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Symbolic Interaction, Public Sociology, and the Potential of Open-Access Publishing

Abstract Symbolic interactionists can gain much by engaging more with public audiences. One way to do this is through open-access publishing, such that the content of interactionist research is freely available to the global public. We reflect on the issue of public sociology within symbolic interactionism, considering the recent impact of digital technology and social media. Within this context, we consider the rise of the open-access movement in scholarly publishing, and consider strategies to better realize open-access in the symbolic interactionist field. We argue that doing this will greatly benefit the development of a more public interactionism moving forward.

Keywords Symbolic Interaction; Public Sociology; Open-Access Publishing

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I should state simply that my vision is for open access in the social sciences…It is a broad field of inquiry having to do with the human situation and, as such, it strikes me that all of humankind has a right to this research and scholarship conducted in the interest of the greater good of humankind.
[Eve and Willinsky 2015:90]

Michael Burawoy's (2005) call for public sociology has had a wide influence, leading many to question the promise and perils of what a more public sociology might mean, and how it could impact our disciplinary theory and practice (e.g., Nichols 2007; Hanemaayer and Schneider 2014). In symbolic interactionism, there have been surprisingly few reflections on public sociology. Those that do exist tend to converge on the point that the philosophical, theoretical, and methodological assumptions of symbolic interaction have many affinities with public sociology (Prus 2007), and particularly so in its "organic" form of close collaborations with local publics (Horowitz 2011; Adorjan 2012). Some scholars have considered the potential of new forms of social media to realize novel ways to present research (Vannini and Milne 2014) that might better connect with and engage public audiences. Social media forms such as Twitter, blogs, and videos could be creatively employed in what might be conceived as an "e-public" sociology (Schneider 2014).

Yet social media and new and diverse forms of communication are not the only outcome of the Internet and new digital technology. It is from this world of digital technology that the "open-access" movement in scholarly publishing was born (Willinsky 2006; Suber 2012; Eve 2014). Open-access is important for striving to share knowledge universally and enable access for those who have been traditionally marginalized or excluded from scholarly networks (Papin-Ramcharan and Dawe 2006; Foasberg 2015). Indeed, any argument for public sociology ought to consider the potential of open-access publishing very seriously, since it provides universal access to our research for the very publics we claim to serve. While open-access models enable the inclusion of much wider audiences, there are economic and intellectual challenges in trying to realize them. These challenges need to be addressed if the increasingly expensive and unsustainable subscription-based model is to be replaced. We argue that symbolic interactionists would benefit greatly from meeting these challenges and instituting more open-access friendly policies, particularly if a more public sociology remains a genuine goal.

Our paper has three major aims. First, we consider the brief interactionist literature on public sociology (e.g., Prus 2007; Horowitz 2011; Adorjan 2012), and consider some of the arguments of how digital technology might help within this broader directive (Schneider 2014; Vannini and Milne 2014). Second, we review the theoretical literature on the rise of open-access publishing, and provide a brief history of its emergence, its potential and challenges, as well as the various institutional pressures that continue to shape it (Willinsky 2006; Suber 2012; Eve 2014). Building on this literature, we argue that open-access policies are a necessary requirement to realize the goals of a more public sociology. Third, we present some concrete ideas of how to achieve better open-access policies in the interactionist field. We conclude by considering how a better system of open-access publishing will help contribute to a more dynamic and robust public sociology for symbolic interactionism as we look to the future.

Symbolic Interaction, Public Sociology, and the Electronic Age

In his presidential address to the American Sociological Association, Michael Burawoy (2005) argued for a legitimate place for public sociology alongside other forms of research practice. While professional, critical, and policy sociology are well-established and rewarded, Burawoy argued that public sociology, the kind of sociology that connects with, serves, and informs everyday people in civil society, has unfairly occupied marginal spaces in the discipline.

Since Burawoy's call for a resurgence of public sociology there have been countless articles, special issues, and edited books that have weighed in on the issue, with contributors who have been both critical and supportive (Blau and Smith 2006; Clawson et al. 2007; Nichols 2007; Nyden, Hossfeld, and Nyden 2012; Hanemaayer and Schneider 2014).

While these debates have raged on, symbolic interactionists have had very little to say about the public sociology debate. This is somewhat odd given the fact that symbolic interactionists probably have the most longstanding record of working with, for, and alongside publics in an effort to understand, in a non-normative and non-judgmental fashion, their life-worlds in an intimate way (Blumer 1969; Prus 1996). Indeed, the early Chicago School, an important precursor to the development of modern symbolic interactionism, often utilized sociology to affect positive social and community change (see: Bulmer 1984; Fine 1995; Abbott 1999; Bowden and Low 2013). Jane Addams' important work at Hull House was very much aimed at ameliorating social ills while also gaining insight into the human condition (Deegan 1988; Lengermann and Niebrugge-Brantley 2007). Enacting positive social change was also a strong theme carried by other early Chicagoans, including George Herbert Mead, who often had active roles writing in public forums about various local and international political issues (see, for example, Shalin 1988; Deegan 2002; Huebner 2014).

These approaches to studying community life have often led to much more considerate treatments and depictions of diverse groups in society. These more sympathetic readings of various marginalized publics led Howard Becker (1967) to famously ask "Whose side are we on?" and ultimately led him to the conclusion that by being fair to the underdog, we do, indeed, tend to be "on their side" in our narrations. Using the tools of the symbolic interactionist tradition, we now have insider understandings, and thus more fair and less stigmatic characterizations of deviant or under-privileged groups (see: Prus and Grills 2003; Kilty, Felices-Luna, and Fabian 2014). The interactionist tradition has gone a long way in reaching out to and helping diverse and oftentimes marginalized publics in civil society, making their lack of engagement with the theme of public sociology all the more surprising.

Having said this, the potential relationship of symbolic interactionism to public sociology has not been ignored entirely. For example, Howard Becker, Herbert Gans, Katherine Newman, and Diane Vaughan (2004) had a conversation that considered the potential of ethnography for public sociology. Each reflected on their careers of doing public ethnography, across a range of different topics and issues, to try and determine how to maximize public impact and engagement. What resulted was an inspiring statement that ethnographic approaches allow for (1) being close to and better understanding the meanings of the people (both perpetrators and victims) impacted in social issues; (2) translating complex problems into accessible language by using narratives and stories of experience; and (3) creatively redefining issues by thinking outside of the box and suggesting new alternatives and possibilities. Vaughan (2005; 2006) went on to publish other memoirs of her experiences with public ethnography, recounting how her examination of organizational risk at NASA was deemed more important to various stakeholders, as well as the wider public, after the 2003 *Columbia* disaster.

Robert Prus (2007) provided the first statement that linked public sociology to the symbolic interactionist tradition explicitly. He argued that those who want to contribute to an authentic public sociology should, indeed, turn to the basic tenets of pragmatist and interactionist approaches to the field, since only by learning from and studying publics directly can we truly know how to best understand and represent their concerns and ideas. Michael Adorjan (2012) considered the potential of social constructionism, a related tradition to symbolic interactionism, to contribute to public sociological work. If constructionists were to explicitly "take a side," Adorjan argued that they would be abandoning the core epistemological tenets (and strengths) of their tradition, which is to treat all social problems agnostically as putative claims. Instead of settling on issues once and for all and taking independent stands on public issues, constructionist scholars excel at providing maps of public discourse. They would be able to present the views of different publics, and how they relate to one another, in widely accessible forums, with the hope of determining not "who is right," but of advancing communication and understanding between groups. Implicit in this is that public dialogue, if maximized, has the potential to allow for useful social adaptations to evolve on their own. This is greatly preferred over the social constructionist playing conflicting roles of ontologically agnostic analyst and claims-making advocate all at the same time. Like Prus, Adorjan believes in a professional role for the sociologist in adhering to a disciplined theoretical and methodological approach, which is most useful for public sociology.

Ruth Horowitz (2011) argued that the pragmatist and interactionist perspective often takes the form of "organic public sociology," since it has traditionally worked alongside communities in order to generate knowledge but also to bring about positive social change. In contrast to Prus and Adorjan, Horowitz argues that interactionists often find themselves as passionate members and useful advocates for human groups in the midst of their research engagements. In this way, Horowitz argues that public sociology is different than professional sociology. Public sociology is by definition a form of practice that reaches out to and strives for positive change with those groups under study. Horowitz reflects on her own history of being a participant on medical licensing boards, and how her activism in this realm usefully inspired her sociology, and vice versa. How can one analytically understand governance and advocacy roles sociologically without actively, and passionately, participating in them? And why would an advocate not make use of sociological insights to strategize best practices? Indeed, neatly dividing the world of active involvement from the world of sociological analysis is not always possible or desirable, as many of the earlier Chicago School sociologists were well-aware (Shalin 1988; Deegan 2002).

Some interactionists have begun to consider the potential of digital media to better engage the public. Philip Vannini's project of "public ethnography" explores how to communicate with publics by using new mediums of expression in digital spaces,

where the members of relevant publics can participate actively in an evolving dialogue with scholars. Vannini and Milne (2014) consider the potential of "multi-modal" forms of communication to reach out to and communicate with wider audiences, using combinations of movies, visual imagery, and traditional text to maximize reader (or viewer) engagement. With the increased popularity of "remixing" found in texts and other media online (Rainie and Wellman 2014:215), sociological work may be reformatted by users into audio, video, or other forms of media, which can effectively engage audiences who are otherwise not inclined to read traditional articles. Not only do multi-modal strategies increase engagement, they also communicate many important aspects of sociological phenomena that traditional text cannot capture. For example, in his recent ethnographic reflections of the tourist industry surrounding Mount Fuji in Japan, Vannini (2017) makes use of a short film clip that he recorded and posted on the Internet to better communicate the atmosphere, pace, and rhythm of the climbing experience.

Christopher Schneider (2014) also explores the possibilities afforded by Internet technologies for public sociology. Posting on blogs, vlogs, tweets, and communication forums in new digital spaces provides the potential for what he calls "e-public sociology," which transcends the boundaries of traditional and organic forms of public sociology. In this sense, authors are now providing statements to wide public readerships *while also* engaging directly in communication with relevant publics first-hand. Using the technology of the Internet, sociologists can provide insights, whether as deliberate "public sociology," or simply through engaging in civic debate on social events as private citizens (Gans 2015). It should be noted that many of the above forms of communication escape the requirements of peer review. This trade-off provides certain expressive freedoms, but jeopardizes credible, reliable knowledge. Thus, while such forms of communication ought to be encouraged, these cannot, and should not, replace peer-reviewed articles and books, which remain our core form of intellectual production. Further, digital Internet technology does not only allow for these alternative forms of communication. Rather, new digital media has enabled the possibility of what could be perhaps the most direct and powerful form of scholarly dissemination to the public while maintaining the rigor and standards of peer review: open-access scholarly publishing.

Open-Access Publishing and Public Sociology

Open-access is simple to understand in principle. Suber (2012:8) defines this as the effort to: "make research literature available online without price barriers and without most permission barriers." Similarly, Willinsky (2006:xxii) explains the philosophy of open-access as "a commitment to the value and quality of research carries with it a responsibility to extend the circulation of such work as far as possible and ideally to all who are interested in it and all who might profit from it." The principles of the open-access movement contribute to a democratic and egalitarian vision of science. Certainly, these ideals are not new in discussions of scientific and intellectual production, and resonate with Karl Popper's (1945) vision of the open society and Robert Merton's (1942) norms of "communism" and "universalism" in science. Merton would consider the modern ownership of scholarly work by private publishing companies a direct violation of the scientific ethos; part of this is the free sharing of knowledge to any who are interested in learning from or contributing to this same knowledge base. While the upside of freely accessible knowledge for all is clearly desirable, realizing this ideal in the midst of the existing system of legal copyright protections and market-based subscription models is complicated. The following section aims to discuss the rise of the open-access movement, and consider its potential along with some of the obstacles and challenges in play.

Traditional publishing required a great deal of physical infrastructure, such as the printing press, book-binding, and the distribution of hard copies to libraries and subscribers around the world (Gans 2012). The digital age has made this requirement less important, as people are able to produce their own digital publishing projects by using the Internet, with little expense. As Suber (2012:1) puts it, "shifting from ink on paper to digital text…to a globe-spanning network of connected computers suddenly allows us to share perfect copies of our work with a worldwide audience at essentially no cost." Since the relative costs are much lower for publishing academic work, it makes less sense to pay for-profit publishers to provide this service. For-profit publishers remain relevant by providing more professional publishing and advertising services, as well as generating and analyzing meta-data, and maximizing search tools. Only very well-funded open-access publishing initiatives would be able to compete on these grounds. Nevertheless, many academics and scholarly organizations are increasingly adopting open-access publishing models as a way to enable new forms of scholarship without the costs to publishing companies. Another obvious benefit of this is that academic knowledge provided through open-access becomes a "non-rivalrous commodity," entirely free for those who wish to obtain it (Suber 2012:58).

Despite these initiatives towards open-access, subscription models remain by far the most dominant, particularly in the social sciences and humanities (Eve 2014). The continual dependency of libraries on for-profit publishers to provide published academic research has developed into what is known as the "serials crisis." As academic knowledge remains a rivalrous commodity, large publishing companies continue to increase subscription costs, such that even the wealthiest institutions in the world can no longer keep up: "the cost to academic libraries of subscribing to journals has outstripped inflation by over 300% since 1986" (Eve 2014:13). Even top universities such as Harvard University and Cornell University in the United States and University of Montreal in Canada, for example, have had to cancel their agreements with publishing companies for fiscal reasons, inconveniencing faculty by restricting their access to the newest research. Dutch universities have threatened to cancel their subscriptions with *Elsevier* unless the company enables greatly expanded open-access policies (Grove 2015). Obviously, these pressures are felt much more severely by smaller academic institutions, particularly those in developing countries. "In 2008, Harvard subscribed to 98,900 serials and Yale to 73,900. The best funded research library in India, the Indian Institute of

Science, subscribed to 10,600. Several sub-Saharan African university libraries subscribed to zero, offering their patrons access to no conventional journals except those donated by publishers" (Suber 2012:30-31).

The first open-access journals were not borne out of the serials crisis, nor the rise of the Internet. Early efforts to share academic knowledge freely date back as far as 1966 with the implementation of the *Educational Resources Information Center*, while the first open-access journals (e.g., *Electronic Journal of Communication*, *Postmodern Culture*) were launched in 1990, just before the world-wide web went live (Suber 2009). By the mid-2000s, as the Internet was transforming the publishing industry, and the serials crisis was becoming more of a reality, research groups across the world convened to discuss how to use Internet technology to improve access to scientific knowledge. The results of these meetings are encapsulated in the 2002 *Budapest Open Access Initiative*, the 2003 *Bethesda Statement on Open Access*, and the 2003 *Berlin Declaration on Knowledge in the Social Sciences and Humanities*. They express concern for the current state of profit-driven knowledge dissemination, and place faith in open-access. These statements, along with the active protests of librarians and researchers have reached a "tipping point" of consensus among implicated parties (Eve 2014:7).

Since this time, new policies have been implemented at the university and government levels across various countries, which mandate research findings to be available via open-access, either through green or gold channels (Eve 2014:79). Green open-access means that some version of an article in a traditional subscription-based journal can be deposited in a freely accessible repository to get around the paywall. This might be in their home institution's library archive, a subject-oriented collection, or a personal webpage of the author. Different policies of journals determine whether a pre-reviewed, post-reviewed, or post-formatted version of the article is permitted, and if an embargo period is required. Gold open-access is handled at the level of the journal itself. Some journals have all of their articles open to the public immediately upon publication, while others become open after an embargo period, and/or charge an "article processing fee" to provide free access to an article that would otherwise be locked behind a subscription paywall. These latter journals are best understood as "hybrid" journals that earn revenue both through subscriptions and by charging author processing fees. These are often criticized in that they "double-dip" by taking advantage of both revenue strategies at once, and that the majority of their articles remain closed-access, since most do not want to pay the rather high fees required to convert them to open-access.

In North America, the National Science Foundation (NSF), as well as the Canadian Tri-Council (CTC) Funding Agencies have recently adopted new policies to encourage more open-access publishing. For example, the NSF released a policy statement that all research receiving funding after January 1st, 2016 will have to be available via open-access no more than 12 months after publication. The CTC has a nearly identical policy, but begins earlier on, from May 1st, 2015. How scholars make their work publicly available is up to them, whether they choose to pay author-processing fees to hybrid journals, choose a fully gold journal, or opt to publish in a journal with a green open-access policy that allows posting the peer reviewed article independently within 12 months. Critics argue that these policies do not go far enough in requiring immediate open-access, and that they lack real teeth, since the penalties for ignoring the rules are not clear. As well, the agencies involved tend to "individualize responsibility" (Beck 2006) for open-access to academic authors, who must now determine how to best adhere to the open-access requirements while also protecting their career interests. Many would risk a slap on the wrist from their funding agency in return for the prestige of landing a top-tier journal that may not conform to the policies in place. Still, the policies are real, and do carry possible penalties for those who do not comply with them. Many, if not most, North American scholars who receive major national funding after 2016 will choose only those journals that conform with the open-access policies in place.

The competing interests that arise in the emerging terrain of open-access publishing create somewhat of a quagmire for scholars, as pitfalls abound with different models and approaches. Green open-access seems to be a good solution, except that many journals prevent this with their copyright policies and embargos, and there is no way to be sure that all relevant articles will make it into these repositories, resulting in incomplete collections. Hybrid journals might seem open-access friendly at first glance, but they provide this only for a high fee, so the majority of articles are still left behind paywalls (Solomon and Björk 2012). Fully gold open-access journals seem to be the best option, with all contents immediately provided openly upon publication, which, *ceteris paribus*, increases engagement with academic work, and boosts citation rates (Swan 2010), especially in the social sciences (Norris 2008).

Yet many of these fully gold journals struggle without backing from major institutions, organizations, or large publishing houses. New open-access journals have difficulty competing for good scholars and generating much impact on their field because they are typically assumed to have less than professional practices and standards of peer review.[1] Many of these journals are rightly considered "predatory," printing virtually anything for a price, with clear economic conflicts of interest, and no honest peer review or copy-editing to speak of. Such journals lure in novice, naive, or otherwise desperate academics, who then generate dodgy research portfolios that border on the fraudulent (Xia et al. 2014). Even for those gold open-access journals that are honest, fair, and legitimate, economic challenges remain in providing free, consistent, and high quality academic work. For-profit publishers have taken advantage of this problem by offering fully gold journals, yet they often provide this service by charging high author processing fees, which some argue contravenes the very principles of open-access.[2] Nevertheless,

[1] One journal that has been able to attract good quality authors while maintaining sound peer review is *Sociological Science*, though this is largely due to its founding by sociological scholars at top-tier academic institutions in the United States.

[2] One example is *Socius*, published by Sage and connected to the American Sociological Association (ASA). This charges smaller author processing fees ($400 for ASA members, $700 for non-members). This is far more reasonable than many of the hybrid rates, yet critics would argue it still creates a financial boundary.

legitimate forms of low-cost open-access journals have soldiered on in spite of these problems, and academic perceptions of these open-access journals on the part of potential authors are beginning to change for the better (Nature Publishing Group 2015). Still, economic issues remain for independent open-access journals, as funds are required for website hosting, maintenance, copy-editing, and office space. If quality gold open-access journals are to be developed and sustained, much more stable funding from relevant scholarly organizations and government agencies is required.

Beyond open-access to journal articles, an especially important issue for social scientists is the accessibility of their monographs. Books are a major form of currency for academics in regards to both their public impact and their career prospects, and this has been especially true in the interactionist tradition. The dominant mode of sustaining open-access to books and book chapters has been through the use of author processing fees. These book processing fees pose problems for researchers without large amounts of funds for these purposes. Eve (2014:130) provides examples where costs were as much as $2,450 for one chapter, and over £11,000 for one book. Other methods of sustaining a model of open-access book publishing have been put into practice such as subsidizing the fees for hosting a book online with the profits from print-on-demand services, sharing the hosting cost with libraries and other research institutions, or offering extra features beyond simply reading the book online for a price (see: Eve 2014:130-135 and Kwan 2013 for more thorough discussions of open-access monographs).

While there has been much discussion about the importance of opening access to published research for the sake of fellow academics, public audiences have been largely ignored. Open science, and by implication, public sociology, is important, since our relevance to the larger public helps instill legitimacy and garner support for our research (Voronin, Myrzahmetov, and Berstein 2011). Embracing open-access can thus improve the status of symbolic interactionism by being more accessible, and providing more frequent insights to public debates. Instead of relying solely on short "translations" of academic work through op-ed pieces, magazine articles, or social media, open-access publishing allows the public to read sociology at the same level of complexity that is demanded in the discipline (Gans 2012). Making this work publicly available serves not only to increase a sociologists' scholarly impact (Norris 2008), but also increases their exposure to the public, often through popularizers of academic findings (Foasberg 2015). Finally, it supports a more public and democratic form of scientific dissemination by allowing taxpayers and research participants to easily access the research they have supported. Can one have, or even encourage, public sociology while maintaining a system that hides the results of publicly funded research behind paywalls, accessible only to the privileged few in the ivory tower? To do so is a contradiction in terms. If interactionists have the will to foster a more public sociology for greater engagement and impact in the social world, we hope that open-access is understood as a quintessential ingredient for enabling this longer term vision.

Symbolic Interactionism and Strategies for Open-Access

It should be said that most of the discussion in relation to open-access presumes that the primary vehicle for scholarly publishing are journal articles. Of course, in symbolic interactionism, this has not traditionally been the most important form of scholarly dissemination, since many of its important contributions come in the form of books (Turner and Turner 1990). This, coupled with the pattern of utilizing past research more slowly, and over much longer periods of time, has meant that scholarly impact metrics often miss the true nature and long term importance of interactionist contributions. Certainly, book publishing will continue, and we encourage authors to consider and pursue open-access alternatives to publishing books as well. Since there are no explicitly interactionist book publishers, it is much easier to focus on explicitly interactionist focused journals, and hence this is where we place our primary attention in this section.

Here, we present a brief survey of the different policies towards open-access held by interactionist-friendly journals, using this to identify how those most closely tied to symbolic interactionist scholarship compare (see Table 1). After discussing the current state of affairs in regards to open-access policy, we will recommend what we see as the most promising avenues for better realizing open-access in the symbolic interactionist field. These proposed strategies will improve the chances for a more relevant "interactionist public sociology," increasing both scholarly and societal impact, by enabling wider, global access to research findings.

Table 1: Gold and Green Open-Access Policies across Interactionist-Relevant Journals.

	GOLD OPEN-ACCESS		GREEN OPEN-ACCESS	
Journal	**Gold Status**	**Paid OA (Article Processing Fee)**	**Archiving Embargo Policy for Pre/Post-Refereed Drafts**	**Embargo Period (For Open-Access to Publisher Version)**
Symbolic Interaction	Hybrid	$3000	Pre-refereed copy allowed after 2 years	N/A
Studies in Symbolic Interaction	No	N/A	N/A	N/A
Ethnography	Hybrid	$3000	Pre-refereed and post prints allowed after 12 months	Requires permission from SAGE
Journal of Contemporary Ethnography	Hybrid	$3000	Pre-refereed and post prints allowed after 12 months	Requires permission from SAGE
Qualitative Sociology	Hybrid	$3000	Pre-refereed and post prints allowed after 12 months	N/A
Qualitative Sociology Review	Fully Accessible	No APC	Pre-refereed and post prints allowed	No embargo

Source: Self-elaboration.

As Table 1 shows, *Studies in Symbolic Interaction* (SSI) is the journal with the lowest level of accessibility, with no open-access policy. *Qualitative Sociology Review* (QSR) is best aligned to the ideal of gold open-access, since, by relying on volunteers, it charges no author-processing fee whatsoever and freely provides all of its content online, immediately upon publication. This journal only began in 2005, yet it is now indexed in many prominent databases and continues to gain ground, with many interactionist scholars supporting it. We thus need not consider improvements of the open-access policy for QSR, since it already meets the gold standard, and provides a useful ideal type for other journals to emulate. The hybrid status of the remaining interactionist journals attests to new strategies by large publishing businesses for heading off, as well as profiting from, open-access, issues we raised in the previous section. These hybrid journals all charge hefty $3000 author processing fees for authors who want to publish their work as open-access, and have restrictive embargos for green archiving of at least 12 months.[3] As such, none of these hybrid journals earn high grades for their open-access policies, but are representative of common trends. We now turn our attention to these core symbolic interactionist publications that lack strong open-access policies, and consider how these might be improved, before assessing some alternative strategies for improving open-access in the interactionist field.

[3] This highlights a problem, since the NSF and Canadian Tri-Council policies require that work is archived within, not after, 12 months. Technically, then, none of these conform to the new policies—one would imagine that this minor breach is preferable over a policy that embargos for 2 years however. In either case, the pressure to use funds to immediately shift the article to gold access through a high fee is quite real.

Symbolic Interaction

Of the hybrid journals on our list, *Symbolic Interaction* will especially struggle to attract scholars with its current highly restrictive archiving policy. Any scholar with national funding from the *National Science Foundation* or the *Canadian Tri-Council* funding agencies will have no choice but to pay the $3000 author processing charge if they wish to publish in *Symbolic Interaction*, since the two year embargo period is too restrictive. This means such authors will be forced to publish their work elsewhere, such as *Ethnography* or *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, if they want to avoid the processing charge while complying with the open-access policy of their funders. At the very least, *Symbolic Interaction* ought to improve its green open-access policy by reducing its embargo in order to compete for the attention of top funded researchers who might otherwise be lost to the competition.

Long term, we would like to see the flagship journal adopt a policy in line with gold open-access, which is primarily an economic problem. The journal's profits from subscriptions are used as the main source of revenue for the *Society for the Study of Symbolic Interaction* (SSSI), supporting meetings, communications, and membership benefits. Flipping this journal to open-access would thus jeopardize all of this funding to the organization. However, it might be noted that the annual meetings for SSSI, as well as the Couch-Stone Symposium meetings have always been free to members, while only charging nominal fees to non-members. It could be possible to charge SSSI members fees that are used to cover the cost of conferences, as well as running an open-access version of *Symbolic Interaction*. Running the journal using an open-access model would cost markedly less by not having to pay for profits to the publisher. We hope that governments begin to realize the potential of transforming subscription costs to university libraries into operating costs for open-access journals. If this money could be incrementally re-appropriated over the long term, hundreds of millions of dollars could be saved per year. The system of academic publishing would be every bit as scientific, with high quality standards, and fully open to the tax-paying public. With this type of public support for open-access, it would be much easier for *Symbolic Interaction* to jump on board. Until such a time, however, fixing the green policy in line with the major grant councils is important as an immediate first step, and will help attract well-funded scholars, improving scholarly impact.

Studies in Symbolic Interaction

New approaches to publishing academic work abound, and interactionists might consider new dissemination strategies that take advantage of the digital age and get ahead of these emerging trends. While *Symbolic Interaction* has slipped in its scholarly impact in the last decade or so, it still has an impact factor of .66 as reported by the ISI Web of Science in 2014. By comparison, *Studies in Symbolic Interaction* has an impact factor of 0.08, ranking it close to the very bottom of Sociology journals contained in the Thomson-Reuters database. This is even less impressive considering that 49% of this number (.04) is owed to self-citation practices (Cohen 2015).[4] It is hard to understand why the impact of this periodical is so low, since *Studies in Symbolic Interaction* has been around since the late 1970s and contains work by many of the more prominent names from the interactionist tradition over the years. Further, it is currently edited by Norman Denzin, who is not only a major name in the interactionist field, but also hosts the *Qualitative Inquiry* conference that attracts thousands annually. Certainly, the journal is not lacking in terms of institutional or charismatic backing.

The main reason for the low impact, we believe, is the fact that the journal is published as a hardcover book. It is available in print, but not electronically, to individual subscribers. It is possible to order copies of individual electronic articles, but this comes with a fee, and is only an option for more recent issues. Even for those who work at a university that has this journal available, the physical act of getting the book and photocopying the article means another boundary to access, particularly in the new world of instant, digitally delivered content. Lee Rainie and Barry Wellman (2014:224), for example, boasted that they wrote their book *Networked: The New Social Operating System* without once setting foot into a library. The reluctance to access print copies is heightened by the fact that *Studies in Symbolic Interaction* has a low impact factor to begin with, so the articles might be deemed expendable in a wider literature search.

For these reasons, we believe SSI would benefit from an immediate shift to a gold model of open-access. The publication clearly has little to lose in terms of impact, and certainly funds from the *Qualitative Inquiry* conference, or other institutional sources,

[4] These measures are not entirely fair since they assess impact over a very short time frame, while interactionist research tends to be incorporated over much longer time frames. A 5-year window might be more helpful.

as well as willing volunteers, could make the publication a success as an open-access model, while saving on all the profits flowing to the publisher. Flipping the journal to open-access would likely improve visibility, use, impact, and global reach by encouraging easier access from users, particularly those in struggling institutions and the developing world. Since the publisher presumably owns the rights of much of the past content, agreements would have to be worked out to either break off or purchase the archived material. Nevertheless, turning to the gold model of open-access with a low-cost digital format seems like an exciting opportunity to bring this publication to a greater stature, which would be beneficial for the interactionist field as a whole.

Other Open-Access Alternatives for Symbolic Interactionism

Having considered how the existing journals might better adhere to open-access friendly policies, we now suggest new alternatives. These include (1) a new freely accessible magazine for public interest in Symbolic Interactionism; and (2) an online repository that serves as a freely available collection for interactionist research. Our first suggestion is that the *Society for the Study of Symbolic Interaction* (SSSI) develop a freely accessible magazine that is intended to disseminate sociological research to the public, perhaps branding itself as the "public face of interactionism." This would be a step up from the existing *Contexts* magazine for the ASA where they promise the "public face of sociology," yet charge subscription fees for full access. The SSSI magazine could be created and maintained for little cost with the help of a willing editor and some volunteer staffing, and could maintain its presence on the existing SSSI website.

The SSSI website could also be maximized to attract more Internet traffic, and be made more aesthetically pleasing to those visitors who are interested in learning more about the interactionist tradition and the kinds of research projects that are underway. This way, the magazine would not only be a dry reporting of research results, but also a place to discuss the experiences of community-research partnerships and organically developed projects that touch a diversity of public audiences. Such stories, combined with shorter, punchier, and more accessible versions of interactionist scholarship, might go a long way to forging and strengthening these ties. Further, participants who step forward to help interactionists with their research would have a source that might update them on future trends. Links could also be provided in such an electronic newsletter to multi-modal content (Vannini and Milne 2014) such as short documentaries, interviews, imagery, or reflections, by creatively using the technology of the Internet.

Our second suggestion is that SSSI develop its own open-access repository, creating an online space for interactionist research to be freely accessible to the public. This strategy could actually provide a relatively quick, if incomplete, fix to the problem of accessibility, while requiring a minimal number of policy and infrastructural changes from the two main journals discussed above. Enabling this sort of research repository would deliver both old and new interactionist work to researchers, scientific popularizers, and the general public who are currently limited by existing paywalls. This is helpful in enabling access to articles otherwise difficult to find, but also in restoring and preserving interactionist work in whatever form it may take. This may involve curating articles, reviews, chapters, books, and public writings that may be rare, unpublished, or out of print, for scholars and the public.

If interactionists enact any of these open-access strategies, they would go a long way in promoting the relevance of their research in public discourses, and enable the possibility of wider audiences for their work, both within and outside of academia. Open-access can further the goals of the differing visions of public sociology by Adorjan (2012), Prus (2007), and Horowitz (2011). By publishing in ways that are more accessible to the public, interactionist research will be more likely to inform civic debates and reflections on social issues. On the other hand, having work accessible within the public realm makes it easier for interested parties to consult sociologists when their research is of some practical use. Open-access policies help to build a wider public audience across the globe, with the potential for more cultural impact and engagement (Foasberg 2015; Gans 2015). To ignore the seismic shift towards open-access in academic publishing due to infrastructural inertia would be detrimental to the growth and development of symbolic interactionism.

Conclusion

Is it possible for interactionists to pursue the goals of public sociology while utilizing a system of publishing and dissemination whereby research results are restricted from the wider public? We think not. Scholars who value public engagement cannot claim to pay anything more than lip service to this goal if their most important research remains behind paywalls. By valuing the unhindered dissemination of knowledge, open-access has the potential to contribute powerful insights to civic movements. While open-access publishing continues to face an uphill battle in changing the infrastructure and practices of academic publishing, we hope that this piece inspires vision and practical solutions to this worthy and inevitable goal in our own scholarly circles.

Making interactionist work more available to citizens globally will maximize the public good, and if done correctly, minimize costs to universities, funders, and other knowledge stakeholders. Publics deserve to have access to cutting-edge academic work so that these insights can help contribute to informed civic debate. Open-access publishing is an issue facing all of academia, with different disciplines more invested than others. In the field of symbolic interactionism, we have an exciting opportunity to implement more public forms of research dissemination, and be a leader among our peers in the transition to open-access publishing. Interactionists would do well to get ahead of these trends rather than trying to react to the changing nature of academic publishing too late. If these new opportunities for open-access are embraced, the potential to reinvigorate interactionism by expanding public engagement and increase scholarly and societal impacts is evident.

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