



Journey into Social Activism: Qualitative Approaches

Joshua D. Atkinson

Journey into Social Activism

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QUALITATIVE APPROACHES

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*This one is for Sandra and Mimi—
you are my love and my life*

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PREFACE

The study of activism in many ways fits into the long view of humanity presented by “big history” scholars such as David Christian (2004) and Cynthia Brown (2007). Both have presented a vision of history that is marked by transitions across levels of complexity; this includes the big history of the entire universe, as well as the history of humanity. For instance, in the beginning of the universe, there were only scattered subatomic particles with little in the way of complexity. These particles eventually formed into simple hydrogen and helium atoms, and after three hundred million years the first stars were ignited. In this view, aspects of the universe were becoming increasingly complex. According to Christian (2004, 252), the same holds true for human civilization:

Transitions to new levels of complexity often depend on positive feedback mechanisms—cycles in which one change encourages another, which stimulates a third, which magnifies the first, and so on around the circle. One of these causal chains played a fundamental role in the transition to larger and more complex social structures. It links population growth, collective learning, and technological innovation. Increasing the size and density of human communities stimulated the processes of collective learning by increasing the size and variety of the networks within which information and goods could be exchanged. The intellectual synergies possible within these larger networks encouraged the development of new and more intensive technologies, which made it possible to support even larger human communities.

In the previous excerpt, Christian refers to the transitions from tribal communities to organized states. The same claims can also be applied to historical changes to activism over the course of human history: increase in the numbers of activists leads to greater knowledge, which can be intensified by technologies. As all of these things increase and intertwine, structures of activism become more complex.

Research by nineteenth-century scholars described activism as a contagious mob mentality (see chapter 1); according to this view, activists were overly emotional people engaged in collective behavior. Although there were significant problems with such early works, these conceptualizations were not entirely wrong. Activism, as observed by these nineteenth-century scholars, did not involve the tools available to activists in the 1960s, let alone today. Early forms of activism witnessed during this time entailed small numbers of people, crude communication technologies, and rudimentary tactics for protest. It is not surprising, then, that observers would find such activist endeavors to be brutish or hysterical. This is not to diminish the causes or endeavors of those earlier activists, but a reminder that much has changed over the past century and a half. The observations of early scholars should not be dismissed as elitist snobbery; their observations provide insight into activism that was less complex than it is today. Over the years, as the number of activists grew across different movements, more sophisticated organizations emerged. As activists developed and employed technologies for communication, they were able to build and link networks. As the tools for the publication of alternative media became more readily available, activism continued to change. Large-scale activist communities have emerged that have constructed alternative visions of the world; the activists in those communities have built structures of knowledge that shape their interactions with the world. These communities are the product of overlapping, networked activists and activist organizations that are engaged in various events and have taken part in the production of mediated texts. Activism has become incredibly complex over the years, to say the least. This increased complexity has given rise to the need for smart approaches to the study of social activism. In an article concerning the connections between activism and dialogue, Shiv Ganesh and Heather Zoller (2012) demonstrate that scholars have often conceptualized activism as tactics, activity, or principles; they note, “across perspectives and disciplines, however, one finds an emphasis, on contestation as a core aspect of activist communication, and key concepts such as advocacy, conflict, and transgression to be central to activism” (69). For the purpose of this book, activism, in a general sense, is defined as collaborations by people in order to advocate for a position, nurture conflicts in society, or violate or transgress laws or norms in society.

My own experiences demonstrate the need for developed approaches in such academic endeavors. I remember the first time I conducted qualitative research on social activism. I was a graduate student at the University of Missouri and had enrolled in a qualitative methods course in the Department of Communication. One of our research assignments was supposed to include data from at least eight interviews. Based on my interest in activism and social movements, I chose to focus on an activist community in Columbia, Missouri. Initially, I did not think that it would be very hard, as I had written papers for other classes on the subject of activism and alternative media that were well received. For example, I had written a paper for my quantitative methods course on the effects of activist messages in alternative media by conducting surveys of students enrolled in the basic public speaking course; that particular paper garnered a top paper distinction at a conference. I had also written a paper for a (quantitative) content analysis course that explored how highly visible protest activities were often followed by significant changes to terminology used in alternative media content; that paper was later published in an edited volume. As I embarked on this new qualitative enterprise in 2002, I felt confident about my abilities as a researcher. I couldn't have been more wrong. I had to gain access to the activist community, and that was no small task. The chief organizer of one of the central groups within the community would not grant me an interview, and several of the other members of the organization seemed to take his lead and turn down my invitations to participate in the research. As I looked to other activists in the larger community, I learned quickly that many of the more radical activists did not trust outsiders and preferred to not get involved in such academic pursuits; they did not feel as if they could entrust a researcher with sensitive details about their militant activist tactics. Finally, one of my fellow graduate students introduced me to a few of his activist friends, and this, in turn, led to a significant breakthrough for recruiting participants. Those initial contacts snowballed into the eight participants I needed to complete the project; they also served as initial contacts for future research.

To be sure, the difficulties discussed here only scratch the surface of all of the problems that I faced within that initial project. These problems, however, demonstrate the need for a well-developed agenda and approach to the research. My early endeavors were really akin to groping in the dark. I only focused on my interests and blindly sought out participants for interviews. Without a disciplined approach, I was left floundering. Despite these trials and tribulations, I became firmly entrenched in qualitative research methods for my future pursuits concerning social activism. Essentially, qualitative methods enabled me to explore the lived experiences and perceptions of activists as they engaged in actions and campaigns to effect social change; such information was

integral for answering the research questions that I found to be important in my own corner of academia. That first project, however, was not the end to my learning process and growth as a qualitative researcher of social activism. In subsequent projects I struggled with moral dilemmas, difficulties with transcriptions, participant hostility and misinformation, shifts in technology, and the basic human needs for food and sleep. Even today I struggle at times with very crucial problems in the process of conducting research concerning this complex issue. As recently as 2011, I conducted research with conservative Tea Party activists and ran into the same problem of gaining access to organizations and the overarching activist community. This time, however, there was no evident fix to the problem, as boundary maintenance and the adherence to thematic purity among the activists in the community were significant obstacles to my research. In the end, I abandoned my plans for interviews and focus groups with Tea Party activists in favor of a qualitative content analysis of the dominant alternative media they produced and used. Ultimately, I have learned that qualitative research concerning this complex topic is a lifelong process. The longer that I engage in such research, the more I need to work on my methods and approaches to the different sites where activism can be found. Qualitative research is often systematic, but it is also malleable enough so that it can conform to a variety of contexts and situations; qualitative research methods are rarely, if ever, so general that they fit into all research sites. Because of such flexibility associated with these methods, as well as the variety and complexity of sites in which activism takes place, I must constantly work to adjust and hone my own approaches to the study of this important topic.

With my experiences and knowledge about the complexity of activism in mind, I found it quite surprising that no one had written a book that made some attempt to cover or demonstrate qualitative methods in the study of social activism. Such a book would be invaluable to students and veteran researchers who strive to employ various qualitative methods across increasingly complex research sites. Given my experience and background, I decided to take the initiative and write *Journey into Social Activism*. I began by reviewing articles published over the past ten years in communication, media, and journalism journals so as to get a sense of the number of projects that used qualitative methods. A review of articles in the Communication and Mass Media database of Ebscohost revealed two things: First, the vast majority of those articles focused on Western-based activism or were written by Western academics, a fact that is reflected in this book. Second, I found that most of the articles published over the past ten years had employed qualitative methods of some sort (e.g., interviews, ethnography, or qualitative content analysis). Essentially, over 55 percent of the communication, journalism, and media journal sources citing *activism* in that database were qualitative in nature, while the

rest were split between quantitative approaches and articles devoted to theoretical discussions. Apparently, qualitative methods are the dominant tool for communication and media research concerning activism, protest, and alternative media. For my book project, I created an inventory of these articles, as well as numerous books and monographs, and began to comb through each source to identify the methods used by the authors. My goal was to explore not only the methods that were used but also the specific processes by which those methods were utilized. I set out to explore the ways in which the authors applied their methods to their research sites and catalog good qualitative approaches to the examination of organizations, networks, events, and alternative media.

Although I managed to accomplish my task, my efforts were met with a huge problem: many of the articles, I found, had little (if any) description of the qualitative methods used by the researchers. In many cases, the researchers did not even note the method that they used to collect data; they merely stated that qualitative methods were the primary source of data. Although some monographs, such as Nick Couldry's (2000) monograph on media pilgrimages and activism, do a fine job explicating the qualitative methods used, most provide only scant information. At best, discussions concerning qualitative methods in the study of social activism are sporadic and often lack detail or depth. A case in point is an analysis of videos posted to interactive media platforms. In the article, the researchers note that they made use of a "qualitative tool" to aid them in their analysis. "Excellent!" I thought. This was exactly the kind of information I was looking for. The article, however, only included a note that stated that information regarding the tool could be found in a previous article by the researchers. Undeterred, I searched until I found the older article, only to discover a reference that information regarding the tool could be found in yet another cited source. "Fine," I thought, "I will simply follow the breadcrumbs until I find this tool." Sadly, I was defeated at this point, as the reference section of the article showed that the source was a conference presentation; I could find no record of this presentation anywhere else. The point is that many researchers did not provide much in the way of documentation about their methods in the articles and manuscripts that I examined, which made writing this book difficult at times. Nevertheless, my examination of these articles enabled me to find nuggets of information and practice that became the basis for the qualitative approaches to the study of social activism featured here. Using these nuggets and my own experiences, I summarized a series of qualitative approaches associated with different research sites that can be used in the study of social activism. For the most part, these approaches have been used in studies of organized activism oriented toward global or national issues, such as civil rights or war; studies of

that type constitute the vast majority of articles and monographs published over the years. This means that formally bounded examples of activism, such as organizations and prepared protests, are the primary focus of these approaches. Decentralized or less bounded forms of activism, such as lifestyle activism or subcultures, are not dealt with in great detail here. Such forms of activism are important and definitely worthy of study, but wind up conceptualized within the major research sites that are the foundation for this book. Ultimately, *Journey into Social Activism* provides scholars and students with exceptional insight into the use of methods within formally bounded sites of activism, with less discernment concerning those that are more decentralized. Intrepid scholars will hopefully remedy such a limitation through future works with greater awareness of those important sites.

The book is split up into two parts. Part I deals with the philosophical foundations in activist research; part II describes approaches to the study of social activism that have emerged from research conducted by qualitative scholars. As social activism becomes increasingly complex, it is important that researchers engage in their use of qualitative methods in thoughtful ways. *Journey into Social Activism* provides researchers with ideas on how to refine their research approaches and methodologies, if not blueprints for building their own research projects. Given that qualitative methods are flexible and malleable, I have no intention of presenting these approaches as one size fits all. What I present here are ways to think about dealing with the complex topic of social activism: How does a researcher formulate research questions? How are interviews conducted? Who should the researcher interview? How are texts collected for qualitative content analysis? How are qualitative content analyses conducted? *Journey into Social Activism* can help scholars to find answers to these questions, or it can provide tips for developing altogether different questions. How the book is used is entirely up to the reader.

PART I

Research Foundations

Part I explores the building blocks that are at the heart of good qualitative inquiry concerning social activism: history, methodology, and methods.

Chapter 1 introduces the history of research on social activism and explicates different scholarly views of social movements. This history lesson is vital for any research project as researchers should be aware of the accomplishments of those who came before them—not only to make meaningful contributions in the present but also to avoid “reinventing the wheel” by exploring concepts and topics that have already been thoroughly researched. Only by comprehending past (qualitative or quantitative) endeavors can researchers effectively situate their own pursuits and begin to construct new projects.

Chapter 2 explains the different methodological positions that researchers can adopt for the study of social activism; that is, the different ontological and epistemological frameworks through which they approach their topics. This is important as the methodological framework influences not only how researchers engage with the world but also how they conceptualize activism. Only by fully grasping their methodological positions can researchers begin to approach the topic of social activism and formulate ideas about research projects.

Chapter 3 introduces a variety of different qualitative methods that have been used in the study of social activism. These methods were culled from a review of qualitative studies conducted over the past decade. The goal of collecting this information is to identify the most commonly used methods (or those that proved to be the most useful), uncover the valuable lessons learned from those research projects, and provide information about how these different methods can be used in the study of activism today.

CHAPTER ONE

The Study of Social Activism

This chapter explores:

- (1) Justifications for studying social activism, including the role of activism in democracy and social discourse, the importance of activism for the formation of political identity, and resistance to the forces of political economy and media power.
- (2) A condensed history of the study of social movements, including the early stages of research which established a view of social movements as phenomena in society, subsequent research which understood social movements as shifts in meaning across society, and contemporary research which describes social movements as networks of organizations and activists.

After graduate school I worked feverishly to get different sections of my dissertation published in well-respected academic journals. I eventually managed to publish a theory piece and a content analysis piece in two interdisciplinary journals and collaborated with my dissertation advisor to publish the central findings of my project in a regional communication journal. However, every time I submitted a manuscript to the journals published by the most influential organizations in the discipline (e.g., International Communication Association,

Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication), I found that I was running into a wall. At first I thought that it might have something to do with my writing style. However, even though my writing improved, rejection letters continued to pile up. It wasn't until I received a scathing review from a journal editor that I came to realize the problem: I had failed to position myself clearly within the larger body of literature concerning activism and social movements. To be sure, I knew the theories and concepts, but I did not discuss how my own research fit within the existing literature. I presented my research to the editors and reviewers of these journals as something floating in a vacuum. In response to the editor's comments, I spent the following months rereading the literature on activism and social movements and finding the places where my research overlapped. Only then was I able to connect with the influencers in the field.

Years later I was asked by some graduate students about what I felt was the most important thing to keep in mind when conducting research. I started to spout something about diligence and process, but then I stopped and told them to disregard what I had just said. To be sure, diligence and process are important, but connecting your ideas and your research to a larger body of literature is integral. I think I went so far as to claim that 75 percent of academic research is organization. I told them the research that came before are building blocks and that researchers have to be able to organize those blocks into a coherent structure onto which they can build. "The truth is," I said, "I know a lot of folks in the discipline who are a lot smarter than me, but never seem to be able to publish their research." The difference, I told them, was that I had figured out how to effectively organize those building blocks around my research.

This chapter provides a justification for studying social activism in contemporary society, as well as a brief introduction to the body of literature on social movements. Over the years, I have come to recognize that qualitative researchers must fully grasp all of these important points *before* they engage in any projects. Understanding the literature on social movements and activism—as well as the importance of such studies to academic conceptualizations of democracy and social change—will enable qualitative researchers to form strong foundations for any queries and pursuits. As I mentioned, research concerning activism does not exist in a vacuum. I understood that there was a large, intertwined body of literature concerning activism and social movements. However, I did not *use* that literature when designing my research; understanding that body of literature aided me tremendously in my own endeavors. Such knowledge also aids in the formulation of research questions, the construction of research tools, and the selection of research sites. Ultimately, we must thoroughly understand our topic of inquiry before we can

commit to any project, whether those endeavors are single exploratory studies or long-term research projects meant to span an entire career. When approaching the topic of social activism, researchers should ask themselves: What research projects and inquiries have preceded my interests? What are the important concepts or theories that have emerged from those projects? How do my own research interests fit into those emergent concepts or theories?

WHY STUDY SOCIAL ACTIVISM?

Over the years, scholars have developed different perspectives through which to view and understand the concept of social activism. My focus here is on the rationales for the study of such endeavors. The question often arises as to why someone should study the actions, protests, organizations, or media of social activists. What is the point? For instance, the British philosophical group Comedia (1984) critiqued alternative media, as well as the academic study of alternative media, as irrelevant. The journalism scholar Chris Atton (2002, 34) responded to the Comedia critique by stating: “Success can only be judged against increased circulation and increased market penetration . . . the alternative press is by its very nature in a subordinate position to that of the mainstream press.” Essentially, because of the low circulation and poor quality of alternative media, this form of activism has limited impact on society. Alternative media may motivate some activists to stage protests or develop an identity, but those results make little significant contribution to social issues or political discourse. Indeed, many scholars have argued that social protest serves more of an ego function to build up the self-esteem of individuals and that many people primarily engage in activism because of their self-pity and sense of victimhood (Gregg 1971; Stewart 1999).

Despite such critiques the study of social activism has persisted, due in large part to the understanding that activism plays an important role in democratic discourse. According to Stephen Lucas (1980), social movements and activism are integral to the different social and political discourses that effectively shape communities and culture. Lucas notes that scholars must be aware that social movements are essential to “explicating the cumulative metamorphosis of discourse in response to emerging exigencies imposed from within and without of the movement” (263). Within this context, social movements and activism do not so much influence politics in a direct manner, but constitute much of the discourse that constitutes and shapes a society. Consequently, the research of many scholars (past and contemporary) has extended our knowledge about three overlapping topics: democracy and social discourse, the formation of political identity, and the political economy of communication and media power.

Many scholars have worked to demonstrate the important role that social activism can have in the democratic process and social discourse about problematic issues. For example, the rhetorician Leland Griffin (1980) demonstrates how activist groups often serve a dialectical function in society as they debate issues, policies, and more. For Griffin, activism is an important component for a vibrant democracy, as the debates between activists who sought change and their counterparts who sought to protect the status quo often brought a plethora of information to the citizenry. Lucas (1980) took a similar approach to activism and social movements; in his view, such human endeavors are a collection of discourses that have developed over time. For instance, information about the horrors of segregation, apartheid, and other such institutions only became visible to the mainstream news media—and subsequently to the citizenry—whenever activists who crusaded against those problems engaged in efforts to win over support. The actions and protests of activists drew the attention of media, and their oppositional perspectives were often incorporated within news articles and reports. At the same time, activists who associated with the status quo ultimately sought to preserve those institutions and injected different information into the debate. In this way, citizens were provided with important information about such subjects as they went to the ballot box and engaged with one another in their local communities. A good example of this view of activism can be seen in the SlutWalks described by Bonnie Dow and Julia Wood (2014). SlutWalks were organized by feminist activists in response to advice from a police constable in Canada that women should avoid dressing like “sluts” to best protect themselves from sexual assault. Feminist activists noted that such advice simply placed blame for assault onto women and shielded perpetrators from guilt; they used social media to invite women to come together for a “slut walk” in which they could reclaim women’s sexuality. As feminist activists involved in these protests often donned sexualized clothing such as lingerie and stiletto shoes, the walks drew the attention of the news media and thus enabled the feminist activists to bring alternative information and perspectives into social dialogue concerning rape and sexual assault.

Other scholars have explored the tactics and strategies used by activists to contribute information and competing perspectives on social discourse without the aid of mainstream news media. For instance, Lynn Owens and Kendall Palmer (2003) demonstrate how anarchists utilized the Internet to tell alternative narratives about free trade and globalization. Owens and Palmer note that much of the mainstream media coverage of anarchists and their protests was quite negative. Nevertheless, the anarchists engaged in a process of “funneling,” in which they linked their own websites to other peripheral

activist websites; those peripheral sites were often linked to more mainstream websites. In the case of the protests against the World Trade Organization, for example, people became interested in anarchists because of the negative portrayals of those activists that emerged in news reports at the time. However, when those people began to look up information about the anarchists online, they found links in mainstream Internet sources to “liberal” activist groups that led them to the anarchist websites; there the anarchists were able to tell their story unabated by the negative mainstream media coverage. In another example, Phaedra Pezzullo (2003; 2007) explored the ways in which collective memory can be constructed through various activities like activist “tours.” Pezzullo studied tours promoted by the Sierra Club, in which people were driven by bus around environmentally damaged areas throughout the United States. These tours gave activists and members of the environmentally ravaged communities opportunities to weave stories and engage in performances, thus building a shared memory about areas of the country that had been ignored if not forgotten. This process was particularly important as it allowed the activists to shed light onto issues that were not covered by or portrayed in the mainstream media.

Many other scholars have demonstrated the important role that activism plays in our political parties and campaign politics. The rhetorician Charles Stewart has published multiple studies about the role of the John Birch Society in the politics of the Republican Party. Analyzing the rhetorical strategies of the John Birch Society, Stewart and his coauthors Craig Smith and Robert Denton (2001) argue that the John Birch Society—established by Robert Welch in 1958 and named for the first American soldier killed by communists—functioned as a monolithic authoritarian structure for teaching conservative American principles and values. This structure was perceived to be necessary by conservatives so that they may combat equally monolithic and authoritarian forces commanded from Moscow. The John Birch Society stood as a watchdog group that scrutinized the activities of various groups in the United States, particularly politicians. Stewart (2002) further explicated his rhetorical view of the John Birch Society by noting that the group (at the time) was organized around a worldview based on communist conspiracy theories. Essentially, this worldview dictated that there were communists around every corner, working to disrupt the United States in any meaningful way. This conspiracy was further complicated by the fact that everybody was involved: the media, celebrities, and politicians. For this reason, nobody could be trusted, which ultimately led the John Birch Society to engage in boundary maintenance and scrutiny of outsiders. All of this is important to the notion of democracy, as the John Birch Society used to play an important role in the campaign politics of the Republican Party from the late 1960s until the 1980s. Along similar lines, Suzanne

Berg and I (Atkinson and Berg 2012a; 2012b) studied the alternative media of Tea Party activist groups around the time of the 2010 midterm elections. Our research demonstrates that the central theme found in alternative media utilized by Tea Party activists is “purity.” In addition, the content of various Tea Party blogs and websites focuses on conservative heroes and villains (liberals, Muslims, unions, etc.); the content also focuses on the biblical roots of the Constitution and the threats that the aforementioned villains pose to those roots. This theme of purity serves as a frame that is important for Tea Party activists in their appraisal of Republican Party candidates, which led to the sudden fall of many candidates who were labeled RINOs (Republicans in Name Only).

THE FORMATION OF POLITICAL IDENTITY

Other scholars have studied the role of activism in the formation of political identity. Essentially, according to these scholars, activist communities or groups not only generate information for use in discourse and debates but also shape the worldviews and interpretive frameworks that people use to understand political issues and events. For instance, Robert Huesca (2001) writes about the notion of participatory civic communication within the networked society. The notion of the networked society has become particularly important as asynchronous interactive media and technology allow for the emergence of global networks that can bypass the power and influence of traditional institutions such as the Catholic Church or the Democratic Party. Traditional institutions are nodes grounded in space and time which does not fit well within a world increasingly networked through asynchronous interactive media; to be involved in those traditional institutions, one must go to specific places at specific times (e.g., sermons, masses, conventions). Institutions constructed through interactive media enable people to be involved from anywhere, whenever they have the time. Huesca claims that activist networks often utilize interactive media and have become more attractive to people than the traditional institutions of the Republican and Democratic Parties. People can engage with organizations such as Indymedia or Focus on the Family through websites and social media much more effectively than they can with those traditional political institutions. Taking part in online discussions, blogging, or even watching videos can shape the worldviews of Internet users. As a result, social movement networks are becoming an integral site for the shaping of political identity.

Atton (2002) and Graham Meikle (2002) build on this concept of participatory civic communication in a networked society by demonstrating different actions that shape an activist’s identity. Both explored the alternative media

commonly used by activists, as well as its importance for shaping one's political identity. Atton explains how the possession of alternative zines has helped to foster a resistance identity for activists. Zines are cheaply produced, special-interest magazines that focus on only a few topics. For Atton (2002, 67–68), the zine, or any other alternative media, serves as a marker that indicates that the individual stands in resistance to the status quo or dominant power structures: “[The zine] presents an individual’s declaration and construction of self-identity and invites others to engage in a dialogue about that identity. By embodying one’s own history, experience, and opinions within a publication (however narrowly published) one is authorizing oneself to speak, validating one’s life, making public one’s voice—at least the parts of one’s voice that otherwise would not get heard.” In addition, Meikle discusses the role of open publishing associated with many online alternative media forums in the construction of political identity. Essentially, alternative online media, such as Indymedia.com or Red-State.com, has allowed activists to publish articles or comment on existing articles. According to Meikle, actions (and interactions) such as open publishing, blogging, and commentary through social media has helped activists to feel involved in a community which, in turn, fostered the development of a political identity.

THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF COMMUNICATION AND MEDIA POWER

Many scholars have explored how activism functions in the face of the political economy of communication, a concept developed to help explain the impact of globalization and corporate consolidation on contemporary society. Robert McChesney (1998; 2004), one of the most renowned political economy scholars, has demonstrated that the consolidation of corporate media effectively depoliticizes people today. The process of consolidation puts most of the resources for media production and distribution in the hands of very few corporate actors, who, in turn, place a high value on profit. The centralization of resources and the profit motive both act as barriers to people outside of those corporate realms of media production; these barriers are a force that ultimately depoliticizes people. In addition, scholars such as Lance Bennett (2003) have explored whether this political economy, in which consolidation depoliticizes the citizenry, hinders the ability of activist groups to communicate and coordinate actions. Bennett argues that the emergence of the Internet and other interactive media has allowed for the development of activist networks that can defy the media conglomerates. The emergent networks have enabled activists to become producers of media in a world that is dictated by the one-way media

logic of the political economy; interactivity empowers activists like never before. The question for Bennett is whether people will use these interactive technologies to go shopping or to build revolutions. Clemencia Rodriguez (2003; 2011) and Kevin Howley (2005; 2013) have contributed to this line of research by examining community media. For both scholars, community media represent an activist practice that is autonomous from the political economy that governs mainstream corporate media. Essentially, community journalists work alongside activists and citizens within minority and oppressed communities in order to produce autonomous news stories that can be circulated through either independent media outlets or sympathetic mainstream media. For Rodriguez, this process is important for disrupting the patterns of violence perpetrated on communities by authority figures, while Howley sees this process as important for media reform. The result for both is more participatory communication that helps alleviate the depoliticizing impact of political economy.

Other scholars, while not directly addressing the concept of political economy, have nonetheless explored the potential for activism in the face of media power constructed in the age of corporate conglomeration. Nick Couldry (2000; 2003)—similar to Bennett, Rodriguez, and Howley—explores the ways in which activists can challenge mainstream media frameworks through the use of alternative media. According to Couldry, media producers effectively create a frame that imbues meanings for those subjects that are portrayed for audiences through media content. Meaning is imbued in part because of the liminality associated with the media; if the media portrays something or someone, then that subject becomes important. This issue of liminality effectively naturalizes the media as the primary authority in contemporary society. Couldry (2000) examines how this natural authority to frame subjects is disrupted when people take part in activist events that contradict media frames; being a witness to such contradiction creates suspicion of authority and media frames. Essentially, involvement in activist events helps to break down the symbolic authority at the heart of the political economy. Clifford Bob (2005) also addresses activism in the face of the political economy, but focuses on how powerful structures in society actually transform international activism. According to Bob, resources for both international activists and nongovernment organizations (NGOs) that support the work of such activists are scarce. He demonstrates how NGOs—who often operate on scant assets—have to be very selective about the groups they support. Subsequently, many international groups are forced to alter their organizational structures, the appearances of the activists during protests, and even the issues that they address through their activism in order to gain mainstream media attention. Only with such attention have they been able

to gain the attention and valuable resources of Western-based NGOs such as Habitat for Humanity.

Ultimately, the critiques about activism noted at the beginning of this section should not be discounted. It is true that alternative media and protests have very small audiences and typically do not draw a lot of attention. It is also true that some people are involved in activist organizations and protests in order to bolster their own self-image. Nevertheless, the work of scholars over the past years has effectively demonstrated that such activism can convey important insights into social discourse and the democratic process, aid in the formation of political identity, and effectively challenge media power structures. The basis for the critiques (particularly those leveled by Comedia) is that activist actions and engagement do not convey information or challenge media power in ways that are easily measured, or that any such measurements would ultimately find negligible results. Such a critique should come as no surprise, however, in an academic environment often dominated by quantitative approaches to research. Quantitative research tools (e.g., surveys or experimental design) focus primarily on observation and the measurement of responses, and activist endeavors are only one small component of democratic processes and resistance in society; the actions of activists often do not generate responses that are easily observed using such methods. For these reasons, qualitative methods can play an integral and leading role in academic explorations. As past research on activism has made valuable contributions to democracy and posed challenges to media power, it is vital for scholars to continue exploring this significant topic.

The study of social activism should not be conceptualized purely in terms of methodologies associated with social construction or carried out exclusively through qualitative methods; nor should one assume that quantitative researchers have nothing to add to this subject. Many of the scholars in the following section have advanced conceptualizations about activism and social movements using methods such as surveys and quantitative content analysis, shaping the direction of research yet to come. Qualitative methods provide a focus on the construction and interpretation of meaning that can rarely be observed or measured through quantitative methods. This focus enables researchers to explore not only the role of social activism in contemporary democracy but also the struggles over political identity and the power of the media.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF SOCIAL MOVEMENT RESEARCH

Social activism has been the subject of academic research for several decades, beginning with scholarly papers about protests and demonstrations written in

the 1890s. Throughout the years, social activism has been studied across various academic fields, most notably in the fields of communication, media studies, and sociology. In order to fully understand social activism and be able to lay the foundations for any research projects about activism, it is important to understand social movements, that is, the context within which activism typically takes place. Past research on social activism focused on the activities and endeavors of social movement actors as they struggled to produce (or to hinder) some form of social change. The ways in which scholars defined and understood social movements provides a window into how activists were viewed. However, the connections between social movements and activism are largely dependent on how social movements are conceptualized.

The notion of the social movement has been debated rigorously over the years. Scholars have conceptualized social movements in a variety of ways across different academic disciplines; such conceptualizations have typically been dependent on observations made by researchers. In the early days of activist research, many sociologists dismissed the activities of social activists as “mob mentality” (Le Bon 2013). Later, sociologists and social scientists viewed the contextual social movements as phenomena; that is, social movements were described as a set of collective behaviors and actions enacted by agents who could be observed (Smelser 1962; Tilly 2002). Simultaneously, rhetoricians and communication scholars viewed social movements as shifts in meaning and ideologies within a society, driven in part by social activists (Griffin, 1952; Pezzullo 2007). In recent years, many scholars have examined social movements as networks of organizations through which activists meet, produce media, build meaning together, and enact resistance through temporary communities (Arquilla and Ronfeldt 2000; Best 2005). The following sections summarize the different views of social movements that have emerged from past literature.

SOCIAL MOVEMENTS AS PHENOMENON

The view of social movements as collections of phenomena dates back to researchers who viewed activism as a form of “collective mind” similar to the actions of looters, rioters, and lynch mobs. However, as interest in this topic progressed into the first half of the twentieth century, the actions of protesters came to be seen as something separate from mere deviance and fell under the label of *collective behavior*. Collective behavior was deemed to be the very essence of a social movement and separate from collective actions that were often associated with criminal or immoral acts; collective behavior came to be viewed as good and decent, whereas the “collective mind” was viewed in a negative light. According to this emergent view, social movements initiate changes in the way in which topics—such as women’s right to vote or the seg-

regation of schools—are conceptualized by the populace. Social movements are constructed from the collective actions of people or organizations that have come together in order to build an alternative understanding about those issues. For instance, activists for women’s suffrage directly challenged beliefs about women in society during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Those activists engaged in marches, picket lines, speeches, and in some cases militant tactics such as pelting police with bricks in order to draw public attention to the problems that they perceived were intertwined with the women’s lack of voting rights. The militant tactics such as throwing bricks typically resulted in the arrest of women suffragists, who were often mistreated in jails (Jorgensen-Earp 1999). In some cases, these actions informed the public about the wrongs that women endured within the democracies of Western society, while in other cases the actions actually drew attention to the oppressiveness of established legal and judicial systems. From this perspective, then, a social movement is constituted from collective actions engaged by social activists; such actions directly challenge dominant power structures or oppressive beliefs in society.

The development of this view was not a simple split of a collective mind away from collective behavior; it was an evolution that began with late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century sociologists in Europe, many of whom had labeled protests or other such activities as a kind of crowd mentality. For instance, Gustave Le Bon (2013), a nineteenth-century French sociologist, likened crowd behavior to a contagion—heightened emotions spread from one person to another when they were together in large groups—an approach that ultimately proved to be quite problematic. Social movements were nothing more than the actions of large, emotionally charged crowds who disregarded civility and contemporary morals; activists were seen as little more than unreasonable “savages”; and protest actions became indistinguishable from boisterous crowds attending a concert or engaged in a riot. In short, Le Bon’s view denied social activists any logic or agency and portrayed the social movement as something outside of democratic discourse. Nevertheless, the research of Le Bon and other early sociologists such as Gabriele Tarde (2009)—who deemed activism to be the imitation of actions by crowds in the late 1800s and early 1900s—became the dominant framework for understanding the actions of labor activists and suffragists during that time.

In the twentieth century, sociologists began to differentiate the protests of activists within the contexts of social movements from the actions of mobs and crowds. Herbert Blumer (1939; 1951) first proposed the concept of collective behavior in order to discuss activism and social movements and differentiate them from other forms of symbolic human activity. For Blumer, collective behavior was an umbrella term for a variety of actions taken by

large bodies of people: crowd behavior, public opinion, mass behavior, and social movements. Crowd behavior was motivated by emotion, public opinion was constructed through discourse about an issue, and mass behavior was prompted through the mass media. Social movements, the final form of collective behavior, were not motivated so much by external factors (e.g., emotional music or political discourse by elites), but by the concerns of the collective. Essentially, a collective emerged around a common concern for issues that was deemed to be problematic for those people and their communities. Blumer noted that there were multiple types of movements in which the collective can engage; most notably the active movements that sought social change and the expressive movements that sought to change people within the collective. This work was supported later by the research of Neil Smelser (1962), who focused on the collective behaviors associated with social movements and the beliefs that motivate such behaviors: “Collective behavior is guided by various kinds of beliefs—assessments of the situation, wishes, and expectations. These beliefs differ, however, from those which guide many other types of behavior. They involve a belief in the existence of extraordinary forces—threats, conspiracies, etc.—which are at work in the universe. They also involve an assessment of the extraordinary consequences which will follow if the collective attempt to reconstitute social action is successful” (8). Smelser calls out multiple phases of collective behavior that could be observed within a social movement. Phase one is the period of structural strain in which groups of people note there is something problematic within society. Phase two is the spread of a generalized belief among the collective which serves as an explanation for the problem and an idea for possible solutions. Phase three entails trigger events that give rise to public outcry and calls for change (e.g., Rosa Parks being arrested for sitting at the front of a bus). The outcry that comes from these precipitating factors then leads into phase four, mobilization, in which organizations form and resources are gathered; the organizations use these resources to stage protests and similar actions. Finally, there is a period of social control, in which the authority structure of the society either breaks up the collective behavior, or works to make structural changes. Ted Gurr (1970) also builds on this line of research by exploring political violence as a product of some collective behaviors. According to Gurr, political violence occurs in three forms: turmoil, conspiracy, and internal war. He associates turmoil with social movements and notes that deprivation and discontent are the factors that lead to such collective action. The violence associated with such behavior ranges from harmless sidewalk protest to localized rebellion and depends on the levels of deprivation and discontent experienced by the people.

This view of social movements as collections of observable phenomena became a mainstay in the study of social movements for most social scientists. However, the defined goals of such social movements began to shift in the late 1970s. Blumer, Smelser, and Gurr examined collective behaviors that focus on correcting a social injustice problematic for the collective; for instance, African Americans working to alleviate oppression stemming from Jim Crow laws and segregation. Alain Touraine (1978) changed this conceptualization of collective action by introducing the concept of “new social movement.” According to Touraine, the social movements of the past (such as the movements for civil rights and women’s suffrage) were focused on workers’ rights, as those movements were grounded in an industrial society that primarily valued labor. In the context of the industrial society, immigrant, minority, or women workers were frequently exploited for their valuable labor; such exploitation gave rise to the strains discussed by Smelser and the deprivation and discontent described by Gurr. In order to end exploitation, collectives of those exploited groups engaged in active movements, as explained by Blumer, so as to remedy the oppression that they experienced. Touraine notes, however, that the pressure groups for workers’ rights, such as unions, were increasingly less necessary as their collective actions had managed to create structural changes throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Indeed, he argues that Western society began to shift to a programmed society, in which information management within and between organizations is valued over labor. The decline of the “old” labor-oriented social movements, and the time afforded to the middle class who frequently worked in information management, gave rise to different kinds of social movements, such as the liberal movements that focuses on giving voice to minority groups and the populist movements that seek to stem the tide of cultural change in society.

Ultimately, Touraine claims these new social movements are oriented around the denunciation of power within society. Professionals working within the emergent fields of information management often gain insight into the power inequities associated with the programmed society and feel compelled to organize efforts to limit those problems. These professionals are not so much interested in collective action for the purpose of structural changes as they are in utilizing collective action to draw the attention of politically ambivalent people; activists seek to shape the identity of such people in particular ways. Later, Francesca Polletta and James Jasper (2001) built on this notion of the new social movement by incorporating the concept of collective identity: “Collective identity describes imagined as well as concrete communities, involves an act of perception and construction as well as the discovery of preexisting bonds, interests, and boundaries. It is fluid and relational, emerging out of interactions with a

number of different audiences (bystanders, allies, opponents, news media, state authorities), rather than fixed. It channels words and actions, enabling some claims and deeds but delegitimizing others. It provides categories by which individuals divide up and make sense of the world” (298). Essentially, collective identity helps to explain how (typically privileged) people come to be involved in activism by demonstrating new social movements as collections of intersecting relationships and interests. These intersections become emotional and moral connections for the people involved; people feel compelled to protest or engage in activism because of overlapping relationships and interests and the connections that come from them. This view of the new social movements, as well as the orientation of such movements as collections of phenomena, stands as the focus of social scientific research. For instance, Alberto Melucci (1996) notes that collective actions carried out by actors within movements aids in the construction of collective identity, while Charles Tilly (2002) explores the role of stories in the formation of personal activist identity.

Scholars in the field of sociology have not exclusively used the concept of social movements as collections of phenomena. In the dual fields of communication and media studies, many other scholars have also adopted this particular view. For instance, Douglas McLeod and James Hertog (1992; 1995) examined mainstream and alternative media coverage of protests as the foundation for a protest paradigm. In particular, McLeod and Hertog paid attention to discussions about “public opinion” within such coverage of protests. They claim that the prevalence of discussions about public opinion in mainstream coverage, as well as the absence of such discussions in the alternative press, creates a self-fulfilling prophesy in the mainstream media about protesters as isolated from the rest of society: “Mainstream media’s rather consistent use of informal representations of public opinion to marginalize [protesters] may have powerful effects. In the process, the protesters are isolated from the ‘general public’ even though they may share some views and concerns with significant portions of the population. In essence, the media coverage may discourage interest and participation in such protest activities and thereby inhibit the growth of critical social movements” (McLeod and Hertog 1992, 273). Michael McCluskey, Susan Stein, Michael Boyle, and Douglas McLeod (2009) use this protest paradigm in order to explore whether structural differences within the activist communities that produce media has any impact on the coverage of protests and other activist events. They have come to the conclusion that communities with more centralized resources and power often construct negative portrayals of protesters and activists. Similarly, Michael Boyle and Mike Schmierbach (2009) demonstrate that all of the negative portrayals of protests in the mainstream media have a negative impact on

whether people decide to become involved in social movement actions and politics. Conversely, they show that positive portrayals of activists in alternative media influence people to become more politically involved and take part in protests. These scholars, like the sociologists discussed previously, focus on protest and other such activist phenomena and view them as the central component of social movements.

Ultimately, the social scientific traditions found in fields such as sociology and communication have focused on the phenomena of collective behavior as crucial components for social movements, which are integral for initiating social change. For these scholars, social movements are collections of observable phenomena. This is particularly evident in the writing of both Touraine (1978) and Melucci (1996). Touraine (1978, 26) focuses on the “collective action of actors” engaged in a struggle “for the social control of historicity.” Melucci (1996, 1) claims that “movements ‘speak before’: they announce what is taking shape even before its direction and content has become clear.” This phenomenon-oriented approach has largely become the primary view of social movements held within contemporary Western society. News media often categorize Occupy Wall Street or Tea Party actions, the phenomena of building encampments in New York City or marching against “Obamacare,” as social movements. However, many other scholars would take issue with this view, as humanistic researchers and rhetoricians have adopted an alternative view of the concept of social movement.

Recap 1-1. Phenomenon-oriented Views of Social Movements	
Scholar	View
Herbert Blumer	Identifies typologies of social movements: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Active movements, in which people engage in actions to effect changes in society • Expressive movements, in which people take actions to change one another
Neil Smelser	Lists phases of collective behavior: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Structural strain • Spread of generalized beliefs • Trigger event • Mobilization of resources • Intervention of social control
Ted Gurr	Sees forms of political violence: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Turmoil • Conspiracy • Internal war

The concept of social movements as meaning has refocused the attention of researchers away from the actions and phenomena associated with activism to shifts in meaning and ideology. For instance, the civil rights movement is seen not as a set of actions carried out by activists in the 1950s and 1960s but as a long shift in meaning structures and ideologies within the United States that began long before the actions of the 1950s and 1960s, often called the Civil Rights era. That is not to say that the actions of those activists were irrelevant, but that the portrayals of segregation in the media, the focus of news stories over the years, and the growing knowledge about the cruelty of racism associated with segregation all challenged oppressive meaning structures that were held by the dominant white community. A social movement, then, entails many different components, most of which are external to the social activists who engage in protests and other collective actions.

Beginning in the 1950s, rhetorical scholars in the discipline of communication began to take up the subject of social movements and activism. The first to engage this subject was Leland Griffin (1952), who initially wrote about *historical movements*. According to Griffin, historical movements, such as the emerging civil rights movement, progress through a series of phases. Social movements begin with the inception phase, in which people notice significant problems in society and discuss them among themselves. Next comes the phase of rhetorical crisis, which is marked by direct challenges to the dominant power structures by activists (e.g., protests, marches, and demonstrations). Finally, there is the phase of consummation, in which the key players in the movement are co-opted into the dominant system; they are elected or appointed to important positions by people in positions of authority. Essentially, through this process people build new meanings (about realities such as segregation) and then challenge the dominant meanings about that institution. Later, John Bowers and Donovan Ochs (1971) and Theodore Windt (1972) began to explore the rhetorical strategies employed by activists to shape meaning. Bowers and Ochs note that many activists engage in a variety of rhetorical strategies in order to change or shift structures of meaning held in society. Activists can engage in different forms of promulgation to win over widespread social support (e.g., picketing or handing out pamphlets and fliers). They can also engage in solidification to build a sense of community and indoctrinate new members into their alternative meaning structure (e.g., singing songs and wearing marked clothing). Activists may use the strategy of polarization to present audiences with a bifurcated worldview (e.g., presenting images of Obama as the Joker from *The Dark Knight* or describing abortion as murder). Finally, activists can engage in the strategies of nonviolent resistance against and con-

frontation with social control agents in order to force the authorities into engaging in abusive police tactics. Windt describes the rhetorical strategy of the diatribe, which challenges dominant meaning structures by utilizing shocking or vulgar rhetoric. This strategy proves to be useful for grabbing attention, hence giving the activists an opportunity to relay a message to onlookers. However, the vulgar nature of the strategy also simultaneously erodes the credibility of the activists.

The research of rhetoricians such as Griffin, Windt, and Bowers and Ochs emphasizes the rhetorical crisis and confrontations between meaning structures. However, critics of these projects later contended that their research ultimately supports phenomenon-oriented notions of social movements that had been the focus of sociologists such as Smelser and Gurr, because activists and their actions are seen as the engines that drive changes in meaning structures in society. That is to say, social movement is a shift in meaning that occurs because activists take to the street and challenge authority figures in society. One of the most ardent critics of such research was Michael McGee (1975; 1980a; 1980b); according to McGee, shifts in meaning are not driven by social activists, but rather the other way around. Factors that are external to activist actions and protests provide the opportunity for people to see, for example, segregation or abortion in a new light; certain factors allow for meanings to shift in society:

When people use new words—or obviously attribute new meaning to old words—we can assume that consciousness of their environment has “moved” by measure of the difference in descriptors themselves or in meanings. We will not say that “movement” exists or has occurred until we can demonstrate by a survey of public discourse that descriptors of the environment have changed in common usage in such a way as to make “movement” an arguably acceptable term useful in formulating the chain of facts we believe to have constituted a real change. (McGee 1980b, 243)

According to McGee, the shifts in meanings constitute “social movement” and give rise to activism on the part of individuals who later adopt those new meanings about those subjects. For instance, a statement by a person in 1800 that women do not have the cognitive capacity to process much information and therefore should not be allowed to vote would not have been deemed to be problematic by other people at the time. However, the same statement made in many parts of the world in 2016 would be deemed sexist; the person who utters such a statement would likely face severe backlash. For McGee, the shift in meaning structures through which people have viewed and interacted with women over the past two hundred years represents “social movement.” Suffragists played a role in this shift in meaning structures, as did Emily Dickinson,

Mae West, and Amelia Earhart among countless other women acting in the public realm; as the meaning structures shifted, activists emerged who pushed for an alternative understanding of the role of women in society. Essentially, these shifts in meaning allowed for activists to emerge, mobilize, and engage in collective action. Such a thesis about the nature of movements and activism has been advanced by the research of rhetoricians such as Justin Gustainis and Dan Hahn (1988), who argue that the actions of early anti-Vietnam War activists did not effectively challenge the war or the United States government. Instead, they argued that the activist strategies of diatribe and confrontation were counterproductive and created support for then-President Nixon. In accordance with McGee, Gustainis and Hahn note that the rapid increase of casualties in the war actually shifted public perception and meanings about the war effort in Southeast Asia. Such shifts gave rise to new antiwar and antinuclear activism later in the decade, which was seen as an extension of the anti-Vietnam War movement (Corrigh 2007; Jack 2007). According to this view, the social movement was driven by the changes created by external factors (e.g., casualties in Vietnam) and not by the actions of early antiwar activists.

That is not to say that social activists are irrelevant or play no role in this meaning-oriented view of the social movement. Building on McGee, Kevin DeLuca (1999; 2005) notes that activists do aid in shifting ideographs and ideological assumptions within society. In particular, DeLuca describes the image events that are often utilized by activists in order to challenge dominant ideological assumptions in society. He explains that in order for modern activists to be successful, they should not engage in the volatile street protests often associated with the movements of the 1960s and 1970s. Instead, it is important for activists to craft images that will draw the attention of media outlets; these images should relate to recognizable ideological assumptions in society, while simultaneously critiquing other dominant assumptions. Essentially, activists stage events in which certain ideological assumptions are upheld or reinforced, while others are challenged. The spectacle of the event can draw media attention, or make the event something that the mainstream media producers would be willing to feature in news content. By upholding certain ideologies, the activists build a sense of identification with audiences of those media, while presenting a challenge to a separate set of assumptions held by those audiences. This is not to say that activists and their image events are the primary force behind shifts in ideology and meaning, but rather that they play a small role in extending or accelerating such shifts. For instance, activists affiliated with environmental groups such as Green Peace did aid in the shift in meanings concerning nature and industrial progress that took place over the years, but the shift began long before those groups' inception. DeLuca and Anne Demo (2000) maintain that the roots of the environmental movement are not in the

activism of the 1970s and 1980s, but in nineteenth-century photography of landscapes in the western United States. They explain how the emphasis on the sublime elements in 1860s photographs of the Yosemite landscape—sublime as envisioned by Burke (1757), Nicholson (1973), and Gould (1995)—constrained perceptions of “nature” for cultural elites in the eastern United States. Such constraint built a spectacle landscape that was devoid of human beings, while at the same time a destination for “the civilized tourist” (DeLuca and Demo 2000, 254). This constraint began to shift assumptions about the environment and gave rise to alternative views about nature that paved the way for environmental activism in the twentieth century.

Ultimately, this view of the social movement is considerably different from that constructed through the research of sociologists and other scholars who predominately relied on quantitative methods for their research. In a sense, the phenomena that is the focus of their quantitative endeavors is only one small component; the shifts in meaning are often external to what is observed in protests and demonstrations. Although phenomena such as street protest and demonstrations are relevant, they do not provide the full story of the social movement. This view, inaugurated by Griffin and honed by McGee, has become the dominant view of social movements and the primary frame for understanding social activism within the field of communication. Rhetoricians and cultural critics such as Christine Harold (2004), Jennifer Peeples (2011), and Helene Shugart (2005) have explored shifts in ideology and meaning, how

Recap 1-2. Meaning-oriented Views of Social Movements

Scholar	View
Leland Griffin	Identifies phases of historical movements: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Period of inception • Period of rhetorical crisis • Period of consummation
John Bowers and Donovan Ochs	List rhetorical strategies of agitation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Petition • Promulgation • Solidification • Polarization • Nonviolent resistance and confrontation
Michael McGee	Maintains that social movements are shifts in meaning across society
Kevin DeLuca	Shows that successful social movements use images that incorporate particular ideological assumptions while challenging others

such shifts have influenced social activists, and the contributions those activists have made in perpetuating such shifts. In recent years, rhetoricians such as David Heineman and Barbara Warnick (2012) have explored the role of interactive media and “hacktivism” within this view of the social movement. This is not to say that all research within communication is meaning-oriented and contextualized in these scholars’ perceptions, but it has become the dominant view for the field. However, the meaning-oriented approach to movements is not the final view of social movements, as recent research has turned to the network metaphor in order to conceptualize movements and contextualize social activism.

SOCIAL MOVEMENTS AND NETWORKS

In recent years, an alternative view has emerged as a way of potentially bringing together the previous two conceptualizations of social movements: conceptualizing social activism in terms of networks of interconnected nodes. This is not to say that social movements exist as networks. Instead, this line of research embraces the meaning-oriented notion of the social movement and notes that most of the forces that push and pull at the ideologies and meaning structures in society are external to any social activism, as described by McGee and others. However, the phenomena constructed and enacted by activists—such as the mobilization of resources and political violence—are important components that do make the social movement visible to the general population and signal that shifts are going on in society. Such phenomena can be observed in the networks of activists and activist organizations that emerge within the context of larger shifts that occur in society. Take for instance the environmental movement. As described in the previous section, the shift in ideological assumptions about the environment and progress began in the 1800s with the photography of landscapes in the western United States. The shifts that occurred through much of the twentieth century were relatively unnoticed, until the emergence of groups such as Green Peace, Earth First!, and the Sierra Club. Those organizations—and local chapters of those organizations that sprang up around the United States—built connections with one another. Some of those connections were more tenuous than others, as some groups did not get along. However, those groups did mobilize resources and engage in strategies of protest that drew more public attention to the shifts in ideologies and meanings, as well as the tensions caused by such shifts. From this perspective, then, a social movement is a shift in the ideologies and meanings in society, wherein social movement networks emerge that draw attention to such shifts at the height of rhetorical crisis.

The network concept first became prominent among anthropologists after World War II, as they sought to trace the connections between members of different groups who migrated from place to place in the postwar economy (Nadel, 1957). This concept was later leveraged in the experimental research of William Evan (1972) as he sought to explain how messages moved within and between organizations. For the purposes of his research, Evan defined a network as multiple nodes connected by lines of communication. His findings demonstrate that communication could circulate through one of three networks: the line network, the star network, and the all-channel. The line entails multiple nodes connected like links in a chain, with messages moving from one node to the next. Nodes connected through one centralized hub form the star networks; the central hub usually controls the flow of information to the other surrounding nodes in the star. Finally, the all-channel networks are those in which each node is interconnected with all of the other nodes in the network. This notion of organizations as networks became more relevant to scholars with the advent of the Internet and interactive media. Researchers such as Roxanne Hiltz and Murray Turoff (1978), Barry Wellman (1988), and Jan Van Dijk (2012) apply the network metaphor to society and claim that computer networks hold the potential to transform the world. Hiltz and Turnoff speculate that the rise of computer-mediated group communication will allow for the construction of international networks and diminish the influence of social and national boundaries. Wellman later explains that modern society is composed of networks and not groups; people exist as nodes interconnected with various other people. Van Dijk notes that such networked humans will eventually become the primary form of organizing in the world, which will drastically alter society in the future.

Building on the research concerning networks and nodes, John Arquilla and David Ronfeldt (2001) and Huesca (2001) apply the concept of the network to social movements. Arquilla and Ronfeldt wrote about the role of Evan's all-channel network in twenty-first-century social movements. They note that all-channel networks are not typically observed in many, if any, organizational settings. Only with the advent of the Internet did the all-channel networks become a reality, as interactive media allowed different nodes (usually organizations) around the world to have access to one another. However, they claim that "radical social movements" are the most likely to engage in such all-channel networking, as such a strategy for communication allows the different nodes to act as a many-headed beast. This enables radical groups within a network to engage in militant actions and then disappear quickly, without compromising the integrity of the network. A radical group could commit some illegal action—on- or offline—and then disconnect and vanish with little or no

impact on the network. Huesca also takes up this issue and claims that the emergence of cross-border networks facilitated by interactive media allow for more participatory communication for social movement actors. Without these emergent networks, most social movement groups and actors exist in isolation and have little impact in creating social change; those small groups need to come together and form a larger national or international organization or flounder. However, with the advent of the Internet, small, decentralized, and diffused groups emerge and link into cross-border organizations so that they are able to take part in debates about social justice and globalization; interactive technology allow for small activist groups to engage, while maintaining their autonomy.

Later, communication scholars such as Laura Stengrim (2005), Kirsty Best (2005), and Victor Pickard (2006b) built on this notion of the social movement network. In her research concerning the Indymedia (IMC) network, Stengrim notes that the emergence of such networks allow for more democratic debates regarding issues of globalization and corporate monopolization of resources. However, the democracy that she observed in the IMC network was fragile and required ongoing critical actions: "(1) promoting affordable widespread access to Web technology and new media; (2) appropriating mainstream discourses for subversive political response; (3) organizing by principle of community and solidarity; and (4) supplementing existing media with grassroots, citizen journalists in community venues like IMC" (Stengrim 2005, 298). With these critical actions established, different nodes of the network were able to challenge power structures in society; citizen activists were capable of exchanging information easily and producing media.

Best, conversely, discusses the role of networked sites such as Protest.net in creating the capacity for temporary protest communities. Essentially, she notes that Protest.net allowed for different organizations to exchange information and to post links which, in turn, gave rise to "networks of networks." The groups involved in these expanding networks planned protests or events and called for people to join in this endeavor. Activists within this large network turned out to aid the initial group, but the efforts were often hindered due to different political views. Best calls this process "mesomobilization" in which temporary communities of protest emerge from the interconnections built through the Internet. Finally, Pickard's research reveals the major themes that were circulated within the Indymedia network through news articles and listservs: "be the media" and "principles of unity." Both themes were so vague that virtually anyone could accept or support them and ultimately would feel welcomed into the network. This welcome feeling would lead activists to be more involved in the network and thus created for them a sense of community. My own work (Atkinson 2010) ties together many of these different ideas about social movement networks by

exploring the ways in which alternative media connect local networks to global networks. I have demonstrated that local activist networks do not exist in a vacuum and often hold many connections to international networks or even sprang from such larger networks. For instance, Amnesty International exists as a global network that produces articles and information listservs that focus on human rights violations and the human costs of war. The organization works closely with the United Nations and other international bodies to help advocate for political prisoners and refugees. At the local level, several Amnesty International chapters have emerged over the years in small communities; those groups often work to advance the messages of human rights developed by the Amnesty International headquarters. The larger global organization, along with the smaller local chapters, constituted the Amnesty International global network. Within their local communities, those Amnesty International chapters are also connected with a variety of other local organizations, typically chapters of global organizations themselves, such as the Sierra Club. The interconnected local organizations constitute a local network. Essentially, the global and the local levels are interconnected and integral to one another.

Ultimately, this network view incorporates both the phenomenon-oriented research, as well as the meaning-oriented research of rhetoricians and other communication scholars. Social movements are long-running shifts in meaning structures that are constantly occurring within a society, while the phenomena associated with social activism are enacted within networks at the global and local levels. In many ways, this view of social movements and networks has helped to negotiate some of the tensions in the debate over the nature of social movements. Social activism is only one component of social movements, but can be recognized as a very important component to the long-running shifts in meanings structures across society.

Recap 1-3. Network-oriented Views of Social Movements	
Scholar	View
Laura Stengrim	Identifies critical actions necessary for networks: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Widespread access to interactive media • Appropriation of mainstream discourses • Principles of community and solidarity • Use of citizen journalism
Kirsty Best	Introduces mesomobilization: interconnections via networks that give rise to temporary protest communities
Joshua Atkinson	Views two levels of networks: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local networks • Global networks

SUMMARY

The multiple views of social movements introduced in this chapter represent the possible contexts for social activism. These contexts are important to qualitative scholars as they plan for their research. As I noted at the beginning of the chapter, situating one's research is vital to the success of any project. Furthermore, the context of the social movement can help scholars to understand the nature of activism. Researchers who view social movements as phenomena see activists as the driving force of a movement. For researchers who see that context as a series of shifts in meaning structures over time, activism is a result of a movement. In addition, full understanding of this context can help researchers to formulate research questions and tools. If scholars view the social movement as a shift in dominant meanings and ideologies, then the public actions of social activists might be of little interest. These scholars would potentially take greater interest in the meanings and media that have motivated activists to become involved. Conversely, if scholars were interested in social movement networks, then they would potentially take an interest in the ways in which interconnections have been established, as well as the role of such interconnections in the formulation of strategies for protest and resistance. Qualitative scholars who are familiar with the literature on social movements will have a more robust knowledge about social activism. This knowledge, in turn, will enable them to build more thoughtful research projects that can make genuine contributions to scholarship and theory.

The following chapters present the necessary building blocks for good qualitative research concerning social activism. Note that this book presents a mixed view of social movements: they are gradual shifts in meaning that are facilitated—at some point or another—by activists who build organizations and networks, engage in actions and events, and produce and circulate alternative media. The key assumption is the premise forwarded by McGee (1980a) and DeLuca (1999): that movements are not started or driven by the phenomena of social activism, but by subtle shifts in the dominant meaning structures of a society over time. Such shifts in meaning may give rise to the opportunities for social activism, so that activism at some point does play a role in facilitating those shifts in meaning and even accelerating them. Overall, the book is dedicated to the examination of how qualitative methods can be used in the study of such phenomena.

Research Methodologies

This chapter explores:

- (1) The methodological frameworks through which researchers view and understand the world, including positivism, post-positivism, cultural studies, dialectics, feminist methodology, hermeneutics, heuristics, phenomenology, and postmodernism.
- (2) The ways in which researchers conceptualize activists depending on context: in person, online, and as audiences of alternative media.
- (3) The nature of ethics in research concerning social activism, as well as the ethical dilemmas that may arise when researchers have to: gain informed consent, consider the confidentiality and anonymity of their sources, interact with activists, and deal with safety and crime issues.
- (4) The position of researchers within the context of their projects and writings.

Over the years, I have come to understand that a solid grounding in the philosophical foundations and ethical considerations of one's field of study are imperative for the success of any research endeavor. Whenever scholars have a strong grasp on their philosophical foundations, they are well prepared to comprehend the methods that they will utilize to study social activism. Note,

however, that philosophical foundations are not equivalent to quantitative and qualitative methods. For example, post-positivist scholars do not use quantitative methods exclusively, nor do hermeneutic scholars utilize only qualitative methods. Positivists and post-positivists regularly use interviews and focus groups to engage in their research, and many hermeneutic or phenomenological scholars have reached for quantitative methods and statistical analysis to accomplish their research goals. The philosophical foundations of these different positions, however, dramatically influence how scholars use their methods.

PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS

Over the years, it has been my experience that many students studying research (as well as many researchers) often conflate the concepts of methodology and method, or use those terms interchangeably, when they are in fact quite distinct. For instance, many people often claim that the primary difference between positivists and hermeneutic scholars is that they simply use different methods; the positivists use quantitative methods, whereas the hermeneutic scholars use qualitative methods. However, differences in methods are not the real distinction between these positions; many positivists utilize qualitative methods, while hermeneutic scholars have incorporated the use of quantitative methods in their research. Methodology is a framework for understanding the world and viewing reality (Anderson 1996; Kvale 2007; Brinkmann and Kvale 2014; Lincoln and Guba 2000; Guba and Lincoln 2005); a methodological position is constructed from a set of ontological, epistemological, and axiological assumptions, as well as the voice of the researcher (Lincoln and Guba 2000; Guba and Lincoln 2005). This emergent framework stands as a paradigm through which researchers learn about the world and phenomena around them (Anderson 1996; Kuhn 1962). Ultimately, methodology entails a set of assumptions about reality and how one can engage with and learn about the world. Conversely, methods are tools and processes that enable researchers to examine subjects, topics, and phenomena in the world (Kvale 2007; Lindlof and Taylor 2010; Schreier 2012). Interviews, ethnography, surveys, and experimental design are all methods that are used in order to make significant observations that can be analyzed and used to construct or extend theory. (Qualitative methods, such as interviews and ethnography, are discussed in chapter 3.) Joey Sprague (2005, 5)—working from material in Sandra Harding’s (1987) edited volume on feminist methodologies—explains this distinction in the following way:

A method . . . is a technique for gathering and analyzing information. We can gather information by listening, watching, and examining documents;

we organize our observations by counting instances of preconceived categories and/or by looking for unanticipated patterns. Researchers' choice of *how* to use these methods constitute their methodology. For example, one can pose questions, collect evidence, and analyze data in different ways. Each methodology is founded on either explicit or, more often, unexamined assumptions about what knowledge is and how knowing is best accomplished.

In order to fully understand the concept of methodology and its distinction from method, it is important to explore the underpinnings noted by Sprague. Ontology is concerned with the researcher's view of reality, as well as what does and does not exist (Lindlof and Taylor 2010). Epistemology is the study of how we come to know about that reality and the standards that we use to evaluate any observations within that reality (Denzin and Lincoln 1998). Axiology is the placement of the researcher's values within the research process, while voice and call to action focus on how the research is ultimately explained to people after the data is collected and analyzed (Lincoln and Guba 2000; Guba and Lincoln 2005). Together, these underpinnings construct a paradigmatic view of the world that stands as the methodological foundation for a researcher as they begin to ask questions and study a particular phenomenon. There are different methodological foundations, including positivism, post-positivism, phenomenology, and postmodernism. However, these positions are based on typologies developed and described over the years by scholars such as Egon Guba and Yvonna Lincoln (1994; 2005), Steinar Kvale (1996), and Svend Brinkmann and Kvale (2014); these typologies are provisional and are still open to debate. Furthermore, for the sake of simplicity, these positional typologies are presented in a neatly divided fashion. This is not often the case, however, as much overlap exists between positions. In fact, many scholars occupy multiple positions in their research; which is possible (and acceptable) as long as the ontological and epistemological assumptions are not contradictory. However, in order to keep the discussion simple, I will approach these typologies as distinct and separate.

Two popular methodological positions are positivism and post-positivism. These positions emerge from an ontological view of the world that focuses on a material reality that can be observed and measured with the five senses. In an epistemological sense, researchers learn about an objective world by seeking out rules, laws, and cause-effect relationships that govern the material world (e.g., Anderson 1996; Comte 2009; Lindlof and Taylor 2010). Positivists hold that meanings can be observed and measured so as to ascertain universal rules and laws, while post-positivists accept that imperfections in meaning-making render such goals impossible; post-positivists focus instead on demonstrating

probability through observation and measurement (e.g., Cartwright 1994; Popper 1963). In terms of axiology, it is typically understood that researchers should work to exclude their values from their work in order to effectively make observations of such rules or laws (Lincoln and Guba 2000). Only through objective observation can researchers fully capture the rules and laws that govern particular phenomena, as values can skew the senses. When it comes to voice and the issue of a call to action, the positivists and post-positivists usually utilize a detached or disinterested voice when conveying the findings of their efforts; in part, this is to further exclude values or bias from the research endeavor (Guba and Lincoln 2005). Taken together, these assumptions about reality, learning about reality, values, and voice constitute the foundation for understanding and engaging with the world. As positivists and post-positivists move forward to conduct research, this framework provides an understanding about what questions to ask, as well as how to answer those questions—or address the hypotheses they put forward.

Other methodological paradigms, such as hermeneutics and postmodernism, are tied to the ontological assumption that reality is at least partially a social construct. The concept of socially constructed reality became an important component of academic research with the work of Peter Berger and Charles Luckman (1966), who claim that social actors negotiate reality. In the process of negotiation, they argue that people utilize experiences, interactions with other people, and interactions with mediated texts to build a subjective view of the world. Essentially, the subjective view one holds must be negotiated with other people in one's encounters so that both may come to a shared understanding of the world. Different paradigms would disagree on the extent of the social construction of reality. Some (e.g., postmodernists) would argue that our reality is almost entirely the product of our subjective experience and negotiated meaning with other people (Gubrium and Holstein 2003), while others (e.g., dialectical researchers) would insist that there is a material reality that impacts the process of social construction (Kvale 2007; Brinkmann and Kvale 2014). Regardless of these differences, scholars generally agree that there is some form of socially constructed reality that emerges from negotiated meaning that cannot be easily observed or measured. In terms of epistemology, then, researchers are concerned with intersubjectivity, or the way in which individuals achieve or construct meaning through social negotiation. In addition, there is an understanding among such methodological positions that values are always present in research and can never be excluded. For some, it is important to engage in validity checks so as to make sure that their values have not tainted their analysis of data (e.g., Corbin and Strauss 2007). Conversely, others let their

values actually guide them, as their work is simultaneously research and advocacy (e.g., Briggs 2003). Such methodological positions include cultural studies, dialectics, hermeneutics, heuristics, phenomenology, and postmodernism. Each discipline is slightly different in terms of its ontological and epistemological views of reality and knowledge.

Dialectics and heuristics are methodological paradigms based upon ontological assumptions about a material reality that deeply affects or shapes the social construction of reality. Dialectics assumes a world in which social interaction is shaped by material conditions; research grounded in dialectic materialism attempts to show how conditions of the material world give rise to interactions between people and the co-construction of meaning (e.g., Cornforth 1954; Engels 2012; Kvale 2007; Brinkmann and Kvale 2014; Sartre 1963). Heuristics also assumes a material reality that plays an important role in the construction of meaning, but focuses more on the experiences of the individual rather than the conditions in the material world. Under heuristics it is understood that people experience the material world around them; those experiences then guide their interpretation of other phenomena as they move through their lives. Experiences are central to interpretation and the emergence of meaning (e.g., Moustakas 1990; 1994; Polanyi 1974).

Hermeneutics and phenomenology focus more heavily on the social construction of reality than material reality. That is not to say the material is irrelevant to these positions, but there is clearly more emphasis on negotiation, discourse, and co-construction of meaning, which is mined to understand the material world that exists around people. Hermeneutics, also referred to as interpretivism, is the study of the ways in which texts are interpreted. Within literary studies, from which hermeneutics first developed, this position focuses on the interpretation of finished texts such as novels, plays, or films. Beyond literary studies, hermeneutics has come to focus on the interactions between researcher and research participant (e.g., Gadamer 2013; Ricoeur 1974); such interactions become a text that the researcher then examines in order to show a “possible consensus of understanding among actors within the frame of reference of self-understanding as mediated within a culture” (Kvale 1996, 51). In this framework, reality is socially constructed, and the researcher must engage in co-construction of meaning with people in order to gain insight about how they achieve meaning through social negotiation (e.g., Kvale 2007; Brinkmann and Kvale 2014; Moustakas 1994; Palmer 1969). Similarly, phenomenology assumes a reality that is socially constructed to make sense of a material world. However, the researcher does not pay exclusive attention to interpretation, but instead draws on the perspectives of research participants about a particular social phenomenon (e.g., Merleau-Ponty 1962; Spiegelberg

1960). Their perspectives are partly based on experience, as well as affiliations with social institutions and interactions with other people. By understanding individual perspectives and the diversity of perspectives on a topic—and how those perspectives are negotiated to build intersubjectivity—the scholar is able to gain a deep understanding of the socially constructed reality experienced by people and groups (e.g., Kvale 2007; Brinkmann and Kvale 2014; Manning and Cullum-Swan 1998).

Cultural studies and postmodernism emphasize the ontological position of a socially constructed reality, but entail slightly different views about that reality. The material is not ignored in either position, as it is important for understanding oppression within social contexts. However, social construction is what defines the material world, including subjects such as hunger, health, and prosperity. Developed from a fusion of theories concerning media, literature, Marxism, and politics, the field of cultural studies assumes a reality that is largely constructed through mediated communication wherein scholars must understand the interrelationship between media and audiences. Cultural studies research focuses on how ideological assumptions and cultural values embedded within mediated communication constitute a structure that shapes the way in which the audience experiences the world (e.g., Althusser 1972; Nelson, Treichler, and Grossberg 1992). In addition, this scholarship explores the construction and reconstruction of race and class through narratives circulated within the media (e.g., Butler 1990; Clegg 1993; Denzin 1997; 1998). Much of the research is utilized in order to uncover oppressive practices embedded within texts and demonstrate how hegemonic forces in society are reproduced; in many cases cultural studies scholars also seek out emancipatory interpretations by audiences in order to demonstrate how resistance against hegemony is possible (Lindlof and Taylor 2010; Ruddock 2001). Whether the researcher is interested in the exploration of structure or demonstration of resistance, their endeavors are often driven by morals and values; what the world “ought” to be like is the starting point for cultural studies projects (Anderson 1996).

Postmodernism, in contrast, is based on the assumption that all “truths,” definitions, and structures that have emerged in the past are flawed because of their grounding in problematic meanings and co-constructed realities. Past research by positivists, post-positivists, and phenomenologists, among others, has placed too much emphasis on theories or conceptualizations of behavior, experience, ideology, or hegemony that are flawed in three primary ways. First, these theories emerged from biased positions in society that have influenced data collection and analysis despite efforts to reduce such influence (Anderson 1996). Second, the theories were developed by members of a

dominant group (e.g., white men), who typically look to people like themselves as the sources of their data; the experiences of minorities (such as people of color and women) have often been excluded from the research projects (Dougherty 2011). Third, postmodernists also note that there is no way to really generalize about human beings and meaning-making, as people build knowledge and meaning in numerous ways within the contexts of a multitude of groups to which they belong (Deetz 1992; Mumby 1997). Ultimately, postmodernists contend that the social construction of reality emerges through actions and performances that are set within multiple overlapping contexts. For instance, people engage and interact with others at work differently than they do among their family. Scholars can only learn about co-construction of meaning and reality within different contexts by seeking to understand interactions and performances of people attending to a co-construction, as well as the contexts in which those take place (Denzin 1997; 1998; Gubrium and Holstein 2003).

Feminist methodology is closely related to both cultural studies and postmodernism. It is closely aligned with cultural studies in that both focus on the role of ideology and representations in the social construction of reality; it is also closely aligned with postmodernism as both note that theories and concepts from past research are flawed as they have come from privileged positions in society. Feminist methodology is primarily concerned with illustrating the ways in which patriarchal structures have shaped the production of knowledge in the modern world, and subsequently marginalized and silenced the voices of women (e.g., Harding 1987; Hesse-Biber 2014b; Radloff 2009); this methodology can be understood in terms of feminist standpoint theory (Naples and Gurr 2014). According to feminist scholars, a standpoint is a shared location that is constructed whenever people come to a common understanding about particular cultural positions; this location helps people to interpret texts and phenomena around them (e.g., Hartsock 1998; Harding 1993). According to Hartsock (1998, 107), “A standpoint is not simply an interested position (interpreted as a bias) but is interested in the sense of being engaged.” Essentially, a standpoint is not a perception or an attitude, but a way of engaging with others for the purpose of building community and understanding the world. A standpoint is accomplished through the recognition of different circumstances within various cultural positions, as well as the power and ensuing subjugation between and within those positions (e.g., Dougherty 2011; Harding 1993; Hartsock 1998). A feminist standpoint, then, involves the construction of a shared location in which people understand how patriarchal positions have dominated knowledge production in society and silenced women and minorities (Clair 1998). Ultimately, feminist methodology seeks to illuminate

women's experiences and privilege their voices so as to better understand the oppressive practices and silence that arises from patriarchal structures (Hesse-Biber 2014b). The tenets of feminist methodology are not confined to the exploration and illumination of women's experiences; they often are also utilized in research concerning silenced or marginalized people, such as lesbian, bisexual, gay, and transgender (LGBT) people. For instance, this methodology was crucial to Isaac West (2010) in his critique of actions conducted by a group called PISSAR (People in Search of Safe and Accessible Restrooms), which is a coalition of activists that work to make restrooms safe for people with disabilities or those who identify as transgender.

The different methodological paradigms covered in this section, as well as the affiliated positions that fall within those paradigms, affect the way in which researchers approach their subjects of interest. The foundational assumptions provide insight into individuals, communication, and relationships, as well as the world within which they exist. These assumptions also guide researchers to observe particular aspects of their subjects: attitudes and opinions, experience, or performance. Essentially, these paradigmatic views constitute the framework that guides the research process. The framework shapes the researchers' understanding about the world, as well as their approaches to a particular subject within the world. For instance, interpersonal communication scholars who study personal relationships within the post-positivist research paradigm often assume a material reality that is governed by the laws of cause and effect. Those scholars learn about the nature of personal relationships by stimulating different groups of people in different ways and observing the subjects' responses. Conversely, some interpersonal scholars study personal relationships through the paradigmatic view of phenomenology. These researchers assume a reality that is in part socially constructed, so they assume that relationships are built through the co-construction of meaning rather than responses to stimuli. These scholars would then seek to learn about those relationships by focusing on participants' perspectives and how those perspectives are negotiated to create intersubjective meaning. Remember that there is much overlap between these typologies. It is not that positivists or post-positivists reject the notion of social construction; rather, their ontological views lead them to focus on the measurement of attitudes and opinions. Hermeneutic scholars do not reject the importance of attitudes, but focus on experiences due to their understanding of reality. The same is true in reference to the study of social activism; scholars who hold these methodological positions conceptualize activism in different ways. This, in turn, leads to different approaches to the study of activism.

Recap 2-1. Methodological Frameworks

Framework	Description
Cultural studies	Reality is socially constructed and shapes the way people understand the material aspects of the world. Researchers examine the power dynamics involved in intersubjectivity.
Dialectics	Reality is socially constructed, but the material world shapes the way in which people co-construct meaning. Researchers attempt to show how conditions in the material world influence intersubjectivity.
Feminist methodology	Reality is socially constructed, but only by those voices and perspectives privileged by patriarchal structures. Researchers attempt to show the ways in which those structures influence knowledge production and ideology in society; they also work to privilege women's voices to aid in the construction of standpoints.
Hermeneutics	Reality is socially constructed, in part through the interpretive frameworks adopted by people to understand the texts and phenomena around them. Researchers engage with people to understand their interpretive processes and strategies.
Heuristics	Reality is socially constructed, yet shaped by the material aspects of the world. Personal experience is a primary component of intersubjectivity. Researchers examine the role of experiences with the material world in the negotiation of meaning.
Phenomenology	Reality is socially constructed and shaped in part by the perspectives that people bring to the negotiation of meaning. Researchers engage with people in order to explore the social institutions and interactions that have shaped their understanding about topics and issues in the world.
Positivism and post-positivism	Reality is constituted by the material world. Scholars search for rules, laws, or cause-effect relationships in communication.
Postmodernism	Reality is constituted from many social constructions from a multitude of subjective positions; context can influence intersubjectivity and the co-construction of meaning. Researchers explore the performances and interactions that shape meaning.

CONCEPTUALIZING SOCIAL ACTIVISTS: ONTOLOGY AND EPISTEMOLOGY

The different paradigmatic views described in the previous section influence more than just assumptions about reality. These paradigms also influence how researchers view individuals in society, as well as activists. James Anderson (1996) differentiates between four primary models of the individual: attribute, conjunctive, situated, and activative. Each of these models is grounded in ontological and epistemological assumptions associated with different methodological frameworks. Anderson's analytical framework enables researchers to develop a strong understanding of social activists, grounded within particular methodological positions. The attribute model assumes that individuals are the sum of their traits: physical, cognitive, and sociological. According to this model, individuals react to stimuli found in the material world. The conjunctive model assumes that individuals have more subjectivity but are largely constrained by the social forces around them. People are defined by—and pushed and pulled by—institutions and social forces such as culture; the collective forms and shapes individuals. The situated model highlights individuals with more power and freedom from the collective. Individuals under the situated model are still bound within values and meanings that are held across society or within particular cultures, but they can utilize elements of culture as resources for the purpose of expressing more subjective meanings. Finally, the activative model views individuals less as constrained by culture and the larger social collective. Individuals emerge from the relationships in which they engage; such engagement is key as individuals assume preexisting meanings within groups and organizations, but also participate in shaping those meanings. This enables individuals to exist differently from one relationship (or context) to the next. An example of this would be when a person is with his or her family in the morning and with friends on a night out; he or she activates different meanings within the two contexts, and so the person exists—or performs—as differently depending on the context.

As mentioned in the previous section, there are connections between different research paradigms and positions and the models described here. The paradigms of positivism and post-positivism adhere to a strict view of the attribute model of the individual, which is deeply rooted in the linear view of communication in which a sender transmits a message to a receiver (see Berlo 1960). The other three models of the individual are grounded in transactional and societal views of communication (see Alberts, Nakayama, and Martin 2010) in which individuals take turns in communication processes of co-constructing meaning while embedded within social and cultural forces. It should be noted that these models of the individual could be (and often are) applied across all

of the different methodological positions, so long as the nature of the individual works within the ontological and epistemological assumptions. As an example, the constrained conjunctive model does not fit well within postmodern assumptions about reality, while the engaged individual under the activative model does not fit well under the assumptions of dialectics. The conjunctive model works well within the assumptions of dialectics and heuristics noted above. In addition, cultural studies scholars use the conjunctive model whenever the focus is on the constraining force of cultural values, ideology, and hegemony; they can also incorporate the situated model whenever the focus is on the construction of resistant interpretations that give rise to emancipation. Both hermeneutic and phenomenological researchers can use either the situated or the activative models, and postmodernist researchers endeavor to adhere to the activative model. These different views of the individual ultimately impact the way in which researchers conceptualize social activists and social activism. The following sections demonstrate the different ways in which activists are conceptualized in terms of these different models, within three distinct contexts: in person, online, and in alternative media.

THE ACTIVIST IN PERSON

Past research has predominately conceptualized activists as *in person*. That is to say, researchers have focused their attention on activists who engage in some form of action set within a physical space such as street protest, speeches before audiences, and civil disobedience at public locations. The activist in person is a physical manifestation that interacts with the concrete world around him or her so as to bring about change in society, or to stem the tide of social change. The preoccupation with the activist in person makes sense, given that activists frequently engage in demonstrations and protests in public spaces in order to draw media attention and gain visibility for their cause; this is often the primary strategy utilized by many social activists and activist organizations. In fact, it could be argued that this strategy of engagement in physical spaces to gain visibility has largely skewed both academic and general conceptions about social activism: activism is deemed to be a physical activity, usually protests (peaceful or otherwise) that include marches, speeches, and some forms of civil disobedience. The words *activist* or *activism* often conjure up images of the march on Washington and freedom riders of the civil rights movement, student sit-ins in response to the war in Vietnam, Tea Party rallies, and Occupy Wall Street encampments. Given this general description of activists in person, it is important to note that how such activists are conceptualized depends on the researcher's methodological approach and view of individuals.

Under the attribute model—which is the model typically assumed by positivist and post-positivist researchers—activists are viewed primarily in terms of their traits. Two important points arise from this view of activists: they react to conditions in the material world, and their actions can constitute a stimulus. First, every activist is a sum of all of traits such as socioeconomic status, educational attainment, and attitudes and opinions about political issues. Several of these traits are developed from stimuli surrounding the activists such as family influence and exposure to political messages in the media. As a result, activists have very little agency in the form of freedom, autonomy, or choice; they are guided by stimuli that affect their specific traits. Second, the actions of activists (e.g., peaceful marching in the street) can constitute a stimulus to individuals who observe those actions, whether they see the activists in person or through media representations. Essentially, the activists' actions are an attempt to communicate to the public a problem or social injustice. Such communication can stimulate a favorable or unfavorable response from individuals witnessing such communication and affect their opinions or attitudes concerning the problem or social injustice.

Under the conjunctive model—which is typically applied in research grounded in the framework of dialectics and cultural studies—identity is an expression that is constructed from association with different social forces. Institutions, organizations, family, and more—what could very well be described as Louis Althusser's (1972) ideological apparatuses—all play an important role in teaching cultural values that mold and shape an individual's identity. In this way, social activism arises from association with politically engaged institutions and organizations; activists have a bit more agency than under the attribute model, as they are not simply subject to the effects of environmental stimuli that surround them. However, their freedom, autonomy, and choices are all limited to what is allowed or perceived to be agreeable to those social forces that hold particular sway over them. The activist in person under this model is viewed less as an individual and more as a member of a group or organization that has connections to larger social institutions. Their connections to groups and larger institutions causes the activists to move about. This enables activists to become the vehicle for messages and meanings that those larger organizations wish to convey to the public. For instance, Donna Kowal (2000) compares the protest rhetoric of American and British suffragists in the early twentieth century. Kowal has shown that the American suffrage activists often engaged in adjustive, or lawful, protest to advance their cause. Conversely, the British activists engaged in militant protests in their endeavors that could best be characterized as violent. Kowal argues that the differences between tactics arose from the suffragists associations with different politically engaged groups

of the day. In Britain, Labor Party politics and the conventions of the Victorian era shaped the activism of British women, while the Quakerism and the emergent “red scare” within political circles of power guided American suffragists. Essentially, cultural values (and fears) helped to shape the different organizations and subsequently led the women in the suffrage movement to utilize different tactics for protest. In this example, culture and political institutions shaped the activism.

The situated model of the individual is less constrained by social forces, albeit still embedded within, cultural forms, practices, and meaning. However, instead of being swept about with little freedom or choice, individuals can take preexisting cultural meanings and use them to express their own thoughts and ideas. This model echoes John Fiske’s (1987; 1993) notion of semiotic democracy, in which people can resist the intended meanings within cultural texts such as films and television programs; people have the opportunity to attach their own set of meanings to texts. Individuals can resist the social forces that swirl around them and choose to interpret things in alternative ways. In short, individuals have more agency by way of freedom, choice, and autonomy. According to Anderson (1996, 90), the situated model entails “an identity with continuity and a semblance of independence and autonomy that materializes a culturally produced subjectivity in, at least, partial response to personal motives and desires.” Phenomenological and hermeneutic scholars typically utilize this model, as the processes of meaning-making and interpretation are usually the focus of their research. From the perspective of this model, the activist in person is one who often engages in resistant readings of cultural texts and tries to explain to others this resistant view. Essentially, activists engage in various actions to lead the general population to an alternative view of, for example, war, masculinity, or corporate profits; activists work to make the public aware of abuses or oppressive practices. For instance, Christine Harold (2004) explores the activist tactic of “pranking” utilized by the Barbie Liberation Organization (BLO) and Biotic Baking Brigade. She describes how BLO entered toy stores, switched the preprogrammed voices of Barbie dolls and GI Joe action figures, and placed stickers on the toy boxes telling angry parents to call their local TV station. In addition, Harold looked at the Biotic Baking Brigade, a group that often threw cream pies in the faces of influential people (e.g., Bill Gates) when news media were present. Essentially, the act of throwing a pie in the face of an influential social leader momentarily disrupted their well-crafted guise of authority and enabled the media (and audiences) to see those people in an alternative way. In these two examples, the activism was the portrayal of resistant views concerning gender roles and powerful people in American

society to individuals (children and parents), as well as to larger audiences (by way of mainstream media).

The activative model of the individual is the least constrained by social forces such as culture or institutions. That is not to say that individuals under this model are uninhibited, as individuals in fact face restrictions within immanent relationships with which they are engaged. This model of the individual, employed by postmodernists as well as hermeneutics and phenomenological scholars, stresses an agent that is active in the construction of meaning within groups and organizations. Such groups are embedded within particular cultures and affiliated with institutions, but individuals within those groups can choose to ignore their influences; the individuals have the agency to create alternatives through their relationships. This perspective of the individual has emerged largely from Erving Goffman (1956; 1963), who describes the behaviors of people as dramas that unfold on stage before an audience; individuals play a theatrical role. Judith Butler (1990) and Vivian Patraka (1996; 1999) expand on this view as they explore the role of the body and performance in the establishment of identity. From this perspective, the activist in person is one who actively constructs alternatives through his or her relationships with others—activists and nonactivists. As discussed in chapter 1, Pezzullo (2003) explored bus tours sponsored by Sierra Club to a place in Louisiana called “Cancer Alley.” The tours provided activists with the opportunity to visit sites in the state ravaged by pollution caused by several chemical companies in the region. As the activists talked to one another, as well as to the members of the community, they constructed a collective memory of the region that was entirely different than the official story promoted by the state of Louisiana and the chemical companies. In another instance, Pricilla Wamucii (2011) explored a group called the Mathare Youth Sports Association (MYSA) in Nairobi, Kenya, that sought to aid impoverished people living in the slums. The group used sports as a method to attract young people from some of the poorer neighborhoods in Nairobi so that the organization’s leaders could engage with those youths about a variety of topics. Through these emergent relationships, the young people began to learn counter-narratives that stood in stark contrast to dominant oppressive assumptions about people living in the slums. These counter-narratives, and the relationships from which they learned the counter-narratives, stood as the foundations for new performances of identity that helped the young people when they left MYSA and began to look for work later in life. In both of these examples, activism constituted the construction of alternative ways of understanding the world and material environment through actions and relationships.

Conceptualizing the activist in person is, at first glance, fairly straightforward, as there is a focus on the embodied activists present within a physical site. The activist online, however, complicates the former. On the surface the two seem to be different, with the activist online sitting behind a computer connecting with other activists through Facebook or YouTube, building websites to educate the public and promote a particular cause, or engaging in some form of “hacktivism” to disrupt state or corporate media. The rise of mobile interactive media has changed this drastically, as the personal computer, phone, and digital recorder now exist within a single device that fits neatly into people’s pockets; activists can take the interactive technology with them to street protests or when practicing civil disobedience. The activist online is then intertwined with the conceptualization of the activist in person. As one examines the different models of the individual, from attribute to activative, the activist in person and the activist online become increasingly blurred. This increased blurring of the two forms comes in large part from the nature of interactivity involved in the different models. According to Sally McMillan (2002), three forms of interactivity have been described in academic research: user-to-system, user-to-user, and user-to-document interactivity. The first form entails interactivity with technology and systems; for example, using Amazon.com. User-to-user interactivity describes interactive technology that enables multiple users to communicate directly, such as using an instant messaging application or the texting capabilities on a smart phone. Finally, user-to-document interactivity is present when users are able to add, change, or alter content of a text, as on Wikipedia and Indymedia.org. The attribute and conjunctive models both incorporate the concepts of user-to-system and user-to-user interactivity; interactive media are used to circulate information or to communicate with other activists. The situated and activative models entail user-to-document interactivity; the interactive media is integral for activists to produce texts.

According to the attribute model, the activist online is, for the most part, an extension of the activist in person. Essentially, interactive media are tools that can be used by activists in their endeavors to stimulate social change. According to Jennifer Earl and Katrina Kimport (2011), we can think about the use of interactive media by activists in three distinct ways: e-mobilization, e-movements, and e-tactics. E-mobilization entails the use of interactive media (e.g., personal computer or smart phones) as a way to quickly notify other activists of protests or actions; such technology enables activist organizations to bring out their members in person efficiently. E-movements constitute activism that is carried out entirely online: all networking, communication, and action takes

place through websites and social media; no mobilization or action takes place in person or in any physical sites. Finally, e-tactics are actions that are carried out online to promote a cause or educate people (e.g., petitions or letter writing campaigns) in an effort to stimulate social change. These forms of activism are closest to the notion of activists sitting behind computers; the activist online is essentially the attribute model of the activist described in the previous section with the exception that he or she uses interactive tools in his or her endeavors. These forms of online activism help to dramatically increase the efficiency of mobilization, dissemination of information, and the capacity for activist groups to communicate across international borders—all at significantly lower cost and outside of the boundaries of mainstream media (Carty 2002; Garrido and Halavais 2003; Salter 2003). Take, for instance, Owens and Palmer (2003) discussed in chapter 1. They examined the use of websites by anarchist groups involved in antiglobalization protests in the late 1990s and revealed that anarchists employed an e-tactic called “funneling” that enabled them to link their own organizational websites to the websites of groups who were sympathetic or allied. Audiences who had seen media representations of antiglobalization protests would seek out more information about the anarchists that were portrayed in the news; their initial web searches would bring them to affiliated websites. Eventually, the audience would follow links to the anarchists’ website, where the anarchists would represent themselves and explain their political position free from media bias. In this way, the anarchists’ e-tactic directed media audiences to particular sites that could potentially serve as a stimulus that would shape opinions and attitudes about globalization. Online activism in this example is the use of interactive media to connect mainstream audiences with stimuli transmitted by various websites.

The conjunctive model stresses the cultural values in which activists are embedded and bound, and how those cultural values shape their actions. Like the attribute model, the activist online within the framework of the conjunctive model utilizes interactive media in order to circulate information more efficiently and mobilize for action. The cultural values that have been adopted by a particular organization often dictate how the activists will actually operate or use interactive media. Take, for instance, Pickard’s (2006a) research concerning the Indymedia Center (IMC) network, which demonstrates the role of values in shaping narratives and activist actions. Pickard describes decision-making in IMC, which emerged in large part from narratives about the network that were grounded in themes of “be the media” and “principles of unity.” The dual themes served as cultural values within the organization that shaped the way in which the activists involved in the IMC network utilize various media at their disposal. “Be the media” was a theme constructed from messages

in the network that called for active engagement with media technology, while “principles of unity” was the theme that emerged from messages that called for consensus building and solidarity. Both of these themes were based on critical worldviews grounded in Marxism, anticapitalism, or feminism, among others. At one point, the network stood to gain a \$50,000 grant from the Ford Foundation, but the whole network had to decide whether or not to accept that money. As principles of unity called for the group to build consensus, one No vote would lead to a rejection of the grant by the entire network, which is what happened when the Argentinian IMC voted no. In this particular case, cultural values tied to the IMC organization guided the activists’ use of interactive media and web tools.

Activists online, when conceptualized in terms of the situated model of the individual, are considerably different from the previous two models, as they have more agency despite being bound within cultural values. The activist online uses interactive media as a tool, but for different reasons altogether. Interactive media enables activists to engage in user-to-document interactivity, which makes them a part of the production process. Instead of circulating information efficiently or mobilizing quickly, activists use computers and mobile technology to gather pictures, video, sound, music, documents, and more that can all be used to construct new texts. The new texts that the activists construct explain a topic in a new fashion, which stands as a resistant view that can be adopted by both activists and nonactivists. For instance, Gabriella Coleman (2009) examined the ways in which hackers and users of “free and open source software” (F/OSS) used court cases and laws to shape understanding about computer code and free speech. In particular, court cases concerning software that made the copy of DVDs possible generated numerous discussions circulated online by lawyers, hackers, F/OSS users, and activists. These discussions gave rise to resistant meanings and views concerning the Digital Millennium Copyright Act of 1998 and incorporated software and coding within the framework of free speech. Similarly, Leah Lievrouw (2011) explores culture jamming online as a genre of activist media that is utilized by activists in order to create a resistant view about the subjects portrayed. She explains that “culture jamming captures and subverts the images and ideas of mainstream media culture to make a critical point” and that it “takes the form of popular culture, but with the purpose of subverting and critiquing that culture” (73). She provides the online art exhibits of Illegal Art and Nike Media Adventure as examples of such culture jamming. In the first example, a free speech and anticopyright advocacy group called Illegal Art created an online art exhibit that featured audio samples and images, which were exhibited illegally as the group was technically in violation of

current copyright laws. In this way, the group demonstrated to viewers how the current state of laws concerning copyright, fair use, and public domain are skewed in favor of corporations. In the second example, one activist took up Nike's online invitation for customers to submit words that they could have embroidered on their own Nike shoes (see Peretti 2001). The activist requested to have the word *sweatshop* printed on his shoes, but Nike refused his request. The two parties engaged in a heated e-mail debate about the issue, which became a long text that the activist subsequently sent out to friends and fellow activists. The text was circulated several times over, until it was printed in various news forums and websites. This text helped to portray Nike outside of their carefully crafted image. Online activism in these cases constituted the use of interactive media and technologies to appropriate popular culture texts and creating altogether new texts; these new texts held resistant and oppositional meaning structures.

Finally, the activative model, when applied to the activist online, entails user-to-document interactivity for the purpose of constructing alternative views of the world. These alternative views of the world are a framework through which activists engage in performance and interact with the physical environment, not just resistant perspectives to show to the general population. Christopher Kelty (2005) claims that the stories told about interactive media by hackers and geeks, as well as their practices of open software, give rise to a social imaginary that alters the ways in which people interact and engage on- and offline. Similarly, Paolo Gerbaudo (2012, 40) notes that websites, social media, and mobile technology converge to enable activists to construct alternative spaces; that is, interactive media is utilized by activists for "acts of choreographing: the mediated 'scene-setting' and 'scripting' of people's physical assembling in public space." For instance, my research with Clayton Rosati (Atkinson and Rosati 2012) demonstrates the use of interactive media in the construction of an alternative cityscape for Detroit by an online activist group. We found that the activists in the community shared various documents and pictures from the city's past and the present through an interactive forum, which gave rise to an alternative image of Detroit. The new image of the city stood in stark contrast to the image that emerges from typical portrayals of the city in the mainstream media. However, this new image was not used to educate people about Detroit, but rather to help the members of the community to better understand their home. This new image provided the activists with new ways to move through—and interact with—the physical cityscape. Online activism, then, was the creation of interactive texts that fostered an alternative view of reality concerning material spaces.

Recap 2-2. The Paradigmatic Views of Activists

Model	View	Description
Attribute model	Activists are the sum of their traits.	In person: Actions constitute stimulus in society. Online: User-to-system or user-to-user interactivity delivers stimuli to audiences.
Conjunctive model	Activists are parts of larger organizations or collectives.	In person: Actions convey organizational messages. Online: Organizational and cultural values dictate user-to-system and user-to-user interactivity.
Situated model	Activists are semi-autonomous, but embedded within cultures and organizations.	In person: Activists develop alternative or oppositional meanings. Online: User-to-document interactivity produces alternative meaning structures.
Activative model	Activists have full autonomy and freedom to work alone or in groups.	In person: Actions and relationships aid in the construction of alternative views of social reality. Online: User-to-document interactivity helps develop alternative ways of interacting with the world.

ALTERNATIVE MEDIA: THE AUDIENCE AS ACTIVIST

This book differentiates between alternative media and activist media. Alternative media refers to news that is produced by activists. Such media is different from mainstream media as the content is either critical of dominant power structures, produced in ways that are different from mainstream media, or interpreted by the audience to be alternative and different from the mainstream. Activist media are used by activists to draw attention to an issue, promote a cause, or reframe an issue. The example of Lievrouw’s research concerning culture jamming noted earlier in relation to the situated model of the activist online serves as a good example. Activist media can be artwork taken to protests

so as to draw attention to an issue, or hacktivist online tactics employed to rearticulate a specific issue in society from the perspective of the activists. In this way, activist media fits in with the previous discussions about the activist in person and online.

When considering the topic of alternative media within conceptualizations of the activist, it is important to consider the model of the audience rather than the model of individual. Nick Abercrombie and Brian Longhurst (1998) conducted a meta-analysis of a variety of decades-old audience research projects and chronicled three paradigmatic views of the audience: behavioral, incorporation/resistance, and audience performance. The behavioral paradigm is based on research concerning mass media effects (e.g., Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, and Signorelli 1980; Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet 1949). Under this paradigmatic view, the audience consists of a collection of individuals who are influenced in some ways by the media content that they are exposed to; media content constitutes a stimulus, while audience reactions or behaviors are considered to be a response. The incorporation/resistance paradigm emerged from research that explored ideology and cultural values embedded in mediated texts, and the role that those texts played in shaping (or not shaping) the audience. This view of the audience emerged from research that sought to demonstrate ideological and cultural structures constructed from media (Kellner 1995; Williams 1978), as well as research concerning audience resistance to those social forces through alternative interpretations of media (Fiske 1987; 1993; Hall 1980). Finally, the audience performance paradigm developed from research on the consumption of media content, pleasure, and fan culture (Ang 1985; Debord 1967; 1988; Ruddock 2001). According to this view, the audience pieces together mediascapes from a variety of media content that they attend to in their lives; these mediascapes constitute a site, or space, for performance as they move about everyday life. The audience learns how to interact and engage with the world from television programs, such as *The Big Bang Theory* and *Jersey Shore*, and use those programs to construct for themselves spaces in the social environment in which they can perform. It is not that the audience sees themselves as a part of the show, but viewers blur the line between their role as audience and the performances of those programs. The rules for engaging with the world in those programs apply to their own constructed mediascapes. Each of these paradigmatic views of the audience emerged from at least one of the methodological frameworks discussed in this chapter. The behavioral paradigm is grounded within the ontological and epistemological assumptions of positivism and post-positivism, whereas the incorporation/resistance and audience performance paradigms are grounded in the multiple frameworks more often associated with cultural studies, hermeneutics, and other methodological positions focused on social construction.

Based on the assumptions of the behavioral paradigm, alternative media are those media that are outside of (or different from) the mainstream press. In addition, the activists who are the audiences of those alternative media are conceptualized as individuals that are the sum of all of their traits; alternative media content are stimuli for those individuals. As an example of alternative media and activists as audience under the behavioral paradigm, McLeod and Hertog (1992) explored the content of different media portrayals of anarchist protests; their research demonstrates the effects of those portrayals on audiences. In the case of mainstream media coverage, the activists were portrayed in such a way as to dissuade people outside of the protests from becoming involved or identifying with the protesters. Conversely, the alternative media portrayals of the activists were more sympathetic, as “alternative media coverage may reduce the fear of isolation . . . by creating a sense of community and by increasing the body of knowledge shared by the anarchist group” (272). Similarly, Boyle and Schmierbach (2009) demonstrate that audiences of alternative media were more likely to become involved in protest actions and would take part in such actions more frequently. In both cases, the alternative media had an effect on the activists who constituted the audience.

The incorporation/resistance paradigm focuses more on how audiences make meaning of media content and less on how media affect them. Media producers encode specific meanings within content that are then circulated among audiences in society, who, in turn, decode the content; they can take away the meaning that was intended by the producers, or they can create new meanings as they interpret the content. Essentially, they can either incorporate the intended meanings (which are typically aligned with dominant ideologies and cultural values), or they can resist such intended meanings and take away something different. Under such assumptions, activist audiences are typically using alternative media in order to construct resistant frameworks for making sense of mainstream media and dominant power structures in society; the activists may be attempting to construct such frameworks for themselves, other activists, or for the general population. For example, Atton (2002) and Downing (2001) have described the alternative views about political topics that are constructed and circulated by activists in alternative media content, such as *SchNEWS* and Heart of Steel Radio. Atton talks about the production and content of the weekly magazine *SchNEWS* produced by an anarchist collective in England that focused on underreported social issues. The features in the magazine were written by activists so as to allow for views and commentary about topics such as race or housing that were not typically included in mainstream news. In this way, the producers provided perspectives about society different from those embedded in the mainstream media, which aided in the construction of new interpretive structures for the reader. Similarly, Downing

describes the Heart of Steel Radio broadcasts out of Longwy, France, in 1978. Activists established the radio station in order to provide a different perspective on the closure of steel mills in that region. The radio reports included voices of community members who were deeply affected by the closures, which helped audiences to see the issue from a different perspective. In both cases, the reporting by activists framed social issues in ways that differed from the portrayals offered in the mainstream media and created the potential for resistance by audiences who might be sympathetic to the cause—either activists or listeners among the general public. Note that under the incorporation/resistance paradigm, activists could build frames that can be used to interpret certain media as alternative to the mainstream. Jennifer Rauch (2007) demonstrates that the interpretive strategies used by audiences constitute a frame through which they view media content. Whether or not media content would be considered alternative or mainstream depends on how it is read and interpreted by the audience. The incorporation/resistance paradigm helps to show audiences of alternative media as engaged in a process of reading and meaning making.

Initially described by Abercrombie and Longhurst as spectacle performance, the audience performance paradigm assumes that audiences piece together mediascapes from their immersion in the media-saturated environment of contemporary society. According to this paradigm, the media that are used by audiences to build such mediascapes typically entail spectacle that has been produced (by corporations) with the intent to draw an audience's gaze. The mediascapes constitute a place of performance for the audience and performances grounded in spectacle tend to be narcissistic in nature. Building on this research, I expanded the notion of the audience performance paradigm by incorporating resistance performance (Atkinson 2010) and standpoint performance (Atkinson, Rosati, Stana, and Watkins 2012). In the case of resistance performance activists use alternative media to build theaters of performance grounded in critical worldviews about dominant power structures, while standpoint performance arises from content that is cocreated by audiences who gain a voice for highlighting oppressive practices. My own work (Atkinson 2010) places all of these different views of spectacle, resistance, and standpoint together under one label of audience performance. According to the audience performance paradigm, the activist audience uses alternative media to construct mediascapes in which they engage in communicative performances of resistance. The alternative media are a backdrop against which the activists engage in performances of resistance or performances of standpoint. For example, Gerbaudo (2012) discusses the important role of the *Adbusters* magazine and media network in the Occupy Wall Street protests across the United States. *Adbusters* put out the initial call for the protests on Wall Street, both in print and online. The magazine's critical views about consumerism and capital-

Recap 2-3. The Paradigmatic Views of Activists as Audience

Paradigm	Description
Behavioral paradigm	Activist audiences are individuals who are influenced by stimuli conveyed through alternative media.
Incorporation/resistance paradigm	Activist audiences use alternative media to construct new frameworks for reading and understanding mainstream media texts.
Audience performance paradigm	Alternative media constitute a backdrop against which activists engage in performances of resistance or standpoint.

ism stood as a backdrop for a choreographed assembly in which activists could perform resistance. In addition, Joe Khalil (2012) explored the role of youth-generated alternative media in the Arab Spring protests of 2011. According to Khalil, the circulation of news reports and images through the citizen journalism of young activists in the region helped to construct a mediascape that was important for the enactment of many of the protests that occurred during that time. In each of these cases, activists used alternative media to cobble together backdrops against which they were able to perform resistance; these alternative mediascapes constitute a fluid world of power structures, oppression, and struggle.

RESEARCH ETHICS: AXIOLOGY

Aside from conceptualizations about reality and activists, a researcher's methodological foundation is also important for understanding how he or she should address and approach potential ethical issues. Axiology, or the role of values in research, is central to any discussion about research ethics. Different methodological frameworks incorporate values differently. The methodological positions of positivism and post-positivism typically attempt to exclude values as much as possible, whereas other frameworks use values as the rationale and justification for research. Axiology is the starting point for ethical decision-making when engaged in the research process. As a scholar who has spent many years studying social activism, I can attest to the ethical dilemmas that can arise in the course of research. I have engaged with activists who have taken part in criminal activities, activists who refused to sign consent forms, and activists who were less than truthful when discussing their organizations and actions. How I chose to address these situations was very much grounded in my axiological foundation, as it helped me to formulate solutions to these dilemmas.

This section explores the concept of ethical communities and frameworks and the role that they play in making ethical decisions within the context of research projects. In addition, this section also covers important ethical considerations that researchers face when exploring social activism.

Axiological assumptions about the role of values comprise the basis for ethical research communities and frameworks that can help researchers to make decisions whenever they encounter significant dilemmas or problems in their work. The following discussion about ethics and decision-making is not intended to provide answers about what researchers should do when they encounter an ethical dilemma or problem. Instead, the purpose of this discussion is to illuminate foundations upon which they can come to “sound, justifiable ethical decisions” (Wiles 2013, 21). Each ethical dilemma and problem is situated within its specific context, and it is essentially up to the researcher to come to the important decision about what is the “right” way to proceed and what would be “wrong.” Ultimately, the section describes ethical frameworks (conceptualizations of moral behavior) and ethical communities (professional guidelines and norms) and shows how both can help researchers to come to a sound decision when confronted with an ethical dilemma.

Ethical frameworks are approaches to dilemmas and problems in research that assume particular moral standards. The frameworks provide a way of thinking about moral behavior and what would be the right way to engage with a problem. Rose Wiles (2013) identifies five common frameworks used by researchers: consequentialist, principlist, nonconsequentialist, ethics of care, and virtue ethics. The consequentialist framework emerged from utilitarian ethics (Johannesen 2002; Pojman 2005), which is an ethical position wherein the end justifies the means. Essentially, the consequences of an action are the primary factor when deciding whether an action is right or wrong. If the action promises to generate good results for people and society, then the action can be deemed to be right. In contrast, the principlist framework emerged from the concepts of deontological ethics and the categorical imperative and holds that certain principles are absolute and can never be compromised (Johannesen 2002; Pojman 2005). These principles (e.g., honesty, respect for autonomy) are the foundation of civil society; violation of such principles undermines the social order. If an action would promote greater good for individuals and society but violate one of the absolute principles upon which society is founded, then the action is deemed to be wrong. The framework of virtue ethics is derived from Aristotle and focuses on the character of the researcher rather than the consequences or principles (Neher and Sandin 2007). This framework outlines the characteristics of a moral researcher (e.g., respectful, sincere, reflexive), as well as the vices of a poor researcher (e.g., deception for self-promotion). These virtues constitute the basis for training new researchers in the field on

how to conduct themselves with research participants. Finally, the ethics of care has emerged from feminist research (Denzin 1997; Edwards and Mauthner 2002; Patton 1990) and focuses on the relationship and interdependence of the researchers and research participants. Within this framework, researchers do not reflect on the consequences, principles, or their characteristics to make a decision. Instead, they focus on the relationship that they have developed with their participants and make decisions that will effectively promote the most “care” for them. However, the concept of care is nebulous as it is not universal, but emerges from the specifics of the research case and is subject to change over time. For the most part, this concept of “care” has emerged from scholarship concerning the feminist ethics of care (e.g., Hallstein 1999; Jagger 1994) and Denzin’s (2001) notion of the “seventh moment” of qualitative research. In these cases, researchers work to give something back to the research participants; researchers try to make the experience useful and beneficial to those participants who volunteered their time. The ethics of care framework often necessitates “meeting the needs of others; recognizing emotions; recognizing people’s relationality and interdependence; and respecting and seeking the views of others and their moral claims” (Wiles 2013, 15). Ultimately, these frameworks provide researchers with a foundation from which they can make the right decisions when they encounter moral dilemmas during their work. They can look to the consequences of possible actions, the principles that are held to be important, and the characteristics of good researchers, or they can act to care for the relationship that they have built with their research participants.

The ethical framework provides a broad basis for the beginning of ethical decision-making; ethical communities and professional guidelines help to narrow this process. An ethical community is constructed from the rules and practices that are deemed to be the ethical obligations of a particular profession or discipline; such obligations are agreed upon to promote and advance the common good (Charvet 1995; Dougherty and Atkinson 2006; Little, Jordens, and Sayers 2003). Wiles (2013) refers to such obligations as professional ethical guidelines. Essentially, practitioners within a discipline or profession come to understand that they should conduct themselves in particular ways if they are to exist as a sustainable community that can be supported (Winfield 2001); these obligations emerge and become institutionalized as each successive group of new community members are socialized into the discipline. Such obligations, however, are not simply a to-do list that researchers and practitioners must follow but a lens through which those people scrutinize and reflect upon their work (Arnett 1986). Typically, the ethical community arises from the members’ shared views of reality and knowledge (ontology and epistemology). My work with Debbie Dougherty (Dougherty and Atkinson, 2006) provides a

partial list of ethical communities in academia that were closely tied to their members' views about reality. For instance, the social science ethical community entails three primary principles by which researchers must abide, all of which have emerged from past research concerning ethics in research settings (Babbie 1989; Bloche 1998; Reynolds 1982; Rothman 1998). First, researchers must work to ensure that the rights of individuals participating in the research are protected. In addition, researchers have an obligation to weigh the benefits of a research project for society against the potential harm to the individual research participants. If the risks are deemed to be too great for the participants, then researchers must make appropriate alterations to the project. Finally, researchers must maintain physical and emotional distance from the research participants in order to fully protect their rights and ensure that they endure minimal risk. If that distance is broached, then confidentiality and anonymity can be compromised, and participants can feel as if they must comply with the researchers' requests. The qualitative research ethical community is an overlapping, albeit different, community that entails a similar focus on moral treatment of research participants, but does not have the same emphasis on distance from the research participants. As many qualitative researchers are grounded in a research paradigm focused on social construction, they work to uncover lived experiences, interpretations, and processes of meaning-making. All of this requires that researchers broach the distance between themselves and participants further than would be allowed within the social science community (Denzin 2001; Dougherty and Atkinson 2006).

When researchers understand the broad ethical framework under which they fall and recognize the norms and guidelines that have emerged within their particular discipline, they will find that they are well equipped to deal with ethical challenges as they arise. Knowledge about the framework and community will enable researchers to critique the work in which they are engaged so that they may "resolve their ethical dilemmas by drawing on their moral judgment about the appropriate course of action" (Wiles 2013, 21). As noted previously, there are no "hard and fast" answers to the moral dilemmas and problems that may be encountered when conducting research. However, by using an ethical framework and being within an ethical community, a researcher can make effective decisions about how to proceed.

When conducting research concerning social activism, several ethical dilemmas can emerge. Often these issues should be considered at the onset of a project before researchers begin to recruit participants, or even before they decide on the method that they will use or the questions that they will ask. These considerations include: consent, confidentiality, anonymity, interactions with activists, safety, and crime. Researchers studying social activism typically need to deal with the first three considerations in every project they conduct,

while the remaining three often emerge at one point or another; for these reasons it is important for researchers to plan ahead so that their projects are not hindered or derailed. Researchers should incorporate plans for these ethical dilemmas into the research design that they describe for the Institutional Review Board (IRB) or Human Subjects Review Board (HSRB) applications, otherwise the changes will have to be revealed to those boards later (which may slow down the pace of the project). Although researchers can never predict all of the problems that can emerge, the more that they can anticipate and manage beforehand, the less likely they are to have to stop their research to revise materials for the IRB or HSRB.

GAINING INFORMED CONSENT

Gaining informed consent is necessary for any research project, whether it be quantitative, qualitative, positivist, or hermeneutic. Gaining consent means that the researcher will fully notify the participants about: the purpose of the research, what involvement in the research will include, how the information that they provide will be used, whether the results of the research will benefit them personally, who will have access to the information that they provide, any potential risks that might be posed, how their confidentiality and anonymity will be protected, and that they may withdraw from the research at any time without penalty (Elm, Buchanan, and Stern 2009; Fontana and Frey 1998; Kvale 2007). In addition, research participants should also be informed about who is funding the research, the institutional affiliation of the researcher, and contact information for the IRB or HSRB with which the researcher is affiliated (Wiles 2013). After a potential participant has been provided with all of that information, the researcher may then ask participants for their consent to take part in the research. All of this on the surface seems fairly straightforward. In many cases, researchers comply with this need to gain informed consent by using legal-looking contracts or forms that provide all of the relevant information and include a space at the bottom for the participant's signature. However, considerable literature has documented the problems that can arise when trying to inform the participants (e.g., information overload; jargon versus lay language) and to gain consent (e.g., consent from minors or people who are illiterate). When engaged with social activists, another significant problem can emerge in the process of gaining informed consent. Many activists, such as anarchists or other extreme groups, hold strong antiestablishment views. Such activists are very suspicious of both corporations and the government and their modes of conducting business. The legal-looking contracts that are typically used by researchers to provide information and gain consent can make such activists wary—so much so that they may refuse to sign the consent form or

participate in the research. In addition, many activists regularly engage in activities and actions of resistance that are deemed to be militant, such as clashing with police or vandalism. These activists are also often reluctant to put their signature onto any legal-looking forms for fear that the information may fall into the hands of the authorities, despite any assurances by the researcher that their anonymity and confidentiality will be protected.

Such refusal to sign on the part of activists constitutes a significant problem for researchers, as the IRB and HSRB typically require that participants' informed consent be recorded. How should researchers proceed with their projects without violating IRB or HSRB protocol? Researchers have a number of options to do the right thing (see Coomber 2002; Wiles 2013). One method to record informed consent can be to simply ask the activists to make a mark on a consent form that signifies to the researcher that they understand what is involved in the research and agree to participate. In this way the activist in person is not easily connected to the mark on the form, and they can maintain their distance from corporate or government processes or resort to plausible deniability to protect themselves from authority figures. Another way to record informed consent without the use of legal-looking forms or contracts is to gain oral consent that is digitally recorded. Instead of offering the activist a form or contract with information about the research project, the researcher merely reads from a prepared document while recording the conversation. The activist can then give his or her consent verbally without having to sign any document.

All of this can be complicated, however, in online environments, where oral communication is not always an option and identity is not always transparent. If the researcher is able to communicate with prospective participants through video conferencing (e.g., Skype), recording of oral consent is still an option if he or she has the appropriate recording software. In some online communities, however, video conferencing is rarely, if ever, available. Many communities are text based, or use avatars that represent the members. For the most part, it is widely understood that informed consent from community members is not necessary whenever the information is provided in online forums that are public—that is, anyone could access the forum or social media profile and read through all of the available information (Elm, Buchanan, and Stern 2009; Wiles 2013). Nevertheless, it is important that researchers at least notify the community that they are engaged in an examination of their content and then provide them with basic information about the project (Kozinets 2010; Wiles 2013). As Wiles notes, “While it may not be necessary to gain consent from all participants prior to observing an online group it is nevertheless essential that participants are aware of a researcher’s identity and their interest in the group” (36). Whenever the online community and the content of their

interactions are private or semi-private, however, gaining informed consent is again integral, but quite problematic. It can be difficult to determine from whom the researcher is actually gaining consent. Are the participants old enough to take part in the research? Are they actually who they claim to be? Is the prospective participant *really* a regular member of the community? In many cases, people who are present in an online community are “lurkers” who do not take part in community activities and simply watch. In other cases, people present in the community are “trolls” or “thread rippers” who are there to cause problems for members of the community; they may see the research as an opportunity to stir up trouble. Gaining consent in these cases may require extra steps by the researcher. One step that can be taken is to request from the potential participant any lists that reveal a history of their contributions, or posts, to the community; many forums, like the Z Space sites provided by Z Net, provide users the opportunity to see past posts and activity of other users. In this way, researchers can easily determine whether prospective participants have truly been involved in the community, or whether they qualify as lurkers or trolls.

CONFIDENTIALITY AND ANONYMITY

Like the process of gaining informed consent, the issues of confidentiality and anonymity on the surface seem to be straightforward. Essentially, confidentiality is the understanding between the researcher and the participant that the information provided will not be knowingly conveyed to other parties, and that the participant’s personal information will not be revealed (Kvale 2007; Oliver 2003). Most researchers ensure participants that their confidentiality will be protected by using pseudonyms rather than their real names (Iphofen 2009). Two particular problems with this process can arise, however, which may complicate the matter of confidentiality: assignment of pseudonyms and activist demands for identification. The first problem, the assignment of pseudonyms, is one that can arise in research in almost any area. When assigning pseudonyms, researchers have two options: ask the participants to come up with their own pseudonyms or assign pseudonyms based on their participants’ special traits or characteristics. The problem is that the pseudonym “Scholarly Activist” may be more interesting and engaging than “Activist #12” or “Joe,” but the name could also hold clues for other participants or members of a given community about the identity of that very participant. This is particularly problematic in research concerning activism, as many activists engage in activities that may be deemed to be illegal or challenges traditional norms in a culture; the use of a catchy pseudonym may put them at risk of arrest or retaliation. Ultimately, it is up to researchers, grounded within their ethical

framework and community, to work with the activists to come to an understanding about what is best in regards to pseudonyms for the purpose of anonymity.

In many cases, activists prefer to waive confidentiality and to be identified in any research proceedings that emerge from their participation. This makes sense as most activists are interested in drawing attention to a particular cause or pursuing social change; the research proceedings would be another piece of “coverage” that could aid them in their endeavors. If this is the case for all of the participants who took part in the research, as well as for the other members of any organizations with which those participants are affiliated, then it may be permissible for researchers to forgo pseudonyms and use the actual names of the organizations and participants (Wiles 2013). However, researchers must gauge whether there are risks to the participants from the release of such information; they must weigh the risks against the participants’ autonomy. The issue is significantly complicated, however, whenever some participants want to be identified, but others within an activist community or organization do not. In such cases, it is highly recommended that researchers keep the name of any organizations anonymous, so as to protect those who do not want to be identified; researchers should not release the names of any of the participants and maintain confidentiality for all (Wiles 2013; Wiles, Crow, Heath, and Charles 2008). Researchers are not bound to such a constraint, however, but must make an educated decision about what is in the best interest of the activists involved in the research. For instance, Karma Chavez (2011) conducted research concerning the coordination of two different activist organizations. Her research involved a combination of participant observation within those two groups and interviews of key activists. In the footnotes to her research proceedings, Chavez notes that, “All participants were offered an opportunity to select a pseudonym. Several elected not to; therefore, unless otherwise indicated, the names used are participants’ actual first names” (15). Ultimately, it is up to researchers, working from and reflecting on their ethical grounding, to make decisions about how to proceed in such cases.

I have had to grapple with the issue of confidentiality and anonymity in my own research. In one instance, in 2003, I had the opportunity to travel to Chiapas, Mexico, and visit communities involved in the Zapatista endeavors to secure indigenous rights. Before embarking on my trip, I gained Institutional Review Board approval to seek out oral consent from the leaders of the autonomous communities in order to record their oral histories and to ask them whether they preferred that I use actual names or pseudonyms. As it turned out, none of the leaders requested pseudonyms and preferred the use of actual names to help spread the word of their work and resistance. My research was eventually accepted for publication (Atkinson 2009b). During

the process of copyediting, however, it struck me that many quotations used from the oral histories implicated some communities in acts of resistance against the Mexican government that could constitute fairly serious crimes. In other words, my research could be used against those communities. An academic article like this would primarily benefit me and do little for those impoverished communities. Was it ethical of me to benefit from risk entailed by their consensual disclosure and identification? Should I take out the names? But then again, their lives were lived in rebellion; who was I to make that decision for them? In the end, I decided that I could not consciously implicate the people of these communities through research that was going to benefit primarily me. Perhaps that was not the right decision, as some might argue that I silenced the community leaders and activists fighting oppression in southern Mexico. My point here is not whether I was right or wrong, but that the struggles over philosophical foundations and ethical considerations follow us throughout the research process.

INTERACTING WITH ACTIVISTS

Dwight Conquergood (1985) notes moral problems that can arise from the way in which researchers interact with their participants. Essentially, he notes two problems that emerge from a strong feeling of difference from the participants, as well as two other problems associated with strong identification with them. All of these problems are more evident for those researchers who engage in research in the “boundaries and borderlands” of society, that is, spaces where culture or norms are being changed or challenged (Conquergood 1991). Strong feelings of difference from research participants can produce the moral problems called the “skeptic’s cop-out” and “curator’s exhibitionism.” The skeptic’s cop-out entails a sense of difference from the participants, as well as feelings of detachment from them. In this case, the researcher largely ignores many aspects of the participants, as they are not like the researcher; Conquergood claims that this is the domain of “cowards and cynics.” The curator’s exhibitionism also entails the sense of difference, but the researcher can also feel a commitment to the cause or views of the research participants. For the researcher, the participants are a curiosity to behold and explore; Conquergood likens this problem to the tourist’s gaze. Researchers who run afoul of the curator’s exhibitionism see their participants through a romanticized frame that constructs them as “noble savages.” Thus, any conclusions based on observations and information collected constitute gross distortions of those participants and their environment.

More complicated for research concerning social activism are problematic interactions associated with strong identification with the research participants:

“enthusiast infatuation” and “custodian’s rip-off.” These are particularly challenging as many researchers often take up the study of social activism because they identify with the political positions of social justice, environmentalism, or other causes for which the activists advocate. These strong feelings of identification can drastically skew how researchers engage with the participants, as well as how they interpret any observations and data that are gleaned from their engagement. The first of these, enthusiast infatuation, emerges from strong identification with the participants, as well as a commitment to their views. As a result, researchers are so excited and intrigued by the participants and identify with them so much that they will not fully critique or reflect on them as they are partially advocating alongside them. The participants, their actions, and their environment are “glossed over by a glaze of generalities” (Conquergood 1985, 6). Theresa Petray (2011) demonstrates the potential hazards of the enthusiast infatuation in her research concerning Australian aboriginal activists’ uses of online protest. In her article she states, “I acted as a critically engaged activist researcher, working in solidarity with my research participants. Critically engaged activist research accepts that objectivity is impossible and instead strives to carry out meaningful, movement-relevant research” (926). The risk for researchers such as Petray is that their interactions may often ignore or filter out problematic issues or oppressive practices within a particular activist community. In addition, the custodian’s rip-off emerges from a strong identification with the research participants while also feeling simultaneously detached from them. By falling into this moral trap, the researcher is interested in “acquisitiveness instead of genuine inquiry, plunder more than performance” (5). The researcher is excited by participants because of his or her identification with an issue or cause, but approaches and engages with them for personal gain and selfish goals.

In order to avoid the moral problems of these types of interactions, it is important for researchers to engage with participants through “dialogical performance.” According to Conquergood (1985, 9): “This performative stance struggles to bring together different voices, world views, value systems, and beliefs so that they can have a conversation about one another. The aim of dialogical performance is to bring self and other together so that they can question, debate, and challenge one another. It is a kind of performance that resists conclusions, it is intensely committed to keeping the dialogue between . . . open and ongoing.”

Ultimately, researchers should seek to engage with their participants in an open and transparent fashion, so that both parties are able to learn from each other. Such an approach when interacting with participants can help researchers to avoid the fetishism or biases that can skew their findings. In many ways, Conquergood’s notion of dialogical performance is similar to Denzin’s (2001)

seventh moment of qualitative research; in both instances the researcher must work to give something back to the participants. Petray (2011) notes that she tried to “avoid uncritical adulation” by committing to improving the aboriginal movement with which she was engaged (926–927); she was obligated to give something useful back to the participants with whom she worked. Such grounding ensured that she was engaged in a meaningful dialogue with aboriginal activists and not simply picking and choosing those comments or observations that she found pleasing or exciting.

SAFETY AND CRIME

All social research entails some form of risk to both the participants and the researchers. Risks to reputation or to sensibilities, no matter how slight, can emerge in any research project. Researchers who study activism, however, often find themselves in environments that involve more than the slight risks to sensibilities. Many activists or activist organizations routinely take part in actions that involve a degree of risk, either in the form of physical risks or legal risks. In these situations, it is important that researchers determine whether it is necessary that they be subject to such environments, and even ask whether their presence is in fact prompting the activists to take part in such actions.

Wiles (2013) identifies three intertwined aspects of research projects that can give rise to risks associated with safety and crime: the location, the topic, and the participants. Locations in which research is conducted can have risks tied to the environment or risks that arise from the researchers’ presence (i.e., their attendance can cause particular people in the environment to become hostile or agitated). For instance, observing or taking part in a street protest can entail risks to physical safety. There is the risk of researchers or participants getting hurt in altercations with the police or by other protesters pushing and shoving through the environment. There is also the risk that some of the protesters may not take kindly to the presence of a researcher among them; they may suspect that the researcher is working for the authorities, or simply distrust the person as an outsider. In such cases, the researcher’s position with other activists can be at risk, and in extreme cases his or her safety can be jeopardized as well. In addition to location, some topics of research can entail more risk than others. Research concerning letter-writing campaigns or activists’ use of websites should pose little to no risk to the researcher or the participant. However, research concerning black bloc anarchist tactics or revolutionary actions against a government would increase the risks for researchers and participants. Finally, the participants themselves are an aspect of the research that can give rise to potential safety and crime risks. In many cases, researchers are directed toward potential participants through snowball sampling; past participants provide

them with names of other people whom they believe would be willing to take part in the research. Often, the researcher contacts those persons and asks for a meeting at a place of the potential participant's choosing, typically with little information about the individual. The place that many participants choose is somewhere isolated or secluded (e.g., their homes). Although problems with safety in these situations are rare, there is the potential for physical risk to the researcher (Adler and Adler 1998; Kenyon and Hawker 1999). In addition, there is the risk that the researcher might anger or agitate the participant in this lone setting, leading the participant to complain about the researcher to other activists; the situation could pit the researcher against the activists.

Ultimately, risks to participants must always be minimized as much as possible, and it is up to the researchers to reflect on the project and determine whether these risks have been minimized. In addition, researchers must also reflect on whether or not the benefits to their research, and to society, outweigh any risks that they might incur. In some cases, minimizing risks can be fairly easy (e.g., always meet participants in semi-public settings). However, when faced with the choice of going to a protest that will likely end with violent confrontations with the police, weighing the potential risks against the value of the experience to the research project can be difficult. In those moments, it is important that researchers have a strong grounding in their ethical frameworks and community, so that they have a foundation on which to base these difficult decisions.

**Recap 2-4. Typical Ethical Dilemmas Encountered
in Social Activism Research**

Dilemma	Possible Solution
Gaining informed consent	Request simple marks on consent forms or gain oral consent and request a history of online activity (to confirm membership in a community).
Keeping sources confidential and anonymous	Use names of activists and organizations only when everyone agrees; otherwise use pseudonyms. Even when everyone agrees, it is necessary take into account legal matters and the safety of the participants.
Interacting with activists	Engage with activists through dialogical performance.
Assessing crime risks and safety	Always assess potential risks associated with the location, topic, and participants.

THE RESEARCHER'S POSITION:
VOICE AND CALL TO ACTION

Equally important to a methodological foundation are the researcher's voice and his or her call to action. Both of these are evident in any proceedings that result from one's research (e.g., journal articles, conference papers, books). According to Anderson (1996, 144), "voice is the style of subjectivity. It reflects the place of the author in her or his claims"; the methodological foundation positions researchers in relation to both their participants and their audiences. They are positioned such that they address the readers of their work in particular fashions. In addition, the nature of their methodological framework also plays an important role in any call to action; in some cases, the call to action is forbidden, while in others it is a vital component of the research proceedings. These two issues are very much intertwined and impact how researchers make their findings public. Guba and Lincoln (2005, 201) sum up the stark contrast between methodological approaches to this process in the following way: "One of the clearest ways in which the paradigmatic controversies can be demonstrated is to compare the positivist and post-positivist adherents, who view action as a form of contamination of research results and processes, and the interpretivists, who see action on research results as a meaningful and important outcome of inquiry processes."

I have found the issue of voice to be particularly problematic when dealing with research concerning social activism. It has been difficult at times in my own work because activists are clearly using their own voices to advocate for issues and positions within contemporary society. However, my own efforts have been not about advocacy but about demonstrating processes of democracy. How do their voices fit in with my own voice within the research process? It is something that I must always ask myself when I sit down to write my research proceedings.

For those grounded in the methodological frameworks of positivism and post-positivism, the voice presented to an audience is typically that of a detached third party with little or no attention paid to their position in relation to participants or audience. Such reflexivity is typically deemed to be problematic for objectivity, which is an important component of the ontological and epistemological views of positivism and post-positivism. In addition, there is seldom any call to action by those scholars within any research proceedings, as such calls represent advocacy, which is also a problem for objectivity (Guba and Lincoln 2005). As a result, research writing of positivists and post-positivists often reads like the following excerpt from an article by Michael McCluskey (2009). McCluskey surveyed various activist organizations about their attributes and

resources and conducted quantitative content analysis to assess those organizations' portrayals in the local news:

This analysis shows that the tone of news coverage may be partially explained by conditions endemic to the focus of the coverage. That is, attributes of environmental groups—the resources they possess, goals they pursue, and communication strategies—are tied to the tone of coverage. Previous analyses found that activists with more resources got more news coverage. Although not all variables were significant, the general trend was that resource-poor groups got more positive coverage. Having fewer members and no PR experience were significantly tied to more positive coverage, even controlling for other resources. (780)

Researchers grounded in paradigms such as cultural studies and hermeneutics have a different approach to voice and call to action. Typically, such researchers do not actually speak alone, but they extend a position of equality to participants and audience alike (Anderson 1996; Lindlof and Taylor 2010). In a sense, both researcher and participants share a voice, as the researcher is giving them a voice by using direct quotations and excerpts from larger oral histories. These quotations and excerpts give rise to a descriptive voice that helps the audience to better appreciate the position of the participants and see the world from their point of view; such writing can create empathy or sympathy (Charmaz and Mitchell 1996). All of this would prove problematic for positivists and post-positivists, as it would in all likelihood encroach upon the objectivity of their researcher. However, because of the epistemology associated with cultural studies, hermeneutics, postmodernism, and other methodological positions, there is a drive to understand the processes of meaning-making; for this reason, maintaining objectivity is not central to their endeavors. Indeed, many researchers endeavor to make the worldviews and the socially constructed reality of particular participants visible to audiences; they also often work to make the oppressive practices faced by the participants visible to any audiences of research proceedings so as to eliminate or limit such practices (Anderson 1996; Guba and Lincoln 2005).

Whether describing socially constructed realities to visualize a worldview and intersubjective meanings or illuminating oppressive practices facing participants, the shared voice used by the researcher can call for some type of action (Denzin 1997; Guba and Lincoln 2005). These calls for action often entail appealing to the audience to recognize particular oppressive practices that are present within society, as well as calling for the audience to work toward the elimination of such practices. In addition, many researchers use their writing to highlight practices that can be used by activist groups to better challenge oppressive practices in society. This is not to say that all such research

entails calls for action or engages in evocative writing to create empathy or sympathy for particular groups; such methodological positions use a position and voice in which those actions are available to the researcher. For instance, Adrienne Russell (2005) engaged in a qualitative content analysis of various listservs that supported the Zapatista movement of Chiapas, Mexico. In her research, Russell uncovered different kinds of myths perpetuated through those listservs and demonstrated their role in the establishment of a network identity. By illustrating this emergent identity, Russell explains its role in advocacy against oppressive power structures in society: “The Zapatista movement has been portrayed as many things, including naïve and misguided, but it also largely retains its image as an inclusive movement whose central members include noble warriors committed more to their cause than to violence and purposeful negotiators for working fair trade and labor rights. The network may not directly control members designing community performance art projects in California, for example, but it powerfully sanctions network causes and voices through communication threaded with the movement myths” (574–575).

Ultimately, the researchers’ methodological approaches position them in certain ways with their participants and the audiences of their work. In the McCluskey example, the researcher was detached from the groups that were studied, and the result is simply a discussion with the audience about the findings of the content analysis. In contrast, the Russell excerpt evokes a deeper description of the world viewed by both the Zapatistas, as well as their allies within a larger worldwide network. By understanding the ways in which their methodologies influence the relationship between these three parties, researchers know how to utilize—and in some cases share—his or her voice or call an audience to action.

SUMMARY

Research concerning social activism ought to be built on strong foundations. All researchers must fully understand their methodological framework in order to grasp deeply rooted ontological and epistemological views about the world and how to understand the world. These views provide researchers with many important preconceived notions about the nature of activists and activism, which helps them to better understand what questions to ask and how to approach their topics of investigation.

Ultimately, it is important to understand that research methodology is integral to the conceptualization of the activist in any research endeavor. As positivist and post-positivist researchers are concerned with material reality and cause-effect relationships, assuming the activative model when approaching questions about activists would make little sense. Conversely, postmodern

scholars assume that individuals (and activists) have more agency in their lives and are thus less constricted by ideological constructs and cultural values; assuming the conjunctive model would not fit into the postmodernist methodological framework. Understanding all of these different conceptualizations and positions—as well as one’s own view of reality as a researcher—is integral to building a research project, as the methodology and the assumptions about activists constitute preexisting knowledge that aid in the formulation of research questions. Without fully understanding the ontological and epistemological assumptions of their methodological frameworks, researchers quickly find themselves groping in the dark—or even worse, reinventing the wheel.

In addition, a methodological framework provides an axiological foundation for making ethical decisions as scholars prepare and engage in research. Every research project holds the possibility for ethical problems and dilemmas, and this is especially true in the case of research concerning activism. The potential moral problems involved in interactions with activists or the risks associated with protests and radical activist organizations can pose serious ethical dilemmas for researchers. By understanding the ethical communities and frameworks that are tied to the different methodological positions, researchers will be well prepared to cope with those problems as they arise. Ultimately, the methodological approach positions researchers in certain ways in relation to their participants and their audiences. By understanding the ways in which their methodology influences their position among those parties, researchers can effectively use their voices and call their audiences to action.

Qualitative Methods

This chapter explores:

- (1) How researchers may formulate their research questions.
- (2) Qualitative methods that can be used to elicit information and data from activists—including interviews and focus groups, and ethnography and field-work—and how these methods can be used in online environments.
- (3) Qualitative methods that can be used to explore texts associated with activists or activist organizations, including qualitative content analysis and rhetorical criticism.
- (4) Tips for managing data throughout the research process.

For the most part, qualitative research methods help to gain insight into the processes involved in co-constructions of meaning, lived experiences, cultural rituals, and oppressive practices. This chapter (like the book) is framed in a way so that scholars adhering to all methodologies (or any combination of methodological positions) can benefit from the review of these methods. Methods are not anchored to specific methodological positions, but are informed by those positions. As noted in chapter 2, methods are tools and consist of processes, whereas methodologies constitute guiding frameworks; methodology steers the use of methods. Qualitative methods such as interviews and focus groups, as

well as participant observation, have the potential to play integral roles for all academic endeavors in terms of the formulation of questions, building operational definitions, and designing research instruments.

Feminist methodology can help to better demonstrate the association between the methodology and method discussed here and in chapter 2. Feminist methodology is grounded in an ontological and epistemological vision focused primarily on patriarchal power structures and the lives of women (and minorities) who are marginalized and silenced by these power structures; the concept of standpoint theory helps to explain this grounding, as well as many of the overall goals of feminist research. This methodology is not a method that can be used to study lived experiences or perspectives of women and marginalized people, but rather a framework that helps researchers to better understand what it is that they are searching for and examining (e.g., Harding 1987; Sprague 2005). The key tenets of standpoint theory—shared location, engagement, and recognition of different circumstances in various cultural locations—covers aspects of communication and meaning that are important for the social construction of reality; these in turn become the focus of inquiry. In this way, feminist methodology helps researchers to understand that they should ask questions about “hidden” experiences of women in interviews (e.g., Dougherty 1999; Dougherty and Krone 2000; Hesse-Biber 2014a), focus on women’s lives and activities in ethnographies (e.g., Buch and Staller 2014), or identify categories related to gender or sexuality and how they relate to power and agency in textual analysis (e.g., Foss 2004; McIntosh and Cuklanz 2014; Ruddock 2001).

Moreover, these tenets and assumptions not only inform the researchers’ inquiries, but also guide the way in which they conduct research and engage with participants. As standpoint theory is interested in engagement and building community, methods carried out from feminist methodology also position researchers in ways to accomplish those goals. For instance, Dougherty notes that interviews should not merely be about eliciting information from participants. Rather, the grounding in feminist theory should lead researchers to use interviews to help women gain a voice and build an understanding about the power structures around them (see Dougherty 1999; Dougherty, Baiocchi-Wagner, and McGuire 2011), as well as confront oppressive patriarchal practices whenever they are encountered (see Dougherty and Atkinson 2006). Similarly, Jennie Munday (2014) claims that focus groups should be conducted in a way so that women and marginalized people can talk among themselves and develop an understanding about the circumstances of their cultural location; the method can effectively aid in the formation of community.

Ultimately, methodology influences method. For instance, in a study concerning the empowerment of incarcerated women, Jenna Stephenson-Abetz

(2012) analyzes the relationships between feminist activist mothers and their daughters; she conducted interviews with the daughters in order to demonstrate how feminist consciousness is passed on and evolves. Her interviews focus on the relationships and community building that went on over time between mothers and daughters. In another instance, Suzanne Enck and Blake McDaniel (2015) interviewed women who were in the Dallas County Jail. The two researchers were working with an organization called Resolana, which was established to educate and empower incarcerated women so that they may take control of their lives following their release. Eliciting information for the study was only part of the interviews that they conducted; helping the women to build knowledge and skills in communication and storytelling was also of profound importance to Enck and McDaniel. In this way, their method was integral to helping the incarcerated women to recognize the circumstances of specific cultural locations and provided them with the skills necessary to become part of larger shared feminist communities. The focus of inquiry and enactment of process in both of these examples were guided by the ontology and epistemology of feminist methodology.

This chapter addresses the processes associated with the different methods that are available to researchers and forms the basis for the following chapters on research sites.

FORMULATING RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The previous two chapters elaborated on the history of research concerning social activism and social movements, as well as the philosophical underpinnings of activism. Essentially, the information in those chapters enables researchers to better understand how their projects fit into the research that has come before and how to conceptualize and approach activists and their endeavors. This information can also aid in the formulation of guiding research questions, as well as the decision about research instruments such as interview schedules.

The formulation of research questions is integral as those questions help to guide the current project and perhaps even help to build the foundation for a larger research agenda. Good research questions should be clear and concise and use terms that are well established, defined, and understood (Kvale 2007; Brinkmann and Kvale 2014; Moustakas 1994). Well-formed research questions on social activism require researchers to: (1) identify the activists, (2) note what makes them activists, (3) relate their activism to a particular research site, and (4) distinguish the primary unit of analysis. First, it is important to identify the activists and note what it is about them that makes them activists. On the surface this seems to be straightforward, but as demonstrated in the previous chapter, this can be rather complex. Under the attribute model of the individual

a person is an activist based on traits, such as the actions that they take (e.g., marching in a protest). Within the context of the conjunctive model, however, affiliation with a particular activist group, such as Focus on the Family, can warrant the designation “activist”; such an individual might never take part in any action, but they are considered to be an activist due to their affiliation with the organization. What might appear to be activism within the framework of one methodological position may not be considered to be activism under another. Therefore, the researcher must identify the potential participants who would be the subject of his or her study, and then justify the classification of those people as activists. Next, the researcher must relate the activism of the potential participants to a particular research site. As noted previously, there are four primary research sites in which activism can be observed and explored: organizations, networks, protests and events, and alternative media (see chapters 4 to 7 for details). Note that research sites are intertwined with the construction of research questions. Identification of a research site provides a way of narrowing the research question into something more manageable, while also helping to situate the project within the history of similar research. Finally, the researcher should distinguish the primary unit of analysis for the project. Units of analysis are subjects that will be examined by the researcher in the process of the research; units of analysis can be media subjects, texts, narratives, or performances (December 1996; Schreier 2012). Essentially, this last step identifies what the researcher will be examining in the project.

Take, for instance, the following research question that I posed in one of my own research projects (Atkinson 2009a, 50): “What problems have arisen in the Erie City new social movement network to hinder the emergence of a multiplex?” In this particular project, I questioned why activists from different organizations within a particular local network had difficulty constructing a resistance “multiplex,” or coordinated performance of resistance. Why were the different nodes of the network not coming together to protest or engage in activities? Within the context of this research, the activists were those people affiliated with different activist groups in the city of Erie; activism was group affiliation or alliance with a group. More importantly, the research question zooms in on a particular research site (the network of organizations in Erie) and the unit of analysis (hindrances to coordinated resistance discussed in activist interviews). With the research question established, I could focus on the relationships between individuals, as well as between the various activist groups. That is not to say that interview questions focused solely on those issues. Rather, the research question led me to search through interview transcripts for examples of conflict or anything else that might hinder the groups from acting together.

Recap 3-1. Steps for Formulating Research Questions

- (1) Identify the activists.
- (2) Note what makes them activists.
- (3) Relate their activism to a research site (e.g., organizations, networks, events, or alternative media).
- (4) Distinguish the primary units of analysis.

The establishment of the research question is crucial as it not only provides some direction for a project, but also aids in the construction of the research instruments and protocols. The research question—and particularly the identification of the units of analysis necessary for the research—aids in the decision about which methods to employ. For instance, if researchers were interested in the role of stories in socializing new members of an activist organization, then discussions about such stories in interviews or recorded in field notes could serve as units of analysis. If they were interested in the depictions of power in alternative media, then magazines or web pages could be units. In the previous example, I was interested in personal relationships or grievances that hindered the ability of different organizations or nodes in a local network from coming together into coordinated protests. The unit of analysis, then, needed to be discussions or stories about personal relationships or problems between organizations. A review of alternative media or websites produced by the different nodes in the network would not effectively address the research question. What I needed was a method that would elicit discussions from activists affiliated from the different nodes; in this case, interviews were deemed to be sufficient to answer the guiding research question. However, understanding which method to use is only the beginning. How should interviews be administered? How should texts be analyzed? How should data be managed?

INTERVIEWS AND FOCUS GROUPS

Interviews and focus groups are the most prevalent qualitative methods used by scholars who operate from ontological positions focused on social construction and the negotiation of meaning, and these methods can also often supplement positivist and post-positivist quantitative endeavors. For the most part, interviews constitute one-on-one conversations between the researcher and a single participant, while focus groups are conversations between the researcher and multiple participants. Essentially, both methods involve the researcher asking participants a series of questions and allowing those participants to provide answers. The way in which those methods are carried out,

however, often depends on the goals of the research; does the researcher seek descriptions of phenomena from participants, or does he or she seek to understand the processes of constructing intersubjective meaning? The basic structure of the interview or focus group can ultimately help to elicit one or the other.

INTERVIEWS

There are two general processes for interviewing research participants: structured and unstructured interviews. Structured interviews are highly dependent on schedules of questions to be asked of participants during their conversations with the researcher (Fontana and Frey 1998; Lindlof and Taylor 2010; Rubin and Rubin 1995). This schedule is a point-by-point list of all of the questions that will be asked by the researcher. The schedule is typically followed strictly from one interview to the next, with the researcher asking the questions exactly as worded and ordered in the schedule. The unstructured interviews—also known as unstandardized (Kvale 2007; Brinkmann and Kvale 2014) or ethnographic (Lindlof and Taylor 2010) interviews—do not follow the strict schedule described here. Instead, researchers work with a subject guide that provides for them a list of all of the important topics that they should cover with participants (Gubrium and Holstein 2003; Holstein and Gubrium 1995; Rubin and Rubin 1995). The guide typically presents simple descriptions of the subjects, rather than the specific questions used in structured interviews. In this way, researchers are free to move through the subject guide as they see fit, checking off topics as they are addressed through conversation with the participants.

Both formats of qualitative research have their advantages and disadvantages. The structured format allows for very little deviation in the way in which questions are presented to the participants. This ensures that the data that is collected from the interviews is well organized and ready for analysis (Huberman and Miles 1998); such uniformity of questions and answers can greatly aid in the constant comparative process that is typically utilized in grounded theory and thematic analyses. In addition, such structure makes it easier to train assistants who can aid in the research process; the step-by-step schedule ensures that assistants and co-researchers can produce comparable data in their own interviews with participants. However, structured formats can create redundancy, as participants may very well provide an answer to a question that indirectly addresses a subject that is part of a later question in the schedule; the later question forces the participants to repeat themselves. Also, the formal approach in the structured format can be off-putting to activists who are wary of such conventions; the approach can be likened to government or corporate bureaucracy. In contrast, the unstructured format provides a degree of flexibil-

ity to how the researcher approaches a topic with the participants (Gubrium and Holstein 2003; Holstein and Gubrium 1995; Lindlof and Taylor 2010); the interview can be more conversational and less “bureaucratic.” This can provide a more relaxed environment, particularly for activists who might be leery of outsiders. In addition, the flexibility of the unstructured format allows the researcher to ask probing questions that may lead to new subject matter that was not addressed in the original guide, allowing the research to grow organically (Kvale 2007; Brinkmann and Kvale 2014). This organic growth can be problematic, however, as the researcher will often be compelled to go back to previous participants and ask them about these new subjects; this can become particularly troublesome when such backtracking occurs multiple times. In addition, the unstructured format can be quite “messy” for the purposes of data analysis. As the conversations flow through the subject guide with the conversations, it can be quite difficult to make comparisons across interviews (Huberman and Miles 1998).

These two processes arise from the use of a schedule of questions or a less rigid subject guide. The researcher’s more specific goals also impact how he or she carries out the interviews. Specific goals for research projects vary widely, but there are two fundamental goals that qualitative interviews can seek to fulfill: gain descriptive information or allow for the participants to tell stories. The first goal seeks direct answers to questions that address a subject or phenomenon, while the latter seeks to coax narratives out of the participants that will give the researcher insight into lived experiences and meanings. Kvale (1996) and Brinkmann and Kvale (2014) liken the researcher to a miner or traveler in order to fully explore the differences between these approaches. On the one hand, the researcher as a miner digs into the participant for nuggets of information. The traveler, conversely, engages in a journey with the participant; the interview questions allow for both researcher and participant to explore meanings and lived experiences. The survey interview format is best used to fulfill the goal of mining for descriptive information about the phenomena under investigation. Also known as the informant interview (Lindlof and Taylor 2010), this mode of interviewing assumes that the participant is a vessel that harbors valuable answers that are needed to address the guiding goals of the research (Gubrium and Holstein 2003; Holstein and Gubrium 1995; Schaeffer and Maynard 2003). Essentially, the researcher finds participants with knowledge about subject matter that is important to his or her research and then approaches them to gain insights about that subject. According to Thomas Lindlof and Bryan Taylor (2002, 177), good informants are those who have “experience in the cultural scene,” are engaged in the scene in “many different roles,” are “well respected by their peers,” or are “facile speakers of the local language forms and can debrief the researcher on contextualized uses and

meanings.” As the researcher is in search of specific information from the participants, structured interviews with the schedule of questions is often the best format. The questions are typically limited in scope and do not allow for the participant to elaborate much beyond that precise issue (e.g., how many people were at the protest?). This makes it easy for the researcher to compare and contrast the answers that are given from one interview to the next, so as to construct a complete and rich picture of the subject at hand.

Research conducted by Melissa Click and Ronit Ridberg (2010) serves as a good example of survey interviews used to elicit descriptive information. Click and Ridberg examined the ways in which activists collectively engaged in food preservation with others, which involved two primary methods: a quantitative online survey and survey interviews. At one point of the online survey, activists were asked whether they would be willing to engage in telephone interviews at a later date. Overall, Click and Ridberg conducted thirty structured survey interviews, which included the following:

The protocol’s 15 open-ended questions were designed to examine four general areas of interest: food values and habits (e.g. how they think about food and how that materializes in their daily lives), attitudes about and reflections on their food-preservation activities (e.g. how they feel during and after preserving food; how food preservation has changed how they think about food), participation in and evaluation of food movements (e.g., do they consider themselves to be part of a food movement; do they see their food preservation practices as food activism), and hopes for the future of food (e.g., what changes do they hope to see in our food system; what role might preserving play in the food system nationally). The final section of the protocol asked the respondents to verify the demographic information they reported on the on line survey. (306–307)

The fifteen questions in their survey interview required that the activists provide direct answers about particular topics or issues. The questions constrained the answers and discussion to very specific areas of interest for the researchers concerning food preservation. When asked about whether they saw their food preservation as activism, respondents did not have the opportunity to discuss their views on war, corporations, or gun control. Overall, the information from these interviews provided the researchers with ample description of the collective activities that the activists engaged in to preserve food.

Postmodern interviewing is a term that can be attributed to different interview formats that were developed to provide a framework to participants so that they may weave narratives and stories; such narratives communicate lived experiences, interpretations, and processes of meaning making (Fontana 2003; Gubrium and Holstein 2003; Holstein and Gubrium 1995). This form of

interview fits into Kvale's (1996) and Brinkmann and Kvale's (2009) metaphor of the researcher as traveler. The term—which was used by Andrea Fontana and James Frey (2000) and developed by Jaber Gubrium and James Holstein (2003)—is less of a format and more of a sensibility and orientation for qualitative research. This approach to interviewing is grounded in the ontological and epistemological views of interpretivism; that is to say, the method of postmodern interviewing focuses on the intersubjective co-construction of meaning, as well as the interpretation of meaning. Postmodern interviewing can focus on the meanings that are constructed through relationships, the processes of meaning-making, or the lived experiences that shape meaning and interpretation. Although they have some differences, the long interview (McCracken 1988), active interview (Gubrium and Holstein 2003; Holstein and Gubrium 1995), and respondent interview and narrative interview (Lindlof and Taylor 2002) all require that researchers format their questions in such a way so as to provide participants with agency. Essentially, participants should have the ability to relay stories to researchers that encapsulate their understanding about the subject at hand (Fontana 2003; Gubrium and Holstein 2003; Holstein and Gubrium 1995; Kvale 2007; Rubin and Rubin 1995). This is typically accomplished with short, open-ended questions that allow participants to elaborate with little constraint imposed from the researchers (e.g., tell me how you became involved in activism). In this way, the postmodern interview process is more conducive to the unstructured format described earlier, although a strict schedule could also be utilized. The objective of the interview is to provide an environment that encourages discussion about the experiences of the participants, as well as insight into their understanding about the complex meanings associated with the topics that are the focus of the research project. The questions provide a framework that allows for the illustration of reality, as the participant perceives it to be. This helps to activate different aspects of the participants' experiences so as to establish their knowledge about certain matters, while also allowing them to elaborate and converse with little prompting. The interviewer takes the information and experiences of a participant and uses them as the basis for relating to other participants. This format of interviewing orients to and gathers data about the knowledge that is being constructed as the participant weaves narratives in response to the researcher's queries, so that contrasting narrative contexts and linkages about substantive matters may become apparent from one interview to the next (Gubrium and Holstein 2003; Holstein and Gubrium 1995). Coherent, meaningful structures emerge through patterned narrative linkages between interviews: "Both parties to the interview are necessarily and unavoidably active. Meaning is not merely elicited by apt questioning, nor simply transported through respondent replies; it is actively and communicatively assembled in the interview encounter. Respondents are

not so much repositories of knowledge—treasuries of information awaiting excavation—as they are constructors of knowledge in collaboration with interviewers. Participation in an interview involves meaning-making work” (Holstein and Gubrium 2003, 68).

According to Kvale (1996) and Brinkmann and Kvale (2014), knowledge exists in a relationship between the subject and the world. For this reason, the postmodern interview is well suited for the examination of the processes and structures that are associated with activist endeavors. The social environment of activism exists in terms of the relationships that the members have with power structures in society and organizations or networks that resist the status quo. The postmodern interview can bring to light the intertwined relationships that exist through the conversational interview process. The nature of this interview process taps into the knowledge and perceptions about morality, justice, and power in society. The interview questions can be used to help visualize the flow of information to the participants, where that information comes from, and how that information is incorporated into their knowledge and perceptions.

Sara DeTurk’s (2011) research concerning activists who protest on behalf of people who are subjected to racism is a good example of postmodern interviewing with a subject guide. DeTurk interviewed fifteen participants, asking them broad questions from a subject guide that enabled the activists to elaborate on their personal experiences of racism, as well as their experiences challenging racism in society:

1. What does it mean for you to be an ally?
2. What do you do as an ally?
3. How did you become an ally?
4. How is your experience or identity as an ally supported and/or challenged? (DeTurk 2001, 588)

These questions are significantly different from those posed by Click and Ridberg. Each question required that the activists engage in storytelling rather than provide direct answers about specific topics. The questions provided a degree of freedom to the activists so that they could bring in a variety of different topics and elements so as to weave a narrative. They could discuss their families, their political beliefs, or aspects of mainstream media or culture. Such freedom gave the activists control over the content of the conversation and discussion. This also gave rise to more than just descriptions of activism, but insight into experiences and knowledge held by the activists. By tapping into their experiences and knowledge, DeTurk was able to demonstrate an “ally identity” that such activists constructed.

FOCUS GROUPS

Also known as group interviews (Fontana and Frey 1998; 2005; Kamberelis and Dimitriadis 2005; Kvale 1996), focus groups represent a conversation between researcher and multiple participants at one time. A focus group can be structured or unstructured, utilized for mining information or engaging in building a framework for exploring the participants' reality. Much of the material mentioned in the previous section can be applied to the construction of solid focus group research. The researcher can prepare a question schedule or a subject guide. The focus group can be formal, with the researcher asking one question at a time from each participant in the group. Such was the case in research conducted by Summer Harlow and Lei Guo (2014, 467–468), in which activists were asked the following concerning their use of digital media and technology: “1) How do you define activism? 2) What are the new technologies and tools you have used in your activist work? 3) Give an example of what worked well, what didn't work so well, and why? 4) How, if at all, would you say activism has changed because of digital tools?” The questions generated discussions between the different participants in the focus group, which was strictly moderated by Harlow and Guo as they made sure that each person was able to address the questions without interruption. Conversely, focus groups can be a large conversation that flows organically, wherein the researcher utilizes a subject guide to prompt participants and probe. The first is easier to control, while the latter can illuminate a plethora of topics and interrelationships that might not have been evident in one-on-one interviews. Many of the benefits of the approaches noted earlier apply to focus groups as well.

The focus group method of data collection can be employed for a variety of different purposes. One reason researchers often use focus groups rather than one-on-one interviews is time constraints; it can be difficult for researchers to meet individually with every single participant. Instead, they can go to a place where the participants regularly get together and conduct a group interview with the participants at that site. Focus groups can also be used for “brainstorming” purposes, which provide researchers with insight into an organization or community so that they may better structure their research questions and project (Fontana and Frey 2005; Kamberelis and Dimitriadis 2005). In addition, researchers can use focus groups in order to better comprehend group and organizational dynamics. By sitting down with several members of an organization, the researcher can often observe stark differences in the surface structures and deep structures play out as those members engage in conversation with the researcher and one another (see Giddens 1984; Heracleous and

Barrett 2001; Weick 1977). The surface structure consists of images and information that a group would want the public to see (e.g., an activist manifesto on a website), whereas the deep structure refers to those rituals and interactions that develop within the group over time (e.g., relying on specific individuals for information and leadership). For instance, P. Vigneswara Ilavarasan (2013) explored the role of ICTs in the activism of Indian youth groups. To this end, he conducted six focus group discussions in which activists were asked to talk about their views of civic engagement, their experiences with different political institutions, their use of ICTs, and how they viewed older generations' political engagement. Overall, the focus groups served a descriptive function, as the information from the discussions demonstrated that youth activists rarely used ICTs or mobile phones in their activism.

The focus group method also has potential drawbacks. The most notable problem with focus groups is the deep group structures noted earlier. Although the researcher can see those group dynamics play out, such dynamics may very well keep participants in the focus group from speaking up. In some instances, there are group members who have a tendency to control conversations and to push their own ideas; if this aspect of group dynamics enters into the focus group it can hinder the collection of data. Even if the participants in the focus group do not come from the same group or community, such commandeering roles may still develop within the focus group. The focus group is, after all, a temporary group subject to the same task, relational, and individual roles found in many small groups; individual roles are often adopted by members who seek to address their own needs and desires, often at the expense of the group (Wellen and Neale 2006). Whether problems come from deep structures of a group with whom the participants are affiliated or individual roles that develop in the focus group, the researcher should be prepared to interject throughout the focus group and give opportunities to more silent participants to speak up. This can be one of the more difficult aspects of qualitative work,

Recap 3-2. Interviews and Focus Groups in Social Activism Research

- Processes for collecting data:
 - Structured interview/focus group: Use of a rigid schedule of questions.
 - Ethnographic or unstructured interview/focus group: “Relaxed” conversations with participants based on a subject guide.
- Goals for data:
 - Descriptions of activism or phenomena: Accomplished through survey interviews that elicit specific information.
 - Co-construction of meaning: Accomplished through postmodern interviews that allow participants to weave narratives.

as the researcher must assume the role of mediator and actually step into conflicts with participants.

ETHNOGRAPHY AND FIELDWORK

Another important qualitative method available to researchers is ethnography. Unlike interviews and focus groups, ethnography cannot be divided into methodological positions. Ethnography, participant observation, and ethnographic narrative excavation are all utilized in scholarship that focuses on social construction, as these methods are integral for elucidating intersubjectivity and the co-construction of meaning within particular communities. Even though ethnography and other forms of fieldwork do not actually place researchers “into the shoes” of their participants and allow them to see the world through their eyes, these methods provide researchers with access to the world of their participants and allow them to gain firsthand experience within their participants’ communities. This is not to say that ethnographic methods are entirely closed off from positivist and post-positivist scholars in their research and fieldwork endeavors. Essentially, fieldwork like ethnography can function within the ontological and epistemological assumptions of positivism and post-positivism, or even provide additional insight following surveys or other such methods.

ETHNOGRAPHY AND PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION

Derived from the Latin term *ethno*, ethnography is primarily concerned with the experience of culture in the human world (Chambers 2000). According to George McCall (2006, 4), the ethnographic enterprise focuses on “documenting and illuminating some culturally embedded social system.” Ethnography itself is not a singular process or format but a combination of different methods at once within the context of a research site (Boellstorff, Nardi, Pearce, and Taylor 2012; Lindlof and Taylor 2010). Participant observation is a typical action that is employed by researchers within ethnographic research, but interviews, conversations, and textual analysis can all come to bear in the investigation of a community or culture that is the subject of research. Participant observation within the context of ethnography enables researchers to do more than simply observe the culture of particular groups and communities; they gain the opportunity to actually immerse themselves within the complex minutiae of an organization or a community (Boellstorff, Nardi, Pearce, and Taylor 2012; Chambers 2000; Denzin 1997; Lindlof and Taylor 2010). According to Anderson (1996, 178), “the researcher lives some part of the member life because the understandings that make it all sensible emerge in their enactments. It is a

localized, ongoing social construction of reality.” In this way, the researcher can actually see what it means to live and engage within such an organization or community. The researcher can understand the experiences that give rise to meaning-making and interpretation, and garner some insight into the construction of identity (Denzin 1997; McCall 2006).

As a method of inquiry, ethnography differs from interviews and focus groups as ethnographic researchers seek firsthand observation of lived experiences of the participants rather than learn about those experiences through narratives and stories. Essentially, researchers place themselves into the world of the participants in order to actually observe the participants’ and their culture in action.

Ethnography involves an ongoing attempt to place specific encounters, events, and understandings into a fuller, more meaningful context. It is not simply the production of new information or research data, but rather the way in which such information or data are transformed into a written or visual form. As a result, it combines research design, fieldwork, and various methods of inquiry to produce historically, politically, and personally situated accounts, descriptions, interpretations, and representations of human lives. (Tedlock 2000, 455)

Much of what researchers can observe through this method is often taken for granted by the participants and subsequently left out of narratives and stories that emerge from interviews and focus groups. To be sure, there is an interviewing process that goes on as researchers engage in their project; they speak with people in the community and with people who have knowledge about that community. However, the ethnographic process demands that researchers observe what is going on around them and what is happening to them when they step into the world and community of the participants. In addition to observing what goes on within the research site, researchers may also engage in participant observation; they may engage in actions and rituals that are common to the participants’ community. In order to gain insight and understanding about a culture, organization, or community, it is vital that researchers engage in the ethnography for a protracted period of time; researchers must “live intimately inside the life space of the cultural members” (Lindlof and Taylor 2002, 17). Essentially, ethnography demands that researchers be immersed not only in the community or culture (almost) every day but also to the point that they feel they have gained a full understanding of the participants’ environment. Although there are no criteria for how much time this would take, it is generally understood that in order to achieve such immersion

researchers must be in the field for at least one to two years (Boellstorff, Nardi, Pearce, and Taylor 2012; Chambers 2000; Denzin 1997; Lindlof and Taylor 2010). The enormous demands for time and effort often dissuade many researchers from engaging in such a method. Nevertheless, ethnography and participant observation are excellent means for examining activist organizations and communities.

According to Erve Chambers (2000), Barbara Tedlock (2000), and McCall (2006), the ethnographic enterprise is focused on laying bare and illustrating experiences and practices within a culture or community that aid in the co-construction of meaning. In this way, ethnography stands as a good method for the examination of social activism, as activists routinely engage in the construction of meanings that stand outside of those of dominant power structures in society. Whereas interviews or focus groups alone can provide the researcher with insight into the intertwined relationships within activist organizations and communities, ethnography allows researchers to observe and take part in the specific processes of meaning-making, as well as the emergent socially constructed reality. Researchers stand to discover many of the taken-for-granted nuances within organizations and communities that are often overlooked and ignored by activists in their responses to questions in stand-alone interviews. Ethnographic research allows for a more thorough investigation of organizations and communities that are constructed through meanings and interpretations that give rise to resistance or defiance.

For instance, Christina Dunbar-Hester's (2012) research concerning radio activism serves as a valuable example of ethnography and participant observation in activist research. For her project, Dunbar-Hester volunteered to work with a pirate radio collective in Philadelphia from 2004–2007. From 2004 to 2005, her work with the group was as a volunteer within the main offices of the collective. As a volunteer, Dunbar-Hester participated in operating the radio station and coordinating content. Her volunteer work allowed her to observe and take part in interactions that were taking place between the Philadelphia collective and other pirate radio groups, which also allowed her to gather information concerning those groups as well. From 2005 to 2006, she “pulled back” from the volunteer work to engage in fieldwork and make observations of special events such as protests. These activities, as well as her interactions with other members, provided insight into the organizational culture of the pirate radio collective. Ultimately, she found that the members of the collective constructed a “technical identity” that was based on the activists’ work with the radio and ICT technology that they utilized in their endeavors. This identity helped the group to feel distinct from other activists who worked with other forms of media in their endeavors.

Outstanding ethnography requires that researchers commit to spending months or even years with the participants in their communities (see Chambers 2000). Sometimes, however, the enormous time requirements of the ethnographic method cannot be met; not because of the commitments or abilities of the researcher, but because of the duration of the event or community that is the subject of study. In many cases, events take place for a limited amount of time, or temporary communities come together for the purpose of addressing a specific short-term goal and then disperse. In order to study such events or communities, researchers can use ethnographic narrative excavation. Robert Krizek (2003) developed this form of ethnography for the excavation and representation of narratives from participants of nonroutine public events. Nonroutine public events are those important social occasions, spectacles, and ceremonies that are notable because of their connection to major social institutions (Dayan and Katz 1992; Turner 1981). The funeral of former President Gerald Ford or Glenn Beck's Restoring Honor political rally in Washington, DC, constitute nonroutine public events. In both cases, the events take place in the public and are associated with major institutions in American society. Because of the magnitude of these social events, the media elites often define the experiences of those events for people (Zelizer 1993). The excavation of narratives from people or groups at a short-term event provides researchers with a way to "see the event more clearly as [participants] place [the event] within the context of their lives" (Krizek 2003, 143). For Krizek, the excavation of narratives from participants at these public events provides the opportunity to reconstruct and understand the event outside of the authorship of media elites. Essentially, the method functions in many ways like an ethnography, only within the context of a shorter timeframe. During the nonroutine public event, the researcher can engage in conversations with people in attendance, make observations, and even participate in activities associated with the event. By engaging in these actions, the researcher can collect data that can prove useful in theory development.

Ethnographic narrative excavation stands as a solid method for the examination of activist protests or events, as such actions are typically short in duration. Many actions or events that are recognized as "activism" occur within a short timespan or protest communities that Best (2005) describes as "temporary." As noted earlier, interviews and focus groups can provide valuable insight into such actions, but there can be taken-for-granted cultural or organizational practices that are overlooked. When researchers engage in ethnographic narrative excavation, they step into the event and conduct interviews and participant observation, as well as take field notes and engage in textual analysis. Such an approach to the study of activist actions and events can illuminate many of

the complex nuances and provide a richer understanding of the role of such actions in intersubjective meaning-making, interpretive processes, and the social construction of reality. For example, I used ethnographic narrative excavation in order to study an activist “Truth Excursion” to Zapatista autonomous communities in Chiapas, Mexico (Atkinson 2009b). The journey to Chiapas was orchestrated by an American activist network as an initiative to put northern activists into contact with southern activists in Central and South America. Because of the duration of the journey (less than two weeks), ethnography, as described here, was not a viable method to examine the event. Instead, I used ethnographic narrative excavation: I recorded the oral histories presented to the members of the Truth Excursion by Zapatista leaders and engaged in conversations with those members at the onset and end of the journey. By engaging in this qualitative method, I was able to demonstrate how the activists used conceptualizations of resistance in their white, middle-class communities (e.g., boycotting Wal-Mart or buying environmentally friendly clothing) to make sense of resistance in the poor Zapatista communities of Southern Mexico (e.g., blocking highways).

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH ONLINE

As many activist organizations, networks, and actions are increasingly Internet oriented, it is vital that researchers be prepared to conduct their research online. On the surface, conducting research online is fairly comparable to research in face-to-face settings. However, as the previous chapter demonstrated, activism online can be conceptualized differently from activism in person, and the anonymity of the Internet can create unique ethical problems for gaining consent and confidentiality. Similarly, the online setting can significantly impact the way in which a researcher actually carries out his or her chosen qualitative methods. In some respects, there are enormous benefits to conducting research within online environments. Most notably, the physical distance between the researcher and participants can reduce tensions and help the participants to feel at ease. According to Nicola Illingsworth (2001, ¶ 9.5), computer-mediated communication allows for disembodiment of both the researcher and participant, which “dilutes the effects of power relations within the setting.” Essentially, researchers are typically in a position of power, in which they control the questions and tempo of any interactions, as well as information conveyed by the participants and their anonymity. Research online helps to mitigate that power by creating for the participant a perceived distance from the research; such distance provides participants with a sense of control over the situation. Conducting research online can be valuable for research projects as such work often entails working with the participant to create frameworks for soliciting

narratives and tapping into knowledge, such as in the case of postmodern interviewing. This also has enormous value for studies that explore social activism as participants are often acutely aware of the power dynamics and are often resistant to such power.

Despite these benefits, there are notable limitations. The most obvious limitations are associated with the medium of communication between the researcher and participants. Social media, e-mail, chat rooms, video chat apps (such as Skype), and instant messaging apps are all media that have been utilized in order to connect the researcher with participants in interviews and focus groups. Each of these media falls under one of two communication categories, synchronous (chat rooms and video chat and instant messaging apps) and asynchronous (social media, e-mail, and listservs). Synchronous interviews and focus groups through interactive media, such as Skype, involve all of the parties taking part in the dialogue at the same time; asynchronous communication is sporadic, with one party making a statement (i.e., sending an e-mail) and awaiting a response from another party. In qualitative research through synchronous communication, it is important to remember that participants' feedback tokens (frowning of the brow, eye contact, hand gestures) might not be accessible; a researcher might not see hand gestures in an interview conducted via Skype. By missing important feedback, the researcher may not recognize when a participant does not understand a question, or is troubled by a particular question. Asynchronous interviews and focus groups can be even more daunting, as the sporadic communication between researcher and participants can take much more time than face-to-face or synchronous communication online; in some cases, an interview or focus group can take months (Rezabek 2000). The enormous time requirements and the gaps in communication between researcher and participants can lead to participant attrition. The loss of participants can be problematic for interviews, forcing the researcher to frequently recruit new participants in order to substitute those who dropped out or did not complete interviews. The loss of participants from the asynchronous mode of communication can be especially devastating for focus groups; as members of online focus groups disappear the nature of the group, as well as the information that could potentially be gleaned from the method, can change.

In addition, qualitative research—typically ethnographic research—has been used for twenty years to explore and understand so-called online communities. Even though these communities are referred to as online or virtual, researchers must establish the proper boundaries that define the communities under investigation. As Christine Hine, Lori Kendall, and Danah Boyd (2009) point out, so-called online communities exist both on- and offline. Despite the fact that the “action” of the community and the communication between community members may take place through online forums or environments, those com-

munity members lead offline lives as well; the members sit at their computers, they go to work, they interact with people around them. Where does the community begin and end? They note that these boundaries may be temporal or spatial and describe the presence of relational boundaries between members. Ultimately, the researcher must decide which boundaries are pertinent to the research. Spatial boundaries refer to the interactions between community members' offline, as well as the role of the community in members' interactions with the world outside of the virtual community. Whenever spatial boundaries are integral to a project, researchers should be committed to collecting data concerning participants' interactions and actions offline in addition to their exploration of the online environment (Orgrad 2009). Temporal boundaries denote the time available to the researcher to conduct the study, as well as the amount of time that a community will exist (some online communities come together around specific issues or events such as an election). Relational boundaries involve the "relationships between researchers and the people they study" (Hine, Kendall, and Boyd 2009, 22); the researcher's ability to build and cultivate relationships with members of a community constitutes this particular boundary. Once these boundaries have been identified, researchers should become familiar with the software utilized to facilitate the online community. They should also seek to understand any cultural rules that exist within the community that dictate how the software is used to interact with others, such as good avatar development or communication etiquette (Boellstorff, Nardi, Pearce, and Taylor 2012).

J. Patrick Biddix and Han Woo Park (2008) provide a good example of qualitative research conducted online in their examination of a student protest that advocated for a living wage for the janitorial staff at Harvard University. The researchers engaged in electronic interviews with ten activists who were affiliated with a variety of different student groups. Biddix and Park identified groups that were particularly prominent in sending out e-materials and linking their websites to other organizations. Representatives of seven of the prominent organizations were interviewed using an instant messaging app or e-mail; three other participants were recruited through snow-ball sampling of the original seven activists. Their research, which also included a content analysis

Reap 3-3. Important Points about Qualitative Research Online

- Understand communication and feedback limitations associated with key media involved in online environments.
- Understand the temporal, spatial, and relational boundaries of the online community.

of hyperlinked websites, demonstrates crucial challenges that were faced by activists in the online protest community.

TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

Textual analysis involves gathering information about texts in order to gain insight about their role in society or communities (McKee 2003). Researchers can explore and examine texts in a variety of ways: qualitative content analysis and rhetorical criticism are two methods that I will cover here. Given that both of these methods focus on the construction of meaning and are guided in large part by the ontological view that texts play a vital role in the social construction of reality, these are methods that are strictly utilized by scholars who are grounded in methodological positions that focus on social construction. Qualitative content analysis is a method used by researchers in order to uncover meanings embedded within a text; the focus of such research is often latent, or underlying, meanings (Altheide and Schneider 2013; Krippendorff 2012; Mayring 2000; Schreier 2012). Conversely, rhetorical criticism is more of an interpretation of a text and explanation about how it should be understood (Foss 2004; Herrick 2012; Stone 1988). Put another way, qualitative content analysis explains what is in a text, whereas rhetorical criticism explains how it should be read and comprehended within a larger social context.

QUALITATIVE CONTENT ANALYSIS

Qualitative content analysis is an alternative to the more common quantitative content analysis; the latter of which focuses on frequencies of themes or terms that are found in a sample of texts. The goal of quantitative content analysis is to uncover manifest meanings within a text. Manifest meanings are those concrete terms that are defined and established at the onset of research, or themes that are composed of such concrete terms (Roberts 1997; Stone 1997). Essentially, the researcher looks for certain terms or themes within a text, counts the number of instances in which those terms or themes emerge, and utilizes statistical analysis (usually chi-square) to discover if the recurring use of terms or themes is significant (Riffe, Lacy, and Fico 1998); such significance helps the researcher to identify any rules or patterns in the usage of terms or themes (Krippendorff 2012). In contrast, the rationale behind qualitative content analysis is to uncover any underlying meanings found in a text that cannot be found through the counting of themes or terms (Krippendorff 2012). Merely counting a theme or term, as in quantitative content analysis, is not enough to understand any latent patterns developed within texts. Essentially, researchers

utilize qualitative content analysis in order to uncover any underlying meanings that are conveyed through the text.

Qualitative content analysis is typically accomplished through one of two processes: a close reading of relevant materials by the researcher and the use of coders. In the first case, the researcher essentially reads each text and notes important elements that fit preexisting categories or elements that might give rise to emergent categories (Altheide and Schneider 2013; Krippendorff 2012). The act of engaging in the reading alone can make for relatively quick and efficient qualitative content analysis. However, this process of qualitative content analysis has two serious flaws: researchers may miss important details, or their agenda or research questions may skew their observations. To remedy these flaws, researchers may enlist the aid of additional “coders” in their analysis of texts. The use of coders can be advantageous, as the researcher can demonstrate that multiple readers arrived at similar conclusions. In order to effectively use coders, however, the researcher must be able to establish intercoder reliability, which demonstrates that the researcher and coders in fact came to the same conclusions (Neuendorf 2002). To establish intercoder reliability, the researcher first needs to thoroughly train the coders about the reading process: What categories will they be searching for in the content as they engage in the reading? What elements should they be searching for within the texts? Such training is essential, otherwise the researcher and coders may very well look for vastly different things within the text; the results would be skewed. Once the coders have been trained, they may conduct their reading. The results of the reading and coding are brought together for comparison, at which point intercoder reliability is determined. A typical method for the establishment of intercoder reliability is the use of Holsti’s formula, in which the researcher divides the number of agreed-upon codes by the number of total coding decisions; if the rate of agreement is higher than 80 percent, then acceptable intercoder reliability has been achieved (Holsti 1969; Poindexter and McCombs 2000).

Phillip Mayring (2000) explains that qualitative content analysis is an important tool available to researchers so that they might untangle the concrete and underlying meanings that govern rules, patterns, and relationships within texts. He claims that there are two modes for the application of qualitative content analysis: deductive category application and inductive category development. The deductive category analysis is similar to Margrit Schreier’s (2012) mode of qualitative content analysis, which has roots in discourse analysis. In this deductive form of qualitative content analysis, the researcher uses categorical frames that have been prepared prior to the analysis in order to examine a text; the goal is to search for elements of a text that can fit within

the preexisting categories or frames. These categories are not concrete terms, as described earlier in reference to quantitative content analysis. Instead, the researcher develops categories that can emerge in a variety of different ways. For instance, a researcher could search for “activism” within a particular text. Activism is not clearly defined by any one term or set of terms and can be understood in different forms (e.g., street protest, culture jamming, hacking, wearing T-shirts with political messages); as demonstrated in chapter 2, there are different ways of conceptualizing activism. The researchers could utilize a definition of activism as a frame to use to seek out examples of activism within a text; a frame constructed from the methodological position of dialectics or phenomenology would provide some parameters, but would also be quite broad. The researcher, or trained coders, can read throughout various texts, looking for forms of activism that fit within the particular frame established at the onset of the project. As the text is examined, readers can identify and note instances of activism within the text. The readers do not merely count the number of times that the category emerges within the text, but examine how the category is utilized. In the “activism” example, one or more readers could note forms of activism evoked within the text, as well as the tone and language use around those forms. The readers could also note the uses of characters or settings used in the descriptions of activism. Ultimately, the frame provides multiple examples of activism that exist within the text; the reading and use of the frame allow for latent meanings to emerge. The researcher can examine those examples to find meanings associated with activism through forms, descriptions, tone, and other uses of language within the text.

My work with Rosati (Atkinson and Rosati 2012) provides an example of the deductive approach to qualitative content analysis. In our research concerning the online community that reimagined the cityscape of Detroit (see chapter 2), we combed through numerous posts on the group’s discussion forum. To facilitate our reading of the texts, we utilized topographical categories developed by William Sadler and Ekaterina Haskins (2005): landmarks, districts, nodes, pathways, and edges. Essentially, as we read through the discussion threads, we looked for discussions about the city and whether comments or materials applied to any of the five topographical categories. Any topographical categories that were identified in the discussion forum threads were recorded and examined: “In our qualitative content analysis, we constructed an Excel spreadsheet in which we listed the topographical categories that we discovered. We noted how the different topographical categories were depicted in photographs and narratives provided by [the web administrator] in the virtual tour, as well as through stories, anecdotes, and attachments (e.g., YouTube videos, MapQuest references) provided by users in 162 of the threads posted on the

[forums]” (Atkinson and Rosati 2012, 7–8). By identifying the topographical categories discussed by members of the online community and examining their depictions, we were able to reveal embedded meanings about the cityscape that were being co-constructed. The cityscape that emerged from the forum looked considerably different from the bleak place depicted in mainstream news and entertainment media.

Linda Kenix (2009) provides good examples of the different forms of qualitative content analysis; her research concerning political blogs utilized multiple forms of content analysis. Kenix argues that political blogs should be considered to be alternative media, which, in turn, necessitates some reconceptualization of that concept. Part of her research utilizes quantitative content analysis and statistical analysis. Other aspects of her research entail deductive qualitative analysis as well as the inductive mode. Kenix starts by identifying different popular political blogs through the use of a memetracker called Tailrank (see chapter 7). Once the popular blogs had been identified, Kenix engaged in a deductive category application in order to classify their connections to other websites. In the appendix of her article, she identifies the criteria for each of the categories that she applied:

Coding Categories for Hyperlinks

Itself: Hyperlink to another location within the same blog site.

Apparent like-minded blog: Hyperlink to another blog that appears to be of the same ideological position as the blog sampled. Given that all of the blogs sampled for this study self-identified as liberal, “like-minded” blogs were also liberal.

Apparent opposite-minded blog: Hyperlink to another blog that appears to be of the opposite ideological position as the blog sampled. Given that all of the blogs sampled for this study self-identified as liberal, “opposite-minded” blogs were conservative.

Blog with unknown political position: Hyperlink to another blog that does not appear to be conservative or liberal.

Mainstream news source: Hyperlink to a professional news website that is generally in pursuit of commercial, for profit, objectives as the motivation for publication; privileges institutions over movements and relies on sources according to perceived credibility.

Mainstream news blog: Hyperlink to a professional news blog that is generally in pursuit of commercial, for profit, objectives as the motivation for publication; privileges institutions over movements and relies on sources according to perceived credibility.

Alternative news source: Hyperlink to a news website that is generally not in pursuit of commercial, for profit, objectives as the motivation for publication; privileges movements over institutions and relies on sources throughout the broader community.

Alternative news blog: Hyperlink to a news blog that is generally not in pursuit of commercial, for profit, objectives as the motivation for publication; privileges movements over institutions and relies on sources throughout the broader community.

Mainstream pop culture source: Hyperlink to a popular, nonnews source that contributes to common culture.

Nonprofit organization: Hyperlink to a nonnews organization that does not aim to make any financial profit and serves the broader community.

Petition: Hyperlink to an online petition.

Personal website: Hyperlink to a nonnews and nonprofessional website constructed by an individual.

Government: Hyperlink to a government website.

Other: Hyperlink to a website that does not warrant inclusion into any of the aforementioned categories. (Kenix 2009, 821–822)

Kenix searched through the different websites that were hyperlinked to the popular political blogs identified through Tailrank. In each instance, she verified whether the content of the blog fit within any of the categories that she noted in her appendix. The results from this deductive analysis were subsequently the basis for her quantitative and statistical content analysis.

In contrast, Mayring (2000) claims that inductive category development is used for the purpose of forming categories that adhere to criteria that emerge from the theoretical background of the research project, or from the research questions that are guiding a study. The mode of inductive category development is closely aligned with David Altheide and Christopher Schneider's (2013) ethnographic content analysis. Inductive category development involves the examination of texts in an effort to discern narrative components such as situation, setting, characters, style, or themes that are related to theories or research questions (Altheide and Schneider 2013; Krippendorff 2012; Mayring 2000). As significant components are identified, the researcher develops categories, often through the process of constant comparison; that is, the researcher compares significant components to see if they are similar. If the components display similarities they are placed into the same category; if not, they are separated. As categories emerge and are refined, some components can be moved from one category to another. The development of categories can reveal underlying mean-

ings throughout a text or a series of texts. This process of analysis, more than deductive category application, is significantly different from quantitative content analysis because there is little or no reliance on frequencies of themes or terms found throughout selected texts. In order to carry out this process, Mayring prescribes that each researcher should decide on a criterion for the establishment and development of categories before they engage in their analysis. Any criteria should be based on one of the following: the initial research questions, theories from past research, or the nature of the study. The established criterion, no matter its basis, guides the examination of the texts and the development of categories. The categories take shape and are fleshed out through rereading and reexamining the emergent categories. Ultimately, Mayring notes that the process for this inductive approach is up to the discretion of the researcher, as they will take the steps that work best within the framework of their study and the texts under examination.

As noted earlier, Kenix's (2009) research concerning political blogs entailed both deductive and inductive analysis. In addition to the application of categories to hyperlinks found on the political blogs, she also utilizes an inductive form of analysis to examine the narratives used within those blogs; this was done so that she could determine if they were "alternative." Kenix describes this component of her research as "an organic exploration of narrative" (797). Essentially, she read through numerous blog posts utilizing the guiding research question as a framework for developing categories; Kenix notes that this reading entailed "a loose, preconceived idea of the discursive elements that may exist in the content" (797) that would highlight important narratives. Ultimately, Kenix's content analysis supported her argument that political blogs should be considered to be a form of alternative media.

Recap 3-4. Qualitative Content Analysis in Social Activism Research

- Processes:
 - Close reading by the researcher alone.
 - Close reading with the help of coders; establishment of intercoder reliability with Holsti's formula.
- Modes of application:
 - Deductive category application.
 - Inductive category development.

RHETORICAL CRITICISM

The rhetorical tradition developed out of the ancient debates between Plato and sophists such as Gorgias, as well as Aristotle's *The Rhetoric*. The former

focused on the nature of rhetoric as Plato argued that only certain elites or philosophers should use rhetoric to lead people to universal Truths, whereas the sophists argued that truth was subjective and dependent on interpretation (Herrick 2012; Stone 1988). Later, Aristotle established a grammar for discussing rhetoric, classifying proofs (logical, emotional) and rhetorical settings (forensic, deliberative, epideictic) (Herrick 2012; McCroskey 2005). The works of rhetorical practitioners such as Cicero, Quintilian, Augustine of Hippo, George Campbell, Hugh Blair, Richard Whately, and others followed meditations of the ancient Greek philosophers. All of these early works set the stage for neo-Aristotelian criticism, a form of rhetorical criticism that was initially used in the examination of delivery and content of speeches. Essentially, under neo-Aristotelian criticism, the researcher examines the proofs, or evidence, that are brought to bear within a speech, as well as the organization of those proofs and the style of delivery (Brock, Scott, and Chesebro 1990; Foss 2004). The researcher engages in a close reading of the texts under examination, searching for proofs and style as units of analysis; those units of analysis are used to make an argument for how others should understand the role of the text within larger social arguments or the social construction of reality. Although this method has been primarily used to examine speeches, some rhetorical scholars have broadened neo-Aristotelian criticism to explore proofs and style in other texts. For instance, Kendall Phillips (2005) has used this form of criticism to examine horror films and their role in American culture. Searching for proofs embedded in movies such as *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, he argues that filmmakers such as Tobe Hooper reflect the fears of American society at the time they produced their films. Certain scenes, actions, and stylistic approaches to filmmaking constitute proofs to the audience that some social problems are threatening American society and culture.

Beginning in the middle of the twentieth century, the scope of rhetorical criticism expanded dramatically because of the work of scholars such as Kenneth Burke, Walter Fisher, Michael McGee, and Maurice Charland. These extensions of rhetoric are in no way mutually exclusive from the neo-Aristotelian form of criticism noted earlier. Many rhetorical scholars who employ neo-Aristotelian criticism also use concepts of dramatism, narrative paradigm, ideograph, and constitutive rhetoric that are associated with the expansion of rhetoric in the twentieth century. Burke (1945) revolutionized the rhetorical tradition with his concept of dramatization, which incorporated a Shakespearean approach to rhetoric by treating rhetorical acts like performances that can be witnessed in plays. Essentially, Burke noted that rhetors—like actors in a play—attempt to build identification with others through their rhetoric, as well as create a strategy for those people to deal with situations around them; the rhetor ultimately wants others to adopt their position. The language that is

used builds identification and creates strategic “equipment for living,” which provides insight about the rhetor. Sonja Foss (2004, 71) elaborates on this equipment for living: “The terms we select to describe the world constitute a kind of screen that directs attention to particular aspects of reality rather than others. Our particular vocabularies constitute a reflection, selection, and deflection of reality. . . . From the infinite terms available to rhetors, they put together components of rhetoric in a way that reflects who they are, the subjects about which they are engrossed, and the meanings they have for those subjects.” For Burke, language—whether used in a speech, a film, or a song—builds a vision that focuses on some characteristics of the world, while filtering out others.

Fisher (1984; 1985) similarly extended the rhetorical tradition through his narrative paradigm. According to Fisher, people build their communities through narratives; stories create meaning about different aspects of the world. The different narrative components (e.g., characters, actions, settings, temporal arrangement) serve as a lens through which people view and experience the world; narratives shape the interpretive process. For example, the stories told by fans of a particular football team about the team and its history shape the way in which they see and experience the sport as it unfolds on the field: It is unclear what really happened in the infamous “immaculate reception” that ended the 1972 playoff game between the Oakland Raiders and the Pittsburgh Steelers, as the limited photographs and film footage of the event cannot accurately identify who touched the ball thrown by Steelers quarterback Terry Bradshaw first (Raider linebacker Jack Tatum or Steeler receiver Lynn Swann). The implications for who touched the ball were enormous, for if the Raider player touched the ball first the immaculate reception was a legal play and the Steelers won the game, whereas if the Steeler player touched the ball first the reception was illegal and the Raiders won the game. As nobody can truly ever know who touched the ball first, the narratives about their teams in the two fan communities shaped the way in which they interpreted and experienced the event. In another example, many media outlets described the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, as a modern-day “Pearl Harbor”; the narrative of the Japanese surprise attack on the US naval base in Hawaii shaped the way in which people experienced, and later remembered, the horror of the terrorist attack.

McGee (1975; 1980a) further developed the rhetorical tradition by exploring the concept of the ideograph. According to McGee, certain groups utilize ideologies in society in order to hold sway over people; this is accomplished through the manipulation of ideographs. The ideograph is a term that refers to abstract political concepts, such as *liberty* or *equality*. As such terms do not exist as concrete manifestations, like the terms *carrot* or *train*, they can mean different things to different people. However, the use of ideographs can create a

sense of shared meaning and understanding of the world; using abstract terms such as *liberty* as if everyone understands it the same way creates the sense that everyone is in agreement about certain principles necessary for society. The construction of such a perception of shared meaning is a powerful tool for persuading people to accept particular political positions that they might otherwise reject.

These concepts of identification—equipment for living, narrative, and ideograph—gave rise to the concept of constitutive rhetoric, which was first articulated by James White (1985) and later developed by Charland (1987). According to Charland, rhetoric calls a particular audience into being by helping to establish identity; rhetoric “hails” the audience and brings them into discourse with others or calls on them to take a particular action. Whether the audience engages in the political discourse or action is dependent on whether they accept the identity that is established for them through the rhetorical artifact.

Rhetorical criticism has served as a valuable tool for the examination and exploration of social activism. For instance, Jennifer Peeples (2011) notes how the terms *downwind* and *downwinder* became ideographs through the campaigns of environmental activists. She examined newspaper reports and other discourse concerning the establishment of a waste incineration plant in Spokane, Washington, in the 1980s. Specifically, Peeples searched for the use of this nautical term as a metaphor for the spread of toxins from industrial sites into the environment. She found that the activists who fought against the incineration plant often utilized the concept of “downwind” in order to portray the proposed plant as dangerous to the city of Spokane. Although the activists lost the debate, they were successful in articulating a term that combined toxins, victims, and physical site. In turn, other environmental and antitoxin activist groups appropriated the term *downwind* in their own campaigns, establishing the term as an ideograph. This abstraction was used to create a sense of shared meaning about impending danger, but also helped to hail audiences into environmental debates that they would have otherwise ignored. Similarly, West (2007) used rhetorical criticism to explore facets of feminist and LGBT activism. In his study, West explores cookbooks that were produced by a Los Angeles area “maternal pacifist” group called WISP (Women Strike for Peace) during the Vietnam War. In his close reading of the cookbooks he searched for recipes and stories that were grounded in ideological assumptions associated with feminism and feminist critiques of patriarchy; specifically, West focuses on elements in the cookbooks that address the gendered logic of warfare. This search reveals the ways in which feminist activism and pacifism could effectively extend into the home and shape political identity through the activities of everyday life.

As stated at the beginning of the chapter, the different methods presented here constitute tools and processes that are available to the researcher. My own experiences have taught me that different qualitative methods can be conceptualized like a worker's toolbox. Whenever I focus on alternative media text, I typically reach for qualitative content analysis. Whenever I focus on activist networks, I use interviews. Whenever one tool does not work, I simply reach into my repertoire and retrieve one that helps me to accomplish my goals. For instance, I conducted research that was designed to compare and contrast Tea Party activism with the anti-Iraq War activism that I had studied in the past. The Tea Party activists whom I tried to recruit viewed me as a socialist agitator who would likely report his findings directly to Democratic Party leadership, or twist their words into silly quotes that would make their endeavors look negative in the middle of an election year. When I did get a chance to conduct interviews or focus groups, I found that those activists tended to give me partial information with no elaboration and would refuse to answer any follow-up questions. In addition, I discovered that four activists with whom I conducted a focus group deliberately provided false or misleading information. When I figured this out and asked them about it, they simply told me that they were "doing what they do." Ultimately, I had to give up on the interviews and focus groups. Given the partial and dubious information, there was little I would be able to glean from any analysis. With that, I then switched to qualitative content analysis of alternative media used by Tea Party activists in the region. In each case, whether using one research tool or switching between multiple tools, my methodological foundations aided in determining how those tools were utilized.

Recap 3-5. Traditions of Rhetorical Criticism

Tradition	Description
Neo-Aristotelian criticism	Examines proofs used in argumentation.
Dramatism	Uncovers uses of language that provide insight into rhetors' motivations.
Narrative paradigm	Relates the narratives that shape worldviews and perceptions.
Ideograph	Explores abstract ideological concepts used in media or other texts.
Constitutive rhetoric	Uses one of the traditions here to demonstrate how messages shape identity and hail audiences into discourse.

According to Lindlof and Taylor (2002, 209), data are “textual, aural, and/or visual records of the object and process of research activity.” Essentially, the records of a researcher’s interactions with the participants of a study constitute the data. The researcher then uses this information for one or both of the following purposes: description or building and expanding theory. The process of using data to reach one of these two goals can be difficult, however, as the researcher can have hundreds of pages of transcriptions, along with a plethora of field notes and texts. All of this information can be overwhelming before the process of analysis has even started. According to A. Michael Huberman and Matthew Miles (1998), researchers should work through their vast collection of data in three steps: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The first step is directly related to the management of data, while the other two are associated with analysis.

Good data management starts with data reduction. According to Huberman and Miles, this step does not begin after the data have been collected, but rather at the inception of the research project: “The entire universe of data is reduced in an anticipatory way as the researcher chooses a conceptual framework, research questions, cases, and instruments. Once actual field notes, interviews, tapes, or other data are available, data summaries, coding, finding themes, clustering, and writing stories are all instances of further data selection and condensation” (Huberman and Miles 1998, 180). Essentially, the research questions and guiding theories developed at the onset of a project should help the researcher to begin the process of reducing data. Concepts and ideas outside of the research questions and theoretical framework will almost certainly arise in interviews and ethnographic endeavors. Nevertheless, such concepts should be recorded and filed away for future research projects; staying focused on pertinent matters is of utmost importance when reducing data. After researchers begin to collect data, they should also engage in various activities to organize the information for storage and future retrieval. Specifically, Huberman and Miles recommend that researchers write data summaries after interviews, type hand-written field notes, and cluster interviews or observations into groupings based on similarity. Ultimately, researchers can document themes or categories as they see them emerge during data collection, and they can write stories about the qualitative research experience to help keep track of important details.

In addition to the ideas for data reduction, Lindlof and Taylor (2010) also provide valuable suggestions for the management of data. They suggest that the researcher utilize asides, commentary, and in-process memos. Asides are brief analytical writing—often a few words or sentences in a notebook or in the margins of field notes—written down to connect concepts that emerge through

interviews or fieldwork. These notes are the first step in conducting analysis and should be edited and typed as soon as possible so as to preserve any important ideas. Like asides, commentaries are notes written down during or shortly after observations are made or interviews are concluded. Commentaries are more complex, however, as they constitute a longer reflection on connections between interviews or observations in the field, as well as connections between those data and theories or concepts. As with asides, researchers should quickly edit and type the commentaries for later use. Finally, the in-process memo is not simply a set of notes written down during or shortly after interviews or observations, but rather lengthy discussions written by researchers after they have had time to review asides, commentaries, transcripts, and other research materials. The in-process memo typically focuses on emergent concepts, themes, or categories and explores them in-depth. All of these forms of data reduction help to consolidate the information that is gleaned from numerous interviews or focus groups and days, weeks, or months of observations in the field. This also proves to be an enormous aid to the process of data analysis, as some of the work of building categories or developing themes will actually begin with data reduction. If researchers neglect to engage in this kind of data management, they can become overwhelmed and disoriented, which will make for a weak start to the process of data analysis later.

Data analysis may begin with the process of reduction, but is manifest most strongly in Huberman and Miles's (1998) data display, as well as conclusion drawing. Data display becomes possible when the researcher sees "a reduced set of data as a basis for thinking about meanings" (180). Essentially, researchers compile important concepts or examples gleaned from qualitative methods so that they may easily review those materials and search for potential connections. Drawing conclusions is the point at which researchers make interpretations based on the data that have been reduced and displayed. At this point, researchers engage in some mode of analysis in order to provide descriptions of meaning or phenomenon, build new theories, or expand existing theories. Researchers have many methods for drawing conclusions from the data at their disposal; thematic analysis, grounded theory analysis, and fantasy theme analysis are but a few methods to consider for drawing conclusions from data. The mode of analysis often depends on the goals of the research project. Descriptive projects typically use thematic analysis or similar modes of analysis such as fantasy theme analysis, while those projects that seek to build or expand theories typically employ grounded theory analysis.

The goal of thematic analysis is to identify broad patterns of meaning that exist within the data (Guest 2012; Saldana 2009). Researchers examine materials that they have gathered (e.g., transcripts, media texts, or field notes) in an effort to find categorical meanings that arise across most, if not all, of the

materials; these categories represent overarching themes across the data. Once researchers have identified the themes, they search for broad patterns: Do the themes repeat in particular ways? Do certain individuals bring up those themes? Do different people discuss those themes in different ways? This enables researchers to provide a rich description of meaning and meaning patterns within data. Similarly, fantasy theme analysis seeks out meaning usage within data, but also explores the functions of those meanings within larger worldviews. The notion of a fantasy theme is built on the concept of symbolic convergence (Bales 1970; Bormann 1972; 1982; Bormann, Cragan, and Shields 1994), which can demonstrate intersubjective meaning within and between groups. Essentially, people in groups weave fantasies about outside settings, characters, or actions to make sense of situations in the here and now. Convergence occurs as the group members begin to focus on similar, outside fantasies to explain the issues facing the group; this leads to a shared rhetorical vision of the situation. The term fantasy is a reference to stories, anecdotes, or hypothetical situations woven by a person. In fantasy theme analysis, researchers look for the characteristics of stories that are passed around a community or culture; characters, settings, and actions can all be characteristics of those stories (Foss 2004). Researchers then try to identify which characters, settings, or actions are used—or “chained”—again and again by other people or groups. For example, a researcher may be interested in the ways in which activists discuss corporations, and the data may reveal certain characters or settings present in the stories told by a multitude of activists. Those characters or settings constitute fantasy themes that have chained from one activist, or group of activists, to another. Once a series of fantasy themes are manifest across a community or culture, they are deemed to be the basis for a rhetorical vision, or shared worldview. Essentially, researchers use fantasy theme analysis to search through the data to find common fantasy themes and the convergence of a shared worldview.

Whereas the previous examples of modes of data analysis and drawing conclusions focuses on describing meaning patterns and structures, other modes of analysis build or expand theory. Grounded theory analysis is one mode of analysis that accomplishes this goal. According to Juliet Corbin and Anselm Strauss (2007) grounded theory is a method of theory development using the data as a basis; the data collection, data analysis, and final refined theory are in close relationship. Researchers go through the grounded theory process to flesh out the structure and the processes of a phenomenon in order to construct a conceptual framework, or to build or expand an already existing framework. This is accomplished through an ongoing interplay between researchers and data that is often referred to as the constant comparative method, in which

researchers draw comparisons between multiple data starting during the data collection phase all the way through to the development of the final theory (Corbin and Strauss 2007; Glaser 1978; Glaser and Strauss 1967). The process of grounded theory data analysis proceeds in three concurrent phases: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding (Corbin and Strauss 2007). These concurrent phases can actually begin and take place as the data is being collected, as researchers will often begin to see connections as they move from one participant to others in interviews, meet and converse with new individuals within an ethnographic project, or jot down asides or commentary in the margins via data reduction. No matter when or how the process actually begins, it is important to note that the phases are concurrent and do not take place in a neat and tidy fashion. Open coding involves the development of categories from the data gathered, similar to thematic analysis discussed earlier. Axial coding is a reference to the conceptualization of interrelationships between these different categories, typically by the development of dimensions for those categories identified through open coding. For instance, a researcher might notice that all activists hold critical worldviews about power structures in society in the process of open coding; this would constitute a category developed through open coding. Through axial coding, the researcher would flesh this out more and note that there are distinct differences between the critical worldviews of different groups of activists; worldviews could be deemed to range from radical to reformist. Selective coding ascertains the central concepts identified through open and axial coding and determines their interrelationship: Do emergent categories and the range of their different dimensions impact other categories? Grounded theory enables researchers to move beyond description and actually develop an understanding about how categories of meaning actually function within organizations, communities, or cultures.

SUMMARY

The qualitative research methods, as well as the practical steps for data management and modes of data analysis, detailed in this chapter can be used by all researchers across the various methodological positions described in chapter 2; these methods are central to any endeavor focused on social construction and negotiation of meaning and solid supplements to positivist and post-positivist research. The chapter is far from comprehensive, however, as I have skipped methods and modes of analysis such as autoethnography and computer-based data analysis for space considerations. The methods discussed here—including interviews, ethnography, and qualitative content analysis—

have been the methods most frequently used to explore social activism. For this reason, these methods will be explained and demonstrated within the context of different research sites in the following chapters. Each of the following chapters will commence with conceptualizations of each research site and then delve into the dominant qualitative methods used to explore those sites in past research.

PART II

Research Sites

Part II explores the different research sites of social activism, divided into sites of congregation (chapters 4 and 5), where activists come together, and sites of action (chapters 6 and 7), which constitute the work and endeavors of activists.

Chapter 4 explains the concept of activist organizations and discusses two common approaches to assist in their study: the focused approach, which involves the exploration of activist organizations through the use of ethnographic means, and the cross-section approach, which constitutes a broad examination of different organizations through interviews.

Chapter 5 focuses on activist networks and reviews two approaches that may be used to study them: the external approach, which involves the examination of texts produced by different nodes in a network, and the internal approach, which comprises ethnographic methods or interviews and focuses on the inner workings of specific parts of a network.

Chapter 6 looks at activist events and actions and includes a review of the literature that has helped to conceptualize and categorize on- and offline activist events. The chapter also highlights two key approaches that have emerged from past research endeavors: using texts as windows into events and using supplemented interviews with activists involved in events.

Chapter 7 differentiates alternative media from a similar topic of activist media by comparing different genres across both media that have emerged in past research. The chapter also examines three approaches that are based on a multilevel view of media—production, audiences, and content—which involve the use of interviews or ethnographic methods, as well as qualitative content analysis or rhetorical criticism.

Ultimately, these four research sites do not exist independently from each other: organizations, networks, actions, and alternative media are intertwined; actions are carried out by organizations, and many networks are interconnected by alternative media texts. As a result, many of the concepts or categories associated with one research site may also be applied to other research sites. The goal is to introduce the individual sites, explain what makes them sites for activism, and provide qualitative approaches to studying them.

CHAPTER FOUR

Activist Organizations

This chapter explores:

- (1) The concepts of organization and activist organization.
- (2) The focused approach to the study of activist organizations, which entails close examination of a few.
- (3) The cross-section approach to the study of activist organizations which allows for researchers to examine a large number of organizations at one time.

Organizations, in general, are ongoing achievements of communicative action, positioned within communities of practice (Deetz 1992; Dougherty 2011; Fairhurst and Putnam 2004; Mumby 1997). This positioning enables organizations of any type (governmental, religious, academic, activist) to be discursive; that is, they are co-constructed through discourse by members. In some cases, the organization can develop quickly as a core leader (or group of leaders) brings members into a predetermined hierarchy; for instance, an owner who hires people to fill the management positions and other necessary posts. In other cases, this does not happen as rapidly; instead, the organization develops over time as members come together, initiate new members, and later depart. In both situations, meanings develop that constitute the organizational

culture, which is just as important, if not more so, than any predetermined hierarchy. Ultimately, the rules and regulations set forth in a predetermined hierarchy are discursive; they are conveyed and maintained through written documents and word of mouth. The culture that develops in any organization is also discursive; the rituals and practices emerge through oral communication and performances among organizational members. The discursive nature of organizations subsequently ensures that they are never static and engage in ongoing change.

WHAT ARE ACTIVIST ORGANIZATIONS?

Activist organizations, like all types of organizations, come in many shapes and sizes: large organizations with memberships in the thousands that include hierarchical levels of bureaucracy or smaller organizations that are comprised of a few dozen of close friends and some volunteers. Essentially, an activist organization is one that works to advance a particular social cause, illuminate a significant social problem, transgress norms or laws, or cultivate conflicts. Many activist organizations struggle to change something in society, while some try to maintain the status quo or stem the tide of change in society. Past research has demonstrated that these organizations are structured in a variety of ways. In some cases, there are strict structures that are codified in missions and charters. In other cases, the organizations are egalitarian or devoid of any formal structure. Overall, there are three interconnected logistical categories necessary for conceptualizing activist organizations: (1) worldview of members, (2) organizational structure, and (3) socialization of new members. Ultimately, these categories can help researchers to better understand a research site, formulate research questions and tools, and approach the activists to motivate them to participate in a study.

The first logistical category, worldview of organizational members, entails the ways in which those members view society, power structures, and forms of authority. In large part, this is based on the concepts of vertical and lateral agitation developed by Bowers and Ochs (1971) and Bowers, Ochs, Richard Jensen, and David Schulz (2010). Vertical agitation is a reference to activism that accepts certain power structures and authority figures in society. Essentially, the activists seek to make changes in society through existing processes and bureaucracy and often look to existing authority figures for their help or endorsement. For example, various civil rights groups in the 1950s and 1960s worked to enact laws in the United States that banned racial or gender discrimination. Such groups did not contest the power of the US Congress or government, but rather worked through those structures and actively reached out to authority figures within those bodies. Conversely, lateral agitation is

based on disputes with the existing power structures, authorities, or ideological assumptions within society; activists see such power as inherently evil (or at least a dire threat to society). Ultimately, activists working from such a foundation seek to replace an existing structure with something altogether new. Take for instance the activism of various anticapitalist anarchist collectives. These organizations do not so much want to pass new laws, but rather seek to radically alter the dominant logic of capitalism in contemporary society. The dominant assumptions and power structures are deemed to be flawed and oppressive and should be replaced with an entirely different system of values. Later, various scholars have used the terms *reformist* and *radical* to describe the worldviews of organizational members (see, e.g., Atkinson 2010). Reformist activists were those who accepted the legitimacy of existing power structures and sought to make significant “reforms” through those structures, while radical activists disavowed existing power structures altogether. Reformist activists were more likely to engage in adjustive, or legal, forms of resistance in order to create social change, whereas radical activists were more likely to engage in militant tactics that might undermine authority figures (Kowal 2000). Ultimately, activist organizations can often be defined in part by the critical worldviews of their members; those members can take a reformist/vertical or radical/lateral view of society, ideological assumptions, and authority figures. What is important to note about this dichotomy is that it is wholly unrealistic. As there are several people within an organization, there are typically multiple worldviews at play. An organization may have several reformist members, with a few radicals interspersed; it is then impossible to fully categorize that organization as reformist. Furthermore, labeling individual activists as radical or reformist is problematic, as people’s worldviews are rarely so simple. Indeed, an individual activist’s worldviews on topics can vary, as they might be radical in terms of corporations and government, but reformist in terms of environmental protection. For these reasons, researchers should not so much label organizations as radical or reformist, but understand where they fall along the continuum between these two ideals.

The next logistical category, organizational structure, is based largely on the concepts of surface and deep structures (Giddens 1984; Heracleous and Barrett 2001; Weick 1977), which exist within any given organization. The surface structure is a manifest set of meanings that are intended for public figures to see and examine, whereas the deep structure refers to latent meanings that often develop through “unofficial” rituals and behaviors among organizational members. At the surface, mission statements and manifestos explain the structure of the organization as members wish for it to be perceived in public. These documents explain leadership, decision-making, goals of the organization, and more. In a sense, the surface level constitutes the bureaucracy of the organization;

who is in charge and how things get done. An organization can develop several documents to establish a sophisticated bureaucracy or multiple ranks of membership, or use few documents that establish little (if any) bureaucracy and convey little about structure to outsiders. The deep structure of an organization, conversely, is often hidden from view; members themselves are often oblivious to these latent meaning structures. These hidden structures are rules of right and wrong that are established through the everyday interactions and activities that take place within the organization.

This category is reflected quite well in my own experiences conducting research with activist organizations. While conducting research concerning anti-Iraq War activism early in the last decade, I interviewed members of a radical campus organization called Student Action (the name is changed here for purposes of anonymity and confidentiality). I first approached one of the members about participating in an interview and he agreed, but also said that I should come to one of the group's meetings and possibly recruit more participants for my research. I eagerly took him up on the offer and went to one of their meetings on campus. The members greeted me warmly and happily at the onset of the meeting, and then one individual announced to me (and everyone else for that matter) that they were an egalitarian, nonhierarchical activist group; he declared that there was no leader and everyone had equal voice. After a short period of introductions, I made my pitch to members to volunteer for my research interviews and then sat down to quietly watch the rest of the meeting unfold. What I found profoundly interesting was that the very individual who had declared that there was no leader or hierarchy within the organization actually led the meeting; in fact, this individual did most of the talking. A few other people in the group would speak up from time to time but they always waited for the first individual to finish before they had their say, and they always deferred to this individual whenever he wanted to inter-rupt. In essence, he was the leader of this "leaderless" organization.

As it turns out, the de facto leader of Student Action volunteered to participate in my research. I was especially happy about this because I wanted to talk to him about the discrepancy between his declaration and the actual practices that seemed to take place within the organization. Part of my interview schedule focused on organizational structure and issues, so this would easily come up in our conversation. When the interview turned to the questions about the organization of Student Action, I asked him about the structure. He reiterated his statement from the meeting about the organization as an egalitarian site where no one led and all of the members had equal voice. I then told him about my observation from the meeting in which he did all of the talking and effectively led the organization in all discussions. At first he was evasive about my observation and simply repeated much of what he had already stated.

When I pressed him, however, he became noticeably agitated and insisted that we simply move on to another topic. Interestingly, this was not the last time that I encountered such a phenomenon: a leaderless surface structure and a centralized deep structure. In fact, I find this to be typical of many radical activist organizations.

As another example of deep structure, members might learn that there are certain leaders or authorities within the group who should be ignored, while others should be heeded or revered. Yet another example would be a group in which certain people from particular backgrounds might not be welcomed (e.g., no conservatives allowed). No such rules of conduct or behavior are documented or openly discussed in the organization, as they would convey an image of the organization that is significantly different from that established in the surface structure. It would behoove members of a politically liberal organization who have stated that they are “egalitarian” and “open to all viewpoints” through their website, have it be known that they actively discriminate against people in their organization who might hold conservative values or opinions. Nevertheless, these deep structures exist and play a very real role in shaping the ways in which people behave or navigate relationships within the organization. In many cases, these deep structures emerge from rituals of solidification (Bowers and Ochs 1971; Bowers, Ochs, Jensen, and Schulz 2010) that are often utilized to create a sense of community. Singing songs, making art together, or wearing symbolic clothing are all activities and rituals that take place within activist organizations. These activities have little to do with persuading outsiders, establishing procedures for decision-making, or working for social change; instead, these activities are used to create a sense of community and togetherness.

It should be noted that every organization has a deep structure that plays a vital role in shaping the activities and actions of members; not every organization has a strong surface structure. The documents and manifestos written and displayed for the public by an activist organization play an important role in how that organization connects with other groups, particularly groups that are part of the “legitimate” power structure. Clifford Bob (2005) demonstrates that such powerful groups “match” with activist organizations that have built surface structures that reflect their interests. In particular, Bob points to the Zapatista movement of Mexico in order to show how the surface structure proves vital in building connections with more “legitimate” groups in society. The Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) initially gained prominence when they emerged from the highlands of the Lacandon Jungle in January of 1994 wearing black ski masks and marching quickly to seize control of small rural communities in Chiapas, Mexico. This uprising was a symbolic protest to resist the new era of free trade agreements that the Zapatistas argued

only elevated the wealthy at the expense of the poor (Klein 2002; Marcos 2001). After this initial move, the EZLN retreated into the jungle to establish autonomous communities from which they sent out a variety of communiqués by Subcomandante Marcos and the Clandestine Revolutionary Indigenous Committee. The communiqués spoke of an egalitarian world where people lived as one with nature; such a state of social existence could help to eliminate poverty, hunger, and war (Klein 2002; Russell 2005). The emergence of the group and their subsequent communiqués were in no way spontaneous, but rather the transmission of a well-orchestrated surface structure that signaled to people around the world the hierarchy, rules and codes of conduct, political philosophy, goals, and commitments of the EZLN. In this way, various civil rights and religious groups, journalists, scientists, and philanthropists took note of the Zapatistas and their objectives and looked to help them in any way that they could; the public presentation of the Zapatistas helped to establish connections between the activist organization and other groups affiliated with churches, universities, and other such “legitimate” bodies (Bob 2005).

Socialization of new members stands as the final logistical category necessary for conceptualizing activist organizations. For the purposes of this book, socialization largely entails passing cultural capital to new members, so that they may attain a level of prestige or respect among other members of the organization (e.g., Atkinson 2007; Winsor 2003). Developed by the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1984; 1991), cultural capital is a reference to knowledge or competency necessary for a person to properly interact and engage with other people in a particular social space; this knowledge is also needed to fully understand what is going on within that space. This competency proves to be integral to the establishment of an individual’s placement within an organization or social group, as cultural capital can be converted into social capital or prestige. Take, for example, a group of people watching a football game on television. Whenever a player crosses into the end zone, one of the people in the group immediately stands up and shouts, “home run!” Assuming that the other individuals in the group know more about football than the former person, the shouted expression demonstrates to the others a lack of knowledge or competency concerning football. The individual who shouted the wrong observation did not properly display cultural capital and cannot gain social capital in the group when discussing the topic of football. Cultural capital is not arbitrary, as it is typically learned through families, schools, or choices concerning association (Sender 2001). In her study concerning cultural capital and socialization in an engineering corporation, Dorothy Winsor (2003) demonstrates that new organizational members are often better equipped to earn prestige whenever they have been provided with texts and a strong hierarchy that helps them to learn cultural capital of an organization. Without the establishment of such

Recap 4-1. Logistical Categories of Activist Organizations

- Worldviews of members: Radical to reformist.
- Organizational structure: Surface and deep structures.
- Socialization of new members.

cultural capital within the organization, new members flounder and often leave the organization in frustration.

Activist organizations are shaped by the worldviews of their members, the organizational structure, and the socialization of new members. All organizations have a deep structure of underlying meanings that are constructed through everyday interactions of members, which play an important role in the construction of forms of interaction and behavior that are deemed to be right (acceptable) or wrong (unacceptable). However, not all organizations have strong surface structures; this is particularly true of activist organizations. Many activist organizations in which the members' worldviews are primarily radical often have less of a surface structure than those organizations with more reformist activists; this is important as the lack of a strong surface structure often leads to problems with socializing new members. Newcomers to a primarily radical organization learn cultural capital more through an unseen deep structure, which often entails a trial-by-error learning process in the organization. The radical worldview—which is often shunned by people outside of the organization—coupled with this frustrating learning process serves as a barrier that keeps many people out of the organization and leads many to leave shortly after becoming involved. This is not to say that all radical-oriented organizations have little or no surface structure as Green Peace and the EZLN are each comprised of primarily radical members, but each have strong surface structures that describe to the public information about leadership, decision-making, mission, and other important details. Overall, however, activist organizations can be conceptualized and described in terms of the members' worldviews, organizational structure, and the socialization of cultural capital.

Two activist organizations will serve as examples of these logistical categories: the reformist-oriented Amnesty International and the more radical Church of Stop Shopping. Peter Benenson established Amnesty International in 1961 for the purpose of investigating any suspected abuses to political “prisoners of conscience” around the world. The campaign drew international attention and grew into a large organization comprised of thousands of people who sought to reform the treatment of political prisoners and expand the rights of political asylum seekers who suffered from repressive regimes. The reformist activists

who came to work with Amnesty International also expanded the focus of the organization to include prison systems in general, as well as the treatment of women and oppressed minorities. Today Amnesty International gathers information on various abuses by governments and other powerful entities and reports its findings to the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and the International Criminal Court (Banks 2004; Power 2001). As Amnesty International grew over the decades, a large bureaucratic surface structure emerged that helped the organization to connect to external bodies such as the United Nations and also helped members to navigate the daily practices of the group. The organization currently consists of an International Board, International Secretariat's senior directors, and the Secretary General's Global Council. Each of these people or committees is charged with different tasks and meet at specific times and places throughout the year; information about each of these bodies can be found through the Amnesty International website (amnesty.org/en).

The Church of Stop Shopping, established by Bill Talen in the late 1990s, is a radical-oriented group and stands in stark contrast to Amnesty International. The group emerged from a protest against the commercialization of Times Square in New York City. Initially, Talen dressed as a Christian-looking minister and walked into various stores and began preaching about the evils of corporate consumerism in contemporary society. Typically, Reverend Billy (as he came to be known) would be arrested for his sermons in the middle of these stores; his protests became a sensation, however, and garnered him significant media attention. Several people around the city came to help him with his efforts, often because his message corresponded with their beliefs that capitalism and corporations are terrible problems for society and the planet. The new protesters became the Church of Stop Shopping and travelled with Reverend Billy to take part in his various sermons, often singing hymn-like songs about the evils of capitalism and corporations (Spurlock 2008; Talen 2013). Overall, the group does not entail a strong surface structure, as is evident from examining the organization's website (revbilly.com); the website provides some details about the history and mission of the organization and a link to information about the "board of directors." However, the website does not provide any information about how the board of directors functions, the directors' tasks, or the processes of decision-making. As such, the Church of Stop Shopping is built around a deep structure that is not easy to observe or navigate (particularly for newcomers), which has strong implications for the retention of new members to the church and the establishment of connections to "legitimate" authority figures and organizations.

Both of these organizations are conceptualized and discussed in terms of the three logistical categories established earlier. The three categories are inter-

twined as they typically influence one another. The worldview of activists in many ways influences whether there is a strong surface structure, which in turn affects the socialization of new members. In the case of Amnesty International, the reformist views of the activists called for a surface structure that would allow for the establishment of connections to bodies such as the United Nations. The need to create these connections, as well as the actions in which the group engaged, created the need for large numbers of new members to aid in the endeavors of the group, which, in turn, also influenced the need for a strong surface structure. In contrast, the radical worldviews and lateral agitation of the activists who came to work alongside Reverend Billy led to a reliance on deep structure; their suspicions of power structures and authority figures in society did not create the need for a strong surface structure. Without such a surface structure in place it is often difficult to socialize new members to the group, which keeps the Church of Stop Shopping relatively small. Essentially, these logistical categories often determine the size of an organization, as well as its interconnectivity with other activist and nonactivist organizations. Research concerning activist organizations, then, often focuses on these logistical categories. For instance, Shiv Ganesh and Cynthia Stohl's (2010) research concerning the role of ICTs in global social justice movements involved interviews with thirty-four activists in Aotearoa, New Zealand. These interviews were used in order to effectively explore activists' personal background, their relationships with other activists, and the nature of their activist work. By touching on these broad topics in the interviews, Ganesh and Stohl were able to gain insight about the activists' worldviews and the structures of any organizations with which they were affiliated. In addition, Click and Ridberg's (2010) research concerning food preservation in food activism utilized interviews to supplement their survey data. The interviews touched on a variety of subjects, including the activists' attitudes about food preservation activities and involvement in food preservation movements. The questions regarding these subject areas helped to describe the worldviews of the activists, as well as organizational structures.

Overall, an examination of the literature concerning the exploration of activist organizations reveals that researchers typically use interviews and ethnographic methods to examine the underlying logistical categories within particular organizations. The examination also indicates two important trends: a focused approach and a cross-section approach. The focused approach involves the examination of one or more specific organizations. In other words, the researcher contacts an organization and asks for the opportunity to talk to members and conduct research. The researcher may look at one organization, or they may examine multiple organizations; the purpose in both instances is to fully explore the inner workings of those specific organizations. The cross-

section approach, conversely, involves approaching activists in general and conversing with them about the organizations with which they are affiliated. Essentially, only one or two activists at the most from any particular organization may be contacted to take part in research; the entire study consists of large numbers of activists spanning several organizations. This enables the researcher to draw general conclusions about activist organizations or build an understanding about organizations within particular social or cultural contexts. The focused approach versus the cross-section approach, then, is a matter of depth versus breadth. In fact, the most striking contrast between the two approaches is their insight into organizational structures. The cross-sectional approach is effective for collecting information that provides insight about the surface structures of multiple organizations; conversely, the focused approach provides information about both the surface and deep structure of one, possibly two or more, organizations. The cross-section approach typically does not allow for much insight about the deep structure, or hidden practices and beliefs, within organizations. For the most part, ethnography has proven to be the best qualitative tool for the focused approach, while interviewing proves to be more useful for the cross-section approach. The next section outlines some of the methods that have been utilized in order to accomplish both approaches to the study of activist organizations.

FOCUSED APPROACH: ETHNOGRAPHIC WORK IN ACTIVIST ORGANIZATIONS

The focused approach to the study of activist organizations entails detailed examination of some or all of the logistical categories associated with one or a few organizations. Essentially, the researcher engages with organizations to learn about intricate details concerning worldviews of members, structure, and socialization. This enables the researcher to reveal the inner workings of one or two activist organizations, as well as the lived experiences of activists within those organizations. As the focused approach is utilized to explore minute details, the research process can be time-consuming and particularly demanding; for this reason, the focused approach typically entails the exploration of only one or two organizations. A researcher could conceivably use this approach to study a multitude of organizations, even an entire network comprised of global and local organizations, but such a project would take years to complete.

The primary tool used to accomplish this approach to the study of activist organizations is ethnography. Ethnographic practices such as participant observation and narrative excavation enable researchers to immerse themselves within the culture that has emerged within specific organizations; they can come as close as possible to actually stepping into the shoes of activists within

those organizations. Researchers can experience the worldviews within the organization, the structure that encloses activists, and the modes of socialization that greet activists upon entry. This is not to say that interviews are absent from the focused approach; some studies of activist organizations have used interviews to explore the inner workings of particular activist organizations. For example, Alex Law and Wallace McNeish (2007) interviewed numerous activists and affiliated advocates in their research concerning a Scottish organization that protested the construction of telecommunication masts necessary for digital mobile media. Through their interviews, they explored the deep structures within the group called NO₂TETRA, effectively demonstrating that the group incorporated scientific debate within their worldviews and structure; the incorporation of such social discourse shaped the way in which the group utilized resources and engaged in protest. My work with Rosati, Alex Stana, and Sean Watkins examines DetroitYES!, a web community that was organized around an online art project called “the Fabulous Ruins of Detroit.” Our research also relies on interviews to demonstrate the construction of standpoint performance established by the activists’ uses of the interactive forums and engagement with the physical environment of Detroit (Atkinson, Rosati, Stana, and Watkins 2012). In both cases, interviewing allowed for adequate observation and analysis of key elements within activist organizations. In each case, researchers were limited in what could be observed in their focused approach to the subject. The schedule of questions or subject guides enabled the teams to illuminate only certain topics or issues within an activist organization; many elements associated with the logistical categories remained hidden from sight. As the focused approach is more concerned with minute detail, ethnographic methods are the more effective option for conducting research.

Ethnographic methods are also important for this approach, because they enable researchers to take on the role of activists within the context of their research. Many researchers seek to engage in “participatory activism,” which is also referred to as participatory-advocacy research (Rodino-Colocino 2011; 2012). Both of these terms refer to researchers making their research into a form of activism; they may use the research to bring attention or credibility to activist organizations, or uncover oppressive practices in society. Essentially, participatory activism involves researchers taking on multiple roles at one time; they are scholars, advocates, participants, and members of the organization. These different roles must be balanced as the researchers begin their research. According to Michelle Rodino-Colocino (2012, 546):

Like any method of inquiry that draws on the naturalistic paradigm, participant activism involves acting in multiple roles simultaneously—as both scholars and activists—and sometimes at all times. “Scholar-activists,” however,

emphasize the more detached scholarly role when stepping back to make observations, analyze, and critically evaluate information gleaned from activist participation. In contrast, “activist-scholars” may emphasize working as members of the group they study by attending meetings, organizing rallies, lobbying lawmakers, or talking to the media.

Whenever researchers are engaged in such participatory activism, they must fully understand all of their roles within the organization and determine which roles take center stage and which should be subordinate (or if any can be subordinate). Similarly, the coordinated management of meaning (CMM) has been described as a mode for scholarly activism. CMM is a communication theory that states that social realities are constructed through social interactions, enabling researchers to understand problems that face a community through social interactions. To effectively solve serious problems that face groups and communities, it is of utmost importance that people first manage their understanding about the problems that they face, as well as the source of those problems (see Barge and Pearce 2004). For instance, drug use is a problem that often faces communities; the source of the problem and proper remedy are all constructed through social interactions. In their study, Carey Adams, Charlene Berquist, Randy Dillon, and Gloria Galanes (2007) demonstrate how CMM relates to research activism as they explore a community group that was tasked with addressing violence in the region. The group could never really get off of the ground, as different members would often argue about causes of violence to the point that the group would splinter. Adams, Berquist, Dillon, and Galanes came into the group as scholar activists who engaged in CMM research to help the organization to better coordinate their understanding of the problems of violence without getting bogged down in the debates that had plagued the group from the beginning. Adams et al. had to balance their own roles as researchers and advocates for the community in order to effectively engage the organization in a public dialogue that produced effective solutions to the problems of violence. Whether one is engaged in participatory activism or applying CMM to produce productive public dialogue within an activist organization, ethnographic methods are integral. Such methods enable researchers to engage with the organization as members, which provides a level of credibility and connection to the activist organization that is not afforded through other methods such as interviews or textual analysis.

Research projects by Dunbar-Hester (2009; 2010; 2012), Chavez (2011), and Amy Blackstone (2009) provide excellent examples of ethnographic methods employed in the focused approach to study activist organizations. Essentially, these projects reveal how participant observation often provides access to the

members of an organization and gives rise to additional methods of inquiry such as interviews. In a series of articles, Dunbar-Hester explores the inner workings of a nonprofit radio group called the Pandora Radio Project based out of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The organization fought for media reform, as they were opposed to the Telecommunications Act of 1996. The research was conducted by way of participant observation that lasted two years, in which Dunbar-Hester took part in organizational meetings and also engaged in workshops tasked with starting up new radio stations (e.g., socializing new members). In addition to participating in the organization, Dunbar-Hester (2010, 124) was also able to conduct semi-structured interviews with “activists, lobbyists, policy-makers, and citizens, as well as informal interview[s] in settings such as workshops” to thoroughly explore the context of the organization. The issue of context is an important point, as no activist organization exists in a vacuum. Dunbar-Hester sought to go outside of the organization to discuss issues of media reform and ICTs with policymakers and community members, rather than simply focus on the activists in the organization. The fact that she was a member of the organization, and took part in crucial projects enacted by the organization, provided her with extraordinary access to members and facilities, as well as those contextual figures around the organization (e.g., policymakers and lobbyists). It is entirely possible that she would not have been granted such access to the organization or contextual figures had she been a researcher who merely approached the organization and requested permission to conduct interviews. The semi-structured interviews were conducted in many ways like the postmodern interviews described in chapter 3; one-on-one interviews directed by a subject guide. In contrast, the informal interviews were more akin to the excavation of narratives at nonroutine public events described by Krizek (2003); the organizational projects, like the workshops, provided opportunities for Dunbar-Hester to meet other activists and discuss various subjects with them. In this way, she was able to fully observe and describe the three critical logistical categories associated with the organization, which, in turn, allowed her to see the ways in which the organization adapted their low-frequency radio campaigns to Wi-Fi and the Internet (Dunbar-Hester 2009), how ICTs shaped personal identity (Dunbar-Hester 2010), and how the production of media created a technical identity (Dunbar-Hester 2012).

Like Dunbar-Hester, Blackstone’s (2009) participant observation research included formal and informal interviews with participants across two activist organizations. Blackstone conducted three and a half years’ worth of participant observation with two activist organizations; one organization focused on breast cancer awareness, while the second focused on sexual-violence awareness. In both organizations, the activists would work with people whose lives

had been deeply affected by either of these problems. Again, the participant observation at “official” organizational functions such as fundraising events and training sessions played a role in Blackstone’s research:

My primary research site was a state affiliate of the Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation, where I conducted field research by participating as a member of the local steering committee, assisting the volunteer staff at Komen’s Race for the Cure office, and volunteering at a variety of fundraising events. I compare data collected through my participation at Komen to data collected from participation at a campus antirape organization in the Midwestern United States, referred to here as Stop Rape. I participated at Stop Rape for about a year, during which time I attended two intensive forty-two-hour training sessions and retreats and “hung out” in the Stop Rape office assisting staff and other volunteers with the day-to-day management of the office and observing everyday goings-on. (92)

Similar to Dunbar-Hester’s experience, volunteering for these activities provided Blackstone with access necessary to conduct many interviews (formal and informal) with activists throughout both organizations. Interestingly, Blackstone provides a good definition for what she considers to be “informal interviewing”: “I considered an informal interview to have occurred at times when I guided the conversation with the intention to elicit specific information about a person’s participation” (94). What is particularly important in the earlier excerpt is the fact that she notes the time that she “hung out” at the Stop Rape office. “Hanging out” talking to members of an organization and observing what is going on can be an invaluable part of the ethnographic project. Essentially, the researcher does not have to participate constantly in activities or formal organizational functions; the researcher can go to the sites affiliated with the activist organization and watch the actions and interactions of the activists unfold. Hanging out can provide insight about both the organization, as well as the context within which the organization exists; this can also provide insight into the intersections between the activist organization and external communities or agencies. In this way, “hanging out,” along with the participant observation and emergent interviews, provides insight into the construction of compassion for other people through these different organizations. Ultimately, she found that the ways in which the activists worked with those people who had been affected by either breast cancer or sexual violence was often gendered; that is, empowerment of people involved shaping their gender performances and roles.

Similarly, Chavez’s (2011) ethnographic research involved participant observations, which gave rise to interviews. Chavez explored the coalition that was constructed and maintained between two activist organizations; one group

focused on queer rights, while the other focused on the rights of migrants. Chavez volunteered to work with both organizations and engaged in activities specific to each, while also acting at times as a liaison that worked to coordinate actions and issues between both. In this particular case, the participant observation generated the questions that were raised during the formal, or structured, interviews:

I accessed such data through 180 hours of extensive participant observation as an activist and liaison between the two groups, where I took detailed fieldnotes on what I participated in and observed. After seven months of fieldwork, I conducted fourteen structured interviews with key activists to ask about the themes that I saw emerging from my data. Specifically, I entered the field with questions about why a queer rights and a migrant rights organization would engage in coalition-building, and I began to witness that much of activists' rationale pertained to the meaning they made from external messages received. (Chavez 2011, 5)

Ultimately, the participant observations and interviews with the activists enabled Chavez to observe that members in each group learned to interpret legal and political rhetoric concerning their particular topic (queer rights, migrant rights); similarities in the interpretations made it possible for the two groups to build a coalition and engage in coordinated tasks. Particularly striking about these findings was the fact that the rank-and-file members of the two groups often viewed the other group to be a threat. Such perceptions should have prevented the emergence of a coalition between the groups. Similar interpretive processes, however, enabled the leadership within the two organizations to reach out to the other, share information, and coordinate tasks without raising the ire of their respective members.

Ultimately, the research conducted by Blackstone, Dunbar-Hester, and Chavez demonstrates the effective use of ethnographic methods to accomplish the focused approach to the study of activist organizations. Participant observation alone allows for the detailed examination of the worldviews of members and socialization of new people and provides significant insight into the surface and deep structures at work within the organization. The participant observation also provides access to the members of the organization and enables researchers to engage in informal interviews and narrative excavation; such access also builds trust necessary for the recruitment of research participants or contextual figures for more formal interviews. Indeed, the participant observations enable the researcher to identify key activists within organizations, as in the case of Chavez's research. The interviews with the activists serve the purpose of triangulation; they provide more clarity to many of the things that researchers might observe in the process of participant observation. Interviews, whether

Recap 4-2. Focused Approach to the Study of Activist Organizations

- Can be employed to examine one or a few organizations.
- Relies on ethnography and participant observation.
- Should give rise to informal or postmodern interviews with members of the organizations.

informal or formal, can also help researchers to uncover things about the structure or processes of socialization that they might have otherwise missed. Many organizational practices or beliefs are not on display for everyone to see; in many cases, someone with years of experience and insight must fully explain these things. Without such explanations, the one's understanding about the activist organization will be incomplete. This entire process of ethnographic research allows for the depth that is sought through the focused approach.

CROSS-SECTION APPROACH: INTERVIEWS IN ACTIVIST ORGANIZATIONS

The cross-section approach involves the examination of several activist organizations at one time, typically by talking to one or two members of those organizations. The researcher may not be able to cover all of the logistical categories in the same rich detail as in the case of the focused approach, nor accurately demonstrate the lived experiences of activists within the organizations. However, the cross-section approach enables the researcher to explore multiple organizations in a relatively short timeframe and reveal some general characteristics associated with the logistical categories across all of the organizations under examination. Ultimately, the cross-section approach is an efficient way of learning about the inner workings of a broad sample of activist organizations. As stated earlier, the focused approach provides depth, whereas the cross-section approach allows for breadth. What is sacrificed in terms of detail is made up for in the amount of information and data that becomes available to the researcher for analysis. Such breadth allows for comparisons of organizations across regions, across networks, across national and cultural boundaries, or across a particular political spectrum.

The most efficient methods for this particular approach to the study of activist organizations is the postmodern or survey interview process. Ethnographies are not effective when dealing with a multitude of individual activists from various organizations; those activists usually have little or no connection and no cultural environment to observe. Indeed, as ethnographies typically require that the researcher devote significant time to each particular research site, ethnographic and fieldwork tools are not particularly useful here. For instance, in

the ethnographic studies noted earlier, the researchers spent a minimum of one year within a single organization engaged in participant observation. As noted in chapter 3, many qualitative scholars agree that a year is the minimum amount of time for effective immersion within a culture on the part of the researcher (Boellstorff, Nardi, Pearce, and Taylor 2012; Chambers 2000; Denzin 1997; Lindlof and Taylor 2010). By using interviews, researchers can approach several activists and ask questions that provide insight into their respective organizations; researchers can explore several activist organizations at one time through interviews. The research projects by DeTurk (2011), Ganesh and Stohl (2010), and Maria Löblich and Manuel Wendelin (2011) provide excellent examples of the cross-section approach to activist organizations. DeTurk's research, briefly discussed in chapter 3, explores the ways in which activists construct an "allied identity" when they work within organizations that seek to advocate for marginalized people. DeTurk focuses on the worldviews of the activists, as well as the ways in which they were socialized and gained prestige with both activist organizations and the marginalized communities for which they advocated. Ganesh and Stohl's research demonstrates the use of, and attitudes about, ICTs in global justice organizations in New Zealand. In part, they set out to explore whether assertions from past research, which claim that ICTs made activist organizations less relevant (e.g., Burt 2005), are true. Interestingly, Ganesh and Stohl found that ICTs allow for activists to express multiple identities, many of which are grounded in organizations; the organizations are a source for identity building more than a source for activist materials or coordination of actions. The ICTs made the organizations very relevant to activists; just not in the way that the activists had originally intended. Löblich and Wendelin's research explores the nature of activism that directly confronted some of the ICT policies of the German government. The researchers were interested in the ways in which activists viewed and responded to communications policies that had been developed to regulate subjects in Germany such as media content, media ownership, intellectual property, and privacy. Overall, their research provides insight into the worldviews of ICT policy activists and the specific tactics of resistance that has emerged from those worldviews.

In all three of these cases, the researchers are not so much interested in one particular organization or group, but rather in aspects of activism in general. For this reason, the researchers had to find ways to reach out to large numbers of activists in order to generate adequate participant pools for interviews. DeTurk's project is particularly noteworthy as she made it a point in her research proceedings to demonstrate to readers the manner in which she recruited participants for her interviews—by sending out the following e-mail through listservs of a university-wide diversity group and campus groups that advocated for marginalized communities:

Seeking allies for a research project. Ally—a person who has relative social power or privilege in society who takes a stand against injustice directed at people who do not (e.g., male feminists, white people working against racism, or Christians working to stop hate crimes against Muslims or Jews). Sara DeTurk, Assistant Professor of Communication, is conducting research on how people come to be allies to others in the face of oppression on the basis of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religion, nationality, age, disabilities, or economic class. If you consider yourself to be an ally and are willing to discuss your experiences in a one-hour interview, please contact Dr. DeTurk at 458-7737 or sara.deturk@utsa.edu. (DeTurk 2011, 588)

The e-mail serves as an excellent example of a recruitment tool. Essentially, DeTurk identified herself to potential participants and notified them about the purpose and nature of her research. Many of the groups on the listservs through which she sent the message may not have had many members, making a focused approach to her study problematic. The recruitment tool and its delivery allowed for her to draw in the largest number of participants possible. Conversely, Ganesh and Stohl started with a key informant approach (Lindlof and Taylor 2010) to find an initial set of participants and then utilized snowball sampling (Frey, Botan, and Kreps 2000) in order to identify more participants. In terms of the key informant collection of participants, they reached out to activists who had been cited in mainstream or activist media, or were noted on activist websites. Essentially, they targeted those activists who were “playing a visible and key role in the [global social justice movement]” (Ganesh and Stohl 2010, 58); these were activists who had become well known for their endeavors. After contacting those individuals and conducting interviews with them, Ganesh and Stohl would engage in snowball sampling by asking the participants if they could name other credible activists who would take part in the study. In the case of Löblich and Wendelin’s research, they sought to interview activists who best conveyed the worldviews of their particular organizations. They conducted interviews with twenty ICT policy activists who were affiliated with a variety of different groups and organizations. In order to draw a rich and diverse sample of activists for their interviews, Löblich and Wendelin set parameters based on theories to help them identify activists and recruit important activists who would best help them to address their guiding research questions. First, they defined ICT activists according to two criteria for activism developed in past research (see Mueller, Page, and Kuerbis 2004): political goals (i.e., they work to influence German ICT policy) and civic background (i.e., they are not affiliated with any corporations, government agencies, or political parties). Second, they only reached out to those activists who were

“prominent”; that is, they had “gained a certain reputation in the public sphere over the last few years . . . they had appeared as [ICT] experts in the mass media and been invited to round table discussions, and that they were the heads of civil advocacy groups” (Löblich and Wendelin 2011, 904). Overall, these parameters helped the researchers to identify relevant activists for their interviews.

Another important point that emerges from these research projects is the ways in which interview questions were constructed. In each case, the subjects covered in the interviews were tied to the research questions at the onset of the research. In addition to the research questions, these scholars built their interview questions on theories and concepts established in past research. As with the recruitment tool, DeTurk provided in the research proceedings the subject guide that she asked in her postmodern interviews with the fifteen participants whom she recruited:

1. What does it mean for you to be an ally?
2. What do you do as an ally?
3. How did you become an ally?
4. How is your experience or identity as an ally supported and/or challenged? (DeTurk 2011, 588)

Each of these questions focuses on the concepts of “alliance” and “ally,” which have arisen in research concerning intercultural communication and whiteness (see Collier 2002; Sorrells 2002). This is particularly important as her research, as well as the work of most academic qualitative scholars, seeks to add to theories established in past literature. In addition, these questions fit within the postmodern process noted in chapter 3 in that they are very broad so that they are open to various interpretations by any activist being interviewed. DeTurk’s questions constitute a subject guide that provides a framework for the participants to weave narratives about their personal lives and backgrounds, as well as their affiliation and roles within particular activist organizations. This enabled DeTurk to learn about many different organizations and groups that advocate for marginalized people and their role in the construction of the allied identity. Löblich and Wendelin, on the other hand, used structured survey interviews in order to address their guiding research questions. Together, Löblich and Wendelin interviewed twenty activists within contexts that the activists chose; the interviews were conducted face to face, on the telephone, and via Skype. Regardless of the context, all of the interviews relied on the use of their interview schedule. The schedule was based on resource mobilization theory (see Carroll and Hackett 2006) and their analyses of ICT activist websites and

media coverage of ICT protests. Essentially, the researchers looked through prominent ICT activist sites, as well as news reports about ICT activism and protests, in an effort to connect such activism to the concept of resource mobilization theory; they used both theory and organizational texts as the basis for their interview schedule. This enabled them to make key concepts from resource mobilization theory more concrete by using the examples from websites and news reports about ICT activism. Such analysis helped Löblich and Wendelin (2011, 904) to develop questions about “ideas, motivations and problem perceptions, self-understandings (how they see themselves and access their own influence), biographical background, forms of social organization, and repertoires of collective action and resources.” All of these questions helped to explain worldviews and the use of organizational resources on the part of the activists. These questions did not allow for the weaving of narratives in the same way as DeTurk’s subject guide. Each participant was asked a series of precise questions, to which Löblich and Wendelin sought specific responses. This is the difference between the postmodern interview (which typically relies on subject guides) and survey interviews (which rely more on schedules of questions). DeTurk’s research was more open-ended in its exploration of activism within a variety of different groups, whereas Löblich and Wendelin’s research sought to answer very specific research questions tied to specific logistical categories associated with the organizations with which the participants are affiliated.

A final point to make about the use of interviews in activist organizations, regardless of whether that research is focused or cross-section in approach, refers to the ethical dilemma of confidentiality and anonymity discussed in chapter 2. Ganesh and Stohl negotiated these topics after the interviews were completed by allowing for the participants to look at the findings of their research. In this way, the participants were able to reflect on what they had discussed during the interviews and decide whether or not they wanted to be identified in any research proceedings. In some cases, they noted that participants would ask to first see the transcripts of the interviews so that they could reflect more fully on their comments; the researchers complied with the participants’ request. In another instance related to confidentiality and anonymity, Patricia Elliott (2010) conducted face-to-face interviews with members of a community radio station in Thailand. The research was particularly interesting as community radio was technically legal under the “People’s Constitution” of 2000; however, the military and commercial broadcasters had blocked the registration of community radio stations and ultimately outlawed them after the 2006 military coup. The particular radio station examined by Elliott produced call-in programs that concentrated their reports and content on lives of

migrant workers from Burma; the call-in nature of these programs provided a marginalized people in Thai society to voice their concerns, problems, and conditions. Elliott engaged in unstructured interviews with eleven members of the community radio station; the interviews focused on the activists' backgrounds in radio, their experiences with their current community radio station, and how they communicated with their audience. The interviews provided important information about the surface and deep structures of the organization. What is particularly notable about this research is that Elliott omitted the names of participants from the final report in order to protect them from legal recriminations from the military junta; the name and frequency of the radio station were omitted as well. Participants were referred to in generic terms (e.g., Informant #3) and the station was simply called FM 99 (not the actual frequency used by the station). Typically, researchers tend to avoid naming activists or organizations if their actions are deemed to be illegal, or if there is the potential for legal or political ramifications. As discussed in chapter 2, it is ultimately up to the researchers about how they should confront and deal with the problem of pseudonyms within their research; understanding their ethical foundations and community can help researchers to fully understand their commitments and where those commitments fit within given risks. Elliott's solution to this dilemma provides a good example from which qualitative researchers can learn about this sensitive issue.

The research conducted by the scholars introduced earlier represents excellent examples of interviews conducted to accomplish the cross-section approach to the study of activist organizations. These three examples demonstrate how researchers can go about recruiting large pools of participants, constructing questions for interviews, and assigning pseudonyms. Of particular importance is the notion of constructing questions for interviews, for this issue resonates with the focused approach as well. As noted in the section on the focused approach, it is often in the best interest of researchers to conduct interviews along with their participant observations; this provides much needed triangulation that can reveal unseen issues within organizations, or clarify things that were not entirely obvious from observations. All three of the scholars in that section used formal and informal interviews within different contexts of their fieldwork. Formal interviews can very well take the form of survey interviews that are constructed in part from the observations, while informal interviews emerge from subject guides. Regardless of approach, interviews—whether postmodern or survey, structured or unstructured—can prove integral for the examination and illustration of logistical categories associated with activist organizations.

Recap 4-3. Cross-sectional Approach to the Study of Activist Organizations

- Can be used to assess logistical categories across a wide variety of activist organizations.
- Heavily relies on interviews to collect information and data.
- Can make the management of data across a multitude of organizations more manageable due to formal, structured interviews.
- Can provide insight into activism in general, as well as organizations.

SUMMARY

This chapter defines and describes activist organization as a research site. Essentially, these research sites entail three primary logistical categories that are integral to any organization: structure, worldview of members, and socialization of new members. Organizations may entail other logistical categories that are specific to their particular group, region, culture, or function. However, all activist organizations will ultimately feature the three logistical categories that are featured in this chapter. Any organization, whether activist or otherwise, entails differences and similarities with other organizations in terms of these three fundamental categories. As qualitative researchers explore activist organizations they will ultimately find that they have to navigate through structure, worldviews, and socialization; indeed, the exploration of activist organizations often entails the examination of one or all of these categories to fully understand that political environment.

The chapter also introduces two approaches to the study of activist organizations: focused approach and cross-section approach. The focused approach is best for researchers who seek rich detail about the worldviews and socialization of members, as well as the structure of the organization; in fact, the focused approach positions researchers well for uncovering hidden facets of the organization that are associated with the deep structure. An excellent route for researchers to take in this particular approach to an organization is ethnographic work. The cross-section approach is less detailed, but it enables researchers to examine several organizations within a relatively short time span. In using the cross-section approach, researchers are less concerned with the logistical categories or other features of a single organization and more interested in uncovering commonalities or contrasts of activism across several organizations. Typically, qualitative researchers use interviews in order to accomplish this approach.

This is not to say that other methods cannot be used in the study of activist organizations. It is entirely possible to analyze organizations through a content

analysis of their literature or their websites; such methods can certainly provide insight into the surface structures of these organizations, as well as worldviews of members. However, the methods noted here tend to be the most common ways in which qualitative researchers have approached activist organizations with much success. The successes of the scholars noted here can provide a framework for students who want to research social activism and veteran scholars who are would like to improve their approaches to the study activist organizations.

Activist Networks

This chapter explores:

- (1) The concepts of network and activist network as well as global and local levels of activist networks.
- (2) The external approach to the study of activist networks, in which textual analysis leads to an understanding of the interconnections between nodes.
- (3) The internal approach to activist networks, which puts researchers in the midst of a network, working directly with the activists involved.

In the most basic sense, networks are nodes that are connected together in some way. Although these nodes can be interconnected in a variety of different ways (e.g., trade and exchange of goods), contemporary researchers view the connections between nodes as modes of communication and communicative action (e.g., Eriksson 2005; Huesca 2001; Jenkins, Ford, and Green 2013; Van Dijck 2013). Manuel Castells (1996) explains that networks are open structures that expand and develop through communication; integration into a network depends on whether or not a node shares the necessary codes for communication with other nodes. As noted in chapter 1, most research has focused on networks that take one of three shapes: the line, the star, and the all-channel

(Evan 1972). The primary variable that influences the shape of a network are the different routes or connections that nodes have to others; the direction of the connection (i.e., one way or two way) also influences the shape. In the case of the line network, the communication is strictly one way, from one node to the next. The star network can entail one-way communication from the hub to all of the other nodes, or two-way communication between nodes and hub; in either case, the hub has control over the flow of communication between nodes. Finally, the all-channel network entails two-way communication between all nodes (see Figure 5-1).

In addition, Evan situates these nodes as predominately organizations, although some researchers take the view of individual people as nodes within networks (e.g., Harlow 2011). According to Evan—as well as Arquilla and Ronsfeldt (2001), Best (2005), and Stengrim (2005) among others—networks are collections of organizations that are interconnected through the ways in which they communicate. Castells (2000) further developed the concept of networks by showing how they are not so much hierarchical or structured organizations, but rather interconnections grounded in one important dichotomous rationale: inclusion or exclusion; essentially, groups or nodes are either in or out. Being a member of a network entails an identity of sorts that is maintained through the threat of expulsion. The advent of interactive media platforms, such as Facebook and YouTube, has made the concept of individual people as nodes in networks more prominent in recent years (e.g., Van Dijck 2013).

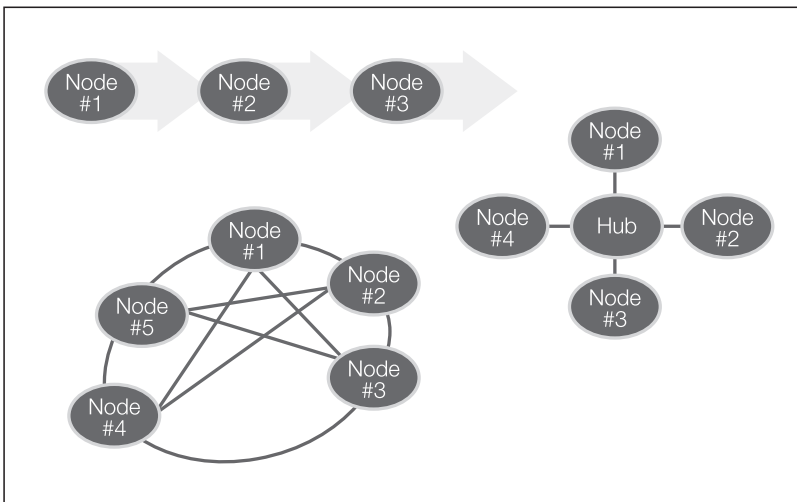


FIGURE 5-1. The basic network shapes described by Evan.

WHAT ARE ACTIVIST NETWORKS?

Activist networks are comprised of organizations or individual activists that constitute nodes, interconnected by communication and communicative action. Essentially, such communication and action includes the transmission of information, the construction of relationships, the mobilization of resources and bodies, and even the implementation of action in online environments (e.g., Bennett 2003; Castells 1996; 2000). In each of these cases, communication is not the by-product of the network, but rather the driving force that gives rise to mobilization and relationships. These networks can take different shapes, unite individuals and local communities, and often span the entire globe. Such networks can also be grounded in a variety of different forms of communication. Although more recent research has focused almost exclusively on the communication between nodes via the Internet and interactive media platforms, face-to-face communication can be vital to the connections between nodes. In my own experience researching activists, face-to-face communication and relationship building within the physical sites often proves to be just as invaluable (perhaps even more so) as social media and interactive media technologies.

As with the organizations described in chapter 4, there are three primary logistical categories that are integral to the conceptualization of activist networks, regardless of whether the discussion focuses on networks of individuals or organizations: (1) reach, (2) connective media, and (3) levels. The concept of reach is a reference to the number of relationships fostered between nodes within a particular network, as well as connections to other networks. This concept has emerged from studies concerning the ways in which nodes (whether individuals or organizations) come together, build relationships, and see those relationships shaped through strains between nodes. Although there is no “typical” or “ideal” scenario in which nodes reach outward and build relationships with others, studies by Best (2005) and Pickard (2006b) provides good examples of reach and how it functions. Best’s (2005) research concerning the construction of “temporary protest communities” lays out the ways in which some nodes can initially make contact, come together, and become shaped by agonisms between activists. Best demonstrates that an initial organization (or group of activists) puts out a call for some kind of action; this call is usually framed within a narrative or story. According to Pickard (2006b), the narratives typically circulated by activists are quite nebulous; that is, they can be interpreted in a variety of ways. Radical and reformist activists alike can see this call and find that it aligns with their critical worldviews. This enables other activists or organizations to heed the call to action and contact the initial node. At this point, a temporary protest community is established (e.g., Occupy Wall

Street, or a protest against a corporation or free trade policy) and expands as those activists or groups pass on the call and build new relationships with others. Best calls this process of groups and activists coming together around a nebulous, common cause “mesomobilization.” This emergent community is not yet a network, as the different people and groups are rallied together for a short-term goal or purpose. The community is shaped, however, by competing worldviews of activists. Many of the groups or organizations that heeded the original call for action embedded within a nebulous narrative will splinter away from the others because of agonistic differences about tactics. Long-term relationships will remain as long as serious conflicts between these people and groups are avoided; the nodes may engage in future dialogue after the dissolution of the temporary protest community, as long as the agonisms do not become antagonisms. At this point, these groups and people constitute a network, connected by communication codes (Castells 1996). Regardless of whether or not a network came into being through the process of mesomobilization, the reach of the network depends on how far communication from an initial node or set of nodes expanded, the number of relationships built through that communication, and whether relationships remained after the rise of any emergent agonisms between nodes. Relationships between groups will remain as long as the nodes share certain communication codes, such as narratives, ideology, goals, or political affiliations. As other groups or people who share these communication codes come into contact, the reach of the network expands. Whenever any nodes make significant changes to these communication codes, they face the possibility of expulsion from the network (Castells 2000).

The second logistical category involves the media that connect the different nodes of a network: What are the means of communication used by the nodes in order to convey information, build relationships, and mobilize resources? How do the nodes engage in the co-creation of communication and meaning? Researchers have focused on face-to-face communication (e.g., Nadel 1957), as well as connections through Internet tools such as weblogs, listservs, and e-mail (e.g., Arquilla and Ronsfeldt 2001; Hiltz and Turoff 1978; Wellman 1988). These earlier lines of research highlight the ways in which nodes sent messages back and forth among themselves and other networks, which reflects the transmission model of communication (see Berlo 1960). This is significant, as network connections were conceptualized in terms of “stickiness,” as described by Henry Jenkins, Sam Ford, and Joshua Green (2013). Stickiness is the notion that transmitted messages that are interesting to audiences (or nodes) stick to them; the passive audience receives the message, and it sticks to them if it applies to them in any way. The concept of stickiness used to be particularly attractive in the days of one-way broadcast communication (e.g.,

television and radio) and at the forefront of early Internet research (e.g., Hiltz and Turoff 1978).

The connections between nodes via media have become much more complicated in the last decade, however, with the advent of social media that allow for more interactivity and intercreativity than previous Internet platforms. Such platforms do not adhere to the transmission model or concept of “stickiness” like older forms of communication; active users of interactive media move information about networks. Van Dijck (2013, 5) discusses how media such as Facebook and YouTube complicate things: “Until the turn of the millennium, networked media were mostly generic services that you could join or actively utilize to build group, but the service itself would not automatically connect you to others. With the advent of Web 2.0, shortly after the turn of the millennium, online services shifted from offering channels for networked communication to becoming interactive, two-way for networked sociality.” Van Dijck notes that different types of interactive media platforms have emerged in recent years; most notably, social media have been used in public debates and the mobilization of public opinion. Such social media include platforms for social networking such as Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter, as well as platforms for sharing media content such as YouTube or Flickr. The emergence of social media and networks based in these two types of platforms has given rise to what Jenkins, Ford, and Green (2013) call “spreadable media.” Essentially, interactive media platforms, such as Facebook or YouTube, do not transmit media content that “sticks” to audiences, as in many of the dominant conceptualizations of media (e.g., Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, and Signorelli 1980). Instead, these platforms enable users to spread ideas, narratives, or images throughout their networks. When people post content to their Facebook profiles or YouTube accounts, the content is visible to all of the other nodes within the network without the initial user “transmitting” it to anyone; ideas that are appealing to others in the network will be reposted or “liked” for other nodes to see both across the network and within other networks. Ideas or images that gain popularity or notoriety are spread; users actively read through and select materials within the network for “liking” or reposting.

The notion of spreadable media is particularly important for the current discussion of activist networks, as contemporary activists increasingly use social media platforms in their endeavors. These platforms have become one of the dominant ways in which individual activists and activist organizations interact and build connections to one another. This is not to say, however, that other modes of interconnection are irrelevant, or that the transmission model that dominated earlier network research should be discounted. Much of the research that focused on face-to-face connections (e.g., Evan 1972; Nadel 1957; Wellman

1988) demonstrated that local networks do utilize (and, indeed, rely upon) face-to-face communication for connections between nodes. My own experiences have helped me to understand the importance of face-to-face communication in modern networks. The key to my early research concerning activism was my ability to gain access to activist organizations, particularly peace and antiwar organizations during the Iraq War era. My access to those organizations proved to be invaluable for recruiting interview participants and engaging in ethnography. Of particular importance was a group that I call Peace Alliance (for purposes of anonymity and confidentiality). The Peace Alliance proved to be exceptional in that the organization operated out of a store called the Peace and Justice Cubbyhole (again, a pseudonym); the Cubbyhole was mostly a book store, but also sold organic foods and fair-labor clothing. Hanging out in the Cubbyhole enabled me to meet people and become noticed by members of the organization in ways that would not have been possible if the group had no such site. In addition, activists affiliated with other organizations in town regularly shopped at the Cubbyhole, thus giving rise to interconnections between different groups that probably wouldn't have happened either. Essentially, the different organizations in that area constituted a local network of activism; the different organizations were nodes through which activists could become involved. The physical site of the Peace and Justice Cubbyhole was an integral part of that network, in that it allowed for the Peace Alliance to become an effective hub for the network. Through the physical site, activists from widely different organizations and critical worldviews were able to meet up and interact; such interactions gave rise to feelings of trust among the activists in the network.

Much of the research concerning contemporary global networks, however, has demonstrated that the interconnections are primarily Internet-based platforms (e.g., Huesca 2001; Van Dijk 2012; Van Dijk 2013). This is not to say that local networks are heavily reliant on face-to-face communication and global networks are entirely online; local networks often rely on listservs and e-mail, while many global networks hold annual conventions or retreats in which activists can meet. However, proximity within a community provides many more opportunities for face-to-face contact between activists, which is not a luxury for those activists within global networks. Overall, most contemporary activist networks, whether local or global, are at least partially online; the question for the researcher is how many of the network interconnections are the result of online platforms and how many occur through face-to-face interactions.

The discussion about media connections provides a nice transition into the final logistical category: level. The concept of level denotes whether an activist

network exists within a single localized community or is connected to a higher global network that spans multiple communities; the concept of level also addresses whether the network is online, offline, or partially online. This logistical category has emerged from research that demonstrates that interconnected organizations can exist at multiple levels (e.g., Atkinson 2010; Huesca 2001; Pickard 2006a; 2006b). I have often observed networks that exist purely within local communities, as well as networks that extend beyond local communities and span the globe. Essentially, there are two levels that best describe a network: The network can be solely local, that is, the network is a collection of organizations or activists within a single community with no expansion beyond that point; or the network can exist at the global level, in which case the network is comprised of several nodes linked around the world. Such global networks are typically interconnected with local networks, as the nodes of the former will make connections with local activists and activist organizations in their immediate vicinity.

Note that the following discussion concerning the two levels of networks focuses primarily on organizations as nodes. This is not to say that individual activists are discounted here or do not exist as nodes within these networks. Individuals do exist within these networks, passing information and narratives to and from the larger organizational nodes. Activists as nodes often serve as citizen journalists contributing news and stories to large organizational websites, and they act as liaisons between the global and local levels as they post information from various organizations onto social media platforms. In many ways, the individual activists as nodes play the crucial role of “spreading” information, narratives, and images across networks; the organizations put those materials out into the network, and the individual activists pick up anything that they find to be relevant. Nevertheless, these networks are typically built from multiple grassroots or international organizations.

Recap 5-1. Logistical Categories of Networks

Category	Type
Reach	The number of relationships fostered between nodes within a particular network, as well as the connections to other networks.
Media	Face-to-face communication. Unidirectional media (e.g., newspaper, radio, television). Interactive (spreadable) media.
Levels	Local networks. Global networks.

Global activist networks are comprised of national and international nodes that have connections into local activist communities. Amnesty International, Indymedia.org, Tea Party Express, and Focus on the Family are organizations that have built connections to other similar global organizations and have established local chapters within communities around the world. The local chapters of these different organizations typically build connections to other organizations (or individual activists as nodes) that share similar worldviews. Because vast distances typically separate nodes in global networks from one another, there is heavy reliance on interactive media platforms; such reliance has led to the all-channel shape (Arquilla and Ronsfeldt 2001; Evan 1972). In other words, global networks include organizations that are often connected to all of the other organizations within the network. If the nodes are not all connected to one another, then there is at least no central hub that controls the interconnected lines of communication; information within these networks is typically free flowing and available to all. Take, for instance, the Tea Party Express, a conservative activist organization that was established in the early days of the presidency of Barack Obama to counter what the activists perceived to be too much government spending. The activists affiliated with the organization described their work in the following way on the Tea Party Express website (www.teapartyexpress.org/contact): “The Tea Party Express came into existence as the tea party movement was awakened by the famous Rick Santelli rant that swept across the country in February of 2009. This power and influence could not be ignored by the political establishment as the grassroots movement exploded onto the scene. Now, after eight national bus tours and several regional tours that housed over 400 rallies, the Tea Party Express has become nationally recognized for making a difference in critical elections.”

The organization established connections with other prominent national Tea Party groups, such as Tea Party Patriots, and launched local chapters around the United States. The connection between the Tea Party Express and its local chapters, as well as with other national groups such as the Tea Party Patriots, represented a global activist network. Essentially, there was not an established hierarchy in which one organization controlled the flow of information within the network. As one organization made declarations or endorsed political candidates, the information was picked up by all of the other nodes in the network. Any node, whether a “parent” organization, or one of the local chapters, was able to put information into the network that had the potential to “spread” to other nodes. This is not to say that the groups in the network were without their differences, as there were reports about tensions between the Tea Party

Express and the Tea Party Patriots. For instance, David Weigel (2009) reported in the *Washington Independent* that Amy Kremer, one of the chief organizers for the Tea Party Express, originally worked with the Tea Party Patriots; according to Weigel, Kremer was forced out of the Patriots because she helped work with the Express on one of their rallies. Essentially, the two organizations disagreed on the level of support for the Republican Party; Tea Party Express worked to help Republicans (even those they disagreed with), while the Tea Party Patriots wanted to challenge any Republicans who did not adhere to a strict conservative vision. These kinds of agonisms are what ultimately keep organizations within a network from merging into a single unit. Such disagreements cannot become too overwhelming, however, or the network will become dysfunctional and dissolve altogether.

Also of note is that global networks sometimes entail particular sets of rules: manifest rules and latent rules. In many ways, global networks are similar to the organizations mentioned in chapter 4; organizations have surface and deep structures. However, the rules within global networks are much more informal as they do not structure the day-to-day routines of activists in the same way as surface and deep structures of organizations; these rules do not establish leadership or perceptions of right and wrong behavior. Because of agonisms that arise between organizations full mergers rarely happen; the rules never become the powerful surface and deep structures noted in chapter 4. For the most part, these rules are grounded in the binary logic of inclusion and expulsion described by Castells (2000). Essentially, if nodes violate the understood communication codes that bring the network together (e.g., ideology, narratives, political affiliations) they will face the strict penalty of being expelled from the network. As global networks tend to be informal, the emergent rules are merely guidelines that help nodes to navigate any problematic agonisms (or even antagonisms). Nevertheless, these rules can often play an important role in some networks. Both rules have best been demonstrated effectively through Pickard's (2006a; 2006b) research on the Indymedia network. Some of the rules that govern the larger Indymedia global network are manifest, while others are latent. Manifest rules are loose sets of regulations that might be established in the early days of the network. These rules essentially lay out the general guidelines, or codes, for how the different nodes will interact and get along with one another. For instance, Pickard (2006b) demonstrates how the Indymedia network uses rules that dictate a consensus decision-making model, in which all of the nodes in the network have to be in agreement concerning important decisions that need to be made. As noted in chapter 2, when the Ford Foundation offered the network a grant of fifty thousand dollars, a consensus had to be reached among the networks about accepting that money. As one organization had ideological

problems with accepting the grant, the network ultimately rejected it. Conversely, latent rules are those unspoken rules, or codes, that develop within a network; these are similar to the deep structures of organization discussed in chapter 4. In another study on the Indymedia network, Pickard (2006a) reveals such latent rules at work in respect to the publishing of activist news through the Indymedia websites. Pickard found that there are different “tyrannies” that affect the publishing of news on the main Indymedia website: rigid ideologies of activists, elites masked by the lack of structure of the network, and tensions associated with vague editorial policies featured on the main website. These tyrannies mirror the problems of the lack of structure discovered by Jo Freeman (1972) in her examination of radical feminist organizations. These tyrannies serve as latent, or unseen, rules within the network that effectively regulate the content ultimately put onto the main Indymedia news site. Unlike deep structures these latent rules did not motivate the actions of activists, but rather influenced the flow of information through the network.

LOCAL ACTIVIST NETWORKS

Local activist networks emerge from the interconnections of individual activists or organizations within a limited geographical region; this region is typically comprised of no more than a single metropolitan area, or a few small cities. Essentially, due to physical proximity and overlapping memberships held by activists across multiple organizations within a region, local networks emerge more organically than those at the global level; familiarity and personal relationships give rise to the interconnections. Unlike global networks that are typically all-channel in form, local networks are usually star shaped. This is due in large part to the connective media that bind the nodes, as many local networks rely heavily on more linear forms of communication; nodes within local networks often utilize face-to-face communication and broadcast forms of media such as community radio, newspapers, and listservs. This is not to say that local networks do not use interactive media platforms, as many activists routinely use social media to keep in contact with other activists in the region. Local networks, however, rely on more than just those interactive media. These star-shaped networks involve a hub connected to several surrounding nodes; the surrounding nodes may have connections to other nearby nodes as well as the hub, but do not usually have connections to all other points in the network. Within this particular form, the hub organization controls much of the information that flows through the network. Most of the information moves one way—from the hub to all of the connected organizations. If peripheral organizations desire to make information available to the rest of the nodes in the

network, the information typically must first pass through the hub; the concept of information transmission and “stickiness” has some relevance at this level.

Of note about local activist networks is the interrelationship between the narrative capacity of the network and the perceived distance between the organizations that are experienced by activists within the network. Both of these concepts emerged from research conducted by myself (Atkinson 2009b; 2010) and in collaboration with Laura Cooley (Atkinson and Cooley 2010). Narrative capacity refers to the ability of the network to effectively circulate narratives and information to different nodes. Typically, local networks rely on one or two media that are widely recognized and used by most activists in the region in order to distribute information between nodes, in addition to personal relationships and face-to-face contact; the hub at the center of the star network often manages and maintains these media. Integral to narrative capacity is whether the other nodes within the network actually know how to use and read the media managed by the hub: Do activists fully understand how the media is accessed? Do they understand how to make use of that media? Are they aware of all of the different media that the hub organization uses? These may seem to be simple questions, but if there is any confusion or misunderstanding on the part of peripheral nodes of the network, there can be negative consequences for cooperation and coordinated resistance, such as protests or demonstrations. If all of the different nodes thoroughly understand how to access and use media managed by the hub, then the network has a high degree of narrative capacity; the different nodes work together and engage in actions effectively. If there is confusion among the different nodes about the media managed by the hub, then there can be drastic breakdowns in trust across the network.

One of my past research projects focuses on two local networks and shows the differences regarding narrative capacity: (a) the Peace Alliance mentioned earlier—which operated out of a store, the “Peace and Justice Cubbyhole,” where many of the activists met and interacted face to face—and (b) the Olive Branch Association (OBA), which I researched later in a different part of the country. The OBA activists did not exhibit the same feelings of trust for other organizations in the local area. In part, such distrust arose because of the hub organization of the network: the OBA did not have a physical site that was open to outsiders. The OBA had an office in a building that was located in one of the harder-to-reach parts of the city; no one from other organizations ever visited that site. Hence, there was very little interaction between the activists from different organizations; each organization felt that they had to fend for themselves in the world. In addition, both networks utilized a one-way listserv managed by the hub, which could only be used by the leaders of those organizations. I found that in the first network all of the activists affiliated with the different nodes understood that the listserv worked this way, and thus the dif-

ferent activists worked well with the Peace Alliance. In the other network, activists mistakenly thought that all could use the listserv; when people could not put information onto the listserv, there was distrust of the OBA. The first network had high narrative capacity, whereas the second demonstrated low narrative capacity.

Narrative capacity ultimately impacts activists' perceptions of closeness or distance from the hub (Atkinson and Cooley 2010). In our collaborative research, Cooley and I found that high narrative capacity allows for narratives and information to pass efficiently through the network. This ensures that vital information about proposed demonstrations, protests, and other such activist events is spread throughout the network. In addition to such information, narratives about what happened at various activist events, as well as news stories from global activist sources (e.g., Amnesty International) can be passed along through the network. We discovered that the effective circulation of information and narratives helps to produce a perception among activists in the network that they are physically "close" to the hub, which stems from feelings of trust among the nodes. That is to say, there is a perception of closeness to the hub of the network when narrative capacity is high. Conversely, low narrative capacity can lead to a perception among the nodes of greater "distance" from the hub. When activists in the network do not fully understand how to access or use any media that is used to circulate information and narratives, distrust or frustration with the hub can emerge. Such feelings can create a gulf between the peripheral nodes and the hub, which is perceived as a physical distance. This is particularly problematic as those peripheral nodes rely on the hub for their connection to all of the other nodes in the network.

Effective narrative capacity and perceived closeness to any hub organization are essentially the glue that holds a local network together. Without high narrative capacity, activists affiliated with different nodes within the network feel distant from the hub; they may distrust the hub or view any leadership associated with a hub as unreliable. Ultimately, all of this can be problematic for the mesomobilization described by Best (2005), as well as the co-performance of resistance illustrated by my own research (Atkinson 2010). Whenever there is distrust or frustration with the hub, activists have little incentive to become involved in protests or actions that are called for by the hub. In the network with high narrative capacity that Cooley and I investigated, all of the activists across the entire network respected the Peace Alliance, even if they held different worldviews than the leadership of the organization. Whenever information was put out into the network by that hub organization, activists affiliated with different nodes trusted the information. Whenever the hub called for protests or demonstrations, the other nodes in the network quickly answered the call in the affirmative. In the local network with low narrative capacity, however, we

found “fractures” that hindered the emergence of coordinated resistance by the different nodes in the region. Whenever the OBA called for protests or actions, many activists questioned the motivations for such a call. In many cases, nodes ignored the calls for action altogether.

Activist networks are comprised of their reach, levels, and connective media. These three logistical categories are intertwined, as the type of media can often influence the reach; the reach of the network, in turn, can influence the levels at which the network exists. The reach of the network entails the number of nodes and the interconnections between those nodes. The broader the reach of the network, the more likely it is that the network exists at multiple levels. In addition, the logistical concepts of organizations noted in chapter 2 (worldview of activists, organizational structure) are integral for the conceptualization of those networks that are comprised of organizations as the primary nodes. Those organizations in the network that have strong surface structures are more likely to build connections to other organizations and thus become part of wide-spanning networks. Organizations that have little in the way of surface structure, such as the Church of Stop Shopping, cannot effectively build connections—not because they do not fit within a network, but because they may not be able to build connections to many other organizations. Such organizations become nodes within networks that are narrow in terms of reach and do not effectively connect at the global level.

Overall, global and local networks are important sites in which activism can be observed and studied. Much of the research within this site has focused on, and been constrained by, the different logistical categories noted earlier. The question for the qualitative researcher is how to approach the research site? In many ways, the study of networks is similar to the cross-section approach to the study of organizations discussed in chapter 4, as networks are often comprised of a multitude of nodes (whether individual activists or organizations). With that in mind, researchers can approach the network from the outside, or they may explore it from within. The external approach to the study of networks has typically been accomplished by researchers through the use of qualitative content analysis of media texts such as zines, newspapers, listservs, Facebook profiles, and YouTube videos to name just a few. Research of activist networks from within has been accomplished with the help of interviews and focus groups, ethnographic fieldwork, as well as qualitative content analysis. Many of the issues described in chapter 4—such as recruitment e-mails and interview questions used by DeTurk (2011)—also pertain to the internal approach whenever researchers are exploring organizations that are nodes of an activist networks; there is significant overlap between these research sites. The following sections explore the ways in which specific qualitative methods have

been carried out and highlight good practices for researchers as they engage in their own qualitative investigations of activist networks.

THE EXTERNAL APPROACH TO ACTIVIST NETWORKS

Researchers who have engaged in the external approach to networks have typically relied on qualitative content analysis as the primary means to accomplish their goals. When using this approach, researchers are essentially on the outside looking inward at the communication and communicative actions of activists within their network; such communication within a network constitutes a text ripe for examination and analysis. It makes sense that researchers rely on textual analysis rather than interview data or observations from participant observation; on the outside, the opportunities to recruit and interact with activists do not exist. Texts become the means by which researchers can effectively gauge issues such as reach, connective media, or levels. There are definite limitations to this approach, as researchers rely solely on their own reading and observations of the texts under analysis; without interviews or fieldwork it can be difficult to verify or corroborate data. However, the external approach enables researchers to quickly and efficiently scour an entire network within a relatively short period of time; in fact, it is quite possible for researchers to examine multiple intertwining and overlapping activist networks. In contrast, the internal approach, discussed shortly, does not allow for such a broad scope within a similarly constrained time period.

Research by Russell (2005), Liesbet Van Zoonen, Farida Vis, and Sabina Mihelj (2010), Melissa Loudon (2010), and Harlow (2011) provides good examples of the external approach to the study of singular networks, or networks with a single hub. David Zimbra, Hsinchun Chen, and Ahmed Abassi (2010) expand on these projects and demonstrate ways in which researchers can observe and explore multiple networks or where network hubs intersect. Russell's research explores the ways in which different websites and online media helped to structure relationships within the Zapatista network (see chapter 4). Ultimately, the analysis of these texts helped to demonstrate different myths that were circulated by nodes in the network: the noble savage, a romanticized vision of Subcomandante Marcos, and neoliberalism as an evil beast. Taken together, these myths structured the ways in which different nodes interacted and thus held important implications for the formation of identity within the network. Van Zoonen, Vis, and Mihelj look at activist vlogging networks on YouTube that emerged after the release of the anti-Islamic film *Fitna* in 2008. Produced by Geert Wilders, a member of the Dutch Parliament, the

film intertwines verses of the Quran with footage of terrorist acts to portray Islam as violent and fanatical. Responses to the film quickly emerged on YouTube; many activists decried the negative portrayal, while others voiced their support. The emergent network stood as a clash between different nodes. When analyzing the YouTube vlog posts, the researchers noted different performances of citizenship: apologies to Muslims for the work of Wilder, deconstruction of the anti-Islamic message, parodies and satire, and testimonials about the peaceful or violent nature of Islam. Loudon's research explored the activist network that emerged from the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC) in South Africa; the campaign was focused primarily on raising awareness about HIV/AIDS, as well as providing medical aid to afflicted people. The network was comprised of a hub organization that served as the national headquarters, along with several branch organizations around the country. Essentially, Loudon's analysis of texts enabled her to demonstrate the role of different ICTs in accomplishing different goals for the network. Specifically, her research shows that interactive media platforms and mobile phones were an integral component of mobilization in the network, while Internet tools such as e-mail and mailing lists were essential for expanding the reach of the network and connecting the global to the local. Harlow explores the role of Facebook in the construction of an activist network in Guatemala and across Central America and focuses on activists' efforts following the murder of Guatemalan lawyer Rodrigo Rosenberg, who blamed his demise on the president of Guatemala in a posthumously released video. The content of the video angered many in the region and led to the creation of Facebook profiles, fan pages, and groups that featured Rosenberg; the platform was essentially used by these activists to call for investigations into the lawyer's death, as well as the resignation of the president. Through her analysis of Facebook sites, Harlow demonstrates that the commentaries posted by readers on profiles were framed in such a way to prompt other activists to "like" the effort so that word concerning this issue would spread; "liking" the comments allowed for the reach of the network to expand.

These three projects provide insight into two vital steps for carrying out qualitative content analysis in the external approach: the generation of representative samples and modes of analysis. The research conducted by Van Zoonen, Vis, and Mihelj addresses the first of these steps: the qualitative content analysis of videos uploaded to YouTube from February to May 2008 and their corresponding vlogs. The researchers were able to effectively generate a representative sample of these vlogs that was both large and manageable. This is particularly important as nodes within networks (organizations and individuals alike) can often generate thousands of observable texts through commentaries, blog posts, websites, and images. Their initial keyword search

concerning the film *Fitna* on YouTube returned 6,000 results; this number was far too large for an efficient analysis. Part of the problem was due to the fact that many videos uploaded by YouTube users are actually “double-counts,” or videos that are uploaded by multiple users; hence, a single video appears in a keyword search several times. To counter this problem, the researchers used multiple keywords to conduct the search, such as “Fitna Wilders” or “Fitna Muslim.” This cut the number of returns to 1,400; a smaller number, but still not manageable. Van Zoonen, Vis, and Mihelj solved the problem with the aid of Mike Thelwall of the Statistical Cybermetrics Research Group in the United Kingdom. Working with Thelwall the researchers developed an e-research tool called Webometric Analyst, which is free and available for download through the Statistical Cybermetrics Research Group website (<http://lexiurl.wlv.ac.uk>). This e-research tool prevented double-counts by coding all of the data that emerged for country of origin, date of upload, and other factors that were registered by the person who uploaded a video; the program focuses on users as well as other factors such as keywords or how frequently a site is accessed. In a separate research proceeding in which Webometric Analyst was used, Mike Thelwall, Pardeep Sud, and Farida Vis (2011, 6) note the following about this approach to searching for web content: “This method produces lists of users rather than lists of videos, however, and is very resource-intensive because it needs to cover a high proportion of the network of users to avoid biases caused by the snowball-type method used . . . it produces unknown proportions of popular and unpopular videos and so matches neither the videos viewed by users nor the videos posted by users.” This is not to say that the researchers were not searching for keywords by using this program, but rather expanding the parameters of the search so as to filter double-counted videos. In addition to user-oriented parameters associated with the Webometrics program, the researchers also used time parameters in their keyword search; they searched only for those keyword combinations within the months of February, March, April, and May 2008, which were the months following the release of the film on YouTube. The search for keyword combinations within these time parameters, along with the use of Webometrics, generated 776 videos for analysis, which was considerably more manageable than the 6,000 videos from the initial search.

Russell in her work on the Zapatista network identity uses an inductive qualitative content analysis of a variety of online media, while Loudon’s uses deductive analysis in her research concerning TAC websites. Russell examined seven subscriber listservs that were used to circulate information about the Zapatistas, as well as “thousands” of websites dedicated to covering the Zapatista movement and autonomous communities; the nodes in this network were individuals acting independently, as well as organizations dedicated to aiding the

Zapatistas. The listservs that she examined were: Chiapas-L, Chiapas95, EZLN-info, Jovenes and Jovenes-d, Peacenet, Zap e-mail, and Zapatismo. The messages disseminated from these six listservs provided links and references to all of the other “thousands” of websites that were also included in Russell’s analysis. Essentially, the listservs and websites stood as the lines of communication that interconnected the different nodes of this all-channel global network. The qualitative content analysis was inductive in nature, as Russell let categories emerge from the texts under examination. In her research, she utilized Barthes’s (1972; 1977) concept of myth and its relation to narrative, as well as different narrative components (e.g., characters, settings), to guide her close reading of the texts and construct categories. Russell moved through listserv postings and websites noting different narrative components within each. She was then able to take all of the different narrative components that had been identified and compare them to one another. As she sorted through the different narrative components, recording similarities and differences among them, three categorical myths began to emerge; the different ways in which the narrative components were utilized across the various texts gave rise to these categories. These myths were the dominant portrayals of the Zapatistas and their community circulated among the nodes of the network. In contrast, Loudon engaged in a deductive qualitative content analysis, in which concepts were utilized as a framework for the study of texts. In her research, Loudon examined the TAC websites, as well as documents produced by the national organization and local chapters. Once she had collected all of the texts produced by those nodes for her research, she employed the comparative framework of social movement theories (see McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald 1996) as a lens through which she examined each in turn. The concept of comparative framework of social movements states that there are three theoretical perspectives for understanding social movement media: the mobilization of resources (i.e., gaining monetary contributions), opportunity structures (i.e., connections to political systems), and the framing of processes (i.e., shaping an understanding of the world). Loudon used this concept as she read through the texts; she identified key information that passed through the network and determined whether the information fit into one of the three predetermined categories noted above. This enabled her to identify the media platforms utilized to relay different kinds of information (mobilization of resources, opportunity structures, or framing) within the network of TAC organizations. The key difference between the work of Russell and Loudon is that the first used theory to guide the reading and allowed categories to emerge directly from the text, while the second applied three categories to the text and sorted elements out into them.

Harlow’s qualitative content analysis of activists’ Facebook profiles in support of Rodrigo Rosenberg was more elaborate than the analyses conducted by

Russell and Loudon. In this case, Harlow engaged in multiple deductive analyses of all of the texts and also utilized an inductive analysis. In order to conduct each of these analyses, she enlisted the aid of four bilingual coders who engaged in readings of the texts with her. The group read through the texts and compared their categorization of different comments posted on the profiles; such comparison allowed for the establishment of intercoder reliability. In terms of the deductive analysis, the group applied the concept of collective action frames (see Gerhards and Rucht 1992), as well as thematic frames (see Matthes 2009; Noakes and Johnston 2005) to guide their readings of the texts; both of these concepts had been established in past literature concerning activist media. In the first deductive application, Harlow and the coders searched through comments that had been posted on Facebook profiles and placed them into one of three collective action frames that had been developed in past research: “diagnostic (How did the comment define the problem?), prognostic (What solutions were suggested?) or motivational (Was the comment a call to arms or motivating?)” (Harlow 2012, 232). As they combed through the texts, they read each comment on the Facebook profiles and determined the action that they seemed to convey; comments were categorized according to one of the collective action frames. For the second deductive application, the group reexamined the texts in order to place activists’ commentary within different thematic frames: “An agency frame (related to participating or inciting action), a values frame (related to high-level abstraction of ideals of justice, democracy, national security, patriotism, familial safety, or good of the community), an adversarial frame (portraying the movement as good versus evil, or specifying heroes and villains), a reflective frame (related to discussions of antecedents, consequences, or media coverage), or other” (ibid.).

The process in this second deductive analysis progressed in the same manner as the first. That is, the concept of thematic frames was used as a lens to read and examine the text. The group categorized each profile commentary related to Rodrigo Rosenberg as one of the four thematic frames. Once Harlow and the coders had completed the coding, comparisons were made concerning the categorization of Facebook comments; Holsti’s formula was calculated, which revealed an intercoder reliability of 90 percent. Both of these deductive analyses allowed for Harlow to pinpoint the ways in which the activists made use of Facebook within this network. In addition to the deductive analysis, they also engaged in inductive analysis of the postings. Essentially, she used one of the guiding research questions for the study as a frame for searching through the texts once more: what kind of material ultimately emerged from the Facebook postings by activists? This approach called for the researcher to compare and contrast different postings, ultimately building categories that defined what meanings and topics were embedded within. In this way, Harlow was able to

demonstrate eight categories that emerged from her analysis of the comments posted on the Facebook profiles by activists: protest-related material, antipresident and antigovernment comments, requests to sign petitions, discussions about media coverage, calls for justice, calls for solidarity with Guatemala, and materials related to Facebook among other types of comments. Overall, the multiple qualitative content analyses in the project provided Harlow with a comprehensive view of how activists made use of Facebook within this network.

In addition, the external approach to the study of activist networks can also help scholars to explore hub-to-hub interconnections, or intersections between different activist networks. In their research concerning websites and interconnected activist groups, Zimbra, Chen, and Abassi (2010) developed a form of network analysis that can aid in mapping networks and observing where network hubs intersect; they termed this method “cyber-archaeology.” This method for content analysis was demonstrated in their research concerning violent anti-Western activism in the Middle East; specifically, they explored websites used by activists to disseminate information about the construction of improvised exploding devices (IEDs). The research not only illustrated a large network of websites for the circulation of technical information about the construction of IEDs, but also found three separate hubs that were interconnected by different websites. Essentially, they noted that there were three stages involved in this process of cyber-archaeology: social movement research design, collection and classification of artifacts, and visualization and analysis of the network. The first stage involves intensive research concerning a particular social movement and identification of key groups. In addition, this stage requires that the researcher identify important online texts that are utilized by these groups. The second stage of cyber-archaeology requires that the researcher pull together a body of texts from the key groups and classify them. Researchers can use preexisting theories or categories to code the texts, or they may develop categories that are specific to their research. Essentially, these first two stages are similar to the processes of qualitative content analysis described earlier in this chapter.

The third stage of cyber-archaeology involves both building a map of all of the different artifacts (typically websites or other web materials) and then illustrating the links between them. During the first part of this stage, the researcher looks at the intensity of communication associated with different classifications of artifacts. Intensity can entail looking at the number of times the artifact was accessed, the frequency of commentary, or the scope of artifacts. In their research, Zimbra, Chen, and Abassi (2010, 64) looked at the number of pages for websites about IEDs in order to help establish intensity: “These site maps are indicative of the communication patterns of the participants, showing where within their virtual community these issues are being discussed and

specific IED-related resources mobilized.” Essentially, this provides insight into which artifacts interest activists more, or shows those artifacts that are used more often. In order to accomplish this task, the researcher can build one map with all of the artifacts laid out. Color-coding or numbers can be used to indicate classification of the artifacts and intensity; such was the case in Zimbra, Chen, and Abassi’s research, as they color-coded websites according to classifications and used numbers to indicate intensity of those sites. The next part of this stage entails demonstrating the connections between artifacts and effectively making a network (and interconnections between networks) visible. Zimbra, Chen, and Abassi looked at the hyperlinks on websites to determine if there were connections between sites; in their map they drew lines between different nodes so as to represent connections between different IED-related websites. In addition to links to websites, researchers can also look for common references or citations in order to demonstrate connections that exist between artifacts. Adding these lines to the classified artifacts helps to illustrate interconnections between nodes and demonstrates what types of resources are shared. These lines also help to demonstrate how resources move from one network to another.

Ultimately, qualitative content analysis has proven integral in the external approach to the study of activist networks. The examples reviewed here provide insight about the generation of representative samples from enormous bodies of texts, as well as ways in which deductive and inductive analysis can be used to uncover meanings and topics within texts. In reference to the first, Van Zoonen, Vis, and Mihelj’s research is important as it provides some ideas about how to collect representative samples when dealing with interactive media platforms (e.g., YouTube, Facebook, Twitter), which can spawn enormous amounts of texts produced by a multitude of users in short amounts of time. The research of Russell, Loudon, and Harlow provides insight about how to actually conduct analysis of texts whenever they are finally identified and collected. This is not to say that other methods are not useful; indeed, multiple methods can help to supplement the qualitative content analysis and offset the limitations noted earlier in this section. Harlow engaged in survey interviews with four creators of the Facebook profiles that addressed the murder of Rodrigo Rosenberg; the interviews enabled her to build a better understanding of the types of activists who were engaged in this networking activity. In addition, Loudon was able to engage in participant observations regarding the connections between TAC and a group called Cell-Life, an organization to which she had some connections; her observation of encounters between Cell-Life and the TAC network enabled her to see ICTs in action. However, these methods were supplemental, at best, as they did not provide additional insight into the networks, but rather helped to corroborate findings from the textual

Recap 5-2. External Approach to the Study of Activist Networks

- Is useful for examinations of interconnections across large networks, as well as interconnections between networks.
- Uses qualitative content analysis as the primary method.
- Cyber-archaeology can be used to provide insight into interconnections between multiple activist networks.

analysis. In short, supplemental qualitative methods can (and even should) be used as a means for verifying findings that emerge from the primary content analysis of websites, videos, social networking profiles, and other interconnections within networks.

THE INTERNAL APPROACH TO ACTIVIST NETWORKS

Research that takes the approach of exploring activist networks from within has typically relied heavily on interviews, focus groups, and ethnographic practices such as participant observation. This internal approach enables researchers to explore and examine networks in the same way that they might study organizations (see chapter 4); essentially, researchers can perform a focused or cross-section examination. In cases of a focused examination, researchers typically employ the use of participant observation or other forms of fieldwork in order to thoroughly explore and describe one or two nodes within a network. While closely observing (or working with) one or two nodes, researchers can fully discern interconnections to other nodes by way of reach and level. Conversely, researchers can also examine a cross-section of nodes within a network; such a mode of research does not garner as much detailed information about specific nodes, but it provides insight about reach and level across an entire network. Overall, the first mode of research provides rich detail about a few nodes, while the latter allows for expansive information about an entire network (or multiple networks).

Projects by Theresa Petray (2011), Natalie Fenton and Veronica Barassi (2011), Clarissa David (2013), and Cooley and myself (Atkinson and Cooley 2010) all serve as solid examples of this approach to activist networks. My work with Cooley explores the ways in which activist interactions and alternative media affected the shape of local networks. We examined two different networks in different parts of the United States and assessed the communication between activists, as well as the modes of communication between different organizations in the communities. Essentially, we demonstrate that both networks relied heavily on some alternative media (in the form of listservs

within both sites) to coordinate all of the different organizational nodes; the organization that maintained the mediated platform in each case was considered to be the hub of the network. In one network, all of the activists fully understood how to operate and take part in using the platform, so they perceived the hub to be fair; the network took on the shape of a symmetrical star. In the other network, there was a lot of confusion about how the mediated platform was operated, so the hub was perceived as deceptive; the network took on an elongated star shape as many nodes described a sense of distance from the hub. Petray's research explored the use of Internet-based platforms, such as e-mail and Facebook, in a local aboriginal rights network in Townsville, Queensland, in Australia; in particular, Petray worked closely with the Townsville Indigenous Human Rights Group (TIHRG). The activists in Townsville worked to raise awareness about the stark gaps between aboriginal people in Australia and the dominant white population; aborigines suffer from lower life expectancies, education, and incomes. Activists had worked to address these issues for decades, but had most recently adopted Internet-based platforms to aid in their endeavors. Petray demonstrates that such interactive media allowed for more expansive networks, as well as opportunities for those networks to make their case to state agencies and the general public. However, the use of Internet-based platforms as a primary form of networking within a local community also held negative implications, as attendance at demonstrations and marches declined significantly; the online networking stood in for actions in physical sites. Fenton and Barassi's research also explores Internet-based platforms, but focuses on a global network that spanned Great Britain. Specifically, they explored the role of Facebook and Twitter by the Cuba Solidarity Campaign (CSC), an organization strongly aligned with labor organizations around the United Kingdom. Essentially, the CSC works to build bridges between Cuban workers and trade unions, as well as labor activists, across the British Isles. In recent years, the group established a Facebook profile and Twitter feed so that they could circulate information more efficiently, as well as expand their network as activists joined or "liked" the group. Fenton and Barassi noted, however, that this mode of networking was somewhat problematic for CSC, as much of the information that was contributed by activists through these platforms was self-centered and self-promotion. That is, activists who made use of the CSC Facebook and Twitter feed did not contribute important information or narratives about Cuba or trade unions, but rather info about themselves to bolster their own reputation or image. In contrast, David's research explores the ways in which interactive media platforms have helped activists to become more politically engaged. David examined the use of ICTs by young people in the Philippines; she did not focus on a specific set of activist groups that made up this particular net-

work, nor a network that addressed any particular issues. Instead, she looked at Filipino youth who had maintained some form of activism, online or off, over time. This enabled her to examine the ways in which ICTs, such as social networking sites and mobile phones, allowed for the emergence of politically engaged networks among youth. The research ultimately demonstrated that the use of such interactive media gave rise to more connections between activists and subsequently lead to increased political activity and digital forms of political engagement.

The research projects noted in this section are important as they provide insights into both the focused exploration of specific nodes and cross-section examination of nodes across entire networks. Fenton and Barassi's research, as well as Petray's, are examples of the focused exploration of specific nodes, as these projects explore one single organization (and its local chapters spread out throughout the country) within a larger network. In both of these instances, the researchers relied heavily on participant observations that were supplemented by additional qualitative methods. In the case of Fenton and Barassi, the researchers explored a set of related nodes and their interconnections with trade unions and political parties across the United Kingdom; their focused examination provides detailed insight into the reach, level, and media of CSC organizations. To achieve their goals, Fenton and Barassi underwent an all-encompassing yearlong ethnography that entailed participant observation, informal interviews with CSC activists, and qualitative content analysis of media prepared by the CSC. The participant observation was most important, as it put the researchers in the middle of events that connected the CSC to other organizations: "The 1-year-long ethnographic project involved volunteering on a daily basis in the national office of the CSC, participating in trade union conferences and events, and following CSC members and organizations to social gatherings and activities in a variety of different ethnographic spaces" (Fenton and Barassi 2011, 184). This enabled Fenton and Barassi to witness and experience the interactions and relationships that constituted the reach of the CSC to local chapters, as well as other global organizations and nodes. The participant observation allowed them to witness events and face-to-face interactions between CSC members and activists from trade unions and political parties, as well as take part in those interactions. More importantly, they had access to the Facebook profile and Twitter feed and were able to witness the activists use the information circulated by those platforms in offline face-to-face interactions. As they worked with the interactive media of the organization, they were in an excellent position to receive feedback from activists concerning messages and formatting of interactive platforms, as well as observe how people discussed those items at meetings or in less formal conversations. Overall, the participant observation allowed for a deep, rich understanding of

different media used to establish and maintain the reach of the node into the network at multiple levels.

The other aspects of Fenton and Barassi's ethnography, informal interviews and qualitative content analysis, were utilized to supplement the information that the researchers gleaned from their work among the CSC activists and observations of the organization; this approach enabled them to uncover elements related to reach, level, and media that were not easily observable or involved in the Internet-based interactions and organizational events in which they took part. The participant observations allowed for informal interviews to emerge organically. The frequency of their attendance at organizational events and social gatherings enabled them to build a rapport with CSC activists at the national headquarters and local chapters, as well as with some members of the trade unions with which the CSC was connected. Overall, thirty-seven activists engaged in the interviews, which were postmodern in nature. The questions that Fenton and Barassi asked during the course of these interviews typically focused on the participants' history of activism and life within the CSC. The information from these informal interviews helped the researchers to understand the context of many of the interactions that they observed taking place throughout the network, as well as the use of the Facebook profile and Twitter feed by activists. Their qualitative content analysis explored media produced by the CSC national organization, as well as the local chapters. Essentially, Fenton and Barassi examined the magazine published by the organization (*CubaSi*), websites developed by the main organization and local chapters, e-mail listservs, and the newly launched Facebook profile and Twitter feed. Their analysis is inductive in nature, as the researchers worked through the texts in close readings searching for themes and concepts that helped them to address their guiding research questions. In this way, themes within the different forms of media emerged that provided additional insight into the use of social media and other interactive media platforms in the reach of the network.

In the case of Petray's research, the focus was on one organization within a local network and its connection to other organizations. The research was accomplished through the use of participant observation. In this case, Petray engaged in participatory activism (see chapter 4); essentially, she worked alongside the activists of TIHRG to raise awareness about the plight of many of the aboriginal people of Australia and advocated on their behalf. In this particular case, Petray attended meetings and events that were organized by TIHRG between 2007 and 2009; the meetings were a safe space in which activists from different organizations, as well as concerned citizens, came together to discuss problems and solutions in the region. In addition, Petray also traveled to different communities close to Townsville and visited organizations that were similar to TIHRG (e.g., Palm Island, Ingram). Her involvement in TIHRG

meetings and events (as well as her visits to nearby communities and organizations) allowed her to observe activists interacting; it also gave rise to informal interviews that emerged organically from her proximity to the group. Such interviews followed a postmodern format and focused on networking, the use of different media, and each activist's involvement in protests and other actions. As in the case of Fenton and Barassi, the observations and informal interviews with activists provided Petray with insight into the interconnections between TIHRG and other nodes in this local network. Overall, the focused examination of the one node allowed for a thorough understanding about how Internet-based platforms affected participation of activists within their own corner of the network.

In the case of David and my own research alongside Cooley, the researchers engaged in cross-section examinations of nodes across one or more networks. These projects employed interviews and focus groups in order to collect data about multiple nodes. I engaged in postmodern interviews with activists across two local networks in the United States. Essentially, these networks were comprised of organizations that were dedicated to peace and justice and staged several protests against the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan; these networks were interconnected by different alternative media platforms, such as listservs and activist-produced newspapers. In each site, I engaged in snow-ball sampling to recruit activists for postmodern interviews; I asked each participant whether they knew other activists in the region who they thought would be willing to engage in the one-hour interview process, regardless of organizational affiliation or the focus of their activism. This enabled Cooley and I to collect a significant cross-section of each network; twenty-seven activists were identified and interviewed in one site, twenty in the other. Overall, these activists were affiliated with numerous nodes across both local networks; the interviews addressed a variety of topics:

The interviews allowed the activists in the research to describe their opinions about social justice and corporations (e.g., Has enough been done by the local government to reform corporations?), their opinions about new social movement networks (e.g., Do you see any collaborative efforts between social justice organizations? If so, provide examples), their role in new social movement networks (e.g., Tell me about the social justice organizations of which you are a member), their interactions with other activists (e.g., Do you ever interact with alternative media producers in Erie City?), and their use of alternative media (e.g., Do you use any alternative media sources? If so, what are the titles of those sources?). (Atkinson and Cooley 2010, 327)

The questions that were asked of the different activists were general enough to allow for the weaving of narratives about two particular things: the nodes of the network and the media that was used to interconnect nodes. Overall, these questions provided insight about the reach of the network, as well as the connective media used to bind the networks.

David's research similarly recruited a wide array of activists across a network of Filipino youth activists. The activists were contacted via e-mail and social networking sites and in face-to-face discussions. Rather than relying on interviews, as in the case noted earlier, David also engaged in focus groups with some of the participants. Essentially, she collected two different types of participants for the research: activists who were heavily involved in politics and nonactivists who had described their political engagement as "normal." In the case of the first, she approached political bloggers, members of regional activist organizations, and university-based political organizations. Overall, twenty-nine activists engaged in survey interviews in which they were asked about their use of ICTs to communicate with other activists and collect news, as well as information about their participation in activist and political events. The nonactivists were recruited from university classes and asked to take part in a study that involved discussion about political activities. The students who offered to take part in the research were split into eight focus groups, with a total of eighty-seven participants overall; the focus groups utilized the same survey questions that were asked of activists in the interviews. The use of interviews coupled with focus groups illustrates the different types of media and news information that were used or consumed by the different participants in the study. More importantly, these methods of research allowed for the collection of perspectives and knowledge grounded in different distinct positions, which provided additional insight into the reach, levels, and media related to the network. The interviews enabled David to thoroughly illustrate the use of media by the activists and to gain insight into the reach and connective media within these networks. The focus groups enabled her to collect broad data about individuals who were not politically motivated or involved in the same ways as the activists; data from both sets provided an excellent opportunity to compare and contrast activists and nonactivists.

Overall, the internal approach to the study of activist networks connects to many of the lessons conveyed in chapter 4. Essentially, researchers may engage in a focused examination of a few nodes within a network, or look at a cross-section of an entire network. Many of the pros and cons, benefits, and limitations covered in the previous chapter for both approaches easily apply here as well. The focused examination of one or two nodes within a network can tell much about how those nodes establish and maintain reach, but less about the

Recap 5-3. Internal Approach to the Study of Activist Networks

- Makes it possible to engage in a focused or cross-section examination from within the network:
 - Focused research reveals establishment and maintenance of reach by specific nodes.
 - Cross-section research demonstrates the interconnection of nodes.
- Relies on ethnographic methods and interviews.

concept of reach across the entire network (or across multiple levels). The cross-section examination within a network can illustrate much about the expanse of a network and how the nodes are interconnected, but provide less insight about activists' work maintaining such interactions. Despite these limitations, the internal approach provides a first-hand view into activist networks, which accounts for a more accurate picture of reach, level, and connective media than what can come from the external approach. Researchers can tap into the knowledge and experience of activists who are deeply involved in the flow of information and communication between nodes; researchers may even experience this flow for themselves.

SUMMARY

This chapter defines the research site of activist networks in terms of three key logistical categories that have emerged in past research: reach, connective media, and level. These three categories are not the only characteristics that are associated with activist networks. Lateral rules, narrative capacity, and the perceptions of physical closeness or distance can all arise as important components as well. The key logistical categories are present within all networks, however, and are intricately intertwined. Without reach or connective media, networks simply do not exist at any level. As qualitative researchers formulate their research questions and research design, they will need to take into account these three categories, as well as the other concepts mentioned here.

The chapter also explores different qualitative methods that have typically been employed in the study of activist networks. Essentially, there are two approaches that can be taken in order to conduct research within this site: the external and internal approaches. The external approach can be more efficient of the two, particularly when time is a significant constraint for the researcher. In this approach, the researcher can engage in qualitative content analysis of documents produced by different nodes in a network in order to get a basic understanding of the reach, connective media, and extent to different levels. The internal approach to the study of activist networks can prove to be much

more time consuming and typically does not allow for as broad a view of a network as the external approach. Nevertheless, qualitative researchers who have used participatory observation, interviews, and focus groups have had success in creating rich detailed descriptions of specific nodes within activist networks.

Ultimately, any of the methods covered in chapter 3 can be used to explore activist networks. Rhetorical criticism could be used to accomplish the external approach, and ethnographic narrative excavation could be used for the internal approach (within certain parameters). The methods noted in this chapter have been used most often in qualitative inquiries concerning activist networks and have proven to be useful in gathering data and building on literature. Researchers have had considerable success using the methods detailed in this chapter to make significant contributions to the literature concerning activism.

Activist Events

This chapter explores:

- (1) Activist events shaped by their strategic function: persuasive strategies, provocative strategies, hacktivism.
- (2) How texts can be used to examine and explore activist events.
- (3) A research approach to the study of activist events that uses interviews in conjunction with other qualitative methods.

Events are actions or performances by people within certain contexts shaped by their environment. Research concerning cityscape and landscape has demonstrated the role of the physical environment in shaping the ways in which people act or perform in public (e.g., Mitchell 2000). For instance, Greg Dickinson (1997; 2006) analyzes the ways in which architecture in places such as Pasadena, California, effectively lead peoples' gazes, or sights, within the physical environment. This process impacts the peoples' knowledge about that site and, in turn, shapes their perceptions about right and wrong actions. In the case of Dickinson's research, cities that had experienced drastic changes in their economic situation due to globalization or economic downturns shaped their

physical environment in order to alter the ways in which people moved through those spaces. Pasadena, for instance, had been a waypoint along Route 66 to Los Angeles, where people stopped for the night and ate dinner. With the advent of Interstate 10, the city's finances were drastically reduced. The city government initiated a refurbishing of the downtown area so as to draw the "shoppers gaze" and change movement through the city (Dickinson 1997). The point here is that events, whether they are protests or shopping sprees, do not happen in a vacuum. People exist within expansive environments that shape their knowledge and perceptions, which, in turn, influences their actions and performances.

WHAT ARE ACTIVIST EVENTS?

Over the years, I have found that activist events are not a simple matter. Whenever the topic of activist events comes up, most people typically think about protests and demonstrations. Because of the emphasis on phenomena such as protests and public demonstrations in many investigations regarding social movements, many people often associate events with public displays of resistance. Events typically portrayed in the news and entertainment media have been actions that were designed by activists to draw public attention, causing people to become familiar with such displays; they readily associate such events with social movements and activism. Specifically, people associate the concept of activist events with actions designed to draw the attention of mass media and the public at large; this makes sense as such actions are supposed to raise awareness about social issues or problems. The march on Washington led by Martin Luther King Jr., protests at abortion clinics staged by Operation Rescue, and Glen Beck's Restoring Honor Rally are the kinds of imagery often associated with activist events. However, activist events can be so much more than protests or actions to draw public attention. In many cases, activist events are not aimed at external audiences, but rather at the activists themselves; these events build a sense of community and reinforce commitment to a cause. Some of these events are activities set up by activist organizations so that members have opportunities to interact and build a sense of cohesiveness. Some events are activities set up between different organizations within a network so that people can learn about other activists and the broad reach of the network. Other events allow for activists from different networks to come together and learn from one another. In each of these cases, public and media attention is not the rationale behind the event; community building, outreach to other activists, and building knowledge are the reasons. For instance, activist "tours" of marginalized communities, such as the tours of

“Cancer Alley” described by Pezzullo, play an important role in community building and shaping activists’ knowledge; such events allow for activists to educate one another.

Another good example of events that build community and cohesiveness comes from my own research concerning an anarchist gathering. In 2002 I explored the North American Anarchist Gathering, which was a weekend-long event that did not entail advocacy or conflict, but fostered connections and a sense of community (see Atkinson 2006). The event was organized to be a weekend of interactions, networking, and education for anarchists. The site of the event was made up of several campsites where people slept and lived, while larger canopy shelters were erected to serve as “classrooms.” During the weekend, anarchists could attend workshops in these shelters, which covered a wide variety of topics such as organizing at your place of work, constructive sewing, female self-examinations, Tolstoy and revolution, and bicycle maintenance. The workshops typically entailed instruction and printed materials, with ample of time for discussion. The event was not intended to draw the attention of the public; there was no attempt to persuade people to particular visions about war, corporations or capitalism. Instead, the event was about building community. Such community building is what Bowers and Ochs first called solidification, which is necessary for the production of cohesiveness between members. As such, the North American Anarchist Gathering was an important event that helped anarchists to understand that they were part of a larger community that held particular values and beliefs; they were not alone. In the larger context of anarchist activism, such a meeting did in fact play an enormous role in their advocacy against corporate capitalism and peace. The activists that I encountered at the Gathering were busy circulating fliers and contact information, all of which would be integral to future activist endeavors.

Besides this long-term vision of advocacy, however, the Gathering enabled the activists to see anarchist principles in action. Decision-making for the weekend, dealing with problems among the activists, and celebrating was all conducted within a framework of anarchism that had developed over two centuries. On one night, a group of anarchists became intoxicated and engaged in belligerent behavior toward other people attending the event. The rest of the anarchists met in the morning to discuss how to deal with the unruly interlopers. Potential solutions were constrained by the tenets of anarchism that had been utilized to establish Gathering rules at the beginning of the event: consensus, nonviolence, and solidarity. Different anarchists offered various options, but the one that finally attained the consensus of the group was the notion of direct confrontation. Specifically, it was agreed upon by the collective that the group would hold hands while standing in a circle around the offending anarchists’ tents chanting slogans about nonviolence and soli-

clarity until they left the event. This action (and decision-making process that led to the action) by the collective not only worked to remove problem makers from the event, but also provided an opportunity for the attendees to experience anarchist principles and tenets. By taking part in these activities, the activists were able to develop a strong sense of community and camaraderie. This example in many ways defies typical convention concerning the nature of activist events.

So what is an activist event? In the most straightforward of terms, an activist event is an occasion for activists to come together and engage in some coordinated activity. Such events are usually shaped by the strategic function that they serve for the activists. Bowers and Ochs (1971), Bowers, Ochs, Jensen, and Schulz (2010), DeLuca (1999; 2005), and Windt (1972), among other scholars, have outlined different strategies that can be called activist events; these strategies entail a variety of tactics. Most of these strategies were mentioned in chapter 1 and will be discussed in more detail here. One strategy of agitation is solidification, which is a reference to the community building and cohesiveness that has been noted here. Tactics that fit within the strategy of solidification would be a group coming together to sing protest songs, watch political debates, read poetry, or activist tours to “Cancer Alley” described by Pezzullo (2003; 2007), the Truth Excursions to Zapatista autonomous communities (Atkinson 2009b) and North American Anarchist Gathering (Atkinson 2006) from my own research.

Aside from these activities of solidification, scholars have also noted a variety of strategies of agitation that are typically performed in public spaces to draw attention: petition, promulgation, polarization, nonviolent resistance, escalation and confrontation, diatribe, image events, and more. For the purposes of this chapter, I have collapsed these strategies into three groups: persuasive strategies, provocative strategies, and hacktivism. Such groupings of strategies of agitation emerge from significant overlap and similarity between different strategies. The first grouping of strategies entails the presentation of ideas about a particular issue to the public, with the sole intention of persuasion; this category of strategies includes petition, promulgation, polarization, and image events. Petition is the activist endeavor to draw attention to an issue using established means of persuasion; the activists circulate petitions or approach authority figures and make direct requests of them. Promulgation is a strategy employed by activists to win over widespread social support. According to Bowers, Ochs, Jensen and Schulz (2010, 23): “Among the tactics employed in this strategy are exploitation of mass media, use of technology, use of the Internet, informational picketing, erection of posters, use of bumper stickers, painting messages in prominent locations, distribution of handbills and leaflets, and mass protest meetings.”

The strategy of promulgation is closer to typical conceptualizations of activist events, as tactics entail protests, demonstrations, picket lines, and other such means of drawing support. The strategy of polarization focuses on forcing people to make a choice between the activists who seek to create some kind of change, or supporting the maintenance of the status quo. Essentially, the activists use tactics that will illuminate an issue in ways that will not allow any audience or viewers among the public to stay neutral or ambivalent. For instance, pro-life activists often used language and imagery that equated abortion with murder; this enabled witnesses to pro-life protests or messages were hard-pressed to take a neutral stance. Who could support murder? Such individuals were forced to either align themselves with the activists or brand them as radicals or miscreants. The specific tactics associated with polarization are the same as tactics of promulgation. The difference between the two is the use of language; promulgation seeks to draw attention and acknowledgment from the public, whereas polarization seeks to force a choice. The strategies outlined by Bowers, Ochs, Jensen, and Schulz are not the only strategies available to activists in their efforts to draw public attention and make persuasive arguments. DeLuca's (1999; 2005) research addresses the notion that contemporary modes of communication typically distort or change the messages of activists presented through traditional persuasive strategies of protest; his exploration of strategic image events focuses on the ways in which activists could effectively use media exposure to their advantage. DeLuca notes that image events are staged actions that draw media attention. The image events, however, use particular ideographs that are widely accepted across society while simultaneously challenging other ideographs. By exploiting a dominant ideograph, the activists can build identification with audiences; this opens the possibility for considering new visions of the ideograph being challenged. According to DeLuca (2005, 16), an image event "shifts the focus of attention from how such unorthodox rhetoric constitutes the identities of protest groups to how it reconstitutes the identity of the dominant culture by challenging and transforming mainstream society's key discourses and ideographs." He goes on to state that these image events "operate in the territory of the system but outside the sense-making rules or the lines on the grid of intelligibility of the system" (20). The use of the dominant ideograph places the message within the "system," while the challenge places it outside. For instance, DeLuca mentions the images produced by Green Peace that depict antiwhaling activists in the 1980s standing defiantly in rafts with Soviet whaling ships approaching them. Green Peace distributed photographs of the event to various mainstream media outlets and print publications. On the one hand, the picture depicted American individualism and coldhearted Soviets—assumptions that have emerged from a

myriad of American media narratives, such as advertisements (e.g., Marlboro ads) and movies (e.g., *Rambo*). On the other hand, it depicted the natural environment and industrial progress in altogether different fashions. Dominant assumptions held in American society at that time were that the environment was nothing more than the fuel for industry. Essentially, the image crafted by Green Peace made for dramatic news coverage that tapped into the American myth of rugged individualism, while forcing many people to view the environment outside of the dominant assumptions about industrial progress held at that time.

The provocative strategies entail the presentation of ideas to the public, but messages are not the primary tool for persuasion. Instead, the activists seek to put themselves into situations in which they will be detained, arrested, or even attacked; strategies that fall within this grouping include nonviolent resistance, escalation and confrontation, and diatribe. Under the strategy of nonviolent resistance, activists typically engage in tactics that break laws. Some examples of nonviolent resistance would be civil rights protesters who performed sit-ins at segregated, all-white restaurants (see Bowers, Ochs, Jensen, and Schulz 2010), or early suffragists in New York State who cast votes when they were prohibited from doing so because of their gender (see Kowal 2000). In each of these cases laws were broken and, just as importantly, many activists were arrested. Essentially, the laws that were broken were laws that the activists had deemed to be unjust, and punishment for breaking such laws demonstrated to the public their problematic or oppressive nature. The strategy of escalation and confrontation is similar, in that the activists engage in activities that violate the law. However, unlike nonviolent resistance, this particular strategy is meant to provoke a violent response from authority figures. Activists use this strategy so that the police, military, or other forms of authority will lash out at the activists, thus demonstrating to the public the repressive nature of those figures. Student protesters during the Vietnam War and anticapitalist anarchists both represent good examples of this strategy. During the Vietnam War, student protesters often engaged in tactics such as throwing urine and feces at police and soldiers, resulting in those authority figures striking back violently at the activists (see Gustainis and Hahn 1988). At the turn of the twenty-first century, many anarchist protesters engaged in black bloc tactics of vandalism and general mayhem at major mass protests such as the demonstrations against the World Trade Organization in Seattle of 1999 and the demonstrations against the Summit of the Americas in Quebec City in 2001. In each case, anarchists initiated clashes with the police, resulting in severe beatings and repressive treatment at the hands of those law enforcement figures (see Klein 2002). The goal of such escalation and confrontation in these cases was to

expose the repressive nature of the state and other power structures in society. Windt (1972) added to these provocative strategies when he discussed the concept of diatribe, which is the use of vulgar or shocking rhetoric by activists who decided to reject conventional means of persuasion. Typically, activists who adopt such a strategy have deemed conventional or established means of communication to be corrupt because they are too closely aligned with power structures and dominant ideological assumptions in society. If those activists were to utilize those means of communication (e.g., mainstream media and news) to relay their message or engage in more traditional modes of protest to attract the attention of producers of such communication (e.g., mass protest, polarization), the message would be altered or co-opted in some way. Therefore, tactics such as nudity or vulgar language or imagery are used to break through all of the other communication, draw attention, and convey the message to the public.

As noted in chapter 2, activism can take place in person or online. Many of the strategies that form activist events noted earlier were conceptualized in terms of in-person activism. That is not to say that promulgation or polarization online is not viable. In fact, many activists have proven adept at finding ways to make those very strategies—including solidification—possible through websites and other forms of interactive media. Each of the examples of activism online noted in chapter 2, such as the concept of culture jamming discussed by Lievrouw (2011), can be classified as one of the strategies described here. In fact, culture jamming stands as a good example of promulgation, as activists use interactive media to draw widespread support for their cause. Take, for instance, the Nike Media Adventure example discussed in reference to culture jamming. In that instance, activists passed around the online conversation between one activist and Nike concerning Nike's invitation to put messages onto shoes purchased from the company. Passing the online conversation around enabled activists to place it into various websites and news stories and gave audiences a chance to see Nike outside of the well-crafted corporate image. Even the "scene-setting" and "scripting" of activist events described by Gerbuado (2012) constitutes the use of interactive media to design and implement tactics of promulgation or nonviolent resistance.

However, research in recent years has shown strategic online activism that is altogether different from the persuasive and provocative strategies described earlier; such activism has been developed specifically for use in online and virtual environments. Such activist events can be categorized as a strategy called hacktivism. This term has been used by Meikle (2002), Gustavo Cardoso and Pedro Neto (2004) and Earl and Kimport (2011) to describe activist tactics carried out online; indeed, *hacktivism* is used in reference to those tactics that can only be carried out online: "[Hacktivism is] a computer-based form of

action which has evolved from its technological context to a new strategy of political resistance. The declared aim is the temporary occupation and exploitation of (mainstream) media, in order to draw the attention to existing power and domination relations” (Apprich 2010, 84). Hacktivism, as defined here, is different from those activist strategies that simply use interactive media as tools. In the cases concerning the research of Lievrouw and Gerbuado, the tactics either emerged from strategies that had first been developed and utilized in person by activists (as in the case of Lievrouw) or they were in-person tactics that relied on interactive media to mobilize action (as in the case of Gerbuado). In fact, these tactics could be referred to as e-tactics, a term used by Earl and Kimport to describe tactics that are “partially online.” Such e-tactics can have their roots in offline or in-person activism, or they can entail a blend of online and in-person action. Tactics online that fall within the strategy of hacktivism (i.e., purely conducted online) would be actions such as floodnet and alternative computing. Floodnet (also known as denial-of-service attack) is described by Meikle (2002) who explains how a group called Electronic Disturbance Theatre used activists and software to flood particular websites and forcing them to crash. Essentially, the group had numerous members and allies go to specific websites at specific times and use software that sent six hundred thousand hits per minute to those sites. The idea behind floodnet was that if the sites encountered enough hits at one time, the server for the site would not be able to handle all of the traffic and effectively shut down; people seeking to access the site would be denied service. Electronic Disturbance Theatre’s floodnet tactic was used to crash the websites for the president of Mexico, the Frankfurt Stock Exchange, and the Pentagon in the United States. Similarly, Lievrouw (2011) describes alternative computing as a genre of activist media that was separate from the culture jamming described previously. The genre of alternative computing refers to a range of new media practices “that are united by a shared ethical and political commitment to information access, open systems, and control over one’s personal information and communications” (Lievrouw 2011, 99). Alternative computing fits within the context of hacktivism precisely because it is carried out through computers and interactive media tools, and because it has little or no connection to in-person activism. Essentially, media infrastructures are used to create action that can draw attention to problems in society, or liberate people from social or legal constraints. Sharing of open source software and production of software that “undermine the intellectual property-driven business models of mainstream software and media firms” (100–101) constitute forms of alternative computing. The production and sharing of such materials serve as an event in which activists take part. The nature of this particular genre actually places it outside of the bounds of alternative media (see chapter 7).

Recap 6-1. Strategic and Tactics of Activist Events

Strategy	Tactic
Persuasive strategy	Petition Promulgation Solidification Polarization
Provocative strategy	Non-violent resistance Escalation or confrontation Diatribes
Hacktivism	Floodnet (denial-of-service attack) Alternative computing

Overall, my examination of the research on activist events identifies two primary approaches to the topic: textual analysis and interviews in combination with other qualitative methods. Although it might seem odd to some, participant observation is not included in the list of qualitative methods used to study this research area. The reason for this is the enormous time requirements for ethnographic research discussed in chapter 3. Specifically, ethnographic practices such as participant observation typically take months or even years to collect adequate data (e.g., Boellstorff, Nardi, Pearce, and Taylor 2012; Chambers 2000; Denzin 1997; Lindlof and Taylor 2010). Although there are some activist events that can span such lengths of time (e.g., Occupy Wall Street encampments), typical events and actions will only last a few days at most. For this reason, ethnographic narrative excavation and fieldwork is more feasible. In cases when ethnographic practices such as participant observation have been used in the study of actions and events, the researchers have typically been involved in the study of organizations or networks; the observations of actions were the result of their affiliation and work within particular organizations or networks. Take for instance the research conducted by Chavez (2011) described in chapter 4. Chavez was engaged in a focused examination of a coalition between two activist organizations. During the course of her participant observation, she witnessed marches and protests carried out by the different groups. In addition, Petray's (2011) internal examination of the aboriginal rights network in Australia noted in chapter 5 included her observation of riots that erupted after a police officer killed an aboriginal man. Fenton and Barassi's (2011) research concerning the Cuba Solidarity Campaign in the same chapter involved their observations of various events staged by the national organization. In each of these cases, the participant observation was grounded within organizations or networks; the researchers observed actions and events carried out by affiliated activists. For this reason, within the context of this book, par-

ticipant observation does not play a significant role in the qualitative approaches to the study of this research site. Instead, the qualitative approaches discussed here are for researchers who are approaching activist events and actions with little or no connection to the organizations or networks that coordinate them.

The first approach to the study of activist events focuses on texts that constitute events (e.g., speeches), or texts that describe events; researchers have largely used rhetorical criticism. The use of rhetorical criticism typically explores speeches or activities that are initiated by an activist or a group and explains the role of that event within the framework of a social movement or social change. Essentially, the critic elucidates how to understand the event within a larger context. Another route to exploring activist events has been the use of interviews, typically alongside fieldwork such as observations and ethnographic narrative excavation. The interviews elicit from activists their experiences and narratives concerning the events. In particular, the interviews often allow for the activists to describe tactics, relationships, group dynamics, and performances associated with the event; interviews also give activists the opportunity to assess the impact of the events on their community, a social movement, or society. The accompanying fieldwork stands as supplemental material that bolsters the information gleaned from the interviews; researchers' observations can effectively fill in any missing material that might have been overlooked (or omitted) by the activists. The following sections provide insight into textual analysis and interviews or fieldwork used in the exploration of activist events.

TEXTS AS A WINDOW INTO ACTIVIST EVENTS

Much of the research concerning activist events has used rhetorical criticism, as well as other forms of textual analysis such as qualitative content analysis. For the most part, rhetorical criticism has been more dominant in the study of activist events, so most of the discussion here focuses on that particular mode of textual analysis; qualitative content analysis, conversely, has been used more often in the study of alternative media. For these reasons, rhetorical criticism will be central in this section, while qualitative content analysis dominates the discussion about textual analysis of alternative media content in chapter 7.

Texts can essentially constitute a view, or window, into an activist event for one of three reasons: the text emerged from the activist event, the text was the activist event, or the text describes the activist event. Don Waisanen's (2013) rhetorical criticism provides an example of examining a text that emerged from an activist event; it focuses on texts that were produced by the Otpor activist organization of the Balkans. His research explores the rhetorical strategies that emerged from student protests against repressive state actions instituted by Slobodan Milosević; essentially, the protests against the forces of Milosević

gave rise to specific recursive rhetorical strategies by Otpor activists. Regarding texts that represent the activist event, Josue Cisneros's (2012) research concerning Reies Tijerina's speech about the "land grant question" stands as the examination of an activist event. The speech was delivered to a national audience following a major militant action conducted by an activist organization with which he was affiliated. Jason Peterson's (2009) qualitative content analysis provides an example of a text describing an activist event; it explores mainstream media descriptions of the protests by African American athletes at the 1968 Olympics in Mexico City, as they raised their fists in defiance during the medal ceremony. After winning medals in the Olympic games, Tommie Smith and John Carlos took to the ceremonial podiums in Mexico City and put their gloved fists into the air as an act of protest concerning the treatment of African Americans in the United States during that time. Major newspapers across the United States, as well as international newspapers around the globe, provided extensive coverage of the event. All three research projects are covered in this section; the point here is to simply establish that the texts can provide some insight into activist events.

Activist events can be examined through texts in one of two ways: rhetorical criticism and qualitative content analysis. Rhetorical criticism differs from qualitative content analysis; the former is used to explain how a text should be understood within a larger context, whereas the latter is used to identify latent meanings that are embedded in the text. Rhetorical criticism, unlike qualitative content analysis, is not nearly as orderly. Instead of engaging in a systematic identification of relevant texts, researchers rely on their own excitement and interest to identify texts of importance (Foss 2004); essentially, the researchers' interests lead them to texts for analysis. The research interests concerning activism and social movements will often lead to texts associated with activist events. This is not to say that researchers' interests alone dictate that the text is worthy of analysis; researchers must build the case that the text is truly important. Once researchers have identified the text that they will examine, they must set about proving that the text is tied to an event in some way and then demonstrate its importance within a larger context (e.g., social movement, society). Qualitative content analysis, conversely is much more systematic in its approach to the study of texts. The researchers' interests may lead to a set of texts, but they must select representative texts for analysis (Altheide and Schneider 2013; Schreier 2012); that is to say, researchers must find a systematic way to identify texts for analysis. For instance, researchers could randomly select ten listserv e-mails from each month during a period of study or interview activists about texts that they find to be most relevant and then focus on those texts. Such differences between the two methods are not confined to the selection of texts for analysis but are characteristic of both approaches overall.

In rhetorical criticism researchers engage in a close reading looking for the units of analysis and interpreting them for an audience so that they can understand the role of the text within larger contexts (Foss 2004; Brock, Scott, and Chesbro 1990). Conversely, in qualitative content analysis, researchers (or coders) search through the text looking for the units of analysis (whether inductive or deductive) in an effort to uncover latent meanings and patterns of meanings within the texts.

Research by Cisneros (2012), Waisanen (2013), and Peterson (2009) all serve as good examples of research wherein activist events were studied via texts. Cisneros examines a speech given by the Chicano activist Reies Lopez Tijerina in November 1967, who was affiliated with Alianza Federal de Mercedes (Federal Alliance of Land Grants); the group sought to press the US government into returning land taken from Mexican people in the 1800s. The speech given by Tijerina followed a raid on a US federal courthouse in New Mexico by radical activists affiliated with Alianza. Cisneros demonstrates how the “Land Grant Question” speech helped to shape identity and agency of Chicano activists following the raid. Specifically, the use of metaphors within the speech aided in the construction of a migratory identity that allowed Chicano activists who attended to this message to effectively negotiate the binaries of “sameness” (that is, similarities with the dominant white majority) and “difference” that existed in late 1960s America. Waisanen examined the rhetorical strategies of the Otpor group following the repressive crackdown of President Milosević in Serbia during the late 1990s. Students from four universities across the Balkans established the organization as a response to oppressive practices by the state. Otpor set about producing a variety of different texts that aimed to undermine Milosević and topple him from power; activists produced radio broadcasts, commercials, posters, fliers, and many other forms of media to attack the president. Overall, Waisanen’s examination of different texts produced by Otpor reveals the use of “glocal recursions” as a rhetorical strategy, in which global strategies of resistance were used for local endeavors; in the case of Otpor, the group used global communication technologies to reach local audiences. Finally, Peterson studied news coverage of the protests by African-American athletes Tommie Smith and John Carlos at the 1968 Olympics in Mexico City; specifically, he looked at the ways in which US and international newspapers depicted the action taken by the two athletes, in which they stood on ceremonial podiums with black power fists in the air. The findings of the textual analysis demonstrates that the newspapers essentially supported the racist climate of the late 1960s by omitting serious coverage of the action or the rationale of the athletes.

A review of these rhetorical critiques demonstrates two important aspects of this type of inquiry: selection of texts and method of critique. Each of these

rhetorical critiques go about the selection of texts in different ways. The Cisneros study involves the examination of a single text: the “Land Grant Question” speech presented by Tijerina in 1967. But why did Cisneros select this particular speech? Tijerina was an exceptional orator and made several speeches to audiences during the time of the Alianza protests. One could argue that the critique should have covered all of the speeches made by this activist over the years, each constituting a different event. However, Cisneros noted that this speech was particularly important as it was given right after the courthouse raid: “Alianza was most (in)famous for their 1967 armed takeover of the federal courthouse in Tierra Amarilla, New Mexico, resulting in a shoot-out with police and the federal hunt and arrest of the Aliancistas. . . . It reached front pages and TV screens across the country, catapulting the Alianza’s regional land-grant movement onto the national stage” (Cisneros 2012, 562). This information is integral, as Cisneros essentially sets the “Land Grant Question” speech apart from all other speeches given by this particular activist during this time. Tijerina’s speech was perhaps the most important speech that he ever presented, as the audience was actually nationwide; the speech had the potential to truly transform identity and agency. This particular speech was an important event in Chicano activism that strategically functioned to call for change and advocate for particular issues. The text did not only serve as a window into a particular event, but was actually the event itself.

Waisanen, conversely, engaged in a thorough examination and critique of a wide-ranging body of materials that were produced by Otpor, or that reported on Otpor media events that took place between 2000 and 2011. The decision to pursue multiple texts was based primarily on the fact that there was not one solitary event that encapsulated the resistance to President Milošević; nor was there one event representative of all of the strategies used to combine global technologies and local concerns. Waisanen needed a broader body of texts to critique; this was accomplished through the use of LexisNexis: “A LexisNexis search of the term ‘Otpor’ was made with major world publications and broadcast transcripts between 2000 and 2011, and a textual snowball sample of artifacts were gathered from these 477 sources’ allusions and references. Focusing on newspapers, books, films, YouTube videos and other in-depth searches of Otpor’s texts, including posters, commercials, and training manuals, I constructed a picture of [their] communication arising from frequent and distinctive patterns in the data” (Waisanen 2013, 160). The search enabled Waisanen to collect an enormous number of texts that were either produced by Otpor across a variety of different media or news reports about Otpor-mediated actions. McGee (1990) has demonstrated that many modern societies and cultures exist in a diffused manner; the broken and fragmented texts that circulate throughout these societies are the context against which meaning and

ideologies develop. Overall, the texts collected by Waisanen were dispersed fragments that, when brought together, provide a cultural context of resistance within Serbia. These texts provided him with ample opportunity to examine numerous media events conducted by the organization; he was able to view Otpor-orchestrated events over the course of an entire decade.

In reference to the method for critique, both researchers drew heavily from the concepts of ideograph and ideology (e.g., McGee 1975; 1990), as well as the notion of constitutive rhetoric (Charland 1987; White 1985). These concepts deeply influenced the researchers' close readings, as they served as a theoretical lens through which the different texts were examined and interpreted. In Cisneros's research, the primary units of analysis were metaphors used throughout the "Land Grant Question" speech. The metaphors were the site in which Tijerina regularly evoked dichotomous ideologies about citizen and foreigner, insider and outsider; such metaphors, as well as the use of ideology, potentially shaped the identity and agency of activists nationwide. Waisanen, on the other hand, took note of four particular units of analysis as he engaged in a close reading of the multitude of Otpor texts:

This approach has precedent in communication studies, following McGee's (1990) argument that critics can construct a text and context out of the diffuse elements appearing in fragmented contemporary cultures. . . . I analyze four aspects of the glocal recursion in Otpor's activities, including the technological conditions under which movement activists built recursive actions, the use of structured spontaneity as a form of recursive organization and appeal, the indigenous, recursive adaptations inviting audiences to revolt, and the dialectical reappropriations recursively drawn between students and the regime. (Waisanen 2013, 160)

As Cisneros and Waisanen identified each of the units of analysis in the different texts, they were examined through a theoretical lens established through key concepts (e.g., ideology, constitutive rhetoric); these lenses aided both of the researchers in interpreting the different activist events. The close readings in which they engaged reveal the connections between identity and agency, as well as global technologies and local concerns. In their published essays, they lay out their interpretations of these texts for audiences; the researchers essentially guide the audience to a specific knowledge about how to read and understand these texts.

Peterson's research concerning the black power protests of Tommie Smith and John Carlos at the 1968 Olympics uses qualitative content analysis, rather than rhetorical criticism. Peterson examined different newspaper articles written during the time of the Olympic games in Mexico City. In order to conduct his research, he had to first identify texts that would provide a glimpse into the

event, as well as proper insight into the ways in which the event was covered by mainstream news media. Peterson drew his sample of texts in the following way: "A sample of news accounts, columns, and opinions was drawn from 15 US and world newspapers published between October 17, 1968, the first day the protest was reported, and October 29, 1968, when coverage of the last day of the Olympic Games ended. Because of the different political and racial contexts throughout the United States, a representative sample of newspapers in major markets throughout the country seemed appropriate" (Peterson 2009, 101). To ensure a representative sample, he selected three newspapers published in each of the major regions in the United States: East, West, South and Midwest. In addition, he also selected three international newspapers that covered the Olympics published in Australia, Canada, and England. This approach to identifying an event, as well as texts as windows into that event, holds similarities to the two previous examples. Peterson's research overall is similar to that of Cisneros, as he selected a singular event that was important to activists and nonactivists across the United States within a particular moment in time; the protest by the two Olympians was an enormous moment in the black power movement of the 1960s. However, rather than simply looking at the event itself, recorded by television and photographs, he chose to look at wide-ranging portrayals of the event in news media across the United States and around the world. Similar to Waisanen, Peterson sought to bring texts as fragments together so as to gain insight into cultural reactions to the protests in Mexico City. With the representative texts selected, Peterson then searched through the texts looking for descriptions of the protest by sportswriters. Essentially, he was engaged in an inductive form of qualitative content analysis in which narrative components were recorded in each example; as discussions about the protests were identified in the text, Peterson took note of the ways in which the two characters and their actions were portrayed. This enabled him to demonstrate that there were significant biases across the twelve US papers that hid from the audiences the social background associated with Smith and Carlos's protest.

Textual analysis has proven to be an important method for the examination of activist events. Researchers can interpret events by constructing conceptual lenses and using them to read through texts that are associated with an event; such a method gives rise to an interpretation of the event within a larger context. In addition, researchers can also engage in a qualitative content analysis to show the content and meanings that are embedded within particular texts that are tied to activist events. In either case, the texts provide a small window for viewing and understanding activist events. However, as the events have already taken place, this approach is somewhat limited. Perceptions and experiences of people who took part in the event are not really represented in this approach, and thus there is a danger that in many cases much may be left out.

Recap 6-2. Textual Analysis as an Approach to the Study of Activist Events

- Uses texts to provide insight into events because:
 - Texts emerged from event,
 - Texts were the event, or
 - Texts describe the event.
- Relies on either qualitative content analysis or rhetorical criticism:
 - Rhetorical criticism interprets units of analysis to explain how texts should be understood within particular contexts.
 - Qualitative content analysis allows for the identification of latent meanings and demonstrates patterns within texts.

INTERVIEWS TO STUDY ACTIVIST EVENTS

The other way in which activist events are typically explored is through the use of interviews along with additional supplemental qualitative methods. Specifically, researchers usually employ interviews so as to provide activists with ample opportunity to weave narratives about events and provide rich descriptions of experiences and perceptions concerning such events. Alongside the interviews, many researchers also rely on fieldwork that involves observations of activist events; the use of this additional method can provide additional data, corroborate activists' information, or reveal additional elements of events of which activists are unaware or unwilling to discuss. In addition, researchers can also use textual analysis (typically qualitative content analysis) in order to supplement the interviews that they conduct with activists. Ultimately, these methods enable researchers to acquire knowledge about the actions, the setting, and the different characters involved; the more methods researchers use, the more information they can acquire.

Research by Daniel Lieberfeld (2009), Jingfang Liu (2011), and Uta Papen (2012), as well as my own work (Atkinson 2009b), provides good examples of how to use interviews alongside additional methods in the study of activist events. In my research, I explored an activist "Truth Excursion" to Chiapas, Mexico, in which activists from the United States and Europe had the opportunity to meet Zapatista rebels in their autonomous communities. In particular, I traveled with activists and looked at the ways in which the US and European activists made sense of the resistance performed by the Zapatista rebels; the US and European activists were familiar with forms of resistance such as boycotts and petitions, whereas the Zapatistas regularly engaged in more militant forms of resistance. Ultimately, I found that the US and European activists relied heavily on their more peaceful forms of resistance to make sense of what they observed and learned in Chiapas; their own experiences with resistance in protests and actions in their homelands blocked out the

more militant forms of resistance that they witnessed in the autonomous communities. Lieberfeld examined activities staged by an Israeli antiwar group called Four Mothers—Leaving Lebanon in Peace. The group opposed Israeli military action in Southern Lebanon in the 1990s and utilized a variety of media strategies to draw attention to their opposition to any military operations. The group was initially started by the mothers of active duty soldiers in the Israeli military, but quickly grew to become much more diverse (e.g., male, international, Palestinian). Lieberfeld focused on the media strategies used by the group, as well as the problems those events posed to their efforts. Specifically, his interviews with members of the group reveal that they regularly wrote letters to newspapers and met with members of the Israeli parliament; essentially, they engaged in the strategy petition. This petition on the part of Four Mothers emphasized a maternal identity of the activists that humanized them and made a stronger emotional appeal for their cause. One significant drawback, however, was that the activists often had to counter their own message with information and messages from male military experts, so that their petition could not be outright dismissed as overly emotional or sentimental. Liu explored Internet-based collective actions conducted by environmental groups in China. Essentially, interviews with a variety of activists affiliated with different environmental groups show eighteen instances of collective actions that used the Internet in some way; some actions were fully online, while others were only partially online. Online events included efforts to protect the Beijing Zoo (using online petitions and letter-writing campaigns) and a campaign to save the Tibetan antelope (using pop-up ads and an online benefit auction). Partially online efforts included environmental activities around Beijing (organized through the Internet) and a campaign to limit the use of air conditioners (using a website to circulate information to activists in various locations). Papen examined the efforts of activists to alter the cityscape of the Prenzlauer Berg district in Berlin, Germany, through the use of graffiti and street art; the city had been in a state of neglect since reunification of Germany in 1990. Through a combination of interviews and fieldwork, Papen noted that activists were able to effectively alter the “linguistic landscape” of the city by strategically placing graffiti and political street art throughout the physical environment. As such, the neglected exteriors took on a new façade that made the environment look more interesting and in effect drew in onlookers from outside of the city. By drawing in outsiders, the activists effectively altered the pathways and activities within the once-neglected site.

Papen’s research, like my research, uses a combination of interviews with fieldwork. In my research, the ethnographic narrative excavation involved interviews with six activists who were taking part in the Truth Excursion, as well as observations of contact between those activists and the leadership of

four Zapatista communities in Chiapas (see chapter 3 for details on the method of ethnographic narrative excavation, which can be used to explore nonroutine public events). The interview component of the excavation involved one-on-one postmodern interviews with each of the six activists at the beginning of the trip, as well as a focus group with all of the activists at the end prior to the group's dispersal. The one-on-one interviews at the beginning of the excursion enabled activists to discuss their backgrounds, how they learned about the Truth Excursions, and what they hoped to discover by taking part in the excursion. The follow-up focus group at the end of the excursion was postmodern in design as well; the questions enabled the activists to weave conceptual narratives about what they learned from the overall trip, as well as their encounters with Zapatistas in the various communities in Chiapas. In addition to these interviews, I observed the Zapatista communities and studied the oral histories presented to the activist group by Zapatista authorities within those communities: "As our small group accessed the Zapatista communities we met the general assembly, the authoritative body of each community, and heard their testimonials about oppression and resistance within their communities. In each community, I asked the general assembly if I could tape record their narrative and take notes" (Atkinson 2009b, 143). My observations enabled me to construct a clear picture of the Zapatista communities and Zapatista resistance that was presented to the activists from Europe and the United States; I was able to compare the presentations of the Zapatistas to the activists' recollections and descriptions of those presentations.

Papen also used multiple methods in her research. She interviewed twenty-five activists in Prenzlauer Berg. These interviews were often spontaneous and "carried out on the spot" (Papen 2012, 61); that is, she would meet with activists as she moved through the city examining the art painted upon buildings. These on-the-spot interviews enabled her to elicit information from activists about their graffiti and street art; she asked the activists about the meanings behind their work, as well as the use of "typescript, colour and other visual aspects of signs as well as their materiality" (ibid.). In addition to the interviews, Papen also engaged in fieldwork in which she traveled about the city in search of graffiti and street art; she selected streets that would "reflect the diversity of the area the study was located in" (ibid.). With that in mind, she noted: "sampling, thus, was theoretically driven but pragmatically constrained (i.e., limited to what was feasible to survey in the time given for this research)" (ibid.). As Papen moved through the city she photographed examples of the activists' art and took detailed notes concerning the environment in which those examples were found; she would note nearby landmarks, modes of transportation through any spaces (e.g., roads, trains), signs and any other forms of writing

posted around any art, and the nature of spaces through which she traversed (e.g., commercial spaces, public spaces). In addition to these photographs, Papan also took photographs of the buildings she was studying. All of these photographs provided a visual record that could be connected to the responses provided by the activists and demonstrate the interconnected nature of language and images in Prenzlauer Berg. Overall, the fieldwork provided information concerning both the linguistic and image elements contributed to the cityscape by activists around the city, while the interviews enabled the activists to explain meanings and modes of production associated with the different forms of graffiti art observed throughout the city.

Liu's and Lieberfeld's research constitute good examples of interviews supplemented by textual analysis in order to fully explore activist events. In her research concerning Internet-based collective actions in China, Liu interviewed twenty-five activists from across nineteen different environmental groups; the activists were "key personnel . . . closely involved in the Internet-based environmental activities in which a particular [environmental non-government agency] was involved" (Liu 2011, 147). The questions focused on the daily web activities, as well as how the groups use the Internet in major collective actions. The information from these interviews provided insight about the groups, their actions on-and offline, and overall Internet use within and between the different groups. In addition to the interview data, however, Liu also collected textual data from websites and archives associated with the different environmental groups. The textual analysis was deductive in nature, as she developed a framework of different website types based on Bob's (2005) notion of structural dimensions for nongovernment agencies (NGOs); this theoretical lens was the basis for three important categories applied to the different websites and archives for analysis: type of activity, intended audience, and frequency of involvement by activists. In order to conduct the analysis, Liu collected all of the web-based materials that were produced by the nineteen groups and then coded each according to those structural dimensions. This required her to note the type of activity that the text represented (e.g., web forum, newsletter, petition), the intended audience for each text (e.g., urban, rural, particular age group), and the frequency of involvement in the web-based text by activists. Liu coded the different web-based texts in a close reading; she poured over the different texts applying the categories based on Bob's research. As elements of the texts were identified as type of activity or intended audience, that element was classified. Overall, the textual analysis provided a detailed description of the online collective actions performed by the different activist groups, while the interviews revealed the strategies used by activists in engaging in those actions. Lieberfeld's research similarly used textual analysis. In his research concerning

the Four Mothers protests against the Israeli military actions in Lebanon, Lieberfeld interviewed a wide variety of different people to show and help to understand the actions undertaken by this particular group. In addition to interviewing activists affiliated with the organization, he also interviewed newspaper editors and reporters; activist interviews elicited information about protest strategies, while the interviews with people in the media allowed for insight into the processes of media coverage. The interviews with members of the media were particularly interesting as they revealed what drew those people to covering the Four Mothers protests, as well as the political and social environment surrounding the military actions and protests in the 1990s. In addition to the interviews, Lieberfeld also included inductive textual analysis of news stories from that period concerning both the military action and the Four Mothers protests. The inductive analysis was conducted through a close reading in which Lieberfeld examined mainstream news stories about the activist group and their actions. The reading process entailed noting the ways in which those actions were described and building an overarching picture of the media responses to the group; categories for media responses developed as the researcher conducted the reading. Ultimately, data from this content analysis helped to build on the information gleaned from the editors and reporters through the interviews.

Overall, this particular approach to the study of activist events entails interviews supplemented by different qualitative methods: fieldwork or textual analysis. This is considerably different from the “texts as windows into activist events” approach described previously. Rather than relying on a single method to explore the research site, many researchers talk directly to the activists involved and supplement any emergent information with an additional method that gives insight into the actual event. Essentially, the interviews elicit perceptions and experiences, while the additional methods allow for an unbiased view of the event. The use of additional methods is particularly important as memories and perceptions about events can be drastically skewed, given that those events can often be volatile. The data that emerges from the use of multiple qualitative methods provides a clear, distinct picture of the activist event and the role of the activists involved.

**Recap 6-3. Interviews and Supplemental Methods
to Explore Activist Events**

- Interviews aid in eliciting activists’ insight and perceptions into events.
- Supplemental methods (e.g., qualitative content analysis, participant observation) provide unbiased information about events.

SUMMARY

This chapter defines the concept of activist events which is broader than simply protests or mobilizations of resources. Events can very well be those types of actions, as in the case of Waisanen's study of Otpor or Lieberfeld's examination of the Four Mothers. However, events can also be activities that bring activists together or shape their identities, as in the case of my research concerning the Truth Excursions or Cisneros's critique of the "Land Grant Question" speech. Whatever the shape or form, events constitute strategies that are used in order to fulfill particular activist goals.

The chapter also presents two approaches to the study of activist events demonstrated through communication and media literature. On the one hand, many researchers have used textual analysis in order to describe an event; rhetorical criticism has been the dominant form of textual analysis used in this approach, although qualitative content analysis is appropriate for such endeavors. In addition, many researchers interview activists about the events in which they have taken part; these interviews are often supplemented with textual analysis or fieldwork. Both of these approaches are valid and useful to researchers, although it can be argued that the latter provides more insight into activist events than the former. It is ultimately up to the researchers to make decisions regarding their approaches to the activist event, and it is their responsibility to carry out their research as thoroughly as possible.

Alternative Media

This chapter explores:

- (1) Alternative media and how that concept is distinct from activist media.
- (2) An audience-oriented approach to the study of alternative media.
- (3) An approach to the study of alternative media that focuses on production.
- (4) An approach in which the researcher examines the content of alternative media.

It has often been the contention of my own research that alternative media constitute the lifeblood of modern social activism. Alternative media serve as the backdrop against which activists engage in protest and resistance. Alternative media (particularly interactive forms of alternative media) are often the connective lines of communication upon which networks are built. Alternative media aid in the formation of activists' political identity, oftentimes by way of taking part in the production process; the production of alternative media constitutes an action that solidifies critical worldviews and makes them more concrete for the activists. Without alternative media, many of the social activism and protest communities that we have seen in recent years (e.g., Tea Party, Occupy Wall Street) would not exist.

An example of the importance of alternative media for social activism can be found in my very first research project (while a graduate student). I was fascinated by a column in *Adbusters* magazine called “Creative Resistance,” which featured photographs of billboards and corporate advertisements that had been vandalized. On the surface, vandalizing a billboard seems to be a pointless act of deviance; defaced property, like such billboards, are promptly cleaned or removed. Very few people ever really see the activists work. Why would someone engage in such activities? However, it turns out that many activists routinely photograph their acts of vandalism and pass them along to alternative media sources such as *Adbusters* and various activist websites. By conducting a rhetorical critique of the “Creative Resistance” component of *Adbusters*, I found that the activists were taking part in weaving an overarching “resistance narrative” about a clash of different visions of American culture. Each activist who vandalized a billboard or advertisement and photographed it took part in telling a larger activist story about corporate power and oppression in American society. The alternative media, *Adbusters*, pulled all of the individual parts together into a larger picture. As other activists read the “Creative Resistance” component of the magazine they, in turn, were inspired to go out and engage in similar activities. This gave rise to new overarching narratives woven through other alternative media sources. It was this potential for audiences to take part in the cocreation of several overlapping narratives that led me into my specific line of research: any activist, anywhere in the world, could be empowered through alternative media. For me, that signaled a significant turn in activism and social movements.

The term alternative media has typically been used to describe news media produced by activists, which is different from the concept of “activist media” discussed in chapter 2. Although the two concepts appear to be similar, they are in fact quite distinct. Take, for example, the activist vandalism of billboards and *Adbusters* magazine. One is activist media, whereas the other is alternative media. Which is which? This is a particularly tough question as I have found that there is little consensus about what does and does not constitute alternative media, or whether one should even draw a line between the two. Much of the problem stems from the overlap between both concepts. Such overlap is best shown in Lievrouw’s (2011) recent work. In her research she combines the two concepts. Her book *Alternative and Activist New Media* notes that both can be categorized by five genres: culture jamming, alternative computing, participatory journalism, mediated mobilization, and commons knowledge. Essentially, Lievrouw’s genres help to demonstrate the idea that there are different forms of media activism. One could very well envision the different genres as concentric circles in which some overlap a little, while others overlap a lot. Culture jamming deals with the appropriation of images and popular texts for

the purpose of critique, while alternative computing refers to hacking and file sharing. These two genres have little overlap with the remaining three genres, and both are more associated with the type of activism described in chapter 2 and the activist strategies noted in chapter 6. Participatory journalism, mediated mobilization, and commons knowledge are the alternative media niches as described in much of the research of Atton (2002; 2004), Downing (1984; 2001), Kenix (2009; 2011; 2012), and others; these “circles,” or genres, have significant overlap. Participatory journalism is a reference to news, blogs, and reporting about activist issues and events. Examples of this genre include the activist websites *Indymedia.org* and *RedState.com*. Media that fall under the classification of media mobilization present information or news about activist events and resources; such media are used to link activists and direct them toward particular events. Examples of this genre include *Protest.net* and *list-servs* (e.g., *Reverend Billy Bulletin*) that circulate information about upcoming protests and actions or provide links to other news sites. Finally, commons knowledge is manifest in websites and wikis in which anyone can contribute knowledge, information, or news; this can be seen in various websites that allow for users to contribute information through threads or posts. The *DetroitYES!* forums from my research endeavors with Rosati provide a good example of commons knowledge. We found that the forums allowed users to post information about the city, along with photographs, videos, maps, links to news stories, and much more. In this way, knowledge about the city of Detroit grew and transformed as activists posted more information.

The shared thread that connects the overlapping genres of participatory journalism, mediated mobilization, and commons knowledge is the idea of people working together for the purpose of producing media content. Atton (2004, ix) notes that alternative media are those projects that attempt to “develop different forms of, the dominant, expected (and broadly accepted) ways of ‘doing media.’” Essentially, alternative media for Atton are new ways of gathering, producing, and circulating news and information. Given Atton’s basic premise of alternative media, it is possible to see the distinction between the billboards and the magazine noted at the beginning of the chapter. The vandalized billboards constitute activist media; the activists engaged in a strategic event for the purpose of drawing attention to particular social problems that stem from American corporations. For some, calling vandalism or graffiti an event might seem to be a stretch. However, like cave drawings of ancient humans, the alterations made to a billboard are rituals that contain and convey symbolic meaning. The point here is not to argue that this is a significant or effective event, but that such actions constitute activism and activist events as defined in chapters 2 and 6. Specifically, the alterations of billboards fits the situated model of activism described in chapter 2; the activists appropriated corporate images and attempted

to reframe them in a way that new meanings were conveyed to the public. More specifically, this strategy of activism can also be classified as promulgation, as described in chapter 6. Conversely, *Adbusters* magazine and its companion website (Adbusters.org) constitute alternative media, in that the producers stand in opposition to conventional practices of mainstream news media, journalism, and the circulation of information in society; their magazine and website are experiments in new forms of journalism and knowledge building. Therefore, for the purposes of this book, Lievrouw's genres of culture jamming and alternative computing constitute activism, or strategic activist events that are initiated and engaged in by social activists. Participatory journalism, mediated mobilization, and commons knowledge constitute alternative media that stands as modes of "doing media" as noted by Atton.

WHAT ARE ALTERNATIVE MEDIA?

To fully understand alternative media, as opposed to activist media, it is important to look at how the concept was developed. The study of alternative media was initiated in the 1980s when David Armstrong (1981) chronicled the different radical media published by social movement actors in the United States since the early days of the Republic. Over the years the study of alternative media has developed through four primary trends: (1) content, (2) production, (3) audience use and interaction, and (4) intersections with mainstream media. Initially, Armstrong's descriptions of different media produced and used by activists established alternative media as media that originates from social movements; the fact that the content of such media critiqued dominant power structures is what ultimately made it alternative. Later, Downing (1984; 2001) engaged in a similar chronicle of different alternative media around the world, noting the different forms of media that could be used (e.g., radio, print, wood carvings) and the different sources that produced such media. Downing's chronicle demonstrates that social movement organizations were not the only sources of alternative media. There were instances in which nonactivists, such as female street traders in Morocco and African Americans living under Jim Crow oppression in the American South, produced and used their own forms of media outside of mainstream channels. This research later gave rise to the work of McLeod and Hertog (1992; 1995) and other scholars who studied the concept of the protest paradigm. Within that line of research, coverage of protests in mainstream and alternative media content stimulated different views about activists and activist events. Ultimately, this early research constitutes a content-oriented approach to alternative media. According to Armstrong, Downing, McLeod and others, media were considered alternative because of the use of

language that challenged power structures, called for sweeping social change, or called into question particular social roles.

Later, Atton (2002; 2004), Caldwell (2003), and Meikle (2002), among other scholars, expanded this content-oriented trend in the study of alternative media, by illustrating the important role of production in alternative media. For these scholars, a medium was ultimately made alternative by the manner in which it was produced. For Atton, alternative forms of media were typically forced out of the public sphere by the monopolization of resources by corporate mainstream media and increasingly relegated to a “ghetto sphere.” Because of the lack of resources, producers of such media had to adopt innovative methods to produce and circulate their content. One particularly inventive technique for producing content was to call upon readers to act as writers; this type of (largely) volunteer work yielded free content for the producers. In addition, Meikle noted that groups who sought to solidify new political identities for people typically used alternative media. Open source publishing associated with online alternative media was necessary for such identity building; writing for alternative websites aided in the solidification of critical worldviews and new political identities. Caldwell’s research also helped to refine this new trend in alternative media research, as he explored media circulated and used within immigrant communities in Southern California. In that research, Caldwell examined the Latino communities pressed against affluent white farming neighborhoods that survived by selling their labor for farm work and house cleaning. Within the Latino community, people cobbled together videos and VHS units from the garbage thrown out by their affluent white neighbors. The videos and VHS unit were circulated throughout the community so that everyone knew what the white neighbors liked and disliked; such knowledge helped the immigrant community to position themselves more effectively to gain jobs. This trend of research concerning production later gave rise to research concerning community media developed by Rodriguez (2003; 2011) and Howley (2005; 2013). These research projects focused on the ways in which particular media and journalistic practices were used to give voices to oppressed or marginalized groups; such media offered empowerment for those people, as well as the audiences. Ultimately, all of these scholars defined media as alternative whenever the producers engaged in unconventional practices to create content. The practices of production, more than the content, is what designated media as alternative.

Another trend in alternative media research emerged that examined such media from an audience-centered perspective. Rauch (2007) and I (Atkinson 2010) focus on the ways in which activists read and make use of alternative media content. Rauch notes that the interpretive strategies used by audiences

for reading media content was what made it “alternative.” The concept of interpretive strategy was developed by Stanley Fish (1980) to explain the different ways in which literary scholars read and understood classic novels such as *Moby Dick*; it was later applied to the study of mass media audiences by Lindlof (1988) and David Machin and Michael Carrithers (1996). According to these mass media scholars, audiences belong to different interpretive communities that teach them strategies for reading and understanding mediated texts. Growing up in a family with strong political commitments would constitute a good example of an interpretive community. As a member of a conservative family, children would learn about concepts of right and wrong, good and evil, which would later impact the way that they read and interpreted news about climate change or the 2012 terrorist attacks on the US embassy in Benghazi, Libya. As news about these issues appeared on television, the grown-up children would use their interpretive strategies and pay attention to different aspects of each story while ignoring others. Thus, news stories about these issues would appear altogether different to viewers who grew up in a liberal family and used different interpretive strategies to read such news content. Such is also the case with alternative media. Essentially, if a reader of a zine or website determines that the text stood in opposition to dominant power structures in society, then they would consider it to be alternative media.

This audience-oriented view of alternative media is an interesting position to take, as there are some publications that adhere to one of the trends noted earlier, but not the other. Are such media in fact alternative? Take for instance the *Progressive*, a monthly print magazine that reports news from a left of center perspective. The magazine routinely criticizes and challenges corporate and government power, including powerful figures affiliated with the Democratic Party; in this way, the magazine adheres to the content-oriented notion of alternative media developed in research by Armstrong and Downing. However, the magazine is produced and operated using typical ways of “doing media”; the magazine is run by an editor in chief, employs writers, and uses advertising to raise the funds necessary to continue operation. In this way, the magazine deviates from the production-centered trend that has emerged from the research of Atton, Meikle, and others. This seems to place the magazine in something of a grey area. Rauch’s notion of interpretation by the audience, however, helps to solve this problem. Many (left-leaning) activists regularly read the *Progressive*, and they interpret it as outside of dominant forms of media production and consider it to be “alternative.” Because the *Progressive* contains critical content and the audience read it as alternative, the magazine can be considered as alternative media; this is despite the fact that the magazine emerges by way of “traditional” means of media production. Expanding on these studies concerning interpretation, my own research focused on how activ-

ists' worldviews and use of alternative media shaped their communicative resistance against dominant power structures (Atkinson 2010). Essentially, the alternative media content constituted a backdrop against which resistance was performed. The process of reading that content and interacting with other activists shaped the interpretation of the content and, consequently, the form of resistance taken through protest and other actions. In these cases, I found that the audience made media alternative through their use of the content. The way in which the audience uses and reads media can make them alternative; in fact, the reading of media can help to differentiate media that appear to fall into a grey area between two of the trends noted earlier.

The most recent trend that has emerged in the study of alternative media focuses on intersections between alternative and mainstream media. According to Kenix (2009; 2011), much of the literature concerning alternative media has been flawed as scholars have assumed such media to be in binary isolation from the mainstream media. The typical assumption about the alternative media has been that these media stand in stark contrast and opposition to mainstream media. Such an assumption is largely based on the trends in research noted earlier, particularly the first two. Those research trends had established alternative media as content that challenged power structures (e.g., Downing 2001), or were media that were produced through alternative organizational practices (e.g., Atton 2002); in both cases the content and production were understood as a contrast to mainstream media. However, Kenix (2011) effectively demonstrates that the two forms of media are not as separate as earlier research implied. Both forms of media often intersect in terms of "individual motivations and identities, organizational practices, media ownership and ideological influences" (Kenix 2011, 11). Organizational practices are of particular interest, as the practices adopted by different media can lead to some of the most observable intersections. In some cases, the different media outlets learn from one another and assimilate practices utilized by the other. For instance, many mainstream news outlets have adopted the practice of reader-writers in recent years, in which they solicit feedback from the audience through interactive media and use such feedback as content. For instance, CNN instituted a program called "Talkback Live," in which viewers post comments about stories as they are featured on the show; audience comments are quickly assimilated into the content. In addition, blogging has become a practice associated with both forms of media, as mainstream and alternative websites regularly feature blogs by their more renowned writers (Kenix 2011), as well as (sometimes) giving the audience the opportunity to establish their own blogs. Furthermore, individuals who contribute to alternative media sources are also often called upon to contribute to mainstream news media. For instance, Erick Erickson is the creator and chief contributor to the conservative activist website RedState.com;

Erickson is also frequently interviewed by mainstream news media such as CNN to provide a “conservative perspective” on a variety of political issues. In fact, CNN regularly pits Erickson against Van Jones (contributor to liberal alternative media sources like *Mother Jones* magazine) in split screen debates. Ultimately, this latest trend in the study of alternative media has effectively demonstrated that there are significant intersections between these two forms of media. Kenix argues that scholars should not think of the media in binary terms, but rather a continuum that ranges from mainstream to alternative.

In order to start thinking about the use of qualitative methods for the examination of alternative media, it is useful to adopt the framework of multi-level analysis developed by Zhongdang Pan and Jack McLeod (1991). These scholars claim that people often make the mistake of discussing media as monolithic; that is, they talk about media as if production, content, and audiences are all lumped together. Instead, they suggest that people think about the media in terms of four distinct, yet interconnected, levels: production, content, audience, and feedback.

Figure 7-1 lays out this notion of multilevel analysis as four lines that overlap and construct a continuous loop. Producers construct content that is transmitted to audiences (or consumed and spread by the audience, depending on your paradigmatic approach to media and audiences). These audiences provide feedback of some sort, which is in turn received by the producers; such feedback aids in the formulation and production of future content. In the following discussion, the approaches that researcher can take in the examination of alternative media will be addressed according to these different levels (feedback will be addressed within the section on content, as the reader-writer strategies utilized by producers of alternative media often make audiences feedback part

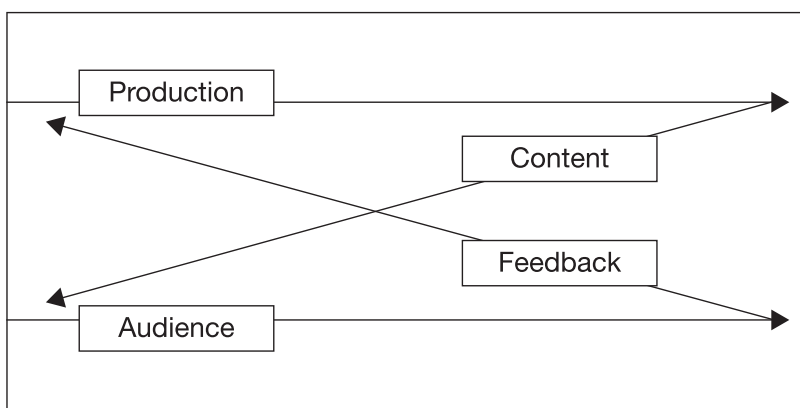


FIGURE 7-1. A representation of Pan and McLeod's multilevel analysis network.

of the content). Indeed, three of the trends that have developed in the study of alternative media conveniently fall within this framework: modes production, audiences use and interpretation, and content. However, mainstream and alternative media intersect in multiple ways as mentioned earlier.

EXPLORING ALTERNATIVE MEDIA PRODUCTION

In the exploration of alternative media production, it is important that the researcher have access to individuals who engage in the production of content; it is also preferable for the researcher to be able to observe production in some capacity. Essentially, the researcher should have access to either the people behind the production of content, or to the processes by which those individuals produce content for alternative media. If such access is not available, then the researcher may engage in textual analysis to make determinations about the finished product. However, such an approach to this aspect of alternative media will not actually provide much insight into the processes and politics of production; textual analysis can serve as a good supplemental method to the exploration of alternative media production, but not a core approach to such assessment. Past research that has explored the production of alternative media has typically relied on interviews and focus groups, as well as participant observation.

Kejanlioğlu, Çoban, Yanikkaya, and Köksalan (2012) and one of my own studies (Atkinson 2008) provide good examples of research based on interviews and focus groups with alternative media producers, whereas Pickard's (2006a; 2006b) research is an exemplar of participant observation used to explore processes of production. Kejanlioğlu et al.'s research does not explore a broad swath of producers, but focuses on the producers within a single organization in Turkey called Independent Communication Network (ICN). This organization produced a website that is in many ways similar to the Indymedia websites that were first developed in the United States; the producers maintained the website and edited materials, while audiences submitted articles to the site or made comments about articles that they read. Content submitted to the site typically focused on human rights and oppressive practices in Turkish society. In their research, they examined participation by the audience in the processes of production; they were essentially exploring Atton's concept of reader-writers who contribute materials to alternative media sources. Through their efforts, Kejanlioğlu et al. have demonstrated that the inclusion of audience-producers into the production of content through the ICN website built a series of intertwined political and social relationships that constituted a complex counter-public; such a counter-public could effectively voice concerns to the citizenry about human rights violations or oppressive practices. My own research explores

the interconnections between local producers of alternative media and those producers at the global level. Essentially, my research demonstrates that producers of local content (e.g., zines, activist newspapers, and radio programs) were often bolstered by simple feedback from their audiences (e.g., encouragement). In contrast, producers of global content (e.g., nationally and internationally distributed materials) frequently received complex feedback (e.g., ideas for future articles, critiques of information in previous articles) from their audience; audiences that provided feedback to the global producers were typically producers of local alternative media. Finally, Pickard's research explores the Indymedia network of news websites coordinated by activists around the world; at the center of the network is one main Indymedia website that is interconnected with several local-level websites (e.g., Indymedia Chiapas, Indymedia Los Angeles). Pickard reveals that decisions within Indymedia typically required a consensus, which held negative implications for the ability of the producers at the alternative media forum to stimulate social change (2006a); in addition, his research demonstrates significant "tyrannies" within the Indymedia organizational structure that shaped the content on the websites (2006b). Both of these projects have been covered in great detail in earlier chapters. In terms of the first project, he found that all of the local Indymedia production sites within the network had to agree on one option when the entire network faced a decision. The second project demonstrates tyrannies that existed within the Indymedia sites that impacted the content that would be published. Despite the fact that the Indymedia network had been founded on the premise that all voices are equal, Pickard noted that was not always the case. He observed different aspects of the network that filtered content that was posted on the main website; these tyrannies emerged from the rigid ideologies of many activists and the anonymity provided by the Internet.

The use of interviews and focus groups demonstrates two important aspects of this approach to the study of alternative media: the exploration of multiple levels of production (e.g., local and global) and the examination of different production roles (e.g., professional producers, reader-writers). The first approach entails a variety of different producers within or across multiple levels of production, while the other typically focuses on the different ways in which activists can engage in production. In reference to my own study, I started my project by interviewing activists so as to discover important locally and globally produced alternative media that they frequently read and used (this played an important role in much of my research, as it demonstrates that alternative media production is relevant as I will discuss shortly). After I had identified the key alternative media sources used by many of the activists within the local network, I invited producers of both local and global media to take part in the interviews. Overall, I conducted postmodern interviews with six local produc-

ers and seven global producers of alternative media content; the local producers were interviewed face to face, whereas the global producers were interviewed via telephone. The interviews focused on the producers' opinions concerning various activist issues (e.g., corporations and corporate power), their identification with social movement organizations and networks, and their interactions with audiences. The questions concerning opinions and identification helped to place the producers within the larger scope of activist organizations, networks, and causes throughout the world. The questions that focused upon their interactions with audiences demonstrated the ways in which feedback and interactivity played roles in local- and global-level alternative media. In fact, the questions concerning feedback with audiences were crucial for demonstrating an important relationship between the global and local levels. By asking the producers at each level about their relationships with audiences and other producers, I was able to discern that the global producers often gained ideas for new content through the feedback that they received from local producers. Essentially, the questions were integral for illustrating interconnections between the different levels of alternative media production.

Kejanlioğlu et al. did not examine different production levels, but focused instead on a single organization that produced alternative media content; the goal of their research was to explore the different types of production within ICN. In order to accomplish their goal, they first engaged in survey interviews with key producers associated with ICN (e.g., editor, reporters) so as to ascertain how the production process was actually carried out; these interviews covered economics of the website, political affiliations for the organization and website, content policies, and perceptions about audience-generated content. These interviews not only provided insight about the internal operations of the organization and website, but also helped to craft focus group questions that were later used with those reader-writers who occasionally provided content through the website: "Two focus groups we conducted in summer 2011 (with university students) and winter 2011 (with activist women) aimed to provide attitudes, cognitions, experiences and points of view about participation in and through media and [ICN]'s alternative journalism. The focus groups were conducted as open-ended group interviews with the moderator encouraging interaction between participants" (Kejanlioğlu et al. 2012, 282). The focus groups were more postmodern in format—as "the moderator raised topics and encouraged the group to carry on the discussion" (283)—and featured questions that enabled the participants to describe their own experiences reading, using, and contributing to ICN. This enabled Kejanlioğlu et al. to reveal different modes of production for ICN, as well as the participation in the production process by people inside and outside of the core organization. The interviews helped to establish a framework for understanding how media was

produced by ICN. The focus groups then explored that framework and provided greater insight into the specifics of how activists operated within the constraints of the ICN framework.

Pickard's research concerning the Indymedia network demonstrates the use of participatory observation to explore alternative media production. Pickard spent three years observing and working with the Indymedia site in Seattle: "[My] analysis is informed by extensive background information stemming from nearly three years of volunteering for and participant observation of the Seattle IMC. During this time, I participated in approximately 50 meetings and events, wrote several news stories for the newswire and received daily emails, usually several per day, from the general, media, media literacy and liaison IMC listervs" (Pickard 2006b, 327). As noted earlier, his access to the site gave him the opportunity to go to meetings and work with a variety of different individuals within Indymedia Seattle. Most important, however, is the fact that Pickard actually took part in the process of producing content and submitting it to the Seattle website; such work was particularly important as it provided him with insight into the organizational and cultural practices associated with the production of content for Indymedia. Had he simply engaged in interviews with key producers or audience-producers (as in the two cases noted earlier), he might very well have not been able to identify key "tyrannies" that shaped content on the website (few producers would likely vocalize such problems associated with their organization or alternative media content). According to Pickard (2006a, 24): "I sketch recurring pressure points and tensions by facing off critiques of participatory models [of democracy] with my observations of Indymedia practice." The key to Pickard's research was the fact that he took part in the processes of production within the Indymedia site and learned firsthand about the cultural practices that went into the alternative media production. As he observed those practices over time, he was able to discern the pressures and tensions that hindered or filtered the content placed onto the main website.

Ultimately, the study of alternative media production involves the examination of the ways in which production takes place; illustrating the cultural and organizational practices that give rise to content. One way to go about doing this is to identify key producers and then engage in interviews and focus groups. This enables producers to tell the researcher what it is that they do to produce content for an alternative media forum. Another way to accomplish such an exploration of production is through participant observation, in which the researcher actually take part in the production of alternative media alongside activists and advocates for social change. These methods alone are often not enough to fully explore production, as many procedural and organizational aspects are involved. In many cases, supplemental methods are used to aid in this exploration. Aside from his participant observation, Pickard also con-

**Recap 7-1. Production-oriented Approach to the Study
of Alternative Media**

- Reveals cultural and organizational practices in the production of alternative media content.
- Uses interviews and focus groups to elicit perspectives and descriptive information from producers.
- Uses participant observation to help researchers gain firsthand experience of process and practices.

ducted interviews with ten key members of the Seattle Indymedia site; such interviews enabled the activists to explain their own experiences and perspectives on the processes of production. In addition, he also engaged in textual analysis of materials circulated through the Indymedia listservs; such analysis helped him to tie “pressure points and tensions” in the organization to the content that was produced. Similarly, Kejanlioğlu et al. engaged in a textual analysis of materials submitted to the ICN website in order to link content with the processes of production. As noted earlier, however, such textual analysis reveals very little about the modes of production without the larger data and information from the producers themselves.

APPROACHING ALTERNATIVE MEDIA AUDIENCES

The study of alternative media audiences typically either focuses on audience’s interpretive strategies or reveals the ways in which audiences use the information through alternative media content. Essentially, the researcher engages with the audiences and allows them to describe the ways in which they read or use alternative media. Interviews and focus groups have been the predominant means for gleaning information from activists, although ethnographic methods such as participant observation may have yielded the same results. Rauch (2007) and I (Atkinson 2007; 2010) provide good examples of the ways in which audiences read or make use of alternative media. Rauch explores how audiences look at news and subsequently determine whether the source constituted alternative media. Essentially, she found that activists looked at three different “ideals” in order to decide whether the news could be considered alternative or mainstream: if the news was sponsored by nonprofit or noncommercial interests, committed to social change, or encouraged participation from audiences, it was deemed alternative. As activists viewed news stories on television or read magazines or newspapers, they would pay attention to these details to make a decision about whether or not it was alternative; alternative media were perceived as more trustworthy than mainstream media. In my own work, I examine

the ways in which critical theory constitutes interpretive strategies for activists. My research shows that reading Karl Marx or Antonio Gramsci impacts the ways in which activists read and understood alternative media (Atkinson 2007). Later, I explored the ways in which activists made use of the information that they gleaned from alternative media. As noted earlier, I demonstrated that activists used alternative media content in the context of organizations that constructed a backdrop against which the activists performed communicative resistance. I found that there were different backdrops against which radical activists engaged in militant resistance and reformist activists performed adjustive or legal resistance. In addition, all of the different backdrops came together to form a communal place of performance in which all activists—radical and reformist—could join and engage in resistance (Atkinson 2010). This was similar to Best’s (2005) notion of mesomobilization, in that these communal sites of performance were only temporary; disputes often arose between different types of activists from their disagreement about tactics for resistance (militant versus adjustive).

In reference to research focused on interpretive strategies, Rauch’s research, as well as my own research, can provide important insight into methods. My research concerning interpretive strategies explores the ways in which activists constructed cultural capital through their use of alternative media, as well as through their affiliation with activist organizations; different forms of cultural capital could give rise to different interpretations of alternative media content. Essentially, I conducted postmodern interviews with a series of activists in which I asked questions about the alternative media that they used, the topics in which they took particular interest, with whom they discussed the content and demographic information. This format enabled the activists to weave narratives about how they read through texts and shared information from those texts with other people. Rauch’s research sought out similar information about interpretation of alternative media by the audience, but used focus groups rather than one-on-one interviews. Overall, the study included twenty-four activists, who were split up into focus groups of four or five members. In each group, Rauch had the activists watch a taped newscast of *ABC World News Tonight with Peter Jennings*, and then she engaged in a discussion with the activists; the discussion was organized within the postmodern process, in which she asked broad questions that allowed the activists to elaborate and weave narratives: “After watching this newscast, small groups of four or five talked about: what stood out in their minds about the program, what they learned from it, anything they didn’t like about it and how it made them feel. Using open-ended questions, I gently steered the conversation by paraphrasing their comments, giving non-judgmental prompts and asking them ‘how they knew that’ or ‘why they thought that.’ This approach helped to elicit the distinctive

language with which these activists talked about the news” (Rauch 2007, 998). Although the newscast did not meet the criteria for “alternative” held by any of the activists—nor would it constitute alternative media under any of the definitions utilized within this book or any alternative media literature—the program was a starting point for discussions about what does and does not constitute alternative media. By starting with an example of what was clearly not alternative media, she provided the activists with the opportunity to critique the newscast and discuss other media; the mainstream media news served as the starting point for a dialogue between her and the activists. This is particularly important, as participants within a research project may often require examples so that they may begin weaving their narratives. This is something that was missing from my research and could significantly hamper any endeavors to explore audiences’ interpretations. Had Rauch simply asked them to talk about alternative media, they may have had no idea about what they should discuss; after all, alternative media is a nebulous term used to describe a wide variety of different things. Scholars often cannot fully agree on what constitutes alternative media. The mainstream media example enabled the activists to explain how the newscast was not alternative and then go on to provide examples of what they perceived to be true alternative media.

Another study of mine concerning activists’ alternative media use and resistance (Atkinson 2010) also provides insight into the use of qualitative methods. This study did not examine interpretive strategies used to read and understand alternative media, but rather the ways in which activists use alternative media and content in their own performances of resistance; I was interested in what they did with the content and how it aided their endeavors. As with the two research projects noted earlier, my examination of activist audiences of alternative media was based on interviews. In this case, the postmodern interviews focused not only on the use of alternative media but how the activists incorporated the alternative media content into their own activism and interactions with other activists. In addition, the interviews attempted to gauge the role of these audiences in the production of alternative media content; this is particularly important, as reader-writers, according to Atton (2002), are a key strategy for alternative media production. In fact, alternative media production cannot simply be limited to writing content but can also include commenting on articles that are found online (Meikle 2002) or providing feedback to alternative media producers (Atkinson 2008). For that reason, I delved into a variety of subjects, including the activists’ worldviews, their roles in organizations, and alternative media production:

During the interviews, I would ask the activists and producers about 1) their opinions about dominant power structures in society (e.g., What are your

opinions about the possibilities for corporate reform in society?), 2) their affiliations and work with “social justice” organizations (e.g., What organizations do you work with here in Erie City? What role do you play in that organization?), 3) their use of alternative media (e.g., What alternative media titles do you regularly use? Do you ever interact with any producers of alternative media? Do you ever write or produce any alternative media yourself?), and 4) demographics (e.g., What is your age?). (Atkinson 2008, viii)

These broad questions enabled activists to talk at length about their own experiences and knowledge and weave narratives that addressed the central issues of the research. As alternative media audiences exist within a world of activism that includes organizations, networks, and events, it was important that the interview questions focused on the connections that activists perceived between those things and the media content that they read and used.

Of course, it is not enough to simply ask activists about the connection between the alternative media that they read, watch, or listen to and their activism (e.g., role in organizations, acts of resistance at specific events); indeed, many connections may be hidden from the activists themselves, or they may not be able to make connections. It is also entirely possible that there are some aspects of their activism that they do not necessarily want to discuss in interviews, which keeps those interests of opinions hidden from the researcher. For instance, I discovered in a project that I conducted with Berg that Tea Party activists deliberately tried to mislead us about their activism and role in activist organizations during a focus group; when the deception was noted during the discussion the activists admitted to it, but dismissed the issue as insignificant (Atkinson and Berg 2012b). These problems can be resolved in a number of ways. One way would be to incorporate participant observation of activists within their organizational setting, much like the focused approach described in chapter 4. This can provide the researcher with insight about conversations that take place within an organization and the topics covered in such conversations, as well as whether those conversations relate to alternative media content that is typically circulated within the organization. In addition, participant observation would enable the researcher to engage in unstructured interviews with members and give rise to discussions about the connections between alternative media and specific organizational structures or worldviews. Another solution is to engage in an investigation of alternative media content used by the audiences. Such textual analysis can help the researcher to craft new questions about alternative media that can be asked of audiences in second and third rounds of interviews; the researcher can essentially contact the activists with follow-up questions that might emerge from textual analysis. This latter approach, in fact, enabled me to enrich my study of activists’ use of alternative media. Alongside the interviews that I conducted with the alternative media

audiences, I also conducted qualitative content analysis of numerous alternative media titles that were described in the interviews. This particular content analysis corresponds with my other studies (see the following section); the interviews informed the qualitative content analysis, and the emergent concepts from both were discussed with key activists in follow-up interviews. I used the two methods in order to be able to construct a full conceptualization of the use of alternative media for these audiences.

In general, the focus group and interview methods are common in the study of alternative media audiences. The examples cited here provide some important insight into how to approach the study of such audiences. First, always use examples, even if those examples are not alternative media. As the concept of “alternative media” is rather vague, it is important to establish an understanding with participants as to what defines alternative media; examples such as the *ABC World News Tonight* newscast used by Rauch can help establish what is and what is not alternative media. In addition, it is important to understand that the alternative media audience stands at the intersection of multiple research sites; they read (watch, or listen to) alternative media, they often participate in the production of alternative media, they are members of (or allied with) various activist organizations, and they frequently take part in activist events. Bringing all of these dependencies to bear in an interview or focus group can be incredibly cumbersome, and those methods may not provide a complete picture of the alternative media audience. Hence, such research should be supplemented by participant observation or textual analysis which will help capture a richer picture of the audience.

Recap 7-2. Audience Approach to the Study of Alternative Media

- Reveals the ways that activists use and understand alternative media.
- Uses interviews and focus groups to evaluate interpretive strategies and uses of alternative media (optional).
- Uses examples in interviews and focus groups to establish what does and does not constitute alternative media.

INVESTIGATING ALTERNATIVE MEDIA CONTENT

Textual analysis of alternative media content is typically conducted in order to accomplish one of two outcomes: reveal any themes or characteristics within the content or explain how the content should be understood within a larger context (e.g., within the context of society or within the context of a social movement). Two methods that can accomplish these goals are qualitative content analysis and rhetorical criticism (see chapter 3). Qualitative content analy-

sis is a method that can uncover prominent meanings within a mediated text (Altheide and Schneider 2013; Mayring 2000), whereas rhetorical criticism is a way in which a researcher can help other people to understand a mediated text as it pertains to culture, social institutions, or communities (Foss 2004; Herrick 2012). Qualitative content analysis tells people what is in a text; rhetorical criticism tells people how the text fits into a context. Research conducted by Kenix (2009; 2012), as well as my own research (Atkinson 2005) and my collaboration with Berg (Atkinson and Berg 2012a), provide insight into the use of qualitative content analysis in the exploration of alternative media. Ross Singer's (2011) research demonstrates the use of rhetorical criticism in such endeavors.

Kenix set out to show blogs as a form of alternative media, as well as the conflicts between the ideology of an organization and the content produced by that organization. In the first case, Kenix (2009) engaged in textual analysis in order to uncover uses of language in blogs, as well as any emergent narratives. Her research demonstrates that many political blogs (liberal and conservative) essentially reported on issues and events that had already been covered in the mainstream media news. The language used in the blogs, however, differed slightly from the language used in the mainstream media, as the bloggers used meanings that were affiliated with particular political positions; for instance, the mainstream media might use the term *freedom fighter*, whereas a blogger would use *terrorist*. In the other case, Kenix (2012) uses qualitative content analysis to examine blogs produced by various activist groups that were guided by Marxist thought. According to Kenix, some scholars have argued that mainstream media forums, which are corporate owned, are much more hierarchical and top-down in their production and approach to the audience, whereas alternative media guided by Marxist thought entail a more egalitarian approach to both production and the audience. In her qualitative content analysis, she looked for language and emergent narratives that would support or repudiate the arguments about mainstream versus alternative media. Interestingly, she found that the narratives that emerged in mainstream media promoted a slightly more community-oriented view than the Marxist alternative media; her analysis reveals that alternative media narratives gave rise to an individualistic and "opportunistic" view of issues.

In my own research (Atkinson 2005), I explored the different conceptualizations of corporate power that emerged from alternative media content regularly read by activists within a local network. My research demonstrates that some alternative media publications (such as Indymedia.org) used terms that evoke a "traditional" form of power in which resources, and the control of resources, stood as power in society; corporations controlled these resources, and thus it

was important for activists to disrupt such control. Not all forms of alternative media used this form of power, as other texts (e.g., *Z Magazine*) used terms that constructed a “hegemonic” form of power. In this case, meaning and ideology constituted power, so education and public dialogue were crucial for activists. Similarly, my project in collaboration with Berg entailed a qualitative content analysis of alternative media used by Tea Party activists; rather than searching for power, we explored the construction of heroes and villains within the texts. Through our examination of various Tea Party websites and blogs, we found that the ways in which heroes and villains were constructed gave rise to an overarching meta theme within the content about “purity”; this meta theme enabled conservative activists to scrutinize Republican candidates in elections and determine whether they were essentially good or evil. In reference to rhetorical criticism of alternative media, Singer’s (2011) research focuses on the 2004 film *Super Size Me (SSM)* by Morgan Spurlock; the film follows Spurlock as he spent one month eating only food from McDonalds. The critique applies Bakhtin’s notion of carnivalesque in a close reading of the movie. Essentially, Singer uses the premise of carnivalesque (in which grotesque themes are used to elicit humor) as a lens through which he examines the film, so as to understand how particular activist audiences are constructed. This close reading of the text enables Singer to demonstrate that the grotesque distortions of Spurlock’s body throughout the movie stands as self-subjugation; that is, Spurlock temporarily gave up his body to an exploitative system in order to shock audiences into an alternative understanding about that system. Such representations hail into being an audience that questions and resists corporate food production and sales.

The five research projects noted in this section demonstrate two key research considerations: selection of texts and process for analysis. In order to conduct a qualitative content analysis of alternative media, it is important that the overall process of the research be very systematic. It is important that the researcher engage in a systematic collection of texts for analysis; it is vital to not simply select texts that are interesting or most noticeable. One way to accomplish this task is through interviews with activists who use alternative media. For instance, in my own research (as well as my work with Berg), I used interviews to learn about the most frequently used alternative media. Essentially, I asked activists to list alternative media that they regularly read or use and then looked for those that were most frequently used across the entire population. In fact, in my 2005 research I interviewed twenty-seven activists and asked them about the alternative media sources that they most frequently used; from their responses, I conducted a qualitative content analysis on those texts that were accessed by no fewer than 20 percent of the activists. I used the same process in

my research concerning activists' uses of alternative media. According to my 2005 proceedings, "by reaching 20 percent of the audience participants [an alternative media source] demonstrated that it was a significant part of the social justice communities" (78) in that region. This enables me to analyze the relevant alternative media used by particular activist organizations and communities.

Conversely, Kenix (2009; 2012) identified relevant alternative media for examination through quantitative content analysis. In her research concerning blogs as alternative media (Kenix 2009), she generated a list of the one hundred top blog posts using an online memetracker called Tailrank. The program, developed by a small company in San Francisco, uses an algorithm to comb through blogs and identify the most popular ones. Taking the list of the top one hundred blogs, Kenix examined each one and took note of the links and coded the nature of the links; to what kind of sites was the blog linked? She then used a statistical analysis of her coding:

Every link found within the text of each blog was coded. The links were coded within the following categories: itself, apparent like-minded blog, apparent opposite-minded blog, blog with unknown political position, mainstream news source, mainstream news blog, alternative news source, alternative news blog, mainstream pop culture source, nonprofit organization, petition, personal website, government, or other. . . . Significance was measured through chi square and p values and strong adjusted residual scores, or the difference between expected and observed counts that demonstrates actual effects of this relationship. (Kenix 2009, 798)

Although the quantitative coding and statistical analysis do not fit within the framework of qualitative methods described here and elsewhere (e.g., Lindloff and Taylor 2010), such methods can help to identify crucial texts that can be examined later through qualitative content analysis; such was the case in Kenix's research. The process of coding and statistical analysis enabled her to determine which blogs had the most traffic and were frequently accessed and used by activists and audiences. As in the case of the other research examples, Kenix was able to effectively select alternative media texts that held relevance within activist communities. With these findings, she was able to move forward with a qualitative content analysis of the relevant texts.

After selecting alternative media texts for qualitative content analysis, the researcher must use a systematic process. This can be accomplished through deductive category analysis or inductive category development. The examples of the research projects conducted by myself (and in collaboration with Berg) constitute a qualitative content analysis from the deductive approach, while elements of Kenix's research projects are examples of the inductive approach. In

my research project and collaboration, categories were first developed from preexisting theories; close reading of the texts allowed for the categorization of the content. In the case of the project focused on the construction of corporate power, theories of power were used as categories that could be sought out throughout the alternative media texts. The concept of traditional power was developed from theories about physical resources used as power that had been noted in previous communication research (e.g., Fairhurst and Sarr 1996; Pfeffer 1992), while the notion of hegemonic power emerged from the writings of scholars interested in ideology and hegemony (e.g., Deetz 1992; Gramsci 1971; Mumby 1997). After I had decided on these categories, I conducted a reading of eighty-seven articles from a variety of alternative media sources, searching for references to corporations and corporate power. For every instance I encountered, I examined the ways in which corporations and power were discussed within those texts; if the language used to describe corporate power adhered to one category, noted it as such. This enabled me to find patterns in the descriptions about power throughout different alternative media used within different activist organizations. Similarly, my collaborative research with Berg relied on research concerning right-wing organizations and activists to build a framework for reading through different alternative media texts frequently used by Tea Party activists; previous research often noted that right-wing groups are often guided by a conspiratorial worldview, in which people are either with the activists or against them (e.g., Atton 2002; Downing 2001; Stewart 2002). As we read through over nine hundred articles, we looked at the way in which this conspiratorial worldview was developed through language choices about heroes and villains. From our analysis, we were able to show a thematic trend about “purity” that helped to reinforce the conspiratorial worldview. In each of these cases, we used theories to develop categories and then applied those categories to the texts under investigation; when we came across an example in the texts, we determined whether it fit into one of those categories.

Kenix’s (2012) research constitutes the approach of inductive category development. In this case, the researcher engaged in a close reading of the text in order to uncover narrative components or themes embedded in the content; Kenix developed categories as she conducted her analysis. In her examination of blogs developed by Marxist organizations, Kenix briefly explains her approach to the qualitative content analysis of the texts: “This inductive approach began with a loose, preconceived idea of the discursive elements that may exist in content and then slowly proceeded in an attempt to reveal narratives utilized that may not have been considered” (84). In this inductive approach, the researcher first developed criteria for selecting examples; these criteria were based on characteristics of alternative media that had emerged

from past research. Specifically, Kenix searched for examples in the content based on the following criteria: “Expansive analysis (Duncombe 1997); independent reporting (Atton 2002); unique stories not covered elsewhere (Makagon 2000); two-way patterns of communication between writer and reader (Rodrique 2001); engaged and open discourse (Ostertag 2007); personalized reporting (Atton and Wickenden 2005); and encouragement of social participation (Tracy 2007)” (87). As Kenix read through the content, she identified examples of each of these criteria and then looked for stories or themes within them. Narrative components or themes that emerged in the content were sorted using the constant comparative method; categories slowly developed and were refined through this ongoing process. Eventually, Kenix developed categories, as well as patterns associated with those categories; such patterns demonstrated interdependencies between different categories within the content.

In contrast, Singer’s research did not systematically demonstrate that the text under investigation was relevant to a population of activists. Instead, it was important that he first demonstrate that the text was both broadly relevant within contemporary society and more narrowly relevant to a particular social movement (see chapter 6). According to Singer (2011, 136):

Upon *SSM*’s theater release, it drew over \$11.5 million dollars in ticket sales, earning a slot among the top ten most successful documentaries of the last 30 years. This feat is especially remarkable when considering that most documentaries ranking ahead of it played a nearly 2,000 more theater venues. In addition to being nominated for an Oscar, *SSM* earned awards from the Sundance Film Festival, the Edinburgh International Film Festival, the Writer’s Guild of America, among other organizations. Politically, *SSM* and its companion book *Don’t Eat This Book: Fast Food and the Supersizing of America* contributed to the visibility of an emerging anti-corporate food movement.

In this way, Singer was able to demonstrate the importance of the text to activist organizations and communities and how it held the constitutive power to shape audiences and publics; the context and information that he provided reveal that the film was worthy of rhetorical analysis. To conduct his analysis, he then moved forward by finding those elements that adhered to Bakhtin’s concept of the carnivalesque in the film; grotesque images and representations became the units of analysis that he pulled out of the film and examined in depth. Those units of analysis were the images and representations of Spurlock’s body as he spent weeks eating only McDonald’s food. Essentially, Singer moved through the text examining these units of analysis in order to discover how they related to one another, as well as the overarching topic of the film

Recap 7-3. Content-oriented Approach to the Study of Alternative Media

- Provides insight into themes or characteristics of alternative media content.
- Uses textual analysis to examine content:
 - Qualitative content analysis reveals what is within the content.
 - Rhetorical criticism demonstrates how people should understand alternative media texts within particular contexts.

(e.g., corporations and food production). This gave rise to the concept of self-subjugation, in which Spurlock gave up control of his body to the corporation so that he could demonstrate an alternative view of that corporation.

SUMMARY

This chapter conceptualizes alternative media as a research site by discussing the different levels of such media and different approaches to studying those levels. Essentially, alternative media, like all media described by Pan and McLeod (1991), exist as multiple levels of production, audiences, content, and feedback. Researchers seeking to understand alternative media can focus on a single level, or they may attempt to examine multiple levels using qualitative methods. In the past, the study of production typically involved either interviews or focus groups with key producers of alternative media, or ethnographic work alongside alternative media producers. Earlier research concerning audiences commonly used interviews or focus groups with activists who regularly read and use alternative media; such research typically explored either the interpretive strategies of the audiences or the role of the alternative media in their resistance and protest. Researchers interested in content of alternative media have typically relied on qualitative content analysis, but rhetorical criticism has also proved to be an important tool in such endeavors. The study of feedback has typically emerged in examinations of one or more of the other levels. For instance, I asked key producers of alternative media about the role of feedback with audiences in their production of content (Atkinson 2008). Along a similar vein, when conducting interviews concerning the formation of communicative resistance (Atkinson, 2010) I asked activists about feedback that they might have provided to producers. Pickard's (2006b) exploration of the Indymedia network relied heavily on participant observation and was supplemented by an analysis of materials circulated through various IMC listservs; much of the material on the listservs was comprised of audience feedback to IMC.

The fact that this research site is constructed from four intertwined levels makes it particularly complex. For this reason, researchers typically engage in

several studies at one time, focusing on multiple levels of the media and using numerous qualitative methods, and which is why I focused on Pickard's (2006a; 2006b) and my own (Atkinson 2005; 2008; 2010) research. In each case, the researcher engaged in one large-scale study of multiple levels associated with alternative media; the findings were so expansive that publication in a single article or forum was prohibitive. Ultimately, good qualitative research concerning alternative media spans these multiple levels and addresses them through multiple qualitative methods.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The preceding chapters have presented a plethora of information concerning research methodology, method, and sites. As I note in the preface, the approaches to the different research sites emerged from my own reading of many journal articles by qualitative researchers. I sought to collect as many research articles as possible and examined each in an attempt to describe good uses of qualitative methods; my goal was to construct a series of practical approaches to the study of activism. In many cases, however, the researchers had documented very little concerning their qualitative methods. In some cases, they indicated that they used qualitative methods, but they failed to specify the actual method. In other cases, they only provided partial information concerning their methods. For instance, some researchers discussed coding elements of a text so as to learn about latent meaning structures, yet they provided no clue about how such coding was actually conducted. Needless to say, this lack of documenting their methods made my overarching goal all the more difficult.

Aside from the obvious problems with the development of this book, however, this lack of documentation brings me to a topic that I feel is important. Why do we have so many poorly documented discussions about qualitative methods? One could claim that the researchers were careless or lazy, perhaps even unscrupulous. However, my experiences have led me to believe that there is more to this problem; blaming the researchers is easy. Instead, I suspect that the problem at hand is much more systematic. When I was trying to publish my research at the beginning of my career, editors and reviewers constantly

demanded a thorough discussion and description of my methods. I was asked to provide more explanation of the analysis or include examples of interview questions. As the years passed, however, such demands began to diminish. In fact, a reviewer told me at one point to strip out the discussion of my methods, as that information was irrelevant. Looking back now, I had to ask myself, "What was going on?" Essentially, I have come up with two explanations for the change in demands by editors and reviewers. The first explanation stems from pure pragmatics. As qualitative research typically relies on conveying rich descriptions of participants' perceptions and lived experiences and journals are constrained in terms of the number of pages allotted to each article, editors and reviewers have been under increasing pressure to make the most out of limited journal space. The fact that there are more and more academics seeking publications to earn tenure (or get jobs) at colleges and universities only increases the pressure. These pragmatic problems, I feel, were the cause of the missing "qualitative tool" noted in the preface. Another possible explanation lies in the proliferation of qualitative scholars in the academy and their appointments to editorial positions. When I first began my career, many of the top journals in the field of communication studies were much more quantitative in nature; the editors were also post-positivists with backgrounds mainly in quantitative methods. Given these issues, it would make sense that there was a greater need for explanation of qualitative methods to editors and audiences who were not as familiar with them. As time has passed and more qualitative scholars and editors with qualitative backgrounds have emerged, the need to explain methods in research proceedings may very well have become less important.

Whether the problem is pragmatic or organizational, the lack of discussion concerning methods in research proceedings and articles can have profound impact on research and academia. As noted in the preface, the qualitative enterprise is a lifelong endeavor. It takes years to learn good use of qualitative methods, and much longer to develop the skills integral for solid research. What is necessary for such learning and development is practice and discourse among scholars. The problems described here threaten to severely stunt any such discourse, which can hinder the practice needed by students and veteran researchers alike.

The reason for writing this book was twofold. First, I sought to convey to students and researchers alike philosophical foundations and approaches to different research sites wherein this complex issue can be observed. The book addresses common practices that have emerged in qualitative research over the years and weaves together some important practices and processes that readers can adopt. Hopefully, students and veterans alike will be able to take away ideas about how to conduct research on this important topic. The second reason for this book is much more latent and tied to the problems that I am not-

ing here. The book can serve to generate more discourses vital for the qualitative study of social activism; no other book deals with this particular topic, and discussions about method within research articles seem to be increasingly scarce. Ideally, *Journey into Social Activism* will stand as a site that students and seasoned scholars alike can turn to in order to start discussions about qualitative methods and social activism in their own corners of the academic world. If nothing else, the book can stand as a reference for such researchers as they work to write proceedings and publish essays in journals where pragmatics or intense views might require shortened (if any) discussions about methods. Studying any topic through the use of qualitative methods, whether it is social activism or corporate advocacy, is a lifelong endeavor that requires the constant development of one's method and approach. As I have noted throughout the book, the methods described here are not the only methods that have been used (or can be used) to engage in the study of social activism. I look forward to reading future works by scholars who will describe strategies for autoethnography and historical analysis in such research, as well as works that construct additional approaches to the methods described here.

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