

# Shall We Overcome? The Sense of Movement Power among Gulf War Protesters

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**ABSTRACT:** Thousands of Americans went to demonstrations against the Persian Gulf War. This research examines the aspirations, judgments, and concerns of different anti-war protesters. After interviewing 48 activists in San Diego, it became clear that more than three-fourths of sample activists thought the movement could not directly alter Bush's war policy. Those activists with a low sense of movement power said they protested because they wanted: (1) to change American values and lifestyles; (2) to adhere to their personal ethical codes; and (3) to interact with a community that affirmed their dissident mentalities.

Beginning in early August, 1990, organizations across the world reacted to signs of the coming war in the Persian Gulf. As President Bush was stationing more than half a million troops in Saudi Arabia at a cost of more than a billion dollars a day, national and local coalitions were forming to stop the war before it began.

This research analyzes the local anti-war movement in San Diego, California. Social movements are complex phenomena, and there are numerous factors that contributed to the anti-war movement. This paper, however, focuses only on the intersubjective assumptions, interpretations, and mental processes of protesters. Specific attention is placed on the reasons why people choose to protest.

The social movement literature on this topic offers four distinct explanations the reasons for protesting. Some movement scholars suggest that expectations of political concessions and instrumental success induces movement participation; others suggest that activism springs from an adherence to moral codes; a third group believes the

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fun and spontaneous nature of movements draws some activists to the demonstrations, while the final group of scholars suggest the purpose of activism in "new social movements" is to disseminate the type of knowledge that can devastate "abhorrent" institutions. To test the accuracy of each claim, 48 activists were interviewed during their participation in this local anti-war mobilization.

### Review of Relevant Social Movement Theory

Numerous factors facilitate the genesis of social movements. As "rational choice" and "political opportunity" resource mobilization (RM) theorists have succinctly argued, "objective/structural" conditions such as stages of political instability, communication networks, types of organizational structure and elite support play a fundamental role in developing a society that is ripe for social movement activity (Oberschall, 1973; McCarthy and Zald, 1977; Tilly, 1978). Additionally, those from RM camps have rightly asserted the necessity of having pre-existing communication lines to recruit new members into the movement (Snow et al., 1980). A person predisposed to join a movement needs to become aware of the movement by a messenger before she or he is pulled into the movement. But the existence of communication lines in themselves does not create the mobilization of individuals into a movement. Researchers must go further than determining the existence of messengers and understand what messages fostered the joining of social movements (Eyerman and Jamierson, 1991; Ferree and Miller, 1985; Turner and Killian, 1987; Weiner, 1982). Since invitations to join the movement do not automatically insure that listeners will become involved, one must decipher the messages that motivated movement participation (Carden, 1978; McNall, 1986; Tucker, 1989). Scholars must comprehend the cultural aspects that transform complacent citizens into actors for social change (Buelcher, 1990; Boggs, 1988; Habermas, 1982; Melucci, 1984; Rude, 1980). As Tarrow (1986:161) wrote, sociologists are "obliged to take into account cultural trends, community and social networks and ideological process within different groups in order to understand how structural potential is translated into decisions to participate." Thus, this research set out to discover the "symbolic" orientation that translates "objective" conditions into grievances that inspire social movement participation.

Social movements actively construct subversive interpretations that rally participants for public protests (Ash, 1972; Wilson, 1973; Boggs, 1986; Scott, 1990). That is, large-scale social movements surface when conventional perceptions of the world get transformed into "new frames of meanings" that demand collective attempts to erase the problems stemming from the prevailing power structure

(Snow, et al., 1986). These "new frames of meanings" act as ideological incentives for movement participation because they offer rationales for breaking from the habitual practices of conforming to the prescribed norms.

### *The Components of Movement Ideology*

Historically scholars have tried to explicate the aspects of movement ideologies that contribute to the inception of communal protests. Some classical social theorists have stressed that movements create a counter-hegemonic subculture that frees subordinates from the ideological apparatus that keeps underlings complacent (Gramsci, 1971). This may, in turn, delegitimize the standing order (Weber, 1946) and create an "utopian ideology" that solicits the "shattering, either partially or wholly, of the order of things prevailing at the time" (Mannheim, 1936:173).

Wilson's (1973) landmark treatise on social movements lists three main components of movement ideologies. These have been widely cited, praised, and critiqued by later theorists. Wilson argued that movement "mobilizing ideologies" have the following characteristics: (1) the discrediting of the standing order; (2) the advancement of an alternative vision of a better world; and (3) a description of what should be done to right the wrongs.

The first point is that movement ideologies have a debunking tone. They dispute the paradigms that justify "normal" practices. The logic of the system, which once seemed indisputable, loses its ability to convince people of its righteousness. Rationales for obedience and deference come to be seen as absurd, stifling or even alienating.

The realization that the present order cultivates misery is not enough to enlist a person's involvement in collective defiance, since a person may say: "It is terrible, but there isn't anything else that is better." So, the second aspect of a movement ideology is to provide a portrait of a future with fewer problems than the present. The vision does not have to be a totalizing utopia in which everything is perfect, but it must suggest how wonderful it would be to do away with the problem.

Finally, the movement ideology also contains the means of alleviating the problem. These strategies and tactics act as precepts on how to pursue a desired goal. Tactics furnish activists with a plan of action and guidelines of how to behave so the opposition will bend to movement demands. Like any sense-making cultural artifact, having a clearly specified plan seems to compel involvement. That is, people are more likely to act when they know what behaviors are considered proper.

Four features have been added by other scholars to Wilson's original argument. They are: (1) Activists must have confidence that the movement has enough power to change governmental practices; (2) Activism rests on following one's conscience and is *not* related to a rational decision-making process regarding movement efficacy; (3) People join movements because movements are amusing; and (4) Contemporary activists have abandoned attempts of immediately altering governmental policies and are primarily interested in altering the ethics and lifestyles of people in a post-industrial world.

(1) *The Sense of Power*. Scholars have suggested that desirability of change and the beliefs that collectives can generate such changes are two separate judgments. A person can favor societal reorganization but can still shudder at the interpretation that such change cannot be achieved.

Accordingly, the "sense of power" scholars argue that the perceptions of movement power are crucial (Piven and Cloward, 1977; McAdam, 1982; Klandermans, 1985). They have asserted that pessimistic feelings about reform possibilities will debilitate any aspirations of joining social movements (Bouchier, 1978; Bailey, 1988). They have claimed that private dissenters won't engage in public struggles if the struggle looks useless, futile and doomed to failure. As Moore (1978:459) suggests: "People are evidently inclined to grant legitimacy to anything that is or seems inevitable. . . . The conquest of this sense of inevitability is essential to the development of political effective moral outrage [and political protest]."

In *Poor People's Movements* Piven and Cloward were among the first theoreticians to incorporate the "sense of collective efficacy" argument into their movement typologies. Piven and Cloward (1977:3-4) wrote:

The emergence of a protest movement entails a transformation both of consciousness and of behavior. The changes in consciousness has at least three distinct aspects . . . [with the third aspect being] there is a new sense of efficacy; people who ordinarily consider themselves helpless come to believe that they have some capacity to alter their lot.

Many scholars followed Piven and Cloward's initiative and claimed that interpretations of movement strength and movement participation are closely linked. A few scholars have suggested that every activist has at least a minute sense of faith in the movement's ability to achieve its goals (McAdam, 1982; Turner and Killian, 1986; Blain, 1989). Others have argued that an unwavering confidence in the movements' capacities to produce change is always a precursor to movement participation (Oliver et al., 1985; Eyerman and Jamison,

1991). Still others have submitted an even stronger hypothesis by claiming that activists must expect success before joining a movement (Oberschall, 1980; Klandermans, 1985).

Thus, I have come to the first major hypothesis that this research tests. McAdam (1982:52) and others have suggested that "Before collective protest can get under way, people must collectively define their situations as unjust and subject to change through group action." It was my task to find out if all activists *must* define the movement chances of success in a favorable light.

Critics say the "sense of power" theory digresses into reductionistic fallacies (Carden, 1978; Fireman and Gamson, 1979; Ferree and Miller, 1985). The model presupposes that activists are "rational actors" who are exclusively concerned over short-term instrumental changes in the government. But this premise that every activist is a pragmatist, and these pragmatic activists only care about governmental concessions, may be faulty. As Ratcliff writes, "the idea of rational calculation and economic self-interest seems out of touch with the diversity of forces that people have during social movement participation" (1984:xi).

A few movement researchers have warned that activists do not live for politics alone. Concerns over instrumental success may motivate participation, but activists may simultaneously be drawn to the expressive side of movements (Curtis and Zurcher, 1974; Harrison, 1978; Meyer et al., 1977). Since protesting can supply emotive qualities which are intrinsically entertaining and satisfying, people may protest for the pleasure derived from protesting.

(2) *The Moral Aspects to Participation*. Activists may feel compelled to participate in a perceived "impotent movement" if the cause is considered vital (Carden, 1978; Jenkins, 1979; Oliver, 1983). Activists may have internalized an internationalized "ethic of caring for all people" to the extent that they might feel morally responsible to "save the humans" or "end third world oppression." This suggests that even under the ominous backdrop of apparent failure, activists may feel obliged to keep plodding along just to keep their vows of fighting against the evil they see in the U.S. foreign policy (Flieshman, 1980; Hirsch, 1990). Activists may become so devoted to living the "moral" life that the only criteria for action may be whether it is right or wrong. Turner writes: "expressing support for a cause, regardless of whether it produces desired visible consequences . . . advocates may simply want to 'do something,' to 'go on record,' to 'strike a blow' for the cause" (Turner, 1981:11). Thus, the second major research question was, "Is anti-war activism primarily based on the desire to act morally righteous?"

(3) *The Jubilant Component of Protesting.* The third argument is that participation is not always linked to somber and serious issues like "real political outcomes" or "being a virtuous person," but activism may stem from the communal side of organizing. A set of scholars have emphasized that people may join a movement because the movement can furnish the symbolic benefits of group membership (Fireman and Gamson, 1979; Traugott, 1977). That is, activists may enter movement circles because those who hold "deviant" or "stigmatized" beliefs may perceive the movement as some sort of sanctuary. The disenfranchised can join a movement because within a movement setting their political posture is praised instead of degraded; people who are lonely due to their marginalized position can find new friends in the movement; and/or activists can express opinions prohibited elsewhere (Harrison, 1977; Carden, 1978; Useem, 1979; Hirschman, 1982). So the third question guiding analysis was: "Can the symbolic pleasures of friendship and identity affirmations be salient enough to motivate movement participation?"

(4) *"New Social Movements" as Educational Forces.* A group of European social theorists has added a substantially different approach to this debate. According to New Social Movement (NSM) theorists, recent movements have adopted the cultural transformation style of undoing the system (Eder, 1982; Offe, 1985; Touraine, 1989). Accepting the principles of "philosophical idealism," NSMs hope that the dissemination of "environmentally sound, post-patriarchal" values can undermine the loyalties that keep institutions together (Habermas, 1981; Melucci, 1984; Cohen, 1985). Thus, NSMs supposedly believe that cultural shifts can lead to institutional alterations (Brandt, 1986; Kivisto, 1986; Luke, 1990).

Attitudinal change is targeted because values secure the cooperation and coordination that lets oppressive institutions flourish. The continuation of wars requires the manufacturing, use and repairing of both warriors and war technologies. To efficiently kill 100,000 Iraqis the U.S. government needs taxpayers sending in their money, parents sacrificing their children, soldiers obeying orders, workers creating bombs, and reporters praising the war. The social control devices like "paychecks," "patriotism," and "imprisonment" are the mechanisms that seek to guarantee that the prerequisites of war are met. This self-contained system can become disrupted and eventually disintegrate if citizens withhold their cooperation with the war (Foss and Larkin, 1986; Arrighi et al., 1989; Fuentes and Frank, 1989). For instance, if consumers boycott GM for making tanks, soldiers lay down their guns, General Dynamics workers leave their jobs, scientific researchers shun military-funded grants, and Americans forego

their material luxuries that result from global domination, then the highly integrated orchestration that makes wars may be hampered to the point of paralysis. Flacks (1987:272) writes, "The fundamental insight of pacifism is that human beings can be addressed apart from their roles, and that address can undermine role compliance. The key to disarming ruling elites is to find ways to weaken their capacity to command subordinates to commit violence." Thus, NSMs may define success as disseminating a critical awareness that lessen American tendencies to comply with the actions that create and sustain the war.

To usher in new ways of thinking on issues of national security, movements must initially assume the role of the gadfly that tells its neighbors that something is wrong (Boggs, 1986; Salomon, 1986; Meyer, 1991). Movements must become the beacon of public discontent that "challenge the logic of the system on cultural grounds and in people's everyday lives" (Melucci, 1984:823). To contest the ideas that uphold the status quo, anti-war activists may see their prime goal as maintaining their public presence that renounces warrior mentalities (Ash, 1973; Flacks, 1988; Epstein, 1991). Peace activism may revolve around maximizing the movements' visibility in the streets and in the media (Hegedus, 1987). Thus we have arrived at the last research question, "Are activists primarily interested in the cultural change approach to altering the political landscape?"

#### *Peace Movement Theorizing*

Essays on the peace movement have dealt with these profound issues (Kriesberg, 1988; Meyer and Marullo, 1992). These scholars suggested that peace movements may try to influence the Commander-in-Chief through two basic routes. The *direct* method tries to immediately influence the state. Activists use this method to elicit elite concerns on specific problems, by providing alternative diplomatic and budgetary policies, by electing "peace" people to positions of governmental power, or by using "civil disobedience" to escalate the costs and difficulty of executing war policies. Yet, peace movements are not confined to the use of these traditional "state-centered" means of making change. Peace movements also have the option of trying the *indirect* route of altering political arrangements through changing American values. Peace movements may try to change political dialogues, alter the assumptions of the U.S. populace and create sub-cultures that oppose the war machine.

Lofland, Colwell and Johnson (1990) recently tried to determine which one of these "theories of change" was widely accepted by 1980s disarmament activists. After reading peace movement manuals with "how to make change" sections, they noticed that the movement had separate factions espousing their own versions of the "best"

tactics. They detected six different groups that championed their own distinctive methods of generating intentional social change: the parliamentarians, the protesters, the transcendents, the educators, the intellectuals, and the prophets.

They found only two of the six groupings wanted to directly confront governmental policies. The *parliamentarians* claimed they could end wars by being proficient players in the conventional political game. World peace would evolve through lobbying, campaign donations, and the ballot box. *Protesters* declared that electoral and traditional political maneuvers were ineffective and that the "direct action" approach was better suited to movement resources. They thought boycotts, sabotage, tax evasion, and civil disobedience could disrupt war operations enough to make politicians give in. They surmised that if an unruly populace makes war costs outweigh war benefits, then the rational politicians and corporate executives will halt the war.

But the other four groupings rejected these direct approaches of inducing change and preferred the indirect method. The *transcendents* believed that after activists reminded "people" of the human price of the war, then supposedly each person would realize that wars cause too much pain. That is, once hordes of U.S. citizens regained their empathy for others, then wars will simply end. The *educators* agreed that shifts of consciousness were the basis for social change, but they suggested that this new worldview would develop when the movement furnished credible facts and information. They thought most Americans tended to support the government and only when Americans are greeted by the provocative "hidden" truths of the war will they convert to the peace orientation. The *intellectuals* also believed in the necessity of good ideas, but they saw their role as creators of the knowledge that will end all wars. Finally, the *prophets* announced that activism should spring from the moral responsibility to confront immoral policies. That is, by publicly acting on their convictions, others may emulate their actions and the corrupt war may end.

#### *Peace Movement Research*

While many scholars have asserted that a high sense of movement strength is associated with participation, few have actually researched this assertion (Herring, 1989; McAdam, 1988), and none have included any analysis of anti-war movements.

Research on the anti-war and peace movements of the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s have confirmed some NSM orientations in the sensibilities of participants (Skolnick, 1969; Horowitz, 1970; O'Brien, 1974; Wittner, 1984). Various tracts regarding the movements against the Vietnamese war found that activists focused on "dialogue" as the

mechanism for change (Halstead, 1978; Gitlin, 1980; Zaroulis, 1984). Hippies, Yuppies, Quakers and feminists supposedly conceived the dialogue process as a technique that would make Americans rethink the fundamental aspects of patriotism (Katz, 1983; Lens, 1990; DeBenedetti, 1990). Horowitz (1970:43) writes that the anti-war movement "tried to assault the romantic, irrational and powerful identification of man [sic] with country."

A few researchers have explored the relationship between New Social Movement theories and 1980s U.S. peace actions, most using case studies of local peace organizations. Studies of regional Beyond War, MEND and Physicians for Social Responsibility groups found that members wanted to unleash new modes of thinking about deterrence models (Mehan and Willis, 1988; Rice, 1988; Brigham, 1990; Neal, 1990). Schiffman's study of two San Francisco peace groups found that activists believed a communal "gestalt switch" would stop militarism (1991). Knudson-Ptacek found that activists in a Boston group called PEACE saw their goal as teaching that human survival depends on global cooperation and that the fate of the world was connected to every person doing his or her best to end war, hunger and poverty (1990). Other research on local peace groups found similar messages; activists wanted to make Americans interested in the well being of non-Americans (Tobias, 1983; Coates, 1984; Roth, 1984). A review essay of the 1980s peace movement literature concluded that "part of the peace activists challenge lies in the cultural realm, to create and disseminate new counter-frames" (Meyer and Marullo, 1992:121).

The only national study of peace activism echoed these local findings. After Loeb (1987:206-231) interviewed activists nationwide, he found that the peace activists of the 1980s wanted to "break the public silence about militarism" and propagate a new popular awareness. Loeb found that nuclear disarmament activists wanted to distribute a vision of how each person's actions play a part in the creation of the crisis, and they wanted to convince enough "ordinary" citizens to quit acting in the ways that strengthen the Military-Industrial Complex. Thus, Loeb concluded that 1980s activists were primarily after cultural change.

#### **Research Methodology**

This research employed qualitative methods and in-depth interviews because these approaches can uncover interpretative schemes and tacit understandings. Ethnographic studies frequently lead to better depictions of the insider's perspective since the significant themes of those being studied can come through the immersion of the

researcher into their daily worlds (Abrahamson, 1983; Jorgenson, 1989).

As with the national anti-war movement, San Diego organizers began forming a coalition of groups against the war in August, 1990, six months before the first bomb was dropped on Iraq. The informal aspects of this research started on October 27, 1990, when the San Diego Coalition for Peace in the Middle East (SDCPME) had its first protest, but all formal interviews were recorded between January 17-February 13. These dates corresponded with the major setbacks to the movement. January 17 proved to be the first major defeat because it was the day after Iraq was first bombed. After the 17th, the movement reacted to the changing circumstances and called for a cease fire. On February 23 Bush amplified the severity of the war by embarking on the land battles which the movement had tried to stop. Consequently, all the statements appearing in this paper were expressed when activists were grappling with the disappointments of the movement's first setback but before the second major failure.

Altogether I interviewed 48 movement activists. Their ages ranged from 18 to 72. While 25 were in the young adult ages of 18 to 30, other ages were also represented. The sample included 25 men and 23 women. In racial/ethnic terms, the San Diego movement was primarily Anglo and so was my sample. I found no African-Americans and spoke with only three Mexican-Americans and four of Arabic descent. Most members of the sample considered themselves a part of the middle class. Twenty-six individuals labeled themselves as middle-class, while five people identified themselves as upper-middle-class, and four said they were upper-class. Eight activists said they had working-class backgrounds, and five said they came from poverty.

Overall, this was an extremely educated group in which 44 had attended college. Eighteen were still enrolled at an university, there were 16 B.A.s, four M.A.s, and two Ph.D.s. The sample was also very secular; only six said they belonged to any organized religion (three Buddhists, two Catholics, and one pagan). Most placed their political orientation on the left side of the scale. Twenty-five were self-proclaimed lefties (nine socialists, four Marxists, four anarchists, three radical feminists, two radical environmentalists, two progressives and one political "gadfly"). Liberals were the next largest pack with 15; there was only one conservative; two offered political identities that I could not place on a conventional political spectrum ("mother," "citizen of the world"); and five thought no label would fit.

Although anti-war activities were happening all over San Diego, the majority of the activities were concentrated within the three organizational boundaries of the San Diego Coalition for Peace in the

Middle East, the University of California Alliance for Peace, and San Diego State Coalition for Peace in the Middle East. The largest group, the San Diego Coalition for Peace in the Middle East, was spread across San Diego county. This was an ad-hoc organization that coalesced different peace, environmental, feminist, leftist, and minority organizations into one conglomerate. This umbrella group held weekly vigils and could attract as many as 10,000 people to its major demonstrations. The two major universities in San Diego were the other scenes of organized dissent. The University of California at San Diego (UCSD) with its vestiges of sixties counterculture was the first campus to respond to the war. Student activists from the co-ops, the radical bookstore, leftist student newspapers, and social justice organizations formed the UCSD Alliance for Peace. They organized teach-ins, sleep-ins, and protests that enticed 3,000 students and faculty to participate. Students from San Diego State University (SDSU) had a much smaller collection of activists who engaged in campus protests. The SDSU coalition for peace in the Middle East held weekly vigils that could draw up to 500 persons. It should also be noted that these separate coalitions shared members and officially endorsed each other's events.

The informants came from these three dens of anti-war agitation. The number of respondents picked from each organization correlated roughly with the intensity and scope of activities taking place in each setting. SDCPME furnished 28 activists; twelve were from UCSD and eight from SDSU.

### Initial Findings

During the course of the interviews, I discovered a diversity of views regarding movement power. They ranged from the depressed activist who saw the movement as incapable of achieving anything to the enthusiastic participant who knew Bush was ready to concede to the anti-war movement within a matter of days. While the sample as a whole included a plethora of diverse assessments of movement strength, I found that there were specific types of interpretations that occurred regularly.

Activists belonged to three types of perceived movement power. The first and largest cluster had 36 activists who believed that the movement had no chance of stopping the war; the war would proceed as if the movement did not exist. A second cluster of eight activists predicted that the movement could possibly stop the war, but they were uncertain whether this preferable outcome would ever materialize. A third cluster of four activists were certain that the movement would determine Bush's war policy.

Group 1: "We have no chance." (n=36)

While the song "We shall overcome" may be a standard hymn heard at protests, more than three-fourths of the activists in this sample dismissed its message. Thirty-six of the 48 activists believed the movement was not going to alter Bush's war policy. During the interviews, activists of this largest cluster made brief confessions such as "Bush won't give into us," or "We are trying to do the impossible" and wanted to move on to another subject. One activist offered this frank statement: "The chances of stopping this war is [sic] presently constituted at zero."

Those who would dwell on the issue usually divulged confessions such as: "I'm not blind, I'm not a fool, I don't hold on to any unrealistic . . . [ten second pause] I don't think the peace movement will stop the war." A student's voice cracked when she said, "It seems that Bush is high up on the Hill and he has closed his windows to the thousands of protesters. It is really frustrating, like we cannot accomplish anything." A college activist mocked me for asking such a "naive" question regarding movement success: "Oh, come on man, wake up. A big thing that is different from today and the sixties is that back then people thought that they could make a big difference. The only thing I can change is my socks. It is odd to think that we can change anything at a federal level." Four activists gave despondent utterances like, "Nothing good will happen and they might get worse. The warmongers will win and we may have to hide."

Group 2: "We might have a chance." (n=8)

Not every activist considered the task of stopping the war as being insurmountable; eight of the 48 activists thought the fate of the movement was uncertain. To them, the contest between the movement and the government could result in various outcomes. They spoke of how the course of events could develop and recited possible scenarios that might unfold. They insisted that the future was uncertain and nothing seemed predestined. They repeatedly made hedging statements about possibilities, such as, "Maybe we can get it done," but they were frequently followed with equivocations: "but I really don't know how things will fall." For these activists many different paths seemed viable, so they maintained a wait-and-see approach to the possibility of movement success.

These activists believed that the movement's bid for success was achievable after the proper circumstances transpired. They cited all the precursory conditions necessary for a movement triumph. But their prophecies warned that if all of the precipitating factors did not occur, then the war planners' script would prevail.

Group 3: "We will stop the war." (n=4)

While the majority of activists had gloomy or guarded appraisals of the movement's success possibilities, four of the 48 activists had optimistic predictions of movement success. It was as if these activists thought it was a matter of fact that their movement would stop the war. To them, Bush would have no choice but to give into the protesters' demands: "We will bring him [Bush] to his knees." One activist bragged that "There will be a real move toward social justice; we will pull something off. He [Bush] can't hold out; we will make him stop this crazy thing." And a 50-year-old male assured me in a matter-of-fact tone that "the chances of us stopping the war is [sic] about 100 percent in favor of us."

### New Findings After Further Analysis

After finding out that people will participate in a movement seen as being relatively powerless, I reanalyzed the transcripts of the 36 activists who had a "low sense of movement power." I wanted to see if "morality," "pleasure," or "cultural change" principles guided their actions.

The first thing that I noticed was that these concepts are not mutually exclusive. A person could be protesting with a combination of any one of these reasons. In fact, there were a few people who cited more than one. But it should be noted that every activist with a low sense of power mentioned at least one of the three principles.

*Transcenders: "After the peace movement embarrasses the establishment, people won't listen to them."*

Thirty-three of the 36 activists with a low sense of power thought the movement must try to end wars through the cultural reformation route. They thought they had no chance of changing Bush's inclinations toward waging wars, but they hoped to change public opinion.

These 33 activists talked about "working against the political socialization process." The less experienced activists offered vague platitudes such as, "we have to educate the masses on what is really going on," while the more seasoned peace veterans suggested that our "goal is to reprioritize the values of this country," or "we have to rebuild American values by addressing the deep issues of militarism, imperialism and racism." And a wife of a soldier maintained that "We are the constant reminder. We want to get people to stop and think. People should be thinking about the war. This war shouldn't be in the back of their heads."



These activists opted for spreading new values because they believed that most Americans were adamantly for the war. A son of a military contractor told me, "A large part of the population is pretty well indoctrinated to support the president, be good fascist types." While a teacher added, "It seems that a lot of people, are under the spell of pseudo-patriotism, and see patriotism is backing the president." And a poet lamented, "We have become so steeped in militaristic values that it is easy for politicians to pull people along and get them to support a war like this." Thus, these activists suggested that elites control public opinion: "the mass media and the educational system have so much control over people's beliefs."

These 33 activists had a long-term goal of subverting and impeding this paternalistic relationship between the rulers and the ruled. They wanted to gradually usurp the state's ability to disperse views that equate obedience to governmental figures with good citizenship. They advised that, "Elites like to see a passive population that doesn't give a shit about what is going on, a population that is like sheep. To the extent that our population becomes more vocal, it is a threat to [the] existing status quo." The professional activists added, "We have to tell people the truth and empower them. We have to get people to start asking the right questions, help them find the answers and watch them take actions for themselves."

The bulk of activists with a low sense of power had shifted to new methods of reconstructing American institutions. They saw the movement engaged in a battle over public sentiments. They conceived themselves as a new style of revolutionaries out to shatter the ideological consensus that preserves authoritative relations. Instead of fighting with bricks or campaign dollars, these activists were fighting with slogans, pamphlets and gestures that were going "wake the people up." Activists saw the purpose of the mobilization as helping Americans to deconstruct Bush's justifications for war so most citizens would eventually disavow their cooperation with the war efforts.

*Moral Witnesses: "I wouldn't feel good sitting at home and not protesting."*

As Lofland, Colwell and Johnson (1990) suggested, peace activism can be a way to heed one's personal moral commitments. Twenty-four activists saw anti-war participation as a compulsory act. They made remarks like "I am obliged to act now; it's something I need to do" and their statements included phrases such as "I have to" or "I gotta do it." These comments implied that protesting had an almost involuntary quality. These activists swore they had a normative duty to act. Comments such as, "it is important for me to live by my morals" were extremely common. These activists saw their participation

as a way to adhere to their ethical codes. They stressed that convictions and conduct should match and made comments such as, "you have to walk the talk."

The unity between values and action created two emotional offshoots. Nineteen of these 24 activists talked about their higher self-esteem that resulted from being a virtuous activist: "I can hold my head up high because I am doing the right thing," or "this may sound arrogant, but I feel real dignified by standing up to this terrible war." The other five activists in this cluster took a different posture and muttered about the negatives of retreating from protest. They said they would feel guilty if they deserted activism: "I have to be involved; it is a trade-off with my consciousness." Participation was a somber pledge that had to be acted out since non-action implied a tacit support for the war: "It is my responsibility; it is what I have to do. I have to do it or I can't deal with myself. I can't stay at home and pretend I like this war."

This mostly white, highly educated group relinquished individualistic and nationalistic norms and felt that communal responsibilities extended beyond the U.S. borders. They felt an altruistic calling to protect "third world people" from the horrors of a war fought "in the name of Americans." They saw a connection with all humans and wanted to defend those in other nations from the "the horrors of gunboat diplomacy." And most important, these 'moral crusaders' had internalized a belief that avoiding activism was unacceptable since non-action was judged as tacit support of the war.

*Socialites: "I like being around people like me."*

Nineteen of the 36 activists with a low sense of power said they were drawn into the movement for the social perks. Even those activists with sophisticated political ideologies stressed the attractiveness of associating with "likeable people." It was as if expressive diversions were the major enticement for activism when political realities looked grim.

These activists generally saw their protesting companions as impressive people. They wholeheartedly admired most of their co-protesters: "You know the movement is made up of a lot of great people." Activists were considered some of the "friendliest people I have ever met." When these activists looked at their counterparts they saw virtuous people who "bring a good attitude, a certain amount of love, camaraderie under hard times."

A consistent theme among these 19 activists was the emotionally satisfying facet of activism. These activists used positive adjectives like "cheery," "life-affirming," and "neat" to describe the communal setting of a vigil or demonstration. They talked about the "enriching"



side of activism and made comments like "for me it [activism] is a powerful emotional experience. I feel overwhelmed. I love marching with courageous people. I just feel very moved, really happy to be with great people." Activists spoke of intense feelings of solidarity: "It [activism] is a bonding experience when you are with people on your side, people you can relate to, people who know the war isn't right." And one person just summed it up, "I feel happy when at protests."

It was clear that their fondness for fellow activists was partially based on their disenchantment with the "public." As shown earlier in this paper, many activists with low senses of political power thought that Americans had to be taught the proper interpretation of warfare. This implies that activists noticed major incongruities of worldviews between "peace" people and "non-peace" people. This perception of Americans as gullible people who recklessly condone wars had the significant repercussion of intensifying the feelings of estrangement from the general American citizenry. A graduate student added, "Most Americans say 'go bomb Iraq,' but they can't tell you where Iraq is on a map and they don't know anything about how U.S. military aid made Saddam the killer he is."

Being active in the peace community made this alienation dissipate: "I was starting to feel isolated, and seeing all those people who think the same way is really neat." Activists felt joy after finding large crowds of progressive Americans. "When it becomes so hard, you feel kinda alone. Then you go to a rally and realize that there are a lot of people out there like you, you start feeling good."

A few activists even spoke of a new-found respect for Americans. A college student joked, "Boy, it was a relief seeing that not all Americans are Rambo lovers." A poet added, "This anti-war movement has made me feel better about Americans. For a while under the Reagan years people were cowards, cynical, material-minded, racist, sexist. Now I feel better about the American people and I can see my place in America." An engineer remarked, "During the 1980s, I hated most Americans. I thought they all were greedy, self-interested pigs. But this movement showed there are some caring people in America."

## Discussion

Clearly this research indicates that the universal declaration that *all* movement participants must always have a high sense of movement power is unfounded. Many participants who stayed active in the movement articulated a low sense of movement power. In fact, most people remained active in this anti-war movement despite their perception that it was impossible to correct Bush's policies in the

Middle East. Thus, a major finding of this paper is that the sustenance and continuance of movement involvement does not require a high sense of movement power.

On the other hand, this research does not unequivocally refute the sense of power hypothesis because I did not interview non-activists. Without the control group of war objectors who chose not to protest, this investigation cannot determine whether silent movement sympathizers had a lower "sense of movement power" than active protesters. Furthermore, this study does not track the careers of activists who have left the movement. It is possible that former activists who quit maintained lower expectations of success than movement "stayers." Thus, it is possible that the armchair or retired activist had a more acute sense of movement impotence than any person who kept protesting.

The lack of longitudinal data also limits the conclusions. By only talking to people during one day of their "active participation," one cannot detect changes in an activist's sense of power. With the one-time interview, it is impossible to appraise the ebbs and flows of the activist's sense of power.

This lack of historical comparisons has theoretical ramifications. Without knowledge of the person's sense of power in his or her pre-participation and the full participation stages, the claims such as "Before a person becomes an activist, she or her must have a new sense of movement power" are impossible to test. Also, without "pre-bombing" and "post-bombing" interviews, one cannot know if the activist's sense of power fluctuated with changing political conditions. Perhaps the budding activist who joined the movement in the early stages of anti-war movement originally thought the movement could stop the mounting war. But by the time the interview was executed, this initial optimism could have evaporated. Unfortunately, this research is incapable of determining this.

We also cannot be sure whether these findings apply to other anti-Gulf War protests around the country. It is possible that the attitudes and assumptions of protesters from San Francisco, Atlanta, or Topeka may have differed significantly.<sup>1</sup>

For those interested in generating general theories about social movements, it may be that the sense of power relationships could work differently in mobilizations that do not directly take on the Military-Industrial Complex. Other movements do not so blatantly confront the vested interests of corporate and political elites and their participants may not feel so powerless.

Nonetheless, this research shows that people can ignore their sense of powerlessness and continue to protest. Despite the adverse realities of Bush escalating the war, activists followed their moral im-

perative and openly denounced the war. That is, peace activism can be seen as an outcome of ethical concerns.

Some activists suggested they were drawn to movement activities for the distinctive social nature of the demonstrations. Activists were pleased to locate a group of "liberal" to "leftist" agitators who were willing to overtly confront the conservative Republican hierarchy. This discovery of anti-war gatherings had the psychologically comforting effect of making new friends and having one's political belief affirmed by a group.

The final insight is that activists in this local anti-war movement relished cultural change as the method of forging social change. Activists conceptualized the movement as a benignly disruptive force that used oppositional ideas to contest the ideas that advance and promote militarism. Activists saw their public rejection of the war as a way to redirect public support away from the war.

In short, the findings suggest: the vast majority of activists during this time span had a very low sense of movement power; and these persistent activists relied heavily on moral pronouncements, the satisfaction of group membership, and their faith in the educational method of societal transformation as the forces propelling their activism.

## Notes

1. This equivocation could error on the conservative side. After completing the analysis stages of this project, I read two articles that mirrored some of the results of this paper (Downton and Wehr 1991; Kendrick 1991). Similar to my findings, these authors found that most 1980s disarmament activists had a low sense of movement power were drawn to activism for the moralistic and communal components of protesting. Unfortunately neither article incorporated NSM theories, so it was impossible to tell if our works depart on this crucial distinction.

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