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Stephen C. Poulson^a, Cory P. Caswell^b & Latasha R. Gray^a

^a Department of Sociology and Anthropology, James Madison University, Harrisonburg, VA22807, USA

^b Department of Sociology, University of California-SanDiego, San Diego, CA92093, USA

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Isomorphism, Institutional Parochialism, and the Study of Social Movements

STEPHEN C. POULSON*, CORY P. CASWELL** & LATASHA R. GRAY*

*Department of Sociology and Anthropology, James Madison University, Harrisonburg, VA 22807, USA,

**Department of Sociology, University of California-San Diego, San Diego, CA 92093, USA

ABSTRACT *This study investigates whether the field of social movements is occupied by parochial concerns. Using a content analysis of two prominent journals that study social movements – Mobilization: An International Journal and Social Movement Studies: Journal of Social and Political Protest – it was found that the field is dominated by the study of Western movements, but is also relatively ‘worldly’ when compared to other academic sub-disciplines. Much work on the ‘global south’ is conducted by scholars who maintain personal associations and connections to regions of the world outside of the West. In addition, it was found that social movement scholars focus predominantly on the study of liberal movements as compared to conservative movements. The types of movements most commonly studied are also examined.*

KEY WORDS: Institutional parochialism, institutional isomorphism, social movements, academic fields

This study primarily investigates the degree to which scholars within the social movements’ subdiscipline of sociology are occupied by parochial concerns. Poulson and Campbell (2010, p. 33) characterized *institutional parochialism* as a form of *normative isomorphism* (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983) that compels academic communities to study their own societies. Basically, a parochial impulse at the individual level – the normative desire to study people who are similar culturally – can make scholarship in the social sciences West-centric. *Institutional parochialism* essentially joins institutional perspectives with findings in the field of social psychology, which have demonstrated that people have greater affinity with those they share common characteristics with (e.g. Sherif, 1966; Tajfel, 1982). Importantly, institutional parochialism was not characterized as a condition specific to Western academic communities, but a normative condition that exists throughout the world.

Previously, this perspective was used to investigate the academic content produced within the sociology of religion (Poulson & Campbell, 2010). In this case, it was found that the subdiscipline concentrated on the study of the Western Christian experience. Despite the low rates at which ‘the other’ was studied within this subdiscipline, Poulson and Campbell (2010, p. 43) concluded by stating: ‘We suspect that if scholarship in

Correspondence Address: Stephen Poulson, Department of Sociology and Anthropology, James Madison University, MSC 7501, Harrisonburg, VA 22807, USA. Fax: 540 568 6112; Tel.: 540 397 1156; Email: poulsosc@jmu.edu

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sociology of religion is largely parochial that the scholarship produced in other subdisciplines of sociology is far more so’.

We were curious as to whether the ‘parochial’ impulse was evident in a subfield of sociology that is relatively ‘young’. According to the logics associated with DiMaggio and Powell (1983) and Poulson and Campbell (2010), ‘young’ institutions should experience fewer pressures that bend them toward ‘sameness’. Moreover, the two primary journals associated with the study of social movements – *Mobilization: An International Journal* and *Social Movement Studies (SMS)* – were founded with the intention of being ‘international’ in their focus. As such, the relative youth of the field might produce more ‘worldly’ scholarship when compared to the sociology of religion.

A related interest was the relative paucity of academic work on ‘conservative’ movements (Blee, 2006; McAdam, Sampson, Weffer, & MacIndoe, 2005; Polletta, 2006; Snow, 2006). In this regard, the under-study of conservative movements could be related to the fact that mostly liberal-minded scholars might be less inclined to study right-wing movements. This might also be a factor in why conservative religious movements are largely neglected by social movement scholars (see Snow, 2006). Of course, the strength of the sociology of religion subdiscipline might also explain the relative neglect of conservative religious movements within the field. Still, it is notable that these two fields have developed largely apart from one another. For example, Hannigan (1991, p. 311) has noted that the study of religion and social movements ‘have occupied the same analytic corners of the discipline’, but that scholarship associated with each field is often ‘isolated’ and ‘sealed off’ from the other.

There are likely many ‘blind spots’ within academic fields that are caused by the parochial impulse. In fact, parochialism may help explain the broader shifts that a field experiences over time. For example, Goodwin (2012) – chair of the Social Movement section of the American Sociological Association (ASA) in 2012 – recently asked members to consider the decline in the focus on ‘capitalism’ as a topic of inquiry within the field. In response, Jasper (2012, p. 3) implied that the parochial impulse is responsible for the shifting focus of the field. He wrote:

One pattern seems to hold up over the last fifty years: former activists go to grad school and begin to write about the movements that energized them. This was once the New Left or civil rights, it is more recently the antinuclear, animal rights, LGBTQ, and other movements.

To be clear, we regard the parochial impulse as a *normative condition* that all academics – really all people – experience. Indeed, when we survey our own work, it is not hard to identify the personal experiences that later formed the basis for an academic inquiry. For example, one author often studies movements and civil conflict in the Middle East. Notably, much of his childhood was spent in the Gulf region of the Middle East where he was introduced to the Arab Muslim world. In this case, the author is not studying people ‘like himself’, but his academic inquiry is still related to a life experience.

There are important reasons to consider the ‘parochial’ impulse. First, it calls in to question a common belief that academic research is oriented toward describing peoples and places that researchers know the least about. In fact, the parochial impulse assures that people are mostly inclined toward the study of people they are most familiar with. Clearly, this impulse creates ‘blind spots’ in academic fields. For example, Henrich, Heine, and

Norenzayan (2010) recently argued that subjects who are Western educated, industrialized, rich, and live in democratic societies ‘are among the least representative populations one could find for generalizing about humans’ (p. 66). Still, Western subjects form the basis for nearly all the people studied in behavioral experiments that are regarded as ‘foundational’ in the behavioral sciences. This is despite the fact people from non-Western cultures often respond to the same behavioral experiments quite differently than Westerners.

Parochialism, Cultural Boundaries, and Institutional Isomorphism

Institutional parochialism has been described as a form of *institutional isomorphism*, a process in which institutions shift from initial diversity to ‘startling homogeneity’ (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Poulson & Campbell, 2010). The introduction of *institutional isomorphism* by DiMaggio and Powell (1983) was notable because it challenged the idea that organizations were becoming increasingly ‘diverse’ in modern times. Instead, DiMaggio and Powell (1983) explored the manners in which institutions were becoming more alike. Importantly, they offered three ‘pressures’ that pushed institutions toward ‘sameness’. The first, *normative isomorphic pressures*, are the norms established when training professionals, which sets standards for membership in a community. These standards may attract, and help produce, people who share common backgrounds and common worldviews. It can force members of an organization to follow similar career paths. In academic communities, normative pressures are built into the acquisition of academic credentials, the graduate training process, and the requirements established for career advancement.

A second pressure that creates ‘sameness’ is the *mimetic pressure* that occurs when members of an organization evaluate other organizations and then ‘mimic’ other organizational structures. In effect, in an effort to increase membership, keep journals competitive, and generally maintain the health of the ‘social movements’ field, stakeholders may imitate other organizations that are considered successful. At the individual level, members within the social movement field may model their careers after those most successful in the field. This could cause members to focus on certain content areas and well established research questions.

Coercive pressures are related to the formal and informal rules that influence an institution (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). For example, laws require organizations to act in uniform ways. One example cited by Poulson and Campbell (2010) is that the ASA routinely attempts to compel sociology departments in the USA to adopt certain curricula that meet criteria established by their academic council (Eberts et al., 1990; Kain, 2007). More broadly, university majors have specific requirements that are often similar – usually almost identical – across different universities. Indeed, universities are organized in the roughly the same manner in order to be accredited, meet their legal obligations, respond to political pressure, and generally ‘conform’ to public expectations (Levinson, 1989).

But the field of social movements – largely oriented within the disciplines of sociology and political science – is a relative ‘newcomer’. In this regard, the field could be in a period of ‘initial diversity’ as opposed to moving toward ‘inevitable homogeneity’. Moreover, the diversity of movements available for study would seemingly make homogeneity less likely. Indeed, the discipline developed in tandem with an increasing amount of social movement activity that marked the second half of the twentieth century.

Finally, the two journals coded in this study are ‘young’ when compared to those established in other sociological subfields. *Mobilization* was established in 1996 and *SMS* in 2002. Since their founding, both journals have moved from biannual publications to quarterly publications, basically ‘doubling’ the number of *SMS* published annually in these journals. Overall, the ‘newness’ of *SMS* might make isomorphic pressures associated with the field less powerful when compared to longer established traditions in sociology.

Both the social movement journals coded for this study are avowedly ‘international’ in scope. In the ‘Aims and Scope’ of *SMS*, it is stated that: ‘*SMS* is an international and interdisciplinary journal providing a forum for academic debate and analysis of extra-parliamentary political, cultural, and social movements throughout the world’ (*SMS*, 2011). Likewise, *Mobilization* was founded as a journal with an international scope. The introduction to the journal on its website states:

In recognition of the growing interconnectedness of the international community of social movement scholars, of the globalization of protest and protest repertoires, and of the need for cross national comparison for theoretical advance, *Mobilization* is an *international journal* that encourages contributions and subscriptions from the global community of scholars. (*Mobilization*, 2011)

The editorship of *Mobilization* has always been split between the USA and Europe. *SMS* editorship and board tends to be heavily tilted toward a diversity of scholars in Europe. In this regard, it would seem likely that these two journals – certainly compared to other journals in other subdisciplines – would be well situated to be more ‘worldly’ in terms of their content.

Academic Production in the Field of Sociology

It is well established that the structure and composition of academic fields affects the types of questions explored and the types of academic work a discipline creates (see Bourdieu, 1984; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1972; Bryson, 2005; Cappell & Guterbock, 1992; Gans, 1990; Halliday & Janowitz, 1992; Levinson, 1989). In effect, the composition of an academic field privileges certain types of questions and certain types of knowledge. Often, academic ‘boundaries’ associated with a discipline are integral to the creation of academic identities (see Lamont & Molnar, 2002; Turner & Turner, 1990). For example, in the humanities, there has sometimes been debate concerning the desirability of expanding an academic boundary to include scholarship not associated with the Western ‘canon’. Bryson (2005) chronicled this debate during a period when some were arguing for the adoption of a more multi-cultural curriculum in English departments at universities in the USA. In this case, the idea of expanding coverage beyond the ‘Western canon’ was actively resisted by many within the discipline.

Some have expressed concern that the field of sociology is too narrowly focused on the study of Western society. Over 40 years ago, Brown and Gilmartin (1969) noted the parochial nature of articles published in prominent sociology journals. Later, Tomasson (1978) made a similar observation during an investigation of paper content presented at the ASA annual meetings. Webber (1981) characterized American sociology as ‘parochial’ during a Presidential address at the Southern Sociological Society. By his own account,

Webber became aware of parochialism during an academic appointment at a university in Columbia when he realized that there was little work within the discipline that addressed common conditions in South America. He summed up:

sociologists have been parochial in their research and, therefore, in the generalizations that they have been able to construct. The United States, in which a majority of the sociologists of the world live and work, has been the site of a large share of the studies carried out [. . .]. It follows from this provincialism that today few if any statements about human relationships can be made whose level of generality even approaches the universalistic. (1981, p. 428)

Currently, Kurzman (forthcoming) is the principle investigator for a National Science Foundation (USA) funded study that is investigating how American social science disciplines shape coverage of the world. Kurzman's initial findings indicate that even during the recent period of globalization, the social science disciplines in the USA remain largely focused on the American experience. Specifically, Kurzman is investigating the regions covered by 'flagship' journals in the social sciences. Using preliminary data provided by Kurzman, we found that 49% ($n = 1589$) of *American Sociological Review* (ASR) articles from 1952 to 2008 were non-comparative studies that focused on the USA, by far the most frequently studied country in the world. By way of contrast, non-comparative studies of countries located in sub-Saharan Africa, represent 0.1% ($n = 6$) of the studies published in ASR.

Parochialism and the Study of 'Awkward' Movements

Associated with institutional parochialism is the study of 'awkward' movements, the subject of a forum in *Mobilization* (see Polletta, 2006). Awkward movements include those that use violence, movements that are secretive or difficult to gain access to, and movements that express ideas or use tactics antithetical to the researcher's values. For example, Blee's (2006) investigation of white supremacist groups was considered 'awkward', in that these groups were sometimes violent and had a membership that was often secretive. Polletta (2006), in introducing the forum stated:

Scholars may avoid certain movements, groups, and dynamics for obvious reasons. Groups that use illegal means are often difficult to gain access to, and even when researchers do not fear for their own safety, they may worry about endangering the people they study. Many of us study progressive social movements because we embrace their aims: indeed, some of us straddle worlds of academia and activism. It is hard to spend time and energy on groups that one finds ideologically noxious.

We believe that 'parochialism' is a condition that contributes to 'awkwardness'. In this respect, the relationship between the researcher and the people being studied often constitutes the degree of 'awkwardness' experienced when conducting a study (see McAdam et al., 2005; Snow, 2006). As Blee (2006, p. 482) noted, this impulse: 'privilege (s) the activism of those most like us, to the relative neglect of movements whose demographic composition or political sensibilities make it difficult for us to gain access or develop deep understandings'.

Propositions, Data, and Methods

Our expectation was that because of institutional parochialism, Western scholars in the field of *SMS* would primarily produce academic work associated with Western communities. At the same time, because the study of social movements is a young field and its primary journals avowedly international in scope, we expected the field might be less parochial than others. Still, we expected that this ‘worldliness’ was not because individuals in the field are less inclined to study people within their own cultures, but rather because the field has attracted the work of scholars with diverse backgrounds from different regions of the world. To this end, we evaluated the assertion that those who study the non-West often appear to have a personal association – familial, religious ethnic, national, etc. – with the regions of the world they study (Poulson & Campbell, 2010). We believe the parochial impulse also inclines people to study those who have similar political worldviews; so, we also investigated whether the parochial impulse causes predominately liberal-minded scholars to focus on the study of ‘liberal’ or ‘progressive’ movements.

Data, Methods, and Measures

This study is a content analysis of the universe of articles ($n = 317$) published from the years 2002 to 2010 in two journals associated with the study of social movements: *Mobilization: An International Journal* and *SMS*. The articles were initially coded for content concerning: (i) if the movement(s) studied was located in a Western or non-Western region, (ii) the region of the social movement(s) studied, (iii) the specific countries studied, (iv) whether the movement(s) studied was liberal or conservative in nature and (v) whether the study was qualitative or quantitative. After article review we also coded for the types of movements studied. Most of the coding was for manifest content (e.g. location, type of movement studied, etc.), and there was essentially no disagreement among coders concerning the content associated with the regions studied by the journals. Two categories required latent coding for content, type of movement and whether a movement was conservative or liberal.

We employed a simple test of statistical significance, a chi square test, when comparing the regions studied within the two journals over time. We used Phi and Lambda as measures of association when comparing journal content. These are not powerful measures, and they do not indicate causation as to why content in journals differed or why certain types of movements were studied. These were used to indicate if article content differed significantly across journals and to determine if there were dramatic shifts in the regions covered by the journals over time.

Coding Methods and Criteria

The initial coding was conducted by students in a research methods class at James Madison University; initially, they content analyzed both journals. Independent of these students, Caswell and Poulson also content analyzed the journals. Excluded from coding were brief introductions, book reviews, comments, lectures (addresses), and ‘forum’ and ‘profile’ contributions. Any substantive discussion (usually two paragraphs) of a movement or people in a geographic region was coded as including that region in the study. If there was one table or figure in an article that offered knowledge about a specific

movement or geographic region, that article was coded as including that region as an area of study. We also coded for methodology used (quantitative or qualitative) and whether the movement studied was liberal or conservative. After article review, we coded journal articles for 'type' of movement covered.

Articles that discussed only theory, academic trends, and methodology were sometimes not considered applicable for certain types of analysis unless they discussed specific movement(s) or region(s) in depth (at least a paragraph). Overall, the articles considered not applicable for the various analysis conducted in this study were relatively few. For example, only 18 articles – of the 317 coded – made little or no mention of a group acting in a specific geographic area (e.g. Olesen, 2005). More studies ($n = 40$) were excluded because they did not include a detailed description of a movement that could be characterized as 'liberal' or 'conservative'. For example, in a study that broadly characterized why people disengage from movements (e.g. Fillieule, 2010). There was a considerable amount of overlap between the cases that were omitted in the two previous categories.

For the most part, we consistently made judgments that erred on the side of greater inclusion. A fairly typical example of a 'threshold' coding dilemma associated with 'region' was an article by Martin and Miller (2003), 'Space and Contention'. On the one hand, even though it was largely introducing a special issue of *Mobilization* concerning 'Space and Contention', it was also a substantive article in terms of its discussion of theory. In this article, there are often brief discussions (usually a paragraph or two) – by way of providing examples – of work of conducted by other scholars. Most of these examples were also articles that appeared in the special edition (e.g. Wolford, 2003). In this case, the article briefly discussed the people in quite a few geographic regions (Western Europe, the USA, Brazil and Mexico), and we debated over whether it included enough discussion of groups in specific geographic regions to be coded as a substantive discussion of those regions. Ultimately, erring on the side of inclusion, we did include the geographic regions discussed in the article.

Overall, articles that discussed the theoretical contributions made by prominent theorists like Charles Tilly, Pierre Bourdieu, Niklas Luhmann and Alain Touraine were most likely to be excluded from analysis because they did not discuss particular movements or particular geographic regions in depth (e.g. Crossley, 2002). There were also a few articles associated with measurement issues and/or methodological issues – an example would be if newspaper data is valid (e.g. Strawn, 2008) – that were sometimes excluded from some analysis concerning movement 'types'. At the same time, Strawn (2008) was investigating newspaper validity in a particular region (e.g. Mexico).

For the most part, our decision to err on the side of inclusion – combined with the fact that broadly comparative studies (e.g. Kwon, Reese, & Anantram 2008) were coded to include all geographic regions discussed – clearly caused us to overrepresent the geographic diversity represented by studies in these journals. For example, we often coded articles on anti-globalization movements as studies that included regions in the global south, but these studies usually concentrated on communities in the global north. A fairly typical example would be a study by Carty (2002) that investigated cyberactivism associated with a campaign against NIKE. The study was almost entirely focused on technological innovation and movement organizing in the global north, but it did briefly mention (in a few paragraphs) a strike in Puebla, Mexico that was the focus of cyber-organizing. In this case, the study was coded as including information about movements in both USA and Mexico even though the information concerning the strike in Mexico was cursory.

We used the standard established by the Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research (ICPSR, 1975–1995) in their codebook for the ‘Westernization Comparative Dataset’ (ICPSR codebook) for categorizing countries in the West. This includes European Union countries, the USA, Australia and New Zealand as the members of the West. It excludes the former Soviet Republics, Russia, and Eastern European countries. This can be considered a conservative definition as to what constitutes the ‘West’ in that some former Communist-Bloc countries – particularly East Germany – are now often considered ‘Western’ or ‘Western-oriented’.

In terms of determining whether a movement was ‘liberal’ or ‘conservative’, we initially considered conservative movements as primarily having platforms associated with resurrecting some element or idea associated with the past (e.g. a return to certain past values) or which generally supported some authoritarian tendency associated with state power. In general, this meant ‘nationalist’ movements were conservative, and past socialist and communist movements (e.g. in China) would be coded as ‘liberal’. Another example would be that anti-immigration movements were considered conservative because movement adherents often wanted to ‘reclaim’ or ‘go back to’ a period before there was an influx of migrants into a community. Liberal movements were considered to be engaged in the act of trying to reform policy in a progressive manner or associated with the concerns and rights of a minority community.

The conservative/liberal variable required latent coding for content – as opposed to simply determining a ‘threshold’ level for inclusion – and there were cases in which we had to reconcile coding differences. Of these, there were a considerable number of articles – particularly in *Mobilization* – that focused on social control, ‘policing’ tactics, and state repression (see *Mobilization* 11(2) for examples). With the intent of erring on the side of inclusion, we decided social control and policing – often designed to curtail movement activism – is associated with ‘conservatism’. Of course, while studies represent the institutional ‘conservatism’ associated with state power and state actors, these are not studies of citizen movements that are ‘making claims’. Importantly, studies of social control and policing far outnumber the study of all other conservative movements combined and significantly increased the number of cases in the ‘conservative’ category. Practically, if we had not coded these as a study of ‘conservatism’, then the rates of conservative phenomena would be far lower. Of course, in many of these studies, there was also a substantive discussion of how open-minded movements responded to repression; so, many of these articles were coded as ‘comparative or contrasting’ both ‘liberal’ and ‘conservative’ organizing.

Rationale for the Exclusion of Texts and other Journal Articles

Texts were excluded from analysis. Journal articles, even though the peer review process can be time consuming, provide a more current ‘snap-shot’ of the field than texts, which often take several years to write and then review. Similarly, major journals in the field of sociology were excluded from analysis. Major journals are increasingly publishing research associated with social movements but the overall number of SMS published in major journals during the period of time we investigated is likely relatively modest in number. To this end, this study does not represent all published work in the social movements subfield. Still, we believe that the most active members in the subfield pay particular attention to the work published in the two journals coded. Moreover, it appears

that these journals are actually far more ‘international’ in scope when compared to the flagship journals. Indeed, the data provided to us by Kurzman did indicate that these two journals are more ‘worldly’ when compared to *all* the content published in *ASR* during the same period.

Results

The content of social movement journals is disproportionately focused on the study of Western society. In this respect, 72% ($n = 126$) of the content in *Mobilization* and 77% ($n = 98$) of the content in *SMS* included the study of Western peoples. Overall, during the period we investigated, 36% ($n = 109$) of the journal content included the study of non-Western peoples. In this respect, 38% ($n = 66$) of articles in *Mobilization* included the study of non-Western peoples and was a bit more more ‘worldly’ (or less parochial) compared to *SMS*, in which 34% ($n = 43$) of the articles included the study of non-Western peoples. This difference was not statistically significant. [Table 1](#) shows the representation of non-West regions in the two journals over time.

The split editorship of *Mobilization* in the USA and Europe and the heavy European involvement in *SMS* are probably reasons for the high coverage of Western European movements. [Table 2](#) shows the geographic coverage for both journals by year from 2002 to 2010. Notably, the diversity in the year 2003 is anomalous and related to the low number of journal articles ($n = 17$) published that year. Over time, the two journals began publishing quarterly and now collectively publish about 40 studies annually. [Figure 1](#) maps this geographic coverage for entire period studied. [Figure 2](#) graphically compares the representation of articles that focused on the West, the Global South, or included both these regions. Perhaps the most surprising finding – particularly given the geographic proximity of Eastern Europe to Western European centers of learning – was the relatively low number of studies that investigated movement activity in Eastern Europe.

The content of these journals is ‘worldly’ when compared to other journals in the social sciences. In this respect, Poulson (2011) recently compared the content of *Mobilization* to the *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion (JSSR)*. Both journals are considered prominent within their subfields. Both are dominated by sociologists but publish

Table 1. Studies that included non-Western regions and groups in social movement journals, 2002–2010

Year	<i>Mobilization</i>	<i>SMS</i>	Studies combined
2002	9 (41)	2 (25)	11 (37)
2003	7 (70)	5 (63)	12 (67)
2004	11 (69)	3 (27)	14 (52)
2005	3 (15)	4 (36)	7 (23)
2006	8 (35)	3 (21)	11 (30)
2007	8 (36)	4 (27)	12 (32)
2008	7 (33)	4 (31)	11 (32)
2009	6 (27)	9 (41)	15 (34)
2010	6 (30)	7 (32)	13 (28)
Total	65 (37)	41 (33)	106 (35)

Note: Percentage of articles published within journal in parentheses.

Table 2. Geographic regions covered in social movement journals 2002–2010

Year	Region studied							Total number of articles
	USA/ Canada	West Europe/ Australia, New Zealand	East Europe/ Russia	Middle East	Africa	Asia	Central/ South America	
2002	11 (37)	11 (37)	1 (3)	0	1 (3)	6 (20)	3 (10)	30
2003	6 (35)	7 (41)	3 (18)	0	2 (6)	3 (18)	8 (47)	17
2004	6 (23)	7 (27)	4 (15)	2 (8)	2 (8)	2 (8)	10 (38)	26
2005	21 (66)	10 (31)	2 (6)	2 (6)	1 (3)	3 (9)	1 (3)	32
2006	17 (47)	11 (30)	1 (3)	3 (8)	1 (3)	4 (11)	6 (17)	36
2007	16 (43)	13 (35)	1 (3)	6 (16)	3 (8)	2 (5)	5 (14)	37
2008	11 (32)	17 (50)	1 (3)	1 (3)	4 (12)	4 (12)	5 (15)	34
2009	20 (45)	16 (36)	2 (5)	7 (16)	1 (2)	2 (5)	4 (9)	44
2010	10 (23)	17 (40)	3 (7)	1 (2)	2 (5)	5 (12)	5 (12)	43
Total	118 (40)	109 (37)	18 (6)	22 (8)	17 (6)	31 (10)	47 (16)	299

Note: Percentage of articles (within row) in parenthesis. The percentages sum to more than 100 because of comparative studies. Likewise, the row counts sum to more than the total article count due to comparative studies.

scholarship from other social science disciplines. For the past few years, they have had comparable ISI impact factors. In the past, *JSSR* generally published more articles, but the article ‘gap’ narrowed substantially after *Mobilization* became a quarterly in 2006.

Comparatively, about 14% of *JSSR* content included coverage of the non-Western world as compared to 38% of the content included in *Mobilization*. Likewise, Kurzman’s data of ‘flagship’ journals indicated that the USA – in non-comparative studies – was the focus of nearly 50% of article content in *ASR*. In this study, we included comparative studies in our geographic totals, and the overall content of social movement journals was

**Figure 1.** Geographic regions covered in social movement journals 2002–2010.

Note: Percentage of articles in parenthesis. The percentages sum to more than 100 because of comparative studies.

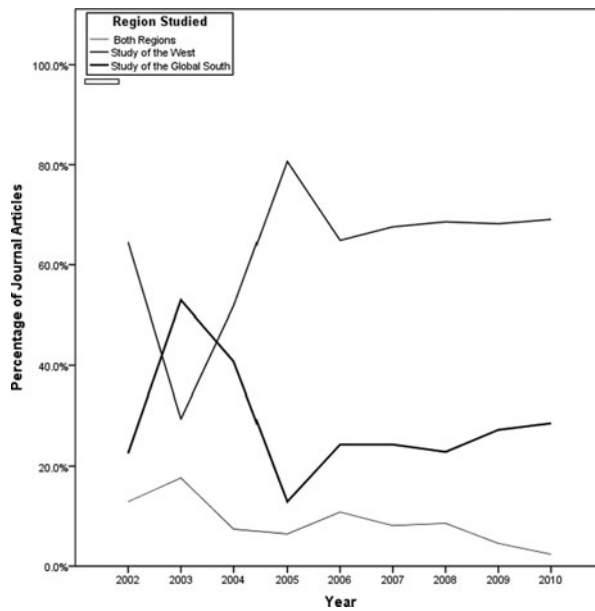


Figure 2. Study of the West and non-West in social movement journals (2002–2010).

still comparatively less focused on the USA. Indeed, even the ‘modest’ coverage of African movements in social movement journals (6%) far exceeds the infinitesimal coverage the region has received in *ASR* (>1%). As such, the field of social movements is appreciably more diverse than the broader field of sociology.

The Parochial Impulse Among Individuals and the Study of the Global South

The study of social movements tends to be Western-centric, but relative to other fields and the overall content of *ASR*, the field is a comparatively worldly endeavor. In explaining this diversity, it is important to note that the field is probably not more diverse because Western social movement scholars are more inclined to study people who are ‘different’ from themselves. To this end, we did find evidence that those who study the global south often had a personal connection – familial, religious, ethnic, etc. – to these topics of inquiry. These are often scholars working and residing in the West, who often for reasons of personal affinity (e.g. they were born in the global south), are conversant with groups outside the West.

To further explore the backgrounds of scholars who study the non-West, we investigated scholar credentials online and coded for incidences when an author referenced their association with a country in the global south (e.g. they were born in Tehran, Iran, etc.). We also used surnames as an indication that an author likely had a personal affinity to a region. For example, an Indian surname combined with a study of a group in India was considered an indication of a biographic connection to the region of study (for example, see Kumar, 2008). This approach almost assuredly undercounted the number of personal associations that scholars had with their objects of study because the information presented online was uneven, and many scholars did not provide biographic

information on their institutional websites. Nonetheless, we did find that of the 111 authors who studied the non-West – some articles were co-authored and some authors published more than one study – there was a personal association between author with the region studied 45% of the time ($n = 50$ authors). We think this is a strong indication that *Mobilization* and *SMS* are relatively ‘worldly’ because these journals publish more contributions from these types of scholars when compared to other social science journals.

Prominent Scholars from the Global South

Given the parochial impulse, scholars who come from the global south and work in the West are clearly valuable if greater coverage of the world has benefits to a discipline. Often, many of these scholars have been trained using Western curricula – many attended schools oriented toward Western educational standards even as they resided in their countries of origin – and are also conversant with traditional aspects of the society they originated from.

There are scholars who move to the West and use knowledge of their country of origin as they craft their careers. Importantly, many of these scholars have sometimes felt they inhabit ‘difficult’ spaces within Western academic communities. An exemplary case might be the experience of Said (1999) who described a tumultuous ‘East-West’ transition in his memoir, *Out of Place*. In effect, some scholars who move from ‘East to West’ struggle to reconcile their increasing association as ‘Westerners’ as they maintain associations, often intense, with their country of origin. On the one hand, these are scholars well trained and conversant with Western empiricism – but who strive to remain fluent with modes of living and knowledge not normally associated with the Western experience. These are people who, sometimes for better and sometimes for worse, often find themselves ‘in-between’ the West and East. Not surprisingly, it is sometimes difficult to reconcile where they most belong (see Said, 1999).

Another notable trend – and the case of expatriate Iranian scholars may be exemplary in this regard – is that many well-known scholars often come from countries that ‘loom large’ in the Western consciousness or they come from countries that are now, practically speaking, ‘too large to ignore’ – China being exemplary in this regard. For example, it is increasingly normative that sociology departments at major universities in the West have a scholar that studies China on their faculty.

Sometimes, the migration of scholars from the global south is associated with specific periods, and specific events, that raised the awareness of a country among people in the West. For example, it does seem clear that a generation of Iranian scholars – many who were born in Iran and fled during the 1979 revolution – have crafted unique careers in the West. This observation is not meant to imply that their work is not often exceptional – but the Western preoccupation with Iran, combined with the extraordinary events in the country in 1979, probably increased the academic market for scholarship on Iran as compared to other regions in the global south. Another example of how orientation to the West can ‘shift’ patterns of Western inquiry would be the recent decline of ‘Russian’ studies in the USA during the past two decades following the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

The Study of Conservatism, Policing, and Conservative Movements

Both social movement journals concentrate on the study of liberal movements but *Mobilization*, during the period studied, devoted considerable space toward investigating

policing tactics and state repression (see Tables 3 and 4). Figure 3 graphs the representation of liberal, conservative and comparative studies that appeared in the journals from 2002 to 2010. In some respects, our decision to code policing and state repression as a study of ‘conservatism’ is definitionally problematic. But erring on the side of inclusion, we decided to include studies of state repression as a conservative response to movement activism. State repression and policing was often studied within the context of how it limited progressive activism. In this respect, many of these types of studies are still largely ‘parochial’ in nature because they are usually associated with the ‘space’ and ‘context’ in which liberal movements are increasingly confined. So, for example, it was common to find articles associated with state repression and policing that described the limited ‘spaces’ that liberal activists operate in. With our broad definition as to what constituted a study of ‘conservatism’ in mind, 25% ($n = 37$) of the articles in *Mobilization* included a study of conservatism as compared to 15% ($n = 19$) in *SMS*. Notably, it was a robust debate associated with policing in *Mobilization* that accounts for the difference in the percentages.

When excluding articles associated with state repression and policing, there are very few studies that investigate citizen-directed conservative movements (see Table 4). Importantly, social movement scholars do not really know what the ‘universe’ of social movement activism looks like, and there are likely far fewer conservative movements available to study. For example, Dalton (2002) has argued that strategies associated with social movement activism have greater appeal to those on the left who have progressive political agendas. In this respect, ‘liberal’ and progressive movements might simply outnumber, in a significant manner, conservative movements.

The different historical context of regions makes the incidence of conservative movements greater in certain areas of the world. In this respect, there is evidence that the incidence of extreme right movements is related to the ‘national public domain’ they operate in. As characterized by Giugni, Koopmans, Passy, and Statham (2005), definitions of national citizenship, political alignments, and party competition all affect the political space that extreme right-wing parties can operate within. Moreover, these differing political opportunities may cause some countries to develop more ‘institutionalized’ right-wing groups (e.g. France) as opposed to other countries where these groups are

Table 3. Studies of state repression and conservative movements in social movement journals, 2002–2010

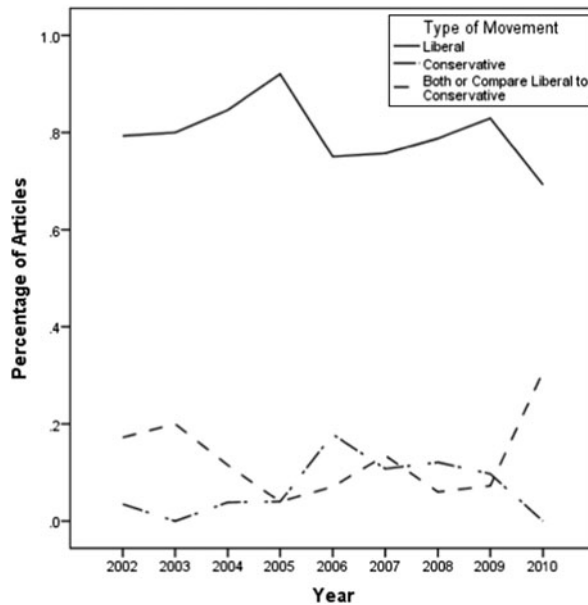
Year	<i>Mobilization</i>	<i>SMS</i>	Studies combined
2002	4 (19)	2 (24)	6 (20)
2003	1 (14)	2 (25)	3 (20)
2004	3 (33)	1 (9)	4 (15)
2005	1 (8)	1 (8)	2 (8)
2006	7 (50)	0 (0)	7 (25)
2007	8 (36)	1 (7)	9 (24)
2008	3 (16)	3 (21)	6 (18)
2009	4 (20)	3 (14)	7 (8)
2010	6 (35)	6 (27)	12 (30)
Total	37 (25)	19 (15)	54 (20)

Notes: Percentage of articles published within journal in parentheses. Difference in rates of publication is significant at $p < 0.5$.

Table 4. Type of movements studied in *Mobilization* and *SMS* (2002–2010)

Movement(s) studied	<i>Mobilization</i>	<i>SMS</i>	Total
Environmental/anti-nuclear	25 (14)	10 (8)	35 (12)
Feminist/women	20 (11)	13 (10)	33 (11)
Transnational	22 (13)	8 (6)	30 (10)
Policing/state repression	23 (13)	6 (5)	29 (10)
Minority/human rights	18 (10)	11 (9)	29 (10)
Industrial relations	15 (9)	12 (9)	27 (9)
Globalization/anti	4 (2)	18 (14)	22 (7)
Community/civic	8 (5)	13 (10)	21 (7)
Liberal/nationalist	10 (6)	10 (8)	20 (7)
National trends	14 (8)	2 (2)	16 (5)
Peace/anti-war	6 (3)	10 (8)	16 (5)
Indigenous rights	5 (3)	7 (5)	12 (4)
Conservative/social	6 (3)	5 (4)	11 (4)
Technological	5 (3)	4 (3)	9 (3)
LGBT	4 (2)	4 (3)	8 (3)
Art/music/subcultural	1 (0.5)	7 (5)	8 (3)
Conservative/nationalist	5 (3)	2 (2)	7 (2)
Anti-poverty	3 (2)	2 (2)	5 (2)
Animal rights	1 (0.5)	2 (2)	3 (1)
Rural-peasant	4 (2)	1 (1)	5 (1)
Health-disability	1 (0.5)	2 (2)	3 (1)
Student	0	1 (1)	1 (0.3)
Total article count	174	129	303

Notes: The percentage of articles within the total published is in parenthesis and rounded to the nearest whole number. The n in each column sums to more than the total n because some articles investigated multiple movements.

**Figure 3.** Study of liberal movements and conservatism/policing in social movement journals.

'marginalized' (e.g. Britain), 'radicalized' (e.g. Germany), or associated with populism (e.g. Netherlands) (Giugni et al., 2005, p. 159). In the USA, perhaps the best 'guess' at a baseline for conservative movement activism can be inferred from Soule and Earl (2005), which like Giugni et al. (2005), used newspaper data to track events expressing right-wing claims. The Earl and Soule study indicated that right-wing groups represented between 10% and 14% of the claims being made during the 1980s.

Our definition of conservatism is far more 'inclusive' than the one used in Soule and Earl (2005) and Giugni et al. (2005), in that we coded studies of state repression and policing as 'conservative' in nature, whereas the previous studies investigated 'citizen movements' that were 'making claims'. When the studies of state policing and state repression are eliminated, conservative movements account for 6% ($n = 18$) of all movements studied.

The Study of 'Awkward' Movements: Opportunity Structures and the Contribution to Theory

During this study, we contacted editors at *Mobilization* and *SMS* and inquired whether there is ever a 'proactive' policy associated with increasing understudied regions of the world or the study of movements that might be considered 'awkward' to study. In both cases, the editors indicated that there was no policy in place to assure that under-represented regions, or understudied topics, were given broader coverage within the journals. There are sometimes 'special' issues devoted exploring particular protest events (e.g. Arab Spring, Occupy!). The current American editor of *Mobilization*, Rory McVeigh, stressed that the overall quality of the papers, in terms of using and extending both theory and methods, is the primary editorial consideration made at *Mobilization*. He responded through e-mail (R. McVeigh, 2012, E-mail correspondence with Stephen Poulson):

The primary goal at *Mobilization* is to publish groundbreaking research of the highest quality. To a great extent, then, the diversity of regions studied is going to be a reflection of what top scholars (both old and young) in the field are currently studying.

In this respect, we do not think there is an association between the quality of the work published in these journals and the parochial impulse. Indeed, as Poulson (2011) stated in a discussion of parochialism within the sociology of religion, there is no reason why parochial endeavors would weaken the 'quality' of scholarship in a field or cause a decline in its disciplinary prestige. In fact, a parochial program – the narrow focus on a few questions for example – might actually create greater group cohesiveness within a discipline and increase the number of prominent scholars working on a few primary questions within a field. This could cause a 'self-fulfilling prophecy' in that 'the best' scholarship is being done on a few questions. More generally, studying peoples that someone 'knows best', beyond the 'affinity' someone has with a movement, is entirely logical as it relates to other practical concerns such as the time one wants to dedicate to a scholarly endeavor. As such, it makes sense that some of 'the best' work done by Western scholars uses examples from events in the West which they are most familiar with.

At the same time, McVeigh noted that he believed that scholars who read *Mobilization* are interested in studies that represent understudied regions or understudied movements.

McVeigh's career is a 'case in point' in that he has often studied right-wing movements in the USA. Moreover, if these movements are sometimes 'different' – in terms of their organizational structure, the ideas of movement adherents, the tactics that they use, etc. – they should represent an opportunity to test and extend theory associated with movement dynamics. Conversely, even if they operate in largely 'the same' manner, these movements can still extend the existing theory to cover a greater number of cases.

In all, we think there is an increasingly inclusive orientation among Western scholars as it relates to the study of regions outside the West. Notably, this may not have been the orientation of scholars in the not so distant past. For example, when Webber addressed the issue of 'parochialism' in 1981, he speculated: 'My impression is that many sociologists – a majority, I would guess – turn cold eyes on notions of engaging in cross-societal studies, evidencing a kind of ethnocentrism that might be seen as peculiarly unsuitable in sociologists' (pp. 425–426). Still, we want to make clear that the parochial impulse does not assume an active and overt bias by Western scholars against the study of the global south or conservative movements. We simply assume that scholars who have little interaction with the global south – probably still a majority of scholars in the West – are not much inclined themselves toward studying movements in these regions. At the same time, there does appear to be an increasing normative belief – associated with increasing globalization – that makes it difficult to ignore 'the rest' of the world. To this end, the explicitly 'international' orientation of both *Mobilization* and *SMS* represents a normative isomorphic pressure that insures these journals are somewhat oriented toward considering research in understudied regions as valuable.

But the question then becomes, assuming these understudied cases offer 'opportunities' for publication, why are more people not using these unique cases more often? To use a metaphor from the field of SMS, if there is an 'opportunity structure' in place that should enable more studies of the global south and conservative movements, why do relatively few people choose to study these types of movements?

The most obvious reason is that even when there is potential to use cases outside the West to make a contribution to theory, the parochial impulse insures that most Western scholars are not well placed to examine these movements. For example, the recent events in the Middle East, the so-called 'Arab Spring' revolutions, clearly offer an opportunity to explore a range of perspectives long established in the discipline associated with state repression, policing, movement frames, the role of technology, the use of certain tactics, etc. Indeed, they offer several exemplary 'cases' that could be used to extend theory. Moreover, the opportunity for comparative research – why some revolutions 'succeeded' and others failed – is also apparent. We do assume that the scale of these events insures, to some modest degree, that they will be covered in the two journals we coded. Indeed, *Mobilization* has recently devoted a special issue to these events. At the same time, relative to the 'potential' these events represent for extending theory, we assume they will remain largely understudied cases. Indeed, when Poulson and Campbell (2010) examined content in the sociology of religion, they found no appreciable increase in the study of Islam following the 9-11 terrorist attacks and the subsequent invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan by the USA and its allies.

Will recent events in the Middle East become exemplary cases to use and extend social movement theory? We expect there will be a few studies, but far fewer than if similar events had taken place in the West. Indeed, one indication that this will be the case was the relatively small amount of research – at least in the articles coded for this study – that

investigated the similarly transformative events that took place throughout Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union in 1989 and the early 1990s. Indeed, it is likely that social movement activism has increased in these countries during and after this period, but we were surprised to find that Eastern Europe – particularly given its proximity and cultural closeness to the West – was relatively understudied in the journals we investigated.

Types of Movements Studied in the Field

During the course of review for this article, we were asked to extend our inquiry to include broader trends within the social movement field. To this end, we coded articles during the same period for the ‘primary’ type of movement studied. In some cases, articles spanned movement categories (e.g. Women and Labor Organizing in Maquiladoras) or discussed multiple themes or movements (e.g. Islamist groups that use internet technology). In these cases, we coded articles as representing as many as two primary types of movements. Other articles, mostly those that used quantitative procedures, had a range of movements in their data. If they were discussing ‘broad trends’ associated with all types of movement organizing – an example would be whether the USA has become a movement society? (see Soule and Earl, 2005) – then they were coded as investigating ‘national trends’. Sometimes ‘national trends’ were oriented toward describing ‘liberalizing’ or ‘conservative’ trends, and those were specified as ‘national liberal’ and ‘national conservative’. The ‘conservative social’ category designates a smaller movement – the rise of a religious conservative group for example. ‘Community-Civic’ categories indicate ‘local’ movements – activism against ‘super stores in different communities for example – and also movements might be regarded as ‘civic’ minded (e.g. a campaign to increase voting). We sometimes combined categories that were analogous to one another, although this made the representation of some movements less ‘fine grained’. For example, ‘human rights’ campaigns were included in the category of ‘minority rights’ movements.

While coding for the movements studied, a few trends became apparent. First, there are some dissimilarities between the journals regarding the rates at which they publish particular ‘types’ of movement. Also, *Mobilization* is far more likely to publish articles that use quantitative methodologies (sig. 001), and we think the comparison of specific journal content reflects this trend. For example, broad ‘national trends’ are explored more frequently in *Mobilization* and many of these papers used quantitative methodologies. Notably, *SMS* has devoted more space to anti-globalization movements – but these were almost always centered on Western movement groups operating in Western cities. Indeed, the fact that the G8 meetings most often take place in Europe, combined with the politics of the European Union, seemed to provide European scholars with greater opportunity to study movements that were broadly identified as ‘anti-globalization’ protests.

We distinguished between these types of anti-globalization movements and studies that looked specifically at ‘transnational’ organizing (e.g. Byrd & Jasny, 2010). The latter were often more oriented toward exploring the challenges associated with organizing across borders (e.g. a transnational environmental movement). Often, the sites of these studies were UN-sponsored meetings in the global south. Overall, *Mobilization* was more likely to study this issue. By way of contrast, the content of *SMS* is more often ethnographic in nature and was more often oriented toward the examination of a particular case study. We were surprised that *Mobilization* has devoted so much space to the study of policing, but also impressed with this work. Indeed, this might be an example were a particular type

of research has captured the attention of a diverse group of talented scholars and then becomes increasingly reflected in journal content as the community ‘works through’ important questions.

We were also surprised at the low incidence at which some types of movements were studied. For example, ‘students’ were sometimes discussed in terms of movement support, but there was only one study of ‘student’-centered movements (Gill & DeFronzo, 2009) – and it primarily offered a typology of these types of movements that others might use. We were even more surprised by the small number, only three studies in total, of health-disability movements. Two of these were by the same author and generally explored the backlash against psycho-analysis in Great Britain (e.g. Crossley, 2005). The other was the only study published in *Mobilization*, and it was primarily a study of a welfare rights movement in France in which people on ‘disability’ were briefly discussed. In effect, it just ‘barely’ met the threshold for being coded as having content associated with a disability movement. Practically, disability associated with physical impairment, access to sites, health care coverage benefits, discrimination toward the disabled, etc. were entirely absent in the studies we coded.

Although not formally described in the table above, there is a considerable amount of work associated with framing, emotion work and an exploration of movement cultures. In effect, there is evidence of the ‘cultural turn’ that has been much discussed by people in the field. At the same time, there are still a considerable number of studies that investigate ‘structural’ variables associated with movement organizing. These would often be articles that were coded as investigating ‘national trends’ (e.g. voter repression) or those that used specific models – ‘political process’ for example – that included social structural variables in their inquiries.

Discussion and Conclusion

If institutional parochialism is conceived of as a continuum, then the field of social movements – as represented by two of its prominent journals – appears to be relatively worldly, although still dominated by studies conducted on Western communities. In this respect, we think that there is some normative isomorphic pressure built into the social movements field – the avowedly ‘international’ nature of the two journals that represent the field – that causes more scholarship associated with the global south to be published in these journals.

At the same time, even though both these journal are explicitly international in their focus, they nonetheless publish far more studies associated with Western movements as compared to non-Western movements. There are structural reasons why academics within the social movement field tend to study the West. Obviously, most prominent academic institutions are located in the West and there is far more quantitative data collected on Western social movements than those which occur in the global south. Additionally, Western researchers often lack skills, such as foreign language fluency, that are needed to research non-Western societies. Still, it appears that one way to create greater regional representation in a journal is to actively solicit scholarship that is produced by people who have an intimate association with people in the global south. In effect, it does appear that the ‘parochial’ impulse – to study people like ourselves – is a largely normative condition among all academics. That is, the people in the West who study ‘the other’ often have an association – familial, ethnic, national, etc. – to their objects of their study. As such, an

attempt to compel ‘Westerners’ to more often study the global south would probably not be very successful. Indeed, if the representation of diverse geographic areas is considered important, then the more practical program is to actively forge connections with scholars who maintain an association with communities in the global south. These scholars – those who are familiar with communities in the West (e.g. where they often live) and non-West (e.g. where members of their families once resided) – represent an important resource for those in the West interested in understanding more about the global south.

We believe that the under-study of conservative movements is also associated with institutional parochialism and perhaps represents a more nettlesome set of problems if studying these movements is considered an important endeavor. Put simply, there are relatively few conservative members of the academy for which a similar kind of ‘out-reach’ can be made. In this respect, the study of conservative movements – when they are studied outside of the context of policing or state repression – is an endeavor undertaken by mostly liberal minded scholars and this likely affects the scholarship associated with these movements. In all, we think this ‘difference’ between researcher and the subject of inquiry should make researchers act with particular care when they characterize the participants and nature of these movements. This is not meant to imply that researchers should condone discrimination, bias, or violence when it is wielded by extreme right-wing movements but rather, we mean to reiterate the points made in the ‘awkward movement’ forum¹ that being a scholar-activist likely affects a researcher’s orientation to the study of both liberal and conservative movements.

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Note

1. At the forum, it was discussed whether violence was sometimes implicitly condoned (or ignored) in the study of ‘liberal’ movements (e.g. the African National Congress in South Africa) and reinforced in the study of ‘conservative’ movements (e.g. conservative Islamist movements). For the record, the authors of this study would characterize themselves as open-minded, probably ‘radical’ by the current standards of political discourse in the United States.

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Stephen R. Poulson is an Associate Professor at James Madison University. He is currently investigating patterns of violence against civilians during the civil war in Iraq. He is also the author of *Social Movements in Twentieth Century Iran: Culture, Ideology and Mobilizing Frameworks* (Lexington Books, 2006).

Cory P. Caswell is a graduate student in the Sociology Department and Science Studies Program at the University of California, San Diego. He is receiving interdisciplinary training in the philosophical and cultural context of scientific knowledge, while retaining a firm grounding in sociology proper. Within sociology, his interests span the sociology of culture, social theory, and science/knowledge.

Latasha R. Gray obtained her bachelor's degree in Sociology from James Madison University in 2011. She has served in the U.S. Army National Guard administratively managing clinical aid stations and is currently a Member Services Representative for a nonprofit organization assisting military personnel.