not just a strategy but also a long-term goal of cultural activists such as those in the animal rights movement. I demonstrate how animal rights activists use two primary strategies of boundary work to achieve boundary shifting—(1) they blur boundaries through focusing and universalizing strategies and (2) they cross boundaries physically, discursively, and iconographically.

In contrast to previous research that noted the variability of cultural resources by national context (Cherry, 2008; Lamont and Aksartova, 2002; Thévenot et al., 2000), I found the cultural resources opponents used to create and maintain symbolic boundaries surrounding humans and animals—as well as the strategies activists deployed to shift and dismantle them—to be largely similar in France and the United States. Within the mainstream animal rights

organizations I studied in both countries, a wide variety of activists engaged in these boundary work strategies, in ways that ranged from oblique references in their leaflets to attempts at creating moral shocks through guerilla theatre (Jasper and Poulsen, 1995). Just as the content sometimes varied by cultural location, so, too, the level of intended shock value varied between organizations. The underlying strategies, however, remained the same.

To counteract the negative repercussions of the human-animal divide described above, animal rights activists sought to dismantle the boundary itself. As a strategy of ethnic boundary making, Wimmer (2008a,b) described shifting boundaries through either expansion or contraction. People may contract a boundary, making it narrower and more exclusive, or they may expand the boundary, making it broader and more inclusive. This latter process of boundary expansion is what animal rights activists seek to accomplish—they want to expand the term “animal” to include both human and nonhuman animals, rather than maintaining a hierarchical differentiation between humans (superior) and animals (inferior). I differ from Wimmer (2008a), who called boundary shifting a strategy, and see it more as a long-term goal to be achieved, as Zolberg and Long (1999:9) noted that: “Boundary shifting can only occur after substantial boundary crossing and boundary blurring have taken place.” Although this ongoing goal has yet to be achieved by the animal rights movement, a clearer example of boundary shifting can be seen in the example of how Puerto Ricans in the United States “became white” by expanding the boundary demarcating who was white (Loveman and Muniz, 2007). In what follows, I outline two main strategies that activists used to achieve this goal of boundary shifting—boundary blurring and crossing. Boundary blurring is itself composed of focusing and universalizing strategies.

BOUNDARY BLURRING

Symbolic boundaries may be “bright” or “blurry,” meaning they may be clear and unambiguous or they may involve “zones of self-presentation and social representation that allow for ambiguous locations with respect to the boundary” (Alba, 2005:22). The nature of a boundary depends on how it has been institutionalized in different domains, such as citizenship and race for ethnic boundaries, or language and cognition for human-animal boundaries. With its historic stability and wide-reaching nature, the human-animal boundary is a “bright” boundary that animal rights activists seek to blur. A blurred boundary no longer serves as a means for categorization or social organization; what the boundary distinguishes becomes indeterminate and it becomes difficult or impossible to locate individuals with respect to the boundary (Wimmer, 2008a,b; Zolberg and Litt Woon, 1999) Emphasizing “civilizational commonalities” such as common religious affiliations can blur ethnic boundaries (Wimmer, 2008a), but broader boundaries may be drawn when people use “universalizing” strategies (Lamont and Bail, 2005). Animal rights activists

engaged in both universalizing and what I call “focusing” strategies to blur the human-animal boundary.

Focusing

At first glance, focusing on a symbolic boundary might seem to contradict blurring that boundary, but focusing on a boundary is the first step in highlighting a boundary’s arbitrary and socially constructed nature. As symbolic boundaries function below our typical level of consciousness, focusing means making the implicit explicit. Although these boundaries were implicit in dominant culture, they were explicit for the activists. Thus claiming that humans were animals represented a primary focusing tactic on the part of activists in both countries. Activists often used the phrase “human and nonhuman animals,” as “Bernadette,” a French activist, described: “It’s ridiculous saying ‘animals and humans’ because we are animals.” “Grant,” a U.S. activist, used scientific explanations to debunk what he saw as arbitrary divisions between humans and animals.

If you believe in evolution, there’s really no clear dividing point between us and animals. Even when you look at language, and brain size relative to the size of the organism, there aren’t as many clear distinctions as most people think, or would like to think.

“Grant’s” comment on boundaries between humans and animals being something that people “would like to think” belies his assumption that the creation and maintenance of such boundaries represent a conscious effort. A belief in symbolic boundaries, or lack thereof, is not as easy as choosing to believe or not. Although national identities and boundaries may be purposefully constructed, at this micro-interactional level, cognitive mechanisms such as stereotyping, self-identification, and categorization provide the building blocks for boundary construction and maintenance (Cerulo, 1997; Nippert-Eng, 1996; Zerubavel, 1991).

Activists in both countries also used focusing to dismantle the companion-farm animal divide. This meant highlighting the fact that most people value companion animals more than farm animals, despite similarities between the two types of animals in cognition, physiology, and emotions. Animal rights activists focused on this boundary and asked their targets why they participated in its maintenance. For example, a poster from Animal Rights International depicts a pig and a cat, and asks the question: “Which do you pet and which do you eat? Why?” This question directly addresses the symbolic boundary between companion animals and farm animals, thus focusing the boundary and highlighting its arbitrary nature.

Universalizing Strategies

Universalizing strategies involve emphasizing a shared morality as the basis for distinguishing between people, rather than making distinctions based

on class, race, or culture (Lamont and Bail, 2005; Wimmer, 2008b). As opposed to particularizing strategies in which people reinterpret a denigrated category in more positive terms (Lamont and Bail, 2005), universalizing strategies place both dominant and dominated into as broad a category as possible, into a global “community of belonging” (Wimmer, 2008b:1042). Animal rights activists engaged in two specific universalizing strategies—first, they universalized the victimization of humans and animals by placing animals alongside humans as victims of violence and, second, they universalized the struggle for animal rights by equating the animal rights movement with human rights movements.

In the remainder of this section, I show how both French and U.S. activists used similar universalizing strategies. However, the cultural content of those universalizing claims sometimes differed between the two movements. These differences point to the importance of collective memory in activists’ decisions to deploy specific arguments, and the effectiveness of those arguments in specific historical and national contexts. I explain those differences elsewhere (Cherry, 2007), and detailing them here is beyond the scope of this article. In this article, I focus on the similar underlying boundary work strategies, not their content, as a way to blur the human-animal divide.

Universalizing Victimization

Activists universalize victimization by linking oppressions, abuses, or wrongs done to other groups to the social movement organization’s target group. This strategy can focus on the act of victimization as well as the social-structural or cultural similarities between the two victimized groups. In this latter sense, activists symbolically link two symbolic or structural “out-groups” (Eder et al., 1995). Activists in both France and the United States universalized victimization by linking abuses toward animals to abuses toward humans. The underlying logic behind this strategy was that if one opposed acts of torture, murder, genocide, and discrimination, then it should not matter who comprised the targets of these acts. Thus activists focused on the horrors of the acts themselves, and they highlighted the similar social structural positioning of animals and the humans who were victims of such acts. Activists compared the treatment of animals to the treatment of people in slavery and in concentration camps. They also likened the killing of animals to murder, with the oft-cited phrase “meat is murder.” These strategies of universalizing victimization culminated in the creation of a concept to denote the discrimination of animals, in what activists called speciesism.

Activists in both countries discursively compared the treatment of animals to the treatment of humans in slavery, but they did so in different ways, highlighting activists’ strategic choice of when and to whom to engage in this universalizing strategy. In the United States, activists primarily compared these abuses in interviews, or on flyers or posters, whereas in France, I observed

activists making this comparison in interactions with their targets. For example, COK's *Vegetarian Starter Guide* compared the treatment of farm animals to the treatment of slaves in response to the question: "If the animals are raised to be eaten, isn't that okay?": "Two hundred years ago in the United States, humans raised other humans to be slaves. The fact that these people were raised to be slaves did not justify slavery. Similarly, raising animals for the purpose of eating them does not justify their exploitation."

French activists made this comparison in very public interactions with their targets. At the Veggie Pride protest, where hundreds of vegetarians and animal rights activists gather each May in Paris, one of the slogans during the march translates as "Breeding? Slavery! Slaughterhouses? Barbaric!" When I attended a tabling event in Lyon, one of the posters hanging behind the table depicted hens in battery cages alongside images of slaves, with the caption "Never again!"

French activists also universalized victimization in conversations with their targets, even sometimes to black passersby. At one tabling event with the Collectif Antispéciste de Paris (CAP), a black family passed the table and Ivora, one of the activists, offered them a flyer. The mother asked what the flyer was, and Ivora replied that it discussed speciesism. The mother then asked, "What is that?" and Ivora responded that "[s]peciesism is to species what racism and sexism are to race and sex," going on to explain that CAP opposed exploiting animals because of their species. The mother's eyebrows arched a bit, and she started to walk away. Ivora followed her and her family, continuing to talk to them, and eventually succeeded in giving them a flyer. When Ivora returned, I said: "Good job—you got them to take a flyer." Ivora said: "Yeah, but I should have talked to them about slavery. I should have said that speciesism and the way we treat animals today is like how slaves were treated 200 years ago."

In face-to-face interaction with their targets, many U.S. activists shied away from making this comparison, for reasons that "Talia," a white activist, explained.

Another really deep sticking point is the history of slavery in the United States, which was modeled on the exploitation of animals, which makes it very, very, very difficult to talk to certain groups of people about the idea that people are animals. The very live history in our culture of treating people like chattel. At present, we have not figured out a way to talk about it in a way that helps us. If anything, at this point it makes it more difficult to talk about why we shouldn't treat animals as chattel.

This avoidance makes sense because of the historical treatment of African Americans as chattel during slavery and because they had to fight to be seen as human. To U.S. activists, actively crossing the racial divide was "pollution" to be avoided (Douglas, 1966). Further, transgressing a racial or other symbolic divide creates the danger of reinforcing it (Durkheim and Mauss, 1963). The only solution for activists to engage in universalizing victimization while not reinforcing the boundaries they sought to blur was when the activists themselves were part of the comparison group. Marjorie Spiegel, a white

woman, chose the black feminist author Alice Walker to write the introduction to her 1996 book *The Dreaded Comparison: Human and Animal Slavery*, for example, and Joe (Vegan Outreach) invoked his identity as a person of color when making these comparisons: “I’m a person of color. I’m a Native American amongst other things. . . . So it does strike a chord in my heart. It is just heartbreaking to me that the parallels between oppressed people and the way that animals are treated, are blaringly obvious. . . . I think that people of color are certainly the most qualified people to speak out about those parallels. In my heart I think anybody should be allowed to, but I guess the bottom line is it’s what’s going to be heard.”

Thus because of their more distant history with slavery, French activists engaged in this universalizing strategy more publicly, in interaction with their targets, whereas U.S. activists invoked the strategy in private discourse or in publications. The strategy of universalizing victimization existed in the movements in both countries, but the frequency and method of its deployment depended on cultural constraints.

These external cultural constraints on the content and deployment of victimization-universalizing strategies clarify when comparing French and U.S. activists’ discourse on slavery to that of concentration camps. Given France’s closer connection to the Holocaust, French activists invoked the Holocaust less than they did slavery. Though both French and U.S. activists claimed in interviews to find this a legitimate contrast, activists in both countries, for the most part, avoided making this comparison publicly.

That being said, two groups made this comparison in very public campaigns. A flyer promoting the National Primate Research Exhibition Hall, a memorial project of the Primate Freedom Project, contained photos from concentration camps interspersed with photos from vivisection labs. The flyer read: “The world would be a different and much better place if even one person had succeeded in building a public display of life behind the barbed wire of a Nazi concentration camp—at the camp’s very entrance—even as the horror occurred. The National Primate Research Exhibition Hall will do just this.”

Perhaps the best-known example of this was PETA’s “Holocaust on Your Plate” campaign, where the group displayed photos from factory farms and slaughterhouses alongside photos from Nazi death camps. On the purpose of this exhibit, a PETA press release stated that: “PETA wants to stimulate contemplation of how the victimization of Jews, Gypsies, homosexuals, and others characterized as ‘life unworthy of life’ during the Holocaust parallels the way that modern society abuses and justifies the slaughter of animals.”⁵ Like slavery, invoking the Holocaust was a boundary to be avoided (Douglas, 1966), and activists justified their use of the Holocaust metaphor in similar ways to the slavery comparison—the press release highlighted the fact that the grandson of Isaac Bashevis Singer sponsored the campaign, and that members of the campaign coordinator’s family “were murdered by the Nazis.”

⁵ See <http://www.peta.org/mc/NewsItem.asp?id=3021>, last accessed October 2009.

In France, activists avoided public comparisons, yet claimed it to be a major debate within the movement. When I asked respondents their opinions of the tactic of comparing factory farms and slaughterhouses with concentration camps, many said they thought they were similar, but they personally avoided using this comparison because their grandparents were placed in work camps or killed in concentration camps during World War II. Thus they avoided the subject, as “Julie” said: “Here, concentration camps are really scary because our grandparents lived it. I know my father is very marked because his parents, his family died in concentration camps. I brought up the subject but the response wasn’t very, it’s delicate. But at the same time, that’s the reality.” In both countries, activists avoided personally engaging this comparison, though large organizations made the comparison in campaigns.

This lack of engaging the Holocaust comparison is surprising, given the popularity among activists of Charles Patterson’s (2002) book *Eternal Treblinka: Our Treatment of Animals and the Holocaust*, and given activists’ relative readiness to discuss slavery when universalizing victimization. Further, social movements as diverse as the lesbian/gay movement and the Christian Right have employed the Holocaust frame (Stein, 1998), making it a more approachable comparison than if the animal rights movement were the first to do so.

A third strategy of universalizing victimization included claiming that killing animals for food was murder. As a legal definition, murder technically only applies to human victims. Thus in this tactic activists played with boundaries between humans and animals, dismantling them or moving them to include animals alongside human murder victims. Activists primarily used this strategy in interviews, slogans, and flyers, but they also physically enacted it in certain actions. Though the phrase “meat is murder” originated in England in the 1970s and was subsequently adopted by many U.S. animal rights organizations, I found examples of this discursive strategy in current practice primarily in the French movement.⁶

In France, activists created the “Sang des Bêtes” action, where on the same day, activists in towns across France engage in a guerilla theater action where they spill fake blood on the streets and distribute flyers denouncing meat eating.⁷ Activists originally held these actions in front of butcher shops, but have since moved to high-traffic pedestrian areas. At the Sang des Bêtes action in Lyon in December 2006, activists physically enacted their universalizing strategy by cutting the “throat” of a cardboard cow in order to spill the fake blood. When they emptied the container of fake blood, they left the cow in the middle of the area, with a poster that read, “agriculture—torture, breeding—slavery, meat—torture and murder.”

At nearly any action, activists employ the phrase “meat is murder,” or in French, “viande égale meurtre” (meat equals murder). In interviews, activists

⁶ I thank Kim Stallwood for informing me of the origins of the phrase “meat is murder.”

⁷ “Sang des bêtes” translates to “blood of the beasts.” The name is taken from the Georges Franju (1949) film of the same name, which depicts slaughterhouse conditions.

also posited animals as murder victims by designating butchers and meat-eaters as murderers, as did Carol (Animal Amnistic): “We are against cruelty and murder. But they don’t think of it as murder. They don’t think of killing animals as murder. It’s food production.” The idea that meat came from murdered animals attracted these activists so much that it pervaded their discourse. When simply speaking to me, or describing meat, the concept of animals being murdered, of meat being a corpse, continually arose. Animal rights activists thus evidenced having an animal-friendly discursive repertoire (Steinberg, 1998) through which they saw the world. While identity-based discourses have great potential for dialogic and cultural transformation (Steinberg, 1998), so do discourses that subvert symbolic boundaries while relying less on identity constructions.

What most people saw as food, activists saw as cadavers, as Ivora described: “If I eat with people who are eating animal cadavers, well, I can’t stop myself from thinking that they’re barbaric.” Rather than saying “meat,” Ivora blithely used the term “animal cadavers,” as did many other activists during our interviews. Their use of such terms reflected their view of the world more than a desire to convert me to veganism, as they already knew I was vegan. However, simply because animal rights activists and vegans slipped into such subcultural argot when speaking to one another did not mean that activists ignored how meat-eaters viewed meat. In fact, activists often played on meat-eaters’ decontextualized views of meat in order to defetishize meat as a commodity. As one French flyer put it: “Isn’t everything put into place to make us forget that meat under plastic wrap is nothing other than a cadaver?” In these ways, activists used the concept of animals as victims of murder to dismantle the human-animal boundary through universalizing that form of victimization.

British philosopher Richard Ryder coined the term “speciesism” in 1970, but the first popular iteration of it came in Peter Singer’s *Animal Liberation* (1975:6). The very concept emphasizes the socially constructed hierarchies between humans and animals that activists critiqued. Further, it puts a name to the victimization of animals. Beneath this universalizing strategy lies the idea that speciesism resembles the oppressions of racism and sexism, among others. Though highlighting the social construction of race and gender served antiracist and antisexist activists well, the concept of speciesism has not impacted popular consciousness as much. And though an Anglo-Saxon activist-scholar coined the term, British and U.S. activists rarely use the term in their work. It is in the French animal rights movement where the concept of speciesism, or more specifically, antispeciesism, has found its home.

“Antispeciesism” denotes a specific type of animal rights activism in France, and antispeciesists comprise a significant portion of the French movement, with activist collectives and organizations existing in most major cities in France. To a great degree, antispeciesists founded the French movement, writing and publishing articles in the *Cahiers Antispécistes*, where David Olivier defined speciesism as follows: “Speciesism is to species what racism is

to race, and what sexism is to sex: a discrimination based on species, almost always in favor of members of the human species” (Olivier, 1992). Olivier explicitly compares speciesism to racism and sexism in an attempt to blur the human-animal boundary. If we take such definitions as bases for antispeciesist movements, here we come closest to an explicit reclamation of shifting symbolic boundaries as a specific goal of animal rights activists.

Demonstrating commitment to such a goal, many French groups incorporated the term into their names, and many activists clearly stated that antispeciesism provided the foundation for their activism. When I asked Yann (CAP) how he described his thoughts on animals, he immediately responded: “Antispeciesist. For animal equality.” Yann then furthered the concept to include a critique of the companion-farm animal divide, saying there was a “discrimination” against animals beyond cats and dogs.

Universalizing Struggles

Activists also engage in universalizing strategies by underscoring commonalities between an activist’s movement and other social movements. This strategy differs from merely proffering a social movement narrative to explain a group’s existence. Rather, this universalizing strategy indirectly blurs symbolic boundaries by creating associations between groups and thus between types of causes. In this sense, universalizing struggles may legitimize a movement, as such comparisons are more often made from newer, lower-status, less successful movements toward older, higher-status, more successful movements. This may serve to justify the movement that employs this strategy, placing it in the same ranks as historically successful and respected movements. Animal rights activists shifted the human-animal boundary by demonstrating the fight for animal rights to be equally important as other social movements focused on human issues. Activists in both movements compared animal rights to the antislavery movement, and U.S. activists in particular compared the animal rights movement to the civil rights movement.

Both French and U.S. activists compared the animal rights movement to the antislavery movement, specifically focusing on the similarities between movement participants, goals, and tactics. Charles (PMAF), explained thus: “In England, the first anti-slavery activists were in the 1800s, and they were also the first animal protectionists.” Not only did they see historical connections between the movements, but activists also carried this association into the present, as one antispeciesist poster claimed: “Those who opposed slavery in the 18th century are those who refuse to eat meat today.” Activists set up the antislavery movement to be the forebearer of the animal rights movement today.

For activists with abolition of animal use as their primary goal, the antislavery movement became an even more enticing comparison. One of the main debates in the animal rights movement in both countries involves whether to

use reformist measures to achieve animal liberation, or to instead stick to abolition as the main goal and strategy. “Fergus,” a staunch abolitionist, demonstrated a rare showing of French optimism, couching his belief in an abolitionist end goal by clarifying its attainability: “Despite everything, this is a realistic vision. But two hundred years ago, abolishing slavery was a completely utopian idea. But we still managed to abolish slavery.”

Finally, activists compared the tactics of the animal rights movement to those of the antislavery movement. “Amber,” a U.S. activist, provided a clear comparison of the type of tactics used in both movements: “Back in the slave days, we would not say that the Underground Railroad, well, you shouldn’t do that because that is illegal. But breaking into labs and liberating puppies is getting people thrown in jail.” “Amber” referred to the legal punishment of activists associated with the Animal Liberation Front (ALF), the radical flank of the animal rights movement. Though the ALF is currently growing in France, it was not the illegal tactics of antislavery activists that captured the imagination of these French activists; rather, the sugar boycott and legislative actions provided the most fodder for comparison in the French movement.

A group of activists in France have been plotting a campaign for the abolition of meat for some time now, as I observed at a French animal rights conference in August 2006. Antoine (Stop Gavage) presented a synopsis of the campaign, making explicit allusions to Adam Hochschild’s (2005) history of the English antislavery movement, *Bury the Chains*. Antoine compared the meat abolition campaign to the sugar boycott of the antislavery movement, but said a meat boycott did not have the same ring because many people thought only poor people did not eat meat.

More than the abolition of slavery, activists in the United States primarily compared the animal rights movement to the civil rights movement. Activists highlighted similarities beyond legislative or political goals, since the animal rights movement also strives to change cultural beliefs and practices. A quote on the back of Vegan Outreach’s “Guide to Cruelty-Free Eating” summarized these wide-ranging goals: “To paraphrase Martin Luther King, Jr.: The arc of history is long and ragged and often unclear, but ultimately it progresses towards justice.” This particular quote proved to be a favorite among activists, three of whom specifically cited it in their interviews. Here, their universalizing strategy highlighted a similar focus on justice as a goal of the movement. Using the master frame (Snow et al., 1986) of justice implies the injustice of current treatments of animals. This move also places animal rights on the same level as civil rights, in the sense that both movements worked toward similar, acceptable goals of justice.

These associations with other social movements ultimately served to dismantle the human-animal divide, as participants portrayed their work as animal rights activists to be similar to human rights work. As Lorena, a U.S. activist, put it: “We have to put out so much more information available for them, so they don’t just see us as dog defenders, instead of human rights and animal rights defenders. Because I believe that whoever defends animal rights,

before, was an advocate of human rights. Those two come together, and cannot be mutually exclusive.” By universalizing the struggle for animal rights, activists sought to share a common “activist” identity with antislavery, civil rights, and other social movement activists.

BOUNDARY CROSSING

The second main strategy activists used to shift the human-animal boundary was boundary crossing, which activists engaged physically, discursively, and iconographically. With certain religious rites, boundaries may be crossed through a symbolic reversal such as using the left hand instead of the right, but the goal of these boundary-crossing rituals was to reinforce boundaries between people or between life and death (Durkheim and Mauss, 1963). In contrast, here the goal was to displace symbolic boundaries, not reinforce them.

Boundary crossing typically describes individual-level processes in which one person moves from one group to another without changing the symbolic boundary itself (Wimmer, 2008b; Zolberg and Litt Woon, 1999). In ethnic studies, this process involves immigrants or ethnic minorities learning a new language, becoming naturalized citizens, or undergoing a religious conversion in order to change themselves to become more like the country’s “insiders.” Ethnic studies scholars claim that if boundary crossings happen widely, consistently, and in the same direction, this “endogenous shift” (Wimmer, 2008a) will change the original boundary. In social movements, however, activists more often encourage collective action rather than waiting for solely individual changes to culminate into wide-sweeping changes. As regards postcitizenship movements and animal rights in particular, such individual boundary crossings would likely not change the boundary since the activists are often conscience rather than beneficiary constituents. As a new social movement seeking cultural change, animal rights activists symbolically cross the human-animal boundary with a goal of shifting or dismantling the boundary altogether.

To dismantle the human-animal boundary, animal rights activists physically crossed the boundary when they used a human body as an animal body. A wide variety of activist groups in France employed this tactic, but every example of U.S. activists physically crossing the boundary came from PETA. One of PETA’s primary, general strategies is to use the smallest number of activists to generate the most media coverage possible, and this especially rings true for their guerilla theater street actions. While naked or scantily clad women often participate in these media stunts, thus playing on the sexualized spectacles in the media, a more subtle tactic of these media events includes using an activist’s human body as an animal body. “Erin” described such an event for PETA’s circus campaigns.

We do our “shackled and lonely and beaten” protest, and that is basically where we have a naked, shackled activist, and she is sitting beneath a banner, and she has got her feet shackled, of course, to kind of mimic the confinement that circus animals have to

endure. She's wearing the same shackles that we see the elephants wearing for 90% of their lives at Ringling Brothers.

Rather than animals transgressing human spaces (Jerolmack, 2008), here humans physically breached animal spaces. PETA commonly employed this tactic, as in one protest where a woman painted her body to resemble a wild animal, and then enclosed herself in a cage to represent the plight of wild animals confined in zoos. In this case, the activist viscerally violated the human-animal boundary by putting her own body in the animal's place.

PETA France introduced the *barquette*, or meat tray action, to France, in which one or two activists wearing flesh-colored underwear and covered in fake blood lay in cellophane-wrapped "meat trays," complete with price stickers with bar codes and the word "meat." Jérôme, the PETA France coordinator, described the purpose of this action as a symbolic reversal: "We do exactly the opposite of the meat industry—they do everything to make consumers forget there is an animal behind meat, they transform it. So we make a parallel with human meat."

Boundary maintenance often relies on institutional processes. Gender-based boundaries in organizations are maintained through processes like the glass escalator (Williams, 1992). Human-animal and companion-farm animal boundaries are likewise maintained through the process of commodity fetishism in the meat industry. Human-animal boundaries also serve as a cultural resource for meat producers, however, when they willingly "erase" human-animal boundaries to anthropomorphize animals in order to give the impression that animals agentically offer their bodies for food (Glenn, 2004). Thus with the *barquette* action, not only did activists engage in commodity defetishization, they also sought to dismantle the human-animal boundary in an opposite manner as meat producers.

Graphic descriptions of human bodies as animal bodies comprised a more discursive boundary-crossing tactic employed by animal rights activists. When I interviewed Bruce (PETA), he described the process of debeaking chickens by comparing it to a physical injury on a human body: "chopping chickens' beaks off, which is like chopping off the ends of your fingers—they are very sensitive." Later in the interview, when asked what goals he was working toward, Bruce replied that "the basic issue, it will be seen as self-evident in a hundred years, that eating animal corpses is no more acceptable than eating human corpses." Again, as a way of discursively crossing the human-animal boundary, Bruce explicitly described the injury and death of animals by using the human body as an example.

More often than these graphic verbal descriptions, French activists transgressed the human-animal boundary iconographically, using a direct visual representation of the human body as an animal body to denounce *foie gras*. As French people associate *foie gras* with Christmas and New Year celebrations, when they consume fully 70% of the *foie* produced in France, the PMAF (Protection Mondiale des Animaux de Ferme) played on this cultural

habit in an anti-foie-gras poster. Putting a female partygoer in the place of a force-fed duck, the poster depicts a funnel about to be shoved down the throat of the woman in her party dress, and asks: "More foie gras?" Other anti-foie-gras postcards and posters employed iconographic boundary crossing and symbolic reversal, depicting ducks and geese as the force-feeders of the humans.

Animal rights activists also discursively crossed symbolic boundaries between companion and farm animals by placing humans' beloved companion animals in atrocious situations that farm animals endure in farms and slaughterhouses. "Erin" claimed most people think: "'It would be hideously cruel if I were to take my dog, string her up by her hind legs, and slit her throat,' yet that is what happens in slaughterhouses." Finally, animal rights activists iconographically crossed this boundary by substituting a companion animal body for a farm animal body, as in the Compassion Over Killing (COK) t-shirt with an image of a dog on a plate and the question, "Why not? You eat other animals, don't you?" French activists used this same image and question, only substituting a French poodle for the mixed-breed dog on the COK shirt. Thus, again, activists in both countries used the same strategies to shift symbolic boundaries even if the cultural content differed.

DISCUSSION

In this article, I drew on research on ethnic boundary work and applied these concepts to animal rights activists' attempts to shift the human-animal boundary. These boundary work strategies not only apply to people and activists attempting to shift collective ethnic identities or nature-culture boundaries; traditional citizenship movements also engage in these symbolic boundary work strategies. Focusing on a specific symbolic boundary is especially useful when movement opponents do not consider the boundary to be symbolic at all, but to be based on some obdurate "scientific fact" such as genetics, biology, or species. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, most people did not conceive of race as a social construct, but as a biological difference. Many white slaveowners and slavery supporters considered only white people to be humans, and believed black men and women to be less than human. Thus antislavery tracts highlighted both blacks and whites as members of "the human species," and the most popular logo of the movement depicted a black man in chains with the question: "Am I not a man and a brother?" The anti-slavery movement thus focused on the symbolic boundary between blacks and whites and its mistaken, pseudoscientific base.

We also see universalizing strategies in other social movements. Bumper stickers from the antiabortion movement, such as "RU-486: Hitler in a Pill," "Adolf Hitler Made 6 Million Choices," and "I'm a survivor of the American Holocaust: Roe v Wade," align the victimization of unborn fetuses to humans in the Holocaust. The fat acceptance movement compares the oppression of

fat people to that of racial minorities, as in the Fat!So? manifesto: “So there’s nothing wrong with being fat. Just like there’s nothing wrong with being short or tall, or black or brown. These are facts of identity that cannot and should not be changed. They are birthright. They’re beyond aesthetics. They provide the diversity we need to survive.”⁸ Finally, myriad movements universalize their struggles, such as when a transsexual participant described her presence at the Michigan Womyn’s Music Festival to be similar to blacks sitting in at lunch counters (Gamson, 1997).

Boundary-crossing strategies can be seen in contemporary movements such as the GLBTQ movement, whose activists fight to dismantle symbolic boundaries surrounding gender and sexuality. Act-Up (Aids Coalition to Unleash Power) physically breaches such boundaries when it stages “kiss-ins” in places where people have discriminated against gays or lesbians. When speaking of gender, activists and movement sympathizers discursively transgress biological definitions and use a person’s chosen sex or gender, or use the gender-neutral “ze” or “hu.” Finally, GLBTQ activists iconographically crossed symbolic boundaries surrounding gays in the military when Georgia Equality sponsored billboards in the State of Georgia with images of gay military members and the quote: “I fight for your freedom and I am gay.”

These examples show the widespread existence of boundary shifting as both a goal and a strategy of social movements. But we also know that slavery would not have ended simply because an artist created an image transgressing racial boundaries. This cultural boundary work also functions as a tool for gaining cognitive liberation (McAdam, 1982) to help mobilize potential constituents. As a mobilization tool, it can also be considered a form of moral shock (Jasper and Poulsen, 1995). But the difference between symbolic boundary shifting and many moral shocks is that boundary work is also a goal in itself. Showing graphic images of abused animals to morally shock people into action is not a goal of the animal rights movement. But encouraging targets to rethink the boundaries between humans and animals by highlighting and transgressing those boundaries—even if shocking—is one such movement goal.⁹

What would be a successful outcome of this boundary work? Norms and values regarding race, gender, and sexuality have quickly changed in recent years, but symbolic boundaries still exist between them and there is still racism, sexism, and heterosexism. If a movement’s ultimate goal is broad societal

⁸ See <http://www.fatso.com/man2.html>, last accessed October 2009.

⁹ Not all animal rights groups employ these boundary work strategies. Only French antispeciesists explicitly claimed shifting symbolic boundaries as a major strategy, and the other groups described here engaged in this boundary work while deploying other strategies and tactics. That only one faction—only four out of the 23 organizations analyzed here—specifically claimed boundary work as a strategy is due in part to the different philosophical orientations of the groups within each movement, and within the movements as a whole. I analyze these differences in movement and group cultures in greater detail elsewhere (Cherry, 2007), but it is important to note the relationship between strategy, philosophy, and movement outcomes (see also Ferree, 2003).

change, activists have found more success in intermediate goals such as getting people to recognize that symbolic boundaries exist, and encouraging people to rebel against them. We can assess the relative success of such intermediate goals by viewing changes in nonactivist movement sympathizers. Even if a person is not a movement constituent, he or she can easily change the language the person uses to support a movement's goal of blurring or shifting harmful symbolic boundaries. We see this when heterosexual couples use the term "partner" rather than "boyfriend" or "girlfriend," or when people who avoid meat for health or environmental reasons call meat "flesh" or "dead animals."

There may be, however, unanticipated negative consequences of such boundary work. While activists seek to dismantle boundaries, their work may unintentionally reinforce them. Zolberg and Long noted that such "accelerated" boundary crossing and shifting can lead to "a crystallization of boundaries, the imposition of conditions that render crossing more difficult and blurring impossible, and perhaps even a redefinition of the host identity amounting to a shift of the boundary in a more exclusive direction" (1999:9). For example, co-workers' responses to female-to-male transsexuals who overtly transitioned actually served to clarify and strengthen gender boundaries (Schilt, 2006). This is because changing cultural codes is not a process solely engaged in by activists—opponents define antiwar activists as unpatriotic or feminists as manhaters "precisely by winning the battle for symbolic encoding" (Swidler, 1995:34). In this sense, this work also speaks to the larger issue of culture in action. I showed how activists dipped into their cultural toolkits to construct strategies of action (Swidler, 1986). Activists' strategies for dismantling symbolic boundaries demonstrate the importance of culture for structural change. We need to consider changing cultural codes as a goal, not as an unintended consequence of social movements (McAdam, 1994).

CONCLUSION

In this article, I examined a process often associated with creating social problems—dismantling symbolic boundaries. While racists may erase within-group differences to negative ends, activists can also blur between-group differences with the aim of combating social injustices. Rather than conflating the ends and means of boundary work, sociologists need to consider how the same processes may be used to different ends—boundary work can both create *and* solve social problems. As such, shifting symbolic boundaries is both a strategy and a goal of social movements.

To better understand such cultural change as a goal, future research should include more long-term information on the culture in which a movement works. This would provide the necessary sources to evaluate the extent of the cultural change attained by a movement. Future research should also include more data on movement targets and opponents. Movement success and threats to the status quo foment countermovements (Jasper and Poulsen,

1993; Meyer and Staggenborg, 1996), and such data would better demonstrate the relationship between contested boundaries. This is a necessary component for understanding which boundaries prevail or fail in such cultural challenges (Fuller, 2003).

I found so little divergence in the boundary work strategies cross-culturally because human-animal boundaries exist in most developed Western cultures. These blurring and shifting strategies resemble processes associated with ethnic boundaries (Alba, 2005; Wimmer, 2008a,b; Zolberg and Litt Woon, 1999), but other cross-cultural studies on different substantive boundaries (e.g., Lamont and Thévenot, 2000) may evidence different strategies, or a different employment of the strategies I described. As we enjoy the resurgence of studies on strategy and culture in social movements, these processes of dismantling symbolic boundaries should become all the more important.

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