

Questions for week 3, Gaventa, *Power and Powerlessness*

Consider the following questions for discussion and for potential paper topics.

1. Gaventa takes up some of the challenges of studying non-issues, as Bachrach and Baratz suggested. Discuss his treatment of non-issues. How does he seem to select the non-issues for consideration? Are they important? Does this analysis lie at the heart of his book, or is it a small part of it? Is his consideration of non-issues convincing?
2. In order to understand collective action, or rebellion, why is it a good research strategy to study its absence, or quiescence? Is it the best strategy? What would be an improvement?
3. In his first chapter, Gaventa discusses the literature on power, and in particular the “three dimensions” of power. What are the implications for the study of power of these dimensions? If there were only one dimension (the first), would it be possible to study power more accurately? What are the most important research problems posed by these definitions?
4. The second dimension of power has to do with structuring (and limiting) opportunities for participation. The third dimension of power concerns the development of an ideology supportive of the system. What evidence does the author bring to bear on each of these two dimensions? What parts of his explanation are the most convincing, or based on the most complete evidence?
5. Think about Gaventa’s choice of topics for each of his chapters. Are each of these chapters necessary? Could any of them have been dropped without losing an important part of the support for the conclusions? Is the existing set of chapters complete, or sufficient to support the conclusion as best any single book could support it? In sum, question the author on his choice of what elements of the theory to test and what elements to ignore.
6. Discuss the question of generalizability. Why did Gaventa choose this case as a vehicle for discussing his theory about quiescence? Would another case have been more convincing? Is there reason to believe that his findings are widely generalizable, or no?
7. Consider a topic such as racial hierarchy, male privilege, sexual assault, or any other topic you might choose where no one would explicitly argue in favor of the situation or phenomenon. How does Gaventa help understand how such “indefensible” structures remain in place?