

Recruiting strangers and friends: Moral shocks and social networks in animal rights and anti-nuclear protests.

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Recruiting Strangers and Friends: Moral Shocks and Social Networks in Animal Rights and Anti-Nuclear Protests

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Abstract

Recent work on social movement recruitment emphasizes the importance of pre-existing social networks and underestimates that of cognitive cultural messages, which are sometimes transmitted across these networks, but at other times are broadcast to strangers. In the absence of networks, moral shocks may be necessary for recruiting strangers, and the most effective ones are conveyed by powerful condensing symbols. Even those researchers who have examined the “frames” necessary for recruitment have been unduly influenced by the social-network exemplar, overlooking broader cultural “themes” in society at large. Through surveys of animal rights and anti-nuclear protestors, we distinguish two mechanisms of recruitment to protest, one based primarily on appeals to new recruits, the other on activating existing networks. Fewer animal rights protestors rated family, friends, and previous activism in other causes as reasons for their animal rights participation; they were often recruited directly by moral shocks in the form of visual and verbal rhetoric.

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