

## SPECIAL SECTION: Social Movements

### *An Insider's Critique of the Social Movement Framing Perspective\**

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Robert D. Benford, *University of Nebraska—Lincoln*

In the last decade the framing perspective has gained increasing popularity among social movement researchers and theorists. Surprisingly, there has been no critical assessment of this growing body of literature. Though the perspective has made significant contributions to the movements literature, it suffers from several shortcomings. These include neglect of systematic empirical studies, descriptive bias, static tendencies, reification, reductionism, elite bias, and monolithic tendencies. In addition to a critique of extant movement framing literature, I offer several remedies and illustrate them with recent work. The articles by Francesca Polletta, John H. Evans, Sharon Erickson Nepstad, and Ira Silver in this special section address several of the concerns raised in this critique and, in so doing, contribute to the integration of structural and cultural approaches to social movements.

#### Introduction

It has become fashionable in the past few years to include interpretive and ideational issues in social movement theory and research. It was not always that way. For nearly two decades prior to the mid-1980s, movement scholars working in the interpretive or constructionist vein found it difficult to get their work published in mainstream outlets. Meanwhile, structuralist and other materialist concerns enjoyed unprecedented popularity in the movements field. Scholars operating within the resource mobilization and rational choice perspectives ruled hegemonically. However, in the 1980s a spate of reviews critical of structural determinism and crass utilitarianism began to appear, thereby providing an opening in the field's opportunity structure for those interested in movement reality construction and communication processes (Cohen 1985; Ferree and Miller 1985; Gamson, Fireman, and Rytina 1982; Killian 1980; Klandermans 1984; Turner 1981; Zurcher and Snow 1981).<sup>1</sup> By the beginning of the 1990s, "ideational factors and the processes of interpretation and symbolization" were "attracting

increasing interest and being discussed under the rubric of 'social constructionism' " (Snow and Oliver 1995, p. 586).

One of the most popular approaches to have emerged in this new wave of interest in movement ideational and interpretive issues was the framing perspective. From this perspective meaning is pivotal. It is particularly fundamental to the issues of grievance construction and interpretation, attributions of blame/causality, movement participation, the mobilization of popular support for a movement cause, resource acquisition, strategic interaction, and the selection of movement tactics and targets.

Whatever else social movement actors do, they seek to affect interpretations of reality among various audiences. They engage in this framing work because they assume, rightly or wrongly, that meaning is prefatory to action. Symbolic interactionists have long operated under similar assumptions. As Blumer (1969, p. 2) asserted, "human beings act toward things on the basis of the meaning things have for them." Meanings are derived (and transformed) via social interaction and are subject to differential interpretations. Hence meaning is problematic; it does not spring from the object of attention into the actor's head, because objects have no intrinsic meaning. Rather meaning is negotiated, contested, modified, articulated, and rearticulated. In short, meaning is socially constructed, deconstructed, and reconstructed.

Taking these as their orienting assumptions and drawing on Goffman's *Frame Analysis* (1974), numerous scholars examined movement reality construction and rhetorical processes utilizing the framing perspective. Scores of articles, chapters, and books employed the approach in the study of social movements. More than a decade has passed since the first systematic studies of movements were published in this genre. Surprisingly, no critical review of this approach has been published to date. Yet it is clear from a variety of recent comments that not all movement scholars view this literature entirely positively (Gamson 1992a; Jasper 1997; Koopmans and Dyvendak 1995; Kriesi, Koopmans, Dyvendak, and Giugni 1995; Swart 1995; Tarrow 1994a).

With these considerations in mind, I seek to remedy this omission by offering an insider's critique of the movement framing literature and a few ameliorative suggestions. It is my hope that a critical appraisal of this area will serve to stimulate further conceptual and empirical advances in the study of movement ideational and interpretive processes. In particular, this essay calls for the development of a sociology of framing processes.

### **A Friendly Critique and an Ambitious Agenda**

In general the framing perspective has made significant contributions to the social movements field.<sup>2</sup> It has infused new enthusiasm for the analysis of ideational, interpretive, constructivist, and cultural dimensions of collective action. It

has moved the field beyond the structural determinism of resource mobilization and political opportunity models and away from the dubious psychology of rational choice approaches. Whether its impact will continue, and to what extent, remains to be seen. The prospect that the framing approach will produce an enduring legacy could be enhanced by addressing several noteworthy shortcomings prevalent in the current literature. One or more of these weaknesses characterize most social movement analyses. But these foibles seem particularly acute in the case of the framing perspective.

### *Neglect of Systematic Empirical Studies*

The bulk of the social movement framing scholarship has focused on conceptual development or on the application of framing concepts to specific cases to the neglect of more systematic empirical studies. There are several possible explanations for this tendency. For one, it might be partially attributable to the relative recency of the development and acceptance of this perspective as a legitimate conceptual approach. Yet more than two decades have passed since Goffman's (1974) elaboration of the framing perspective. Moreover, considerable time has elapsed since Tuchman (1976) introduced framing to media studies, since Gitlin (1977) applied frame analysis to how media portray social movements (also see Gitlin 1980; Tuchman 1978), since Gamson et al. (1982) analyzed the ethnomethodology of constructing an "injustice frame," and since Snow, Rochford, Worden, and Benford (1986) stimulated contemporary movement framing studies with their article on frame alignment processes. It would seem that the time is ripe for systematic empirical studies of movement framing processes.

That is not to claim that there have been no empirical studies of movements based on framing concepts. Indeed, the earliest elaborations of framing concepts and processes were empirically grounded (e.g., Gamson et al. 1982; Snow and Benford 1988; Snow et al. 1986) as has been the case for recent conceptual elaborations (Benford 1993a; 1993b; Benford and Hunt 1994; Diani 1996; Gamson and Modigliani 1989; Gamson and Meyer 1996; Gerhards and Rucht 1992; Hunt, Benford, and Snow 1994; Meyer and Whittier 1994; Mooney and Hunt 1996; Ryan 1991; Snow and Benford 1992; Swart 1995; Williams 1995). By the 1990s framing concepts figured prominently in movement case studies (Babb 1996; Blanchard 1994; Capek 1993; Cohen and Wolsfeld 1993; Coy and Woehrlé 1996; Diani 1996; Ellingson 1995; Entman and Rojecki 1993; Erwin 1993; Griffin 1992; Haines 1996; Jenness 1995; Johnston 1991; Marullo, Pagnucco, and Smith 1996; McCarthy 1994; Mooney 1991; Stoecker 1995a; Zuo and Benford 1995).

While these studies contribute to the accumulation of knowledge in this field, we lack systematic empirical studies across cases, movements, and time. As John Evans (1995) so aptly inquired, "Why is there no Charles Tilly of frame analysis who compares cases?" One obvious reason for this lacuna is that, for a variety

of practical and substantive reasons, most movement analyses are based on case studies. While the case study approach has yielded scores of rich investigations of social movement dynamics, we have failed to demonstrate that one of our central theoretical constructs—collective action frames—affects mobilization.<sup>3</sup> We lack studies of negative cases, as when framings fail to stimulate collective action. Instead, movement framing studies often are plagued by circular claims in which unverifiable causal relationships are implied (Stoecker 1995b; Swart 1995). That is, we tend to work backward from successful mobilization to the framings activists proffered and then posit a casual linkage between the two.

These tendencies may also reflect epistemological and ontological domain assumptions underlying the framing perspective. Since the fundamental guiding questions have been how collective actors go about the business of socially determining “What is it that’s going on here?” (Goffman 1974, p. 8), and, by extension, how movement actors seek to sway others that their collective definitions of the situation are right and reasonable, ethnomethodological and phenomenological approaches have seemed appropriate. Perhaps if we returned to the thematic question that inspired Goffman’s *Frame Analysis*, William James’s (1950 [1869]) question “Under what circumstances do we think things are real?”, we might be in a better position to begin to formulate research questions that would allow us to pursue systematic studies of framing processes and their relative effects. From a constructionist standpoint, the question is not what’s going on here, but under what conditions do people believe in a particular version of reality? In multiple versions of reality? Historical comparative methods (Ragin 1987) could be employed to identify the relationships between conditions and framings, framings and collective beliefs, collective beliefs and movement outcomes, and the like.<sup>4</sup>

Perhaps the problem lies in the fact that frame analytic methods remain underdeveloped. Goffman certainly provided little guidance along these lines. Gamson (1975, p. 607) recognized this shortcoming upon his initial reading of *Frame Analysis*: “It has abundant implications for what it is that we should attend to, but the methodological implications are only suggested and not developed at this point.” He elaborated on the essence of the problem:

Can one use this framework to do systematic social research? Can we train graduate students to be Goffmans? . . . The question of whether we can train people to do frame analysis really boils down to how well the enterprise is codified. If it remains a sociological art form, then only certain talented individuals with inclinations in this direction will grasp the underlying principles intuitively and be able to perform.

The more appropriate test is whether one can teach a conscientious clod to do this kind of analysis. After all, the most ordinary graduate student can be taught how to collect survey data and analyze it. (p. 605)

Although most sociological research that is creative and illuminating is as much an art form as it is a science, it would indeed be helpful to delineate some basic

principles for doing frame analytic studies, particularly those involving the study of complex, multidimensional, and multilevel processes such as those associated with social movements.

Recently, Hank Johnston (1995) has begun developing such a methodology, albeit only for micro level analyses. In his essay, "A Methodology for Frame Analysis: From Discourse to Cognitive Schema," Johnston delineates how to do micro-frame analysis of social movement discourse systematically. Although Johnston's suggestion that "micro-discourse analysis" can be employed to test "macroscopic perspectives" may have merit, considerable work remains toward elaborating a methodology for conducting social movement frame analyses across and between micro-, meso-, and macro-levels.

Finally, the lack of systematic empirical studies of movement framing processes may be attributable to imprecise conceptual/theoretical development. Although movement theorists have sought to develop clear statements regarding the intended meaning of the terms, they may not have thoroughly succeeded in doing so. Take, for example, our *master frame* concept (Snow and Benford 1992). A review of the literature using this term reveals several distinctive ways in which the term has been empirically employed, some of which are quite different from our original intended meaning (e.g., compare Carroll and Ratner 1996; Gerhards and Rucht 1992; McAdam 1994; Meyer 1995; Mooney 1991; Mooney and Hunt 1996; Swart 1995; Tarrow 1994b).

The ambiguity of the framing concept stems in part from the fact that "frame" has two different implications as a metaphor.<sup>5</sup> On the one hand, it is used as a *grammar*—"a structure in which meaning is contained in and conveyed by the relationships among the elements" (Williams and Benford 1996, p. 3). On the other hand, frame metaphors are used in a contextual or *indexical* sense. Here "the frame acts as a boundary that keeps some elements in view and others out of view" (p. 3). Thus a frame conveys "what is or is not important by grouping certain symbolic elements together and keeping others out" (p. 3). Both the structural (frame as grammar) and indexical (frame as contextually generated content) uses of frames are found in Goffman as well as in the works of movement framing scholars. Williams and Benford (1996) suggest that clarifying the structure-versus-content distinction would serve to reduce ambiguities in part by alerting researchers to methodological implications (e.g., unit of analysis) of conceptualizing frames in one way or the other.

Even where there have been precision and clarity concerning specific framing concepts, there have been essentially no operational definitions developed that could be used by positivistically inclined researchers who wish to generate and test movement-related framing hypotheses. No doubt, the half-life of Mancur Olson's (1965) notions of the "free rider problem" has been augmented substantially by the fact that this problem could be modeled mathematically and "tested"

quantitatively with or without data (e.g., see Hecakathorn 1993; Kim and Bearman 1997; Macy 1990; 1991; Marwell and Oliver 1993; Marwell, Oliver, and Prah 1988; Oliver 1980; Oliver and Marwell 1988; Oliver, Marwell, and Teixeira 1985; Walsh and Warland 1983). Not that movement scholars should use as a model an approach that from the outset was not germane to the field of social movements (Tarrow 1994b). Rather the suggestion offered here is that some attention ought to be devoted to operationalization so that those who are so inclined can begin testing hypotheses derivable from the framing literature.

### *Descriptive Bias*

To date, the lion's share of the empirical work associated with movement framing has been descriptive. At times, it appears that a major thrust of the research agenda has been to identify the universe of specific frames. This has resulted in a rather long laundry list of types of frames. While there is justification for the identification of each of these types of frames, the overall impact has been a trivialization of the framing perspective. This tendency has also detracted from more interesting analyses of framing processes and dynamics.

While it is potentially illuminating to identify some generic collective action frames, especially those which have become or have the potential for being developed into master frames, the identification of scores of specific frames would seem to have diminishing utility for the study of social movements. Those in the generic category include injustice frames (Gamson et al. 1982), justice frames (Ryan 1991), oppositional frames (Blum-Kulka and Liebes 1993; Coy and Woehrlé 1996), hegemonic frames (Blum-Kulka and Liebes 1993), equal opportunity frames, and rights frames (Williams and Williams 1995). These would seem to serve the field well because they are clearly applicable across a variety of movements and cultural contexts.

The more specific frames may have less general utility, though. These include special interest frame (Ryan 1991), growth is good frame (Ryan 1991), East-West conflict frame (Ryan 1991), inclusion frame (Diani 1996), realignment frame (Diani 1996), revitalization frame (Diani 1996), anti-systemic frame (Diani 1996), ideology of imperialism master frame (Gerhards and Rucht 1992), hegemonic power ideology master frame (Gerhards and Rucht 1992), identity politics frame (Carroll and Ratner 1996), political economy frame (Carroll and Ratner 1996), liberal frame (Carroll and Ratner 1996), agrarian fundamentalism frame (Mooney 1991), free market frame (Mooney 1991), producer frame (Mooney 1991), civil rights master frame (McAdam 1994), student left master frame (McAdam 1994), gender-neutral frame (Williams and Williams 1995), environmental justice frame (Capek 1993), law and order frame (Blum-Kulka and Liebes 1993), state terror frame (Blum-Kulka and Liebes 1993), war frame (Blum-Kulka and Liebes 1993),

cold war frame (Meyer 1995), common security frame (Meyer 1995), managed rivalry frame (Meyer 1995), arms control frame (Marullo et al. 1996), anti-intervention frame (Marullo et al. 1996), interdependence frame (Marullo et al. 1996), multilateralism frame (Marullo et al. 1996), personalism frame (Marullo et al. 1996), nonviolence frame (Marullo et al. 1996), doomsday frame (Benford 1993b), killer drunk collective action frame (McCarthy 1994), drunk driving frame (McCarthy 1994), wild boys frame (McCarthy 1994), public health frame (McCarthy 1994), auto safety frame (McCarthy 1994), road design frame (McCarthy 1994), and a plethora of specific frames from Gamson's (1992b) *Talking Politics*—progress frame, energy independence frame, soft paths frame, no public accountability frame, not cost effective frame, runaway technology frame, devil's bargain frame, free enterprise frame, partnership frame, capital flight frame, foreign investment frame, remedial action frame, delicate balance frame, no preferential treatment frame, reverse discrimination frame, feuding neighbors frame, strategic interest frame, Arab intransigence frame, Israeli expansionism frame, and dual liberation frame.<sup>6</sup>

The point of presenting this extensive, albeit incomplete, list of movement frames is not to call into question the analytical utility of each for the specific study to which it was applied. Rather, the point is to bolster the claim that the bulk of empirical work has tended to accomplish more toward yielding a morphology of frames rather than producing a sociology of movement framing processes. The long list of specific movement frames serves as testimony to the extent to which the concept resonates among social movement researchers. But its popularity has ironically yielded more descriptive heat than it has shed analytical light. In short, the term "frame" has become a cliché in the study of social movements.

### *Static Tendencies*

Underlying the descriptive bias in the movement framing literature is the tendency to focus on frames as "things" rather than on the dynamic processes associated with their social construction, negotiation, contestation, and transformation. Movement scholars have been more inclined to attend to frames rather than to framing.

A *frame* refers to "an interpretive schemata that simplifies and condenses the 'world out there' by selectively punctuating and encoding objects, situations, events, experiences, and sequences of actions within one's present or past environment" (Snow and Benford 1992, p. 137). Frames thus enable an individual or group "to locate, perceive, identify, and label" events within their lifespaces and the world at large (Goffman 1974, p. 21). Before collective action is likely to occur, a critical mass of people must socially construct a sense of injustice (Benford and Hunt 1992; Capek 1993; Gamson et al. 1982; McAdam 1982; Moore

1978; Piven and Cloward 1977; Turner 1969; Turner and Killian 1987). The consequent *injustice frame* (Gamson et al. 1982) is the seedling for the development of a *collective action frame*. Snow and Benford (1992) define collective action frames as emergent action-oriented sets of beliefs that inspire meaning and legitimate social movement activities and campaigns. Collective action frames “underscore and embellish the seriousness and injustice of a particular social condition or redefine as unjust and immoral what was previously seen as unfortunate but perhaps tolerable” (Snow and Benford 1992, p. 137).

Collective action frames “not only perform this focusing and punctuating role; they also function simultaneously as modes of attribution and articulation” (Snow and Benford 1992, p. 137). *Framing* refers to this signifying work, that is to the processes associated with assigning meaning to or interpreting “relevant events and conditions in ways intended to mobilize potential adherents and constituents, to garner bystander support, and to demobilize antagonists” (Snow and Benford 1988, p. 198). Although attending to framing processes would seem to be an inherently sociological enterprise, the tendency has been to focus on the psychological topic of frames as cognitive frameworks.

To encourage movement scholarship that goes beyond such static tendencies and overcomes the descriptive bias mentioned in the previous section, I offer several analytic suggestions and point out some recent studies which exemplify a more dynamic approach. First, we need to expand the focus of attention, along the lines recently recommended by Klandermans (1992) and Tarrow (1992), to include various analytic levels and to bring into focus the multi-organizational field in which collective action occurs (cf. Curtis and Zurcher 1973). Zuo and Benford (1995) heeded this call in a recent analysis and linkage of macro-, meso-, and micro-mobilization processes associated with the 1989 Chinese democracy movement. This approach seeks to integrate macrostructural, organizational, cultural, and phenomenological factors that contributed to the rapid spread of the democracy movement from a few hundred students to millions of citizens in the face of enormous resource deficits and brutally oppressive social control efforts. John Evans was also inspired by Klandermans’ call. His work, which appears in this issue, examines the impact of multi-organizational fields on the social construction of the religious pro-choice movement’s collective action frames.

A second recommendation is to expand movement framing studies beyond nation-state borders. A recent resurgence in interest in diffusion processes suggests that this level of analysis holds considerable promise for social movement analysts (McAdam and Rucht 1993; Oberschall 1995; Snow and Benford 1995). This emerging literature raises several challenging research questions. Under what conditions are collective action frames likely to transcend cultural and geopolitical barriers? How do diffusion processes vary from one movement context to the next? What are some of the mechanisms by which frame diffusion might occur?

Sharon Erickson Nepstad's paper in this issue begins to address these and related questions. Nepstad examines how religion provided a common cultural link for frame alignment and hence cross-national diffusion processes to occur in the U.S.-Central American peace movement.

A third suggestion is to expand the temporal focus of movement framing studies. The bulk of framing studies are either synchronic or encompass a relatively brief slice of time. We need studies which examine continuities and changes in framing strategies, their forms, and the content of frames over the life of a movement, throughout a cycle of protest, or across an historical epoch. Four recently published papers have made significant strides along these lines. Marullo et al. (1996) analyze framing processes and their relationship to ongoing movement and extramovement environmental change in the U.S. peace movement. They found, for example, that as the cold war ended, peace movement frames shifted from bilateral frames such as arms control to frames emphasizing multilateralism and global interdependence. Mooney and Hunt (1996) studied continuities and changes in framing strategies and frame resonance across several waves of U.S. agrarian mobilization. They conclude that "movements are shaped by a repertoire of interpretations in which the alignment of master frames varies with changing socioeconomic and political contexts" (1996, p. 188). Ellingson (1995) traces the dialectical relationship between collective action events and the production of discourses in antebellum Cincinnati preceding and following riots over abolitionism. Ellingson's study reveals how activists transformed their framings in light of episodes of collective action and how collective action in turn was affected by the new discourses. Finally, in the aforementioned paper on the religious pro-choice movement, Evans (this issue) traces continuities and changes in framings across time as a reaction to various social actors and political contingencies in the movement's multi-organizational milieu.

A final recommendation is to study more carefully negotiation and conflict processes endemic to the development of collective action frames. As Goffman (1974) observed, framing processes are fraught with hazards. Perhaps nowhere is this more true than in the realm of social movements. *Frame disputes* are a ubiquitous feature of the internal and external politics of movements (Benford 1993a). Internally, disputes erupt between and within social movement organizations. Some disputes pertain to what is "real," what movement actors perceive actually happened. Many other frame disputes erupt over how to represent or articulate a particular version of reality (i.e., how to frame) to potential supporters, bystanders, media, and targets of change (Benford 1993a; Haines 1996). Externally, frame disputes erupt between social movement protagonists and their antagonists (Hunt et al. 1994). For instance, in *Prime Time Activism*, Ryan (1991) analyzes "frame contests" waged in the wider political arena between movement activists and their opponents, calling particular attention to the media's role. Similarly, in a study

of social movement *counterframing* and *reframing* processes, Benford and Hunt (1994) analyze attempts by opponents of the U.S. peace movement to discredit, undermine, rebut, and otherwise neutralize the movement's claims, myths, collective identity, and interpretive frameworks and, in response, how peace activists sought to repair and sustain their claims, ideologies, and identities.

Taken together, these studies represent a significant step in the direction of specifying the dynamics of social movement framing processes including various socio-temporal, structural, and cultural factors that influence the construction, negotiation, articulation, modification, and acceptance or rejection of movement claims across time. While these recent trends certainly prompt optimism regarding the prospects of overcoming static tendencies in the movement framing literature, considerable work remains to be done on movement framing dynamics.

### *The Reification Problem*

A fourth general shortcoming in the movement framing literature, indeed in much of the movement literature, concerns the issue of reification. By reification, I refer to the process of talking about socially constructed ideas as though they are *real*, as though they exist independent of the collective interpretations and constructions of the actors involved. We speak of social movements, collective identities, ideologies, and frames as "things."

This reification leads to several additional theoretical and empirical problems. First, there is the *tendency to anthropomorphize* these reified notions. Movement scholars often write about social movements as "speaking," "framing," "interpreting," "acting," and the like, that is, engaging in activities that only human beings are capable of doing. Social movements do not frame issues; their activists or other participants do the framing.

This leads to a second problematic of reification discernible in many discussions of movement framing, the *neglect of human agency*. It is ironic that in many new social movement and social constructionist analyses, human action and interaction are stripped from the text. We should keep in mind that these things we call "social movements" and their organizational manifestations are comprised of interacting, co-acting, and reacting human beings (Benford 1993b; Buechler 1993; Hunt 1992). Social movements do not engage in protest, violence, frame contests, and the like; human beings do these things (cf. Becker 1986).

The neglect of human agency leads in turn to a third problem of reification, the *neglect of emotions*. The role that affective factors play in movement participation and mobilization, though once central to social movement analyses (Smelser 1962; Turner and Killian 1972), has been largely ignored for over two decades.<sup>7</sup> Resource mobilization scholars, in their haste to recast movement actors as highly rationalistic and thus to overthrow what they erroneously referred to as the "collective behavior tradition" (Snow and Oliver 1995), unwittingly neglected

a vital social movement resource—emotions. Consequently they ignored the possibility of examining the ways in which movement actors produce, orchestrate, and strategically deploy emotions in pursuit of their collective goals. The inordinate amount of attention devoted to organizations, selective incentives, and rational calculations at the expense of affective dimensions of movement participation has yielded an overly cognitive conception of movement actors.

Unfortunately, those operating within the framing/constructionist perspective have not fared much better than their structuralist predecessors in elaborating the role of emotions in collective action. Instead, we continue to write as though our movement actors (when we actually acknowledge humans in our texts) are Spock-like beings, devoid of passion and other human emotions. This might be one area in which common sense makes the most sense, for any lay observer or movement participant would testify to the importance of emotions in collective action. Skeptics are encouraged to spend some time observing outside a family planning center, a penitentiary preceding a state execution, a state capitol building, or the White House.

The neglect of emotions by movement scholars employing framing perspectives can be attributed in part to an omission by Snow et al. (1986) in our frame alignment paper. As Schmitt (1986) astutely pointed out in an unpublished comment on the paper, we ignored the role of emotions. This was a particularly surprising omission in light of Zurcher and Snow's admonishment of resource mobilization scholars' "neglect [of] the importance of strong passions in relation to the ebb and flow of movement organizations" (1981, p. 477).<sup>8</sup> Schmitt (1986, p. 3) correctly observes that our own data, "clearly reveal that self-feelings were critical in the conversion process." He goes on to point out that "happiness, hate, intensely felt grievances, joy, friendliness, deep concern, suffering, hope, pessimism, and sentiment pools were also prominently mentioned" (Schmitt 1986, p. 3). Schmitt concludes:

Snow et al. (1986) might, themselves, wish to reevaluate the place of emotions in frame bridging, frame amplification, and frame extension. They generate, for instance, the concepts of value amplification and belief amplification (Snow et al. 1986, pp. 469–472), but do not consider the possibility of *emotion amplification*. There is, however, a natural attitude of emotionality (Denzin 1984b), and intentional value-feelings (Denzin 1984a, pp. 120–126), framing rules (Hochschild 1979), and feeling rules (Hochschild 1979) that promote this naturalness throughout societies and, I believe, formal organizations. (1986, p. 4)

I concur. Schmitt's comments inspired me to include a section in my dissertation on "affective amplification" (Benford 1987, pp. 127–130) and Scott Hunt and me to take up the issue of the "scripting of emotion" in a subsequent paper (Benford and Hunt 1992, pp. 41–42; cf. Zurcher 1982; 1985). Yet ours were but cursory treatments of an issue that merits extensive theorizing and research. The

role of emotions in social movements and in collective action framing processes remains a relatively unexplored but potentially fertile topic.

### ***Reductionism***

At the other end of the continuum from reification is the tendency of some scholars to lapse into reductionism. Here I refer to the proclivity to reduce collective action and interaction to individual level explanations, to psychologize what is sociological. Frames are often depicted in purely cognitive terms. However, we must keep in mind that frames are modes of interpretation that are socially/culturally constructed. A "feminist" frame, for instance, is not a cognitive schema with which a person is born. Rather it is a way of defining, reframing, interpreting reality that is collectively fashioned and passed on. Thus scholars walk a tightrope between reification and reductionism. This tightrope can be negotiated by focusing on human interaction, discourse, and the social construction of reality.

William Gamson's and his colleagues' work best exemplifies this approach. In *Encounters with an Unjust Authority* Gamson et al. (1982) employed a technique they referred to as "experimental hoaxing" to study micromobilization processes in contexts prefatory to potential collective action. They analyzed 33 "encounters in which the authorities begin with a presumption of legitimacy that is called into question" by the subjects (p. 28). Their study sheds considerable light on the conditions under which and how people socially construct "injustice frames." More recently, Gamson and Modigliani (1989) examined the social construction of media packages and frames associated with nuclear energy controversies. Finally, in *Talking Politics* Gamson (1992b) conducted 37 peer group conversations (focus groups) with 188 participants to illuminate how working class people go about the business of socially constructing interpretive frames regarding controversial public issues.

Several of us have begun to focus more explicitly on movement talk and narratives as they relate to the social construction of meanings, collective identities, and injustice frames. For example, I analyzed the social construction and nurturance of vocabularies of motive and motivational frames in a study of the nuclear disarmament movement (Benford 1993b). Peace movement groups cultivated the imputation and avowal of various "motives" toward building commitment, stimulating collective action, and sustaining participation. In a paper published in this special section, Ira Silver reports how actors in a social change foundation simultaneously articulate instrumental and expressive vocabularies of motive. Silver's research advances understanding of the relationship between participants' claims regarding who they are and who they are not, or *boundary framing*, and the social construction of collective identities in social movement contexts. In a related vein, Scott Hunt and I examined identity talk within the U.S.

peace movement over a ten-year period (Hunt and Benford 1994). We found that identity discourse helps to concretize activists' perceptions of social movement dramas, demonstrate personal identity, reconstruct biographies, impute group identities, and align personal and collective identities in movement groups. Zuo and I extended this analytical agenda in our analysis of how the 1989 Chinese democracy movement spread so rapidly (Zuo and Benford 1995). Student activists' frame alignment strategies and nonviolent direct action tactics tended to resonate with ordinary citizens' observations and experiences. Moreover, according to movement participants, the fact that students grounded their framings in traditional Chinese cultural narratives of Confucianism, nationalism, and communism contributed to "frame resonance" as well as making it difficult for state authorities to discredit the students' "motives."

While these studies appear to have navigated between reductionism and reification, much work remains to be done in this area. Questions remain regarding the factors that affect the "mobilizing potency of moving framing efforts," why "some proffered framings affect mobilization, while others do not," and the relationship between collective action frames and collective action (Snow and Oliver 1995, p. 587).

### *Elite Bias*

A sixth shortcoming prevalent in much of the movement framing literature is the tendency to focus on the framings of movement elites to the neglect of rank-and-file participants, potential recruits, bystanders, and others. From the frame alignment article by Snow et al. forward, much of the literature is written as though participant mobilization were simply a matter of movement activists pushing the appropriate rhetorical button. While it is true that several writers acknowledge "framing hazards" and contingencies (Benford 1993b; Erwin 1993; Griffin 1992; Snow and Benford 1988; Snow et al. 1986; Swart 1995), these are presented primarily as problems movement elites can overcome provided they devise a "potent" or "resonant" framing strategy.

This bias is in part a reflection of the ways in which researchers typically study social movements. We tend to study movements either by interviewing people identified as key activists, via media accounts (most frequently newspaper stories), or by analyzing movement-generated or related documents. In all three cases, we obtain data that tend to reflect the views of movement leaders and extramovement elites. In short, our analyses of framing processes often have a built-in, top-down bias.

In order to develop a more comprehensive understanding of various frame construction, frame alignment, and frame resonance processes discussed above, we need to design more studies which include the interactions, understandings, talk, and the like of non-elites as well as of elites. As Snow and Benford (1988,

p. 204) pointed out, "the relationship between the framing efforts of movements and the mobilization of potential constituents is highly dialectical, such that there is no such thing as a *tabula rasa* or empty glass into which new and alien ideas can be poured." One obvious implication, therefore, is to focus on the interplay between elite and non-elite framings of contentious events or issues. Another is to gather data on the construction of folk ideologies along the lines illustrated by Gamson's (1992b) conversation groups but in more naturalistic contexts. A third implication is to examine relatively autonomous, grass-roots movements as they first begin to organize and mobilize around an issue.

### *Monolithic Tendencies*

The foregoing six sets of shortcomings in the social movement framing literature suggest an overarching problem with this body of work. There is a general tendency to oversimplify, to treat movement frames or framing processes as monolithic. Much of this literature neglects the multilayered complexities of frames and framing activities. Scholars have yet to analyze the multiple laminations and frame transformations identified by Goffman (1974) that are part and parcel of political culture and the social movement arena.

A related shortcoming prevalent in the movement literature is the tendency to treat frames in a singular fashion as though there is a *single* reality. Yet movement actors bring a repertoire of socially constructed frames to any particular movement encounter. Each participant can apply one or more of these frameworks to a specific situation.<sup>9</sup> Movement participants actively engage in reality negotiating and testing processes in the course of their day-to-day involvement in the movement. Each brings her/his own biographical and experiential background to the movement encounter which she/he seeks to fit with the movement group's already constructed versions of reality. In other words frame alignment and construction processes are *interactive* processes. They may involve ongoing modifications to extant movement frames. We know little about these complex processes. Nonetheless, it is clear that reality construction entails emergent, dialectical processes that are fraught with conflict, hazards, and fragility.

While contemporary approaches to analyzing movement frame construction and framing processes are overly simplistic from interactionist, ethnomethodological, and phenomenological standpoints, they also fall short sociologically. In our enthusiasm to dislodge the movements field from the structural determinists, interpretive scholars have tended to repeat the errors of their structuralist predecessors by throwing out the metaphorical baby with the bathwater. Some would have us reject the numerous contributions of resource mobilization scholars. This tendency was particularly prominent at the 1992 "Culture and Social Movements Conference" held at the University of California-San Diego at which some eminent movement scholars pronounced structuralist approaches "dead." Such pro-

nouncements appear unwarranted and fail to contribute to a more thoroughgoing understanding of social movements (Lofland 1993). As Francesca Polletta cogently argues in this issue, the retention of various dichotomous conceptions, such as culture versus structure, have tended to constrain theoretical and empirical development in the study of social movements. What would be helpful instead would be scholarship which seeks to develop more comprehensive theories and research designs that integrate social structure and culture, human agency and structure, affect and organization (e.g., see Giddens 1976; 1984; Jasper 1997; Sewell 1992). As I have argued elsewhere, the "time has come to consider the possibility that structural and interpretive approaches may be complementary rather than contradictory" (Benford 1993b, p. 209; cf. Musolf 1992).

While some might believe that there are insurmountable epistemological and ontological obstacles to fashioning a general theoretical synthesis, a few recent developments in the field suggest that such a project holds promise. Sidney Tarrow's work (1992; 1994b) is exemplary of the attempts to integrate culturist and structuralist approaches in the study of social movements. Along similar lines, Mario Diani's (1996) study of Italian regional populism offers theoretical and empirical insights into the linkage between mobilization frames and political opportunity structures. Likewise, Koopmans and Dyvendak's (1995) analysis of antinuclear movements in Western Europe suggests that political opportunities facilitate and constrain the construction and impact of activist discourse. Gamson and Meyer (1994) outline how structural relations affect the interpretations of collective actors and how interpretive work involving the framing of political opportunities can facilitate overcoming structural impediments. In other words, political opportunity structures should not be treated simply as objective facts, but rather as objectivated realities that are subject to transformation.

### **Conclusion**

My purpose in this essay has been to identify and elaborate a number of problems that characterize the social movement framing literature, suggest a few potential remedies, and illustrate several fruitful approaches currently being pursued by movement scholars. Movement framing studies have suffered from the neglect of systematic empirical studies, a descriptive bias, static tendencies, reification (and related problems such as a tendency to anthropomorphize reified constructs, the neglect of human agency, and the neglect of emotions), reductionism, an elite bias, and monolithic tendencies. To stimulate scholarship that seeks to overcome some of these shortcomings, I offered several suggestions: systematic framing studies across time, movements, and cultures; the development of methodologies for doing movement frame analyses; conceptual clarification and more precise operationalizations; additional work that moves beyond naming frames to studying framing processes analytically; analyses that take into account the multi-

organizational fields of social movements; studies of the cross-national diffusion of movement frames and framing strategies; greater attention devoted to the negotiated, contested dimensions of movement framing processes; the restoration of actors, emotions, and talk in social movement research and theory; studies that focus on non-elites as well as elites; and additional theoretical and empirical work on integrating structural and cultural perspectives on social movements. This is indeed an ambitious agenda but one that is already well underway as the scholarship of the contributors to this special issue confirms. The papers in this volume by Francesca Polletta, John H. Evans, Sharon Erickson Nepstad, and Ira Silver represent diverse and creative attempts to overcome several of the shortcomings identified in the foregoing critique. Together, their work advances our understanding of the links between social movement culture and structure.

#### ENDNOTES

\*I am grateful to Steve Buechler, John Evans, Herb Haines, Michelle Hughes Miller, Raymond Schmitt, Randy Stoecker, and Rhys Williams for their insightful comments and suggestions. An earlier version of this paper was presented at the 1995 annual meeting of the Midwest Sociological Society. I would also like to express my sincere thanks to the many anonymous reviewers who conscientiously read and commented upon papers considered for inclusion in this special section. I thank *Sociological Inquiry* editors Joane Nagel and Bill Staples and managing editor Kevin Gotham for their vision and assistance. Finally, I am indebted to Brett Walter for his editorial assistance.

<sup>1</sup>For more recent reviews and critiques of the resource mobilization and rational choice perspectives as applied to social movements, see Benford (1993b), Buechler (1993), Ferree (1992), Jasper (1997), McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald (1988), Piven and Cloward (1991), Schwartz and Paul (1992), Snow and Oliver (1995), and Turner and Killian (1987).

<sup>2</sup>I will not attempt to summarize those contributions here because that is not my purpose in this paper. For an uncritical summary of the framing perspective, see Snow and Oliver (1995). For various discussions regarding the perspective's contributions and utility, see Jasper (1997), Larana, Johnston, and Gusfield (1994), and Morris and Mueller (1992).

<sup>3</sup>I am grateful to John Evans for raising this point.

<sup>4</sup>For helpful guidelines and models for undertaking comparative social movement analyses, see Klandermans (1993) and Lofland (1996).

<sup>5</sup>I am indebted to Rhys Williams for his insightful observations regarding the distinctive ways in which "frames" have been employed in the literature and the implications that follow.

<sup>6</sup>A case could be made that a few of the frames are generic rather than specific (e.g., environmental justice, antisystemic, law and order, gender-neutral). I classified these as specific, however, because of the specific way in which they were used in the studies.

<sup>7</sup>For recent exceptions, see Goodwin (1997) and Jasper (1997).

<sup>8</sup>In a more recent review Snow and Oliver (1995, p. 589) conclude that the "affective dimension of collective behavior and social movements is the least theorized and researched of all the social psychological dimensions." They point out that this lacuna is due in part to the "long-standing tradition in Western philosophy of treating reason and emotion as opposites" (1995, p. 589). They quote Turner and Killian (1987, p. 13) who argued that "Emotion and reason are not today regarded

as irreconcilables. Emotion may accompany the execution of a well-reasoned plan, and the execution of an inadequately reasoned plan may be accompanied by no arousal of emotions." But Snow and Oliver, like Zurcher and Snow (1981) before them, wind up attributing the neglect of emotions by contemporary social movement scholars to "the ascendance of the resource mobilization and rational decision perspectives" (Snow and Oliver 1995, p. 589) while failing to mention that social constructionists (including movement framing scholars) have been equally remiss in neglecting the role of emotions in social movements.

<sup>9</sup>Goffman (1974, pp. 25, 302–308, 321–338) recognized the possibility of several frameworks being applied to an event or occurrence.

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