

## *The Challenge of Cultural Elites: Celebrities and Social Movements\**

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Although celebrities have become a regular fixture in modern social movements, there is little explicit theory on why, or on how they may affect the movements in which they participate. We begin by discussing the resources celebrities can bring to bear on social protest movements, as well as the risks that celebrity participation entails both for the movement and for the celebrity. We suggest a notion of political standing, which sets limits on the sorts of causes in which celebrities will generally participate. In constructing their legitimacy to speak for a movement, celebrities frequently alter the claims of that movement to more consensual kinds of politics. We examine the entry, action, and influence of celebrities in particular movements by looking at two recent controversies in which celebrities are deeply involved: The ongoing efforts to preserve the woods around Walden Pond, and the recent passage, and subsequent political fallout, of an antigay referendum in Colorado. In the first case, celebrity participation led to a redefining of movement claims into a non-conflictual inclusive politics that skirted important questions. In the second case, the larger claims of gay rights and liberation were eclipsed by the entry of celebrities into the conflict who universalized the opposition to discrimination. We conclude by discussing the systematic biases that movement use of celebrities may create, and the need to consider the impact of celebrities' peculiar relationships to audiences as they affect political movements and public life.

The *celebrity without a cause* has become almost anomalous, as a recent *New Yorker* cartoon highlights (Fig. 1). Professional athletes and their leagues make much of the players' interest in charitable works, calling for contributions to local United Way chapters or urging children to stay in school and/or read. Award ceremonies for actors and musicians are veritable displays of shifting celebrity interests, with Hollywood actors and Nashville musicians, for example, embracing predictably different causes—although red ribbons demonstrating AIDS awareness have become ubiquitous at all such ceremonies.<sup>1</sup> Were such displays of celebrities' interest confined to formal ceremonies or public service announcements, they would be of concern to students of social change only as barometers. In fact, however, celebrities often carry their causes into political arenas, and their participation in



Fig. 1. *New Yorker* cartoon (April 12, 1993).

social movements offers a number of clear advantages and constraints. Yet within the vast range of writing on social protest movements, there is virtually no explicit theory on the roles celebrities play in movements; the influence they may have in affecting their mobilization, claims, and impact; and, perhaps most importantly, the overall influence that dependence on celebrity supporters has on the kinds of social movements that emerge.

In this article we mean to begin remedying this deficit. We suggest that explicit consideration of celebrities' participation in social movements adds depth to established perspectives in the study of social movements, particularly

resource mobilization and the collective identity. The unusual roles that celebrities play in the processes of mobilizing political and social resources, and in constructing collective identity, provide us with a new light on these processes, and indeed on the larger politics of social protest. We want to understand the ways in which celebrities influence the movements they join. This work is not to be the last word in understanding the participation of celebrities in social movements, but rather an attempt to stimulate research and thinking on this important phenomenon and to suggest questions and concepts to guide subsequent work.

We first examine the phenomenon of celebrities, noting how the creation of celebrity itself has changed in recent years. We next discuss the resources celebrities can bring to social protest movements, as well as the risks that their participation entails for the movement. We examine the processes by which celebrities claim *standing* in social movements, and the kinds of causes in which they are likely to be most effective and visible. We examine the entry, action, and influence of celebrities in particular movements by looking at two recent controversies in which celebrities are deeply enmeshed: the ongoing efforts to preserve the woods around Walden Pond, led by celebrities who live elsewhere; and the opposition to Amendment 2, an antigay referendum in Colorado. We conclude with a discussion of the systematic biases that movement use of celebrities may create, and of the impact of celebrities' peculiar relationships to audiences or publics.

### Celebrity

"The professional celebrity, male and female," wrote C. Wright Mills (1956), "is the crowning result of a society that makes a fetish of competition" (p. 74). She is celebrated, whatever she may be best at, as long as she has won. Achievement as definitive of celebrity, after four decades of television, seems now dated, perhaps nostalgic, almost quaint. Since Mills wrote, the production system through which celebrity images are managed and disseminated has gone through major shifts, and understandings of celebrity have followed (Gamson 1994). Definitions of celebrity have proliferated, gathering primarily in Daniel Boorstin's claim that the celebrity is "a human pseudo-event," a person "known for his [or her] well-knownness" (Boorstin 1961, p. 57; see also Lahr 1978; Monaco 1978; Schickel 1985).

There is much to this insight that celebrity is deliberately manufactured and that the famous are therefore not necessarily the "deserving." Additionally, and importantly, the celebrity's social influence is not based in formal, institutional power (Alberoni 1972). We turn our attention to those public figures whose *lives* are watched with great interest, but whose claims to attention are not tied to the *consequences* their actions have for those

watching. Celebrities are, in Alberoni's (1972) play on Mills, a "powerless 'elite,'" a group that occupy a privileged social position but derive status not from institutionally based social power, but from the fact of public attention.<sup>1</sup> Their notoriety has less to do with what they *do*, or with how they can directly affect lives, than with what and who they *are*. Other elites command attention because of their power to influence; celebrities derive any influence they may have from attention.

In contemporary Western societies, these figures come almost exclusively from the cultural realm: primarily from the mass media of film and television, from music and sports, and to a lesser degree from theater, literature, and art.<sup>1</sup> Although they have historically forged links to powerful figures within government (Brownstein 1990), and although individuals sometimes convert celebrity status into electoral office (Ronald Reagan, for example, or Sonny Bono), celebrities are distinguished by their *autonomy* from state institutions.

Two distinctive features of contemporary U.S. celebrity affect their roles in an impact on social movements. First, their notoriety is developed for the most part through a rationalized celebrity industry: Production tasks are divided between tightly linked subindustries (public relations, entertainment law, management, and talent agencies, tied to each other and to news media and entertainment-production companies). By no means a smoothly operating, unified industry (Koch 1991; Gamson 1994), it is nonetheless one in which marketing and public relations plainly dominate in the pursuit and management of public attention for profit. When celebrities enter social movement activities, they bring with them the peculiar dynamics and concerns of the notoriety industry.

Second, over time the celebrity production system and its workings have become increasingly visible in media coverage, casting doubt on the claim that celebrity status is derived from natural, internal personal qualities (Gamson 1992). This means that celebrities' standing as authentic, and their motives for public action (are they expressing themselves genuinely or performing themselves manipulatively?), are always in question. Both celebrity texts and celebrity production systems, in fact, tend to drive toward the representation of stars in a "semifictional" language: at once both real and artificial, spontaneous and programmed, performing themselves and being themselves. Celebrity status, detached from institutional centers, from requirements of merit or achievement, and from solid grounds of authenticity and authority, is marked by tremendous ambiguity and instability (Gamson 1994; Dyer 1991). The ambiguity associated with celebrity identity leads to a clouding of the identity and of the claims of the movements in which they participate, as we will see in the cases below. First,

drawing from social movement theory, we offer an overview of potential benefits and costs of celebrity participation in movements.

### Social Movements and Celebrities

Since the 1970s, analysis of social movements has been greatly influenced by the resource mobilization perspective (e.g., McCarthy and Zald 1977), which views protest activity as the product of purposive application of resources (including time, money, and public support) to political ends. Participation by celebrities is certainly a resource for social movements, but not an unambiguous one. The chief asset that celebrities can offer social movements is the visibility that comes with their participation; celebrities carry a spotlight with them. As Gitlin (1980, p. 146) notes, "Once an individual has been certified as newsworthy, he or she has been empowered, within limits, to make news." The presence of a media-certified celebrity makes an event inherently newsworthy. Depending upon the magnitude of her personal star, by virtue of presence the celebrity can bring media and public attention to a cause that would otherwise be neglected.

In addition to drawing media attention, celebrity participation may draw in other participants and potential supporters. In this way, celebrity participation can extend the boundaries of a conflict, as Schattschneider (1960) suggests, expanding both the audience and the number of legitimate actors in a political conflict. People with no previous interest in pesticides, for example, may listen to a public service advertisement because Meryl Streep appears in it. Rock fans may attend an antinuclear power demonstration to see Bruce Springsteen, yet wind up hearing numerous speakers talk about alternative means of generating energy, and spend the day mingling with a crowd that includes committed partisans of the antinuclear power movement. (Conversely, a lesser known musician may offer to play at such a demonstration to gain exposure to Springsteen's audience—and indeed, the antinuclear movement.) Some celebrities may condition their participation upon considerations of personal career gain, but others are calculating in using what resources they have to bring attention to the issues they care about most. As Susan Sarandon explained her own political activism, "If my privacy is going to be invaded and I'm going to be treated as a commodity, I might as well take advantage of it" (quoted in Brownstein 1990, p. 11).

Immediately, the participation of a celebrity may make an event newsworthy, providing a "hook" for mass media coverage of the event and perhaps the analysis, activism, and goals propelling it. A celebrity's presence is also likely to make attendance more attractive to potential supporters. Witnessing a celebrity performance or appearance at a rally or demonstration is an additional selective incentive for participation (cf.

Olson 1965; Fireman and Gamsón 1979). Potential participants may often want simply to attend the same event as a celebrity, in hopes of shaking a hand or catching a glimpse of someone attractive or important. Would-be activists also know that the presence of a celebrity increases the likelihood of both higher turnout and media coverage. As people are more likely to want to participate in an event they believe will be successful, and as numbers are widely seen as a mark of movement strength, the celebrity's capacity to attract audiences is no small matter.

Celebrities can also provide critical fund-raising help to social movement organizations (Prindle 1993). The greater visibility and media coverage that come with celebrity participation are in themselves fund-raising assets. Additionally, celebrities can be more directly employed in the process. Successful actors and athletes have more personal wealth at their disposal than most movement participants, and can also bring fungible resources to a movement through their time, for example, performing at an event or filming a public service announcement. Celebrities can also participate in smaller fund-raising events, offering donors closer contact in exchange for greater contributions. Dinners, balls, and cocktail parties have become staples in the fund-raising repertoire of contemporary social movements: A 1990 Hollywood dinner in honor of Nelson Mandela raised \$1.2 million for the antiapartheid movement, for example (Prindle 1993, p. 109). Musicians frequently stage events and create products such as record albums and videos expressly dedicated to funding a favored cause. Bob Geldof of the Boomtown Rats is perhaps the best exemplar of this approach, organizing a series of concerts and albums devoted to ending world hunger. Similarly, comedians Billy Crystal, Whoopi Goldberg, and Robin Williams stage an annual *Comic Relief* television program to raise money to aid the homeless. Such events also lend public attention to the causes they fund. And funding frequently attracts more funding.

Finally, politicians and policymakers are not immune to the lure of celebrity contact, if only to share the celebrity spotlight (Brownstein 1990; Prindle 1993, pp. 113-117). Thus, a member of Congress is more likely to find time in his or her schedule to meet with Jessica Lange or Sally Field about farm policy than with another lobbyist or policy expert. A typical month for Charlton Heston included—in addition to political fundraisers and taping of spots for "Arbor Day and the ecology," for the Negro Colleges of America, and against drugs and smoking—meetings with Representative Newt Gingrich and Senator Phil Gramm (Prindle 1993, pp. 107-108). In this way, celebrities can open doors for movement activists. Elizabeth Taylor, for example, has made a practice of bringing street AIDS activists to meetings with politicians, introducing them as personal friends who have

something important to say about the issue (Collins 1992). Taylor in effect uses her celebrity to provide access to activists otherwise shut out.

All told, the advantages and possibilities outlined above can significantly improve the prospects for a challenging social movement to reach and mobilize its activist constituencies, to gain mass media attention, to raise money, and to win access to political decision makers. Along with these considerable benefits, however, come corresponding risks and potential costs.

The very spotlight of notoriety that comes with celebrity participation may drown out some movement claims and constituents. The spotlight a celebrity brings to a movement may focus only on her. In his study of media coverage of the New Left, Gitlin (1980) notes that even celebrities drawn from the ranks of social movement groups often ultimately obscured the movements that created them. This pattern of overshadowing the movements is likely to happen all the more quickly and easily when media-anointed celebrity spokespeople lack organic roots in the movements for which they speak. When the stories covering a large march on Washington for reproductive rights all focus on the notable women who have led the parade, rather than the movement's larger claims, we must wonder whom such attention serves.

When space for coverage of challenging movements is limited, the proportion of it that goes to celebrity spokespeople means that there is likely less space available to participants and activists organic to the movement. Sally Field's concerns about U.S. nuclear weapons policy may reach mainstream media outlets more easily than those of antinuclear activists or strategists, but she may offer substantially less in terms of content or critical analysis (Meyer 1990). In the best of all possible worlds for social movements, the celebrity spokesperson brings attention and audiences to activists and dissidents. Commonly, however, movement leaders may drop out of the equation, as celebrities can become surrogates for dissident activists, negotiating with the media unconstrained by movement views. The story of social protest then becomes a celebrity story, and not one that includes politics, policy, or space for grassroots action. Celebrity dissent can become strikingly similar to the "radical chic" stereotype opponents employ to discredit movements.

Social movement activists and their opponents struggle to define or "frame" their claims and activities in a variety of venues, including the mass media. Although not entirely without power in this struggle, most movements operate at a distinct disadvantage, competing first for attention altogether, and second, for their preferred images of self and claims (Ryan 1991). Adding celebrities to the field of actors engaged in these struggles

may make it easier for movements to gain entry, but harder to control their self-definition. Gitlin (1980), for example, notes that media cultivation of celebrity leaders in the New Left effectively distanced these leaders from any potential grassroots base. Meyer (1990) shows how the very visible and extensive presence of celebrities in the nuclear freeze movement led to the predominance of a vague and nonchallenging definition of the movement's claims. As the freeze movement gained celebrity blessing and greater mainstream political support, it moved from a systematic criticism and call for remaking of United States foreign policy to a nonfocused appeal for some element of restraint in nuclear weapons and general opposition to nuclear war. The latter frame was less effective in mobilizing support and far easier to coopt. Celebrities bring with them significant incentives to shift movement frames, and in particular to depoliticize or deradicalize movement claims. Participation by celebrities then can speed the process of institutionalizing and domesticating dissent.

#### Celebrity Standing and Social Movements

Even as activists try to mobilize celebrity participation as a resource for their movements, celebrities themselves attempt to exercise control over how they will be used. Cognizant both of their need to maintain a working relationship with their audiences, and of the kinds of claims and movements in which they will have some kind of credibility, celebrities may in fact gravitate to less challenging movements, and to more consensual claims within larger social movements. This softening effect requires a more serious look. Toward which sorts of movements and claims do they gravitate? How and why might celebrities depoliticize movement discourse through their involvement?

Celebrity participation in social movements is marked by feasts and famines (as is mobilization; see Tarrow 1991). Recently, for example, the abortion rights movement has featured ongoing and extensive participation by many notable celebrities. In contrast, very few celebrities have been willing to identify themselves publicly with the anti-abortion movement. Indeed, although there is no shortage of conservative celebrities involved in more conventional partisan politics (Brownstein 1990), entertainment industry activism has tended to lean toward "liberal" causes such as civil rights, environmentalism, and homelessness (Prindle 1993, pp. 105-113). Rather than speculate about the propensity of artists or athletes to "prefer" certain causes ideologically, however, we think it more fruitful to critically investigate the factors that affect how extensively a celebrity will be publicly engaged in a particular cause.

First, a celebrity sympathetic to a very unpopular cause may be unwilling

to risk the public disapprobation that would come with identification with a marginal political viewpoint or a stigmatized constituency. Few celebrities, for example, have been willing to work to call attention to Haitian refugees (Olden Polynice, a professional basketball player from Haiti, is a notable exception), even as many were actively engaged in the campaign for sanctions against South Africa's apartheid government in the middle 1980s. Support for sanctions was by no means a consensus position in U.S. politics, but it was a very popular one, and actors took little risk of popular disapproval and disaffection by endorsing it.

Supporting popular movements in times of high mobilization may be an attractive political outlet for concerned (and even less concerned) celebrities. However, we see little visible celebrity activity in movements having a more difficult time with popular support. Actors and athletes, for example, are now rarely visible in labor struggles outside their own industries. Few celebrities will publicly address an international issue such as Palestinian self-determination, or a domestic issue such as welfare reform. Participation in a social movement means embracing identification with that movement, and for any person whose livelihood and status are tied up with her relationship with a larger audience, such identification can be terribly risky.

Second, mass media coverage (and thus visibility) of a celebrity's participation in a movement is bound by the same principles that govern other aspects of celebrity journalism. The media reward with coverage novelty, excess, conflict, and other kinds of drama (Gitlin 1980; Ryan 1991). Although celebrities' viewpoints on political issues are often included as tidbits in celebrity profiles, ongoing participation by a celebrity in a social movement is unlikely to attract ongoing coverage. Meryl Streep's concerns about pesticides are relevant only when there is political mobilization on pesticides. Steve Allen's participation in the antinuclear weapons movement in the United States, spanning four decades, attracts media attention only when the movement can generate media interest in its activities. Regardless of Allen's continued support of movement organizations in periods of slack mobilization, mass media are interested only when the movement appears as a relevant political actor (Meyer 1993). Thus, even when a celebrity participates in a movement, such participation is invisible unless the movement itself generates some threshold of political activity.

Awareness of public approval and of media attentiveness shapes the visibility of celebrity participation in social movements. We can sharpen this explanation by asking in which types of movements and with which sorts of claims celebrities can claim *standing*, that is, a recognizable legitimate interest in the outcome of a political question or movement. We

borrow the term *standing* from legal theory, which allows that only certain agents have recognized interest in making claims before a court (Beckwith 1994). Expanding the notion to social movements, which often do not operate within formal legal institutions, we can think of standing as a socially constructed legitimacy to engage publicly in a particular issue.

The construction of standing and its essential elements change across particular venues. Acceptance as a legitimate spokesperson of a movement, for example, can be accorded within several different venues, among them movement organizations, mass media, and political authorities. The gatekeepers in each will consider different factors in according standing and will draw the boundaries of legitimate standing to include different actors. For celebrities, whose "elite" status is especially tenuous (based on consumption rather than votes, and on "personality" rather than action) standing is especially tricky. This instability is key to understanding the form and impact of celebrity participation in social protest movements. The celebrity must make a credible claim to having just cause for her concerns and efforts. *Celebrities are most likely to engage in, and gain credible attention in, issues in which they can claim legitimate standing. They may also redefine the movements in which they engage such that their standing is viewed as legitimate.*

Given celebrities' needs to maintain both standing and popularity, several patterns emerge. First, there is a tendency toward making general collective claims about rights, such as peace, a clean environment, or abortion rights—rights about which celebrities, regardless of status and wealth, can easily claim shared concerns and standing with a larger public. Anyone, even a celebrity, can argue with some credence that his or her life may be directly affected by government's policies on the environment or strategic nuclear policy. They have an obvious stake, or standing, in the outcome of such a political dispute, and therefore can make claims on government.

Claims for specific group entitlements or rights tend to be remodeled into charity. By making a call for charitable giving to any particular group, a celebrity distances himself or herself from the beneficiary group. The claimant calls for generosity, but not for any kind of structural political change. *Comic Relief's* regular efforts to help the homeless, and USA for Africa's attempt to raise money to aid the hungry elsewhere, both appeal for generosity, but not reform. This is a well-established tradition of celebrity activism, as various disease telethons and public service announcements attest. Although the celebrities may become tiresome, they are nonetheless legitimated voices.

Finally, demands for selective benefits for particular groups are often subsumed by celebrities into larger collective ones. Most unusual is for

celebrities to stake their claim for some disenfranchised or stigmatized group, arguing for that group's special benefits by right. In making such claims, the celebrity essentially throws her lot in with that of a stigmatized group, and calls for at least modest structural reform. These efforts entail real risk, as either a celebrity's legitimacy in speaking for a group is called into question, or the celebrity risks alienating her audience by explicitly identifying with the unpopular and disadvantaged. Such claims are the least attractive and most tenuous for celebrities, and thus celebrity participation in movements will tend to push the framing of claims to either charity or collective benefits. Thus, a liberation movement for African Americans becomes a "civil rights" struggle, expanding the scope of those who can legitimately make claims. Similarly, AIDS activism can become an effort to provide for those suffering from the disease, not because of their rights, but because of society's generosity. To illustrate these transformation processes associated with celebrity participation in social movements, we turn to two cases. In different ways, both the case of Walden Pond and of Colorado's Amendment 2 demonstrate how celebrities, maneuvering around difficulties of standing, revise and depoliticize movement claims.<sup>5</sup>

#### Walden Woods

It is oddly ironic that Henry Thoreau, who achieved notoriety only posthumously, should serve as the rallying point of a celebrity-based environmental preservation campaign. Musicians, actors, and athletes, invoking Thoreau's legacy as mandate, used their star power and money-raising ability—characteristics Thoreau lacked—to protect some of the woods near Walden Pond and to manage a seething local conflict about affordable housing. In the process, the project moved to consensus-style politics and broad coalition building that Thoreau himself would have found elusive, if not abhorrent. In applying celebrities as a political resource to a local movement campaign, organizers simultaneously succeeded beyond their wildest dreams and lost control of their movement.

The dispute began as a conflict about zoning in Concord and Lincoln, Massachusetts, the towns abutting Walden. Both towns are home to very wealthy residents reluctant to allow real estate development that might compromise their own property values. A developer, Philip DeNormandie, had twice been unable to win approval to build luxury condominiums on land he owned near Walden Pond. In 1986, at the height of Boston's real estate boom, he and Mortimer Zuckerman packaged a development deal for the land that local officials would find difficult to refuse. Zuckerman would build an office park about 700 yards from the Pond, while DeNormandie proposed to build Concord Commons, a 139-unit development that would

reserve approximately 40 units for low- and moderate-income buyers.<sup>6</sup> With no opposition, open hearings were held on January 20, 1987, and the Concord Board of Selectmen unanimously approved the proposal the same day (Perney 1990).

The opposition that followed was scattered and ineffective. In the spring of 1988, Thomas Blanding, a self-identified "Thoreau scholar," in conjunction with both wealthy landowners and local environmentalists, formed the Thoreau Country Conservation Alliance (TCCA) to oppose the developments. TCCA tried to build a campaign upon its own resources, by conducting studies of soil erosion and local traffic patterns, holding public meetings, lobbying and writing letters to elected officials, and publishing newspaper ads. Development opponents did not mention affordable housing in any of their efforts, confining their arguments to two sets of issues: The proposed developments would adversely affect the quality of life for Concord and Lincoln residents; Thoreau's woods deserved special preservation because of his literary significance, and his value as a symbol to the environmental movement (TCCA 1988).<sup>7</sup> TCCA was largely unable to generate much local support, partly because of its late arrival to the issue, partly because of strategic ineptitude (Blatt 1990). In November 1989 Chet Atkins, the U.S. congressional representative from the area, finally met with the group and told them that federal help to preserve the area was unlikely, but that they might try to raise the money needed to buy the sites themselves, a sum then estimated at approximately \$10 million. Local officials saw little prospect that TCCA could stage such an ambitious fund-raising campaign, and expected the opposition to disappear (Blatt 1989).

By all accounts, TCCA would have disappeared without the almost accidental mobilization of new resources. In December 1988 CNN picked up a local story that TCCA hoped to raise the money to preserve Walden Woods, and the rock musician Don Henley saw the report on television in his Los Angeles home. Henley called Blanding, identified as president of TCCA in the report, and offered to send money and help (Perney 1990). Naming Thoreau as an early inspiration and citing his own efforts in other political causes, including protecting the Brazilian rainforest, Henley declared that it was critical to have a domestic symbol of the environmental movement. Blanding had never heard of Henley, but he recognized the benefits of outside help, and led Henley on a tour of the area early the next year.

From the beginning Henley framed the issue broadly and symbolically, rather than as a local dispute in which he would have no legitimate standing. "People are going to hear about this, not only here but around the world," he announced. "We are going to hold fund raisers and prevail upon

foundations and trusts. MTV is going to help out and we are going to use my profession, rock 'n roll, to come up with the money. . . . Walden Woods, like the flag, the cross, and the Star of David, is a symbol and, as such, it must be preserved" (Perney 1990, p. 16). This frame immediately allowed his own efforts to become relevant, but also opened the way for the participation of a larger audience for what had begun as a suburban zoning dispute.

Henley's interest and efforts in the project immediately gained attention from elected officials, other celebrities, and national mass media. He scheduled the first benefit events, a pair of concerts, for late in April 1990. Hosted by *Miami Vice* star Don Johnson, the concerts featured Arlo Guthrie, Bonnie Raitt, Bob Seger, and Jimmy Buffett, and were highlighted by Henley's onstage reunion with his old band, the Eagles. To use other celebrities, Henley also organized a press conference and other fund-raising events, most notably a private party at the Hard Rock Cafe, at which supporters could buy for \$100 the chance to mingle with the musicians and other notables, including numerous local politicians, the author E. L. Doctorow, Red Sox pitcher Roger Clemens, and the actors Dana Delaney, Carrie Fisher, and Ed Begley, Jr. (*Lowell Sun*, April 26, 1990). All told, the events of April raised some \$250,000—a small part of the \$10 million needed to buy all of the land, but substantially more than Blanding and his allies could have raised in years.

Local and national media were cynical about the celebrities' efforts, charging them with ignorance and insincerity—and with lack of standing. The *Middlesex News* (April 27, 1990), for example, ran a cartoon of Don Johnson, in *Miami Vice* garb and sporting sunglasses, standing in front of a sports car with the license plate, "Don." The cartoon Johnson explains that Walden Woods must be protected "because I can really relate to that Thoreau dude." Others dismissed the celebrities' trendiness. As one critic wrote, "Among the distant Hollywood set, saving the woods where Thoreau once mused has become chic, much as have saving the Brazilian rain forest, the African famine victims, or the dolphins from tuna fishermen" (*Concord Minuteman Chronicle*, April 26, 1990). The participation of celebrities not rooted in the area—without legitimate standing as residents—was excuse to distrust their efforts and dismiss their claims.

More serious were criticisms from advocates and local officials concerned with affordable housing. Opponents charged that the celebrities were being manipulated by local interests. Joseph Flatley, administrator of the state's affordable housing program, explained, "Part of what's going on is you've got wealthy people who paid a lot to get into the community and don't want to let anyone else near Walden Pond at a lower price. I think

if the celebrities understood the facts it would startle them. . . . The only time the conservation issue comes up is when the site is proposed for affordable housing" (*Boston Globe*, April 5, 1990). Amy Anthony, state secretary of the Department of Communities and Development, sent Henley an angry telegram charging that some of the calls to preserve Walden Woods were "a thinly veiled attempt on the part of a few to obstruct the construction of affordable housing in a wealthy suburb" (Perney 1990, p. 16).

Henley redoubled his efforts to win credibility and construct a distinct and noncontroversial identity. To answer the charges of trendiness, he emphasized his seriousness, warning his critics, "They may think they're dealing with some Hollywood moron, but they have another thing [*sic*] coming. I've done this before. I didn't just get off the boat. I've been an environmentalist for 20 years" (*Boston Herald*, April 20, 1990). He founded his own organization, the Walden Woods Project (WWP), that would be locally based and clearly independent of the tainted TCCA, personally hiring one of Senator Kennedy's local staff to administer the project. To answer the charges of insensitivity to affordable housing, he announced that WWP would buy not only the land slated for development, but also a third parcel on which to build affordable housing (Blatt 1990).

Henley obviated an ongoing conflict between preservationists and affordable housing advocates by committing to both positions: preserving the land and providing affordable housing. He effectively ended most criticism by eschewing politics. Pointing to his celebrity activist experience, Henley claimed standing as an activist in a global environmental movement, one in which Walden Woods had only symbolic value. The market, not the government, would provide the answers to everyone's concerns. Henley negotiated an arrangement with a nonprofit environmental charity so that supporters could make tax-deductible contributions. He established an advisory board for the project that would ensure high visibility and little controversy, featuring most prominently entertainers, including Kirstie Alley, Ted Danson, and Meryl Streep.<sup>8</sup> Tom Blanding and the local activists disappeared from both public view and political significance.

The Walden Woods Project's explicit commitment to embrace and contain all positions in the controversy—protection of the woods, provision of housing, and endorsement of the prerogatives of private property—left Henley and his allies with the need only to buy the land. Opponents were happy to stand back and allow the stars to raise money to satisfy all of their concerns. It was now easy to ignore any larger issues about the environment or affordable housing that the controversy initially raised. WWP continued working to convert its primary resource, celebrity visibility, into money.

WWP staged a series of three benefit concerts in New York's Madison Square Garden in October 1991, then another series in Los Angeles featuring country music performers. In the fall of 1992, WWP sponsored a comedy benefit in Washington, D.C., hosted by Mike Myers and Dana Carvey in their roles as Wayne and Garth. WWP has twice sponsored what it promises will be an annual 10 kilometer walk for Walden Woods, on which fundraisers can accompany well-known actors. WWP, now featuring a more diversified list of celebrity endorsers (including, for example, Sister Souljah and Elizabeth Pena), offers to plant a tree in Walden Woods for those who will contribute \$35; sells T-shirts, calendars, and posters; and most recently offers a volume featuring celebrity appreciations of nature in general and Walden in particular (Henley and Marsh 1992). As money, rather than mass support or visibility, has become the primary challenge for the preservation of the Walden Woods, Henley and WWP have cultivated corporate sponsors, including Apple Computer, AT&T, Evian Waters, the Hard Rock Cafe, the Hearst Corporation, Mr. Coffee, MTV, Reebok, Revlon, Stop and Shop groceries, and Trebor Pulp and Paper (*Forest Walker*, September 1992).

Unsurprisingly, given this broad coalition, the Walden Woods experience is trumpeted as a model for the environmental movement. Yet WWP's efforts have been consumed by fundraising and developing a structure to buy three expensive tracts of land. Henley's very substantial, and essential, commitment of time and money is less likely to inspire other celebrities than to warn them off similar efforts. TCCA, meanwhile, and other local activists for housing and preservation, have largely fallen by the wayside, lacking the wherewithal to contribute much to the current task at hand (raising money) and sometimes expressing resentment that Henley and WWP have taken over the effort.

The mobilization of celebrities as a resource to support a local preservation campaign ultimately overwhelmed and overshadowed the locals. Entertainers from elsewhere had neither interest nor standing to take sides in the zoning conflict, and instead consistently emphasized a rhetoric and standing based on consensual and universalist claims, subsuming local claims based on particular standing in the process. Local activists, lacking the fundraising capacity of the celebrities, were dependent upon local or state government to help them achieve their goals. Their inability to leverage sufficient political capital to influence elected officials led to a dependence upon outside resources. The celebrities who could leverage such resources redefined and redirected activists' claims, leaving the initiators essentially out of the loop. The celebrities had interest in Walden Pond only for its symbolic value to the environmental movement, and in affordable



housing only as a hedge against political opposition.<sup>9</sup> Paradoxically, the celebrities inflated the significance of the Walden dispute, yet carved out a solution unlikely to have any impact beyond Concord.

### Colorado's Amendment 2

With the 1992 passage of Colorado's Amendment 2, a state law denying homosexuals minority status and the legal protection that comes with it, celebrity involvement in gay and lesbian rights, typically next to nonexistent, briefly picked up. Amendment 2, as National Public Radio put it, "sparked protests and boycotts, especially by celebrities who spend their winter vacations there" (*All Things Considered*, 1993). Barbra Streisand, Martina Navratilova, Chris Evert, Jill St. John, Reggie Jackson, Cher, Whoopi Goldberg, Joan Rivers, Lily Tomlin, and Liza Minelli, among others, joined in various forms of vocal response to the amendment. A close look at this case is instructive, demonstrating the particular shifts in movement agenda, framing, and strategy that occur when celebrities do become involved in the lesbian and gay liberation struggles. In constructing standing for participation in this movement, celebrities carved out identities that limited the scope and claims of gay and lesbian activists, actually inhibiting the construction of dissident identity.

"It's a playground for the rich, the powerful, and the celebrated, but now the slopes in Colorado have become politically slippery," said Barbara Walters, introducing *Nightline* coverage of responses to Amendment 2. "A new law has outraged gays and lesbians"—and the story cuts, oddly, to Barbra Streisand, who opened the public celebrity involvement in anti-Amendment 2 activity with a sound bite (at a fundraiser for AIDS Project Los Angeles) that became an opener for much mass media coverage: "There are plenty of us who love the mountains and the rivers of that truly beautiful state," Streisand says, "but we must now say clearly that the moral climate there is no longer acceptable" ("Colorado Hit by Boycott" 1993).

Two things are immediately evident. First, Streisand embodies the type of celebrity claims commonly made in this case. She claims standing as someone who loves Colorado, and more importantly who expresses that love by spending time and money there; she and others claim partial membership not of the group "lesbians and gays," but of the group "Colorado citizens." Later, her claim to citizenship not quite holding, Streisand backed off of her reported call for a boycott, implicitly citing her lack of status as a Coloradan as reason. "The people living in Colorado," she said, "are contemplating many strategies. I will respect whichever they feel is most effective" (della Cava 1992, p. 2D). Importantly, she does not

defer to "lesbians and gays" or "lesbians and gays living in Colorado," but to "the people" of Colorado. Such maneuvering is unnecessary for tennis star Martina Navratilova, who joined a federal lawsuit against the amendment. Navratilova is one celebrity who has a double claim: She is, in the *Chicago Tribune's* description, "an avowed lesbian who lives in Aspen" (Coates 1992, p. 1), or in ABC's description, is "gay, a part-time Colorado resident, and opposed to both the law and the boycott" ("Colorado Hit by Boycott" 1993).

Second, the story places Streisand as a spokesperson for "outraged gays and lesbians," though she is neither. The slippage is extended in the story's coverage: While initially claiming that Amendment 2 created a "firestorm in Colorado's gay and lesbian community" with immediate "calls for an economic boycott of the state," launching of a "lawsuit to declare the amendment unconstitutional," and the sounding of a coast-to-coast "battle cry to overturn the vote," the reporter later claims that "not surprisingly, celebrities who vacation in Aspen led the charge against Amendment Two" ("Colorado Hit by Boycott" 1993). The outrage and actions of lesbians and gays are backgrounded in favor of non-gay celebrities; in fact, continued coverage of the boycott took its place primarily in entertainment sections, sandwiched, for example, between a "Woody Update" and a "Prince Pooh-Poohs Money Claims" story (Varin 1992).

How might a non-gay celebrity become a spokeswoman for angry gays and lesbians, and what difference does it make that she does? To understand what it means for gay and lesbian movements to have Streisand take center stage, we must first understand the limits on celebrity involvement in identity-based movements such as these. Whether in liberal accommodationist forms, separatist culture-building forms, or radical confrontational forms, the diverse movement for lesbian and gay liberation and rights has made "coming out" a centerpiece of political strategy. Whereas in early same-sex subcultures coming out had been primarily a private decision of self-acceptance and acknowledgement of identity to other homosexuals, dominant gay and lesbian movements after the 1969 Stonewall rebellion transformed it into a "profoundly political act that could offer enormous personal benefits to an individual," serving "as both goal and strategy" (D'Emilio 1983, p. 235; D'Emilio 1989, p. 466; see also Altman 1971; Adam 1987). Coming out functions simultaneously as an act of personal accomplishment (overcoming self-hatred, facing homo-hatred), a movement-building strategy (as newly "out" people became invested in the success of the movement, and an advertisement for it), and a public political statement (that "we are everywhere," no longer accepting the oppressive circumstances denying lesbian and gay existence and rights).<sup>10</sup>

Lesbian and gay movements operate on the familiar terrain of "identity politics."<sup>11</sup> Gay and lesbian rights and liberation movements have been built not only on the personal-is-political strategy of gay self-disclosure, but on the cultural-is-political strategy of institution building. Both in autonomous lesbian-feminist organizing around "womansculture" and gay-male-dominated regional organizing, much movement activity focuses on building institutions and cultural forms, including newspapers, clinics, neighborhoods, record companies, and community centers (D'Emilio 1989; Phelan 1989; Whittier in press). What has emerged since the late 1960s is a firmly institutionalized notion of "gay" and "lesbian" as quasi-ethnic minority statuses (Epstein 1987).

The emphasis on *being* publicly gay or lesbian as a primary political move, and as the centerpiece of movement building, means participation by those not identifying as gay is awkward. Participants of undeclared sexuality are typically assumed to be gay, and thus subject to stigma from the outside. From the inside, they are typically pressured to declare their identities. The practice of "outing" takes this dynamic to its extreme: On grounds that staying closeted contributes to gay oppression, any "suspected" lesbian or gay man is brought (willingly or unwillingly) into the political ring. Public figures who come out are expected to participate, and heterosexual supporters are expected to recognize the limits of their participation as "conscience constituents" (McCarthy and Zald 1977, p. 1222). It is precisely one's standing that is crucial to movement action.

Not surprisingly, then, celebrity participation in gay and lesbian movement activities has been sparse and awkward. Very rarely does celebrity involvement take the identity strategy, with its attendant claims to selective benefits such as gay and lesbian civil rights. Partly, declaring an identity does not necessarily translate into movement participation. The singer k.d. lang, for example, recently declared herself a lesbian (after years of teasing that she was a "L. . . L. . . Lawrence Welk fan"), but she participates more actively in animal rights and vegetarianism movements than in lesbian and gay movements.

Partly, of course, celebrities and their handlers see too much to lose by coming out in the entertainment industry—one need only recall Rock Hudson to get hold of the confusion and coverups a gay celebrity can evoke. Being openly gay is seen as a bad career move, in that an established off-screen gay image can inhibit audiences' abilities to "buy" a celebrity in a straight role (Prindle 1993, pp. 73–76). The careers of openly gay performers tend to be built around their identities as gay; entertainers who do come out tend to be minor figures, at best. In 1991, for example, two television celebrities made political statements on the national talk show circuit

that fit directly into the rhetoric of gay rights identity politics. One, the grand marshal at a gay pride celebration had, according to *People*, been "nudged" out of the closet by California Pete Wilson's veto of AB101, a bill that would have protected gays and lesbians from job discrimination. "We will not be ignored," Dick Sargent said at the parade. "We deserve to be heard. People don't understand that we're everywhere" (Lait 1992, p. B2). His claim to fame: playing Darrin Stevens for three years on television's *Bewitched* more than twenty years earlier. Sheila Kuhle, often appearing with Sargent, spoke even more explicitly in the language of personal politics. "It's interesting how threatening it is," she said on CNN's *Sonya Live*, "to simply say, 'I'm me and I'm proud'?" ("Gays in Hollywood" 1992). Her claim to fame: playing Zelda Gilroy on television's *Dobie Gillis* in the early 1960s.

Limits on celebrity involvement in a movement based on stigmatized identity, then, are evident. Based in the interests of avoiding stigma and possible career damage, celebrity involvement in gay rights poses the difficulty of finding grounds other than identity on which to claim standing and base participation. Amendment 2 may be a spot for celebrity participation exactly because standing can be partially claimed on grounds other than sexual identity—Aspen is, after all, a Hollywood "community" in its own way—and can also be easily expanded to include non-gay claims.

Without the options of claiming standing as either Coloradans or minority-group members, celebrity participation in the response to Amendment 2 has turned (for all but Navratilova) on the framing of the issue. Most basically, they shift the frame from that of an issue that turns on the particular treatment of a particular group of people—that is, institutionalized hatred and discrimination against those with particular desires—to that of a broadly defined issue that turn on the indivisible benefits in which all citizens have a stake. The point, as Streisand puts it, is to speak out "when the civil rights of *any group* . . . are being threatened" (Varin 1992, emphasis added). The shift, by eliminating the particularity of anti-gay discrimination in favor of a focus on the universal "immorality" of discrimination, is necessary to stake out a basis for participating in the discussion at all.<sup>12</sup> To the large degree that (avowed heterosexual) celebrities took center stage as opponents of Amendment 2, then, the frame of the movement response was necessarily shifted away from the territory of identity politics. It was less the *anti-gay* discrimination that was targeted, but rather the *anti-gay discrimination*.

It is important to notice not only that celebrities affect a framing shift within a movement action, but that their participation is driven toward an issue that will allow them an insider's claim—that is, an issue that can be

framed so that anyone and everyone can "speak out" from equal ground. Sexual-minority struggles take a broad range of identity-based actions, from civil rights marches (most recently, the huge 1993 March on Washington, another event that allowed celebrity participation) to gender-playful street activism and nonviolent cultural terrorism. The latter are heavily dependent on the claiming of a lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender identity, and are assertive of claims to rights and dignity on the basis of *difference* from heterosexual society: they tend to be hostile toward assimilationist goals and geared toward challenging existing sexual categories. Celebrity participation, and the attention it brings with it, skews visible movement action toward broadly defined issues that emphasize heterosexual and homosexual *sameness*, claiming rights on that basis and remaining unconcerned with a challenge to sexual categories. In effect, the celebrity participation brought the opposition to Amendment 2 greater visibility and public acceptance by restricting the sorts of claims gay and lesbian activists were seen to make.

#### Analysis and Conclusion

Celebrity participation in social movement campaigns has become an increasingly common feature in modern U.S. political and social life. In this article we have tried to provide encouragement for further scholarly attention; this piece is, of course, not the last word on the topic. We conclude by emphasizing our main premises, and speculating about larger questions that celebrity participation in movements raises.

We have offered an approach for looking at celebrities and social movements, and for considering the processes by which celebrity participation in social movements affects those movements. We have built upon and sought to synthesize recent theoretical work on social movements and on celebrity, providing a theoretical overview of the costs and benefits of celebrity participation in movement campaigns. Through close examination of two recent movement campaigns in which celebrity participation was extremely visible, we examined and elaborated the ways in which celebrities influence the campaigns they join. Both cases, Walden Woods and Colorado's Amendment 2, demonstrate the costs and benefits of celebrity participation in high relief. The presence of celebrities changed the dynamics of the developing campaigns: There is little doubt, even among the original opponents to Walden developments, that without the celebrities their campaign would have disappeared quickly. As to gay and lesbian activism, other anti-gay referenda, lacking celebrity involvement, have drawn far less attention than Amendment 2. In both cases, the celebrities immediately expanded the scope of participation, bringing campaign concerns to broader

public attention, and leveraging outside resources to try to influence local decisions. Also in both cases, local leadership, claims, and concerns were overshadowed as celebrities effectively reframed movements into more consensual, less controversial, and ultimately less disruptive affairs. Such developments suggest that thoughtful activists will consider celebrity participation in their movements with some ambivalence.

The advantages and disadvantages of celebrity participation all revolve around the celebrity's relationship with an entertainment industry and with various audiences: mass media, funders, and a broader public. These relationships are built around a constructed image that may be an asset to challengers. An athlete's strength, an actor's ruggedness or glamor, or a musician's earnestness may rub off, or cast a reflected glow, on the activists and causes the celebrity supports. At the same time, athletes, actors, and musicians (and those around them) will be wary of associations that may compromise their preferred image. Even those celebrities who are willing to risk or compromise their image may find that their audiences are not. Celebrities bring with them their own peculiar relationships to audiences. The dynamics of the particular industry in which a celebrity is engaged restrict opportunities to forge an identity. Musicians, for example, sustain themselves within a more segmented marketplace than, say, athletes and may therefore be able to survive projecting a less favored identity, for example, gay or lesbian, or left-political. Even so, as Gamson (1994) has found, celebrities elicit a range of audience interpretive strategies, often centering on questions of authenticity and fictionality. Often quite aware of celebrities as profit-making constructions, audiences are likewise often skeptical rather than gullible, consumed less with admiration than with gossip, fame mechanics, and image-reality games. Thus, we saw the cynicism accompanying the attention to celebrity participation in movement campaigns. Celebrity involvement in social movements may indeed trigger not only a shift in movement claims, but a conversion of publics' responses to movements and their claims: from consideration of public issues to playing with famous selves.

It is extremely difficult, we have argued, for celebrities to lodge credible claims for structural reform. Most celebrities, after all, sit in visibly advantaged social and economic positions. Even when some try to make stronger and more comprehensive claims, the very visibility of their advantages undermines their intent. We have suggested that essential dynamics of celebrity participation in social movement campaigns can best be understood by thinking about the concept and problems of *standing*. Celebrities are almost invariably most visible as participants in movements in which they can legitimately claim standing or stake. This usually means movements

dominated by moderate, middle-class politics and concerns, emphasizing collective and indivisible benefits, or, alternatively, charity. If attracted to a campaign making somewhat broader claims, celebrities frequently transform those claims to something more palatable to the mass audiences they bring.

As shown in the Walden Woods case, celebrity participation invokes a politics of consensus, which is ultimately a weak mobilizer. The absence of visible efforts by celebrities in claims of rights by disadvantaged or stigmatized groups, as shown in the Amendment 2 case, may suggest that an already distorted political arena has become somewhat more skewed. If celebrity participation means that the disadvantaged or unrepresented can only win visibility by limiting their claims to that which can be gained through noncontroversial politics or charity, then our politics and culture become dangerously distant from the concerns of the dispossessed.

The resources that celebrities bring to bear in social movement struggles do not generally include citizen education or detailed political analysis. The absence of celebrities, however, makes it more difficult for activists to draw media attention. Celebrities aid in gaining entry to mainstream political and cultural institutions, but in doing so they may redefine and homogenize the movement they purportedly represent. The Walden Woods case surely shows the possibilities of harnessed celebrity power, but also its limits; the Amendment 2 case reveals the watering-down process not only of claims, but of the identities of the activists, that often accompanies celebrity support.

Careful thought and analysis should continue to be directed not only toward the repercussions of celebrity activism for movements themselves, but also for U.S. political discourse more generally. What happens to public discourse when movement stories become celebrity stories? Standing for celebrities in movement activity is shaky precisely because celebrities are not like other public figures, and those encountering them tend to respond to them as a different breed: They are typically expected to speak as individuals, not as representatives, and to perform rather than preach. If it is celebrities whom we use to proffer and explain movement claims, perhaps this is because of the atrophy of indigenous political organizations and genuine communities of struggle. If celebrities, manufactured by entertainment industries, must carry the water for the politics of protest, perhaps this reflects more substantial distortions in society.

#### ENDNOTES

\*We presented an early version of this article at the annual meeting of the American Sociological Association, in Miami, Florida, on August 14, 1994. Direct correspondence to

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<sup>1</sup>In striking illustration of the place of "cause-symbolizing" in celebrities' in-person performances, ribbons of various colors proliferated at the 1993 Academy Awards, with some confusion and controversy (What does purple stand for? Does the proliferation of colors dilute the impact of ribbon-wearing?).

<sup>2</sup>Alberoni (1972, pp. 75-78) has suggested several conditions for the emergence of "stardom": the existence of autonomous centers of power institutionally guaranteed against state intervention, complex social structure, large-scale society, increase in economic wealth, and social mobility. The claim that celebrities do not derive power from institutional position is not meant to suggest that they have no power within institutions—many Hollywood stars wield great influence in film-production institutions, for example—but that institutional positions are not the basis for social position.

<sup>3</sup>For a detailed cultural history of fame, see Braudy (1986).

<sup>4</sup>The futility of this sort of speculation has recently been illustrated by David Prindle's argument that Hollywood liberalism is caused by "the existential situation . . . of eternal frustration, resentment, and paranoia," which leads to the adoption of "the perspective of social outsiders," by "economic uncertainty," and by the high percentage of Jews and homosexuals in the industry (Prindle 1993, pp. 97-99).

<sup>5</sup>The presentation of the cases is based primarily on newspaper, magazine, and broadcasting reporting, and the reader should keep in mind the limitations of such reporting.

<sup>6</sup>Massachusetts had recently enacted "anti-snob" zoning ordinances, to encourage wealthy suburban towns to diversify their housing stock. By including some "affordable" housing in his project, the developers could bypass local approval altogether and get authorization from the state.

<sup>7</sup>When critics pointed to the numerous single-family homes already dotting Walden Woods, TCCA spokespeople responded that these were more appropriate to the area than offices and condo parks (*Boston Globe*, April 20, 1990).

<sup>8</sup>The board also included representatives from mainstream environmental organizations, such as the Sierra Club, the National Audubon Society, the Wilderness Society, and the American Hiking Society, but not more controversial groups such as Greenpeace, much less direct action groups such as Earth First!

<sup>9</sup>The ultimate Walden Woods Project approach may have led to substantially less of an achievement in the cause of affordable housing or environmental protection. The huge sums of money needed to purchase lots of largely suburban landscape surrounding Walden Pond could easily instead purchase and preserve tracts of unspoiled wilderness many times larger. In the same way, the celebrities subsumed efforts to increase charitable efforts to provide more affordable housing, allowing their own title to the project. Should WWP succeed in creating 42 units of affordable housing, Concord would need to produce 300 more affordable units to be in rough compliance with state guidelines. It seems hardly likely that WWP can make up this difference, or that the project will have spillover effects anywhere else (e.g., Meyer and Whittier 1994).

<sup>10</sup>The coming out strategy is not without its profound difficulties. As many writers and activists have pointed out over the past two decades, the dominant sexual-minority movements and strategies have been informed by the experiences of their predominantly white, middle-class membership. Coming out neither functions the same nor functions as effortlessly for those in subordinate racial and class positions. "The call by gay activists to reject the

heterosexist norms of the nuclear family was totally ethnocentric," write Isaac Julien and Kobena Mercer, for example (1991, p. 168), "as it ignored the fact that black lesbians and gay men need our families, which offer us support and protection from the racism we experience on the street, at school, from the police, and from the state." See also Moraga (1983).

"For general theoretical statements on identity politics in "new social movements," see Cohen (1985) and Touraine (1985). For discussions of sexual-identity-based movements and their dilemmas, see Weeks (1985, Chapter 8), Escoffier (1985), and Phelan (1989); and on gay-based AIDS activism see Gamson (1991).

"One other common response to the obstacles to claiming standing is to participate in charity work. Interestingly, it is extremely rare to find celebrity involvement in fundraising for gay rights. Because AIDS continues to affect gay men disproportionately, and because it has been culturally associated with gayness in the United States from the days of its "discovery" (see Brandt 1988; Altman 1988; Treichler 1987), the widespread celebrity involvement in AIDS fundraising can be seen as a coded means of involvement in the gay (and to a lesser degree, gay and lesbian) movement. With the notable exception of Elizabeth Taylor (see Collins 1992) the bulk of celebrities' involvement with AIDS has been on a charity rather than an explicitly political model. That model allows participants to claim standing as members of a broad collective (the nation) and to distance themselves from association with the various stigmas attached to AIDS. For examples of celebrity-based AIDS fundraising and charity activities, see Prindle (1993), Kochler (1992), and Fox (1992).

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## *Life Course Malleability: Biographical Work and Deprivatization*

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The traditional view of the life course as the patterned progression of individual experience through time has been challenged on several fronts. The emerging view is that patterned progression is subject to diverse social, historical, and cultural influences. This article extends the challenge by considering the way ordinary biographical work situationally and discursively shapes life course patterning in relation to local cultural and organizational usage. Ethnographic and narrative data from a variety of settings illustrate a social constructionist approach. Concluding comments address the link between the malleability of the life course and the increasing deprivatization of contemporary experience.

The life course has traditionally been viewed as the patterned progression of individual experience through time (Clausen 1986). The progression has been anchored in bodily growth, psychosexuality, behavioral conditioning, and cognitive development (Langer 1969). For example, Freud's (1965 [1905]; 1966) well-known stages of psychosexual maturation (oral, anal, phallic), expanded by Erikson (1963, 1968) to include phases in adult life, presented the essential challenges or dilemmas of growing older. Loevinger (1976), in turn, embellished Erikson's view by focusing empirically on ego processes and identifying integral stages.

Disciplinary practices reflect this view. Experiential progress through time is featured in developmental psychology textbooks, in which such familiar stages of personal change as childhood, adolescence, young adulthood, midlife, and old age appear on dust jackets and in chapter titles, orienting the reader in developmental terms (see, for example, Freiberg 1987 and Schaie and Willis 1991). In medical sociology, a developmental framework for analyzing patterned progression through time emerged in the vocabulary of experiential "trajectories," "status passages" (Glaser and Strauss 1968), and "moral careers" (Goffman 1961), which was widely adopted in ancillary disciplines such as nursing. Curricula and course contents have accordingly guided teaching, learning, and research.

The view has become stereotypical and has considerable popular