

Joshua Atkinson; Suzanne V.L. Berg

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RIGHT WING ACTIVISM: THE NEXT CHALLENGE FOR ALTERNATIVE MEDIA SCHOLARSHIP

by Joshua Atkinson and Suzanne V.L. Berg

Research concerning the topic of alternative and activist media has been fruitful over the past decade. Chris Atton (2002) has demonstrated the blurred line between audience and producer, while Graham Meikle (2002) has explored the role of open publishing in the establishment of political identity. In addition, I (Atkinson) have attempted to build on such research by bringing alternative media research associated with journalism and media studies together with the social movement research conducted by communication scholars like Victor Pickard (2006a; 2006b) and Kirsty Best (2005). Overall, these scholars and research projects have helped to bring clarity and understanding to a concept that, ten years ago, was largely unknown or poorly conceptualized. However, the existing research contains one enormous flaw: with the exception of a few studies (for example, Atton, 2004; and Downing, 2001) it is largely based on the examination of politically left-leaning alternative media and activist organizations. This provides a narrow view of alternative media and contemporary activism, which leaves scholars half-blind to the political realities of the twenty-first century.

In recent years, right-wing groups have worked to create and exploit cultural divisions through their alternative media networks. Such cultural divisions often isolate minority and ethnic groups, making those groups more susceptible to repression and exploitation. The cultural divisions fostered by these right-wing organizations, then, constitute a significant threat to human rights and democracy in the era of globalization. Such right-wing movements and their media represent the newest challenge that faces scholars who research alternative and activist media. In the following essay, we provide a template for future research by applying the concept of Resistance Performance to the United States-based Tea Party protest community. In addition, we outline the difficulties scholars may face if they seek to fully utilize the concept of Resistance Performance in any future research concerning right-wing alternative media and organizations; these difficulties are based on our attempts to interview grass roots alternative media producers

affiliated with various right-wing organizations. To illustrate the themes embedded within the narratives found in right-wing websites and publications, and used by self-proclaimed Tea Party activists, we applied the Resistance Performance perspective established in my past research (Atkinson, 2005; 2010; Atkinson and Dougherty, 2006). Within this particular essay, we looked to right-wing alternative media content that focuses on issues of religion and ethnicity, as those concepts most directly relate to the concept of biopower. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (2000) define biopower as the following:

Biopower is a form of power that regulates social life from its interior, following it, interpreting it, absorbing it, and rearticulating it....The highest function of this power is to invest life through and through, and its primary task is to administer life. Biopower thus refers to a situation in which what is directly at stake in power is the production and reproduction of life itself. (pp. 23–24)

Essentially, biopower is a process in which life—biological and social—becomes defined, which then affects the way people live and interact. In this way, human lives are defined and shaped. In the case of right-wing alternative media, we examined those articles and postings that depict the “Ground Zero Mosque” as a triumph of radical Islam, and children born to illegal immigrants as “anchor babies”; such stories affect the lives of those who are different from the white Anglo majority in the United States.

Past Challenges for Alternative Media Research

In order to understand the new challenge of right-wing activism that alternative media scholars now face, we must provide an overview of challenges met in the past. Over the past thirty years, research concerning the topic of alternative media has addressed three primary challenges: the challenge of definition, the challenge of exploration, and the challenge of integration. Scholars first grappled with the problem of providing a definition for the concept of alternative media. This was no easy task. The first to answer the challenge was David Armstrong; his book *A Trumpet to Arms* (1981) provided rich descriptions of the underground press of the turbulent 1960s and 1970s. Later, John Downing (1984) took up the study of alternative media in his book *Radical Media*, which profiled a variety of alternative newspapers, ‘zines, radio programs, and television networks operating during the early 1980s. Overall, the work of Armstrong and Downing brought attention to underground press and the media employed by social movements in the United States and Europe. Armstrong and Downing focused their definition of alternative media on those media used by social movement actors who sought to challenge power structures and transform social roles. Research concerning alternative media, then,

focused primarily on the media produced by left-leaning social movement organizations like Green Peace and the Nuclear Weapons Freeze Campaign (a.k.a., Freeze).

In the years that followed this initial research, other scholars began to take up the challenge of exploration, such scholars were interested in the politics of production. Chris Atton examined alternative media production in his books *Alternative Media* (2002), *An Alternative Internet* (2004), and *Alternative Journalism* (2008). In his research, Atton illustrated the various strategies used by under-funded organizations that produced and circulated alternative media content. The most important of these strategies was the use of reader/writers, or audiences who submit their own material to alternative publications and websites. Alternative publications rarely, if ever, have enough resources to pay reporters or writers, and so in order to function they rely on the audience to become the authors of news stories and commentaries. Meikle (2002) explained how the role of reader/writer was important to political identity. Many political activities that typified mainstream party politics have fallen away as conventions and other activities are now televised or viewed on the Internet; many people utilize open publishing functions found on alternative websites to become politically active. The act of writing for an alternative publication helps to shape political identity in the way that attending political meetings and conventions once had in traditional party politics.

The exploration that developed from the research of Atton and Meikle, as well as a host of other scholars, provided a more detailed understanding of alternative media. The challenge of integration developed because of the emergence of two separate lines of research concerning contemporary political activism. One line of research was the alternative media research conducted by journalism and media scholars such as Atton, Downing, and Meikle. At the same time, however, scholars in the field of communication also began to explore activism in the age of hyper-media. In recent years, many communication scholars have adopted the network metaphor that was developed by organizational communication researchers like Evan (1972) in order to study contemporary activism. Through this metaphor, new social movements are conceptualized as a series of nodes that are linked together by the Internet and other interactive media technology. Victor Pickard (2006a; 2006b) studied how Indymedia.org, an activist news site, stood as a network that was used to circulate a series of narratives to activists around the globe. In the case of Pickard's research, the dominant themes of the narratives circulated by activists through the network were 'be the media' and 'principles of unity.' These themes are particularly nebulous and vague, which allows for different activist groups to identify with the Indymedia network; this identification leads those groups to contact one another and attempt collaboration. Such a process creates diversity that, in turn, permits the expansion of a new social movement, but also gives rise to serious problems between organizations and activists. Kirsty Best (2005) describes those problems as agonisms that arise from the "mesomobilization" of disparate groups that

come together from “networked activism.” Based on the research of Alan Scott and John Street (2001), mesomobilization is a reference to multiple organizations coming together for a single purpose. Essentially, numerous activist groups might utilize Internet sites like Indymedia.org to plug into a particular network; through that site, activists learn of demonstrations and protests promoted by the larger network. Those promoted actions would be framed by the site within the nebulous themes of ‘be the media’ and ‘principles of unity’ described by Pickard. Mesomobilization takes place, then, as the various organizations work together to promote or defend those vague themes. Best notes, however, that setbacks arise as the activists in multiple organizations hold differing opinions about strategies for Communicative Resistance. The agonisms that arise from these setbacks create divisions between organizations and make the mesomobilized protest communities temporary at best.

In recent years, I have worked to integrate the line of research concerning alternative media together with the research concerning new social movements and networks; the concept of Resistance Performance (RP). RP has emerged from those efforts (Atkinson, 2005; 2010; Atkinson and Dougherty, 2006). The concept of RP focuses on the role of alternative media in the construction and co-performance of resistance against dominant power structures in local level communities. Two research methods have proven integral to the RP research: qualitative content analysis (see Krippendorff, 2004; Mayring, 2000) and active interviews (see Holstein and Gurbrium, 1995). The qualitative content analysis has been used to highlight the dominant themes within alternative media content read and used by activists in local level communities, and thus illustrate the backdrop against which activists converge to perform resistance. The active interviews are used to illustrate the categories associated with such resistance performed within local level networks against the backdrop constructed from alternative media content. The resistance described by local level networked activist entails five categories: Critical Worldviews, Alternative Media Interaction, Communicative Resistance, Intercreative Capacity, and Narrative Capacity (Atkinson, 2010). The first three categories are particularly important in our present study. The category of Critical Worldviews entails the different ways in which activists perceive society and dominant power structures: radical to reformist. Alternative Media Interaction entails the ways in which activists make use of alternative media: participatory to passive. Communicative Resistance is a reference to the tactics and strategies of resistance that activists use to address problems that stem from dominant power structures: militant to adjustive. Ultimately, the first three categories demonstrate how activists build perceptions about the power structures in society through their use of alternative media content within the context of local level networks; those perceptions stand as the backdrop against which militant or adjustive protest strategies are planned and protest communities are formed (see Atkinson, 2010).

Overall, the concept of RP does a fine job of integrating both lines of research described previously, as concepts such as reader/writer, network, and protest community are used within the overall framework. However, as stated in the introduction, there is a significant flaw with this research, as well as the past research concerning alternative media and new social movements. Pickard, Atton, Meikle, others, and I have constructed theories based on observations of left-leaning and liberal activist organizations. Ultimately, then, the next challenge for scholars who would study alternative and activist media lies in the exploration of right-wing alternative media. In the following pages, we demonstrate how to potentially apply the first three categories of Resistance Performance to the examination of right-wing alternative media content. We utilize the preliminary framework of RP to examine alternative media used by activists affiliated with the United States-based Tea Party protest community. The Tea Party emerged as a political force in the United States following the 2008 election of President Barack Obama, and the implementation of both the Troubled Asset Relief Program (TARP) and the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009. Tea Party activists often claim that their protests and actions are grassroots efforts, and that they are concerned citizens banding together to curb government spending and federal taxes. These groups often describe such taxation and spending as serious encroachment on constitutional freedoms. Much of the work conducted by the Tea Party has been directed at the Republican Party, as activists work to move the Party platform farther right. Overall, the Tea Party activists can be categorized as ‘reformist’ rather than ‘radical’ within the RP framework; they want to reform the US political and legislative system through adjustive strategies (radical activists seek to eliminate the system altogether through militant strategies). However, critics of the Tea Party claim that taxes are only a disguise for racist agendas that are mobilized against the first African-American President. According to these critics, the Tea Party actually engages in reversive arguments, calling for a return to a time of white Christian dominance when minorities ‘knew their place.’

Resistance Performance: An Examination of Content

In past RP research, qualitative content analysis of media was used to examine alternative media used by activists in an effort to uncover latent meanings within those texts. Essentially, qualitative content analysis of texts illustrates the backdrop against which local level networked activism plays out. For instance, through qualitative content analysis of alternative media texts used by activists in a town called Mystical City, I searched for examples in which the producers of the texts described so-called enemies along with the alleged problems that they posed to society. The results of the analysis demonstrated that the alternative media used by those activists entailed overarching themes of ‘human rights’ and ‘democracy’; for example, corporations (such as Enron) stood as enemies who

threatened both human rights and democracy through their actions and their contributions to political candidates (Atkinson, 2005; Atkinson, 2010; Atkinson and Dougherty, 2006). My past RP research demonstrated the backdrop against which the Communicative Resistance was carried out in local communities. In this context, powerful corporate elites controlled most of the resources in society, and kept most of the people in the US and world in a state of impoverished servitude that neglected human rights and violated the tenets of democracy. Interviews with local level activists demonstrated that reformist activists focused on the need to foster human rights and democracy in their resistance against corporate enemies; such activists engaged in adjustive forms of resistance such as education and peaceful marches. Alternately, radical activists focused on the injustice done by those corporate forces and engaged in militant resistance; they sought to physically impair the dominant power structures. However, it is important to note that the concepts of human rights and democracy that were embedded in much of the alternative media content used by radical activists constrained their performance of Communicative Resistance; the activists did not intend to harm people.

In the following pages, we identify dominant themes that emerge from the analysis of three alternative media texts used by right-wing activists affiliated with the United States-based Tea Party protest community: RedState.com, Glenn Beck radio program and website, and the Rush Limbaugh Show and website. As in the case of past RP research, we searched those alternative media texts for descriptions of so-called enemies, as well as problems posed by those 'enemies.' In the case of these right-wing alternative media, we limited our examination to the topics of the Cordoba Initiative's mosque, proposed for construction two blocks from the site of the 9/11 terrorist attacks in New York City, and the debate about so-called 'anchor babies,' born to illegal immigrants in the United States. We chose these two particular topics because they relate directly to the concept of biopolitics and biopower, as these themes and narratives construct an image of Muslims and immigrants. Such constructions, in turn, hold the potential to affect relations with these groups, influence their lives, and the position of their communities within social life.

RedState.com

RedState.com is an interactive website that is in many ways similar to the left-leaning Indymedia.org. It is similar to Indymedia in that audiences typically provide the content through posting their own stories and comments. It is different from Indymedia, however, in that there is a core group of RedState writers who initially founded the website in 2004 and who act as editors for the site today: Ben Domenech, Erik Erickson, Mike Krempasky, Josh Trevino, and Clayton Wagar. Most of the content found on the website is developed by the founders and their staff, which is then supplemented by additional

content posted by the audience. RedState mirrors Atton's (2002) concept of the reader/writer strategy used in many alternative media formats.

The qualitative content analysis of recent news stories posted on RedState concerning the proposed Cordoba mosque in New York City illustrated the producers' focus on Imam Feisal Abdul Rauf and the mosque organizers, positioning them as "secret radical Muslims." Feisal Rauf, a self-proclaimed moderate Muslim Imam, stated that the Cordoba Initiative sought to build a mosque close to the site of the 9/11 terrorist attacks in order to build bridges between the Muslim and Christian communities. Many writers at RedState post content aimed at disproving Rauf and the other organizers' intentions about the planned mosque. The Directors of RedState.com wrote an August 2, 2010 editorial, which described the Imam as someone with radical ideas:

...his writings directed at Muslims are full of praise for Wahhabi fundamentalism. He has refused to "repudiate the threat from authoritative sharia to the religious freedom and safety of former Muslims," a pledge issued nine months ago by ex-Muslims under threat for their "apostasy." He refused to describe Hamas as a terrorist organization, and will not talk about the Muslim Brotherhood. He is an open proponent of integrating sharia into the law of Western countries. When speaking to Arabic audiences, he discounts the idea of religious dialogue.

The RedState directors' argue that Rauf promotes himself as a religious moderate, but harbors radical ideals. A September 9, 2010 story responds to the debate over the Ground Zero Mosque: "The political elite have no problem being dictated to by a radical group within Islam which it would never tolerate from mainstream Christians. What's worse is the use of fear of radical Islamists by so called moderate muslims [sic] to advance *their* agenda." Throughout the text, one finds embedded links to articles and news stories at other sources on which the directors' story is based; the provision of such links is typically employed by RedState in order to build their argument. A later story posted August 10, 2010 by Dan McLaughlin titled "The Ground Zero Mosque and the Obama Administration" builds on the story posted by the directors:

We should welcome efforts to cooperate with moderate Muslims who wish to advance the cause of an Islam that rejects the various elements of the Islamist political ideology....But of course, hard experience has shown us endless examples of imams who talk the talk of moderation to Western audiences, while preaching fire and sword in Arabic behind closed doors. There are, as we detailed previously, several reasons to

doubt that Feisal Abdul Rauf, the imam of the proposed mosque, is any sort of moderate, regardless of what he may have said to sympathetic journalists and diplomats....This being so, the builders cannot be motivated by what they claim to be. On the contrary, their Cordoba Initiative must be a \$100-million exercise in exacerbating tensions.

As in the case of the directors' argument, it is once again suggested that Rauf and the organizers pretend to be moderate while actually holding radical views. The ire is not reserved for President Obama alone: Erickson argues that General David Petraeus uses news media to heighten tensions with the Islamic world: "What is politically incorrect for the media or Petraeus to say: Islam is largely incompatible with Western values when significant portions of the religion, not just the fringe, are driven to riot over koran [sic] burnings, cartoons of Mohammed, and the like." RedState alleges there is an incommensurable split between Western/Christian values and Islam. Numerous articles posted on RedState share this view and promote such an argument about both the Imam and the organizers of the mosque.

In reference to the issue of so-called anchor babies, only a few stories were posted on RedState.com at the time of analysis. In those stories, there was a focus on the increasing numbers of 'others' within the United States. According to an August 15, 2010 post titled "Amnesty (is) for Dummies" by a user called uvbogden:

Based on this Citizenship Clause, even children born in the U.S. to illegal alien parents are currently considered citizens. This definition of birthright citizenship has led to the practice of foreign women crossing the border into the country illegally, for the sole purpose of giving birth to a child in an American hospital, so that baby would be a citizen of the U.S. and serve as an 'anchor baby,' facilitating the legal immigration of the entire extended family. Recent reports have found that, while illegal aliens comprise only 4% of the U.S. population, they account for more than 8% of babies born in the United States. Considering this rate of birth of anchor babies, the subsequent family members that will immigrate based on these births, and the current and projected rates of illegal immigration, the sheer numbers of illegal aliens constantly breaching our borders are overwhelming.

Essentially, articles on RedState.com depicted 'anchor babies' as a tactic for moving entire families illegally into the United States. In this way, then, the following construct is suggested: foreign born Others only value their children and babies as tools that are a

means to an end. These Others are slowly moving into the United States and taking up space and resources that could otherwise be used by the citizenry.

The Glenn Beck Program and Rush Limbaugh Show

The Glenn Beck Program exists in two primary forms: Beck's radio program, and his website. The website features transcripts from the radio program, as well as additional material written by Beck and his staff. The radio program, which is produced and distributed by Beck's company Mercury Radio Arts, began in 2002 and currently reaches over 400 radio stations via Sirius XM satellite radio. The website was established shortly after Beck took to the air in 2002 to supplement the radio program. Like Beck's program and website, the Rush Limbaugh Show exists in multiple media formats. The program began in radio format in 1988 and has since developed a website to supplement the material presented on air. Overall, the Rush Limbaugh radio program is broadcast by over 600 stations. Unlike RedState.com, both Beck and Limbaugh's programs and websites are not intercreative; there is no audience contribution of content. In addition, the transcripts and articles found on the sites do not provide links to outside sources that bolster or support their claims.

Qualitative content analysis of these programs reveals similar content issues concerning the proposed Cordoba mosque in New York City. Both programs and websites build on the 'secret radical' idea found within RedState.com, but do not limit such radical ideals to Imams and organizers. Instead, these programs suggest that 'many' Muslims 'secretly hate' the United States and seek to integrate Sharia Law with local laws. In addition, both Beck and Limbaugh link the federal government and 'liberals' to these 'secret radicals' in their discussions about the Cordoba Initiative and the proposed mosque. Beck claimed in his August 18, 2010 broadcast that the Cordoba Initiative was named after the Spanish city of Cordoba, where he implies that Muslims turned a cathedral into a mosque to break Catholicism in the region:

Is it reasonable to ask to see if the terrorist, the Muslims that are extreme and extreme American haters, is it unreasonable to ask the question, do they believe that we are a wildly decadent society, that we are a society that is corrupting the world? They call us the Great Satan for a reason....And that it is possible that the World Trade Center was looked at in the Muslim world by some as our temple to our God, money, and power. Is it possible that it is viewed by some in the Muslim world as that temple?...Just like in Cordoba they take the cathedral of Christianity, conquer Christianity, and then take that cathedral and make it into a mosque, the third largest mosque in the world. And that was a

statement to the rest of the world that we have conquered their God and we are now leading.

Similarly, Limbaugh claimed in his broadcast of September 9, 2010 that “they” become violent when “they” do not get what “they” want:

Every time, it seems to me, anyone does not do exactly what they want, they start threatening to take it out on us, the troops, the imam [sic] here. This is a threat. The imam [sic] said, ‘Yeah, if I’d a known all this, I wouldn’t have done it. But, gosh, if I move it now, why, I don’t know what they’ll do.’ So this is the hammer that’s held on us, the religion of peace, which is not what everybody thinks it is, is going to have an uprising, much like the Dutch cartoon uprising if we move the mosque. Troops are already under great threat from militant Islamists. That’s why our troops have guns and armor. I mean it’s not peaceful out there on the battlefield....So basically the imam is saying we have to do what he wants. We gotta build this mosque or there’s going to be violence. How’s that any different from a threat? I mean that’s exactly how terrorists negotiate. Can we just be up front and honest about this? Yasser Arafat, you name it, this is how they negotiated. You do what I want to do or we’re gonna blow somebody or something up.

Limbaugh uses the word “they” to construct an image of a nebulous group of Muslim people who he represents as dangerous. Both commentators imply that the danger is made greater by ‘liberals’ who ‘control’ the federal government do little to stop the ‘secret radicals,’ or hinder those who would confront the ‘danger.’ In reference to the ‘anchor baby’ issue, both Beck and Limbaugh take a position similar to that depicted in RedState.com. Essentially, they suggest that birthing a child is a tactic used by foreigners to gain illegal access to the United States; in this way, babies are tools and not valued by the foreigners.

Much of the content found throughout these three alternative media sources focus on taxation and government spending, which corresponds with many of the claims that Tea Party advocates have made about the goals and aims of their particular protest community. However, as the qualitative content analysis has revealed, much of the content of alternative media used by Tea Party activists also delves into issues of religion and ethnicity. Our analysis identifies recurring themes about foreigners and ‘Others’ with ‘secret, illicit agendas’ within the United States. These themes construct an overarching backdrop for Communicative Resistance for the Tea Party. Within this backdrop, the following image is constructed: the United States is under siege from outside forces

including militant zealots who seek to destroy, and devious foreigners who seek to sap the nation's valuable resources. Such narratives create the potential to justify the isolation and exploitation of ethnic minorities. In the 2010 election cycle Republican politicians such as Sharon Angle, who campaigned for United States Senate in the state of Nevada, used elements of this backdrop to draw the support of Tea Party activists and right-wing groups. Angle reportedly claimed that Sharia Law currently governs the cities of Dearborn (Michigan) and Frankford (Texas); Angle offered no further explanation (Allan, 2010; Simon, 2010). In addition, Republican Senator Lindsay Graham of South Carolina has called on the Senate to re-evaluate the 14th Amendment of the United States because of the growing threat posed by the 'anchor baby tactic,' even though there is overwhelming evidence that such a tactic does not actually exist:

However, people who study patterns of illegal immigration say that [statements by Graham are] probably not true in the vast number of birthright citizenship cases. The co-author of the Pew study told *Time's* Kate Pickert that "well over 80 percent" of the 340,000 births to an illegal immigrant in 2008 were to a mother who had been in the country for at least a year, suggesting they did not come to the country specifically to have a child." (Goodwin, 2010)

Through employing the tactic of promoting themes that originate in right-wing alternative media, political figures create widespread distrust of ethnic minority communities living peacefully within the country. Such suspicion can have drastic ramifications, influencing the ways dominant groups perceive minorities, which, in turn, can profoundly affect the position of immigrant communities within society.

However, this is where the analysis of right-wing alternative media through the framework of RP incurs significant problems. Right-wing alternative media portray for activists a particular worldview, and the problems that exist within society. Under the framework of RP, activists learn about the world by using alternative media, and then come together to express opinions and engage in resistance against perceived threats. The qualitative content analysis identifies the backdrop, but does not reveal how activists use that backdrop or engage in resistance. In past RP research, qualitative content analysis of alternative media used by left-wing networked activists identified a backdrop defined by themes of human rights and democracy. Such a backdrop was only one part of the puzzle for RP. A full understanding of Resistance Performance within local communities by left-wing activists required an examination of the critical worldviews that they brought into their networks, the ways in which they used and interacted with alternative media, and the interactive capabilities of the network. Such categories, in reference to RP, influenced

whether Communicative Resistance was militant or adjustive, performed in conjunction with multiple organizations or in isolation.

Without knowing more about the categories of RP, scholars remain blind to the full picture of right-wing activism. Nevertheless, it is crucial that scholars work to better understand this situation, for there are significant dangers posed by this backdrop. For instance, in July of 2008 David Adkisson, an avid reader of Beck and other right-wing producers, walked into a liberal Unitarian Church in Tennessee and opened fire on the congregation killing two people and wounding others. After his arrest, Adkisson claimed that he attacked the church because “liberals had tied the country’s hands” in the so-called war on terror (Maxwell, 2008). In another incident in August of 2008, Timothy Dale Johnson allegedly entered the Arkansas Democratic Party headquarters and opened fire, killing the state party chair (Bustillos, 2008). Later, in 2010, Andrew Joseph Stack III crashed his single engine airplane into a federal building in Austin, Texas. In his suicide note, Stack called for violent revolt against the federal government (Brick, 2010). This is not to say that all Tea Party activists are violent or suicidal. Many of the Tea Party activists whom we have known are kind people who have genuine concerns about the federal government, radical Islam, and immigration. These people hold reformist views, which implies that the government can be changed through adjustive strategies of education and legal political rallies. However, a backdrop exists in which violent acts can be deemed necessary forms of resistance by radical activists; especially violent acts against members of minority communities. Gathering information that could build a solid understanding about the five categories of RP, however, will prove extremely difficult. In the following pages, we outline potential problems that loom for scholars and activists who wish to examine the processes of right-wing alternative media and activism.

Resistance Performance: Problems and Challenges

In the fall of 2010, we began to conduct active interviews, focus groups, and discussions with many activists who are affiliated with the Tea Party protest community. As with past research, we consider these interviews and focus groups necessary in order to fully understand the five categories of RP. Such interviews and focus groups have proven to be problematic, however. One important problem that scholars will most likely face as they turn their attention to right-wing alternative media producers, activists, and organizations: conspiratorial worldviews. Such a worldview on the part of right-wing activists leads to a variety of different tactics to obscure inquiries regarding their use of media: avoidance, lack of disclosure, and misdirection. These tactics hide or skew the five categories of RP, making the work ahead difficult.

In my past RP research I found that the worldviews of the left-wing activists were based on critical theories of Marx, Gramsci, Adorno, and others; hence the Critical

Worldviews category. In interviews and discussions with Tea Party advocates and activists we have noted the presence of worldviews based on conspiracies that cannot be proven or disproven, or cannot be disproven even in the face of overwhelming evidence. For instance, some of the Tea Party activists with whom we have spoken are convinced that President Barack Obama is not a United States citizen who was born in Hawaii, but a Muslim who was born in Kenya and is bent on subjugating the United States under Sharia Law. Such activists have demanded to see proof of his citizenship in the form of a birth certificate. However, when faced with evidence of the President's United States citizenship they claim that such evidence has been forged or fabricated.

Such conspiracy theories concerning the President and others correspond with Charles Stewart's (2002) past research concerning ultra-conservative groups like the John Birch Society. According to Stewart, groups like the John Birch Society are founded on conspiratorial worldviews in which the enemy is behind every door and hiding in every shadow; absence of evidence stands as evidence of the conspiracies. In fact, this view corresponds with the qualitative content analysis described above (the theme of 'secret radical Muslims'). A worldview in which anyone (liberal, foreigner, Muslim) may be a potential enemy, or working to aid enemies, creates a strict sense of inclusion and exclusion. People who are part of the group can be trusted, while outsiders cannot. As outsiders, we and other scholars cannot be trusted; particularly by those activists who engage in the production of alternative media. This lack of trust leads to three different obscuring tactics that we have observed in interviews and discussions with activists who engage in the production of local-level alternative media. So-called rank-and-file activists who attend rallies and go to protests are not likely to engage in these tactics.

first, many of the local-level alternative media producers whom we have contacted to interview or recruit for focus groups refuse to speak to us. Our emails go without reply, and people who we approach to engage in discussion walk away. Because of this, we have only had opportunity to interview a small number of producers and local-level activists. In the second tactic, Tea Party producers who do engage in interviews refuse to disclose crucial information about their organizations or networks. These producers typically reveal partial information about a situation or their organizations, and then refuse to reveal more. For instance, one Tea Party activist with whom we spoke claimed to have played an important role in the election of a prominent Republican by utilizing the Internet to draw Tea Party activists to aid that Republican. However, when pressed for details, the activist refused to elaborate any further. We concluded that these activists feared they would reveal important Tea Party 'secrets' by telling us more about their network, as well as their production and use of alternative media. Scholars can confront tactics such as avoidance and lack of disclosure with persistence and determination. It is essential to continue recruiting participants for interviews, and keep asking for interviews after people have initially declined.

The third tactic that we have encountered is much more problematic. It involves misdirection on the part of the local-level media producers affiliated with the Tea Party. In interviews and discussions with alternative media producers who affiliate with Tea Party organizations, we have encountered situations in which those activists have deliberately provided false or misleading information, or information that proved contradictory. In one instance, I met online with a group of activists who were very involved in Tea Party efforts, three were producers of local-level alternative media. Before I met with them, one of producers emailed me to stress that none of the four activists knew one another. At the onset of the discussion, the activists again reiterated that they did not know one another. As the discussion progressed, however, it became increasingly obvious that the four had intimate knowledge about one another's families, jobs, etc. Finally, one of the producers admitted that they knew one another quite well, and had been friends for a long time. When asked why they had insisted that they did not know one another, they simply replied, "that is what we do"; there was little else in the way of an explanation. This tactic, like the previous two tactics employed by Tea Party activists, seems to be born from the conspiratorial worldview. However, this particular tactic led me to question some of the information they relayed during the course of the discussion. Essentially, the misinformation that I detected as well as the potential for other misleading statements, obscures my understanding of the Tea Party activists, alternative media, and protest community as a whole. In addition, such misinformation could potentially skew the different RP categories if we were to progress to the next research stage of grounded analysis.

Ultimately, the conspiratorial worldviews of activists give rise to tactics used by right-wing alternative media producers in interviews and discussions that can hinder the research of scholars interested in the subjects of alternative media and social movements. Herein lies the challenge for alternative media scholarship. As right-wing activists gain popularity and move into positions of authority, it becomes increasingly important to understand the alternative media that have served to position those activists and their causes. The Tea Party protest community has forced the Republican Party to the far right through public rallies, and by promoting Tea Party candidates who run as Republicans. In this way, the Tea Party gained substantial legislative power in November of 2010. In Europe, the Freedom Party in Austria and has gained unprecedented access to power by stoking nationalist fears about Muslims. Previous research concerning alternative media has taken a utopian view of activists, media, and radical democracy. The examples of the Tea Party, Freedom Party, and other rising groups demonstrates how activists can cultivate cultural divisions, and use those divisions as a pathway to power. By utilizing the framework of RP, scholars can begin to understand the thematic backdrops against which many right-wing activists and organizations engage in the performance of resistance. Such information can help scholars and political opponents of such groups to neutralize some of the more dangerous aspects of those thematic backdrops with their own information

campaigns. However, scholars must also find ways to engage with the right-wing activists and audiences of right-wing alternative media to gain a full picture of what is going on within these movements and protest communities.

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