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A Deviance Perspective on Social Movements: The Case of Animal Rights Activism

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This article outlines a theoretical framework for understanding deviance and deviance-management in a social movement context. Such a deviance perspective is useful because in striving for social change, activists challenge existing social norms and may readily be defined by their environments as “outsiders” or deviants. However, activists also differ from traditional deviant groups. The article therefore conceptualizes activists as “entrepreneurial deviants,” combining features of both moral entrepreneurs and deviants in society, as presented in Howard Becker’s classical theory. It is argued that in order to understand the strategies of deviance-management performed by activists, traditional notions of “passing,” “techniques of neutralization,” and “subculture” must be complemented by the concepts of “confronting,” “techniques of idealization,” and the forming of a “transformative subculture.” Empirically, the article builds on a case study of animal rights activism in Sweden and the ways in which the activists counter stereotypes, which is interpreted as a form of deviance-management.

INTRODUCTION

In striving for social change, social movement activists challenge mainstream society both by the message they convey and the unconventional methods they use. Animal rights activists are a case in point; by ascribing rights to animals parallel to human rights, they fundamentally question the dominant worldview as well as common behavioral codes. For instance, where others may enjoy a delicious meal, these activists see a murder committed and experience disgust even at the thought of ingesting animal-flesh (Hansson and Jacobsson 2014). By extension, activists are often perceived by their surroundings as norm-transgressors or lawbreakers and—more generally—as “outsiders” or deviants.

Yet, previous studies have paid surprisingly scarce attention to deviance in a social movement context. Overviews of social movement research generally include no entry for deviance (see, e.g., Crossley 2002; Jasper 1997). This may stem from a number of interrelated factors. Firstly, scholars tend to normalize social movements’ non-conformist behavior by classifying and viewing it as

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political conduct, without necessarily theorizing activists' experiences of social exclusion and alienation from society (see however Freilich et al. 1999). Secondly, the topic of deviance may be associated with an earlier approach, popular in first half of the twentieth century, where protesters were perceived as "irrational crowds," which for good reasons has fallen out of fashion (cf. Goodwin et al. 2000). Finally, today there is also a division of labor between researchers in the fields of social movements (who study political behavior) and deviance (who study non-conforming behavior). As a consequence, research questions about deviance tend to be omitted from social movement research.

In this article, we argue that a deviance perspective, focusing on the fact that activists are widely perceived by the general public to breach social norms (cf. Becker 1963; Goffman 1963), is needed to make sense of the life-worlds and experiences of activists. We follow Becker (1963) in seeing deviance as arising in social interaction and resulting from definitional processes: deviant behavior is behavior that people label so. As some groups in society have more power to impose their definitions than others, it follows that such labeling is also a way of exerting social control. (This focus is also consistent with the constructionist approach to social problems, e.g., Rubington and Weinberg 2011; Spector and Kitsuse 2001). As we demonstrate, animal rights activists are faced with the public's social stereotypes, which they have to counter, both in order to manage their social relationships in everyday life and to effectively convey their message. The fact that such stereotypes are numerous is linked to the perceived "other-ness" of activists, and thus a deviance perspective can contribute to the analysis of social movements.

Drawing on an interview study with activists belonging to different groupings within the Swedish animal rights movement, this article aims to develop a theoretical framework for understanding deviance and deviance-management in a social movement context. This undertaking should not be taken to mean that "deviance" or equivalent concepts have never been employed in relation to social movements before, nor that there are not important insights to be gained from earlier works on social movements. For example, in previous research animal rights activists have been analysed in terms of the notion of "emotional deviance" (Groves 1995), and attributed the experiences of "ostracism and scorn from family and friends" (Gaarder 2008) as well as alienation and "disengagement from the mainstream culture" (Pallotta 2005). What we suggest, however, is that a comprehensive focus on the conditions and consequences of activists' deviance is missing, limiting our understanding of social movements as well as the dilemmas that social movement activists face. This article sets out to fill this gap.

ACTIVISTS AS ENTREPRENEURIAL DEVIANTS

In order to examine deviance in the context of social movements, we contend that it is necessary to consider activists' inherently ambiguous position in the moral order. To understand this ambiguity theoretically, we suggest that it is useful to depart from Émile Durkheim's reflections on morality as developed in *Moral Education* (2002 [1925]). Here Durkheim puts forward what he regards as being the fundamentals of the moral order, specifying these as *ideals* and *norms*. Ideals refer to that which is desirable but not yet transformed into social obligations. Norms, on the other hand, signify rules that prohibit or permit certain types of conduct, and that are supported by legislative or social sanctions. In line with Durkheim's distinction, activists can be conceptualized as *followers and pursuers of moral ideals*. They produce and advance moral

visions in order to change the world to make it better conform to their views on what the world should be like (e.g., Jacobsson and Lindblom 2012; Jasper 1997). Yet, activists' commitment to specific moral ideals concurrently compels them to transgress social norms as their visions come into conflict with the established rules and conventions in society. Legislative or social punishments may therefore be imposed on activist's conduct. Thus, since activists are committed to moral ideals *as well as* being seen as norm-breakers, they typically represent not only the illegitimate deviant, or the virtuous person of the moral order, but both.

Activists' ambiguous position in the moral order is reflected and reproduced in the general public's oscillating definitions of activists' moral status. First, this can be seen on the level of action. For instance, when animal rights activists film a farmer's bad treatment of animals, this might be perceived as conduct in fulfillment of the ideal of animal welfare, denoting that animals should have a decent life and not suffer. At the same time, however, it also involves unlawful intrusion into a private area, and may be perceived as a threat to the personal integrity and well-being of the farmer. When the public's focus is on legal doctrines and lawfulness, animal rights activists will consequently be looked on as trespassers and criminals (see, e.g., Liddick 2006). At other times, when the ideal-defending component of the action takes precedence, the protester may instead be seen as a moral example, having accomplished what ordinary citizens find too difficult and risky to do themselves.

Furthermore, social movements' ambiguous moral standing is also played out in activists' dramaturgy. Here the public's perception of activists tends to move between that of an idealistic performer and a militant performer. As idealistic performer, the protester is looked on as a good-hearted and caring individual, standing out as an exceptional person facing up to the grand worries and problems of society. Yet, when turning into a militant performer, the activist is instead regarded as a hostile and argumentative outsider, disturbing the smooth flow of life's everyday routines. For example, in propagating ideals that many find controversial and provocative, animal rights activists transgress ceremonial norms, such as etiquette around meals (cf. Goffman 1967). Also when staging public performances they have to take into account ceremonial norms prescribing calm and balanced comportment in public. If protesters maintain their self-composure, showing deference and demeanor, passers-by are more likely to acknowledge them as being committed to moral ideals regarding the improvement of animals' life-conditions and well-being.

Third, the ambiguous moral status of social movements' is also visible in relation to activists' recruitment strategies. Here the public's responses tend to oscillate due to protesters' employment of non-conventional or provocative means of winning new members, such as civil disobedience, blockades, and moral shocks. For instance, animal rights activists' commonly employ moral shocks, showing horrifying pictures and emotionally laden pictures and films of animals in distress, to awaken moral sensibilities and recruit new members (Jasper and Poulsen 1995). Here the activist becomes a passionate campaigner, as the use of shocks bears witness to the protester's commitment to moral ideals. However, this representation of the protester may soon be replaced by the image of the frightening campaigner since activists' attempts at shocking also imply infringements on social norms. This is especially the case when protesters employ alarming pictures drawing parallels between the Holocaust and the animal industry, and the effects on the public are easily reversed. Hence, it has also been shown that activists who employ anger and moral outrage to recruit new members may be experienced as intimidating, and their methods repulsive, by their audience (e.g., Jasper 2011).

Moreover, in order to further illuminate activists' ambiguous moral standing, the established notion of "positive deviance" is relevant (cf. Boyle 2011; Heckert 1998) as this testifies to the

fact that activists also differ from the more traditional deviant groups. Employing this notion means that activists are theorized alongside individuals that are regarded as different or peculiar because they perform better than the norm prescribes, including geniuses (who e.g., may be viewed as lacking social skills), athletes (who e.g., may be perceived as superficial and obsessed with their body) and exceptionally beautiful individuals (who e.g., may be seen as stupid) (Heckert 1998). However, as these examples reveal, the concept of positive deviance is commonly applied to people demonstrating excellence in a field or displaying special innate characteristics (e.g., Stebbins 2011), and not to pursuers of moral ideals of what the world should be like.

Additionally, even when illustrated by moral examples such as the good neighbor or the relief-worker, one should be cautious when analyzing activists in connection with positive deviance. Activists, in contrast to the altruists mentioned in the research literature, are committed to moral ideals *as well as* radically disputing and opposing the norms of conventional lifestyles and institutions in society. Moreover, it has been pointed out that positive deviance draws on an idea of deviation derived from statistical norms, rather than norm transgressing conduct proper (e.g., Stebbins 2011). As a consequence, the general public's reactions to the protester's behavior is typically more open, oscillating from one situation to another, implying that the protester has to be particularly sensitive to—and also try to influence—social definitions.

Due to the moral equivocality integral to social movement activism, we thus argue that protesters constitute a specific type of deviant, requiring a re-conceptualization of the analytical tools traditionally employed in the understanding of deviance. Having this aim in mind, we suggest that it is fruitful to relate to Howard Becker's (1963) classic work *Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance*. In relation to Becker's conceptual apparatus we propose that activists can be understood as representing a deviant type, which we call *entrepreneurial deviant*. This means that activists may be defined as deviants as well as what Becker names "moral entrepreneurs," which he sees as the prototype of a rule-creator (1963:147–163). Similar to the moral entrepreneur, the activist is strongly committed to the activity of creating and establishing new norms in society. Being involved in a symbolic crusade, the ultimate goal is to achieve social change (Gusfield 1986). Thus, in Becker's words the activist experiences that: "... there is some evil which profoundly disturbs him. He feels that nothing can be right in the world until rules are made to correct it" (Becker 1963:148). Yet, the activist also differs from the typical moral entrepreneur, such as the psychiatrist or the politician, in not being underpinned by tradition or supported by acknowledged institutions in society. Instead the protester, like other deviants, continually breaches social norms and may be seen by mainstream society as a public nuisance and a menace to society.¹

¹If one is aware of the vital differences between activists and other types of positive deviants stemming from activists' specific position in the moral order, it might still be possible to conceptualize social movement activists in those terms. Entrepreneurial deviance would then constitute a seventh type of positive deviance in addition to the six types acknowledged in Heckert's scheme (1998). This means that "entrepreneurial deviance" (denoting individuals, primarily activists, committed to following and pursuing moral ideals based on which they confront and seek to transform the normative order) is related to, but also different from, "altruism" (involving individuals who voluntarily assist other people without any expectation of reward, such as saints or good neighbors); "charisma" (referring to individuals endowed with exceptional powers of attraction, such as Jesus or Gandhi); "innovation" (including individuals who combine already existing cultural elements in a novel fashion or produce new ones, such as Noble Prize winners); "supra-conformity" (consisting of individuals who are conform to the point of reaching that which is idealized for a particular norm in society, such as straight-A students and athletes); "innate characteristics" (including individuals who are socially defined as endowed with extraordinary inborn qualities, such as intelligence and beauty); and "ex-deviants" (comprising previously stigmatized individuals that manage to convert to the status of normal and become purified, such as a skillful person with a physical disability).

Summing up, having positioned social movement activists as occupying an ambiguous moral standing in relation to the moral order of society at large, and introduced our key-concept of entrepreneurial deviance, we proceed by developing a theoretical framework for understanding deviance in social movements. In doing so we draw on an interview study with Swedish animal rights activists, focusing on how activists deal with and try to counter social stereotypes, which we interpret as a form of deviance-management.

DATA AND METHOD

Our analysis of stereotypes is drawn from an empirical study of animal rights activism in Sweden, based on 18 open-ended, in-depth interviews with activists involved in various networks of the wider animal rights movement. Ten of the interviews were conducted in 2004 with activists engaged in Animal Rights Sweden, the oldest and largest animal rights organization in Sweden, with a membership of approximately 35,000 in 2012. The remaining eight interviews were conducted in 2010 with activists belonging to the Animal Rights Alliance and a local network of animal rights activists in Gothenburg. Some of our informants also had experience of ALF (Animal Liberation Front) actions.

In order to select our informants we adopted the approach of “intensity sampling,” focusing on information-rich cases that manifest the phenomenon of interest clearly (e.g., Patton 2002). Against this backdrop the selection criteria were that all informants were vegans with distinct animal-rightist and activist identities, which means that we have only interviewed the most dedicated activists in the respective groups. As the protesters’ experiences of social stereotypes are notably similar regardless of organizational belonging, we treat them here as one sample.

We contacted the key-activists in the respective group at the time of the study, either those holding formal leading positions or those who functioned as informal leaders. The remainder of the participants was recruited through snowball sampling, with the aim of securing diversity in terms of age and gender. We interviewed 11 women and 7 men aged between 20 and 60. Once having established a relationship of mutual trust with the key-figures of each group, nearly all activists directly accepted when asked about participating in the study. The interviews lasted between one-and-a-half to five hours and focused on the activists’ experiences of, and outlooks on, their activism as well as their everyday lives (including their work, education and family life). As a consequence of the open-ended approach employed, the topic of stereotypes not only came up in connection with our pre-formulated questions; it also featured spontaneously in the interviews as the activists shared information about their biographies. The recurrent stories of activists’ encounter with stereotypes of the same kind led us to conclude that the 18 interviews were enough to reach saturation.

In the following, and based on the interviews, we identify the ways in which activists seek to deal with and counter social stereotypes.

STRATEGIES FOR MANAGING SOCIAL STEREOTYPES IN ACTIVISM

The mass media in Sweden often focuses on the illegal actions performed by animal rights activists; media representations thus tend to picture activists as norm-transgressors and “others,” often in a stereotypical way. Activists must relate and respond to this. We suggest that a significant

expression of the effects of deviance in social movements concerns activists' *management of social stereotypes*. Like the typical deviant, activists must spend a lot of time and energy on handling exaggerated and generalized images (cf. Ross and Lester 2011), presenting them as strange, bizarre, or dangerous outsiders. However, consistent with the general absence of a deviance perspective in the study of social movements, scholars commonly sidestep the importance of stereotypes. We suggest that the analysis of stereotypes should be given more attention within social movement research, since this is critical for understanding the life-world of activists and the dilemmas that protesters face. We also show that, as entrepreneurial deviants in society, activists employ a number of different strategies to manage stereotypes, reflecting their ambiguous position in the moral order.

The Significance of Social Stereotypes

The importance of stereotypes in the context of social movements becomes apparent in the general fact that *social stereotypes permeate activists' interaction with the general public*. In our study, we came across a wide range of deviance images, which activists must address when bringing up issues relating to veganism and the animal rights cause with their audience. All of these images reappeared during the interviews (each of them was mentioned by at least four informants). One stereotype of animal rights activists is based upon their alleged indifference towards human beings, making the protester into "a misanthrope" who does not care about humans but only animals. As one activist informed us:

If you are a vegan and animal rights activist, you are seen as a person who only cares about animals. That most of us are also engaged in other fields people seem to forget. I am for instance also engaged in a feminist group, spreading information about men's violence towards women. That we would only care for animals is something we hear from other activist groups too, they think we have a hang-up about animals.

Hence, being perceived as people who only care about animals and not humans, activists also react to this attribution and seek to manage it.

Another stereotype concerns animal rights activists' assumed juvenile age and immaturity, where the protester is viewed as a "youth led astray." This renders the activist into a person whose commitment is not genuine and may be threatening since it has originated in misdirected anger. As another protester informed us:

We are supposedly engaged in various issues because we have to think that everything is wrong. We always have to protest and attend every demonstration possible. Many think that we don't have a thought behind what we do. We are just young people and within a year we will have changed our minds. This is just a period we are going through.

Thus, stereotypical ascriptions also aim to weaken the impact of the activists' cause, as the negative images take precedence over the arguments and protesters are seen as unserious or immature people.

In addition, there is the stereotype of the activist as "a city-dweller" who does not know anything about farming or living in the countryside. One protester told us that "we are seen

as people who live in the city and never have seen animals in a farm. We are perceived as if we don't know anything about the real lives of animals." This image is likely to have developed because animal rights activists criticize the way farmers treat animals, and it also illustrates that stereotypes may involve attributions defining the protester as ignorant and misinformed.

Moreover, the animal rights activist may be seen as "a puritan" who leads a puritanical life, abstaining not only from consuming meat-products, but also from life's other pleasures. One of the activists that we interviewed related the following:

The typical image of animal rights activists is that we are extreme. We don't drink alcohol or coffee and don't eat buns, cookies or sweets. They think that you are not just a vegan, they attach so much more to this. People think we live a very Spartan and boring life.

Thus, stereotypes may likewise include negative appraisals of activists' lifestyles, implying that protesters do not lead a normal life.

Such social stereotypes may be based upon the assumption that animal rights activists do not live up to the expectations related to gender or family roles. For instance, there is the case of "the crazy auntie" who is an activist running a home for stray animals such as cats, dogs or rabbits. She is allegedly an odd and lonely person, living for the well-being of her residents.

Two specific deviance images stand out as almost all our informants mentioned them. Firstly, there is the stereotype of the activist as "a militant" that employs violence as a method. Here, the animal rights activist is looked upon as someone who sets meat-transporting lorries on fire and threatens individual farmers to stop their production. As one activist told us: "How many times have I heard the question of how many Scan [Swedish meat company] lorries I have put on fire. I am associated with militant persons even though I am the complete opposite. It is a misconception."

Here stereotypical attributions connect animal rights activists with subversive activities and terrorism.

Moreover, it is clear that many of the aforementioned stereotypes relate to events highlighted in the media, which functions as an important social arena in the construction of the deviance images of activists. This seems to be particularly true of the stereotype where the protester is seen as "a mink-releaser" who illegally and injudiciously liberates animals, specifically minks. The image of the mink-releaser, which was acknowledged by the overall majority of our informants, turned up in Swedish newspapers and TV in the mid-1990s and has been commonly used up to this date. As one of the interviewed activists told us:

We are all thought to release minks. It is the first comment one gets at work or if one meets someone out at a restaurant. Everywhere this comes up. "So you are one of those persons releasing minks." I tell them that Animal Rights Sweden has never organized such an action.

We maintain that the relevance of examining stereotypes in connection with social movements appears in relation to activists' deviance-management strategies. As we show below, activists employ different types of strategies reflecting activists' position as entrepreneurial deviants and their ambiguous standing in the moral order. In theoretical terms, this means that the traditional notions of "passing" (which concerns the deviant's behavioral response to the general public), "techniques of neutralization" (dealing with the deviant's inner, psychological world),

and “subculture” (referring to the deviant’s relationships within the deviant group) have to be complemented with, what we name, “confronting,” “techniques of idealization,” and the forming of “a transformative subculture.”

Behavioral Strategies: Passing and Confronting

A first strategy that we were able to identify draws on the fact that the protester, in common with the typical deviant, employs various passing strategies, concealing demeaning facts about him- or herself due to the rewards in being considered normal (Goffman 1963). The possibility of passing lies in the circumstance that others may actually not discredit a discreditable quality of an individual since it is not evident to them from the social encounter. Hence, a dyslexic may seek to pass as a literate by pretending to possess reading and writing skills; in order to live up to heterosexual gender-expectations an individual may hide his/her wish to go through a sex-change operation; and a person whose self is tainted by experiences at a mental institution may conceal his/her background so as not to be viewed as a dysfunctional individual. As our interview-data demonstrate, passing is also regularly employed by animal rights activists. Advocating a radical worldview where animals are regarded as sacred beings (Lowe 2001), activists may experience personal suffering and estrangement in most contexts in social life (e.g., Shapiro 1994). In protection of the self, the protester therefore seeks to keep her deviant emotions, thoughts or behavior to herself. Attempting to pass as normal, for example when visiting a soccer game or meeting a friend at a café, is moreover likely to succeed as animal rights activism is not associated with a physical deformity or a tribal stigma (cf. Goffman 1963; cf. also Becker’s (1963) concept “secret deviant”).

Against this backdrop, we also contend that *protesters manage the negative effects of stereotypes by concealing and masking their activism in selected contexts in everyday life*. While activists may sometimes confront people’s stereotypes in situations beyond the field of mobilization in public places, our interviews show that encounters involving personal relationships, whether formal or informal, may pose constraints on activists’ behavior. In line with what Goffman (1967) has called “the avoidance process,” the activist then evades the situation altogether or, when present, makes attempts not to bring up specific topics or pretends not to be aware of the other’s conversation in order to save his/her face. For example, an animal rights activist reported that telling her colleagues at work of her vegan lifestyle “can lead to a lot of personal attacks.” Striving to avoid the standard images of a vegan, this protester also made attempts to hide her activist-identity:

I never discuss veganism or activism at work but I just mind my own business. Of course, if someone asks I answer but I give no long talks. People are inclined to be negative to things they are not used to. I used to be the same in relation to veganism before I became a vegan, I must admit. . . . There are of course those who flip out and see you as a threat. That is not the way one wants to be introduced. . . . In the canteen I never bring up issues concerning activism, I just eat my food and discuss work-related matters.

Similarly, another activist told us about circumventing disagreements when visiting restaurants or private homes with friends who are meat-eaters, experiencing the stereotypes associated with veganism as too burdensome to oppose on such occasions: “I usually just eat my food. I am not

standing up yelling that ‘now I would like to order vegan food’ but I just ask if they have products without milk and such things.’” Additionally, as Goffman (1967) has noted, social life does not only involve the obligation to keep one’s own face, but also that of others. Protesters may therefore feel that they ought to protect the integrity of the non-committed person involved in the social encounter. Hence, as another activist voice makes clear: “It would be untenable both for me and for the others if I would bring up animal rights arguments all the time.”

In line with these observations, it is moreover important to note that the negative effects of stereotypes may affect the protester to take a cautious stance when establishing personal relationships with non-activists. For example, several activists pointed to the significance of first reaching a working consensus before revealing their activist-identity (cf. Goffman 1967). Hence, one protester reported that she seeks to keep her engagement to herself at the beginning of new acquaintances. In this way other people are thought to be less likely to perceive her in accordance with the stereotypes of a vegan, and later accept her for who she is:

I haven’t always dropped the bomb immediately and said that I am a vegan. If I start a new job, have begun at a new school or entered a group of some kind, I keep it secret for a while. Later, when they know that I am a vegan, they shake about, take an extra look at me but without making any remarks. In general I think that people who don’t know us think that we are strange.

Another activist, relating to the time she was expecting a child, also describes the strategy of concealing one’s vegan-identity in the initiating period of the relationship:

I do feel odd and different sometimes. Then I can feel that I am complicated if I am in a place where I am the only vegan. . . . If I get to know someone first and then tell them that I am a vegan, then I will be accepted as a person. In the parental group my husband and I did not say anything at first when we were expecting the baby. We told them only after the child was born.

Finally, our interviews confirm that everyday contexts also provide important opportunities for emotional refill, enabling activists to face the public on future occasions. Hence, another animal rights activist told us about visiting soccer-games with his non-committed friends, making it possible for him to relax from his engagement. In order not to trigger the stereotypes to negatively affect the social intercourse, passing as normal was again put forward as an important strategy:

We usually go to various sport events and to watch AIK [Swedish soccer team] play. They don’t even know that I am a vegetarian but I feel it is just great. . . . I try not to talk about it [animal rights] because I feel it is nice to be able to relax. I eat vegan food when we are out but I don’t think anyone has noticed that I do that every time. . . . In order to spread the animal rights message one ought really to state it out all the time. But I am just a human being and for me it is important to let go of what I work with all day long.

Our examples have served to illustrate that passing (Goffman 1963) is a strategy used by animal rights activists in everyday life.

However, being entrepreneurial deviants in society protesters also manage their deviance by “confronting” their social environment (see, e.g., Anspach 1979). Hence, while routinely adopting passing to reduce emotional pressure, for activists passing functions as a necessary counterpoint

and respite to further opposing and challenging social norms. The strategy of confronting testifies to the strong action orientation of social movements (Peterson 2001), and stands in stark contrast to the deviant who has resigned and come to accept the role that society has assigned her. Consequently, rather than seeking to adapt to the social expectations of the environment, activists deal with their deviance by arguing their cause, setting good examples, staging attacks, setting up blockades or carrying out acts of civil disobedience in order to transform the social order. Moreover, protesters do not only confront norms when mobilizing but also in their everyday life. For instance, since animal rights activists practice an all-inclusive lifestyle with no animal products, they may experience daily clashes and tensions with their families, friends or outsiders, in relation to their eating-routines, clothing, and so on (e.g., Pallotta 2005).

Hence, we suggest that *protesters at times mobilize to confront the general public's stereotypes*. In order to gain wider resonance, protesters have to successfully frame their arguments and messages. As our interview-data show, this also involves a need for activists to counter the deviance images communicated by their audience. For example, when animal rights activists raise consciousness in public places they recurrently have to respond to the stereotypes of being militant, puritan or people who release minks. As one activist attests to:

A common prejudice is that we release minks. I meet it every time I am in town. I don't know where it comes from but Swedish people seem to have been hit by some kind of psychosis because this is almost the only counter-argument one hears. Earlier I tried to turn it around: "If you don't release minks they will be gassed to death." Now I just say: "We don't do that."

Thus, due to the existence of stereotypes the activists must be prepared to respond to and counter them.

In addition, confronting stereotypes includes coping with provocation and demonstrative reactions. When confrontations occur in public places with strangers (cf. Eyerman and Jamison 1991), the tensions involved also tend to increase. For example, another protester we interviewed told us about the innuendos and sarcasms she has to deal with when promoting the animal rights cause in the city center:

I can be surprised with how mean people can be or how little they care when I meet them in town. When I approach them with a petition they don't say anything or they give remarks such as "Meat is delicious" or "I want to wear fur." Sometimes people ask a question and then leave before they have heard the answer, mostly with the intention of provoking. Then they can laugh at you and say silly things.

Here, confronting stereotypical judgments is less about arguing than being able to contain others' unsympathetic behavior (cf. Jacobsson and Lindblom 2013). Hence, just being noticeable in public places also improves activists' chances to challenge and change the public's negative images. As the same activist later clarified:

People also approach us to give praise and say that we are admirable being able to stand here all the time despite the fact that people are angry with us. We get positive reactions because we are visible in town. That almost outweighs all the negative persons we meet.

By being patient and tolerant activists may thus successfully challenge the stereotypes others have of them and, by extension, be admired for their courage.

Psychological Strategies: The Techniques of Neutralization and Idealization

An established notion in the study of deviance-management is that the deviant reduces the negative psychological effects of his or her rule-infringements by employing techniques of neutralization. According to Sykes and Matza (1957) these techniques draw on the fact that the juvenile delinquent undergoes a socialization-process similar to the average man, and will therefore accept “the legitimacy of the dominant social order and its ‘moral rightness’” (Sykes and Matza 1957:665). Hence, rather than adopting a new normative system from which to make his transgressions warranted, he is “embedded in the larger world of those who conform”; in particular, his teachers, neighbors, and family, and “cannot escape the condemnation of his deviance” in society (Sykes and Matza 1957:666). As a consequence, the juvenile delinquent, like the average person, also admits to the wrongfulness of stealing, lying, and destroying, which means that he needs to neutralize his norm transgressing conduct so as to become acceptable even to himself. Utilizing various approaches of justification, for example “the denial of responsibility,” viewing himself as a billiard ball helplessly pushed into new situations, he is able to counteract the force of social norms. Techniques of neutralization have also been shown to play an important role in social movements as the protester like the juvenile delinquent remains sensitive to social codes of conduct (e.g., Liddick 2006).

In line with this, our interviews suggest that *activists strive to neutralize the effects of their norm-transgressions by construing counterstereotypes of the general public*. For instance, in order to facilitate further unlawfulness or defiance, activists may “deny the victim” her human qualities: the sufferer of the protester’s action is then thought to have deserved what was done to her (Liddick 2006). Animal rights activists employ this technique mainly in relation to people who work in the animal industry, such as farmers or butchers, but also vivisectionists who may be stereotyped as “evil people.” As stated by one interviewee: “I can never understand how one could choose a profession and be able to cope with having a profession where animals are tortured. I can see those people who can just stand there and murder animals as evil persons.”

By extension, related ascriptions like “scum,” “sadists,” and “executioners” frequently occur as well.

Furthermore, counterstereotypes also include those who consume meat. Hence, animal rights activists typically speak about, and relate to, “meat-eaters” or “meaters,” attributing negative characteristics to people who cook and ingest meat of some kind. Giving an account of her social intercourse with fellow-protesters, an activist shared the following experience:

When we meet we may talk about how to reach out to the meat-eaters. We may have some fun at their expense and ask ourselves how it is possible to persuade a person who eats a hamburger five times a week. It is great to just be able to do this and feel that it is they who are faulty, since usually it is us who end up in a defensive position.

As other informants made clear too, by focusing on the shortcomings of ignorant or indifferent meat-eaters the roles are temporarily reversed. Hence, counterstereotypes may also be a way to “condemn the condemners” as those who impose the deviant label are seen as having no moral authority, being guilty of their own failings (cf. Liddick 2006; Sykes and Matza 1957).

However, we suggest that activists, being entrepreneurial deviants in society, employ both techniques of neutralization and what we term “techniques of idealization” to reduce the

dissonance of their norm-transgressions.² Whereas the former techniques follow the generic formula: “I am presumed guilty according to the norms of the majority-society, which I accept, but still I am innocent because of the circumstances,” the latter are based upon the rationale: “I am presumed guilty, according to the norms of the majority-society, which I don’t accept, and I am ready to take responsibility for my actions and for which I am proud.” The techniques of idealization draw upon the essential fact, pointed out by Durkheim (2002 [1925]), that the moral order does not only consist of social norms (what the world is) but also of moral ideals (what the world should be like). This implies that the moral order is not given or fixed but continually develops, as there are actual or potential conflicts between moral ideals and social norms. In line with this, we suggest that the protester may justify her rule-infringements not by pre- and post-rationalizations to prove innocence but instead by her commitment to moral ideals. Such justifications include “taking pride in standing up for one’s moral ideals,” “experiencing empowerment and liberation when mobilizing for moral ideals,” and “feeling moral superiority vis-à-vis the general public for being devoted to moral ideals.” For instance, an activist interviewed conceived of his acts of civil disobedience as involvements bringing new meaning into his life: “These actions have affected me as I nowadays experience bonds to animals. I am particularly deeply connected to the subjugated animals and their fate.” The denial intrinsic to the techniques of neutralization is here replaced by personal responsibility and affirmation of one’s conduct.

Furthermore, the techniques of neutralization are based upon the understanding that the conduct of the majority-society affects the psychological functioning of the individual: if most people in society sustain norm-conformity and social control then the delinquent cannot evade the fact that her behavior is deviant, not even to herself. Nevertheless, pursuing moral visions of the environment, peace or animals’ well being, activists transgress social norms, but may also win *social support* by doing so. In our study, we were able to identify a number of practices, which function to affirm activists’ moral ideals and justify their norm-transgressions. These include, what we call, the search for “ideal confirmation” (finding social support for one’s views in contexts of consciousness-raising), “ideal legitimation” (finding support in law- and policy-making) and “ideal amplification” (finding support among family or friends for one’s activist commitment).

Hence, we also propose that *activists employ techniques of idealization to manage stereotypes*, seeking to offset the public’s deviance-images by their commitment to moral ideals. This can be illustrated by relating to how activists may deal with the stereotype of “the social failure.” Like other outsider groups, activists may be regarded as misfits: out of work or lacking a professional career; as not leading a proper middle class family life preoccupied with the concerns that structure the days of normal people in society; and as inadequate consumers, lacking the monetary means for purchasing novel possessions. One common strategy to deal with the image of the social failure is to victimize oneself and blame the institutions of society for the predicaments one faces (cf. Sykes and Matza 1957). In contrast, activists may accept their social

²We here follow the original formulation by Sykes and Matza (1957). Meanwhile, the notion of techniques of neutralization has greatly expanded and been given new meanings (see Christensen 2010). Even though what we call techniques of idealization bear similarities with “appealing to higher loyalties” in Sykes and Matza’s theory, we argue that, in contrast to the rationale of this technique, activists also repudiate numerous imperatives of the dominant normative system.

and economic position as outsiders, since this is conceived of as a deliberate choice. Protesters then seek to transform the negative meanings attached to being social failures into positive commitment for their moral ideals. Employing a technique of idealization, which we call “reformulating the stereotype into a lifestyle choice,” activists make attempts to be seen as moral examples because of their social deviance.

Our interviews confirm that both male and female protesters frequently give up opportunities for career advancement and raising a family (see also Jacobsson and Lindblom 2012; Lowe 2001). Seeking to lead simple lives committed to the animal rights cause, the activists adhere to a lifestyle that they find to be morally superior to that of ordinary people. As one of our informants put it when asked about his engagement:

The animal-rights cause is an important part of my lifestyle and I think everyone should follow this path. The lifestyle is mainly expressed in my eating-habits. Then it is also about all the work that I put into changing society. . . . People should not think so much about having a family or devoting their time to possessions. I think it is clear that we who are engaged in Animal Rights Sweden don't care much about such things. We are not as materialistic as society at large. . . . I myself have no family and those who are most active are those who don't have children. Of those who usually come to our membership meetings I don't think there is even one who has a child.

Viewing his outside position as a lifestyle choice based on personal sacrifice, this activist strives to be regarded as a pursuer of moral ideals, and not a social disappointment, in the eyes of others.

Strategies at the Group-Level: A Cohesive and Transformative Sub-Culture

Another deviance-management method confirmed in our study draws on the fact that the activist-group displays features, which make the concept of sub-culture (e.g., Becker 1963) applicable in connection with social movements. As mentioned earlier, activists experience alienation from ordinary people and a polarization between “us” and “them.” To deal with this estrangement, the activist-group commonly functions as an alternative home and a place to rest similar to other deviant sub-cultures (see also Jacobsson and Lindblom 2013; Gaarder 2008; Pallotta 2005; Shapiro 1994; Herzog 1993). Moreover, activists establish an internal culture. They learn a new cognitive and emotional language, and establish their own informal hierarchies, drawing on their moral ideals and where actions are assessed according to these ideals. For instance, in the animal rights movement, a vegan is assigned a higher status than a vegetarian or a meat-eater (Jacobsson and Lindblom 2012). This re-socialization also means that protesters pass through a moral career to cultivate a stable, non-conformist identity (Pallotta 2005), which is a process also constitutive of other deviant groups.

Our interview-data moreover show that *activists deal with the public's stereotypes by the cohesion of their sub-culture and its in-group norms*. Vegan food and food-consumption constitute an important part of the animal rights activists' sub-culture. As one of our informants informed us: “there is huge knowledge exchange between vegans and everyone is willing to share their knowledge and exchange recipes.” Emphasizing the importance of vegan food the same activist later exclaimed: “When food is served all vegans go crazy.” In line with this, activists moreover arrange vegan cookery courses where the newcomer learns the necessary craftsmanship to become an integrated member of the group. Protesters also communicate over

the Internet to discuss what sort of milk, pies, and bread they are permitted to consume. Thus, by sharing a common practice of veganism, mirroring activists' condemnation of meat-products, the subculture also serves to protect the activist from being overwhelmed by the public's stereotypes (cf. Becker 1963). Against this backdrop, one of our informants told us that being a lonely vegan, with no fellow-activists, was almost unbearable, as she was continually perceived as a releaser of minks or a puritan by the people she encountered: "I always had to explain and defend myself. People made mean remarks and were unsympathetic in general." Yet, joining an animal rights group meant a major change in her life: "It felt like coming home, finding people who think like me and striving in the same direction." The majority of our informants shared similar experiences.

Nevertheless, being entrepreneurial deviants, protesters do not only seek to strengthen the internal structure of the activist-group; they form "a transformative sub-culture" whose rationale is to reach out and to expand. Hence, as social movements are routinely directed towards changing society and its institutions, the activist-group is typically also profoundly other-oriented. In line with this, it has been noted that social movements continually mobilize in public spaces (Eyerman and Jamison 1991); that protesters commonly establish social networks, not merely with other movement-organizations, but also with politicians, students, neighbors, and persons in authority positions (e.g., Crossley 2002); and that social movements are involved in, and frequently need to adapt to, the media (e.g., Tarrow 1998). We propose that this other-directedness and frequent contacts with its surroundings distinguish the activist-group from other deviant subcultures, which are less proselytizing and more secluded from society (e.g., Becker 1963).

Thus our interviews additionally suggest that *social stereotypes negatively affect protesters' communicative efforts and social networking with the general public*. As it is constitutive of stereotypes that they generalize rather than distinguish and separate (e.g., Ross and Lester 2011), stereotypes contaminate activist-groups who work within the boundaries of existing law with the same undesirable characteristics as those groups who promote illegal actions. For example, in the Swedish animal rights movement, Animal Rights Sweden needs to distinguish itself from other activist-groups, such as the Animal Liberation Front (ALF), whose norm-breaking methods and behaviors are problematic to be associated with. As one of the interviewed activists within Animal Rights Sweden informed us:

The boundary-drawing in relation to other factions has become more pronounced over time. . . . We [Animal Rights Sweden] always make sure that we obtain permission for our demonstrations and we avoid the worst places. I don't see any reason to demonstrate a few meters from a farm. To be 50 meters away is no disadvantage. The media gets good pictures and those at the farm still get the message.

In order to be viewed as a serious and reliable organization, the quoted activist underlines the importance of taking measures to separate Animal Rights Sweden from other factions of the movement. However, to the general public the differences between "legitimate" and "illegitimate" groups may still be difficult to gauge, since people typically possess only limited information about the activists' biographies and organizational affiliation. As our interviews confirm, this means that the people protesters encounter frequently view them in terms of the standardized images of militants or animal-liberators. Thus, stereotypes also provide evidence for what

Becker (1963) terms “falsely accused deviant behavior.” Here the activist is perceived as a deviant without, in fact, having been involved in any norm-breaking activity.

The Dialectics of Deviance-Management in Activism

We have claimed that activists constitute a specific type of deviants as they occupy an ambiguous position in the moral order, being pursuers and followers of moral ideals *as well as* transgressors of social norms. With the objective of conceptualizing this condition we developed the notion of entrepreneurial deviance, characterized by passing, techniques of neutralization and the formation of subcultures employed in combination with confronting, techniques of idealization and the founding of a transformative subculture. Taking our line of reasoning one step further, we now also propose that to successfully deal with their deviance, protesters need to *dialectically move* between the two opposite processes to which these concepts refer.

Firstly, for sustainable deviance-management, social movements have to strike a balance between the strategies of passing and confronting. On the one hand, too much focus on passing renders activists into *social conformists* where their cause, sooner or later, becomes insignificant or vanishes. In our study, this is illustrated by some protesters who were afraid of losing their commitment if they avoided standing up for their convictions, for instance at school or work. They therefore sought ways of overcoming the comfort of fitting in. On the other hand, a sole orientation toward confronting the beliefs and conventions of mainstream society also creates difficulties since it may lead to *social marginalization*. Hence, animal rights activists may sense that it causes problems every time they socialize with people not involved in the movement as they feel that they are always different. Activists’ outsider position in society is then a deeply felt burden, which also affects their well-being (e.g., Shapiro 1994).

Secondly, the techniques of neutralization and idealization represent different but complementary strategies in social movements, and too much focus on one strategy will lead to less viable deviance-management. On the one hand, we suggest that the wide-ranging use of techniques of neutralization reaches a point where the defense ruptures and the activist experiences *inauthenticity* due to avoidance of standing up for her actions and facing the consequences. Self-doubt and a longing to be reconciled with one’s biography await behind the wall of rationalizations. In the animal rights movement, this problem particularly applies to militant groups, such as the ALF, which routinize the employment of masking and concealing their identity with no open dialogue with the public. Since these protesters are not willing to face the legal consequences of their actions, the connection between animal rights activism and delinquency also becomes notably apparent in this case (e.g., Liddick 2006). On the other hand, however, the one-sided employment of techniques of idealization is likely to lead to *burnout* as the protester takes personal responsibility for her actions in every situation. This is also confirmed in our study of animal rights activism where protesters reported experiences of stress and exhaustion. Carrying the world on their shoulders, with no limits to their commitment, activists were overwhelmed by emotions of guilt or compassion fatigue (see also Jacobsson and Lindblom 2013; Pallotta 2005; Herzog 1993).

Finally, we suggest that another precondition for efficient deviance-management is that activist groups balance their introvert and extrovert tendencies. On the one hand, showing only limited interest in mobilizing for social change, and focusing instead on strengthening the

group's inner cohesion and sub-culture, the activist group transforms into a *sect*. This point is illustrated by the relative success of Animal Rights Sweden; this group in the context of the Swedish animal rights movement has remained oriented towards achieving cultural extension and resonance (i.e., reaching out to a wider audience). This stands in stark contrast to less prosperous and more introvert activist groups, where protesters conceive of themselves as an avant-garde of the movement, performing high-risk actions and preferring secrecy in the planning of actions (for instance, the action-groups of the Animal Liberation Front). Their strong in-group focus risks converting them into political sects (Jacobsson and Lindblom 2012; Peterson 2001). On the other hand, if the activist group lays disproportionate weight to outreach and social networking, with no attention directed toward identity-work and logistic structuring, this may result in *dissolution*. Since social movements are emergent phenomena, where protesters may move from one social movement to another and the durability of most activist groups is short, the challenge of retaining group unity concerns most protesters. Nevertheless, this problematic tends to be greater among small activist groups, since they frequently lack a formal organization and depend on every individual's commitment to a larger extent.

CONCLUSION

In this article, we have argued for the importance and usefulness of a deviance perspective in the study of social movements. Just as activists are involved in framing and mobilization, political opportunity strategizing, emotion work, collective identity formation, and so on, we have shown that activists must also engage in deviance-management in order to reduce the social and psychological effects of their being defined as norm-transgressors and outsiders. In line with this, the significance of meaning-construction, and in particular the production of social stereotypes, has been emphasized (cf. Rubington and Weinberg 2011; Spector and Kitsuse 2001). Theoretically, we have moreover proposed that the traditional notions of passing, techniques of neutralization and subculture should be complemented with, what we have termed, confronting, techniques of idealization and the forming of a transformative subculture when applied to social movement activists. The deviance perspective outlined above sheds light on phenomena and processes, which are usually neglected in the study of social movements. Yet, previous research tends to overlook activists' ambiguous situation as outsiders in society, a condition that we touch upon now when discussing the advantages of our approach.

Firstly, the deviance perspective put forward in this article draws upon a comparative approach of protesters and other types of deviants. In earlier studies on social movements, however, activists are frequently examined only in connection with politically relevant actors such as political parties, the government, the state and other social movements (e.g., Crossley 2002). Consequently, there is a tendency to not consider whether activists share the conditions of groups commonly recognized as deviants, for example organized crime groups, corporations, and sects (this is noted by Freilich et al. 1999; on militant activist groups as sects see Peterson 2001). In contrast we contend that such comparisons are highly relevant since they reveal protesters' affinity as well as dissimilarity with other norm-transgressors, thus unmasking protesters' ambiguous position in the moral order.

Secondly, our deviance perspective takes into account that protesters also experience alienation, victimization and powerlessness. Yet, the existence of such experiences typically goes

unnoticed as research on social movements frequently emphasizes activists' efforts to mobilize and achieve resonance with their audience. With so much research focus on activists' outreach and issues related to recruitment, rather than on how protesters deal with their everyday lives, protesters' creation of sub-cultures and their collective management of deviance tend to be poorly understood (cf. Jasper 2011).

Thirdly, the deviance approach presented draws on the observation that activists are sensitive to the codes and rules of the social order and also develop conformist strategies. In contrast, in some previous research, activists may be treated solely as non-conforming individuals oriented toward the emancipation of their own selves or others' (e.g., Anspach 1979). In this way it is often ignored that activists are accorded negative social identities by their surroundings, creating a need for them also to adapt to social norms, passing as normal and rationalizing the negative effects of their norm-transgressions. Similarly, in earlier studies on deviance, the research focus may be restricted to how activists resist or seek to influence definitions of deviance in society. Yet, when scholars concentrate on protesters' conflicts with those who construct the rules of deviance (e.g., psychiatrists or policymakers), the fact that protesters are themselves defined as social deviants is not illuminated and accounted for (e.g., Lauderdale 1980).

Fourthly, the deviance perspective outlined here also illuminates that protesters develop specific strategies for managing deviance. Nevertheless, while the aforementioned research is prone to take the distinction between activism and deviance at face value, other scholars who analyze social movements may claim that protesters display no essential dissimilarity with those social categories traditionally examined under the rubric of deviance. For instance, protesters have been viewed as posing the same sort of threat to the normative order as criminal and/or other deviant groups (Freilich et al. 1999), as well as outsiders "predisposed towards violence" (Allport 1924) and suffering from "pathological personalities" (Lasswell 1930). Here activists are not only compared to other groups that transgress social norms, their commonalities are also overemphasized as activists' role as moral entrepreneurs, pursuing societal visions and employing techniques of idealization, is not highlighted.

A task for future research, then, is to test the usefulness of the concept of entrepreneurial deviance and to see to what extent the strategies of deviance-management, and the dialectics that we have identified, apply to other social movement activists as well, in relation to their specific social contexts.

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