

PATTERNS OF MOVEMENT RECRUITMENT

***Why dense networks help recruitment to new social movements,
but obstruct recruitment to the New Age movement***



Paper Presented at the ASA Annual Meeting 1999

August 6-10, 1999

Available online: http://www.gwdg.de/~uspw/tkoenig/papers/recruitment_patterns.pdf

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SUMMARY

It is argued that while most social movements recruit their members from dense, submerged networks, movements rooted in Middle America, such as New Age and other marketed social movements, recruit individuals who precisely miss an embeddedness in dense, emotionally gratifying networks. As a consequence of these differential recruitment patterns, lower middle class movements lack the support from grassroots groups, which has made new social movements and to a lesser extent poor people's movements so successful in the generation of collective action.

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PATTERNS OF MOVEMENT RECRUITMENT

“[A movement] recruits members, usually from selected class and status levels, who are more or less ready to act in certain ways.” (Gerth & Mills 1954: 438)

According to conventional wisdom of social movement theory, dense informal networks are the cradle of movements. In this essay the universal validity of the thesis that social movements arise only from informal networks will be questioned. Instead, it will be argued that movements whose constituency comes from a certain class background¹ — the lower middle classes, i.e. *Middle America* (Gans 1988), — do not require dense networks for either their emergence or growth. In fact, the position of many lower middle class persons in tightly knit networks — their families — prohibits them from joining “their” movements such as New Age. Accordingly, for movements that primarily recruit from *Middle America* strong pre-existing networks, read: family embeddedness, turn out as obstacles rather than facilitators of movement mobilizations.

There are, of course, two immediate questions to this hypothesis. Why do family matters not concern movements based in other classes, namely, the poor and the new middle class? How do low middle class movements recruit, if not through networks? Both questions will now be addressed in this essay, which introduces a set of conjectures that link resource distribution, class, if you wish, network and social movement recruitment structures.

Recruitment Pools

Any analysis of recruitment patterns is well advised to delineate the universe of prospective movement recruits. Although the assumption that classes-in-themselves turn to classes-for-themselves is flawed, most movements’ recruitment pools are limited to certain somewhat objective classes. Yet, some scholars would like to delink recruitment pools from objective classes, since class positions themselves are negotiated and, hence, alterable:

¹ Class as it is understood here, is oriented at “the structure of relationships among all relevant characteristics” (Bourdieu [1979] 1992:182, translation mine, p. 182, translation mine). These characteristics encompass material, cultural and social capital in Bourdieu’s sense..

“Mobilization potential should be conceived in itself as a set of social relations, as an interactive and negotiated perception of the opportunities and constraints of action shared by a number of people.” (Melucci 1996: 64)

Long-range social theory might proceed in such fashion. However, in the short run and for middle-range phenomena such as social movements, the mobilization potential remains essentially constant over time. Ironically, to argue otherwise runs the danger of obfuscating aggregates of objectively similar social positions with collective actors. When orthodox Marxists cannot grapple with the fact that classes-in-themselves do not automatically turn into classes-for-themselves, those scholars who argue that given a collective actor its mobilization potential is infinitely malleable deny that most classes-for-themselves are rooted classes-in-themselves. The labor movement has not and will not rely primarily on industrialists for the expansion on its rank-and-file, although some odd capitalist “converts” might help its cause symbolically and, due to their management skills, might even become designated movement entrepreneurs. Similarly, the Ku-Klux-Clan will not extensively recruit among African-Americans. Norwegian nationalists will rarely appeal to Slovakian citizens. Beyond such obvious cases, formally universalist movements are frequently also restricted to well-defined classes. As has been mentioned already several times, new social movements recruit disproportionately from the new middle class. That New Age converts disproportionately from the low middle class has been established in the previous chapter. Thus, it seems advisable to distinguish somewhat objective classes, which are fairly stable over time, and might or might not limit the mobilization potential of a movement and its collective identity.

If the class background of the recruitment pool does matter, the question becomes, how does so. My contention here is that the impact of class movement mobilizations is somewhat mediated through different recruitment patterns. Let me, thus, first identify two competing models of movement recruitment.

Networks and Mobilization: Competing Hypotheses

When reviewing political process models and sociology of religion approaches to movement recruitment — “conversion” in the sociology of religion vernacular — one can detect two fundamentally different conceptualizations. Political process theory emphasizes the importance of dense networks for the emergence of movements. In contrast, sociology of religion approaches focus on *structural availability* (Snow [1976] 1993: 208). Key to movement susceptibility to

movement recruitment in the latter approach is thus the absence of a substantial network in the environment of the potential convert. Let me review these two theses.

Network Thesis

In the early 70s Oberschall introduced the notion of “bloc recruitment” into social movement theory. Since then, theoretical and empirical work from a wide variety of has piled up on the conjecture that most movement participants are recruited through pre-existing network channels, so-called ties (Bearman 1993; Bearman & Everett 1993; Diani 1995; Diani & Lodi 1988; Donati 1984; Fantasia 1988; Friedman & McAdam 1992; Gould 1993; Hechter 1987; Jenkins 1983; Kim & Bearman 1997; Klandermans 1990; McAdam 1982; McAdam 1986; McAdam 1988; McAdam & Poulsen 1993; McAdam 1994; Marx Ferree 1992; McCarthy & Zald [1977] 1987; Marwell, Oliver & Pahl 1988; Marwell & Oliver 1993; Snow & Oliver 1995; Zwick 1990). *Bloc recruitment* denotes the merger of pre-existing voluntary associations into a movement (Oberschall 1973: 125). At times movement organization even specifically target leaders of organizations whose goals show affinity with its own movement goals for recruitment and, if successful, thereby “convert” not only the leader himself, but also at least part of his following (Oberschall 1993: 24). This way “multi-organizational fields,” (Fernandez & McAdam 1989) in which sympathetic movement organizations recruit reciprocally members can develop. These dynamics facilitate the recruitment process significantly, although in case an organization that is perceived as ideologically hostile by some of the members of the original organizations enters the multi-organizational field, a schism of the movement might result. For instance, “[w]ithin the [National Office] faction [of the SDS — the *Students for a Democratic Society* —], there was the continual suspicion that the [Progressive Labor Party] joined SDS in order to spread its ideology and to recruit new members from those already in the SDS network,” (Balser 1997: 219) which ultimately led to the destruction of the SDS. By and large, however, multi-organizational fields have been remarkably resistant to movement schism and indeed fostered movement growth and efficacy (Bearman & Everett 1993; Carden 1978; Diani 1995; Fernandez & McAdam 1989). But not only inter-organizational recruitment depends heavily on ties. The seminal study of the *Mississippi Freedom Summer Project* has shown that individuals’ informal friendship ties to movement participants predict individual movement participation best (McAdam 1988). The network tie thesis has performed well on data coming from the Dutch new

social movements in general (Klandermans 1990) and the peace movement in particular (Kriesi 1988), and the Italian environmentalist movement (Diani & Lodi 1988). In the case of the Philippine Huk rebellion, it has been shown that the opposite is equally true: Strong ties outside the movement might lead to its dissolution (Goodwin 1997). It even has been convincingly theorized, that certain network structures might render *selective incentives*, the *sine qua non* in rational choice models of collective action, superfluous (Kim & Bearman 1997). In short, the review of the network theorem has been overwhelmingly favorably on both theoretical and empirical planes.

Availability Thesis

In view of the above evidence the proposition that, “[w]hen people are divorced from their community and work, they are free to reunite in new ways” (Kornhauser [1959] 1960: 60), has been derided to such an extent that some scholars are confident to proclaim that “contrary to the tenets of mass society [theory], isolated and rootless individuals *n e v e r* mobilize” (Melucci 1996: 64f, my emphasis).² Yet, students of new religious movements have repeatedly pointed to the fact that most new religious movement converts join these movement precisely because they do *n o t* have any strong ties to anybody (Snow, Zurcher & Eklund-Olson 1980; Snow & Machalek 1984; Snow [1976] 1993; Stark & Bainbridge 1980: 1380; Stark & Roberts 1982: 60, 63; Volinn 1985: 150). New religious movements have consistently targeted persons lacking a tightly knit friendship network. These structurally available persons lack close emotional bonds and command an above average amount of free time; sometimes they feel isolated or alienated from their environment. From a functionalist perspective, one might even argue that new religions integrate anomic elements of society (Robbins 1988: 29). While not sharing this assessment, I do think that there is merit in the hypothesis that individuals lacking strong personal commitments are more available and thus more susceptible to movement recruitment *u n d e r c e r t a i n c o n d i t i o n s*, which will be elaborated below. In fact, the findings resulting from the study of the failure of the Huk rebellion quoted above in favor of the network thesis might equally be interpreted as the inverse of the “availability” hypothesis described here.

² In any case, this criticism is clearly overdrawn. Kornhauser ([1959] 1960: 90) himself asserts that “the individual who is *totally* isolated (that is, without even family ties) for long period is not likely to possess that minimum of personal organization required by collective activity, the loss of all family life leads to personal deviance - in the extreme case, mental disorders and suicides — rather than to mass behavior.”

Still, most works on new religious movements that analyze recruitment — “conversion” in the jargon of sociology of religion — processes, also contend that the most efficient recruitment is conducted through already existing network ties (Heelas 1996; Snow & Machalek 1984; Snow, Zurcher & Ekland-Olson 1980; Stark & Bainbridge 1980). On the other hand, a study on the Nichiren Shoshu Buddhist movement finds that most non-network recruited members had had only few ties before joining the movement (Snow [1976] 1993). A closer inspection of Snow’s ethnography reveals that most recruitments were achieved through feeble network ties, a finding consistent with theoretical expectations derived from early network theory (Granovetter 1973). The recruited persons themselves maintained only few network ties that required commitment. In turn, this suggests that the higher efficacy of network recruitment can be explained through a better selection of prospective recruits. After all, non-network proselytizing by Nichiren Shoshu Buddhists is conducted quite amateurishly, as random pedestrians and diners are targeted. In a different context, the *Landmark Forum*, the largest New Age organization, has indeed institutionalized the recruitment through network ties. Non-members normally only obtain knowledge of introductory meetings of the *Forum* if they held an invitation from a current *Landmark* member.³ In other words, management techniques might account in extreme cases for the seeming importance of networks. In still a different vein, Stark and Bainbridge contend, that “the occult milieu [...] does not spread through or [is] sustained by social networks,” (Stark & Bainbridge 1980: 1392) but rather is created and perpetuated through the mass media.

It, thus, seems that availability and network theses are valid for different movement types. This thesis is hardly new. It is well known that millenarian movements do not appeal to those well integrated in local kinship communities, while Pentecostalism does (Gerlach & Hine 1970: 82). Yet, to my knowledge, no systematic analysis of conditions that decide on the applicability of either of the two recruitment patterns has been made.

³ Personal experience, *Landmark Forum*, Los Angeles chapter, introductory meeting, Torrance, CA, August 7, 1996.

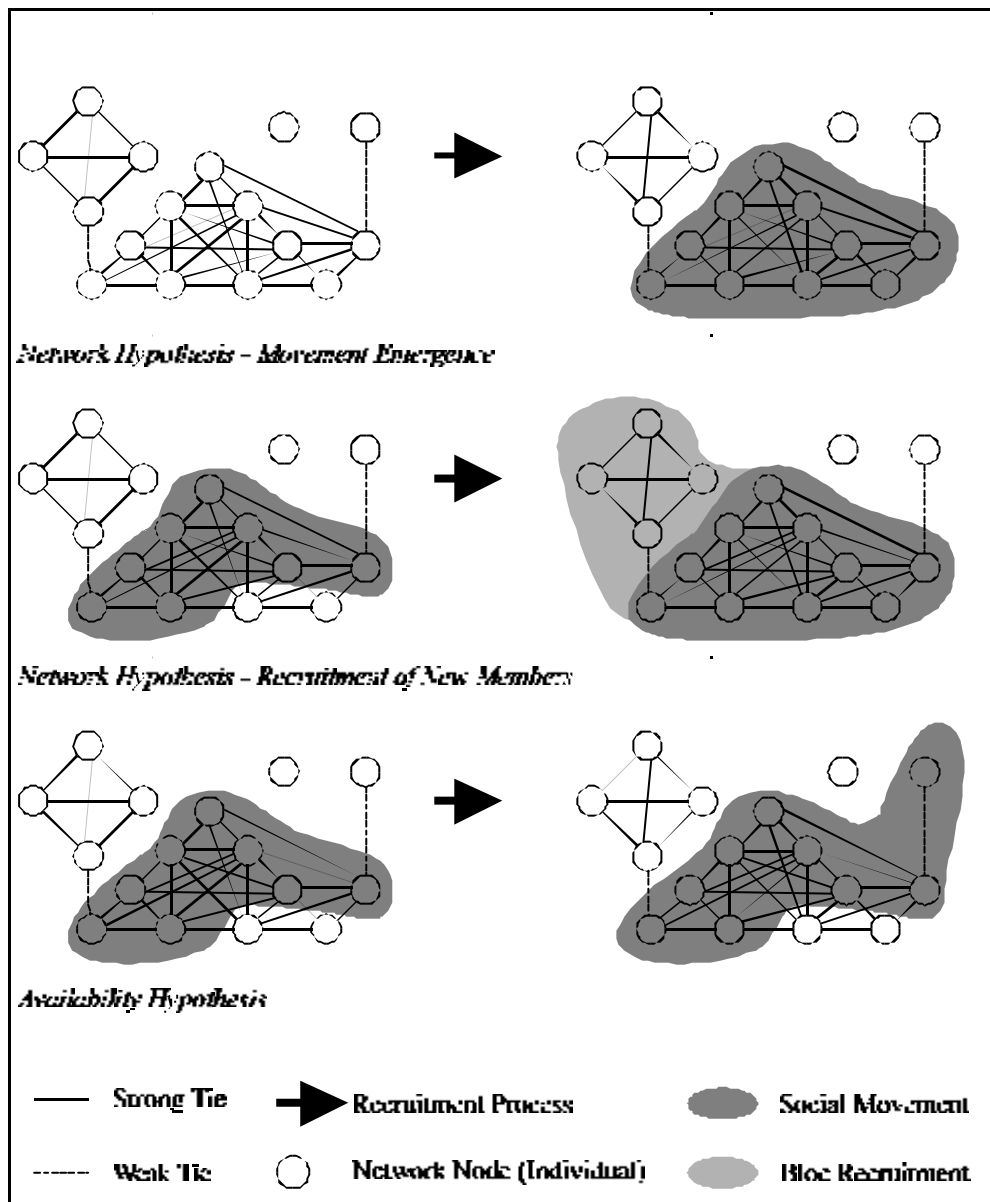
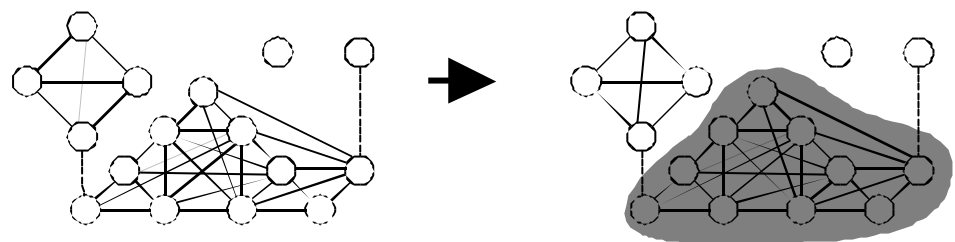


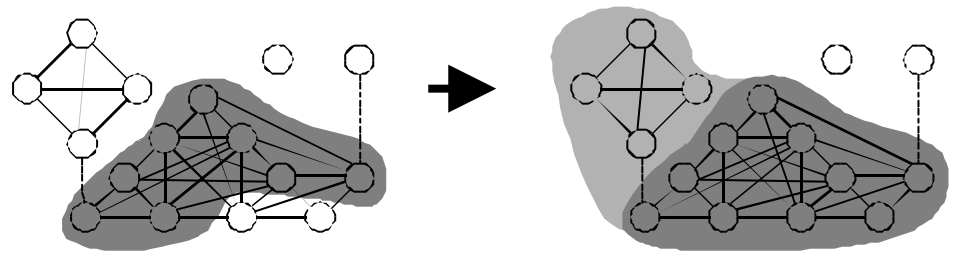
Figure 1: Recruitment Patterns

Read this way, availability and network hypotheses become rival explanations, and, as will be argued, are valid for different avenues of recruitment employed by different types of movements. The availability hypothesis implies that the utilization of weak network ties is a superior technique to select those persons that are not embedded in strong networks and thus most susceptible to movement recruitment. The “weakness” of a tie in this sense is characterized by the amount of time spent for its maintenance, the emotional intensity it evokes, and the intimacy and reciprocal services that are attached to it (Granovetter 1973: 1361). Persons join the movement, because they are structurally available and not located in dense networks themselves. The network hypothesis

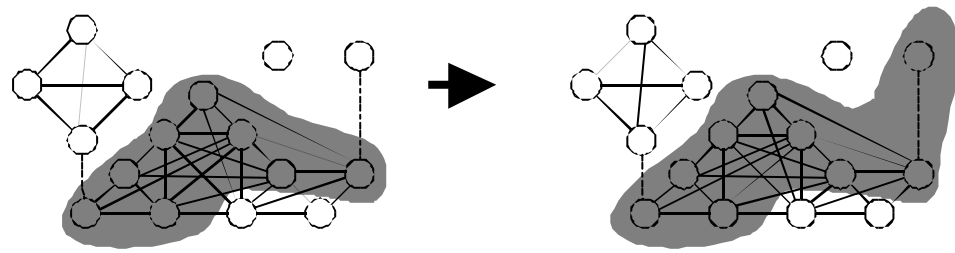
on the contrary is based on the assumption that persons join the movement because they are part of a dense network containing many (strong) ties. These ties allow for an interactive redefinition of the nature of the social environment or social problems, which then results in an emergent movement (e.g., McAdam 1986; Kim & Bearman 1997). Clearly, these persons are not structurally available before they enter, or rather transform into, the movement. Collective action arises out of the network.



Network Hypothesis - Movement Emergence



Network Hypothesis - Recruitment of New Members



Availability Hypothesis

- Strong Tie ➔ Recruitment Process ● Social Movement
- - - Weak Tie ○ Network Node (Individual) ● Bloc Recruitment

Figure 1 visualizes the two competing hypotheses.

Synthesis

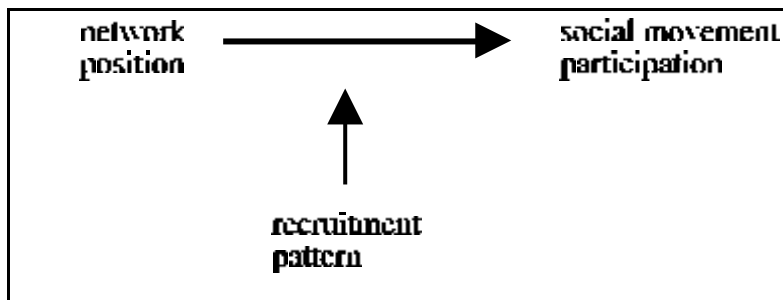


Figure 2: General Model of Availability and Network Hypotheses

The key for the reconciliation of the two theses lies in the examination of a theoretical drawback of current network studies of social movements. Both availability and network hypothesis predict movement

development given established networks. Unfortunately, though, the network variable is by no means unrelated to another key independent variable in the political process approach, namely the pool of resources available to the actual and prospective constituency of a movement. To be sure, the network position of an individual does implicitly contain some assumptions of the distribution of resources within a network. Individuals at central nodes of the network, i.e. persons maintaining many ties to other network members, indirectly command over more resources. Vice versa, persons with more material resources at their disposal can maintain ties more easily. After all, there exist some costs to communication, which is the major mechanism for the maintenance of ties. These costs range from obvious cost of telecommunication and commuting to less obvious opportunity costs. Yet, until now there has been little concrete hypothesizing around the question, how resources available to an individual influence his or her network position. Even less attention has been paid to the question, how resource distributions foster or prohibit the construction of networks in the first place.

Poor People's Movements

The neglect of the theoretical connection between social class and network organization comes to no surprise, as there is little variation in the class bases of movements examined with the help of network analysis. These analyses of social movements mostly focus on movements privileged stratum of the population, namely the new middle classes. The *Mississippi Freedom Summer* study sets the tone: Participants “were expected to be financially independent” (Fernandez & McAdam 1989: 318) during a two month period dedicated solely to movement activities. Even if participation requirements for movement activities are less demanding in other cases, it is obvious that new social

movement participants surveyed in other studies command over a rich resource pool (Brand 1987: 42; Dalton, Kuechler & Bürklin 1990: 7; Klandermans 1991: 27; Offe 1985: 828ff; Rochon 1988: 16f).

Studies that analyze movement activity by the least affluent population strata — the unemployed or social security recipients — seem to rely much less on the network hypothesis, when it comes to movement mobilization. Their catchphrase is facilitation through elites (Cress & Snow 1996; Piven & Cloward 1977; Piven & Cloward 1992). In fact, most poor people's movements cannot be sustained without what Cress and Snow (1996: 1104ff) call a "benefactor." This benefactor — be it a person or an organization made up of resource rich people — then usually occupies a central network position. Together with the communication cost problem raised above, we thus arrive at

Conjecture 1: The more material resources individuals command, the higher the likelihood that they will take on a central position in the network.

That resources are important for mobilization should be obvious since the advent of resource mobilization theory. Here, the direct path from resources to mobilization success — dotted in Figure 3 — has been complemented with a second path, which is mediated through network structure. What is interesting in this respect is that in the case of poor people's movements networks only matter, once they find an ally from outside their constituency. Indeed, it has been forcefully shown that poor people do command dense networks, probably denser than those of the new middle classes and certainly more vital in their everyday life. Poor people's networks whose ties are characterized through material reciprocity enable the least affluent strata of the population to cope with the everyday shortage of material goods they encounter (Stack [1975] 1997; Snow & Anderson 1993). Because they fulfill this vital function, these networks are extremely stable. Yet, they are not a fertile ground for movement mobilizations, unless elite factionalism creates opportunities for political entrepreneurs from groups endowed with more cultural and material resources than the beneficiaries to enter the network structure as leaders. These leaders need to trigger *cognitive liberation* (McAdam 1982: 44ff). We thus arrive at:

Conjecture 2: Networks, whose central nodes command a high amount of both material and cultural resources relative to their environment, i.e. the society they are located in, have a much higher propensity to generate movement activity, than equally structured networks, whose central nodes lack these resources.

Conjecture 3: Poor people develop extensive solidarity networks out of necessity.

Corollary 1: Poor people's movements usually develop out of dense networks, in which central nodes have been inserted from outside.

So far, there have been hardly any news. Even though the relationships between the central independent variables have been rearranged slightly, the bottom line remains, that, if the network density and amount of resources variables take on high values, chances are, a movement will develop.

Low Middle Class Movements

Contemplate next new religious movements, where prior existing network structure is weak. What is the strength of their material bases? Income and wealth of new religious movements members usually lie somewhere in-between that of poor people and the new middle class (Barker 1989: 14; Hess 1993: 5; Knoblauch 1989: 517; Robbins 1988: 4, 44; Schneider 1991: 53; Stenger 1990: 400 Turner 1991=: 200; see also previous chapter). Recall, that the proto-typical New Ager is "younger, [...] Caucasian with lower to mid-level careers in public or corporate businesses" (Bromley 1997: 127). She or he has enjoyed some college education, but frequently holds no degree and is working as a small entrepreneur or in clerical job. Unlike poor people, new religious movement participants do not need to maintain solidarity networks for their everyday survival and can afford to spend part of their money on non-essential goods. However, they usually work long hours. Mostly, their working hours are fixed, which renders time a scarce resource. Persons from this background who lack a friendship network at work and/or a family are those who are most susceptible to movement recruitment. Lower middle class members, who do not feel isolated or alienated, usually do not participate in any movements. Depending on one's theoretical persuasion one might invoke any number of reasons, ranging from the free rider problem to Gramscian hegemony, for this apathy. Most parsimoniously their passivity can be explained by the centrality of the nuclear family network, possibly supplemented through some informal friendship groups that are mostly not explicitly purposive (Gans 1988: 44). The relative affluence of low middle class members relieves them of the need to develop larger networks. At the same time, there are no institutionalized avenues of network building, as it is the case for the new middle classes and their movements. For now, we obtain the, albeit for lack of generality most provisional,

Conjecture 4: Lower middle class movements recruit those parts of the class that are most isolated, i.e., do not command over any substantial network ties.

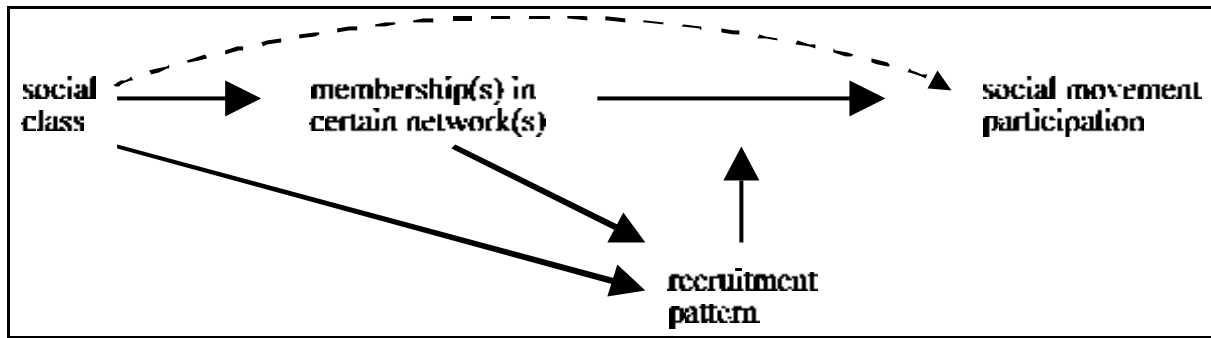


Figure 3 Proposed Model (Dotted path inessential for present discussion)

Empirical data on this conjecture are scant, but my own observations validate this thesis, when it comes to family ties, the most important ties for Middle America. For instance, 27 out of 29 participants in a workshop on relationship techniques at the 1997 *Whole Life Expo* in Del Mar, turned out to be single, although evidently such seminars clearly cater to couples. This observation replicates earlier data on Sri Chimnoy adherents, who were also disproportionately frequent single (Gussner & Berkowitz 1988: 154). The thirteen persons that took together with myself an introductory meditation session at San Diego's North Park Sri Chimnoy center also invariably arrived single. New Age literature also covers relentlessly dyadic relationships. Most New Age stores have their own section on the topic. The main characters in most New Age works, including the ones reviewed above, is single, but longs for a dyadic relationship. The disproportionate number of women participating in New Age in conjunction with the almost complete disregard for gay and lesbian culture constitutes an additional indicator for the solitude of many New Agers.

New Middle Class Movements

Consider now the new middle classes. Already almost half a century ago it has been observed that among members of the privileged strata usually a higher level of interaction exists (Mills [1956] 1959). The reason for this high level of interaction lies in the institutional setup new middle class members face. They work or have realistic aspirations to work in the upper echelons in the service sector and have usually completed or are about to complete at least a four year college education. Oftentimes, universities bring together for like-minded people for the first time and supply them with crucially important (Cress & Snow 1996) meeting spaces, where social movements can be initialized. What is more, movement activity is intrinsic to the careers for some new middle class members (Gelb & Palley 1982; Rose 1997: 483). Thus, even after their departure from university,

new middle class members affiliated with new social movements remain in institutionally sponsored networks. For instance, Bernstein (1997: 550) shows that lesbian/gay movements in a drive to support pro-movement legislation “activated friendship, organizational and professional networks to arrange meetings between legislators and their gay and lesbian constituents and other supporters” (emphasis mine). In essence, we obtain

Conjecture 5: Institutional paths foster networking between members of the new middle classes, which enables movement recruitment through network ties.

Now combine corollary 1 with conjectures 4 and 5 and attain the central contention of this essay, namely:

Corollary 2: Class position determines the design of networks, from which movements can or cannot recruit or emerge.

The model obtained is shown in Figure 3. Note that this is not class in the Marxian sense. I do not argue that certain classes translate into certain class-based movements. Rather, I take original resource mobilization theory seriously and argue that certain distributions of resources combined with certain institutional patterns result in certain movements. There is no class-in-itself that mutates into a class-for-itself at some level of economic or societal development or some materially satisfied middle classes that turn to postmaterialist values and create self-expressive new social movements.

Instead, the present explanation constrains rational choice with institutionalist accounts. Certain institutions, in this case the educational system, bring together a set of similarly cognitive predisposed persons with considerable cultural and material resources at hand (university students), which lays the fundament for networks, out of which viable movements arise. It pays the individual to join or create these movements either indirectly through the acquisition of skills she later needs for her profession or directly through the transformation of movement positions into institutionalized careers as employees of NGOs, in the academy or political pressure groups. It is then a matter of “taste,” if one engages in the New Right or the New Left. A different set of people commands considerably less cultural capital, but is financially secure, though not independent. A minority of persons in this set suffer from both social isolation — mainly in the form of the lack of a life partner — and the incongruence between their aspirations and their actual social status. There is no institutional setup to bring these persons together, nor do they have the skills to create their own movements from below. It pays (or better: seems to pay) for these persons to join groups that seemingly operate on the

class	typical movement	most important networks for class members	recruitment pattern (rank and file)	type of leaders	class background of leaders	organizational form	political impact
poor people	movement for the unemployed	extended family; friendship networks (inception solidarity induced)	network recruitment (bloc recruitment)	movement entrepreneurs; volunteers	new middle class	voluntary associations; formally organized	medium
low middle class	New Age	nuclear family	structural availability	movement entrepreneurs	low and new middle class	business organizations	low
new middle class	women's movement	nuclear family; friendship networks (inception institutionalized)	network recruitment	career volunteers	new middle class	voluntary associations; informal and formally organized	high

Table 1 Predicted Recruitment and Mobilization Patterns

Highlighted cells are explained by the main model developed in this essay

same premises as the higher status movements described above. The pay-off is both to become embedded in a network — possibly even find the informal network, i.e. the family, one is longing for — and to be member of a group that supposedly grants a higher status.

From here, one might want to continue and think about the different dynamics that develop out of those different patterns. Table 1 summarizes the theoretical patterns that arise from my conjectures, and also contains some suggestions for further development. Let me outline the impact of different recruitment patterns on organizational form here.

Impact on Organizational Form

Both new social movements and poor people's movements hence usually start out as and grow through dense networks. Most likely, these networks will persist once the movement has developed. Thus, informal networks will play a central role in the reproduction of these movements. In contrast, New Age as a typical low middle class movement cannot rely on any substantial pre-existing networks, nor does the institutional environment New Age organizations face, namely a market consisting of petty firms, encourage the establishment of movement networks.

The difference in the organizational structure of poor people's and new middle class movements lies in the role formal organizations play in movement development. As poor people usually lack the cultural capital to transform their networks directly into effective agents for movement action, one would expect that formal organizations led by persons outside the beneficiary constituency would dominate the poor people's social movement industry. New middle class movements, on the other

hand, might take on both informal and formal organizational forms. Which of these forms predominate, will mainly depend on the political opportunity structure. For instance, the political opportunity structure for the women's movement in Germany was seductive to a network of small, autonomous and informal groups, while the in US both informal groups and a national umbrella organization flourished (Rucht 1996). To sum up, poor people's movements and new social movements thus not only recruit through and emerge from networks, but are also reproduced in network form.

Movements with a predominant low middle class constituency, however, will usually not originate in pre-existing networks and lack the more formalized institutional organizational opportunities most new social movements can recur to. Thus, one would predict, they in turn will be sustained to a much lesser extent through informal networks than their counterparts discussed above. Yet, undoubtedly, also for these movements some organizational vehicle is critical for movement survival (Jenkins 1983; McCarthy & Zald [1977] 1987). The organizational problem is solved by many of the new religious movements through the emergence of capitalist business organizations that carry much of the organizational burden. The New Age movement is prototypical in this respect. At the fringe of the movement there are a few non-profit organizations, for example the *Church of Religious Science* and several neo-pagan covens, which mimic the grassroots groups of the new social movements from an organizational point of view. New Age's main organizational base is a "network" of small businesses. New Age bookstores, practitioners in New Age disciplines such as tarot card reading, channeling, rolfing, etc. are somewhat related to each other. The omnipresent practice of referral boards in New Age stores testifies to the existence of such relationships. But these businesses are always competitors for the financial resources of their customers and therefore are unlikely to develop a network of strong ties.⁴ In sum, New Age unlike movement that originate in higher or lower strata of the population, neither recruits from dense networks nor does it develop any substantial networks. Instead, New Age recruits those persons that failed to become embedded in the class-specific network, that is, families. Of course, this lack of network structure does also

⁴ Note, that while weak ties are particularly important for the growth of a collective (Granovetter 1973), strong ties are undoubtedly more important in the generation of solidarity, read: collective action..

entail important recuperations of the movement identity and its collective action potential. For space restrictions, this impact cannot be discussed here.

Conclusion

Several years ago, it was pointed out, that “existing studies fail to acknowledge conceptually or treat empirically the fact that individuals are invariably embedded in many organizational or associational networks or individual relationships that may expose the individual to conflicting behavioral pressures” (McAdam & Poulsen 1993: 641). With the exception of the study this statement stems from, this observation unfortunately still rings true, even in the face of the multitude of recent advances in network theory. Even more strikingly though, while network models have increasingly become more dynamic, there has been no attempt to explain the outlook of network structures themselves, as if networks would fall ready-made from the sky.

My findings suggest instead that pre-movement network patterns are class specific. Dense and widespread networks prevail at the high and low ends of the social strata, while the most important networks of the low middle class are family-centered and consequently much narrower. The former thus command over the basic organizational underpinnings for the emergence of collective action with voluntary associations as its vehicle, a process that has been described by a legion of movement literature. New Age and other low middle class movements cannot recur to such fertile network ground. Rather, they have frequently to overcome the strong embeddedness of their potential followers in their respective families or workplaces, which are reluctant towards a redefinition of the existing social realities. In line with these different points of departure, different recruitment strategies emerge. New social movements have arisen from and still arise from preexisting networks that foster cognitive liberation through (communicative) interaction. New Age has instead relied on weak network ties in the recruitment of socially more isolated individuals. While this has resulted in the rapid growth of its constituency, collective action by New Agers has remained conspicuously absent. As in previous millenarian movements, “a fundamental vagueness about the actual way in which the new society will be brought about” (Hobsbawm [1959] 1971: 58) has remained.

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