On June 14, 2002 thanks to generous support from the American Sociological Association Fund for the Advancement of the Discipline and Boston College, the Media Research and Action Project and Boston College’s Sociology Department will sponsor a one-day working conference exploring the interplay of social movement theory and practice. Honoring William A Gamson’s lifelong commitment to both theory and practice, the conference brings together social movement scholars and activists to share their efforts to cross the usual divides between theory and practice, and between action and reflection.

**Conference Goals**
The conference seeks to learn from existing work linking theory and practice and to illuminate outstanding challenges. Specifically, we will explore the following questions:
- How does the relation between theorizers and practitioners, between theory and action, affect theory-building and the construction of social movement paradigm(s)?
- How can this theory-building affect the practice?
- Would reworking this relationship alter theory-building and paradigm construction?
- How can dialogue among scholars, students, and activists encourage critical reflection among both social movement theorists and social movement activists?
- What can scholars learn about our own positions as teachers, researchers, and producers of knowledge in relation to the broader social movement sector?
- How is theory-building affected by the theorists’ social location in the academy?
- How and to whom are we teaching the history and theory of social movements?

**Background**
For over three decades, William A. Gamson’s work has explored key questions about individual and collective agency in social movements, contributing enormously to the formulation of empirically grounded social movement theories. Gamson has also maintained connections with social activism. For instance, building on Richard Flacks’ notions of “making history” and Aldon Morris’ concept of a “movement half-way house”, Gamson and Boston College colleagues created the Media Research and Action Project, MRAP, a movement incubator working to strengthen communication for social change.

As importantly, Bill encourages intellectual generosity, offering warm support to new generations of sociologists. He respects other social movement scholars and practitioners for their ideas and passion, regardless of their official status.
Background information for conference attendees

Because of resource limitations, conference attendance is by invitation only. The following information is of relevance to conference attendees.

Morning session
The conference opens with presentations from activists and scholars followed by discussion groups. Using Gamson’s work and life not as a focus but a springboard, conference participants will explore the interplay of social movement theory and practice. We realize that many social movement scholars known primarily for theoretical contributions maintain practical social movement involvement worthy of attention, and that many social movement practitioners theorize but do not write “for the literature.” We have structured the conference to highlight such innovative collaborations. The day will begin, for instance, with presentations from activists regarding their theoretical needs to which Aldon Morris and Richard Flacks will offer responses. Discussion groups follow.

Afternoon Presentations: Best Practices and Outstanding Challenges
After a break for informal conversations and lunch, conference participants will share their best practices and outstanding challenges in linking social movement theory and practice.

All conference participants are invited to submit proposals for afternoon workshops. We are seeking short (250 word) submissions summarizing best practices and remaining challenges to reworking the relation between social movement theorists and activists. We invite reflection on “glorious failures” - i.e., valiant efforts that moved a social movement forward even if unsuccessful by some measures.

Process
All short reports received prior to the conference will be posted on the MRAP web-site. The conference working committee\(^1\) will select representative reports for brief presentations to be followed by discussion.

We hope to encourage informal exchanges among the participants as well. To facilitate this, we also ask attendees to provide a brief summary of their interests (research and practice). These sketches will also be posted on the MRAP web-site.\(^2\)

Conference attendees with questions should to call Louise Lymperis at 617-552-8708 (Tues., Wed., & Thurs.).

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\(^1\) Working committee members include: Kevin Carragee, David Croteau, Adria Goodson, William Hoynes, Sharon Kurtz, Jeff Langstraat, David Meyer, Charlotte Ryan and Cassie Schwerner.

\(^2\) [http://www.bc.edu/sociology](http://www.bc.edu/sociology). Click on Media Research and Action Project.