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When Is Inequality a Problem?

Victim Contests, Injustice Frames, and the Case of the Office of Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Student Support Services at Indiana University

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The authors argue that since social activists are often busier establishing the unfairness of inequalities than establishing the mere existence of those inequalities, a constructionist sociology of inequality ought to build upon the scholarship on "victim claiming" and "injustice framing." To illustrate, they present the case of the Office of Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Student Support Services at Indiana University—a local controversy in Bloomington, Indiana, in 1994 that was also part of the national debate over gay and lesbian rights. The central issue in the case was whether treating gays differently from heterosexuals was justified, often framed as comparable to discrimination against blacks. Among other things, the authors conclude that the discourse of black civil rights has spawned a broader cultural discourse for inequalities that are also unjust, and hence, it has become central to debates about the meaning of inequality, particularly in the United States.

Keywords: *claims-making; constructionism; framing; homosexuals; inequality; victimization*

> We started having regular meetings [in 1951]. We had been saying, "We'll just have an organization." And I kept saying, "What is our theory?" Having been a Communist, you've got to work with a theory. "What is our basic principle that we are building on?" And Harry [Hay] said, "We are an oppressed cultural minority." And I said, "That's exactly it!" That was the first time I know of that gays were referred to as an oppressed cultural minority.
>
> —cited in Marcus (1992, 32)

One of the biggest questions threading through American political culture is how to deal with a range of putative inequalities. A closely related question is precisely which inequalities are worthy of public concern. Activists of many political, cultural, and social movements on both the Right and Left are fighting against some perceived injustice or another, with many fighting more specifically against certain perceived unjust inequalities—be they the treatment of poor inner-city blacks or rural white evangelicals (cf. Smith 1998). At the same time, across the political spectrum, there are many inequalities regarded as simply irrelevant to political life—for instance, the correlation, among males, between height and economic or political success. Without perceptions of injustice, there can ordinarily be no impetus for activism against inequality, and any social structure upon which it rests may be reproduced with little struggle by the beneficiaries of that arrangement. Therefore, our focus in this article is on those relationships that, while generally agreed to be "unequal," arouse controversy over whether they are justifiably unequal and therefore nonproblematic, or injustices requiring corrective action.

The Social Constructionist Approach to Inequality

Recently, Scott Harris (e.g., 2001, 2003, 2006) has articulated the need for a constructionist sociology of inequality. He notes that many sociologists assume that there are only two major approaches to inequality—functionalist and conflict (Harris 2001, 455-59; 2004, 113-14)—and that a body of work that is explicitly and rigorously interactionist has not been developed. In a manner similar to how Spector and Kitsuse (1977) critiqued social problems researchers almost three decades ago, Harris takes issue with inequality

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researchers for not developing a constructionist sociology, distinguishing between traditional objectivist versus constructionist (particularly interactionist) approaches. Objectivists assume they know what inequality is and engage in research to find out what impacts (leads to, improves, enhances, detracts from) inequality and to document its consequences. These scholars presume their own expertise for identifying important unequal relationships (Harris 2003). Social actors' diverse interpretations of the situations tend to be treated as secondary, while scholars play "sociologists as experts" (cf. Spector and Kitsuse 1977)—nowadays sometimes called "public sociology"—and construct their own explanations of, and remedies for, putative social injustices.

On the other hand, a more securely constructionist approach—one that focuses on the creation of meaning as its central concern (Holstein and Miller 1990)—would problematize "inequality" (and "equality," for that matter). Constructionist scholars would not assume that they know what inequality *is*; rather, they would act as if (1) only people in society "know" (i.e., can determine and act upon) what it *is*, and (2) what it is is variable, contingent, and contested. Research can be designed to elicit or explore the range and limits of this variability. As Harris (2003, 216) put it, constructionists focus "not on the veracity of [people's] interpretations, but on how and for what reasons those interpretations are assembled." And indeed, Harris's empirical research demonstrates that when people do talk about inequality, it is not always with the meaning that sociologists attribute to it.

Our approach to this issue contributes to Harris's constructionist project but also differs from it in at least three ways—in terms of the research question, the methodology, and the level of analysis. First, and most important, our research question is slightly different. As we see it, Harris's point of departure has been this: since there is so much sociological attention to inequality, why isn't much of it constructionist? We want to turn that question around and ask: since there is so much sociological attention to "social constructions," why (notwithstanding Harris's own work) hasn't there been much about "inequality"? We suggest that this is, in part, because *the injustice* of the inequalities they study (and not merely the inequalities themselves) are taken for granted by sociologists.[1] If people-in-society do not see it that way, this is believed to merely reflect a lack of access to whatever it is the sociologists know or value.[2]

Our approach also departs from Harris's in terms of methodology. Although his theoretical work acknowledged the possibility of constructionist studies that do not focus on language (e.g., Harris 2000, 379), Harris's empirical work has focused primarily on what is brought into talk (this in social intercourse between individuals, and in interview data). While this is an effective way to avoid errant assumptions about what people mean by "equality" or "inequality" and to direct attention to the construction of those meanings, we feel that limiting the social constructionist study of equality/inequality to actual uses of these and similar terms by research subjects may unnecessarily restrict our analyses. By focusing only on what is brought into social interactions, we cannot assess what is omitted. Indeed, if there is little constructionist work on "inequality," that may be in part because a lot of the discourse about inequality (as sociologists have traditionally understood it) does not use the word (or close derivatives thereof). We submit that the absence of "inequality" in discourse signals something and, moreover, that if people are not discussing "inequality" directly, they might still be engaging it indirectly. Thus, what goes unsaid, and/or what is said via metaphor or other allusion, may be important parts of the meaning construction process (Miller 2003).[3]

Our third departure from Harris's approach is at the level of analysis. Again, while his theoretical work suggests the utility of studying how social institutions in general are constructed as "unequal," Harris's empirical work focuses on interactional, micro-level understandings and interpretations of equality/inequality in individual pairs (particularly married couples; Harris 2000, 2004). We are interested in equality/inequality across cultural categories of types of people (or sometimes "people-types"; cf. Loseke 2003b), such as "men" and "women" (or "husbands" and "wives"), "blacks" and various "nonblacks," "Southerners" and "non-Southerners," or as in our case study, "gays" and "straights." Our ultimate interest in such categories here is thus at the macro-level of cultural meanings. That is, we think of putative identities—and the meanings of the putative boundaries around them—as *collective representations*, "interpretive structures" that "reflect and perpetuate culturally promoted and shared understandings of . . . social reality" (Miller and Holstein 1989, 4). Moreover, we hold that if done carefully, this kind of analysis can be accomplished without reifying those representations—neither ascribing agency to the categories nor ascribing intentionality to some reified collective conscience (Miller and Holstein 1989). Collective meanings of categories—and other meanings associated with them—produce culturally circumscribed (and thus, in some cases, presumably quite limited) sets of discursive resources that can be "appropriated" by claimants in their public discourse (Spencer 2000). In that sense, we prefer to think in terms of "public" rather than merely "social" problems, looking at that important aspect of social problems work that is carried out in public arenas (Benford and Hunt 2003).

Injustice Frames, Victim Claims, and the Injustice of Inequality

The idea that a sociology of inequality should focus on the perceived fairness of putative inequalities is already embedded in the two main approaches that contextual constructionists (Best 1993) have used recently when analyzing the public discourse of activists: studies of "claims-making" conducted by constructionist social problems researchers and the framing approach to social movements. These kindred literatures developed somewhat independently toward the end of the 20th century, adopting distinct analytic vocabularies for analyzing similar types of data. Both encompass diverse studies of social activists working to persuade audiences of the significance of their causes and the immoralities by which those causes are generated. Lately, mutual recognition has led to some efforts, not yet comprehensive, to recognize overlaps and begin accounting for them (e.g., Benford and Hunt 2003; Jenness 1995; Loseke 2003a). Here, we attempt to add to that inchoate project.[4]

Framing research has been dominated by the study of "injustice frames" (Benford and Snow 2000; Gamson, Fireman, and Rytina 1982). As William Gamson noted a while back, activists' injustice frames are frequently incommensurable with dominant realities: "they face a field of combat that is already occupied by a competing legitimating frame that is established and quiescent rather than emergent and action-oriented. When truly hegemonic, the legitimating frame is taken for granted. Would-be challengers face the problem of overcoming a definition of the situation that they themselves may take as part of the natural order" (Gamson 1992, 68). Thus, any "inequality" may be recognized as real and existing, but still taken for granted as the inevitable, normal, and/or functional means of distributing wealth, power, prestige, safety, and security, or anything else considered valuable. This being the case, one of the first things that activists often must do is to engage in meaning-work. Benford and Snow define injustice frames as "a mode of interpretation—prefatory to noncompliance, protest, and/or rebellion—generated and adopted by those who come to define the actions of an authority as unjust" (Benford and Snow 2000, 615). These pioneers of framing studies indicate that what many injustice frame studies accomplish is to "identify the 'victims' of a given injustice and amplify their victimization" (Benford and Snow 2000, 615).

This "victimization process" has been addressed in some detail within the constructionist social problems literature (e.g., Berns 2004; Best 1999; Dunn 2002), beginning with the work of Jim Holstein and Gale Miller, whose 1990 article "Rethinking Victimization" did for the idea of "victim" what Harris is doing for "inequality"—problematizing it and urging sociologists to view it as a variable and contingent outcome of a social process of meaning construction, a type of "responsibility assigning discourse" (Holstein and Miller 1990). Holstein and Miller suggest that a *victim* is a social agent whose basic characteristic is the putative experience of harm. Since social problems are constructed as "harmful conditions," they necessarily involve claims about victims. Victims are seen as innocent, not responsible for the harm that has come to them, and thereby meriting sympathetic responses. *Victimizers* are those constructed as the responsible parties, willfully and intentionally causing harm, or not preventing it (Holstein and Miller 1990; Loseke 2003b).[5]

Of particular interest in relation to injustice framing are "victim contests" wherein claims about victims are disputed by antagonistic parties. As Holstein and Miller (1990) wrote,

> If 'victim' is regarded as a *claim* about the world, then belief in the 'factual' status of the description depends upon such things as credibility, influence, and warrant for honoring one set of claims over another. The version that is treated as real is thus a product of the 'politics of description' . . . with victim status depending as much on the identities, bases of influence, and rhetorics and counter rhetorics of contesting parties as it does on the characteristics of the candidate 'victims' themselves. These all represent analyzable topics for an interactional analysis. (p. 114)

For constructionist researchers, these contests are particularly helpful, since the controversies they can generate may provide unmediated discourses that allow us to less obtrusively examine the "inside" of the meaning construction process (Latour 1987).

Victim contests broadly resemble "framing contests" and "counterframing," as initially suggested by Benford (1993). Indeed, Benford and Hunt (2003) indicate that the "public problems marketplace is a terrain of contested claims" wherein protagonist claims regularly elicit and respond to antagonist claims. They suggest four possible counterframing strategies, each of which is illustrated in the data we present below. These are

1. *problem denial*—denying the very existence of the problem. In this case, the claim is that there simply is no inequality, or if there is, it is not a problem.[6]
2. *counterattributions*—acknowledging the inequality but deflecting blame away from the target of an initial attribution and suggesting an alternative victimizer. This fits well with Holstein and Miller's indication that victim contests are fundamentally about assigning blame and/or responsibility.
3. *counterprognoses*—offering alternative solutions to the problem.
4. *attacks on collective character.*

This last strategy, attacks on collective character, is the most pertinent to our research, and it seems useful to clarify some connections here to constructionist work in social problems. As Loseke (2003a) indicates, victim contests often become debates not only about "condition categories" but also about "people categories." That is, "claims producing putative people cast these types as residing within particular moral universes" (p. 79). These people deserve either sympathy or condemnation, and how "to 'think' and to 'feel' about people-categories" is what is being constructed here (Loseke 2003a, 76). Similarly, Holstein and Miller (1990) point out that we can usefully attend to the "affect of victimization" in terms of things like constructing sympathy or outrage. Attacks on collective character achieve results similar to what, in the vocabulary of accounts at the individual level, has long been called the "denial of victim" (Sykes and Matza 1957); that is, simply put, bad or irresponsible people make for less sympathetic victims and are often presented as responsible for their own difficulties, turning them from victims into their own victimizers. Furthermore, on the collective level, these victimizers may be responsible for problems encountered by "the rest of 'us.' " Hence, attacks on collective character often imply counterattributions or counterprognoses (2 or 3 above).

The Office of Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Student Support Services at Indiana University (IU)

Data

The data for this study were originally part of a larger study on the social construction of minority and ethnic groups (Berbrier 1996). In the 1990s, while Berbrier was a graduate student in Bloomington, Indiana, he collected documents relating to a local controversy over efforts to establish an outreach and support office there for lesbian and gay students. These initial data included many newspaper articles—from *Bloomington Herald-Times* (a mainstream daily), *Bloomington Voice* (an alternative weekly), and *Indiana Daily Student* (the journalism school's student-run daily)—and 200 letters e-mailed to the president of IU, solicited from around the country by local activists. The office continues to operate, and in 2004 we acquired a variety of additional documents that had been reproduced on its Web page. These include the 1993 Final Report of the Indiana University Educational Task Force on Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Concerns, many newspaper articles from both the initial period and beyond, and a series of annual reports for the office dating back to 1993.[7] Our presentation here begins with a summary of the story "The Opening of the Office," in order to familiarize readers with the plot and main characters. We then move into an analysis of the framing contest.

The Opening of the Office

The stage had long been set by June 1994, when the trustees of IU voted to establish an office on campus that would support and counsel gay, lesbian, and bisexual students. In 1990, the school's Code of Student Ethics had been revised to include proscriptions against discrimination based on sexual orientation. Also included there was a detailed list of students' individual rights concerning harassment on the basis of sexual orientation and one regarding the specific acts regarded as harassment. Notably, the amendment to the Code of Ethics addressed issues of harassment and discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation as matters of "individual rights" (Carty 1993, 2).

In September, responding to the IU Board of Aeons and the Student Senate's recommendations for the establishment of a university-funded center for gay, lesbian, and bisexual students, the Office of the Dean of Students established a task force to identify and address "the needs and concerns of the student population as well as to identify and create resources" for the IU community (Carty 1993, 2). The group, called the IU Educational Task Force on Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Concerns, was composed of 40 members from the faculty, staff, and students.

Two and a half years later, in March 1993, the task force reported on its (several) subcommittees' inquiries and findings. One subcommittee was charged with identifying "challenges as they relate[d] to the recently adopted [revision to the] *Code of Ethics*" (Carty 1993, 4)—a document that, again, recognized discrimination and harassment of lesbians and gays as matters of individual rights. Under the heading "Assessment of Needs," the subcommittee cited specific policies that distinguished heterosexual from homosexual couples—for example, a campus housing policy that limited family housing to legally married couples and the denial of access to a university chapel for the purpose of same-sex "blessing unions" (p. 5). Throughout its report, the task force deployed language clearly portraying these and other inequalities as unjust violations of rights. For example, regarding the family housing policy, it wrote, "The family housing situation is one of equity. The current family housing policy discriminates against and excludes individuals who are not traditionally married. The proposed family housing policy gives equity to all domestic partners without discriminating against any committed relationship" (Carty 1993, 6). In June 1994, in response to the many recommendations in this report, the Board of Trustees voted to establish the Office of Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Support Services.

While the task force and its efforts had gone essentially unnoticed by the local community, upon the trustees' announcement, an assertive campaign of opposition began. This countermobilization was led by two student organizations and one state legislator. The organizations were the campus branch of Young Americans for Freedom and the IU College Republicans, whose representatives were repeatedly quoted in local newspapers and engaged in ardent exchanges with office supporters via letters to editors. The legislator was Representative Woody Burton, a Republican from the district of Greenwood.[8] Burton became the most polarizing figure in the debate when he threatened to introduce legislation to withhold $500,000 in state funding from the university, retaliating for the $50,000 in taxpayer money that had been earmarked by the university for the office.

Eventually, a compromise was reached. On October 19, 1994, IU's then-president Myles Brand announced that the funding for the office would come from a private donor, not taxpayer money. In addition, Brand announced that unlike the offices for established minority groups, this office would not be independent. Rather, the University's Office of Student Ethics would be renamed as the Office of Student Ethics and Anti-Harassment Programs, and would subsume the Office of Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Student Support Services within its structure. In return, Representative Burton agreed to withdraw his threat to cut state funding (Rowland 1994). Despite an impassioned outcry on the part of the supporters of the office who indicated that these changes would undermine the intended function of the office, the university held firm. The Office of Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Student Support Services was officially opened on November 24, 1994.

The Victim Contest

Given that the task force had framed the question as one of individual (rather than group) rights, it is interesting that one of the initial issues in this victim contest was the "minority status" of lesbians and gays, from which were derived other themes for establishing the in/justice of the unequal treatment. These included (a) the relevance of behavior versus orientation, (b) the nature and degree of the discrimination and harassment, (c) the in/justice of discriminating against homosexuals, and (d) the meaning and relevance of "diversity." Since these themes are closely woven together in myriad combinations, we too weave through them in the following analysis; thus, the headings indicate emphases, but the sections are not thematically exclusive.[9]

Opening Salvos: Behavior versus Orientation

As indicated above, the announcement of the planned office generated sustained opposition. An article in *Bloomington Voice* announced that the opponents "see no clear need for the services . . . and object to the use of the term 'minority' in reference to Gays and Lesbians" (King 1994). The article continued by focusing on the disagreement between proponents and opponents of the office over the specific issue of designating "minorities." Jim Holden, president of the IU Republicans, said, "I know a lot of minorities who object to the idea that there is no difference to being a minority and being homosexual. I would personally be offended if that comparison was drawn. I don't think there's a similarity between someone's behavior and the color of their skin. It's a behavior that you willfully choose to participate in" (King 1994). In Holden's view, then, a group's "minority" status is established by "the color of their skin." Being homosexual, on the other hand, is established by "someone's behavior." Carlos Lam, president of the local chapter of Young Americans for Freedom, expanded upon Holden's argument by directly attacking the collective character, denying the group a victim status. "The difference is that the sexual behavior of gays, lesbians, and bisexuals is wrong. . . . The way to correct the wrongs of being gay is by practicing abstinence. With a Hispanic or a white you can see the difference, but the actual gay sex act is the mark that you're gay" (King 1994). For Lam, it is relevant not only that homosexuality is determined by behavior but also that it is "wrong" behavior; the "wrongs of being gay" need to be corrected. Sally Green, president of the IU gay and lesbian organization OUT, responded, "It's not a behavioral choice, it's orientation. The reason they're saying that is because it's easy to pick out an African American or a Latino student, but with gays and lesbians it's a little more difficult, so that makes it harder to appreciate how we actually are a minority" (King 1994). Green distinguishes between "behavioral choice" and "orientation." In her argument, Green asserts that African Americans and Latinos are both minorities, and that they are visible ("they are easy to pick out"), possibly by virtue of skin color or facial features. She concedes that gays and lesbians are less easy to identify but argues that it does not preclude their minority status. Although one cannot see a person's orientation, Green contends that it is no more a behavioral choice than skin color and thus no less a criterion for minority status. That it may be more difficult to discern does nothing to remove gays and lesbians from their status as victims.

The article also indicated that IU trustee Cindy Stone claimed that the opponents' arguments "cut to the very core of diversity issues," calling the distinction between gays and other minorities "ridiculous." "You ask someone who is being harassed, whether they feel like they're in a minority because their skin is different, their gender is different, their orientation is different, they feel like they're in a minority because they're in a potential position to be victims of hate crimes. . . . Hate crimes occur because someone is different in some way. This university is built on inclusiveness, not excluding people because of one or more characteristics that are different" (King 1994). In Stone's construction, minority status is conferred upon those who are "different," on the basis of the nonbehavioral and equivalent characteristics of skin color, gender, and orientation *and* on the basis of the fear of falling victim to hate crimes.[10] This early fight about minority status, behavior, and orientation seemed to set the stage for much of the rest of the debate, which would continue for several months.

Victims versus Villains

Images of homosexuality informed claimants' alternative constructions of people as either victims or villains, following Loseke's (2003a) outline. A former president of IU's Young Americans for Freedom named Shun Ravago is quoted claiming that there was no need for an office for gay, lesbian, and bisexual support because homosexuality is a "preference rather than something someone is born with" and, moreover, that "IU is saying that being a homosexual is like being black or Asian, but it's not the same at all. It is an immoral lifestyle. The center is going to be a place in which homosexuality is condoned. . . . The gays, lesbians, and bisexuals at IU are a minority group of the population, like pedophiles or masturbators" (Hahn 1994). Here, Ravago presumes two types of minorities—immoral versus moral. He denies that gays embody the victim potential of *oppressed cultural* minorities (blacks and Asians); rather, they comprise a *numerical* minority of villainous sexual deviants. Once again, the question comes down not to inequality but to the question of why people (audiences, "society") should care. If good people are harmed and they are not at fault, our cultural feeling rules call for sympathy: people *should care* (Loseke 2003a). But invoking cultural villains, such as pedophiles, elicits feelings of antipathy and vengeance. Ravago thus denies victim status to gays through an attack on their collective character. "Minorities," in this construction, may be treated unequally, but that is how things ought to be for immoral minorities.

Responding to these sorts of allegations, IU student columnist Matt Oliver asserted that gays do, indeed, constitute an unjustly oppressed group: "homosexuals are clearly a minority group, whether the state wants to officially recognize them or not. Gay bashing is a nationwide pastime. Homosexuals have been kept out of the Army, out of schools, and out of the mainstream of our society. The gay population has been forced to hide in its own bars, in its own cities, and have its own Olympics. It is by the will of the majority that this has occurred" (Oliver 1994). In Oliver's construction, gays are objectively a minority (i.e., whether "officially recognized or not"). Like others, Oliver does not use the word "inequality," choosing instead to dramatize poor treatment ("bashing," "kept out of the mainstream," "forced to hide," and segregated) in which the broader culture becomes the victimizer responsible for the harm; that is, discrimination is the "will of the majority," and harassment is a "nationwide pastime."

Similarly, another student, Raman Nagarajan, asserted that this culture keeps gays closeted. As a result, "it prevents homosexuals from enjoying the same things heterosexuals can. A heterosexual couple can take a walk on a crowded boardwalk at sunset and not have to worry about getting hit with a baseball bat. Homosexual couples can't. This persecution keeps them from the 'pursuit of happiness' that is a cherished American value" (Nagarajan 1994). Again, without explicitly using the words, Nagarajan claims that homosexuals face both "inequality" and "injustice" because they cannot do and enjoy the same things as heterosexuals. Furthermore, the "pursuit of happiness" evokes constitutional guarantees for the "cherished" inalienable rights of each individual. By claiming that homosexuals are prevented from enjoying this basic right, Nagarajan is claiming that homosexuals suffer an unjust inequality—that it is, indeed, "persecution."

Finally, like so many others, Nagarajan seems to believe that the constitutional frame was not enough and that (at least at that time and place) civil rights framing was particularly appropriate: "if more people realize that homosexuality, like race, is not a characteristic that one can control, then they would see the fundamental similarity between the civil rights movement and the gay rights movement" (Nagarajan 1994). Again, invoking similarities between homosexuality and race, and between the civil rights movement and the lesbian/gay rights movement, is used to allege that the inequalities homosexuals face are as unjust as those faced by blacks. Or put another way, if you believe that blacks have faced unjust inequality meriting redress, you must also believe this for lesbians and gays.

The Importance of the Minority Designation

Since the case of the Office of Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Student Services at Indiana University is not particularly *about* whether gays and lesbians constitute a minority group (like African Americans), that such discourse was generated might indicate something about of the potency of "minority" status and the stakes involved in establishing or recognizing a group that way.

In the early 1990s, this very "minority" status of gays was being debated politically. The terms of that debate—orientation and minority status versus chosen (and presumably immoral) behavior—were familiar to those who followed gay rights issues in those years, especially the controversy over gays in the military (which we discuss further below).

In the minority-status discourse, the opponents were not arguing about the inequality, but whether it was unjust in the same way as discrimination against blacks and Latinos, whose generally accepted status as "minorities" implied that discrimination against them was both undeserved and illegitimate—that is, emblems of their victimhood (Berbrier 2002). In the context of the debate then, conceding minority status means conceding that there are inequalities that *ought to be* addressed.[11]

The opponents went further, implying not only that the discrimination claims were exaggerated but that they were only to be expected, and even justified, by the deviance of the behaviors. The alleged victimizers were presented in the discourse as provoked by the increased visibility of homosexuality. For example, IU College Republicans' president Jim Holden explained why he saw "no clear need for the services" in this way: "if anything, the center will cause so much tension that it will increase harassment—not that I believe there's an incredible problem with it already" (King 1994). Similarly, Representative Burton—in what some might interpret to be blame-the-victim style—would later attribute any harassment to the activists themselves when he "conceded . . . that there is discrimination," and even that it was wrong, but that lesbians and gays could avoid it by "becoming unknown and invisible" (Hodges 1994). Burton was also quoted as saying that "when people are going to do things that aren't mainstream American, they're going to be discriminated against more" (Wimmer 1994). The remedy to injustice was to closet the targets, since their actions (or the actions of their representatives) were responsible for the harassment and attacks. Here Burton parsimoniously illustrates three items from Benford and Hunt's (2003) list of counterframing strategies: first, counterattributions—Burton deflected the responsibility to the gay and lesbian activists, thus denying lesbians and gays the status of victim, as "minorities." Second, counterprognoses—Burton's solution is to erase the victims. And third, Burton's attacks on their collective character—the bottom line is that these folks are "not doing the 'mainstream American' things."[12] Thus, once again, the opponents are not arguing about inequality per se, but about whether it can be justified; minority groups can be victims of others, but deviants are only victims of their own behavioral choices (cf. Berbrier 2002).

Equality from Diversity

Throughout, the data also yield frequent references to "diversity." As Ellen Berrey (2005) has indicated, a "diversity trope" has developed in our popular discourse that can be (and has been) used in multiple ways, including being co-opted by neoliberals when seen as profitable. For some progressives, the term is invoked with regularity, used as if it were a *universally legitimate symbol mandating equality*. That is, since it is assumed that just about everyone supports diversity, all groups within that diversity who are manifestly subjugated must receive better treatment.[13]

Those supporting the IU office engaged in similar rhetoric. During the height of the victim contest, the university's vice president, Kenneth Gros-Louis, wrote a letter to alumni defending the university's decision:

> A university always has been a place where people of diverse backgrounds gather . . . What's changed recently is a dramatic increase in . . . violence against people who are perceived as different. Over time, that has included women, African-Americans, Latinos, Jews, foreign students, and increasingly, homosexuals. . . . College campuses across the country are seeing an increase in harassment and other negative acts based on race, religion, and sexual orientation. We are no exception. (Meeker 1994)

Gros-Louis's style here, as well as several other passages presented here (and many more not shown), are examples of what Berbrier (2002) called "indexical association," wherein a stigmatized group is discursively associated with culturally accepted groups by pointing to putative similarities, thereby equating them. In that article, there was an emphasis on direct comparisons across groups. In contrast, many of the associations here were made less by direct analogy and more indirectly by metaphor. That is, by putting the words side by side, and connecting them, it is implied that "sexual orientation" is akin to "race" and "religion" as a source of unacceptable forms of harassment; "homosexuals" themselves are akin to women, blacks, Latinos, Jews, and foreign students—people who are "different" or have "diverse backgrounds."

In September 1994, IU staff member Duncan Mitchel concluded that Jim Holden and Woody Burton were "unable or unwilling to grasp so simple and basic a concept as equality" (Mitchel 1994). This was the last part of a long letter, and the final word in the letter was Mitchel's first use of the word "equality." His conclusion regarding "equality" was built upon two foundations: claims about diversity and indexical associations. Specifically, Mitchel had opened his letter stating that this indicated that Holden had "absolutely no idea what the word 'diversity' is supposed to mean. . . . [He] can only conceive of a world where one sex, race, religion or sexual orientation reigns supreme and all others are suppressed, or at least relegated to the back of the bus" (Mitchel 1994). Once again, "diversity" is used here with a metaphorical indexical association; that is, the phrase "the back of the bus" links discrimination against gays with both the oppression of African Americans and one of the civil rights movement's most sympathetic icons, Rosa Parks. Later, Mitchel is still more explicit in turning the diagnosis of the problem from promoting a deviant immoral lifestyle to the justice of opposing discrimination. The office was not promoting anything, but merely "taking gay students, faculty, and staff members under its protection. If the law punishes someone for desecrating a synagogue, it is not 'promoting Judaism.' When the Armed Forces conduct anti-racist training, they are not 'promoting Negritude' " (Mitchel 1994). It is only at this point in his letter that Mitchel finally introduces the issue of "equality."

Mitchel indicated that he had been motivated to write his letter because of a claim, attributed to Holden, that the office would promote "a certain lifestyle above others." Such inversion of putative victims and victimizers is common in anti-gay counterrhetoric: society is presented as the victim of the gay agenda. As Young Americans for Freedom's Carlos Lam put it, "the gay lifestyle has caused demoralization in America" (Lam 1994). But it was also this point upon which the university bent. Instead of being independent (like recognized minority groups' offices) the office was to be subsumed under the Office of Student Ethics and Anti-Harassment Programs. According to Vice President Gros-Louis, this was because it was intended "to provide a safe educational environment and not to advocate a lifestyle or political agenda" (Gros-Louis 1994). In reaction, two local gay activists, Gary Pool and Daniel Soto, solicited letters from around the country via e-mail; they asked that these letters of support for the office be addressed to President Brand, who subsequently received over 200 such letters. Many of them criticized the university president for "capitulating."[14] A contribution from Jeffrey Bass noted that "the original proposal by the Board of Aeons called for a center similar to the Black Culture Center and the Latinos Center" (Bass 1994). Eric Hinsch-Little (1994) wrote and asked President Brand, "If a group calling themselves say, The African-American Student Union formed on the IU campus, would you force them to change their name?"[15] And Martin Meeker, a graduate student in history at the University of Southern California, wrote to the IU president, "Although ignorant and hateful people would like to deny us our identity and community, gay, lesbian, and bisexual people do form an ethnicity, as diverse as any other but also as cohesive. In face of intense discrimination (as a historian I am quite aware of the position of gays in the

1950's) we have formed our own culture, institutions, and even traditions" (Meeker 1994).

To sum up to this point, the literal terms of this debate—"behavior," "orientation," "victim," "villains," "minority," "deviant," "diversity," and "culture"—were not deployed in order to establish or deny inequality or even degrees of inequality. Rather, the claimants were directing their audiences to consider the *meaning* of relationships of power, prestige, and rights. Those relationships appear to have been understood by all parties to be unequal, with the focus on whether those inequalities reflected problematic situations in need of rectification, or not.

Thus far, our analysis has not strayed from Bloomington, Indiana. But while all discourse (like all politics) is inherently local, any discourse that is *only* local, and thus only locally meaningful, is sociologically uninteresting.[16] Hence, we now inquire into how these events may have been related to things beyond the local setting.

Contextualizing the Discourse

In recent decades, qualitative work that is called sociological has idealized—and sometimes seemed to have revered—the uniqueness of each local and situational variant, to the neglect of patterns and larger contexts. What sociologists often refer to as the "cultural turn" has at times—owing perhaps to its interdisciplinarity—seemed more like the "idiographic turn." Hence, veteran scholars of both social movement framing and the construction of social problems have expressed similar concerns that there is too much attention paid to the particular—how particular frames and claims are linked to particular movements or problems (conditions)—and too little to how frames or claims are linked across contexts (Best 2001; Benford 1997; Spencer 2000; Williams 2004). Moreover, understanding these connections may help clarify the conditions under which perceived inequalities can spur activism.

In this regard, Spencer (2000) uses the term "appropriation" to refer to the action of strategically borrowing discourses from one cultural site and linking them to another, to highlight how such discourses are publicly accessible, collective meanings and representations. In this respect, the events and rhetoric generated in the Indiana case are particularly intriguing because the claimants appropriate discourses from both another controversy and from the broader cultural setting. Specifically, the national backdrop to this local victim contest included the political dispute over "gays in the military" and the resulting "don't ask, don't tell" policy (e.g., Scott and Stanley 1994). This controversy, on its own, was a highly visible victim contest over the differential treatment of homosexuals and heterosexuals and evolved just prior to the events in Indiana. Thus, as part of the same research project, we collected newspaper accounts of this national case from Lexis-Nexis (Berbrier 1996); our examination of some of the rhetoric generated therein illustrates two kinds of appropriation: (1) locally, from the national victim contest, and (2) the local and national appropriations from discourse by or on behalf of black Americans, particularly regarding the civil rights movement.

Locally Appropriating from a National Issue: Status versus Behavior Revisited

The debate over status versus behavior that played out on the national level in 1993 was very familiar to people following the gay rights movement, so much so, we believe, that it seems implausible to suggest that it did not influence the events one year later in Bloomington. We easily found several instances of how that debate played out there. For example, the head of the Joint Chiefs of Staff at the time, Colin Powell, wrote, "Skin-color is a benign, non-behavioral characteristic. Sexual orientation is perhaps the most profound of human behavioral characteristics. Comparison of the two is a convenient but invalid argument" (Trainor and Chase 1993). At around the same time, in an article that appeared in the *Los Angeles Times*, Charles Bussey, a black veteran of World War II, was quoted as having said, "I resent people who try to compare our situation with gays. There's no similarity. Blacks couldn't hide their blackness. Gays are able to hide their sexual preference. The issues are nowhere near the same" (Reza 1993). Similarly, John Watkins wrote a letter to the *Seattle Times* in which he described how he had served in the army while it was being integrated and how, contrary to the rhetoric of those advocating integration of gays into the military, opposition to integration was the (numerical) minority opinion and most soldiers, including the top brass, supported the idea as "a matter of simple justice." He went on: "they backed integration and worked hard to make it work. And it did work. We should remember this when we discuss the homosexual problem. Blackness is a matter of appearance, not behavior. Homosexuality is a matter of behavior, not appearance. Do we want to endorse the behavior?" (Watkins 1993). These claims are remarkably consistent with those made by Jim Holden in the local case described above. Both Holden and these claimants from the national controversy held that homosexuality is distinguished by choice and "preference." "Appearance" is therefore held up as the essence of what makes for a minority group: it is an involuntary and ascribed "status."

Also as with the local Bloomington case, the gays-in-the-military discourse produced claims in which the status-behavior distinction was explained via comparisons with blacks, as in the following letter to the editor: "you can tell when someone is African-American or Asian because it is self-evident. But you know someone is gay only because they express it with words or actions. Regardless of whether its origins are genetic or social, homosexuality manifests itself by behavior—and only by behavior" (Carlson 1993). In this case, the comments echo those of State Representative Burton (see note 12) who argued that you can know a visible "minority"—including Jews but not closeted homosexuals—when you see one.

We use these examples of the national case of gays in the military to direct attention to the fundamentally collective nature of the representations made in the Indiana victim contest. That is, the national controversy generated a public discourse that became accessible for appropriation into other disputes. Since it is unlikely that the claimants in the Indiana case had all just then become interested in or concerned about homosexuals in 1994, we believe it is reasonable to assume that most (on both sides) had keenly followed the "gays in the military" controversy the year before. The terms of that debate about the in/justice of discrimination is thus circumscribed by the prior and larger debate, which provides people in local settings with discursive resources with which to debate the meaning of inequalities.

Appropriating from and Indexically Associating with Blacks and the Civil Rights Movement

In both national and local gay rights victim contests, indexically associating with and invoking "civil rights" themes were common. Again, examples abound. Massachusetts Congressman Gary Studds (who is openly gay) argued that "the American people are just beginning to wrestle with this issue [of gay rights]. Rosa Parks wasn't asking to sit in the middle of the bus" (Puga 1993).[17] In a separate piece, the *San Francisco Chronicle* reported how Representative John Lewis of Georgia (a civil rights movement icon who was one of the leaders of the Selma-to-Montgomery voting rights march in 1965) said that the claims of opponents of gay rights were "like the words we heard in 1965" (Sandalow 1993). These comparisons to the civil rights movement made in the national discourse are remarkably similar to those drawn by IU staff member Duncan Mitchel and student Raman Nagarajan above. Both local- and national-level rhetors were drawing upon a broader cultural discourse that is a legacy of the African American struggle for civil rights—the "civil rights master frame" (Snow and Benford 1992). It seems, therefore, not only that the Indiana case was influenced by discourse produced in the gays-in-the-military controversy but that in both contexts people were influenced by the still broader discourse about minority rights that had developed over several decades (Skrentny 2002).

The national case also resulted in a discourse comparing President Clinton's initiative to allow gays into the military to President Truman's racial integration of the military. Indeed, from the outset, gay rights advocates and supporters of Clinton's initiative made this comparison "the cornerstone of their campaign" (Goldman 1993). Truman's initiative was regularly invoked when comparing the discrimination of gays in the 1990s with that of blacks under Jim Crow. By indexically associating gays and blacks, and by mirroring the discourse of the opposition to racial integration—a practice that by 1993 was widely regarded as ridiculous, if not a national embarrassment—these claimants seek to dramatize the injustice of excluding gays as something that over the decades would be recalled as similarly absurd. Moreover, it is important to note that it was precisely because racial integration was perceived as having been both traumatically difficult and notably successful that it was all the more appropriate. As expressed by Kahne Parsons, "Truman's decision recognized that cultural norms were insufficient grounds for discrimination. He did not exempt the military from standards of fairness and tolerance; instead, he placed the military in the position of racial pioneer, with the result that today the U.S. armed forces exemplify the highest standards of racial tolerance and equality. . . . Let us not kid ourselves that the stakes are not equally high for our gay and lesbian brothers and sisters: Gays and lesbians are the target of physical and psychological violence every bit as cruel as that directed against racial minorities" (Parsons 1993).

Summary and Conclusion

This article illustrated how scholarship might benefit from investigating how situations thought to be unequal may be interpreted as either problematic or not, thereby turning the attention of inquiry toward the *legitimacy of inequality*. Building upon research on social movement framing and the construction of social problems, we have suggested that the in/justice of in/equalities may be negotiated as victim contests. We have suggested that, ordinarily, for inequality to be addressed there has to be some sense, or consensus, that it is unfair. Under these sorts of conditions, members of stigmatized groups—whose perceived unequal treatment is legitimated by their stigma—may collectively engage in meaning-work to address the situation (Berbrier 2002). The ensuing controversies yield discourses about the nature of the groups, the inequalities across the groups, and the causes of the inequalities.

Our constructionist standpoint guides and enables us to explore processes by which meanings are developed. This approach encourages analysis both in terms of how people recognize or experience inequalities *and* in terms of how they judge them to be functional, motivating, oppressive, immoral, exploitative, and so on. These issues are often altogether elided in what passes as "critical" theory, even as those scholars focus largely, if not exclusively, on various social inequalities.[18] Furthermore, constructionism takes us beyond the traditional dichotomy of individual versus structural explanations of inequality (i.e., causal mechanisms) to concerns about *how* any kind of explanation takes shape, develops, or is deployed.

At the same time, however, we have argued in support of a contextual constructionism, holding that a strict application of constructionism—one that ignores anything beyond the discourse—also limits our horizons. Indeed, in the Indiana case, we found virtually no direct references to the gays-in-the-military issue that had transpired during the prior year. But our review of that national debate demonstrated clear parallels between the two victim contests. It seems likely that the local 1994 case involved appropriating from the national discourse (though we cannot causally link the two) and similarly that both were appropriating from broader collective representations about what is meant by civil rights, minority status, and discrimination, and the feelings aroused when these and related tropes are deployed. It seems likely, in other words, that understanding what was being said in Indiana in 1994 requires looking beyond the local discourse, or even the local context.

Furthermore, both cases (Indiana and national) also exemplify how inequalities can be, and sometimes are, constructed and contested without explicitly using the word "inequality." Those who opposed both the office at IU and lifting the ban on gay soldiers frequently called attention to what they said was the primary distinction between homosexuals and heterosexuals: behavior. By presenting homosexuality as a simple matter of choice, opponents asserted or implied that any inequalities faced by gays were of their own making and thereby not unjust. In contrast, those supportive of either opening the office or eliminating the military ban often stated that being gay was a natural or "un-chosen" orientation, and in that sense similar to popular beliefs about race, thus confirming their view that inequalities faced by either gays or blacks are fundamentally wrong.

What is interesting here is not only what was being linked but also how (cf. Spencer 2000). Since the harsh segregationist discrimination of Jim Crow is now almost universally vilified as morally reprehensible, its mere mention may elicit suspicions and negative feelings about unjustifiable discrimination. Indexical associations to blacks include appropriations of a civil rights discourse that elicits these strong feelings. In other words, the associations are being made with *feelings* about the injustice of discrimination—exemplifying what Holstein and Miller (1990) identified as the "affect of victimization." Furthermore, given that rhetors connect terms such as "homosexuality" or "lesbian" or "minority" or "victim" with cultural tropes or historical narratives such as those involving the struggles of blacks in America, it seems clear that discourse involves more than local and situated meanings. Moreover, if we are directing our attention to the status of inequalities as social problems, some of the most consequential discourse may well transpire when words like "inequality"—or even "injustice"—are *not* mentioned. Here it involved using analogy and metaphor to *create* associations that could arouse an affect of victimization, thereby problematizing unequal treatment.

Substantively, these data reinforce earlier observations that the struggle for black civil rights in America has become the principal moral narrative regarding discrimination and equal rights (Berbrier 2002, 2004). In the discourse of almost any group (or putative representatives of a group) who say they are fighting "for rights" or "against discrimination," you will find references to that epic struggle, or in the analytic vocabulary deployed here, appropriations of the "civil rights master frame" (Snow and Benford 1992). So powerful and resonant is that story, so well known, that the story itself does not need to be retold. Rather, metaphor or other implicit references are deployed—tropes like "Uncle Tom," "Jim Crow," "the back of the bus," or "segregation." These pieces of the story are, we argue, collective representations.

Understood as collective representations, it is clear that the discursive tools to de/legitimize a given inequality do not (and perhaps cannot), as Williams and Kubal (1999, 231) put it, "emerge from thin air." Rather, "the structure of culture has shifts in the opportunities available" to social movement actors (p. 233). In the context of creating inequalities that are unfair, one might note, for example, that at one time there is an emphasis on "minorities" and a decade later on "diversity." At the heart of the choices of what to appropriate are perceptions of the cultural resonance of tropes and narratives.

Recognizing the simultaneously local and collective nature of these representations, we can begin to glimpse elements of the structuration of meaning (cf. Giddens 1984). Thus, while always in flux and always variable, representations can become more or less stable and sedimented (intersubjectively agreed upon) or unstable and variable (contested, negotiated). The meaning-work that produces collective representations involves addressing one putatively stable meaning, such as the recognition that homosexual behavior is "deviant" or "sick"; working to destabilize it (increase variability; turning established "facts" into archaic "opinions"); and, within this flux, aggressively and repeatedly proffering a new meaning, with an ultimate goal of restabilization in a different legitimate meaning. In this case, that result would have gays, lesbians, bisexuals, and the transgendered recognized as "normal" members of society deserving of respect and equality.

While different from how Harris (2001, 2003, 2006) has conducted his empirical studies on the social construction of inequality, none of our departures from his approach—neither our focus on injustice, our indifference to the direct use of the word "inequality," nor our theoretical concern with collective representations—contradict his theoretical views. As with Harris (2003, 205, 223-24), we have highlighted both interpretive discretion and interpretive constraints. We have examined creative definitions of putatively unequal situations as acceptable and/or immutable, or as unacceptable and mutable, and we have done so while considering the cultural resources and goals that shape such discourses. So, it is quite possible to be doing interactionism when studying and writing about structures and cultures as realities that channel and constrain human action, even while highlighting interpretive discretion and the active creation of meaning (Maines 2001).

Further research could include comparative analyses across diverse victim types. For example, we wonder how these processes regarding the meaning of inequalities between heterosexuals and nonheterosexuals might compare to beliefs about whether poverty is problematic (Hunt 1996) or to specific attributional claims along those lines (e.g., "the deserving poor" vs. the undeserving "welfare queens"). That is, are there patterns, such as metaphorical indexical associations, across constructions of different "morally worthy" persons (Loseke and Fawcett 1995)? Additionally, beyond civil rights framing, what other narratives and discourses are engaged regarding inequality? Spencer (2000), for example, noted that the innocence of both childhood and womanhood are commonly appropriated when victims are being constructed. Finally, comparative treatments could also yield interesting analyses of variations in how people talk about what sociologists think of as inequality (or injustice), even when they are not talking about "inequality" (or "injustice").

Notes

1. While Harris does note that researchers have not ordinarily studied the process by which inequalities come to be acknowledged as social problems (Harris 2001, 2003, 2006), we make that our focal point.

2. More specifically, in our review of the literature, we find that stratification researchers are aware that many of the inequalities they study are not recognized as problematic by many (or powerful people), and some of them try to understand why, yielding three general explanations: One, derived from self-evaluation theory, holds that those who are lower in the stratification system are impressed by the greater control of the external world held by those who are dominant—as evidenced by their success. Thus impressed, they consider their experiences of inequality to be legitimate (Della Fave 1986). Another explanation is that people tend to believe that individuals get what they deserve and that ours is a "just world" (e.g., Hunt 2000), or as Hochschild (1981, 63) put it, "victims of bad luck or structural biases must somehow have been evil or stupid, just as the wealthy must somehow be moral or smart." A third explanation, rooted in Marxism, is that those who benefit from the system deploy their resources in order to both maintain the existing structure and propagate ideas about equity that legitimate the status quo (e.g., Herman and Chomsky 1988; Kerbo 2003; Perrucci and Wysong 2003). In varying degrees, each of these approaches assumes that poor people who find inequality unproblematic are victims of a false consciousness derived from faulty information or logic. None of these approaches, therefore, produces systematic empirical treatments of the process by which inequalities come to be recognized and articulated—or socially constructed—as injustices. That is, none explains *how* people come to accept (or reject) inequalities, nor how meanings of inequality are outcomes of social negotiations—although they can yield interesting questions in that direction.

3. For constructionists, conceding this point does not mean a slippery slope back into an unreflective naturalism (Gubrium and Holstein 1997) nor an unreflective criticalism (Berbrier 2003), but rather a more thoroughly contextualized constructionism of inequality based on myriad discursive forms and interpretive strategies. (See discussions in Best 2003; Gubrium and Holstein 1997; and Harris 2004.)

4. The leading framing researchers have recognized their work as contextually constructionist; Snow and Benford (2000, note 3). Still, we recognize that this is part of a broader cultural and discursive turn and that any full account of "overlaps" would have to include still other analytic vocabularies (e.g., Steinberg 1999).

5. Both victims and victimizers can be nonhuman and/or reified agents (e.g., when the environment is harmed by a global capitalist system) or they can be people, as either individuals or groups (Loseke 2003b). When they are either collectives or nonhumans, these *actants* (cf. Latour 1987) might only be ascribed agency and not intentionality by sociologists (cf. Giddens 1984), but for constructionists that is an empirical and not logical matter: it may be that some social actors do construct "capitalism," or "the Jewish race" as having intentions.

6. Similarly, constructionist social problems researcher Donileen Loseke (2003a) invokes the question "Has harm been done?"

7. While Berbrier knew some people who were peripherally involved with the office (most of whom were associated in one way or another with the sociology department), he never spoke with any of them about the controversy (to the best of his recollection). He knew none of the main protagonists prior to the research project.

8. Woody Burton is the brother of current Republican Congressman Dan Burton.

9. Our first instinct was to present the evidence of theoretically relevant themes by mutually exclusive categories. We were unable to do so efficiently or coherently because of the thematic overlaps in the discourse. Moreover, it occurred to us that since we deal here with a public contest, the temporal development of the discourse that is revealed in this presentation better evokes the interactive, or at least reactive, character of framing contests.

10. For a specific discussion on violence against gays and lesbians as a social problem, see Jenness (1995). Interestingly, Jenness finds that this issue is compared less to violence against minorities in general as much as it is to violence against women in particular.

11. It bears noting that within the lesbian and gay rights movements, the "minority" issue has a long history and is internally controversial—a good example of a frame dispute but also an ontological one (e.g., Epstein 1987; Vallochi 1999). As one reviewer suggested, some activists believe that the mainstream gay rights organizations may cede too much moral ground when emphasizing orientation rather than behavior—that is, if one's homosexuality is freely chosen, then perhaps that should be an individual right to be infringed upon neither by the state nor by individuals who disagree with that choice.

12. These associations, in this case, were made not only by the gay rights activists and their supporters. Representative Burton also raised it in discussing the appropriateness of the "minority" designation. As reported by *Bloomington Voice*, he argued at a press conference that gays do not constitute a true minority because they do not look different—a criterion he invoked for minority status. But instead of only raising physical appearance in a reference to African Americans or other visible minorities, as many opponents of gay rights do, Burton took a different and more controversial route: Burton used the example of Jews to support his claim that true minority status is rooted in appearance. "Jews look different," he said. "They have different facial features." When challenged to say whether or not there were Jews in the room, he said, "Yes, you can see people in this room who look Jewish. But I'm not going to point them out" (Hodges 1994).

In a letter to the editor of *Bloomington Herald-Times*, Carol Guess and Linda Sneed, of the Bloomington Lesbian Avengers, countered, "By granting authentic minority status to certain groups on the basis of physiognomy in order to deprive homosexual students of necessary services, Burton revealed his fundamentally racist and anti-Semitic beliefs" (Guess and Sneed 1994).

13. As Berrey wrote, "Activists promote a progressive agenda by connecting diversity with concerns about structural inequality and social equality" (Berrey 2005, 158); for example, one of her activist respondents suggested the operational definition of diversity to be "proportionate political representation" (p. 159).

14. These letters were printed out and bound and are held in the Office of Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Student Services on the Bloomington campus.

15. Actually, though there was some confusion in the wake of the sudden announcement, the name of the Office of Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Student Services remained the same throughout. The umbrella organization's name was changed from the Office of Student Ethics to the Office of Student Ethics and Anti-Harassment Programs, apparently specifically to incorporate the gay, lesbian, and bisexual office.

16. More specifically, the *content* of the discourse would be sociologically irrelevant if its meaning is restricted to one situation. However, other features of the discourse, such as turn-taking structure or other sociolinguistic features, may still have value for some types of sociological inquiry and rhetorical analysis.

17. Actually, Rosa Parks, and the Montgomery Improvement Association, began with very moderate initial demands, which included greater courtesy from bus drivers, hiring African American bus drivers, and seating on a first-come, first-served basis—with blacks seated from rear to front and whites from front to rear (which just might be interpreted as asking to sit in the middle of the bus). The Montgomery Improvement Association only became more demanding in the face of the intransigence and belligerence of the white power structure (e.g., Cashman 1991, 128 ff.).

18. An interesting example, because of its title, is Robert Heiner's *Social Problems: An Introduction to Critical Constructionism*. Heiner took the kind of critical approach described above. In a conference presentation, Berbrier (2003) argued that Heiner's (2002) title is misleading because, beyond some lip service, the book barely mentions or describes the social construction of anything. The chapter on inequality, for example, is not about how inequality does or does not

become a social problem but about the outcome of inequality and how bad it is, and how it can be traced to capitalism.

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