

## BOOK REVIEW/COMPTE RENDU

**Jo Reger, Daniel J. Myers, and Rachel L. Einwohner,** eds., *Identity Work in Social Movements*. Social Movements, Protest, and Contention Series, Volume 30. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008, 312 pp. \$US 25.00 paper (978-0-8166-5140-5), \$US 75.00 hardcover (978-0-8166-5139-9)

In the past twenty years, social movement scholars have acknowledged that the construction, maintenance, and deployment of collective identity are critical social movement activities. This has led to ongoing research on the work involved in collective identity processes, including the negotiation of collective consciousness, the creation and maintenance of group boundaries, and the deployment of collective identity in the course of social movement struggles. While there is much descriptive research on the use of identities in social movements, there are fewer coherent theoretical frameworks that would allow us to systematically evaluate the role of identity processes in movement organizing, choice of tactics, and outcomes. *Identity Work in Social Movements* offers the promise of a theoretical framework that might begin to allow us to do so. However, the empirical chapters are inconsistent with the main theoretical framework developed by the editors, and while the collection offers insights into identity processes, they are scattered throughout the book and do not deliver a coherent message.

In their introductory essay, the editors seek to build on the literature on identity in social movements, in particular David Snow's idea of "identity work." They make two innovative theoretical arguments. First, they develop the idea of "identity workloads," recognizing that "in some times, in some contexts and for some people, the 'work' of identity construction can be more difficult than others" (p. 6). In so doing, they move from elaborating mechanisms of identity work to defining a variable about which we might make predictions. While this is a welcome innovation, the editors stop short of theorizing the relationship of different identity workloads to movement organizing, choice of tactics and outcomes. The editors identify two analytical dimensions that can help to determine how much identity work confronts a given movement. The first dimension is the focus of identity work, which they divide into a focus on sameness and a focus on difference. The second dimension is

the audience for the identity work, whether it is internal to the movement or made up of external actors. Up until now, they argue, social movement theory has examined these dimensions of identity work as discrete choices — activists choose either to focus on sameness or difference, and work on deploying them internally or externally. Their second innovation is to argue for an “intersectional” model that acknowledges these different kinds of work may be going on at the same time. Identity workloads are “relatively easy” when there is a clear-cut focus and audience for identity work; they are harder and more costly when social movement actors try to address sameness and difference at the same time, or multiple audiences. The editors conclude with a brief discussion of the impact of interactional, organizational, and cultural environmental factors on identity workloads, reviewing previous work on this issue, but not developing a new framework to make sense of these disparate findings.

Unfortunately, the empirical case studies included in the volume do not support the intersectionality argument. For example, Elizabeth Kaminski and Verta Taylor’s chapter “We’re not Just Lip-synching Here” does not show that identity work on intersecting fronts is harder than the clear-cut situations with a single focus or audience. Their study shows how drag performances before straight audiences emphasize both the sameness and difference of gay experience. However, interviews with performers and audience members does not reveal much struggle by performers or audience members over these multiple and potentially contradictory framings, and they conclude that these multiple framings successfully create a sense of acceptance and community among diverse audiences. Rachel Einwohner’s chapter “Passing as Strategic Identity Work in the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising” actually shows that it is sometimes harder to have a clear-cut focus and audience for identity work than to be working on multiple fronts. For the Jewish activists who passed as Poles in advance of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising, the erasure of their own Jewish identities was extremely demanding. In this case, the audience and the emphasis of the identity work (sameness with non-Jewish society) were clear cut, but the work itself was hard because it involved the activists denying their own authentic identities.

Although they are inconsistent with the intersectionality framework, the case studies more convincingly show how environmental and organizational factors affect the collective identities activists choose to develop. Jane Ward’s “Diversity Discourse and Multi-identity Work in Lesbian and Gay Organizations ” does show the difficulties involved in constructing organizational identities that affirm sameness and difference simultaneously, in a refreshing study of two organizations that failed to

do so. In these cases, the organizational struggles over identity seem to come not so much from having to emphasize sameness and difference at the same time, as from the lack of structural incentives to do so. In a contrasting case study "Dealing With Diversity," Silke Roth shows how the Coalition of Labour Union Women was able to implement organizational practices that supported feminist labour activists in affirming a common identity while respecting ethnic and racial differences. In this case organizational practices reduced the identity workloads of the activists, even though they were contending with diverse and intersecting identities.

Organizational and cultural ecologies also affect the content of the identities activists develop and deploy. Jo Reger's "Drawing Identity Boundaries" compares campus feminist groups in a conservative and a liberal college environment, concluding that the identities constructed by each group depend significantly on the kind of antagonists and allies they face in the broader campus community. On a similar theme, Benita Roth discusses the impact of the social movement environment on the reconstruction of feminist identity among women's liberationists, detailing their struggle and ultimate failure to preserve a collective identity that included leftist men. In her account, this led to a collective identity that emphasized gender similarity over political similarity. In "I am the Man and Woman in this House," Kevin Neuhouser shows how female Brazilian favela activists are constrained by a fairly rigid Brazilian gender ideology to use "motherhood" as their public activist identity. The hard identity work comes from having to navigate a rigid cultural landscape, more than having to balance identity foci and audiences simultaneously.

Other chapters in the volume offer additional insights. Two chapters focus on theorizing the identity work of movement allies, with Susan Munkres' study showing the limits of "deep identification" between Salvadorian activists and American allies, and Dan Myers laying out a research agenda on ally identity drawn from a review of literature on allies in the gay rights movement. Mary Bernstein's concluding essay neatly extends her own theoretical framework ("Celebration and Suppression: The Strategic Uses of Identity by the Lesbian and Gay Movement, 1997") using the book's case studies. In sum, the volume outlines a potentially fruitful new theory of the role of identity work in social movements. However, the case studies presented do not always support the theoretical framework developed by the editors, and instead, highlight the complexities of developing and deploying identity in social movement contexts.

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