

## BRINGING THE OUTSIDERS IN: OPPONENTS' CLAIMS AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF ANIMAL RIGHTS ACTIVISTS' IDENTITY\*

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*Most research on the role of identity in social movements treats identity as something that is constructed solely by movement participants themselves. However, participants are not the only actors involved in this identity construction. This article uses basic insights from symbolic interactionism to argue that external claims, or claims made about movement participants by those outside the movement, also shape activists' sense of identity. Using data collected during three years of fieldwork with members of a non-violent animal rights organization, I show how the activists made use of their opponents' depictions of them—in particular, charges that the activists were “overly emotional” and “irrational”—when describing themselves. Specifically, I illustrate two processes by which these external claims left their mark on the activists' identity: identity disconfirmation and identity recasting. More broadly, I suggest that “bringing the outsiders in” to examinations of identity and collective action provides a more complete picture not simply of identity construction but of movement dynamics as a whole.*

The introduction of new social movement theory (NSM) in the 1980s sparked scholarly interest in the role of identity processes in social movements. Centering on the belief that the “newness” of many contemporary social movements reflects cleavages and concerns that differ from protest of the past, this theory argues that new social movements are aimed at personal and cultural change instead of more traditional political objectives (Cohen 1985; Johnston, Laraña, and Gusfield 1994; Melucci 1989; Offe 1985; Taylor and Whittier 1995). Following this innovation, scholars began to pay serious attention to the processes of self and collective definition that take place both before and during protest (Melucci 1989, 1994, 1995). Despite some disagreement as to whether the contemporary movements generally referred to as “new social movements” (e.g., the women's movement, the environmental movement, and movements for the rights of gays and lesbians) are really that “new” (see Bernstein 1997; Calhoun 1993; W. Gamson 1992a; Hunt, Benford, and Snow 1994; Kriesi et al. 1995), the theory's focus on identity processes in social movements has been welcomed as a fruitful theoretical advance.

This article takes issue not with recent research emphases on identity and social movements, but with the particular way that identity has been treated by most of that research. In general, this research characterizes identity in terms of *activists'* self-definition. However,

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this conceptualization mistakenly assumes that movement participants are solely responsible for constructing their identities. Drawing on general insights from symbolic interactionism (Cooley 1902; Goffman 1959; Mead 1934), I argue that movement participants' sense of identity is a product not only of their interactions with each other, but also of their interactions with non-participants such as targets, state officials, and the general public. I use qualitative data collected during nearly three years of fieldwork with members of a non-violent animal rights organization to demonstrate how opponents' claims about the activists shaped the activists' sense of who and what they were. This article therefore extends current work on identity and social movements by calling for a broader consideration of the "other" in identity processes in social movements.

I begin with a discussion of the ways that social movement scholars have conceptualized identity in social movements. Next, I turn to an examination of the role of movement non-participants in activists' identity construction. While some movement scholars have noted the role of the "other" in activists' identity processes, they tend to focus on how these outsiders provide a boundary against which activists define themselves. In addition to this passive outsider role, I suggest that outsiders also contribute to activists' identity actively, by making claims about who and what the activists are.<sup>1</sup> I demonstrate these active contributions using examples from my fieldwork. These illustrations focus on one set of outsiders and on one particular set of their claims about the activists' identity; namely, hunters and biomedical researchers' claims that the animal rights activists were overly emotional and irrational. I analyze two processes by which the activists incorporated others' views into their own sense of identity: public disconfirmation of opponents' claims through identity management, and private recasting and affirmation of those claims. I close with a discussion of the implications of my argument for future theory and research on social movements.

### IDENTITY AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

The empirical research on identity and social movements is vast. Many researchers examine identity as a motivating factor for participation in collective action, either as a selective incentive (Friedman and McAdam 1992) or as something that establishes and sustains activists' commitment to a cause and participation in a social movement community (J. Gamson 1996; Hirsch 1990; Neuhauser 1998; Taylor 1989; Taylor and Whittier 1992, 1995; Whittier 1995). Others have explored the identity components of collective action frames (W. Gamson 1992b; Hunt et al. 1994) and the narratives that foster identities compatible with participation in protest (Polletta 1998). However, identity is not merely a static, pre-existing factor that leads to action. Most scholars agree that the identities relevant to collective action are also shaped during the action itself (Clemens 1996; Fantasia 1988; J. Gamson 1996; Hirsch 1990; Klandermans 1992; Lichterman 1995). Further, while "doing" is part of "being," the identities relevant to collective action can also have lasting effects on those who participate in the action, even well after the action has ended (McAdam 1988; Taylor 1989; Taylor and Raeburn 1995; Whittier 1995).

Scholars have also identified several different "faces" or dimensions of identity. *Personal identity* refers to one's sense of who he or she is, including his/her individual traits as well as activities (Jasper 1997; Johnston, Laraña, and Gusfield 1994). In a movement setting, each participant's personal identity includes those aspects of self that are salient in that setting (e.g., "I am a moral person" or "I am a compassionate person"). *Social identity* is also an individual-level category, yet refers to the individual's sense of self as part of a group (Klandermans and de Weerd 2000; Tajfel 1981). In movements, it includes "I am a feminist," "I am an environmentalist," and so on. In contrast, *collective identity* refers to a shared sense of identity among members of some collectivity; among movement participants it is "the shared definition of a group that results from members' common interests, experiences, and solidarity" (Taylor and Whittier 1992: 105), as reflected in statements such as "We are human

rights activists” and “We are people who seek justice.” Finally, although these dimensions are distinct, they affect each other. For example, White and Fraser (2000) argue that collective identity develops through the merging of the personal identities of individual activists. Similarly, McAdam and Snow (2000) point to the alignment between an individual’s personal identity and the group’s collective identity that takes place during movement recruitment.

Thus, identity—both individual and collective—and collective action are inextricably intertwined. The link between the two goes beyond what has been termed “identity politics,” in which the expression and promotion of a particular identity is a political act, as in the case of gay and lesbian activism (see Bernstein 1997; J. Gamson 1995; Lichterman 1999; Taylor and Raeburn 1995). Indeed, research in settings as diverse as Tiananmen Square (Calhoun 1991, 1994) and Brazilian squatter settlements (Neuhouser 1998) suggests that collective action of all types may be thought of as the enactment of identity; individuals participate in protest because doing so stems from their understanding of who they are, both as individuals and as part of a collectivity.

That identity plays an important role in collective action seems evident. What is problematic are the assumptions underlying the definition and treatment of the concept of identity as a whole. By emphasizing the “I” and the “we,” most research implies that activists’ identities are constructed *solely by the activists themselves*.<sup>2</sup> Such conclusions are not inaccurate, since identity obviously reflects participants’ self-understanding; they are, however, incomplete. These treatments generally overlook the role played by movement outsiders in constructing activists’ identities. By “outsiders,” I mean the entire set of those individuals who are not members of the movement-relevant collectivity with which activists identify, including targets and opponents as well as allies and third parties.<sup>3</sup>

As I note below, some researchers have examined outsiders’ contributions to identity processes in social movements. However, this scholarship generally focuses on outsiders’ *passive* contributions—that is, on how the presence of the out-group provides a benchmark for activists’ opposition or a boundary that activists use to define the limits of their collectivity. In contrast, I emphasize outsiders’ more *active* contributions to activists’ identity. I do so by focusing on what Johnston et al. (1994) refer to as “public identity,” or the claims about movement participants made by non-participants. Social movements abound with examples of such claims; for instance, Southern civil rights workers were labeled as “Communists” and “outside agitators” and feminists have been described as “anti-family” and “man-haters” (Marshall 1985; McAdam 1988). This article posits a link between activists’ public identity and their individual and collective identities. Specifically, I argue that activists react to and draw on others’ claims when constructing their sense of who they are, as individuals and as a group, and use those claims in redefining and/or reaffirming their self-conceptions. I do not suggest that these external claims comprise activists’ identity entirely, or that outsiders are the sole determinants of who and what the activists are; instead, I demonstrate how those claims left their mark on the activists’ identity. My goal, therefore, is to “bring the outsiders in” by highlighting their active role in contributing to the identity processes that are central to collective action.

### INTERACTIONIST UNDERPINNINGS

My argument rests on principles from symbolic interactionism, a theory that highlights the role of the “other” in the construction of an individual’s sense of who she is. According to this theory, the self is described in terms of process, the result of personal reflection during which an individual (the “I”) becomes aware of and reflects on him or herself as an object (the “Me”) (Mead 1934). However, as Cooley’s (1902) concept of the “looking-glass self” makes clear, reflecting on oneself as an object also requires that one see oneself as others see her. Although the self is individual, therefore, it has a social component.

The presence of others is also crucial to one's identity, the interactional display of the self. As Goffman (1959) argued, people manage the impressions that others have of them by putting forth particular aspects of themselves (and hiding or downplaying others). Symbolic interactionism therefore emphasizes that identity is an interactional achievement, and is profoundly shaped by both the presence and the views of others. Again, however, when applied to social movements, this theory reminds us that the relevant "others" that shape activists' self and collective definition include not only fellow activists, but also opponents and other third parties who both provide the "looking glass" in which activists see themselves and whose impressions shape the identities that activists display. These ideas provide the underpinnings for the following analysis, in which I demonstrate the impact of opponents' claims on animal rights activists' identity.

### **DATA AND METHODS**

My data come from nearly three years of fieldwork with members of a non-violent animal rights group in Seattle. Between October 1992 and August 1995, I attended the group's monthly meetings as well as a number of protest events; the latter included marches and demonstrations as well as outreach activities and participation in public meetings and hearings. At these meetings and events I both observed the group's activities and had conversations with the activists, taking handwritten notes on both; I also typed up field notes within twenty-four hours of each event. The activists were aware of my research activities and interests. In addition, I collected various pieces of organizational literature, including flyers and other printed materials handed out during protest events as well as copies of the group's monthly newsletter. Although I began my fieldwork in the fall of 1992, I was able to collect a complete set of newsletters dating back to the fall of 1990, when the group was formed. Finally, I conducted semistructured interviews, lasting between one and three hours in length, with fourteen activists. I use pseudonyms when quoting and/or referring to respondents (including interviewees as well as others that I observed or spoke with informally).

I also collected data from members of several groups that were explicitly targeted by the activists' efforts. These included interviews with thirty-one individuals (including furriers, circus patrons, hunters, and animal experimenters), all of whom had had face-to-face interactions with the activists (see Einwohner 1997 for the specific procedures by which these groups were identified and contacted for interviews). These target interviews illustrated what these particular "others" thought about the activists, including their sense of the activists' traits and motivations. This analysis draws on twenty of those interviews (thirteen hunters and seven animal experimenters), chosen because of the similar claims that the interviewees made about the activists.

Taken as a whole, then, these data illustrated both the activists' "private identity," or their own sense of themselves, and their "public identity," or the claims made about them by others. In the following sections, I draw on these varied data to demonstrate the relationship between these two dimensions of identity; that is, I show how those external claims contributed to the activists' sense of whom and what they were. First, however, I review currently scholarly discussions of the role of the "other" in identity and social movements.

### **OUTSIDERS' PASSIVE CONTRIBUTIONS: BOUNDARY MAINTENANCES**

Some social movement scholars have explicitly noted the role of outsiders in the construction of activists' identity. According to this body of work, activists' identity is constructed in part through the recognition of distinctions between the in-group and out-group (Taylor and Whittier 1992; Whittier 1995). Thus, one way that outsiders contribute to the construction of activists' identity is by providing a boundary for activists' self-definition, or a "they" who represent the limits of what it means to be the "I" or the "we."

The differences between activists and those whom they oppose are central to any political struggle and play a clear role in activists' understanding of themselves. For example, Mueller (1994) argues that the feminist consciousness that emerged in the late 1960's was shaped in part by the efforts of a small group of women whose conflict with various policy makers and agencies regarding women's rights "developed a conception of gender equality or collective identity that was thoroughly radical in its implications" (1994: 247). Other studies of the women's movement (Taylor and Whittier 1992, 1995) as well as the animal rights movement (Groves 1997) and anti-abortion movement (Ginsburg 1989) have also found that activists define themselves in contrast to those on "the other side." Along with movement opponents, factions within a movement can also provide a boundary or standard against which particular groups of activists define themselves. Whittier's (1995) analysis of collective identity among radical feminists in Columbus, Ohio describes how different "micro cohorts" that entered the movement at different times defined themselves, and feminism, in distinct ways. Similarly, Adair (1996), Benford (1993), J. Gamson (1995, 1996, 1997) and Lichterman (1999) describe the internal disagreements and identity distinctions within the antinuclear, peace, feminist, and gay and lesbian movements, respectively.

Beyond opposing specific "others," activists also construct their personal and collective identity by resisting broader social conventions and arrangements. This point follows from new social movement theory, a central tenet of which is that movement participants create cultural change by forging new understandings of themselves (Melucci 1989, 1995, 1996). In creating *new* identities, however, activists necessarily react against *existing* conceptualizations or "codes" (Taylor and Whittier 1992). For example, J. Gamson's (1995: 395) description of queer activists as people who "revel" in their outsider status, "with an edge of defiant separatism," suggests that these activists necessarily draw on others—i.e., the "mainstream"—in understanding themselves. Similarly, Smith (1998) argues that the reason why the American evangelical movement is so strong is precisely because it sees itself as "embattled with forces that seem to oppose or threaten it" (1998: 89).

Supporting these scholars' claims, my fieldwork also found many instances in which activists defined themselves in comparison with various "others." The animal rights activists often described themselves as people who are "aware" of the various cruelties against animals and therefore distinct from those who are either "unaware" or unwilling to recognize these cruelties. For example, when I asked Emily to describe what animal rights activism meant to her, she replied,

The basic issue for me is that animals have a value of their own. And this has nothing to do with how useful they are to humans. Most non-activists haven't really thought about this. I mean, I think most people think that they love animals, but I don't think they're evolutionarily "there" yet.

Other activists were much less charitable in their references to movement outsiders. Marilyn, for instance, referred to the non-animal-rights-activist public as "the lunkheads," and I heard other activists use terms such as "those dead heads," "the meat eaters," or simply "slime." Like Emily, however, all these individuals made it clear that they saw themselves as different from people who hold mainstream views about the role and worthiness of animals, and that those differences were important to their own self-understanding.

In sum, while a variety of research has shown how movement non-participants help construct activists' identity, the outsiders' role is generally thought to be passive; outsiders are thought to contribute to internal identity processes merely by their presence, providing the basis for activists' "oppositional consciousness" (Taylor and Whittier 1992). However, I argue that outsiders also contribute to activists' identity actively, by making claims about who and what the activists are.

### OUTSIDERS' ACTIVE CONTRIBUTIONS: THE IMPACT OF OPPONENTS' CLAIMS ON ACTIVISTS' IDENTITY

Not surprisingly, those “cruel,” “unaware,” “lunkheads” outside the movement also had a few choice words for the animal rights activists themselves. While interviewing circus patrons, furriers, hunters, and biomedical researchers who had been targeted by these activists’ efforts, I heard a variety of terms used to describe the activists, ranging from “kooks” and “extremists” to “aging hippies.” However, it was the hunters and biomedical researchers who showed the most consensus in their claims about the activists’ identity, motivations, and credibility. These individuals unanimously described the activists as “overly emotional” and “irrational” and therefore incapable of understanding the logic of hunting and scientific research, respectively (see also Groves 1995, 1997 for similar findings). For example, commenting on his interactions with the activists at a public meeting of the Wildlife Commission, the agency that determines hunting seasons and regulations in Washington State, one hunter said,

We [hunters] were talking and using scientific and biological information to base these hunting seasons on. The anti people [activists] had no scientific information or biological information. All their “no’s” and “don’t hunts” and “do away with hunting” was based on emotion.

The biomedical researchers I interviewed—all of whom had interactions with the activists as well—echoed this sentiment. As one explained,

I don’t see that the animal rights movement is a bad thing in and of itself... [activists] perform a very useful role when they perform that well. But they don’t perform it very well. And they don’t raise—they don’t say, now, “well, for this given project so-and-so has published on the use of a simulator, it would appear that you might be able to do this.” They don’t bring a scientific argument or a rational argument. They bring purely an emotional argument.

Claims about the activists’ “sentimentality” and “irrationality” gave these hunters and researchers reason to dismiss the activists’ stance, and therefore hampered the activists’ abilities to achieve their protest goals (Einwohner 1999). What is more interesting, however, is that these claims—negative as they were—also found their way into the activists’ descriptions of themselves. Below, I describe two distinct processes by which these claims left their mark on the activists’ self-understanding. First, the activists publicly attempted to *disconfirm* these “emotion claims” through impression management techniques, by striving to appear “logical” and “rational” during encounters with their opponents. In private, however, a quite different process took place. Away from their opponents’ gaze, the activists agreed with these external claims, using emotion to describe themselves and their cause, yet they *recast* those claims in a more positive light, thereby reaffirming their sense of identity and purpose. Taken together, these processes show the relationship between activists’ “public” and “private” identity, and illustrate outsiders’ active contributions to the activists’ self-understanding.

#### *Disconfirming External Claims through Impression Management*

The activists I interviewed, spoke with, and observed were well aware of the content of their opponents’ claims. For example, Marisa told me that, “I think they [hunters] see me as

this typical woman who's overly compassionate, this bleeding heart liberal." She therefore pointed to cultural images associated with femininity—particularly relevant to studies of the animal rights movement, which is comprised mostly of women (Jasper and Nelkin 1992)—as a possible source for the hunters' claims. Randy, in contrast, did not evoke gender as explicitly, but still correctly described the content of the hunters' and researchers' claims:

I've talked with them [biomedical researchers] and they basically think we're the old tree huggers of the environmental movement. Bunny huggers who love animals... I'm pretty sure that they think that we have no intelligence, that we let our emotions run rampant, that we don't really understand what it is they're doing because we don't have the background, and we're irrational...and I think hunters think we're nut cases. Just totally nut cases. Touchy-feely types.

In addition to recognizing the content of their opponents' claims, therefore, the activists also recognized the accompanying derision; in other words, they knew that emotion, in their opponents' eyes, rendered the activists incapable of following logic and therefore detracted from the legitimacy of their arguments. What is perhaps more telling evidence of the activists' recognition of these claims, however, were their attempts to counteract the claims with their public displays of self.

When interacting with their opponents, activists purposefully sought to present themselves as calm, rational, and reasonable, thereby disconfirming their opponents' claims to the contrary. The directions that one of the group's leaders, Wendy, gave to the activists at one meeting illustrated this intent. That meeting was held several days before many of the activists planned to give testimony at a public hearing on hunting regulations. The activists' primary goal in giving this testimony was to convince the nine-member Washington State Wildlife Commission to ban three specific forms of hunting: hound hunting (using dogs to pursue game), bear baiting (using food lures to attract and hunt bear) and pursuit seasons (allowing hunters to pursue, but not shoot at, game in the off-season). In this particular instance, then, the Commissioners were the primary targets of the activists' protest efforts. However, since the activists knew that many hunters would be present at the hearing as well, they prepared themselves for interaction with both state officials and hunters, knowing that their demeanor in this public forum could make a statement to both groups about who and what the activists were. My field notes describing those directions read:

Wendy said that it is important for people to state their opinions, but that they should do it very quickly and clearly. She said that people should just stand up, say something like "I oppose bear baiting, hound hunting, and the pursuit season" and then just sit down. She also said that people could say more, but that they should think out what they want to say beforehand "so that you don't ramble on."

Thus, the activists' goal was to enhance their anti-hunting stance by appearing focused and prepared, not "rambling" and "illogical" (as the hunters contended they were). Further, it is noteworthy that Wendy made a special plea to have as many men as possible give testimony at the hearings, saying that hunters would not listen to "a bunch of emotional women shaking their fists." Here again, an activist made reference to the movement's gender profile, but with particular attention to gender as a factor that could confirm the opponents' claims (i.e., that the activists were overly sentimental, emotional women who could safely be ignored). Wendy's attempt to increase the visibility of male activists was therefore also an attempt to disconfirm the opponents' claims through impression management, or public displays of self.

It is important to note that the activists' testimony at the Wildlife Commission hearings was just one part of a broader, multi-faceted campaign that was aimed mainly at hunters themselves yet had multiple targets, including (at various times) state officials, business owners, and members of the general public (see Einwohner 1997 for a more detailed discussion of the hunting campaign). Each of these targets can be considered "outsiders," and each group undoubtedly made claims about who and what the activists were. However, the activists thought of the nine Wildlife Commissioners as hunters, or at least as part of the hunting community. As Wendy explained, "The commission is really an old boy's club. They're in thick with the hunters. Some of them are hunters themselves, and they have the same interests and values." Thus, even though the activists' efforts at those hearings were directed at state officials, because the activists believed the commissioners to be hunters themselves, their impression management techniques reflected the hunters' claims and were intended to disconfirm them.

This illustration brings up a broader point as well: the targets of activists' impression management need not always be the same as the sources of their public identity. Public claims made by any given group of outsiders can be available to any other group, and can therefore be potentially damaging to activist efforts. Thus, activists may need to act so as to counteract or disconfirm a negative public identity, even when targeting a group that did not make those negative claims in the first place. The use of this proactive strategy is illustrated by the activists' mission statement, which was printed in every copy of the activists' newsletters. It read in part, "Our approach to animal issues stresses the importance of presenting information in a credible, well researched, and reasoned manner at all times." Further, as an activist wrote in one newsletter, "I believe our cause is furthered when we present ourselves diplomatically, when we participate in intelligent discourse. Image is important."

Since both quotes refer to activists' public behavior in general (as opposed to efforts directed at one specific group of targets), they show that the activists saw the importance of always presenting themselves "intelligently" and "credibly" to any group of outsiders. This theme came up during my interviews with activists as well. When composing protest letters, for example, Allison said,

I always want letters to sound normal, non-hysterical, and more business-like. I want to get a letter across that they'll listen to and respect. Because when people hear "animal rights" people think about breaking into labs and stuff, but that's the extreme end.

Again, such behavior was an attempt to disconfirm the activists' public identity—which stemmed from claims made by specific targets, yet which appeared to at least potentially be shared by the public at large—by appearing, as Allison said, "normal" and in ways that would command "respect" (see also Adair 1996 for additional examples of anti-nuclear activists' public attempts to counteract opponents' negative identity claims).

#### *Recasting External Claims in a Positive Light*

Opponents' claims about the animal rights activists' identity left their mark by prompting the activists to present themselves as reasonable, calm, and rational individuals, and not the "irrational," "bleeding hearts" that their opponents made them out to be. However, such public displays of identity—especially during face-to-face interactions with opponents—might reflect strategic decisions more than they represent a "true" sense of who and what the activists understand themselves to be. Therefore, it is important to examine activists' identity presentations in private, activist-only settings as well.

Interestingly, while the activists publicly disagreed with their opponents' depictions of them, in private, they frequently used the theme of emotion when describing themselves. In



doing so, they exhibited what Hunt et al. (1994) refer to as “identity avowal,” or agreeing with their opponents’ depictions. However, the activists used emotion in a very different way from their opponents, extolling rather than hiding or downplaying their emotional attachment to animals and animal rights issues. In other words, while they privately displayed the same identity that their opponents attributed to them (i.e., “emotional individuals”), they *recast* that identity much more positively than their opponents did.

The activists with whom I spoke often described themselves and their activism in terms of either emotional attachments to animals or emotional reactions to animal abuse and exploitation (see Groves 1995, Jasper and Poulsen 1995 for similar findings on other groups of animal rights activists). As Kelli explained,

I’m an animal lover, but not an animal user. The relationship is one of mutual interest. I just want to see animal suffering minimized as much as possible, because it just breaks my heart.

For Elaine, a deeply emotional reaction to some film footage of a harp seal slaughter was what initially spurred her to action:

I almost died inside. I felt sick and paralyzed. I couldn’t believe that anyone could club a living thing to death...Well, after seeing this, my awareness and also my horror was raised. I was debilitated, I was just paralyzed for several days and I couldn’t do anything. But then I thought to myself, “I have to pull myself out of this, and instead of self-destructing at this emotional horror I have to be more positive and make people aware of what’s going on and do something more constructive.” That was when I joined [the movement].

Randy’s story was similar to Elaine’s, although his initial foray into animal rights activism was sparked by a PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals) display that he saw while living in Washington D.C.:

It’s hard for me to talk about it without some emotion. I read the literature on the train home, and I literally was just bawling. I kept putting it down and thinking, “My God, are we really doing this stuff? This is horrible! Why?!” And I had never been a joiner, I had never joined an organization...[but] that summer I plunked down 25 bucks or whatever it was and joined PETA.

Activists’ behavior at monthly meetings also bespoke the emotional aspects of their activism, and more importantly their willingness to reveal it. In many ways, these meetings depicted what Taylor (2000) refers to as a movement’s “emotion culture,” or a context in which expressions of caring are fostered. For example, some activists routinely brought their dogs to meetings and would often pet or talk to these animals lovingly during the proceedings. Emotional reactions to various visual displays and slide presentations were also quite common. Activists often reacted audibly to images of animals, e.g., with “ahhhhs” at pictures of wildlife and their young or gasps at pictures of animals injured by hunters; on one occasion I even saw an activist break down in tears. Finally, the group’s newsletters also contained numerous references to the activists’ feelings and self-described “compassion” and desire for a “cruelty-free world.” For example, one activist wrote in the December 1990 newsletter that she felt “like crying” when thinking about beef cattle on their way to slaughter, and an item in the March 1991 newsletter asked the activists to write letter to a local Boy Scout troop that

planned to use hunting activities as part of a fundraiser, saying “Give them a piece of your compassion.” Another activist wrote in the February 1991 newsletter, “A gentle, caring lifestyle is but a testimonial for animal rights. If we joyfully practice cruelty-free lifestyles, others will want to participate.”

Thus, unlike their public displays of identity, in which emotion was purposefully hidden (or at least counteracted with “rational” presentations), in more private settings such as meetings and newsletters the activists’ identity as emotional individuals was displayed prominently and used to legitimate their actions. In other words, in such settings emotion was not problematic, but was simply part of who and what the activists understood themselves to be. In fact, not only was emotion used by the activists to describe themselves, it was even seen as an indicator of group membership. A conversation I had with Allison after one meeting made this point particularly clear. We were discussing the group’s “open-door” policy, which required that monthly activist meetings be made open to any interested member of the public, including opponents and others who disagreed with the movement. I pointed out that the meeting had been attended by a man I knew to be a member of the Washington Association for Biomedical Research, a pro-animal experimentation organization. Allison, who had been unaware of that individual’s identity, said,

You know, I had a sort of a weird feeling about him, like, is he one of us? And I passed some literature to him, but he didn’t take it, so my feelers went up. I knew he wasn’t quite right. I noticed that he wasn’t very emotional about anything.

#### *Affirming Identity by Confronting External Claims*

The difference between the activists’ public demeanor and private communications was telling. Aware of their opponents’ negative claims, activists presented themselves to those opponents as rational, credible (i.e., non-emotional) individuals in an attempt to counteract those claims. In contrast, in more private settings activists freely admitted and even lauded their compassion for animals, thereby putting a positive valuation on the very aspects of their identity that their opponents described pejoratively. However, while the activists’ impression management techniques were clear examples of identity presentation in response to their opponents’ claims, the more private descriptions may have stemmed solely from the activists’ “oppositional consciousness” to a “cruel” society in general. Were this the case, it would indicate only passive contributions to activists’ identity from outsiders. The following examples show that such identity displays also resulted from a direct and active confrontation with the opponents’ claims. Thus, these examples do not illustrate a separate process by which external claims leave their mark on activists’ identity; instead, they simply provide more evidence of opponents’ active contributions to the activists’ self-understanding.

The activists’ newsletters were a particularly rich source of information on the activists’ sense of who and what they were. These publications served multiple purposes. One was informational: newsletters contained contact names and phone numbers for various campaign activities as well as numerous “Action Alerts” informing activists of specific issues and upcoming events; they also included advertisements for “cruelty-free” products, vegetarian and vegan recipes, and notices about companion animals (and, in some cases, activists) who were looking for new homes. At the same time, the newsletters provided a forum for the activists to offer various “testimonials” on themselves, the group, and the animal rights movement as a whole. Especially in the early issues (those that were published in the first few years of the activist group’s existence), contributors wrote columns and/or longer articles describing what their activism meant to them. These items also revealed activists’ use of emotion in describing themselves. However, they presented emotion as a legitimate source of activism *in specific response to* their opponents’ negative identity claims. For example, an

article, “Heart Politics,” in the February 1991 newsletter took on opponents’ charges of “irrationality,” explaining that animal rights activism follows a logic:

For people such as myself, animal rights and vegetarianism are the logical, emotional, and spiritual completion of our politics—what has sometimes been referred to as “heart politics.” The circle is finally closed against any argument that says, “This one is inferior or unimportant and so may be killed.”

Another example of a direct confrontation with opponents’ claims came from the group’s first newsletter, published in October 1990, which contained a story about hunting. Written in the second person, it asked the reader to imagine him or herself as a bear being hunted. At the end of the story, the author wrote,

There are those who will say this portrayal is sentimental and designed to arouse your feelings, that animals don’t feel as I have made them feel in my story...[but] no fully human being should eschew sentiment. It is not a “womanly” trait to be disdained by methodical, rational men. It is rather a universal trait among beings who honor life.

These examples illustrate the activists’ self and collective definition in response to their externally generated public identity; in both cases, activists drew on these external claims in reaffirming their own sense of who they are. While material like this—intended primarily for the private consumption of the activists—might seem like “preaching to the choir,” the fact that contributors to the newsletter felt compelled to defend the emotional bases of their identity and activism *to fellow activists* is instructive and illustrative of the power of the opponents’ claims to shape the activists’ sense of self. Confrontations with opponents’ claims therefore helped affirm the activists’ identity; here, they lauded the emotional aspect of their activist identity in part because their opponents found such behavior so contemptuous.

#### **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS: IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH**

Social movements are not simply about activists themselves. Many of the things that protesters do—the actions they take, the messages they proclaim, and the strategies they use—are geared toward other groups, including opponents, officials, members of the media, and the general public. Out-group members are not simply audiences for and targets of protest: they play key roles in the construction of activists’ individual and collective identity.

Drawing on examples from fieldwork with a group of non-violent animal rights activists, I have shown how those activists’ opponents—in particular, hunters and biomedical researchers—made active contributions to the activists’ sense of identity. The imprints of these claims were apparent in the activists’ externally oriented displays of identity, as the activists sought to counteract their “overly emotional” and “irrational” image by presenting themselves as calm, credible, and logical in their dealings with their opponents. Hunters’ and researchers’ claims shaped the activists’ internal “identity talk” (Lichterman 1999) as well; privately, activists admitted and extolled their “compassion,” seeing it as unproblematic and even superior to “logic” and “cold rationality.” Thus, the activists’ “private” identity was shaped, at least in part, by their “public” identity. Activists’ individual and collective identities are therefore not solely a movement achievement; they may also be “imposed” from the outside, and can therefore be something to be “overcome” (Adair 1996). Movement outsiders do not determine activists’ identity wholly, but they do contribute to the “identity work” (McAdam and Snow 2000) in social movements.

This discussion reiterates a central—if basic—point: there is no “we” without a “they” (Melucci 1995; Oberschall and Kim 1996; Woehrle and Coy 2000). Thus, in order to answer “Who are we?” activists look not only to each other, but to those outside the movement as well. However, the outsiders’ role is not simply a passive one, as other scholars have suggested. Outsiders also make active contributions to activists’ personal and collective identity by making claims about who and what the activists are; activists then react to these claims, in various ways, in coming up with their own sense of identity.

The presence of outsiders and the contributions that they make, either actively or passively, to the construction of activists’ identity has implications for how we study and theorize collective action. One implication is methodological. My argument suggests that to capture the processes of identity construction fully, one must collect and analyze data not only from activists, but also from those against whom activists define themselves and who have their own sense of who and what the activists are. In other words, to understand personal and collective identity in social movements, one must assess a movement’s public identity as well.

A second, related implication of this argument has to do with the definition of a social movement. Since outsiders contribute to activists’ collective identity, a central component of social movement activity, should those outsiders be considered part of social movements? Tarrow’s definition of a social movement explicitly includes outsiders; he describes movements as “collective challenges by people with common purposes and solidarity *in sustained interaction with elites, opponents, and authorities*” (1994: 3-4; emphasis added). Similarly, Oliver (1989) argues that movements should not be thought of simply as social movement organizations (SMOs) that are often the focus of empirical research, but should also include non-affiliated individuals who participate in SMO activities, crowd events such as riots and looting, and a broad awareness of movement issues on the part of the non-involved public. What these theorists suggest is that movements are more than simply the actions of activists; instead, they are “systems of action” (Melucci 1989, 1996) that include movement participants as well as non-participants.

According to this view, outsiders are part of social movements because they are part of the systems of action that comprise movements. As some scholars note, however, movement opponents should not be considered movement participants (Oliver 1989). One can hardly consider hunters and biomedical researchers to be animal rights activists, even though they contribute actively to activists’ self-understanding. Nonetheless, they play an important role in the animal rights movement as part of the interactions that comprise and shape that movement. The same is true of the media and other third parties whose reactions to and assessments of protest activities affect movement dynamics (Gitlin 1980).

My point here is not to quibble about who should and should not be considered a member of a social movement. That is not to say that the distinction between “insiders” and “outsiders” is unimportant; on the contrary, as other scholars have noted, recognizing the differences between “us” and “them” is crucial to the construction of activists’ personal, social, and collective identity. However, while attending to such differences it is important not to treat the activities of one group as more worthy of scholarly inquiry than the other. Just as the analytic distinction between “us” and “them” may clarify identity processes in social movements, I suggest that it is also appropriate, and useful, to think of both activists and their opponents as “interactants.” This term highlights the contributions of both sets of actors to social movement activity, and is consistent both with interactionist analyses of social movements and with a growing body of research that has explicitly focused on the role of movement targets and other relevant third parties in movement emergence and outcomes (Barkan 1984; Jasper and Poulsen 1993; Jenkins and Perrow 1977; McAdam 1983; Meyer and Staggenborg 1996; Walsh 1986). A broader conceptualization of social movement activity, one that incorporates outsiders’ interpretations and reactions to protest activity, prevents the privileging of self-identified activists as the dominant focus of social movement research and yields a richer analysis of the complexities of political conflict.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> The concept of claims and claims making has been central to constructionist perspectives on social problems (see Spector and Kitsuse 1977) but is relevant to the study of social movements as well (McCright and Dunlap 2000).

<sup>2</sup> Some recent research that focuses on how state and cultural-level processes shape activists' identity construction is a notable exception to this trend. Such work includes Marx's (1998) analysis of the relationship between state-mandated racial categories and black mobilization, Tilly's (1998) discussion of nineteenth-century British election activities and their effect on citizens' political identities, and Johnston and Snow's (1998) examination of the subcultural sources of Estonian national identity during the Soviet era.

<sup>3</sup> Movement participants are commonly thought of as "outsiders" or "challengers," terms that reflect their relative powerlessness vis-à-vis the polity and/or mainstream (W. Gamson 1990; Lo 1992; Spalter-Roth and Schreiber 1995; Tilly 1978). In this article I take the opposite approach, referring to movement participants as "insiders" and all others as "outsiders." My use of these terms therefore stresses group membership and identification rather than positions of structural power, and is similar to the distinction between in-groups and out-groups in social psychology.

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