

Another World IS Possible: Scholars and Activists Discuss Paths to Social Change

Executive Summary

CBSM capped a well-attended (220+) conference at Hofstra University with an ASA session that drew activist-oriented scholars in research and teaching universities, community-engaged and activist scholars and their activist collaborators. Graduate students, untenured, and tenured faculty participated. After presentations by engaged scholars Rob Kleidman and D. Mark Wilson and the activist-scholar team, Nadia Marin Molina and Greg Maney (Molina presenting), the session explored 3 related questions:

- 1) How can engaged scholarship enrich social movement theorizing?
- 2) How do universities present institutional barriers to engaged scholarship?
- 3) How can CBSM section work strategically to expand safe spaces for engaged scholarship?

Summaries can assume a more definitive tone than the conversations from which they emerge. We want to stress that we warmly welcome additions to and criticisms of this report.

Recurring themes: Strategic reflection begins at home

- **Engaged scholarship has many forms.** Some engaged scholars partner with community groups to analyze and solve specific problems. Some engage movement activists in critical conversations about their work. Some address broader publics through books, articles, mass media, etc. Some link the above projects to debates within the discipline. These projects are not exclusive but synergistic.
- **Social location matters.** Some institutions support engaged scholarship, many do not. Power inequalities between universities and within professional associations couple with pervasive social inequalities (race/class/gender/sexuality...) to create divisions among us. Research university-based scholars may have little contact with engaged scholars in teaching universities who work routinely with community organizing groups that catalyze classic contentious politics.
- **Establish safe spaces and prefigurative relationships supporting engaged scholarship.** t. Effective challenges must be strategic and collective—recognizing barriers to engaged scholarship and respecting members' circumstances and strengths. Specific measures include support for engaged scholarship at our conferences and journals. It is important to move engaged scholarship from the margins into the mainstream of social movement studies. Without personalizing criticism, CBSM members can challenge and support each other to strengthen engaged social movement scholarship. .
- **Research that matters:** When and how does theorizing and methods development support engaged scholarship and when does it hinder it? Can we ask, "To what end and for whom do we theorize?"

Future Directions: Participants encouraged the section to continue dialog to:

- Create conference sessions and journal guidelines that support engaged scholarship.
- Include engaged scholarship in undergraduate and graduate student experiences.
- Help graduate students identify jobs and institutions that permit or support engaged scholarship.
- Help scholars learn to document engaged work as peer-reviewed scholarship
- Given the importance of outside reviewers in the tenure and promotion process, increase understanding and appreciation for engaged scholarship among established scholars,
- Identify under-theorized areas for further exploration,
- Explore promising arenas for engaged scholarship (several speakers noted that social movements may emerge from non-contentious community networks and civic engagements),
- Map barriers to engaged scholarship including the political economy of the corporate university and the professionalized culture of social movement scholarship.
- Nurture opportunities to dialog across barriers and cultural constraints.

Participants thanked Rhys Williams and CBSM section leaders for creating an environment encouraging critical reflection; and thanked Greg Maney and conference organizers for their brilliant work on the Hofstra conference.

Notes and Recommendations from Presentations and Breakout Groups 8-14-07

Participants: Beth Caniglia, Eva Crawford, Randy Haluza-DeLay, Wendy Harrod, Stacy Keogh, Rob Kleidman, Heather Laube, Greg Maney, Philip McCarty, Debra Minkoff, Nadia Marin Molina, Ron Mize, Char Ryan, Rhys Williams, D. Mark Wilson

Caveat: These notes are not unified criticisms or proposals. We share them to capture important and vibrant conversations catalyzed by the Hofstra Conference and CBSM's follow-up session. Session called for ongoing self-reflection and dialog re how to build SM theorizing.

Discussion questions

1. *The Relation between Social Movement Theorizing and Engaged Scholarship: Is mainstream SM theorizing compatible with engaged scholarship? In what ways?*
 - Do aspects of mainstream SM theory challenge our ability to do engaged scholarship?
 - Can existing theory guide activists in such areas as strategy? (Several participants reiterated call for SM theory to have predictive value). Concepts of strategy should inform strategizing.
 - For SM theory to better inform social movement activism must we primarily address its accessibility (popularization)? Some raised further questions re SM theory's utility if it produces universal, ahistorical models. Issue is not just access but conceptualization.
 - How and by whom are research priorities set?
 - Why is "praxis" praised in theory but discouraged in practice?
 - Question was raised re consequences of defining public sociology very broadly as all sociology intended for non-academic audiences. Concern raised was that defining public sociology so broadly may not benefit scholars who actually work in partnership with CBOs.
 - This was among many unresolved tensions. Engaged scholarship is more usefully seen as a social coalition in which differentially located actors play different roles. However, this should not obscure fact that some coalition members take higher risks than others, and merit support.

2. *Barriers to Engaged Scholarship – Faculty Roles and Rewards*

Can SM scholars receive professional recognition for their engaged scholarship? This was the workshop's main focus of discussion. Participants included graduate students concerned re marketability and faculty concerned re tenure and promotion.

 - Tenure requirements/Professional advancement:
 - Expected levels of publications take away from time available for CB research
 - Scholarship that is useful to activists often defined as service rather than research
 - Journals and presses most valued by colleagues tend to be hostile to engaged scholarship, both in terms of methods we tend to deploy (e.g., case studies) and our frequent emphasis upon policy implications of our research
 - Lack of prestige or even awareness of journals focused upon applied research

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- “Bad words” (per D. Mark Wilson’s presentation): penalizing scholars for using popular discourse or speaking to pressing contemporary social problems
- Lack of mentors who themselves are engaged scholars.
- Universities as institutions have vested interests in local and state business and economic structures thus often are wary of ‘community organizing.’ Thus, the political economy of the academy may pose institutional barriers to engaged scholarship.
- Challenges to academic freedom that penalize scholars for producing policy-relevant research. Lack of administrative support for (or active opposition to) engaged scholarship.
- Academic specialization/fragmentation; participants noted that social movement theory is also evolving in sections addressing race, community, labor, sexuality etc.

3. *Barriers to developing engaged scholarship through experiential learning/teaching*

- Community-university partnerships take more time. While Carnegie and others have documented the value of experiential learning, teaching courses that incorporate engaged scholarship takes more time. And yet these may inspire a new generation of engaged sociologists.
- Universities often support experiential learning in principle but under-fund the work. Faculty must exert ‘sweat equity’ allocating their personal resources to make class/student projects viable.

Recommendations

1. *Institutionalize support for **engaged scholarship** within universities, academic journals, the CBSM section and ASA as a whole.*

- Tenure/Professional Advancement
 - Follow *Social Forces* lead and encourage major journals to prioritize articles devoted to public sociology and engaged scholarship generally.
 - Call upon *Mobilization* and other social movements-oriented journals to have special issues and articles on a regular basis featuring engaged scholarship.
 - Cite engaged scholars in our own work
 - Create a list of existing journals that emphasize applied and engaged sociology. Cite articles in these journals
 - Engage in dialogue with colleagues about the value of engaged scholarship:
 - Praxis generates more rigorous theory and methods
 - Scholarship that speaks to social problems and offers alternative ways of thinking and being is not only more socially valuable, but is likely to enhance public support for our discipline.

Recommendations, cont.

- Generate institutional support by networking with administrators and faculty
 - Agree to do media work for university public relations. Once track record is established, encourage UPR to publicize one's own CB research
 - Establish relationships and trust with wide range of administrators and faculty through participating in university's shared governance process. Support those who share your vision for making the university a resource for the community.
- Mentoring:
 - Create a sub-area within the CBSM Section mentoring program for graduate students interested in engaged scholarship
 - Be role models for students by identifying intersections and maximizing synergies between teaching, service, and scholarship.
- Develop strategic alliances with other sections engaged in social movement theorizing including sections focused on labor, race and ethnic studies, intersectionality, etc.
- Encourage interdisciplinary work – blur the borders. Broaden the 'public sociology' movement and literature to include the substantial body of work on engagement, including material developed by the American Association of Higher Education and the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.
- Use our roles as peer reviewers, editors, etc. to encourage colleagues to flesh out the public and policy implications of their research. Encourage scholars to share their work with those whom they study, whenever possible, and to use this to create a dialogue that critically examines both activism and scholarship.
- Support scholarship on the increasingly corporate nature of the university, its impact on academic freedom generally, on SM scholarship and engaged SM scholarship.
- Tighten interplay between SM theorizing and engaged scholarship:
 - Engage in dialogue with colleagues about the value of engaged scholarship:
 - Praxis generates more rigorous theory and methods
 - Scholarship that speaks to social problems and offers alternative ways of thinking/being is valuable and enhances public support for discipline
 - Document how engaged scholarship can advance the discipline theoretically, methodologically and in terms of social relevance. This will inform
 - How SM theorists frame civic engagement
 - How we think about 'protests,' 'activists,' 'activism.'
 - How engaged scholars relate to public sociology. For instance, develop and disseminate messages that define public sociology more narrowly.
- Foster networking both among sociologists engaged in community-based research (CBR) and among sociologists engaged with social movement organizations. While encouraging attention within journals to engaged scholarship, avoid balkanization that may implicitly devalue the work (e.g., separate sections within journals for engaged scholarship).

Recommendations, cont.

- Networking and capacity building
 - Conduct research on what types of engaged scholarship faculty members are doing as a way not only to highlight this work, but also to identify institutional contexts where such work is supported
 - Create blogs as networking tools
 - Define public sociology more narrowly: Some ideas in this regard:
 - Encourages active and equal partnership with community organizations
 - Strengthens civil society by facilitating voice, transmitting knowledge, developing skills, identifying assets...
 - Encourages grassroots policy sociology – Even if it does not directly involve SM theory, create policy-centered partnerships with community partners, looking for ways to use/co-opt institutional and outside resources
 - Critiques, envisions, and informs institutional policies
 - NB: Discussions surfaced but did not resolve differences regarding how broadly to define public sociology. We flag this as needing additional discussion to clarify how differences affect engaged scholarship.
 - Within the CBSM section:
 - Integrate engaged scholarship into section sessions. Discourage marginalization.
 - Avoid scheduling sessions on engaged work opposite theory sessions.
 - Recognize that engaged SM scholarship crosses ASA section boundaries. Encourage collaboration with other sections/sessions.
2. *Support scholarly engagement with organizations rooted in communities marginalized by inequalities of power. These include labor, community and social movement formations.*
- Encourage ongoing working relationships with community-based organizations. These sustained relationships increase opportunities for deeper and more critical reflection.
 - Develop a website that helps to connect scholars and community groups interested in the same issues. Emphasize the importance of building long-term relationships. Stress to scholars the benefits of short-term research projects. Stress to activists the benefits of long-term research projects. Note how short-term projects can lead to long-term projects. Once projects are completed, brief summaries with simple language will be posted on the site.
 - Support community-university partnerships that deepen or ‘go beyond’ service learning:
 - Participants in CBSM conference and subsequent sessions call for critical reflection on community-university partnerships, particularly service learning.
 - Service learning may have limited payback for teaching students critical thinking: Service can be organized so as to obscure the structural foundation of the social problems that students address. Reflection is needed to draw lessons.
 - Universities’ service learning often meets meet their—not communities’—needs.
 - Who sets the agenda of community-university partnerships? Who assesses results?
 - Avoid ‘out-sourcing:’ responsibility for student orientation, training, oversight, supervision, etc. too often is shifted to community organization.
 - Problems targeted by service learning projects may at times obscure the role the university is actually playing in the community. This calls for critical reflection.

Recommendations, cont.

3. Ideas for supporting engaged SM scholarship in teaching settings

- Demonstrate to university administration the value to students of experiential learning, generally and in engaged SM courses.
- Urge administrations to provide resources for experiential learning including dedicated staff, space, library and web supports, etc.
- As a springboard to further activities, urge universities to dedicate a day of community service. Follow day with adequate reflection to draw out deeper lessons for students regarding the ways they impact communities and can be involved in communities.
- Stress how involving faculty, staff and students in community service builds the campus community and builds ties between university campus and broader community.
- Follow the lead of the MLA encouraging universities/departments to negotiate specific work plans that reflect a scholar's blended efforts —creative teaching as well as research and service.

4. Immediate Next steps:

Subject to CBSM leadership's considerations (timing, resources, etc.) we suggest the following possibilities for next steps within the CBSM section itself:

- Send it to CBSM leadership.
- Request feedback and suggestions for continuing the initiative.
- This could begin with posting the report on the CBSM web-site.

5. Additional possibilities. Besides posting report on CBSM web-site:

- Should we send it to the ASA Planning groups for 2008 and 2009 conventions?
- Should we ask ABS, SWS, SSSP and ASA to cross list Engaged Scholarship sessions for Boston Convention?
- Should we post it on various public sociology sites?
- Should we send it to key leaders of public sociology initiative?