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*The American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 99, No. 3 (Nov., 1993), 640-667.

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*The American Journal of Sociology* is currently published by The University of Chicago Press.

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# Specifying the Relationship between Social Ties and Activism<sup>1</sup>

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Much empirical work in the social-movements literature has focused on the role of social ties in movement recruitment. Yet these studies have been plagued by a troubling theoretical and empirical imprecision. This imprecision stems from three sources. First, these studies are generally silent on the basic sociological dynamics that account for the reported findings. Second, movement scholars have generally failed to specify and test the precise dimensions of social ties that seem to account for their effects. Finally, most studies fail to acknowledge that individuals are embedded in many relationships that may expose the individual to conflicting pressures. This article seeks to address these shortcomings by means of an elaborated model of recruitment that is then used as a basis for examining the role of social ties in mediating individual recruitment to the 1964 Mississippi Freedom Summer Project.

In recent years much attention in the social-movements literature has been focused on the role of social or organizational ties in movement recruitment. The result has been a growing body of studies that appear to attest to the causal importance of organizational ties (Barnes and Kaase

<sup>1</sup> This article was completed while the first author was a fellow at the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences. Partial support for the year at the center was provided by National Science Foundation grant BNS-8700864. The research on which this article is based has been supported by several awards given to the first author. These include a Guggenheim Fellowship, National Science Foundation grant SES-8309988, and various forms of support from the Social and Behavioral Sciences Research Institute at the University of Arizona. In addition, we would like to thank Carol Diem and Phil Wiseley for their research assistance on the paper, and Bert Klandermans and Karl-Dieter Opp for their helpful comments on an earlier draft of the article. Direct correspondence to Doug McAdam, Department of Sociology, University of Arizona, Tucson, Arizona 85721.

1979; Curtis and Zurcher 1973; Fernandez and McAdam 1988; Gould 1991; McAdam 1986; Rosenthal et al. 1985; Orum 1972; Walsh and Warland 1983) or prior contact with a movement participant (Bolton 1972; Briët, Klandermans, and Kroon 1987; Gerlach and Hine 1970; McAdam 1986; Snow, Zurcher, and Ekland-Olson 1980; Zurcher and Kirkpatrick 1976) as strong predictors of individual activism. But while they remain important, these studies are nonetheless plagued by a troubling theoretical and empirical imprecision that raises important questions about their ultimate utility. This imprecision stems from three sources.

First these studies are generally silent on the basic sociological dynamics that account for the reported findings. That is, in most cases, no theory is offered to explain the observed effects of social ties on activism (for exceptions, see Opp 1989; Fernandez and McAdam 1988; and Gould 1993, 1991). So there remains a fundamental question about what the findings mean.

A second source of imprecision stems from the failure of movement scholars to specify and test the precise dimensions of social ties that seem to account for their role as facilitators of activism. As Marwell, Oliver, and Prahl (1988, p. 502) note, "it is widely agreed that participants in social movement organizations are usually recruited through preexisting social ties. . . . But exactly how and why social ties are important is less well established."<sup>2</sup> This second problem is very much related to the first. Having failed to advance a theory that specifies the precise link between social ties and activism, empirical researchers have been content to assess the basic strength of the relationship instead of testing the causal power of the various dimensions of social ties. Accordingly, we do not really know whether it is the presence of a tie, the number of ties, or the salience, centrality, or strength of a tie that determines its effectiveness as a recruitment agent.

Finally, and perhaps most important, the 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. This weakness is due to all the well-known dangers of sampling on the dependent variable. Almost invariably, the studies of movement recruitment start by surveying activists after their entrance into the movement. But showing that these activists were linked to the movement by some preexisting network tie does not *prove* the causal potency of that tie. No doubt there are many others who also had ties to

<sup>2</sup> The paper by Marwell et al. (1988) is perhaps the only empirical work to date that takes seriously the need to distinguish and test the causal significance of various dimensions of social ties.

the movement but did not participate in its activities. We suspect one of the principal reasons for the failure of the tie to impel participation in these cases is the existence of other, perhaps more salient, ties that are constraining involvement. But, to date, our lack of conceptual models of the recruitment process and the tendency to study activists after the fact of their participation has left the effects of these "multiple embeddings" unexamined.

In this article we hope to address these shortcomings in the network literature on recruitment. We will begin by briefly reviewing the existing literature on recruitment to activism and placing the recent emphasis on structural or network factors in the context of a broader discussion of other possible causal influences. We will then sketch a very rudimentary model of recruitment as mediated by social ties. In doing so we will take conceptual account of the multiple embeddings typical of social life. We will then use this model as a basis for examining the role of social ties in mediating individual recruitment to the 1964 Mississippi Freedom Summer Project. Specifically, we will seek to determine (a) which dimensions of social ties (e.g., salience, strong vs. weak, etc.) have the most causal potency and (b) how competing ties affect the decision of whether or not to participate in the project.

## REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Among the topics that have most concerned researchers in the field of social movements is that of "differential recruitment" (Jenkins 1983, p. 528; Zurcher and Snow 1981, p. 449). What accounts for individual variation in movement participation? Why does one individual get involved while another remains inactive? Until recently, researchers have sought to answer these questions on the basis of individual characteristics of movement activists.

### Psychological or Attitudinal Accounts of Activism

The basic assumption underlying such accounts is that it is some psychological or attitudinal "fit" with the movement that either compels participation or, at the very least, renders the individual susceptible to recruiting appeals.

For all their apparent theoretical sophistication, empirical support for all of these individually based psychological or attitudinal accounts of participation has proved elusive. Summarizing his exhaustive survey of the literature on the relationship between activism and various psychological factors, Mueller (1980, p. 69) concludes that "psychological attri-

butes of individuals, such as frustration and alienation, have minimal direct impact for explaining the occurrence of rebellion and revolution per se." Much the same conclusion has been reached as regards the link between attitudes and activism. On the basis of his analysis of 215 studies of the relationship between individual attitudes and riot participation, McPhail (1971) concludes that "individual predispositions are, at best, insufficient to account" for participation in collective action.<sup>3</sup>

Does this mean that psychological characteristics or attitudes are irrelevant to the study of individual activism? Certainly not. In our view, both remain important insofar as they demarcate a "latitude of rejection" (Petty and Cacioppo 1981) within which individuals are highly unlikely to get involved in a given movement. However, in the case of most movements the size of the pool of recruits—the "latitude of acceptance"—is still many times larger than the actual number of persons who take part in any given instance of activism. Klandermans and Oegema (1987) provide an interesting illustration of the size of these respective groups in their study of recruitment to a major peace demonstration in the Netherlands. On the basis of before-and-after interviews with a sample of 114 persons, the authors conclude that 26% of those interviewed were unavailable for recruitment because of their basic disagreement with the goals of the demonstration. That left nearly three-quarters of the sample as potentially available for recruitment. Yet only 4% actually attended the rally. It is precisely this disparity between attitudinal affinity and actual participation that, of course, requires explanation. One thing seems clear, however; given the size of this disparity, the role of individual attitudes (or the psychological factors from which they derive) in shaping activism must be regarded as fairly limited. If 96% of all those who are attitudinally or psychologically disposed to activism choose, as they did in this case, not to participate, then clearly some other factor or set of factors is mediating the recruitment process.

### Microstructural Accounts of Activism

Since psychological and attitudinal explanations of individual participation have been weak, there has been increased usage of alternative microstructural explanations. The microstructural account posits that it is

<sup>3</sup> In general, the discrepancy between attitudes and behavior has been borne out by countless studies conducted over the years. In summarizing the results of these studies, Wicker (1969) offered what remains the definitive word on the subject. Said Wicker, there exists "little evidence to support the postulated existence of stable, underlying attitudes within the individual which influence both his verbal expressions and his actions" (p. 75).

relatively unimportant if a person is ideologically or psychologically predisposed to participation when they lack the structural location that facilitates participation. Without structural factors that expose the individual to participation opportunities or pull them into activity, the individual will remain inactive. A number of recent studies appear to demonstrate the strength of structural or network factors in accounting for activism (Fernandez and McAdam 1989; Gould 1990, 1991; Marwell et al. 1988; McAdam 1986; McCarthy 1987; Orum 1972; Paulsen 1990; Rosenthal et al. 1985; Snow et al. 1980). These studies tend to focus on two sources of the link between the potential recruit and social movement activity: interpersonal ties and membership in organizations.

*Interpersonal ties*—Knowing someone who is already involved in social movement activity is one of the strongest predictors of recruitment into the membership (Briët et al. 1987; Gerlach and Hine 1970; Heirich 1977; McAdam 1986; Orum 1972; Snow 1976; Snow et al. 1980; Von Eschen, Kirk, and Pinard 1971; Zurcher and Kirkpatrick 1976; Bolton 1972). Strong or dense interpersonal networks encourage the extension of an invitation to participate and they ease the uncertainty of mobilization. Oliver (1984), for example, finds that one of the best predictors of participation in neighborhood organizations is residence in the same area as one's closest friends or relatives. Oliver also states that "social ties may be thought of as indicators of subjective interest in the neighborhood, as factors influencing the availability of solidarity incentives for participation in collective action or as factors reducing the cost of action by making communication easier" (1984, p. 604). These notions elaborate on why social ties are an important measure in the prediction of participation.

*Membership in organizations*—Organizational membership is another microstructural factor that has been linked to individual activism. There are two possible explanations for the relationship, the first of which has already been mentioned. Membership in organizations is an extension of the interpersonal social tie. Acquaintances made in the formal setting of the organization form elaborate structures of interpersonal ties. In other words, belonging to an organization is a good way to meet people and the likelihood of being pulled into social-movement activity increases through this contact with others. Movement organizers have long appreciated how difficult it is to recruit single isolated individuals and therefore expend most of their energies on mobilizing support within existing organizations.

The alternative explanation draws on the relationship between organizational membership and feelings of personal efficacy. It appears that individuals who hold membership in several organizations have a stronger sense of efficacy than those who have few or no memberships (Finkel 1985; Neal and Seeman 1964; Sayre 1980). A strong sense of

efficacy is also a good predictor of participation in collective action (Craig 1979; Paulsen 1990, 1991; Sutherland 1981; Travers 1982).

Whether the positive relationship between membership in organizations and activism is explained using networks of interpersonal ties or the development of a sense of efficacy, its existence is well established. Empirical evidence supporting the relationship is clear in a wide variety of social-movement contexts including the civil rights movement (McAdam 1986), student sit-ins (Orum 1972), and the antinuclear movement (Walsh and Warland 1983).

#### TOWARD AN ELABORATED MICROSTRUCTURAL MODEL OF RECRUITMENT

In our view, the recent emphasis on structural or network factors in movement recruitment represents a welcome corrective to the earlier individualistic accounts of activism. And certainly the empirical evidence linking individual or organizational ties to movement participation appears to be stronger than the simple association between either psychological attributes or attitudes and individual activism.

Not discounting this progress, serious conceptual and methodological lacunae continue to plague the structural network approaches to the study of movement recruitment. Three such problems were noted above. First, we still lack a general sociological explanation of the empirical effects reported in these studies. In short, we have demonstrated a strong association between social ties and activism, but have largely failed to account for the relationship theoretically. Second, perhaps owing to the absence of any real social structural theory of recruitment, with a few notable exceptions (Fernandez and McAdam 1988; Gould 1991, 1993; Marwell et al. 1988) researchers have failed to distinguish empirically between various dimensions of social ties. So it remains unclear which aspect(s) of a social tie (e.g., strength, salience, centrality) accounts for its effectiveness as a recruitment agent. Finally, as both Roger Gould (1991, 1993) and Andrew Marchant-Shapiro (1990) have perceptively noted, our efforts to assess the link between social ties and activism have thus far been seriously hampered by a highly truncated view of this relationship. As Gould (1990, p. 14) notes, these studies rest on "the presupposition that existing social relations exert an unconditionally positive influence on a group's capacity to mobilize for collective action." In point of fact, social ties may constrain as well as encourage activism. Our failure to acknowledge the variable impact of social ties is due, in turn, to our failure to take account of the "multiple embeddings" that characterize people's lives. The effect of these two limiting presumptions has been to structure empirical analysis in ways that virtually assure

positive effects. First, we have tended only to study activists, thereby inflating the positive influence of existing social ties. And second, instead of examining a range of social ties, we have restricted our attention to a single class of ties: those linking the subject to others in the movement. This leaves unexamined (a) all those nonactivists who also had ties to the movement and (b) the effect of other social ties—parents, peers, and so forth—on the recruitment process. To truly test the utility of a structural/network account of activism we must take account of both phenomena. To do so, however, first requires a fuller conceptualization of the role of social ties in the recruitment process. In sketching such a conceptualization, we will begin by stressing the importance of two concepts: *multiple ties* and Sheldon Stryker's notion of *identity salience* (1968).

All of us, except perhaps for the occasional hermit, are embedded in many relationships. Some of these are mediated by formal organizational processes; the rest by informal interpersonal dynamics involving one or more persons. The presence of these multiple ties points up the fundamental flaw in most existing studies of movement recruitment, which focus solely on the presence or absence of a prior tie between the subject and someone in the movement. The question is, Why should this tie be granted causal primacy? Why should it be examined in the absence of all others? The fact that we are embedded in many relationships means that any major decision we are contemplating will likely be mediated by a significant subset of those relationships. This, of course, would apply to participation in any significant forms of activism, especially those of the "high-risk" variety (McAdam 1986; Wiltfang and McAdam 1991). The fact that the recruitment decision is likely to be influenced by a number of people, in turn, raises the critical question of how the individual goes about aggregating the advice she or he receives. It is unlikely that all the advice will be consistent. It is more likely that the contemplated action will invite a range of responses from those party to the decision-making process. We thus need a model of how these responses are aggregated to yield a final decision.

Here is where Stryker's (1968) notion of *identity salience* may prove useful.<sup>4</sup> For Stryker (1981, pp. 23–24), "identities are conceptualized as being organized into a hierarchy of salience defined by the probability of the various identities being invoked in a given situation or over many situations." In turn, the salience of any particular identity is a function of the individual's "commitment" to it, defined "as the degree to which the individual's relationships to specified sets of other persons depends

<sup>4</sup> Stryker is hardly alone in stressing the idea that the self is made up of a hierarchy of identities. McCall and Simmons's (1978) notion of "role salience" and Rosenberg's (1979) concept of "psychological centrality" also rest on this fundamental premise.



on his or her being a particular kind of person" (1981, p. 24). So, for Stryker, it is the centrality and importance of our relationships with others that serve to establish and sustain the salience of various identities.

When applied to the recruitment process, the perspective above suggests that the decision to join or not join a movement will be mediated by the salience of the identity invoked by the movement and by the support or lack thereof that the prospective recruit receives from those persons who normally serve to sustain or reinforce the identity in question. This suggests a three-step recruitment process by which a prospective recruit brings the intended behavior—in this case, movement participation—into alignment with their existing hierarchy of identities. First, the individual must be the object of a recruiting appeal (whether direct or, in the case of the media, indirect) that succeeds in creating a positive association between the movement and a highly salient identity. This linkage creates the initial disposition to participate in the movement. Second, the recruit discusses this disposition with those persons who normally sustain the identity in question. In effect, the recruit is seeking to confirm the linkage between movement and identity and thus the ultimate "correctness" of the intention to participate. Should the recruit receive this confirmation, she or he would still need to reconcile the intended action with the demands of any countervailing identities that may be even more salient. This would again open the individual up to influence attempts by those persons on whose support these more salient identities rest. The ultimate decision to participate, then, would depend on the confluence of four limiting conditions: (1) the occurrence of a specific recruiting attempt, (2) the conceptualization of a tentative linkage between movement participation and identity, (3) support for that linkage from persons who normally serve to sustain the identity in question, and (4) the absence of strong opposition from others on whom other salient identities depend. The prohibitive nature of these conditions may help explain why so few of those whose attitudes place them in the "latitude of acceptance" (Petty and Cacioppo 1981) actually engage in activism.

This perspective would also help to account for the oft-noted role of established organizations (Curtis and Zurcher 1973; McAdam 1982; Morris 1984; Oberschall 1973; Rosenthal et al. 1985) in the recruitment process. Provided that the identity invoked by the organization (e.g., "Christian," "feminist," etc.) is highly salient to its members, it would be hard to imagine a more efficient way to recruit movement adherents.<sup>5</sup> In effect, when organizations serve as recruiting agents, the three-step process outlined above is reduced to a two-step process. The initial recruiting appeal

<sup>5</sup> For a slightly different but highly compatible argument, see Taylor and Whittier (1992).

is immediately merged with efforts to confirm the “correctness” of the link between member status and movement participation. Moreover, the organization may well retain a virtual monopoly on those significant others who have long sustained the identity in question. To the extent that these referent others have affiliated with the movement, it will be difficult for the individual in question not to do so as well.

But the ultimate utility of this perspective will not derive from the plausible interpretation it affords past findings, but rather from how well it accords with data designed to test its merits. This is what we hope to do in the remainder of the article.

### THE STUDY

In seeking to assess the role of social ties in movement recruitment, we will focus on a single instance of high-risk activism: participation in the 1964 Mississippi Freedom Summer Project. That campaign brought hundreds of primarily white, northern college students to Mississippi for all, or part of, the summer of 1964 to help staff “Freedom Schools,” register black voters, and dramatize the continued denial of civil rights throughout the South. As instances of activism go, the summer project was time-consuming, physically demanding, and highly newsworthy.

The project itself began in early June with the first contingent of volunteers arriving in Mississippi fresh from a week of training at Oxford, Ohio. Within ten days, three project members, Mickey Schwerner, James Chaney, and Andrew Goodman, had been kidnapped and killed by a group of segregationists led by Mississippi law-enforcement officers. That event set the tone for the summer as the remaining volunteers endured beatings, bombings, and arrests. Moreover, most did so while sharing the grinding poverty and unrelieved tension that was the daily lot of the black families that housed them.

Preliminary to their participation in the campaign, all prospective volunteers filled out detailed applications providing information on, among other topics, their organizational affiliations, previous civil rights activities, and reasons for volunteering. On the basis of these applications (and, on occasion, subsequent interviews), the prospective volunteer was either accepted or rejected. Acceptance did not necessarily mean participation in the campaign, however. In advance of the summer, many of the accepted applicants informed campaign staffers that they would not be taking part in the summer effort after all. Completed applications for all three groups—rejects, participants, and “no-shows”—were copied from the originals which are now housed in the archives of the Martin Luther King, Jr., Center for the Study of Non-violence in Atlanta, and

the New Mississippi Foundation in Jackson, Mississippi.<sup>6</sup> A total of 1,068 applications were coded in connection with this study. The breakdown of these applications by group is as follows: 720 participants, 239 no-shows, 55 rejections, and 54 whose status as regards the summer project is unclear.

Besides the five pages of information included on these forms, the applications also served as the methodological starting point for a follow-up survey of those who applied to the project. Specifically, several items of information from the original applications—alma mater, parents' address, major in school—functioned as crucial leads in efforts to obtain current addresses for as many of the applicants as possible.

The result of these efforts were verified current addresses for 556 of the 959 participants and withdrawals for whom there were applications. Of these, 382 (of a total of 720) had been participants in the project, while another 174 (of 239) had withdrawn in advance of the summer. Separate questionnaires were then prepared and sent to the participants and to the no-shows. Participants were questioned about the influences that led them to apply, their activities immediately preceding the summer, as well as their personal and political experiences during and since the project. The questionnaire sent to the no-shows dealt with these topics as well as the reasons why they withdrew from the project. In all, 212 (or 56%) of the participants and 118 (or 68%) of the no-shows returned completed questionnaires. In addition, in-depth interviews were conducted with 40 volunteers and another 40 no-shows to flesh out the information gleaned from the questionnaires. Together, the applications, questionnaires, and interviews provide a rich source of data for an analysis of the ways in which social ties mediated the decision of whether or not to take part in the project.

## RESULTS

In seeking to learn more about the relationship between social ties and movement recruitment, we will address two principal topics. First, we will take up the issue of multiple ties by examining for each applicant the breadth of support they received for participation across five categories of possible ties (parents, friends, civil rights organizations, other volunteers, and religious groups or figures). Second, we will seek to determine which dimensions of social ties appear to account for their important role in

<sup>6</sup> Our deep appreciation goes to Louise Cook, the former head librarian and archivist at the King Center, and to Jan Hillegas—herself a Freedom Summer volunteer—of the New Mississippi Foundation, for all their help in locating and copying the application materials used in this project.

recruitment. Specifically, we will look at three such dimensions: (1) the strength of the tie (weak vs. strong), (2) the locus of the tie (face-to-face or geographically removed), and (3) the salience of the tie.

### Multiple Ties

As Gould (1991) and Marchant-Shapiro (1990) have argued, prior network studies of recruitment have failed to take account of the multiple ties that comprise a person's social world. Instead, researchers have focused on the presence or absence of a particular type of tie—prior contact between the recruit and another activist—as the crucial relationship mediating entrance into the movement.<sup>7</sup> An earlier analysis of recruitment to the Freedom Summer project shares this deficiency (see McAdam 1986). To illustrate the point as well as to provide a statistical baseline for what is to follow, we have rerun, using updated data, the final logit regression from the earlier paper.<sup>8</sup> Table 1 reports the results of this analysis.

The dependent variable in the analysis is participation/nonparticipation in the summer project. The independent variables include a variety of measures, among which are the applicant's gender, race, age, college major, highest grade completed, and home and college regions. But the single best predictor of participation is the existence of a prior strong tie linking the applicant to another volunteer. However, this is the lone network or social-tie item included in the analysis. No effort has been made to assess the impact of other kinds of ties on the recruitment process. The result is precisely the kind of truncated analysis of the relationship between social ties and activism about which critics such as Gould and Marchant-Shapiro have rightly complained.

To remedy this deficiency we have sought in the present analysis to

<sup>7</sup> The work of David Snow and several of his colleagues provide an important exception to this general assessment. In their pioneering theoretical work on the role of social ties and social networks in recruitment, Snow et al. (1980) acknowledge the importance of "multiple embeddings" in structuring a person's "differential availability" for movement participation. Later, Snow and Rochford (1983), in their study of recruitment into the Hare Krishna movement, sought to analyze the effect of various social ties on the recruit. They conclude that "a substantial majority of . . . recruits had few countervailing ties which might have served to constrain their participation in the movement." In his later book on the movement, Rochford (1985) provided additional data consistent with this conclusion.

<sup>8</sup> Since the publication of this analysis in 1986, the first author has acquired additional data that has allowed for a recoding of the network items (strong tie to a volunteer, weak tie to a volunteer, and strong tie to a no-show). Table 1 is included, then, not only to provide a baseline model for the results to follow in this paper but to update the key analysis from the earlier paper.

TABLE 1  
 LOGIT REGRESSION PREDICTING FREEDOM SUMMER PARTICIPATION  
 BY VARIOUS INDEPENDENT VARIABLES

Independent Variables	Dependent Variable (b)	Summer Status SE(b) <sup>a</sup>
Level of prior activism .....	.020	.039
N of organizational affiliations .....	.118*	.059
Strong tie to a volunteer .....	.491**	.191
Weak tie to a volunteer .....	.141	.098
Strong tie to a no-show .....	-.169	.325
Major:		
Social science .....	.167	.324
Other .....	-.137	.182
Home region:		
West north central .....	-.204	.324
New England .....	-.372	.387
Mid-Atlantic .....	.294	.583
East north central .....	-.517	.486
West .....	.694	.468
South .....	-.411	.484
College region:		
West north central .....	-.144	.297
New England .....	-.447	.327
Mid-Atlantic .....	-.251	.555
East north central .....	.439	.486
West .....	-.444	.358
South .....	.748*	.333
Race = white .....	-.135	.218
Gender = female .....	-.446**	.178
Age .....	.022 <sup>+</sup>	.013
Highest grade completed .....	-.014	.022
Distance from home to Mississippi .....	-.0003	.0002
Constant .....	1.039	.636

NOTE.—N = 766.

<sup>a</sup>No-shows = 0; volunteers = 1.

<sup>+</sup>P < .10.

\*P < .05.

\*\*P < .01.

assess the effect of various types of ties on the decision to take part in the Freedom Summer project. Specifically, we have differentiated the applicants on the basis of whether or not they report having received support for participation from each of five categories of others: parents, friends, religious groups or figures, civil rights organizations, or another volunteer. The data on the first three support categories were taken from a single item on the follow-up survey distributed to the applicants. The item asked respondents to rank order, from a fixed list, all those groups

or individuals who "*positively* influenced your decision to apply to the Freedom Summer Project." The first three support categories listed above were included in the responses provided to subjects.<sup>9</sup> The subject's responses to these three support categories were coded separately to yield three dichotomous variables. For example, subject's responses to the category "parents" were coded "0" and "1" to create the variable "parental support." Listing parents as a positive influence resulted in a code of "1"; failure to list was coded as "0." The same coding procedures were used in regard to the other two categories of ties as well.

The fourth support category, civil rights organizations, was generated using the list of organizational affiliations provided on the original applications. Those subjects reporting membership in a civil rights organization were coded as "1" on this variable; those lacking such an affiliation were coded as "0." The final support category, "other volunteers," makes use of the variable, "strong tie to another volunteer," included in the earlier logit regression (see table 1). This variable was created using information provided on the original project applications. One item on the application asked the subjects to list at least 10 persons whom they wished to be kept informed of their summer activities. The most common categories of names supplied by the applicants were those of parents, parents' friends, professors, ministers, and any other noteworthy or influential adults they had contact with. Quite often, however, applicants would list another applicant. This enabled us to construct a measure of the interpersonal ties connecting the applicant to (a) other Freedom Summer volunteers and (b) no-shows. In doing so, we were careful to distinguish between "strong" and "weak" ties (Granovetter 1973). Persons listed directly on the subject's application were designated as strong ties. Weak ties were defined as persons who, although not listed on the subject's application, were nonetheless linked to them by way of an intervening strong tie.

The applicant's responses to this application then were coded to produce a fifth dichotomous variable, termed "volunteer support." Only those applicants who reported a strong tie to a volunteer were coded as "1" on this variable. All other responses, including weak ties, were coded as "0."

Table 2 reports the percentage of volunteers and no-shows who received support from each of these five support categories. The percentage difference between volunteers and no-shows was significant in regard to the following forms of support: that from parents, civil rights organizations, and other volunteers. Moreover the differences are in the expected

<sup>9</sup> The other responses included in the list given respondents were "spokespersons for movement groups," "movement literature," and "other."

TABLE 2  
 PERCENTAGE OF VOLUNTEERS AND NO-SHOWS REPORTING SUPPORT  
 FROM VARIOUS SOURCES

	VOLUNTEERS		NO-SHOWS	
	%	N	%	N
Parents .....	26**	55	14	17
Friends .....	46	98	52	61
Religious groups or figures .....	14	30	19	22
Civil rights groups .....	43 <sup>+</sup>	313	37	89
Other volunteers .....	41**	210	24	36

<sup>+</sup> $P < .10$ .

\* $P < .05$ .

\*\* $P < .01$ .

direction. The differences are especially great in regard to the first and last of these categories. The percentage of volunteers reporting support from parents was nearly double the figure for the no-shows. And the proportion of volunteers reporting support—in the form of strong ties—from other volunteers was 75% greater than the comparable figure for no-shows. But these simple bivariate comparisons tell us little about the impact of these various forms of support, either in relation to each other or to the other significant variables shown in table 1. For that we turn to table 3, which reports the results of a second logit regression predicting participation.

Included in the analysis shown in table 3 is a pared-down version of the model reported in table 1 (including all the significant relationships from the earlier analysis), plus the five support variables. The results generally mirror the findings reported for table 1, while simultaneously confirming the suggestion contained in table 2.<sup>10</sup> That is, in the aggregate, those who made it to Mississippi *did* have the benefit of greater support

<sup>10</sup> The reader should note that the  $N$  for the analysis reported in table 3 is only 206, as compared to 630 for table 1. The reason for the reduced  $N$  has to do with a shift in the sources of data used in computing tables 1 and 3. All the variables in table 1 were generated using data taken from the original project applications. Excluding those whose applications were rejected and those whose project status could not be determined, the number of such applications was 959. However, the data from which the support variables shown in table 3 were constructed were taken from the 330 follow-up surveys returned by project applicants. In order to test to see what effect, if any, reducing the  $N$  would have on the magnitude of all variables other than the support categories, a separate logit regression was run. It is reassuring to note that a comparison of these two logits (the original with an  $N$  of 206 and the one described above with an  $N$  of 630) revealed no significant differences in the direction or magnitude of the other coefficients.

TABLE 3

LOGIT REGRESSION PREDICTING FREEDOM SUMMER PARTICIPATION BY VARIOUS INDEPENDENT VARIABLES, INCLUDING TIE CATEGORIES

Independent Variables	Dependent Variable (b)	Summer Status SE(b) <sup>a</sup>
Level of prior activism .....	.085*	.041
N of organizational affiliations .....	.217 <sup>+</sup>	.129
Weak tie to a volunteer .....	-.524	.403
Strong tie to a no-show .....	-.504	.546
Race = white .....	-.026	.522
Gender = female .....	-.555 <sup>+</sup>	.338
Age .....	.192*	.069
Highest grade completed .....	.016	.056
Distance from home to Mississippi .....	.0004	.0003
Support categories:		
Parent .....	1.223*	.497
Friends .....	-.491	.368
Religious groups .....	-.548	.526
Civil rights groups .....	.149	.433
Other volunteers .....	1.360**	.455
Constant .....	-4.810**	1.850

NOTE.—N = 206.

<sup>a</sup>No-shows = 0; volunteers = 1.

<sup>+</sup>P < .10.

\*P < .05.

\*\*P < .01.

from parents and project peers. Or, if one prefers the negative interpretation, the no-shows were handicapped by relatively low levels of support from these two important groups. Whichever interpretation one prefers—and both are probably operative—the results support a complex, differentiated view of the role of social ties in movement recruitment. Ties to persons not in the movement—in this case, to parents—may also influence recruitment decisions. And, those ties may, as in the case of the no-shows and their parents, constrain as well as encourage participation.

Prior Contact with Another Volunteer: Interpreting the Relationship

While our efforts to broaden the study of the relationship between social ties and activism have produced results suggesting the importance of various types of ties (e.g., to parents), they have done nothing to undermine the special significance previously ascribed to contact with another activist, in this case, another Freedom Summer volunteer. On the contrary, regardless of what other ties or additional variables are introduced into the analysis, a strong tie to another volunteer remains, to this point,



the best predictor of participation in the summer project. The robustness of this finding suggests a conclusion that is both interesting and perhaps broadly relevant in seeking to make a behavioral decision in the face of conflicting advice from multiple others: *behavioral*, as opposed to rhetorical or attitudinal, support is likely to prove decisive. That is, in supporting with their own actions the applicant's original behavioral intention, other volunteers provided a more dramatic and, perhaps, more meaningful form of support than the other ties whose influence we have sought to measure.

But apart from this generalization, we do not really know what it is about these ties to other volunteers that accounts for their predictive significance. What dimensions of these ties are especially facilitative of activism? In the remainder of this article, we will explore this question in some detail. Specifically, we will take up two dimensions of these ties: "strength" and salience.

1. *Strength of ties*.—Much has been made in the movement literature of the "strength of weak ties" (Granovetter 1973) as a force for the diffusion of collective action. Numerous studies have shown that movements often spread by means of diffuse networks of weak bridging ties (Freeman 1973; McAdam 1982; Oppenheimer 1989) or die for lack of such ties (Jackson et al. 1960). These findings suggest that, at the meso level, the critical function performed by social ties for a movement is one of communication. However, the findings reported earlier in tables 1 and 3 suggest a very different role for social ties at the individual level. The significant positive relationship between strong ties and participation and the absence of any relationship between weak ties and involvement suggests that, at the microlevel, ties are less important as conduits of information than as sources of social influence. And the stronger the tie, the stronger the influence exerted on the potential recruit. This implies that the ultimate network structure for a movement would be one in which dense networks of weak bridging ties linked numerous local groups bound together by means of strong interpersonal bonds. But for our purposes, the mesolevel structure of a movement is irrelevant. Our concern is solely with the microlevel function of social ties. And in this regard, our results support a strong conclusion: as dimensions go, the strength of a social tie appears to account for much of its power as a predictor of activism. But before we pronounce certainty on this issue, let us turn our attention to one other dimension of social ties.

2. *Salience of ties*.—Given the theoretical importance ascribed to the salience of a tie at the outset of the paper, it is especially important that we try to assess the significance of this dimension in shaping the applicant's decision regarding the summer project. To do so we will make use of several items from the original project applications. The principal

item is an open-ended question asking the individual to explain why they “would like to work in Mississippi this summer.” These answers were content-coded along a number of dimensions. But the important dimension for our purposes concerns the extent to which, in their statements, the applicants explicitly aligned themselves with a specific community or reference group. Some examples of these types of “aligning” statements follow:<sup>11</sup>

If I'm to continue *calling myself a Christian*, I must act NOW to put my abstract conception of brotherhood into practice.

*All of us in the movement* must join forces if the Summer Project is to succeed.

*In my group of future teachers* I make it a point to ask each of them, “Why do you want to go into education?”

When combined with the organizational affiliations listed on the application, these statements allowed us to create the variable, “recruitment context,” to capture the principal communities/identities that served to draw people into the project. Five such communities emerged from our reading of the open-ended question. These were teachers, religious community, socialists/leftists, liberal Democrats, and the civil rights movement. Along with the category, “no discernible group,” these five communities or reference groups comprised the coding scheme for the variable, “recruitment context.” But to be coded as belonging to any of these communities, it was not enough that the applicants express identification with the group in their statements. They also had to include among the organizational affiliations listed on their applications at least one organization tied to the community in question. So, for example, to be coded as belonging to the “liberal Democratic community,” the applicants would have had to assert this identity in their statements *and* report membership in either their campus chapter of Young Democrats or in a similar group (see Appendix). The variable, then, has both a subjective identification and objective organizational dimension.

The significant, but hardly surprising, finding from our perspective concerns the much higher rates of participation among those embedded in all five of the aforementioned recruitment contexts. Table 4 reports the percentages of no-shows and volunteers in each of the five contexts with the comparable figures for those not identified with any discernible context.

Only 65% of those lacking an identifiable recruitment “community”

<sup>11</sup> These quotes were taken from the summer project applications. In each case the emphasis is my addition.

TABLE 4  
 RECRUITMENT CONTEXT BY STATUS ON THE SUMMER PROJECT\*

	RECRUITMENT CONTEXTS													
	Church/ Religious		Civil Rights		Liberal Democrats		Socialist/ Leftist		Teachers		No CONTEXT		TOTAL	
	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N
Volunteers .....	83	94	87	82	85	51	83	93	87	87	65	320	75	727
No-shows .....	17	19	13	12	15	9	17	19	13	13	35	169	25	241
Total .....	100	113	100	94	100	60	100	112	100	100	100	489	100	968

\*Only two applicants were coded as affiliated with more than one recruitment context. Rather than lose data by excluding these subjects, we coded them as being affiliated with whatever context they first aligned themselves in their response to the open-ended item.

made it to Mississippi, as compared to from 83% to 87% of those so embedded.<sup>12</sup> The apparent causal influence of these recruitment contexts would appear to be due to two factors. First, the subject's expressed identification with these communities suggests a high degree of salience for the identities embodied in each. And second, their membership in organizations associated with these communities no doubt afforded these subjects strong support for their expressed identity as well as for the link between that identity and participation in the Freedom Summer project. This is exactly the combination of a highly salient identity and strong social support for activism based on that identity that we stressed at the outset as crucial to the process of movement recruitment. But one might complain that organizational membership alone could well predict activism and that combining it with subjective identification makes it impossible to tease out the effects of each. We will turn to this issue in our final analysis.

*Assessing the combined effects of these dimensions.*—So far we have sought to assess the independent effects of various factors or dimensions on the relationship between social ties and activism. But what of the combined effects? When taken together, which of these factors or dimensions appear to account for the role of social ties in constraining or facilitating activism? To answer this question, we report the results of four logistic models incorporating all but one of the significant variables touched on previously.<sup>13</sup>

The results reported in table 5 serve to underscore the importance of the combination of a highly salient identity and structural support for same in encouraging activism. Three specific results from the table bear comment. First, membership in any of the five recruitment contexts is shown in the full model (model 4) to bear a strong, positive relationship to participation in Freedom Summer.<sup>14</sup> Second, none of the simple organizational variables—including number of organizational affiliations, as well as the specific categories of organizational membership—are predictive of participation when included in the same model as the recruitment contexts. Finally, even the heretofore significant effect of a strong tie to another volunteer washes out in the face of the predictive power of the context variables.

<sup>12</sup> When we use an overall chi-square test, these differences are significant at the .01 level.

<sup>13</sup> The one exception is the measure of parental support used in table 3. Given that the measure was based on information taken from the follow-up survey, including it here would have reduced the overall *N* for the analysis from some 600 to 200.

<sup>14</sup> "Recruitment context" is a single categorical variable in the logit regression. The coefficient for each context reflects the effect that is in addition to the base category, "no discernible group."

The conclusion is unmistakable: neither organizational embeddedness nor strong ties to another volunteer are themselves predictive of high-risk activism. Instead it is a strong subjective identification with a particular identity, *reinforced by organizational or individual ties*, that is especially likely to encourage participation. Does this mean that organizational or individual ties are irrelevant to the recruitment process? Hardly; it does, however, suggest that if the identity sustained by the tie is neither linked to participation nor particularly salient to the person in question, it is not likely to encourage activism. What about the opposite question? Is strong identification with a particular identity enough to promote involvement in the absence of structural support for same? It is significant that we cannot directly answer this question with our data. None of our subjects expressed strong identification with any of these five identities without also being structurally embedded in the relevant organizational community supportive of that identity. That is, identity salience would itself seem to be a social product.

We are left, then, with the kind of necessary but not sufficient relationship sociologists are so fond of. Prior ties—either through organizations or particular others—would seem to be necessary, but not sufficient, for recruitment to high-risk activism. In the absence of (a) a strong identification with the identity sustained by the tie and (b) a link between that identity and the movement in question, prior ties are no more productive of participation than the absence of ties. Such prior ties provide the crucial social context in which identities *may* achieve salience and the linkage between identity and activism *can* be forged, but the existence of such ties does not ensure that these crucial processes will, in fact, take place.

Before concluding with a discussion of the significance of these findings, a few words are in order regarding the strength of the relationship linking integration into the “teaching context” with participation. Of the five contexts it would appear to be the one with the least relevance for an explicitly political project such as Freedom Summer. In point of fact, however, the relationship is entirely consistent with the contemporary “framing” (Snow and Benford 1988) of the project and, as such, represents a nice nonintuitive example of the broader social psychological dynamic sketched earlier.

As noted earlier, one of the two principal components of the project was the campaign to establish a network of “freedom schools” throughout the state. These schools were to expose students to a broader range of subjects and more information on African-American history than they typically got in the historically impoverished “separate but equal” institutions they normally attended. The prominence accorded the freedom school effort in planning for the summer (see Holt 1965; McAdam 1988),

TABLE 5  
THE EFFECTS OF VARIOUS INDEPENDENT VARIABLES ON PARTICIPATION IN FREEDOM SUMMER PROJECT

INDEPENDENT VARIABLES	MODEL 1		MODEL 2		MODEL 3		MODEL 4	
	(b)	SE(b)	(b)	SE(b)	(b)	SE(b)	(b)	SE(b)
Level of prior activism .....	.037*	.015	.024	.171	.030 <sup>+</sup>	.018	.001	.020
Race = white .....	-.144	.189	-.097	.192	-.051	.196	-.006	.200
Gender = female .....	-.291 <sup>+</sup>	.157	-.311*	.158	-.338*	.161	-.311 <sup>+</sup>	.165
Age .....	.064**	.016	.066**	.017	.061**	.017	.048**	.018
Highest grade completed .....	-.042*	.019	-.036 <sup>+</sup>	.019	-.037 <sup>+</sup>	.019	-.032 <sup>+</sup>	.019
Distance from home to Mississippi .....	.00008	.0001	.00009	.0001	.0001	.0001	.00009	.0001
N of organizational affiliations .....	.110*	.051	.102*	.052	.089	.056	.050	.057
Weak tie to volunteer .....	.504**	.190	.119	.261	.145	.264	.090	.269
Strong tie to a no-show .....	-.260	.340	-.290	.353	-.239	.353	-.352	.361
Support categories:								
Civil rights group .....			-.277	.189				
Other volunteers .....			.570 <sup>+</sup>	.336	.561 <sup>+</sup>	.339	.524	.349

Proximity of tie:						
Proximal .....					.177	.181
Distal .....	-.013	.176	-.028		.190	.194
	.238	.189	.237		.241	
Membership:						
Religious organization .....			-.429 <sup>+</sup>		.242	.296
Civil rights organization .....			-.241		.197	.202
Democratic Party organization .....			.198		.253	.282
Socialist or New Left organization .....			.074		.228	.277
Teachers organization .....			-.434		.372	.431
Recruitment context:						
Religious .....					.723*	.341
Civil rights .....					1.057**	.390
Liberal Democrat .....					1.210**	.414
New left .....					.798*	.344
Teaching .....					.867*	.382
Constant .....	-.177	.481	.104	.603	1.129	1.000

NOTE.—*N* = 766.

\* *P* < .10.

\*\* *P* < .05.

\*\*\* *P* < .01.

made the recruitment of qualified teachers a major goal of project organizers. Toward this end they sought and received official endorsement for the project from the major national teacher's associations, including the American Federation of Teachers and the National Educational Association.

These endorsements, coupled with the specific steps taken by organizers to recruit upper-division education majors on campus, represent exactly the kinds of efforts to link a particular identity with participation that we expect to be especially effective in encouraging participation. Though historically not as disposed to political action as those integrated into the other four recruitment contexts, prospective teachers were, in this case, the object of specific recruiting appeals that sought to link their future occupational identity to involvement in the Freedom Summer project.

#### DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

All of this calls to mind the model of movement recruitment outlined at the outset of this article. We suggested that the ultimate decision to participate in a movement would depend on four *limiting conditions*: (1) the occurrence of a specific recruiting attempt, (2) the successful linkage of movement and identity, (3) support for that linkage from persons who normally serve to sustain the identity in question, and (4) the absence of strong opposition from others on whom other salient identities depend.

The results reported in table 5 can certainly be interpreted as consistent with the above account of recruitment. All of our subjects—no-shows and volunteers alike—shared the first two limiting conditions noted above. Clearly they were aware of the project (condition 1) and, given their willingness to apply, appear to have viewed the project as consistent with some salient identity (condition 2). In our view, what differentiates the volunteers from the no-shows is the extent of support they received for this linkage (condition 3) and the relative absence of opposition from salient others (condition 4). Not only were the volunteers embedded in more organizations, but also in ones—civil rights organizations, teacher associations, and so forth—ideally suited to reinforcing the linkage between identity and action. Moreover, as the greater support from parents suggests, the volunteers also appear to have received less opposition (or more support) from other salient relationships in which they were involved.

All of this may help to explain the surprising lack of statistical significance of the relationship linking a strong tie to another volunteer with participation. While this relationship had been significant in all previous analyses, it appears that it was merely a proxy for the recruitment con-



texts included in table 5. That is, the volunteers' ties to other volunteers were themselves a function of the participants' greater integration into specific recruitment contexts that served as the microstructural basis for their decisions to take part in the project.

If this is the case, then, the analyses presented here do more than simply support the general model of recruitment outlined earlier. Our findings also argue for a much stronger effect of organizational (or otherwise collective) as opposed to individual ties in mediating entrance into collective action. Clearly much work remains to confirm this conclusion, but it is an intriguing one and one that accords with "bloc recruitment" accounts of the emergence and rapid spread of collective action (Oberschall 1973). Ties to individuals may well mediate the recruitment process, but they appear to do so with special force and significance when the tie is embedded in a broader organizational or collective context linking both parties to the movement in question.

We would be remiss, however, if we closed the article on the structural note above. Clearly, the most important implication of this research is as much sociopsychological as structural. Network analysts of movement recruitment have been overly concerned with assessing the structure of the subject's relationship to the movement without paying sufficient attention to the social psychological processes that mediate the link between network structure and activism. As Gould has recently argued, "It is risky to make generalizations about the impact of network structure in the absence of detailed information about collective action settings" and the "influence process" by which people come to participate in a social movement (1993, p. 195).

More specifically, prior ties would appear to encourage activism only when they (a) reinforce the potential recruit's identification with a particular identity and (b) help to establish a strong linkage between that identity and the movement in question. When these processes of identity amplification and identity/movement linkage take place, activism is likely to follow. In the absence of these processes, prior ties do not appear to be predictive of participation. Movement analysts, then, need to be as attuned to the *content* of network processes as to the *structures* themselves.

## APPENDIX

### Organizational Fields

Space constraints do not allow for a complete listing of all the organizations that were coded as constituting the "organizational field" for the five recruitment contexts. We can, however, provide the following broad description of these five "fields."

1. *Religious organizations.*—Any reported affiliation with a specific church or temple was coded as a “religious organization.” So too were any campus- or community-based religious groups (e.g., Episcopal Society for Cultural or Racial Unity, Young People’s Fellowship). In all, 106 organizations were coded as constituting this category.

2. *Civil rights organizations.*—Forty-one groups were coded under this category. Besides the so-called “big five” civil rights organizations—SNCC (including Friends of SNCC), CORE, SCLC, NAACP, and the Urban League, another 36 campus- or community-based civil rights organizations were included under this category (e.g., the Orangeburg Freedom Movement, Georgia Students for Human Rights, Vassar Civil Rights Organization).

3. *Liberal Democratic party organizations.*—This category comprised the smallest number of specific organizations, but even so, 16 groups were included under the heading. Far and away the most frequently listed organization in this category was the Young Democrats. In addition, however, 15 other reform Democratic groups were counted as part of this category (e.g., Heights Reform Democrats, Riverside Democratic Club).

4. *Socialist/leftist organizations.*—This category comprised 19 organizations. Some of these were campus-based New Left organizations such as Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), but most were more traditional socialist or “old” left groups such as the Student Peace Union, War Resisters League, or the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW or “wobblies”).

5. *Teachers or other educational organizations.*—Any professional association of teachers (e.g., American Federation of Teachers, Glen Rock Teachers Organization) was coded under this category as were any campus-based groups of future teachers or education majors (e.g., Future Teachers of America, Indiana University Association of Student Teachers). Thirty-one groups were coded under this category.

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