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Part III

Who Joins or Supports Movements?

Introduction

Once initial activists in a social movement form groups and begin to think of themselves as a movement, their next step is usually to try to expand their movement by recruiting others to their cause. Like theories of movement origins, theories of recruitment have evolved through several stages, from an emphasis on individual traits to one on structural availability, and finally toward a synthesis of these dimensions.

Before the 1960s, researchers tended to see protestors as swept up in crowds, acting in abnormal and sometimes irrational ways because of frustration with their individual circumstances. In some theories marginal and alienated members of society were seen as most likely to join social movements (Kornhauser 1959); in others it was those who were insecure or dogmatic (Adorno et al. 1950; Hoffer 1951). Such claims were usually demeaning to protestors, who were thought to be compensating for some sort of personal inadequacy, and subsequent empirical research did not generally support the image of protestors as more angry or alienated than others.

In 1965 an economist, Mancur Olson (1965), took the opposite view of potential protestors, arguing that they are so rational (and self-interested) that they will not join groups if they think they can gain the benefits that the groups pursue without taking the time to participate. In other words, they will be "free riders" on the efforts of others. You don't have to join the environmental movement to enjoy the clean air that it wins for all of us. One reason to free ride is that your own participation won't make a difference, something especially true in very large groups. To attract participants, Olson said, movements must provide "selective incentives" that go only to those who participate, such as an interesting newsletter or insurance for trade union members. Olson challenged scholars to show how organizers manage to overcome the free rider problem.

Problems in the crowd paradigm, combined with Olson's challenge, helped inspire the resource mobilization paradigm, which shifted attention from what kinds of *people* protested to what kinds of *structural conditions* facilitated protest. Attitudes were summarily dismissed as unimportant or at least insufficient, for

Framing and Frame Alignment In order to attract people to join and remain committed to a movement, its issues must be presented or "framed" so that they fit or resonate with the beliefs, feelings, and desires of potential recruits. Like a picture-frame that highlights what is in the frame but excludes everything outside it, frames are simplifying devices that help us understand and organize the complexities of the world; they are the filtering lenses, so to speak, through which we make sense of this world. Frames may take the form of appealing stories, powerful clusters of symbols, slogans and catch words, or attributions of blame for social problems. Social-movement leaders and recruiters work hard to find the right frames, ones "aligned" with the understandings of potential recruits. Framing is thus one of the principal activities in which movement activists participate, and activists are often involved in framing contests or "framing wars" with their opponents in an attempt to win the "hearts and minds" of the public. See Snow et al. (1986) and Snow and Benford (1988).

many people had the right attitudes but did not participate. As part of this new agenda, "biographical availability" was seen as necessary for participation: those with few family or work obligations—especially young people—were available to devote time to movement activities (McCarthy and Zald 1973; McAdam 1986).

More importantly, researchers found that the best predictor of who will join is whether a person knows someone else already in the movement (Snow, Zurcher and Ekland-Olson 1980). In many movements, a majority of participants are recruited this way. Social networks were seen as a precondition for the emergence of a movement as well as the explanation for who was recruited. In the extreme case of "bloc recruitment" organizers bring a social network almost intact into a movement (Oberschall 1973). Social structures like these suggest that—contrary to Olson—people do not make choices as isolated, selfish individuals.

Different kinds of social networks can be used for recruitment. They may not be political in origin or intent. Black churches were crucial to the Southern civil rights movement in the 1950s (Morris 1984); fundamentalist churches helped defeat the Equal Rights Amendment in the 1980s (Mansbridge 1986); and mosques facilitated the Iranian Revolution (Snow and Marshall 1984). Networks developed for earlier political activities can also aid recruitment into a new movement—one reason that a history of previous activism makes someone more likely to be recruited (McAdam 1988). The clustering of movements in waves makes this mutual support especially important, as one movement feeds into the next (Tarrow 1998). Because of these networks, prior activism and organizational memberships help predict who will be recruited (and who will not be).

This view of recruitment is summed up in our excerpt from Doug McAdam's book on "Freedom Summer" of 1964, when hundreds of mostly white college students went South to help in voter registration drives. McAdam's methodological strategy is to look first at the students who applied to the project (compared implicitly to college students generally), then at those who actually participated (as opposed to those who were accepted but did not show up). He finds three factors important in explaining who applied: biographical availability, ideological compatibility, and social-network ties. In explaining those who showed up and those who did not, the first two factors drop out and the third factor becomes crucial. Those who knew others who were going were the most likely to follow through on their plans.

Recent work on recruitment has criticized the mechanical image of networks in much of the earlier research. Without denying the importance of personal contacts, this work has examined the cultural messages transmitted across these networks. Edward Walsh (1981), for example, described "suddenly imposed grievances": dramatic and unexpected events that highlight some social problem. In his case the Three Mile Island accident in 1979 alerted people to the risks of nuclear energy, giving a big boost to the antinuclear movement. Recruitment involves a cognitive shift for participants. McAdam (1982) called this "cognitive liberation," when potential participants begin to think they may have a chance of success.

In this view, direct personal contacts are seen as important because they allow organizers and potential participants to "align" their "frames," to achieve a common definition of a social problem and a common prescription for solving it (see Snow et al. 1986). In successful recruitment, organizers offer ways of seeing a social problem that resonate with the views and experiences of potential recruits. Networks are important *because* of the cultural meanings they transmit. Networks and meanings are not rival explanations; they work together.

Snow and Benford (1988) distinguish three successive types of framing necessary for successful recruitment: *diagnostic*, in which a movement convinces potential converts that a problem needs to be addressed; *prognostic*, in which it convinces them of appropriate strategies, tactics and targets; and *motivational*, in which it exhorts them to get involved in these activities (this last seems primarily about arousing the right emotions). They argue that frames are more likely to be accepted if they fit well with the existing beliefs of potential recruits, if they involve empirically credible claims, if they are compatible with the life experiences of the audiences, and if they fit with the stories or narratives the audiences tell about their lives. Frames, in other words, must resonate with the salient beliefs of potential recruits. (We'll read a chapter on frames in part V.)

Collective identity is another concept used to get at the mental worlds of participants that might help explain participation: in order to devote time and effort to protest, people must usually feel part of a larger group they think they can help (Melucci 1996). (On collective identity, read also the selection by Mary Bernstein in part VII, where she shows how different kinds of identity claims can be important strategic moves.) Pieces of culture such as frames and identities have audiences outside the movement as well as inside it.

This emphasis on culture challenges the arguments of many structuralists who promoted the idea that individual characteristics do not help explain who will be recruited to a social movement, an idea that is a kind of half-truth. The structuralists concentrated on arguing against personality traits as a predictor—without ever gathering serious evidence about personality traits (Klandermans 1983, 1989). But they also rejected attitudes and grievances as part of an explanation, in favor of structural traits (Gurney and Tierney 1982; Klandermans and Oegema 1987; Useem 1980). But this kind of argument went to ridiculous extremes: bigots don't join civil rights campaigns just because they are in the right network; leftists don't join right-wing movements because a "bloc" of their fellow parishioners do. The fact that not *everyone* with a set of beliefs or personality traits gets recruited does not mean that supportive ideas or other traits are not a necessary condition. They are just not sufficient.

"Moral Shocks" and Self-Recruitment

Sometimes in the course of daily life something happens to us that distresses, surprises, and outrages us. A loved one may be killed by a drunk driver. Our boss may ask us for sexual favors. Construction on a nuclear power plant may begin down the street. Sometimes we are shocked by information we receive (perhaps from a newspaper or political pamphlet) rather than by personal experience. We learn that cosmetics are tested by being put into the eyes of rabbits, or that NATO is deploying a new type of nuclear missile throughout Europe. These "moral shocks" are often strong enough to propel us into trying to do something. We may seek out a social movement organization if we know one exists. We may even try to found our own. Although people who join a social movement typically know someone involved in it, a moral shock may still be the trigger that gets them to join. In some cases it can even push us into participation when we do not know anyone at all in the movement. In such cases, we see a process of "self-recruitment" to a movement: people actively seek out a movement or movement organization in which they can participate, as opposed to being recruited by the movement itself.

Another cultural approach, broader than frame alignment, shows how attitudes and worldviews matter. Political scientist Ronald Inglehart (1977) has argued that new "postmaterial" values and beliefs have emerged in the advanced industrial nations since the 1960s. Through most of human history, in his view, people have been forced to worry about basic material needs such as food, shelter, and security, but since World War II the advanced industrial world has been largely spared traditional privations. Those born after World War II (especially the college-educated and

Free-Rider Problem People who would benefit from a social movement may not in fact protest but rather "free ride" on the efforts of others. Such people calculate that their own contribution to the movement (assuming that its constituency is large) is likely to be minimal and that they will enjoy the achievements of the movement anyway. So why should they bother to protest? Of course, this problem assumes that (and only arises when) people are rather narrowly self-interested. But many people protest because they feel morally obligated to do so, or because they derive pleasures or benefits from protesting (e.g., new friends) whether or not they think it will succeed. See Olson (1965).

affluent middle class) were "freed" to pursue "higher" goals such as control over their lives, environmental protection, and satisfying work, rather than worrying primarily about their paychecks. The spread of mass communications and higher education contributed to the same trends. Together, the result has been less emphasis on economic redistribution, class-based political organizations, or the pursuit of political power. Instead we have seen movements critical of large bureaucracies, complex technologies, and many different forms of oppression.

Stephen Cotgrove and Andrew Duff try to explain who is likely to support the environmental movement, depending on their relationship to industrial production, by using the concept of postmaterial politics articulated by Inglehart. They show how a movement can have a middle-class social base, even though it is not pursuing the economic interests of this class. So the growth of a post-industrial sector of the economy can help explain not only changes over time (Inglehart's interest) but different sympathies across parts of the population at any given time.

In the final excerpt, Charles Kurzman shows that Osama bin Laden's followers tend to be well educated, middle-class, and "modern." He is implicitly addressing a remnant of crowd theory, in which Westerners assume that the Islamic world is mired in religious superstition in a rejection of modern rationality. While they do question some aspects of the modern world, looking nostalgically backward to a golden age of Islam, they also use the latest technologies and media. We may not accept a particular religious orientation, but that does not mean we can dismiss it as irrational or primitive.

Recruitment involves more than cognitive beliefs about how the world works. Its moral and emotional dimensions are equally important. All the key concepts used to explain recruitment depend heavily on their emotional dynamics. The term "moral shock" is meant to incorporate some of these other dimensions, as events or information raise such a sense of outrage in people that they become inclined toward political action, with or without a network of contacts (Jasper 1997; Jasper and Poulsen 1995). Social networks are also grounded in the emotional bonds among their members: we pay attention to people in our networks because we are fond of them or trust them.

The new synthesis pays more attention to what goes on inside people's heads (and hearts). Protest is no longer seen as a compensation for some lack, but part of an effort to impose cognitive meaning on the world, to forge a personal and collective identity, to define and pursue collective interests, and to create or reinforce affective bonds with others. These are things that all humans desire and pursue. There is today considerable consensus that structural positions in networks and cultural (including cognitive, moral, and emotional) orientations and transformations are equally important in recruitment. But there are also cases in which cultural messages can be used to recruit people in the absence of social networks, relying on moral shocks instead of personal contacts. For virtually all social movements, only a small fraction of potential recruits actually join, and it takes all the factors we have considered to understand who does and who does not sign up.

Discussion Questions

1. What is the role of daily life in affecting one's likelihood of joining a social movement, even a movement one is sympathetic to?
2. Why must social-movement organizers take care how they "frame" their arguments and choose their symbols in trying to recruit members?
3. What are postmaterial values? Who is most likely to have them and why?
4. What kinds of people are more likely to sympathize with the environmental movement? Does this mean they will join it?
5. What are some of the ways that Osama bin Laden is "modern"? Have these helped him to be more effective in recruiting followers? In attaining his goals?
6. How do individual traits and structural conditions interact in recruitment to social movements?
7. What do scholars mean by the "free-rider problem"? What would be an example of free riding? How might movements address this problem?