

Review

Reviewed Work(s): *From Identity to Politics: The Lesbian and Gay Movements in the United States* by Craig A. Rimmerman

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Thus, the second part of Crossley's agenda: to rework Smelser's value-added model, originally published in 1962. Crossley contends that, while SM researchers since the 1970s have tended to dismiss Smelser and his contemporaries, the most useful insights of the past 30 years have essentially been rediscoveries of factors Smelser first emphasized.

The value-added model explains movement formation as the interaction (in any order) of six analytically distinct elements, and each of these finds its analog(s) in newer SM theories. Smelser's "structural conduciveness" is replaced by Tilly and Tarrow's political opportunities. "Mobilizing of participants for action" is developed into the ideas of resource mobilization and social networks. However much promise the proposal has, once again, its empirical utility is not fleshed out.

Whether one is skeptical of or won over by Crossley's broader agenda, the reader will benefit from his insights into the role of meaning and structure in social movements. I would highly recommend adding *Making Sense of Social Movements* to the syllabus for a graduate social movements course. And I would recommend that just about everyone else working in the social movements sub-field read it, as well.

From Identity to Politics: The Lesbian and Gay Movements in the United States, by **Craig A. Rimmerman**. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2002. 239 pages. \$19.95 paper. ISBN: 1-56639-905-X.

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Ambitious, rich in detail, well-written, and clearly organized, *From Identity to Politics* offers a comprehensive analysis of lesbian and gay social movement organizations over the past several decades. Based on eight years of interviews with activists, academics, and political figures, as well as work on Capitol Hill as a staffer for Senator Tom Daschle, Craig Rimmerman offers a unique, insightful, and provocative analysis.

From Identity to Politics captures the continuing debate within the lesbian and gay movements over political strategy. Should

movement organizations align themselves with other progressive social reform movements (i.e., the liberationist strategy), or with dominant, mainstream culture (i.e., the assimilationist strategy)? Alternatively, should lesbian organizations pursue a narrow legal rights strategy intent on altering the social order just enough to allow gay and lesbian inclusion, without wholesale reform? Rimmerman charts the debate. Along the way, he addresses a wide range of movement organizations including the Mattachine Society, the Lesbian Avengers, ACT-UP, the National Black Lesbian and Gay Leadership Forum, the National Lesbian and Gay Task Force, as well as the Human Rights Campaign and the Log Cabin Republicans. The detail impresses. Most significant, and of great interest to sociologists, the work compares and contrasts various social movement theories (e.g., resource mobilization, new social movements, and political process) as these theories apply to lesbian social movements.

Rimmerman carefully delineates the strengths and weaknesses of the various theoretical perspectives, as well as of the various movement strategies. Ultimately, he advocates alliance with other progressive social movements. In particular, he argues for the "coalition around-an-issue strategy" (pp. 170ff) endorsed by Urvashi Vaid in her 1995 *Virtual Equality*. Rimmerman hails the legislative success of this strategy pointing to the Americans with Disabilities Act, and the Hate Crimes Statistics Act, as well as the Ryan White AIDS Care Act as evidence of successful coalition building. I found the argument quite compelling. However, his balanced treatment of alternative strategies and perspectives reminded me of an old adage: Reasonable minds can disagree. In this sense, the book makes a great contribution to pedagogy.

Further, the work includes a persuasive analysis of the U.S. Christian right and the challenge it presents to the lesbian and gay movements (see Chapter 5). Rimmerman effectively demonstrates the influence of the Christian right on the U.S. political process, and documents the extensive resources available to the Christian right, including a vast radio and television network, as well as the organizational and volunteer resources of conservative local/regional/national religious groups.

He documents how the Christian right utilized these resources and set the terms of late-twentieth-century debate over sexual orientation, particularly the debates over same-sex marriage and the ban on military service. He also demonstrates the strategic agility of the Christian right, particularly its effective use of the "special rights" concept (pp. 141ff) to counter the nascent success of anti-gay discrimination laws adopted by cities, counties, and a few states during the 1990s. Sociologists with a penchant for resource mobilization theory will appreciate the treasure trove of evidence Rimmerman collects, evidence revealing the resources available to the Christian right and accounting for much of its success in Washington power politics.

While Rimmerman provides a thorough account of the Christian right, he completely ignores the Christian left, an omission I found curious. Notably, he mentions the Universal Fellowship of the Metropolitan Community Church, a predominantly gay and lesbian denomination, only once, and he does so in the context of criticizing the organization's role in planning the ill-fated Millennium March. Given the leadership role that UFMCC clergy play in many lesbian/gay communities, such an omission seems unfortunate. Moreover, Rimmerman fails to mention the activity of liberal Protestant and Jewish organizations (e.g., local congregations, regional bodies, and national organizations) favoring pro-gay and lesbian policies. Perhaps, he considers these aspects of the lesbian/gay movement superfluous, but they strike me as important to the evolving cultural debate over sexual orientation. For instance, over the past decade, 425 local congregations of the United Church of Christ (also referred to as "Congregational Churches"), a quintessentially American denomination that traces its history to New England Puritanism, voted to become "open to and affirming of" gay and lesbian people and their relationships. Similar movements exist in most of the mainline and old-line Protestant denominations. Thousands of local congregations have taken the step officially to vote in favor of lesbian/gay inclusion, and in favor of recognizing same-sex relationships, and this reality significantly alters the cultural and legal debate over sexual orientation. I do not consider it coincidental that the United Church of Christ is the largest Protestant denomination in Vermont,

the first state to adopt a civil union law for gay and lesbian couples. Given the assortment of lesbian/gay organizations Rimmerman includes in his analysis, ignoring the activity of pro-gay religious organizations seems like an unfortunate analytical oversight, and conceals the activities of a consequential grassroots movement for lesbian/gay rights.

Notwithstanding, Rimmerman offers a nuanced, theoretically balanced, and compelling analysis of the lesbian and gay movements in the United States. Given its insider political knowledge, and its attention to social movement theory, as well as its accessible and well-written prose, *From Identity to Politics* would enhance undergraduate sociology courses in social movements, social change, and social inequality, as well as sexuality. Graduate students could readily and quickly grasp its analysis, and would gain much from its Washington-insider perspective. I highly recommend *From Identity to Politics* to any reader committed to attaining political and social equality for lesbian and gay Americans.

Disability Protests: Contentious Politics, 1970 to 1999, by **Sharon Barnartt** and **Richard Scotch**. Washington, DC: Gallaudet University Press, 2001. 272 pp. \$69.95 cloth. ISBN: 1-56368-112-9.

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Despite the substantial volume of work on social movements, old and new, there is a relative dearth of rigorous analyses of collective action initiated by the disabled for the transformation of their social condition of existence. Indeed as Barnartt and Scotch point out, disability movements have so far not even merited entries in the major anthologies that discuss social movements, and with the exception of a few interesting journalistic accounts, the only exception is a single scholarly article that focuses on just one protest movement initiated by the disabled. As such, *Disability Protests* constitutes a welcome continuation of and departure from existing analyses of social movements and collective behavior. Deploying the methodology of event history analysis, the authors focus on