# CHAPTER 4

# MICROMOBILIZATION:
# HOW INDIVIDUALS BECOME INVOLVED IN SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

In the previous chapter, we discussed macro-level and meso-level factors external to social movements that influence when and where movements emerge. However, when a movement does develop, some individuals join it and some do not. Why? The answer is that macro-structural forces are not felt equally by everyone: our individual beliefs, biographies (events in our lives), and locations within social networks make some of us more "susceptible" than others to participate in a social movement. Furthermore, once an individual joins a movement, their experience as a participant effects the level of their continuing commitment. At one extreme, activists may become frustrated, bored, or scared, and drop out of the movement; at the other extreme, they may become more knowledgeable, more skilled, develop close relationships with other activists, and stay in it for the long haul. Micromobiliiation refers to the tasks activists undertake to "muster, ready, coordinate, use, and reproduce material resources, labor, and ideas for collective action" (Hunt and Benford 2004: 438). The term highlights the fact that social movements do not simply spring into existence when social conditions axe ripe. Instead, they axe produced by the collective work of movement activists.

## INDIVIDUAL CHARACTERISTICS

Apart from the efforts of activists to generate support for a social movement, there are individual factors that predispose some people to participate in social movements generally and in particular social movements.

### Beliefs and Values

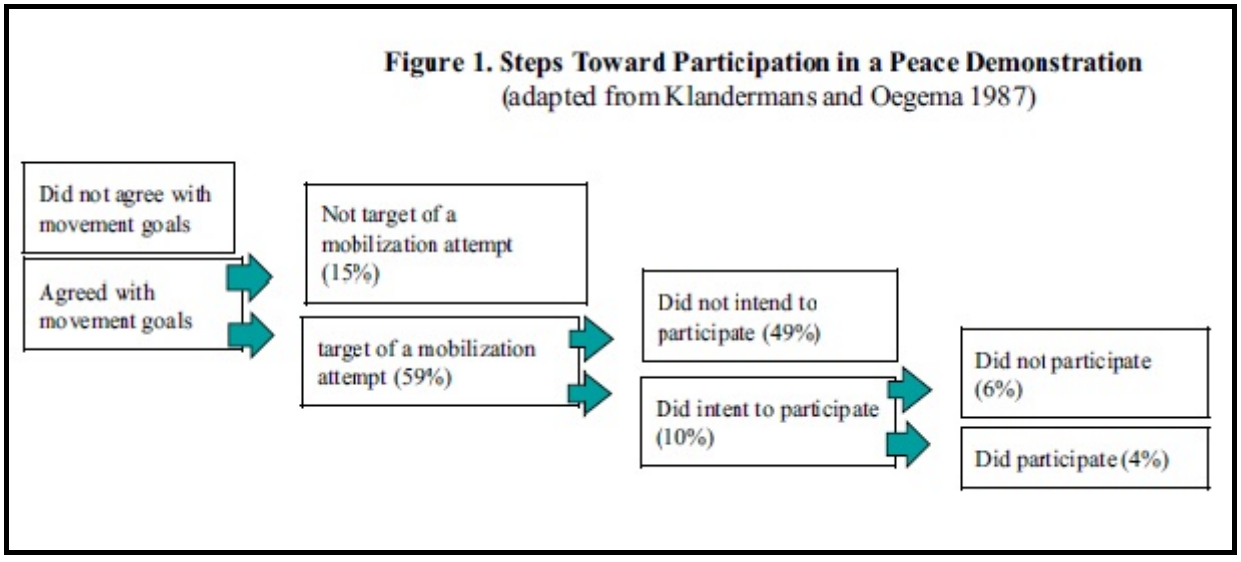
Individuals are more likely to join a social movement when their own beliefs and values are congruent with that movement's ideology. Someone who believes that life begins at conception and that abortion is murder is not going to join the pro-choice movement. Note that an ideology includes a strategy—what is to be done to solve a particular social problem. People are also more inclined to join movements whose strategies they approve of. For example, many people oppose commercial logging on federal lands axe nevertheless unwilling to participate in the kinds of direct action sponsored by the organization Earth First!, like spiking trees. (Spiking trees involves driving large nails into trees in forests that might be targeted by logging companies, then publicly announcing the action. Companies will then

avoid logging there, since a spiked tree that is put through a saw mill can ruin the saw and the nails are dangerous to saw operators.)

Both the content of an ideology and how strongly it is held by an individual may affect its impact on social movement participation. In a study of pro-life and pro-choice activists, Luker found that most pro-choice activists were recruited by others to participate in the movement. Pro-life activists, on the other hand, were more likely to have sought participation in the pro-life movement by themselves.

Compatible attitudes and beliefs may be a necessary condition for social movement participation, but they are clearly not sufficient. As shown in Figure 1, in a study of the Dutch peace movement, Klandermans and Oegema (1987) found that while 74 percent of respondents they sampled from the population opposed the deployment of cruise missiles in the Netherlands, only 4 percent actually participated in a large-scale demonstration opposing the missile deployment. To participate, sympathizers had to have contact with the peace movement; believe that attending the demonstration would have some effect (in this case, not that it would stop the cruise missiles, but that it would push the Dutch government to combat the nuclear arms race); know others who intended to go; and be free of barriers to participation (illness or work, for example). Hence, social movement organizers face two different tasks. Consensus mobilization refers to the process of convincing people to support a movement's ends and means, while action mobilization involves getting people to participate (Klandermans 1984).

That literature also suggests that, in general, those who respond to recruitment appeals by advocacy organizations tend to be the more privileged individuals among the movement adherents, thereby exacerbating the impact of privilege on patterns of organizational participation (Brady et al. 1999, Lofland 1996).



**Identity**

The likelihood of an individual participating in a social movement increases when she or he is strongly committed to a collective identity that is linked to that movement (Kelly and Breinlinger 1996; Klandermans et al. 2002). For example, if I am a teacher and the teachers in my school district go on strike, I am more likely to participate if being a teacher is an important part of who I am. Participation is even more likely when a person's collective identity is tied to a group of movement participants (Klandermans 2004)—so if I identify strongly as a member of the teacher's union that is organizing the strike, then the likelihood of my participation in the strike rises dramatically.

**Feelings of Efficacy**

As the Dutch peace movement studied showed, beliefs are not enough to generate participation in a social movement. Individuals are unlikely to participate unless they feel that both their individual contribution and the collective action itself has the potential to create change. Many people bemoan the continued existence of poverty but declare that nothing can be done to alleviate it—and of course do not join in anti-poverty efforts. The feeling of self-efficacy that facilitates social movement participation can come from different sources: an individual's personality characteristics, prior involvement in a successful social movement, or membership in a particular social group. Young people in the 1960s had a strong sense of "generational potency"—of the power of their generation—because of their large numbers, the attention they had received as children from the media and advertising, and the material comfort in which many of them were raised (McAdam 1988). A study of members of Bread for the World, a national anti-hunger organizations, found that members were more likely than the general population to score high on measures of political efficacy. (Respondents were asked the extent to which they agreed with statements like, "People like me don't have any say about what government does.") (Cohn et al. 1993).

Beliefs about the efficacy of a particular collective action come from a number of sources. One is the number of people one expects to participate (Oberschall 1980, Klanderrnans 1984). Others are the amount and type of resources available to activists and perceptions of the opportunity structure. For example, it would be relatively hard to get people to take part in a campaign to make all higher education tuition-free, but easier to mobilize them around an effort to increase the amount of government funds available for student loans. Finally, we should note that for some people, a social movement's goal may be so valued that they take action regardless of the potential for success (Oberschall 1980).

Source: Imaginary Foundation. http://blog.imaginaryfoundation.com/author/bonkers-bainbridge/page/8/

### Perceptions of the Risk of Participation

Social movement participation may entail risks, and some actions are riskier than others. Risky actions are those that pose some danger—such as arrest, imprisonment, social disapproval, or injury. Most of the risk involved in social movement participation comes from the actions of opponents, and particularly from political authorities (the police or army) who have the legal authority to use force. Individuals assess the risks of participation and take them into account in their decisions about whether, and how, to participate (Jenkins and Perrow 1977; Hirsch 1990; McAdam 1986; Opp 1989). Not surprisingly, people tend to commit themselves to social movements in stages: first, they take part in less risky activities, like going to meetings, and then move to more risky actions such as engaging in civil disobedience, which entails breaking a law.

## MICROSTRUCTURAL FACTORS

When I become a parent, my involvement in social movement activities changed dramatically. Before my children were born I frequently traveled to demonstrations far away. Several times I committed civil disobedience and was arrested. There were periods of intense social movement activity when I spent long hours in meetings or leafleting or making signs (when I probably should have been working on my doctoral dissertation!). Now, with two young daughters, I try to remain involved in promoting the causes I believe in, but my participation by necessity has a different form. I was very excited about bringing my children with me to an antiwar demonstration in Indianapolis on the second anniversary of the start of the Iraq war in March 2005, but the night before my two-year-old daughter developed a fever, and the family had to stay home. Now, instead of marching I am more likely to make phone calls to the offices of my representatives in Congress and send them emails. If I do attend a demonstration, I choose not to risk arrest because it might mean spending time in jail, away from my children (and away from my job, which could get my in trouble at work).

My story illustrates how micro structural factors—aspects of the social organization of a person's life--encourage or inhibit their involvement in social movements. The social groups and organizations that we are part of, as well as the roles that we occupy within them, influence our availability and motivation to participate in social movements.

### Biographical Availability

Participating in a social movement entail costs—it means expending time, energy, and possibly money that could have been "spent" on other things—particularly one's family and one's work. The costs of participation prevent some who are sympathetic to a particular movement from actively participating in it. College students are relatively easily mobilized into social movement activities because their social relationships are less likely to prevent them from doing so: they are less likely to have jobs, to be married, and to have children. On the other hand, college students may require parental permission to take part in some social movement activities, which presents a barrier to participation. In his study of

Freedom Summer volunteers, McAdam (1988) found that only 22 percent had full-time jobs (and 70 percent of those were teachers who had the summer off). Less than 10 percent were married, and 2 percent were parents. In particular, biographical availability predicts how much time a participant gives to a movement (Wiltfang and McAdam 1991).

However, full-time employment does not discourage involvement in social movements when one's occupation allows for some discretionary time, as for many professionals, such as teachers (Wiltfang and McAdam 1991). In addition, full-time work does not decrease availability when one's occupation is compatible with a particular social movement. For example, clergy were among those who committed the most time to the sanctuary movement, which was based in churches (Wiltfang and McAdam 1991). The sanctuary movement arose in the 1980s to help Central American refugees fleeing political persecution who were not legally allowed in to the U.S. Activists provided them with safe places, often within churches, as well as help finding housing and employment.

**Prior Participation in Social Movements**

Once a person takes part in social movement activities, they are more likely to do so again. One reason is that participation facilitates the development of an identity that fosters activism. In his study of Freedom Summer volunteers, McAdam (1988) found that 90 percent had already been active in a social movement or civic organization—either a civil rights organization or other organizations, like religious groups or political party organizations. This was higher than the number of "no-shows" who had belonged to such organizations. However, a subsequent analysis found that past membership in social movement organizations was associated with future involvement only when the participant had developed "a strong commitment to a particular identity" that was linked to activism and was reinforced by social ties (McAdam and Paulsen 1993). For example, simply having participated in the environmental movement would not predict involvement in future movements.

But an individual who participated and developed a strong identity as an environmental activist, and who continued to be part of groups or organizations that reinforced that identity, would be more likely to participate. Prior participation in social movements is related, in particular, with the willingness to engage in risky actions (as opposed to costly actions) (Wiltfang and McAdam 1991).

Having participated in a social movement may also increase one's belief in the effectiveness of social movements, making one more likely to participate. Current participation may increase the likelihood that one will learn about relevant issues and other movements, as this information spreads through organizational networks. A prime example is the early leaders of the feminist movement that arose in the 1960s, who had been civil rights and antiwar activists. From these experiences they learned about the power of collective action and gained the skills to organize a movement themselves. They were able to recruit women for the feminist movement use existing activist networks of which they were a part (Freeman 1983).

**Personal Ties with Movement Participants**

Having friends, relatives, or co-workers who are active in a social movement increases the likelihood that you will join, too. The important mechanism operating here is the rewards and sanctions that accrue from such social relationships—for example, disapproval from friends if you do not to take part in a march. Personal ties with movement participants also increases the likelihood that you will be informed about movement activities, but this factor is less important (McAdam and Paulsen 1993). The salience of personal ties is evidenced in a study of participation in a Dutch peace march, which found that informal recruitment networks (friends, relatives, neighbors) were more important than formal linkages (being contacted by a peace organization, for example) in determining who intended to participate (Klandermans and Oegema 1987).

In a study of signers and non-signers of a petition to the Dutch government opposing the deployment of cruise missiles in the Netherlands, researchers found evidence for the importance of social ties to social movement participation (Oegema and Klandermans 1994). Non-signers were less likely to have a strong commitment to the campaign. But some people with strong commitments did not sign, either. Something else, in addition to ideology, distinguished signers from non-signers, and that was their social environment. Of those who initially indicated an intention to sign the petition, 18.2 percent had changed their mind several months later. The primary reason, in addition to a weak commitment to the campaign, was lack of support in one's social environment. Of those who did not change their minds, 14.8 percent nevertheless did not ultimately sign the petition. Here the important factor was, again in addition to a weak commitment, their lack of contact with others who signed the petition.

Of 34 women interviewed, only 8 became involved on their own initiative. More than one-third (13) were recruited by friends or acquaintances; 3 were recruited by husbands or boyfriends; and 10 were recruited by other family members. Interestingly, many of the women pointed to an ideological conversion as the reason for their involvement, but for most this conversion occurred *after* they had already been introduced to other movement participants.

**Participation in Other Types of Organizations**

As noted in the previous chapter, individuals may learn of and be drawn in to a social movement through their involvement in some other non-movement organization, like a church or civic group. Indeed, activists may intentionally recruit multiple participants from some preexisting organization—termed bloc recruitment (Oberschall 1973). A prime example of bloc recruitment through churches occurred in the civil rights movement. Early civil rights organizations like the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) and CORE (Congress of Racial Equality) were unable to mobilize widespread protests because they lacked a mass base in the black community. But for decades, churches had played a central role in black communities. The Montgomery bus boycott in 1955 successfully created the first mass-based protest of the civil rights movement because it was led by local clergy who used the churches to mobilize participants.

Movement leaders transformed the churches into political resources and committed them to the

ends of the movement. The new duty of the church finance committee was to collect money for the movement. The minister's new role was to use the pulpit to articulate the political responsibilities of the church community. Regular church meetings were transformed into the "mass meeting" where blacks joined committees to guide protests, offered up collections to the movement, and acquired reliable information of the movement, which local radio and television stations refused to broadcast. The resources necessary to initiate a black movement were present in Montgomery and other communities (Morris 1981: 752). Churches have also served as recruitment centers for other movements, such as the sanctuary movement that aided Central American refugees in the 1980s; the pro-life movement; the anti-gay movement; and the nuclear disarmament movement.

Martin Luther King, Jr. preaching at a church. Black churches were crucial in mobilizing participants in the civil rights movement. (Photo: Getty)

The greater formal education a person has, the more likely they are to participate in social movements. This is probably not because of any cognitive changes that education produces, but because the more highly educated a person is, the more likely they are to be part of social networks that link them with movements.

**Participation in Countercultural Networks**

Ties to organizations are less important in recruiting individuals into a social movement in locations where a strong activist culture already exists. In a campaign opposing the deployment of cruise missiles in the Netherlands, participants were more often recruited through countercultural networks where local organizations were weak, but more often through local organizations where the counterculture was weak (Kriesi 1988). For participants in Freedom Summer at campuses with strong traditions of liberal activism, like the University of California-Berkeley, recruiting participants depended less on organizational networks than it did at other campuses. Instead, students learned about the opportunity to participate, and were encouraged to do so, by virtue of being part of an activist subculture.

## MOVEMENT-BASED FACTORS

According to rational models of individual behavior, individuals make decisions about participating in social movements on the basis of what they will gain from doing so. Hence the incentives that social movements offer to participants will work to either pull people in or push them away. The mobilization of social movement participants involves two distinct tasks: recruiting participants to become involved in a movement, and maintaining their involvement once they have joined. Briefly, when participation is rewarding and satisfying, people are more likely to become involved and to stay involved.

**The Role of Incentives**

The problem of how movements induce people to participate is expressed in the free rider problem (Olson 1965). Often the outcome of collective action is a public good—i.e. something that is necessarily available to everyone whether they help obtain it or not, like clean air or a new law. Participating in a social movement, as in other collective actions, requires the expenditure of time and energy that could be spent on other things. Given these costs, a rational individual will not participate since he or she will reap the benefits of the movement's success anyway. Then why would anyone participate in a social movement when they can free-ride? In March 1979, a nuclear power accident at Three Mile Island in Pennsylvania resulted in the temporary evacuation of over 150,000 residents. Local residents then formed a social movement organization whose goals were to prevent the restarting of the power plant, which had been shut down, and to monitor the cleanup of radioactive material from the accident. However, of those residents who agreed with these goals, only 13 percent participated in the organization's activities. The remaining 87 percent were, in other words, free riders (Walsh and Warland 1983). Table 1 describes the reasons these free riders gave for not participating.

One solution to the free rider problem is that individuals take part in collective action in order to obtain benefits that are only available to those who participate. Sociologists have identified several types of such selective incentives to participation that social movements may offer.

**purposive (moral) incentives**. (also called collective incentives) Often individuals participate in a social movement because it feels good to do what one thinks is right. In other words, the purpose of the collective action motivates them to join. Recall that conscience constituents axe to those who participate in a social movement not because they will benefit from it materially, but for purposive reasons (McCarthy and Zald 1977).

**material incentives.** These are tangible benefits received from participating, like a job, a newsletter, or a t-shirt. They tend to be less important than purposive and solidary incentives in explaining participation (Klandermans 1984, McAdam 1986). In organizing farm workers, Cesar Chavez created several organizations that would provide needed individual benefits to farm workers and thereby draw them in to the movement: a credit union, a consumer coop, and citizenship counseling (Jenkins 1983).

**solidary incentives**. Individuals may be lured in to participation by the opportunity to associate with others as part of the social movement community. You can spend time with people you like, gain the approval of friends, and the enjoy the process of working together with others.

Solidary incentives are especially important in social movements that have few material resources to provide in exchange for participation. Organizations working for peace and justice, for example, are typically not well-funded enough to provide substantial material incentives, which in any

**Table 1. Reported Reasons for Free-Riding Among Residents Near Three Mile Island**
(adapted from Walsh and Warland 1983)

| | |
|---|---|
| unaware of existence of SMO | 26% |
| family and personal preoccupations | 18% |
| opposed to joining any groups | 9% |
| never invited to join SMO | 8% |
| disagreed with SMO' s tactics and strategies | 6% |
| economic pressures | 7% |
| political powerlessness | 5% |
| felt others could accomplish the tasks | 5% |
| denied seriousness of the problem | 4% |
| social pressures | 2% |
| issue too technically complex | 2% |
| other | 8% |

case would be antithetical to the ideologies of many. Purposive incentives are readily available for such organizations: they can offer individuals the opportunity to work for a cause they believe is just, using just means. Yet the goals of peace and justice groups are often not readily attainable (stopping a war, ending racism) and even partial successes may be infrequent. These organizations cannot always offer participants the satisfaction of achieving a concrete goal, but they can offer the solidary incentives by creating an organization in which people feel valued and valuable. Several studies of teachers' organizations have found that identification with the organization was greater when the teachers were involved in making decisions (Knoke 1986).

An additional point about incentives is that different ones matter for participants at different points in their involvement. While ideological factors may be the primary motivator initially, continued participation typically depends more on solidarity with other participants. In a study of a Chicago community organization, Hirsch (1986) found material self-interest to be the major factor in the initial mobilization of participants, but continuing involvement was based additionally on solidary incentives that arose from interaction within the group. Solidary incentives are also crucial in generating more intense involvement in social movements. Relatively impersonal recruitment methods, like direct mail,

may succeed in generating weak membership ties—for example, in getting someone to send in a donation—but face-to-face interaction is needed to draw people in to greater involvement (Diani 2004).

**The Creation of Political Solidarity**

If purposive and social incentives are key to mobilizing social movement participants, then the next logical question is, How are these incentives created within social movements? How do the ways in which participants work together, what they do together, and others' responses contribute to feelings of moral purpose and social satisfaction? One clue is to look at the research on the development of political solidarity in social movements. Solidarity can be thought of as identification with a group such that one's fate is felt to be inseparable from the fate of the group. It is similar to collective identity, but involves an intense commitment to the group even in the face of personal risks or costs. Social movement activists have long considered solidarity crucial to movement success. (The anthem of the labor movement is "Solidarity Forever.") Political solidarity is a specific type of solidarity that involves commitment to a group's cause and tactics (Hirsch 1986), such that one is ready to take action on its behalf. Put another way, it is commitment to a group's political struggles.

How is solidarity built? A number of different factors contribute to it:

1. **interaction**. Solidarity is enhanced when people spend time together. In some social movements, participants may live and work together in a residential community. Members of Weatherman, a group that split off from SDS in 1969, lived in “cells” of 5-10 people in different cities. This fostered an intense commitment to the group, to the point that one participant was persuaded to send her young daughter to live elsewhere so that she could devote herself more fully to the group. It is not uncommon for social movement organizations to hold retreats, where participants spend several days together in relative isolation to socialize and/or discuss movement issues such as strategy or organization. SMO meetings often start with time for personal sharing, when participants can connect on a personal level.

2. **symbolism and language**. Sometimes groups adopt a unique language, behavior, or style of dress, which enhances collective identity, hence solidarity. At the college where I teach, there is sort of a "uniform" among activist students: bandana tied on the head, rainbow buttons or patches (signifying diversity) on one's knapsack, grungy clothes, bare feet, hair very short or shaved. Of course not all students involved in peace and justice activism fit this profile, but the point is that as is true of many groups, social movement participants often create a sort of subculture. Language can help establish solidarity, as well. In some movements, participants adopt new names for themselves. African-Americans have done this upon joining the Nation of Islam, and it is common in radical feminist groups as well.

3. **consciousness raising**. Consciousness. raising refers to a discussion technique that was first used by activists in the 1960s. Participants take part in an informal discussion about their lives, feelings, and beliefs. As they learn what they have in common, personal issues are transformed into political ones, and individuals' commitment to pursuing the movement's goals is increased, as is their willingness to use

non-institutional tactics (like sit-ins). Hirsch's (1986) illustrates how consciousness raising builds solidarity in his study of the student divestment movement at Columbia University in 1985, which culminated in a blockade of the administration building by several hundred students. The divestment movement was part of a worldwide effort to end apartheid (legal racial segregation) in South Africa in the 1980s. Students sought to persuade, or force, colleges and universities to divest of (sell) the stock they held in their endowments that was invested in companies doing business in South Africa. The goal was to exert sufficient economic pressure on the South African government that it would abolish apartheid. In the Columbia divestment effort, group discussion—whether in the context of teach-ins or "rap sessions" in dormitories—was important in educating students about the existence of apartheid, the divestment campaign, and the university's unwillingness to divest.

The term *consciousness raising* was created by activists in the feminist movement in the late 1960s (Evans 1980). Small groups of women—called women's liberation groups—were created all over the country, in which women could talk about their lives, find what they had in common, and come to see that what they had assumed were personal problems were, in fact, political ones—i.e. problems that they faced because of they were women in a society in which men had more power. Similarly, McAdam (1982) used the term *cognitive liberation* to identify the change in thinking that is required in order for people to join a social movement.

4. **collective empowerment.** This occurs when individuals are drawn in to involvement by witnessing a dramatic social movement activity that demonstrates the group's power. As stated above, when an individual's belief in the potential effectiveness of the movement increases, she or he becomes more likely to join. In the case of the student blockade at Columbia University, many more students joined the blockade than anyone had expected based on previous participation in meetings and rallies (Hirsch 1986). The blockade was begun by a group of about 150 students who were led to the steps of the administration building by an organizer at the end of an anti-apartheid rally. Despite the fact that none knew that a blockade was planned (the organizers had kept it secret to prevent campus security from interfering), very few students left the site. And, another hundred soon joined them. As one participant noted:

> Often when I'd see a rally, I'd think there was a bunch of people huffing and puffing about an issue who are going to be ignored and things are going to go on just as they were before this rally. The fact that there were a couple of hundred people out there who were altering the way the University does business gave me the feeling that this would be noticed, that people would pay attention (Hirsch 1986: 248).

Another example involves the huge march for nuclear disarmament that took place on June 12, 1982. Over one million people marched through the streets of New York City demanding a halt to the arms race between the U.S. and the USSR. My Aunt Marcia, who lived in New York, had never participated in the nuclear disarmament movement, but as she watched the march from her apartment window, she became so enthralled that she ran down and joined a contingent of children marching by. In fact, the common social movement practice of organizing large demonstrations is intended to produce collective empowerment. The experience of attending a demonstration with hundreds or thousands of like-minded

people and listening to inspiring speeches, singing, and carrying signs can boost solidarity.

A similar phenomenon—we might call it individual empowerment--can occur simply when someone takes action on behalf of a movement, regardless of its potential for success. In fact, there is evidence that social movements sometimes recruit people for activities that are intended primarily to energize participants rather than persuade opponents (Rochon 1998). One interesting example comes from the abolitionist movement. After the House of Representatives passed a ban on considering petitions related to slavery, the movement's effort to obtain signatures increased dramatically (Dillon 1974, cited in Rochon 1998). The petition campaign was being used then primarily to motivate activists and to engage potential supporters in a discussion of the issues. As one scholar puts it, "The key for movement mobilization is to get people in the door and to get them involved in some kind of activity" (Rochon 1998: 160), and then the experience of activism changes them.

5. **polarization**. As the conflict at Columbia University intensified, people took sides, and this increased solidarity among the student activists (Hirsch 1986). Specifically, after the president sent a letter to everyone at the university accusing the students of being "disruptive" and "coercive," more participants joined. For those already participating, their loyalty to and trust of each other increased when the university officials threatened expulsion unless the students left, and the blockaders together decided they would refuse to do so. A professor who I interviewed about his involvement in the antiwar movement in the 1960s recalled a similar dynamic. He remembers leaving the first campus teach-in on the Vietnam war at his university feeling excited and intellectually stimulated—and then hearing faculty colleagues proclaim that this terrible event had disrupted academic life with political matters. This hostility that contrasted so with his own feelings of excitement pushed him into involvement with the antiwar movement.

How does polarization increase political solidarity? In helping to define the boundaries between groups, polarization builds collective identity. Collective identity involves not only specifying a "we," but also a "not-we," or an "other" (Gamson 1992).

6. **collective decision making.**
Finally, Hirsch (1986) found that the Columbia students' commitment was increased by the process of making decisions as a group (for example, about whether to continue the blockade). Collective decision making presumably gave participants more ownership of their decisions. It also contributes to the development of political skills, specifically the ability and self-confidence to formulate and express sound opinions (Rochon 1998). This type of decision making is discussed

Activists at the Occupy Wall Street demonstration in fall 2011 take part in a General Assembly where they use collective decision making. (photo: Kara Newhouse)

in depth in the chapter on how social movement activists organize themselves.

***The Freedom Summer Volunteers***

Sociologist Doug McAdam, author of Freedom Summer

Stumbling upon some boxes of paper in 1982 set the course of sociologist Doug McAdam's life for the next six years.

While researching the origins of the civil rights movement, McAdam noticed that many white civil rights activists had gone on to play central roles in the other movements of the 1960s—the antiwar movement, the student movement, and the feminist movement. He decided the best way to investigate how and why this occurred was to study the participants in Freedom Summer. In 1964, a thousand northern white volunteers—mostly college students—descended on Mississippi to help civil rights workers register blacks to vote and to teach literacy and citizenship in Freedom Schools.

But McAdam first needed a list of the Freedom Summer participants. He searched and searched, without success. One day, looking through papers at the Martin Luther King, Jr. Center in Atlanta, he came across a goldmine: the original completed applications of all those who were accepted to participate in the project, including those who ultimately did not volunteer. As McAdam puts it, "I had serendipitously stumbled onto the makings of a kind of naturalistic experiment. Here were two groups—volunteers and no-shows—that presumably looked fairly similar going into the summer. One had the experience of Freedom Summer. The other did not" (8). He realized that by comparing the two sets of applications, he could identify the factors that prevented some people from taking part and pushed others into involvement. And, comparing the volunteers and no-shows after Freedom Summer would allow him to identify how the summer influenced volunteers.

McAdam found that the best predictor of who participated in Freedom Summer and who withdrew was the extent of their ties to other applicants. Applicants had been asked to list ten people they wishes to keep informed of their summer activities, and McAdam found that volunteers were more likely than no-shows to list other volunteers. Through these ties, volunteers presumably reinforced each other's desire and courage to participate. Another difference was that volunteers were more likely to have been members of other organizations, particularly political ones. This gave them a sense of the effectiveness of collective action and more opportunity to become informed about civil rights. Interestingly, the two groups differed little with regard to ideology. Finally, volunteers had fewer obligations that would have prevented them from going: they were less likely to be employed full-time, to be married, and to have children.