Being active, but not an activist:
Managing problematic aspects of activist identity by expressing individuality, or taking alternative forms of collective action

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B.A. (Psychology), with Honours.

This thesis is presented for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of Murdoch University, 2013.
I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary education institution.

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Avelie Stuart
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Thesis Abstract

Drawing on social identity and self-categorization approaches to collective action from social psychology, and social movement theory from sociology, the empirical studies in this thesis investigate the identities and experiences of those engaged (and disengaged) in various social movements in Australia - including environmentalisms, international aid and development, human rights, and animal rights movements. The participants were at various points of commitment to these social movements - from being sympathetic, to actively engaged, and even in leadership positions. The two research aims were to: 1) expand current understandings of the ways that problematic aspects of social identity content and identity boundaries can prevent sympathizers from engaging in collective actions; and 2) examine strategies those committed to collective action use to manage problematic aspects of their social identities, and how they establish a unique contribution to social change in contrast to other social movement groups. Each of these questions speak to the other in that they centre on the ways that a narrowly defined but shared understanding of the “activist” or “protester” constrains and shapes alternative means of pursuing social change.

The empirical work consists of four studies. Study 1 is a qualitative analysis of materials and interviews with members of the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society. I examined how members rhetorically construct their identities in order to frame their cause as legitimate, and how members come to personally identify themselves as members of the organization in a way that allows them to manage potential conflicts between multiple identities – as individuals, and as group members. Study 2 uses an inductive open-ended survey to understand how social barriers can shape people’s willingness to participate in collective actions during their early socialization into social
movement groups. Study 3 is a quantitative analysis of survey data, using themes from Study 2, which demonstrates how stereotypes of activists can influence individuals’ identification as activists. Study 4 is an interview study with experienced activists, coordinators, and advocates of various social movement organizations. In this study it was found that people experienced in collective action can distinguish themselves from a primarily protest-based activist identity in order to establish their unique contribution to the broader movement, and also maintain feelings of personal satisfaction.

The contributions of this thesis are that it establishes a more nuanced understanding of the types of identity routes available to people who want to engage in collective action – such as an advocacy route, contrasted to the activist route. The thesis also concludes with a discussion of the need to understand transitionary socialization processes when people attempt to join social movement organizations, and it makes suggestions for developing a model of conversionary collective action – which is what participants termed the “quiet” approach to social change.
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Context Statement

Abstract

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CHAPTER 1.

Introduction and Literature Review

Thesis Overview

Moderate forms of collective action can be understood as good for social cohesion because citizens are taking an active interest in their collective future (McGarty, Lala, & Thomas, 2012; Thomas & Louis, in press). This view of collective action, that I adopt here, has come to primarily focus on mobilization: how can we promote pro-social collective action by everyday citizens? (e.g. Thomas, Smith, McGarty, & Postmes, 2010). However, these calls for positive re-engagement in civil society are faced with fiercely persistent lay theories about the apparent apathy and selfishness present in Western individualistic societies. Young people in particular are often described as lazy, materialistic, and uninterested in participating in their collective futures despite imminent global-scale issues like climate change, extreme poverty, and human rights abuses. The apathy interpretation, I and others argue, is an incomplete and inaccurate one. Apart from glossing over a hive of ongoing social movement activity occurring globally, a different interpretation is that inaction is motivated and meaningful. Inaction can be understood as a rejection of participating in a system that is seen as illegitimate or ineffective, and where people feel that their efforts to create social change and have their voices heard, are being wasted.

1 More radical and violent forms of collective action are still treated as concerning in the research, but this thesis is concerned primarily with moderate collective action.
Some relatively recently formed political and social organizations in Australia have recognized that there is a mismatch between the political opportunities provided to people, and the ways in which younger generations in particular want to be able to express their democratic voices. Some examples are - GetUp!, whose goal is to allow “thousands of everyday Australians who are working together to make progressive voices, values and priorities heard again” (https://www.getup.org.au/about/disclosure); and the Big Help Mob, who say that an overemphasis on how the world is “stuffed” is disempowering, and that when given an avenue young people will contribute to their communities with immense enthusiasm. Big Help Mob describe themselves as “huge mob of ordinary people like you who combine their powers to perform extraordinary feats of generosity for people, ecosystems and animals who need help” (http://bighelpmob.org/what_is_this). These groups represent contemporary alternatives to the more traditional forms of political participation, and a core message present in their communications is that they are accessible to the “everyday citizen”.

The availability of a variety of avenues for people to engage in political and social movements is not always apparent or publically visible, however, because another persistent and narrowly defined cultural myth is that of “the activist”. The figure of “the activist” is misleading because, “despite the larger-than-life nature of this image, the lifelong, intensely committed, and passionate activist is far from typical” (Corrigall-Brown, 2012, p. 123). In short, it creates the idea that activism is only for extraordinary (or extreme) people. It is my aim in this thesis to make alternative means of political participation more apparent, and to challenge the idea that inaction is always the result of a lack of ‘sufficient’ motivation.
The empirical studies in this thesis investigate the identities and experiences of those engaged (and disengaged) in a range of social movements in Australia – such as environmentalisms, international aid and development, human rights, and animal rights movements. The participants in this research are at various points of commitment to these social movements - in a trajectory that ranges from being sympathetic to actively engaged, and even in leadership positions. Using a combination of research methods I examine the ways in which people negotiate the meaning of their identities as active participants (but not necessarily “activists”), particularly in the face of threats to that meaning.

I approach identity meaning from two angles. First, by extending the existing research on barriers to participation in collective action by sympathizers; looking beyond pragmatic or instrumental concerns I demonstrate how people draw on shared understandings about collective action as a social and interpersonal practice, and the ways that they use these understandings to reflect back on their own self as potential collective actors. For example, by drawing on implicit knowledge about protests and protesters some individuals can experience ambivalence about their own capacity or willingness to participate in protests, but can still engage in other types of actions.

The second way I approach identity meaning is to investigate the rhetorical strategies that those committed to collective action use to re-construct their identities to managing against threats to the legitimacy or efficacy of their actions. These rhetorical strategies are contextually meaningful, because rhetoric is a resource for people to draw on to challenge existing ideas – meaning that the contexts that shape identity are important for understanding who will take up that identity and participate in particular forms of collective action.
Each of these two research questions speak to the other in that they centre on the central figure of the activist. Activism is a fairly normative social tradition of democratic society (Verhulst & Walgrave, 2009), but it tends to be associated with particular subcultures and political orientations - typically left-wing\(^2\) (Corrigall-Brown, 2012). I demonstrate in my research how a narrowly defined but shared understanding of the “activist” constrains access to alternative means of pursuing social change, and can be disempowering for individuals who are in the early stages of seeking out forms of collective action in which to participate effectively. This is examined by studying why people say they do not participate in actions (Study 2), and also by studying the rhetoric of those intensely committed to collective action – where it is found that some individuals and groups can differentiate themselves from activists in order to establish a uniquely effective and meaningful approach to social change (Study 1, Study 4). These unique methods for social change were either taking actions that could be seen as radical (Study 1), or conversely, more subdued methods – referred to as the “quietly, quietly” approach (Study 4).

What I demonstrate in this thesis is that identity re-construction by highly committed individuals, and the rejection of an activist identity by those pursuing alternative approaches to social change, and disengagement by sympathizers can all be understood as reflexive attempts to reclaim meaning and/or protect against threat to the meaning of one’s identity. That is, disengagement by sympathizers can, in part, be symptomatic of the perceived potential for one’s actions (or self) to be seen as illegitimate; similarly to the way that creative use of rhetoric by committed actors is a response to threats to their legitimacy. In addition, these findings contribute important

\(^2\) Although there has also been an increase in ultra right-wing activity in Europe and the US.
theoretical and practical contributions towards developing a model for understanding the softer or quieter approach to social change (developed in Chapter 6 and 7 in particular).

I will begin the thesis with a review of social movement and collective action literature.

**The Meaningfulness of Social Movements**

Early scholarly work on social movements assumed that crowd behaviour was irrational because individuals, when anonymous, become uninhibited through a process of deindividuation (Le Bon, 1982; Zimbardo, 1969). This view has been thoroughly challenged (e.g. McCarthy & Zald, 1977; Reicher, Spears, & Postmes, 1995) and most social movement research now assumes that collective action is meaningful. For example, sociologists employ resource mobilization theory (McCarthy & Zald, 1977) to demonstrate that social movement participation can be an instrumental process whereby individuals weigh up the costs and benefits of taking action. However resource mobilization theory was also critiqued on the basis that it ignored the ideological aspects of social movements (Snow & Benford, 1988), and the social psychological processes that underpin them (Klandermans, 1984).

Social psychologists have also worked hard to change ideas about the supposed irrationality of collective action or intergroup conflict (e.g. Reicher, 1984, 1987; Stott & Reicher, 1998). Klandermans (2002) argues for the importance of subjective social psychological explanations of social movements, because identification with one’s ingroup is key to overcoming the ‘dilemma of protest’ (Olson, 1968) whereby people must see the benefits of acting as outweighing the costs of participation. Thus collective action is typically understood, in the literature, as a meaningful group-based activity. Lay
theories and media coverage of crowd actions still tend to focus on the supposed mindlessness of ‘mobs’, however (e.g. see Reicher & Stott, 2011, for an analysis of the 2011 London riots).

The literature this thesis is situated in draws on both sociological and social psychological disciplines – primarily the discursive social identity approach in social psychology, which sets out a theoretical framework for understanding how people construct and reconstruct their identities in response to current social circumstances; and social movement theory from sociology, which emphasizes how people are embedded in social situations that shape their opportunities for action, and that strategic communications about social movements are intertwined with identity processes. I will give a broad outline of the relevant literature, and introduce the main aims and arguments of this research in relation to this literature.

The Social Psychology of Collective Action

The relevant social psychological research relating to the study of collective action comes mainly from those working within a social identity approach. The social identity approach is an epithet to describe the shared predictors and meta-theory of social identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), and self-categorization theories (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987). Social identity is defined as “that part of an individual’s self-concept which derives from his [or her] knowledge of his [or her] membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership” (Tajfel & Turner, 1979, p. 63). This is defined in contrast to personal identity which is the part of the self-concept that relates to knowledge of oneself as a unique individual. The key distinction about personal
identity is that it “always reflects differences from ingroup members” (Postmes & Jetten, 2006, p. 17).

The concept of social identity bridges the individual and group such that they are defined as interdependent, and explains how behaviour can be understood as meaningful at a social as well as an individual level (Postmes & Jetten, 2006; Turner et al., 1987). In the shift from personal to social identity, a process called depersonalization, the individual transitions from categorizing themselves in unique individual terms, to categorizing themselves as a member of the currently salient ingroup; shared traits with ingroup members become salient and the individual’s self-concept moves to a more inclusive level of categorization (Turner et al., 1987).

According to self-categorization research, categorization processes are dynamic and fluid (Onorato & Turner, 2004; Turner & Onorato, 1999). In turn, the kinds of behaviours or actions that individuals will engage in are informed by the currently salient identity. That is, when personal identity is salient, they will act in ways that express their self as a unique individual; if a social identity is salient, they will typically behave in ways that are expressive of the characteristics that they share with their ingroup members – that is, according to ingroup norms (Jetten, Spears, & Manstead, 1996; Turner et al., 1987). Thus, the concept of social identity explains how individuals come together in groups and act in coordinated ways.

Of particular interest to collective action research is that social identity strength overcomes individual concerns and motivates people to pursue outcomes that benefit the group as a whole (Klandermans, 2002). Further, willingness to participate in collective action is based on the expected costs and benefits of participation for the group (Klandermans, 1997). However Blackwood and Louis (2012) argue that it is a
mistake to exclude personal cost/benefits from this equation, where they found that people who strongly identified as activists perceived higher individual benefits and group-level benefits. That is, through adopting and behaving according to group norms, individuals can come to see themselves as more personally agentic (Baray, Postmes, & Jetten, 2009; Blackwood & Louis, 2012).

Social identity has been shown to be a consistent predictor of participation in collective actions – for example, in a meta-analysis by van Zomeren, Postmes and Spears (2008) social identity was shown to bridge injustice and efficacy motivations for collection action (see also Thomas, McGarty, & Mavor, 2009a). However, some scholars have argued that this relationship between social identity and action can be weak, and that there is a need for specificity in which social identities relate to which actions (e.g. Bliuc, McGarty, Reynolds, & Muntele, 2007; Livingstone & Haslam, 2008; Reicher & Hopkins, 1996).

The determination of which identities are important, and in what contexts, can be understood by looking at the content of those identities – identity content is composed of the norms, values, and beliefs of the group. Thomas, McGarty and Mavor (2009a) demonstrate in the encapsulated model of social identity in collective action (EMSICA) that in order for groups to engage in sustained collective action, the social identity needs to include norms for taking action, and further that these must be aligned with emotions that are also relevant to taking action (such as moral outrage), and efficacy beliefs. Furthermore, Bliuc, McGarty, Reynolds and Muntele (2007) argue that the social identities that best predict collective action are not those based on broad social category membership (e.g. gender, race), but rather based on more specific identification with a psychological group of people who share the same opinions (e.g. pro-
choice, anti-nuclear). An example of this is identification with a group of people who share one’s view of what constitutes being Australian, rather than identifying with the broader group of people that are socially classified as Australians (Bliuc, McGarty, Hartley, & Hendres, 2012).

### Discursive Approaches to Social Identity

There are different areas of focus within the social identity approach; the main body of work that I draw on in this thesis comes from the discursive approach to social identity, developed by Reicher and colleagues. In the ESIM – *Elaborated Social Identity Model* (Drury & Reicher, 2000, 2009; Reicher, 1996; Stott & Reicher, 1998) – they develop a model of social change where social identities emerge and change through social interactions. They argue that social identities should not be treated as static entities, but as socially constructed and contested. In particular they emphasize that social categories are used to organize actions: “Category boundaries will determine the extent of collective mobilization, category prototypes will determine the leadership of collective mobilizations, and category content will determine the direction of collective mobilizations.” (Reicher & Hopkins, 2001a, p. 387).

Reicher, Drury, and colleagues, have studied crowd events and large scale collective action where people can experience a dramatic shift in their identity; for example, an event where a crowd clashes with the police causes those people to bond together and develop a new shared identity (Drury & Reicher, 2000), and this identity process is facilitated through phenomenological empowerment (Drury, Cocking, Beale, Hanson, & Rapley, 2005). This work highlights the crucial interactive role between discourse, social interactions, and cognitions – where identities are contested and constructed through interactions with ingroup and outgroup members. In addition, and
of particular relevance to this thesis, these interactions with ingroup and outgroup members involve strategic “identity performances”, where cognitive self-categorization is influenced by performing one’s social identity to various audiences (Klein, Spears, & Reicher, 2007).

I too adopt this discursive social identity approach to examining identity construction and the meanings associated with particular (contestable) social identities. The context of my research has some differences from the context in which ESIM was developed, however. Rather than crowd events, I examine how people make sense of their self as collective actors in the absence of compelling events. That is, where people need to be motivated to seek out and join social movement organizations based on shared opinions and values, rather than feelings of shared deprivation or grievances per se (McGarty, Bliuc, Thomas, & Bongiorno, 2009). I argue that there is a need to interrogate individuals’ understanding of the normative, and sometimes prescriptive, content of particular types of collective action identities and their association with particular actions. I focus on identity terms that are associated with practices, rather than those associated with specific social movements - main examples being the ‘protester’ or ‘activist’, which are associated primarily with protests and direct actions. I interrogate how people draw on shared understandings or representations of activist identities and use them to make decisions about becoming an activist themselves. For example, individuals can look at the enactment of an activist identity by those who consider themselves to be activists – that is, social identity performances - and in turn use those reflections to evaluate their own self (Klein et al., 2007). The inferences that people make about activists are likely to be particularly important in early group socialization experiences, because it is those early experiences that foster identification
with the ingroup and in turn adoption of ingroup norms (Livingstone, Haslam, Postmes, & Jetten, 2011).

**The Sociology of Social Movements**

This thesis is primarily concerned with individuals’ experiences and behaviour, thus it is situated as social psychological. However I draw on sociological research because it offers complimentary insights into collective action and social movements. Indeed, despite their separate research traditions, many of the claims of social movement theorists are remarkably similar to those of social psychologists – particularly regarding collective or social identity. Of most relevance to this thesis is literature on social embeddedness, socialization, social ties, framing theory, and symbolic identity boundaries.

**Participation is Predicted by Social Ties and Networks**

Sociological network analyses describe what is referred to as social embeddedness – where people are socially situated in networks that give them both grievances and opportunities for taking action (e.g. Della Porta, 1995; McAdam, 1986; Passy, 2001). Social network analyses are more of a top-down approach, in contrast to a psychological model of how individuals come to identify with a group and participate in collective action. They illustrate that individuals are socialized into particular social networks, and that they take political cues from the people that are within these networks - people that they depend upon, trust, regularly interact with, and perceive as similar (the “social logic of politics”, Zuckerman, 2005). These networks – which can include membership of political organizations - provide the resources individuals need for involvement in collective action (Klandermans, van der Toorn, & van Stekelenburg, 2008).
In terms of predicting social movement participation, networks analyses repeatedly find that the people who come to participate in social movements tend to have social ties to people already active within the social movement, which McAdam and Paulsen (1993) argue is evidence of the role of collective identity. That is, a common identity with active members is what compels non-members to become members. A persons’ multiple networks (or multiple embeddings), however, can come into conflict and thereby people need to negotiate a coherent and consistent sense of various aspects of their self through ‘biographical availability’ – which is the development of a narrative that articulates their personal freedom to be available to participate in collective action (McAdam, 1986; McAdam & Paulsen, 1993; Passy & Giugni, 2001; see also Harré, 2007).

The implication from social network research that I highlight here is that it emphasizes a more long-term or embedded view of identity and action, than what a social identity approach would articulate – because these networks become established through socialization processes that begin from childhood. What this perspective also neatly highlights is a socially nuanced theory of agency – of how people enact choices within socially defined situations. To illustrate the contrast between individualist and socially situated theories of agency, consider these examples: first, the past exclusion of women from voting based on the individualist assumption that women were generally uninterested or unsuited to politics, to the socially situated explanation that attributes women’s political disengagement to norms and socialization practices (Andersen, 1990). In another example that illustrates how cultural norms can shape the behaviours that are available to individuals, Cleaver (2007) found that in cultures with traditional gender roles women may not be able enact their participation in collective action through direct
involvement in public meetings, but instead they can influence male members of their household who then speak in public on their behalf. The point is that socialization practices and socio-cultural norms have the potential to explain why people can appear disengaged from social movements despite the appearance of opportunities for engagement. Social norms and socialization practices can thus pose barriers to straightforward participation in collective action, and shape the kinds of opportunities that are available to people.

Klandermans (1984) work on ‘expectancy’ incorporates an understanding of the influence of social norms on shaping collective action participation. This is where individuals’ subjective expectations of the outcomes of collective action, including expectations of what significant others’ think of them for participating in actions (termed “social incentives”), can create barriers to participation (in addition to instrumental barriers, e.g. time, location). Social incentives highlight the ways that people make assumptions about how other people will interpret their behaviour; for example, if someone is concerned that a family or friend will disapprove of their participation in collective action this can discourage them from participating. Social incentives thus are underpinned by the social meanings that are attached to behaviours. If others interpret my behaviour as meaningless or illegitimate, then what social consequences will my participation have?

In Klandermans and Oegema’s (1987) stage process of participation in collective action the final stage is that individuals need to overcome barriers – including social incentives. However, they argue that these barriers are surmountable if an individual is ‘sufficiently’ motivated. I argue that this emphasis on motivations has led to social incentives and other barriers being overlooked in recent literature. I aim to re-
energize the empirical examination of social incentives, and other social perceptions of collective action, as barriers to collective action participation. I argue that social incentives may be particularly important for individuals who are attempting to integrate with social movement groups in their early collective action experiences – that is, early contact with social movement groups. This informs that crucial process of the development of subjective bonds and attachments to the ingroup, which social psychologists and sociologists alike have stressed as vital for sustained participation in collective action (Klandermans, 1997; McGarty et al., 2009; Turner et al., 1987; Zuckerman, 2005). Moreover, I argue that we must first understand the content of barriers if we are to determine the particular ways in which people can overcome them (or how organizations can better frame their mobilization communications so as to avert these concerns). Rather than explaining inaction as being the opposite of what predicts participation (such as identity, motivation, efficacy, ideological commitment, empathy) this research focus on barriers aims to investigate reasons why people might actively avoid politics (see also Corrigall-Brown, 2012; Eliasoph, 1998; Stroebe, 2013). That is, avoidance of politics can be a political action in its own right, if it is a meaningful response to social situational factors.

I do not study socialization processes as such, but rather explicate what social barriers people can face, and how they can interact with motivations in a way that functions to halt or shape individual’s socialization into a social movement group. This reflects the notion of “anticipatory socialization” (Merton, 1968) whereby people anticipate and negotiate their place within a group according to perceptions of what is required of them to be a ‘good’ group member (inner obligation to be a 'good' group
member has been shown to mediate the relationship between identity and willingness to participate, Stürmer & Simon, 2004).

**Framing and Identity Boundaries**

Social movement scholars have also evaluated how frames – which are the communicative structure of shared ideas - mobilize populations. Framing theory was driven by a turn away from resource mobilization and towards culture and language (Snow & Benford, 1988; Snow, Rochford, Worden, & Benford, 1986). Social movements frame their communications about the need for collective action strategically, in order to mobilize populations (see review by Oliver & Johnston, 2000). Frames can include communications about identities – that is, social movements not only employ instrumental strategies, but part of their political activity involves communicating who they are (Polletta & Jasper, 2001).

Framing is also researched in discursive approaches to social identity in social psychology, although it is not usually referred to as such. Concepts such as identity entrepreneurship (Reicher & Hopkins, 1996; Reicher, Hopkins, Levine, & Rath, 2005) convey how committed collective actors in leadership roles employ rhetorical strategies that creatively shape the boundaries and content of social identities (Reicher & Hopkins, 1996). Moreover, the act of identification itself can be understood as strategic; identification is something groups do to empower themselves (Drury et al., 2005).

Framing theory and identity entrepreneurship research highlight the strategic nature of identity and how it is bound up with social movement strategy. For example, collective actors can strategically soften or harden the boundaries of their collective identity in order to mobilize sympathetic populations or to separate themselves from
mainstream culture, respectively (Bernstein, 1997; Gamson, 1997; Hunt & Benford, 2004; Lamont & Molnar, 2002). The key distinction in this research is the *symbolic* nature of identity content and boundaries; rather than the essential qualities or characteristics of groups. The symbolic aspects of identity are inclusive of “cultural materials – names, narratives, symbols, verbal styles, rituals, clothing” (Polletta & Jasper, 2001, p. 285), where for example, environmental activists can display their identities through adopting “green” practices and clothing styles that make political statements (Horton, 2006).

Identity communications and constructions are ongoing developments that are responsive to changing political circumstances, and so cannot be considered to be static or essential representations of a social category (Bernstein, 1997).

Identity framing is best studied by analysing rhetoric (in either talk or text) – for instance, examining how people who are highly involved in collective action can rhetorically manage against the potentially problematic aspects of their identities by strategically altering their identity boundaries in their talk. By rhetorically lowering identity boundaries they allow more people access to that identity, but by raising their identity boundaries they can establish claims about their uniqueness or separation from mainstream culture (Gamson, 1995, 1997). This identity management work is ongoing and nuanced, and has implications for who has access to that identity. That is, which individuals of a particular demographic can become part of the mobilized ingroup is dependent on how inclusive the symbolic boundaries of the ingroup are. Moreover, in order to mobilize populations, framing needs to align and resonate with the identities of sympathizers (Polletta & Jasper, 2001; Snow et al., 1986).

The reasons for including identity framing and rhetorical reflexivity in this research relates to how individuals and groups manage against threats to the
meaningfulness of their identity, as well as who has access to that collective action identity. I investigate how identity meaningfulness is maintained, and at times constrained, through the strategic and symbolic aspects of social movement framing – particularly identity framing. An example of how individuals rhetorically manage this identity complexity is Einwohner’s (2002a) research on animal rights activism. She found that animal rights activists can experience problematic conflicts between the personal values and beliefs that led them to campaign for animal rights, and knowing that the ways these values are expressed could be used by others as a means of criticizing the group (e.g. being ‘too emotional’). Thus activists’ strategic engagement with oppositional others plays an active role in the development of their identities and strategies. Moreover, framing has consequences for mobilization – that is, if the entry into an identity requires a steep learning curve, has highly prescriptive norms, or attracts controversy, then that social movement may be marginalized by the public and be off-putting to potential new members, or even be excluded from other social movement groups who share the same end goals (Becker, Tausch, Spears, & Christ, 2011; Della Porta, 1995; Linden & Klandermans, 2006).

In my research I focus on the identity management complexities posed by the adoption of an activist identity – whereby calling oneself an activist is not merely a self-definition, but carries political connotations that communicate to other activists and non-activists who they are. Activists define themselves now and in the future by referencing their past, and distinguishing themselves from other groups (see Liu & Gastardo-Conaco, 2011; Reicher, 2004). This means that explicitly adopting an activist identity has political and personal connotations that need to be continually managed. I study the identity rhetoric of both committed actors, and disengaged/moderately
engaged sympathizers as to how they manage the more negative connotations that can come to be associated with particular collective action identities, and the consequences this has for participation in particular types of collective actions.

**Integrating Social Psychological and Sociological Perspectives**

As can be seen from this overview, social psychology and sociology have many similarities despite the extent to which they have operated separately. Klandermans and colleagues (e.g. Klandermans, 1984, 1997; Simon et al., 1998) have substantially worked to bridge sociology and social psychology (see also Hogg, Terry, & White, 1995; Stryker, Owens, & White, 2000), but they note that the reasons for separate trajectories between the disciplines are complex (Klandermans & de Weerd, 2000). I do not aim to resolve these differences here, as they are beyond the scope of this thesis. However, for the topics of investigation in this research, namely collective/social identity and strategic identity construction, the research from the two disciplines is remarkably similar. There are no incompatible theoretical or epistemological frameworks that prevent interdisciplinary integration on these topics. I will now briefly outline some similarities and differences, but do so primarily to define the key terms and research approach.

As stated, a central tenet of the social identity approach is that social and personal identities are fluid and dynamic, influenced in intergroup contexts where, through cognitive processes, social identity becomes more salient than personal identity. This is a claim that seems similar to that of sociologists who also distinguish between personal and collective identity, and how they relate to each other in collective action (Snow & McAdam, 2000). However, self-categorization theory carries rather specific assumptions about fundamental cognitive processes of categorization – such as that of
depersonalization (Augoustinos, 2006; Turner et al., 1987). These principles are, as far as I am aware, not present or are not examined in sociological literature.

Moreover, while social identity researchers have focussed on self-categorization and subjective aspects of group membership, sociologists have been more influenced by the labels applied to groups in particular societies (labelling theory, Goffman, 1963; Stryker et al., 2000). Sociologists have also tended to focus on the identity of the group as an entity (‘collective identity’), whereas social psychologists focus on the identity of individuals, as derived from their group membership (‘social identity’, Klandermans & de Weerd, 2000). However Simon and Klandermans (2001) use ‘collective identity’ to refer to individuals' identities as members of a collective, and that is the term I adopt here. Examples of how these level of analyses tend to differ between disciplines is that in framing research a sociological project would examine how framing mobilizes collective entities or networks of people, and how the ideological content of frames operate on socio-cultural levels (Snow & Benford, 1988), whereas a social psychological focus (such as in this research) examines how individuals’ strategic manipulations of identity can be made sense of in subjective and personal ways, in terms of the choices they make about their ability and willingness to align with various collective action frames (processes termed ‘frame alignment’, and ‘frame resonance’, Benford & Snow, 2000; Snow & Benford, 1988).

The aim in this thesis is to draw on the sociological literature on the strategic components of identity – for example, identity deployment (Bernstein, 2005), symbolic identity boundaries, and framing (Benford & Snow, 2000) - to undertake a detailed examination of what meaning specific identities hold for individuals engaged in collective actions, with an understanding that identity meaning is contested within
particular social contexts that shape the behaviours that are socially normative and available to people wanting to participation in social change movements. This approach also incorporates an understanding of the strategic and rhetorical work involved in building up and communicating identity as an inherent part of social movement activity. Thus the empirical research in this thesis examines the language use of committed actors and how they align or manage conflicts between personal and collective identities (Study 1, Study 4), how they distinguish themselves from other groups within the same social movement (Study 1, Study 4), and how sympathizers’ inferences and anticipations of the normative practices and boundaries of collective identities can function to halter or alter their participation in collective actions (Study 2, Study 3). These research questions are compatible with this inter-disciplinary approach.

What Type of Collective Action?

The main definition of collective action used in the literature has been that of actions directed at improving the conditions of one’s own group (Wright, Taylor, & Moghaddam, 1990). In this type of collective action the ingroup identity is one of a group who suffered from various types of social injustice (e.g. being denied the same rights as other groups). Ingroup members share this sense of injustice with each other, as well as feeling the injustice against “me” - as part of their self is derived from that group membership. However, the type of collective causes that I investigate in this thesis are primarily where people act on behalf of disadvantaged social groups that they do not belong to, or for environmental causes – examples included in this research include people who advocate for the welfare of asylum seekers and refugees, people who raise awareness about global poverty, and people who campaign against animal cruelty. I aim to contribute to the understanding of how people come to participate in
these social movement causes especially when they do not experience immediately pressing circumstances that might compel them into taking action. Instead, they have to actively seek out and find groups or organizations where they feel they can belong and become an effective group member.

Wright (2009) argues that these forms of collective action have a conversion based approach, where the aims are to convert increasing numbers of people to endorse the social movement values and normative behaviours, as opposed to a competitive approach which involves minority groups competing for status against an outgroup that is seen as culpable. In conversionary movements the ingroup approaches ostensible outgroups with an open-hand, and attempts to convert them to their normative world-view (Wright, 2009). Towards the end of the thesis (Chapter 6, 7) I expand on this point about the need for theoretical specification of collective action suited to that of conversionary movements. But for now I note that the opinion-based group concept (Bliuc et al., 2007) works to overcome this theoretical problem of why people will take action on behalf of others – where in movements such as environmentalism people are still taking action on behalf of an ingroup, but rather than the ingroup being a (disadvantaged) social category it is an opinion-based group composed of people with whom they share opinions and ideas (Bliuc et al., 2007; McGarty et al., 2009). The opinion-based group concept can be utilized to understand the processes of how people come to connect with and form an attachment to these psychological groups of like-minded others in social movements that are attempting to deal with large scale global issues (e.g. anti-poverty causes, Thomas, McGarty, & Mavor, 2010).

In terms of the particular types of actions that are included in this thesis, I am intentionally inclusive – defining collective action as any activity, whether undertaken
with a group or alone (but on behalf of groups), with the intent of bringing about social change. Included in this are actions ranging from individual lifestyle behaviours (e.g. being ‘environmentally friendly’ or an ‘ethical consumer’), to participating in mass actions such as sit-ins and protests, as well as what might be considered more extreme or direct actions. The primary reason for being inclusive is to account for low-cost actions (e.g. talking to friends about social issues), as they may be indicative of a person who is on a trajectory from sympathizing to engaging in sustained collective action. This also relates to the rise of what is sometimes termed slacktivism - where a larger number of people fairly frequently engage in actions such as ‘liking’ something on Facebook, but do not necessarily continue on a trajectory of commitment to further collective actions. This kind of collective action is important to understand because, as Reicher and Haslam (2010) note, widespread social change is more likely to be transmitted through the small everyday actions of the many, than the dramatic actions of the few.

**Summary of Thesis**

Adopting the view that identity is an ongoing process or project of *becoming* (Drury & Reicher, 2000; Harré, 2007; Klein et al., 2007; Reicher, 2004; Reicher & Hopkins, 2001b), this research is not focussed on what is stable or inherent about identity, but rather, how identities and practices have a reciprocal relationship (Drury et al., 2005). This approach primarily involves examining subjectivity and meaning-making, and viewing such meaning-making as forming the basis of social behaviours (e.g. Drury et al., 2005; Drury & Reicher, 2000; Klandermans, 1997; McGarty, Yzerbyt, & Spears, 2002).
Understanding identity meaning is particularly important when considering that activism is a social and historical tradition – it is not just a means to an end. I argue that this means that becoming an activist is to take up a particular type of identity project (Harré, 2007; Klein et al., 2007) in which people not only need to identify with the cause and with a relevant ingroup, but also need to view collective action, or rather particular types of collective action, to be an effective and desirable form of social practice. In addition, people look to others (such as activists) to form their own sense of self (Klein et al., 2007). Those who do become active long-term are accompanied by motivational rhetoric that helps them to maintain commitment to the cause (e.g. Barr & Drury, 2009), and must be able to make activism a central life-project that is free of competing demands (Harré, 2007; McAdam, 1986).

I argue that there is a need to interrogate individuals’ understanding of the merits of particular types of collective action such as protesting or advocating, where identity is intertwined with social movement practices. One way to approach this is to examine identity content - as identity content forms the basis of collective action (Livingstone, Spears, & Manstead, 2009; Thomas et al., 2009a; van Zomeren et al., 2008). Another is to study the contestable and reflexive boundaries of collective identities (Gamson, 1997; Reicher & Hopkins, 1996). Therefore, where other work in this domain may focus on the processes of categorization of identity, in this thesis I examine the meanings and content associated with particular identity terms (e.g. ‘activist’, ‘protester’, ‘advocate’), and how these inform action participation and non-participation. As I demonstrate in this research, participants can differentiate between different collective action identities in ways that are consequential for whether or not
they will participate in particular types of social actions, or participate in any actions at all.

Given that identity serves as a tool of social influence by legitimating and making sense of the movements’ goals and strategies, through communications with oppositional groups and sympathizers, the main research question of this thesis connects to an overarching question relevant to much of the social movement/collective action literature - *How do sympathisers and even active participants reflect on, and actively contest, shared understandings of collective action and collective action identities that in turn shape their identity formation and engagement (or disengagement) in a social movement?*

The specific contribution this thesis makes to this research, is to focus in on two further more specific questions, which are: *How do people committed to collective action mitigate threats to the meaningfulness of their identity, and manage conflicting identities?* (forms the basis of Studies 1 and 4); and, in the anticipation of becoming a collective actor, *what inferences do people make about collective action and collective identities that are problematic and aversive, thus presenting barriers to their participation in collective action?* (forms the basis of Studies 2 and 3). Again, an argument I make is that inaction/disengagement should not be treated as a lack of action, but rather that people’s varying levels of participation and commitment in social movements is meaningful when considered within the specific cultural and political spaces that they are working within.

The overall aim of this research therefore is to draw attention to the complex and nuanced content of collective and personal identities and the relationships between them. The particular context of this research is mainly (but not exclusively) on forms of collective action where people need to be motivated to go beyond their everyday lives and become connected with a group of collective actors with whom they may share no
social category membership, but rather share world-views, values and opinions (opinion-based groups; Bliuc et al., 2007). In these contexts, without pressingly urgent need to fight against material or relative deprivation against oneself, or one’s ingroup, I investigate the facilitators and hindrances to the formation and ongoing development of a voluntarily acquired identity as a member of a social movement group, and the psychological attachment to this group.

**Description of Each Empirical Study**

After an outline of the research methodology in Chapter 2, the empirical work begins in Chapter 3 with the question of how multiple (personal and social) identities are rhetorically managed by people engaged in collective action - particularly when those identities have strong, prescriptive ideological content that has the potential to come into conflict. Through a qualitative study of the rhetoric of members of a controversial marine conservation organization, the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society, we examine how members construct their identities in order to frame their cause as legitimate, and how members come to personally identify themselves as members of the organization in ways that allow them to manage potential conflicts between their multiple identities – as individuals, and as members of SSCS.

In Study 2, based on an open-ended survey of a range of people who were slightly/moderately engaged in collective action, we examine how problematic aspects of collective action identities can pose barriers to further participation. In this study we develop the focus on social incentives and anticipatory socialization by studying people’s anticipation of what it would be like to become a collective actor or belong to a collective action group. Findings here revolve around stereotypical notions of collective action that have consequences for people’s willingness to visibly perform the normative
practices associated with activism – that is, protests and demonstrations – and the consequences this could have for their ability to retain personal agency.

In the subsequent Study 3, a survey methodology was used to quantify some of the main findings from Study 2. Key questions examined in this study are the relationship between activist stereotypes and identification as an activist, as well as predictors for participation in different classes of actions – distinguished as ‘visible’ and ‘low visibility’ actions, where we expected that identity performance concerns and concerns about group belonging and the ability to retain agency within a group might restrict people from engaging in more visible, group based actions.

The final empirical Study 4 is an interview study with experienced activists, coordinators, campaigners and advocates of various causes. They were asked about their identity and what types of collective action they engage in. This study creates a view ‘inside’ social movements, demonstrating a variety of groups that can share similar collective goals but undertake actions in different ways and call themselves by different names. One particular finding here is that people experienced in collective action show signs of learning through experience to find personal meaning and satisfaction from carrying out collective action in the way they feel best suits them. This sometimes entails distinguishing oneself from activists, such as by establishing a “softer” or more “subdued” identity (commonly referred to as “advocates”).

These studies contribute to the key aims of making alternative methods of pursuing social change more visible, and extending insights into how identity conflicts are managed, resolved, or are interpreted by people engaged in collective action. The research also demonstrates various problematic experiences that those joining and becoming active in a social movement can face, and which can therefore interfere with
their motivations. The thesis concludes by making suggestions for further research, including outlining a suggested alternative model for explaining the psychological processes involved in social movements that have conversionary aims – that is, movements that attempt to convert people to a normative world-view through advocacy and education, rather than combating inequality through direct actions and demonstrations.

**Format of the thesis**

All of the empirical chapters, except Chapter 5 (Study 3), have been written up in preparation for publication and appear as complete manuscripts, except that there is only one reference list at the end of the thesis. Context statements appear between each study to provide a connection between them and the overall aims of the research. The paper that has been accepted for publication is cited as the published article in the other studies, rather than referring to the chapter number.

Study 1 has been accepted for publication, as: Stuart, A., Thomas, E. F., Donaghue, N., & Russell, A. (2013). “We may be pirates, but we are not protesters”: Identity in the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society. *Political Psychology*. 34, 753-777.

Study 2 has been submitted for publication, and is called “I don't really want to be associated with the self-righteous left extreme”: How self-reflections on collective identity can hinder participation in collective action. We thank anonymous reviewers for comments on a previous version.

Study 4, called “Taking a look inside: identity and strategy alignment within social movement groups” has been prepared, but not yet submitted, for a special issue in the *Journal of Social Issues.*
CHAPTER 2.

Epistemology and Methodology

I have taken a critical realist position and a mixed methods approach, and this chapter outlines what this means, and the advantages and limitations of this approach.

**Epistemology**

The epistemological position sets out the starting point for the research project. It sets up what knowledge claims can be made, and the boundaries and limitations of these knowledge claims. I adopt a critical realist epistemology, which is influenced by both realism and social constructionism (Archer, Bhaskar, Collier, Lawson, & Norrie, 1998). Realism is a position adopted by most psychologists (often without express acknowledgement). It is a position that assumes that influences on psychological processes (such as structural influences) can be inferred from observable behaviours (Marsh & Smith, 2000). Realism differentiates from positivism - a perspective typically only adopted by the physical sciences, whereby all knowledge claims are based on what is directly observable (Marsh & Smith, 2000). Realists can make assumptions that what a person says is what they think and feel ‘inside’ (with caveats for response biases and contextual influences). That is, realism involves the inference of cognitive processes from measures such as behavioural observation, physiological measures, and self-reports.

Critical realism is a relatively recently developed position (primarily developed by Bhaskar, 1975) that seeks to differentiate from realism because it aims to be more
contextually specific, and takes input from social constructionism by being sensitive to the functionality of language. In adopting this perspective, researchers acknowledge that language is not a neutral medium for conveying thought. Rather, discourses serve social and ideological functions and people actively construct and reconstruct the objects they interact with. This critical realist position can be understood in contrast from what is termed “hard social constructionism”, which is adopted in discursive psychology (Edwards & Potter, 1992). For example discursive psychologists will study two or more people engaged in a naturally-occurring conversation and analyse how specific formulations of language result in an in-turn formulated response from another person. In discursive psychology there is no inference beyond context, and no assumptions are made about what people ‘really’ think or feel.

The critical realist position differs from hard social constructionism in that there is still an assumption that there exists a shared social reality. Social constructionism is often criticised on the basis of a lack of generalisability and that it does not infer what is behind or underneath discourse, such as how discourse is shaped by material conditions (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Sims-Schouten, Riley, & Willig, 2007). This therefore often results in an inability (or refusal) to draw implications beyond the specific context of the research. While a social constructionist epistemology is suitable for some research aims, in my research I aim to generate empirical findings that could be used to understand experiences and behaviours beyond discourse, and apply these to the development of theory that is amenable to being empirically examined in other contexts. In short, I make assumptions that there is a shared social reality in which inferences can be made about human experiences and behaviour, but that this social world is constructed and discourse is to some extent functional (i.e. what people say, and when, is strategic).
Therefore the knowledge claims that are made with critical realism are that we can interpret people’s talk as a reflection of their experiences and identity (e.g. their rhetoric reflects their belonging to particular social groups), while also identifying some discursive practices and rhetorical devices.

As may be apparent, critical realism is a nuanced position to define. I put forward the argument that the advantage of adopting a critical realist epistemology is that it allows for sensitivity and flexibility towards the constructed aspects of the social world, and in particular, language use. It is well suited to social psychological topics which seek to understand how people participate in social practices with one another, and where the research aims are not to pinpoint psychological processes within individual’s minds, but to understand people in situ. I adopted a critical realist epistemology to attempt to move beyond the divide between realist and constructionist positions. Critical realism carves a path between the two, with the aim to develop research insights that are contextually sensitive, and acknowledge the constructed and fluid transitions and movements of human culture and language.

Theory and Methodology

Reicher (2011) argues for the avoidance of “methodolotary” because choice of method follows from theoretical and conceptual approach. While “experiments make perfect sense as a way of advancing a causal view of psychological process and of looking at the consequentiality of particular variables”, he says, “it is less helpful in looking at the slippery way in which people make, debate, and contest meaning in the world.” (p. 395). Therefore the choices of method in this thesis follow on from the theoretical and conceptual matter under investigation.
In understanding the ways that people make sense in the world, subjectivity is deemed to play an important role for explaining individual and group behaviour. Unlike a cognitive psychology view, social psychology perspectives, such as the social identity approach, conceptualize phenomena such as stereotypes as not just part of instrumental cognitive processing principles (the ‘cognitive miser’ metaphor), but rather as an outcome of sense-making processes that relate to ongoing contestation for power in intergroup relations (Augoustinos, 2006; McGarty et al., 2002). The human subject is thus conceptualized and treated in research as an active agent engaged in projects of self-making (and sense-making).

The research methods of this thesis are as follows: Studies 1, 2 and 4 use qualitative research methods, while Study 3 reports on a quantitative survey. The first two studies use the same analytic method: thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis involves identifying reoccurring themes and patterns within talk or text. This method can be used within a critical realist epistemology, and can be theoretically inductive – thus one aim of my research was to inductively generate theory and measures to be used in later quantitative research. The limitations that a qualitative investigation poses in terms of generalisability can be addressed through utilizing quantitative measures that are informed by the qualitative research findings. Thus this enables the researcher to conduct in-depth and exploratory qualitative research, as well as generalisable, confirmatory quantitative research.

Further to this, quantitative research, despite what is often assumed, does not always require a realist epistemology. Quantitative measures can be used by researchers who adopt a critical realist position - this is because numbers (like words) can be seen as a form of rhetoric in which people actively construct the subjects with which they are
engaging in. Thus the findings can be interpreted on this basis - where people’s responses can be considered to serve rhetorical functions, while also providing insight into the beliefs, attitudes and agendas that motivate or inhibit their engagement in collective action.

The findings from the first two qualitative studies inform the design of the quantitative measures of Study 3. The themes and terms used by participants to describe their perceptions and experiences were incorporated into the generation of the items for the questionnaires, and were used to guide the hypotheses. Moreover, in the final study (Study 4), some of the findings from the quantitative research were discussed with interviewees as to whether they reflected their experiences. The qualitative approach used in this final study draws on principles of interpretive phenomenology (Shaw, 2010; Smith, 1996), where the researcher adopts (as much as possible) the perspective of the interviewee, so as to represent their views. In this type of analysis, in order to understand each individual’s views, the transcripts are carefully analysed individually initially and any similarities in their narratives are drawn together towards the end of the analytic process.

Further explanations of how these methods are used can also be found in each empirical chapter.
CHAPTER 3.

Context Statement

This study focuses on the first of the overarching research questions in this thesis – on what strategies people can use to actively manage and deflect threats to their legitimacy and the meaning of their identities. It entails an analysis of the identity rhetoric from the founder and several members of the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society (SSCS). SSCS has a reputation as a ‘radical’ marine conservation group. They engage in high-risk direct actions, such as placing themselves between whalers and whales. The data analysis first examines public commentary published by Captain Paul Watson (founder) and then compares these findings to interviews with members of the SSCS, in order to understand the implications of adopting an SSCS collective identity. We examined the complexities of their identity narratives; key research questions focussed on how they resolve conflicts between different aspects of their identities, and how they justify the legitimacy of their controversial approach to conservation. One finding is that the SSCS claim they are not “protesters” or “old school greenies” - a finding that echoes through the other empirical studies of people from variety of different groups, where the connections between identity and practices show signs of being nuanced and complex responses to challenges to retaining identity meaning in constantly evolving political conditions.
Abstract

Radical activist organizations face the complex task of managing their identity so as to draw political attention, but also to appear legitimate and thus gain public support. In this paper we develop a picture of the identities of Sea Shepherd Conservation Society (SSCS) members, a group mostly known for their direct action against whaling, via a thematic analysis of material from the SSCS website and interviews with SSCS members. In online commentary founder Captain Paul Watson establishes several deliberately paradoxical notions of who the Sea Shepherds are. We relate these identity statements to interviews with core activists to examine how they manage the identity conflicts resulting from the group identity, such as being seen as “pirates” and “hard lined vegans”. It is found that SSCS position themselves as a diverse and unstructured organization, yet distinctively passionate and willing to take action where others will not. The implications of this research are discussed in relation to the importance of understanding the constraints and conflicts around political activist identities.
“We may be pirates, but we are not protesters” Identity in the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society

“Sea Shepherd may not be everyone’s cup of tea. We are a no-nonsense, in-your-face, activist organization that rocks the boat, upsets the status quo, and pins the bell on the rear end of corrupt and ineffective politicians. We get called names, and we recruit enemies faster than we recruit supporters, but the one thing we do better than any other organization on this planet is that we champion and risk our lives for our clients, the creatures of the sea, as if they were our family – which when you think of it, they are.” Captain Paul Watson, 2008.

The Sea Shepherd Conservation Society is a non-profit direct-action marine wildlife conservation group, founded by Paul Watson in 1977 (SSCS, 2010). Their most high profile missions are directed at preventing Japanese whaling vessels from operating in the Antarctic whale sanctuary. Their missions have had temporary success as the Japanese whalers suspended their 2010-2011 operations due to “harassment” from the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society, although they have since returned for the 2011-2012 whaling season (SSCS, 2011). Sometimes branded eco-terrorists (a label heavily refuted by the SSCS; see Nagtzaam & Lentini, 2008, for a further discussion), they have a high profile in international politics and were recently the subject of a Animal Planet channel series titled Whale Wars. Despite their high profile in international environmental politics and the environmental conservation movement this group has hitherto received relatively little research attention.

This paper explores the identities of Sea Shepherd Conservation Society members and the ways in which they negotiate meaningful ‘symbolic’ identity boundaries that enable them to distinguish themselves as uniquely effective, but also retain a level of legitimacy and justification for their approach to conservation. We
begin by briefly reviewing research from sociology, social psychology and the political sciences, which describes the central importance of social or collective identities in participation in social movements which aim to achieve social or political change. In doing so, we follow the lead of Stryker, Owens and White (2000) who argue that a (sociological) focus on social structure and ideology can be usefully integrated with a (social psychological) understanding of individual psychological processes (see also van Stekelenburg & Klandermans, 2010a). We then consider recent developments in that literature, which increasingly emphasise the nuanced ways in which individuals can manage competing or potentially conflicting aspects of their identity. This work is then related to the case of environmentalist identities, and in particular the SSCS members, through an analysis of commentary published on the SSCS website and in-depth interviews with committed members. Our goal is to describe the ways that members of the SSCS negotiate these prescriptive identities through their talk, emerging as both ‘ordinary’ and ‘extraordinary’ in their commitment.

Social Movements and Collective Identities

The concept of identity has been central to the study of social movements and activism in sociology (see Polletta & Jasper, 2001, for a review), and social psychology (e.g. Klandermans, 1997; Klandermans, 2002). In the sociological literature there is now widespread agreement that social movement groups choose strategies for change that are not merely instrumental but also expressive of their identity (Polletta & Jasper, 2001). That is, social movements form not only to meet pragmatic needs (organization, co-ordination), but also to enable expression of more intrinsic, symbolic aspects of self-

3 The terms ‘social identity’ and ‘collective identity’ can have different understandings and tend to be used by different disciplines (where sociology has tended to prefer ‘collective’ and social psychology has tended to prefer ‘social’). In this paper we are referring to the identity of a person as a member of a collective, as discussed by Simon & Klandermans (2001).
hood (though there is some disagreement as to whether collective identities exist prior to participation in collective action, or form around participation in action; see Snow & McAdam, 2000). In the social psychological literature too (most notably social identity theory, Tajfel & Turner, 1979, and self-categorization theory, Turner et al., 1987) it is understood that a collective, group, identity forms the psychological basis of a common cause (Klandermans, 1997; 2002 see van Zomeren, Postmes & Spears, 2008, for a recent meta-analysis; Reicher, 1984, 1987; Thomas et al., 2009a). This is because collective identities link the grievances of individuals to a collective cause, and in doing so act as the psychological link between individual and group. Collective identities allow for a re-description of “personal” interest into collective interest (Blackwood & Louis, 2012; van Stekelenburg & Klandermans, 2010a) and provide a set of content or norms that define ‘who we are’ and ‘what we do’ (Thomas, Smith, et al., 2010; Turner, 1991). As such, examining the identities that bring groups of people together, or that are formed in social movements, is important for understanding the foundation on which the movement rests and the ways in which they seek to create political and social change.

While there is a now relatively widespread agreement about the importance of collective identity in social movement research, recent developments in both sociology and social psychology call for increasingly nuanced understanding of the role of multiple identities (e.g. Amiot, de la Sablonniere, Terry, & Smith, 2007; Roccas & Brewer, 2002; Swann, Gomez, Seyle, Morales, & Huici, 2009), and how personal and collective identities relate to each other in social movement participation (Jasper, 1997, 2004; Polletta & Jasper, 2001; Snow & McAdam, 2000). This issue seems particularly important in the study of social movements where identities are often strongly
ideological and we might expect strong potential for conflicting or opposing identities. For example, consider the extent to which someone who identifies as an environmentalist, and is also employed by the mining industry, would be able to flexibly negotiate various social contexts without the identities coming into conflict. The current research can be seen as a contribution to these calls for an examination of how people negotiate, manage and experience their overall sense of themselves, particularly when some aspects of self might come into conflict. Similar to recent studies (e.g. Hopkins, 2011; Jaspal & Cinnirella, 2010), we argue that the examination of rhetoric is one avenue that enables an understanding how personal and collective identities relate, and how people manage conflicts among their multiple identities. Before we can describe how our research tackles this problem, it is first necessary to outline two concepts (employed somewhat similarly by sociology and social psychology) which are relevant to our approach: identity boundaries and identity content (norms).

Managing Multiple Identities

*Symbolic identity boundaries.* Symbolic identity boundaries are the conceptual distinctions made by actors to categorise and order the social world into groups of people, creating a sense of “us” and “them” (Lamont & Molnar, 2002) and, according to the social identity approach, are also represented at a cognitive level (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Turner et al., 1987). Identity boundaries are often made visible through developing practices for communicating group based identities (Hunt & Benford, 2004; Lamont & Molnar, 2002). For example, environmental movements can create distinct ‘green’ identities by adopting behaviours and lifestyles that are developed within the cultural and political spaces of contemporary environmentalism, and are demonstrated through everyday practices (‘environmental citizenship’; Horton, 2006). The ‘green’
philosophy of environmental movements is generally known to be anti-consumerist and advocates sustainable use of resources, reusing/recycling goods, living “local lives”, and involves “visibly shared habits” such as a distinctive dress style (Horton, 2006, p. 3; see also Carter, 2001). Such symbolic identity boundaries serve to create a distinct identity around which develops an activist community or culture separate from mainstream culture, as well as highlight the claims of the social movement to the public. Bernstein (1997) argues that social movements deploy their identities strategically; sometimes to highlight similarities to the majority identity, at other times highlighting their differences.

In the context of environmental movements, Wright (2009) argues that they usually adopt a conversionary model that is focused on including more people in the ‘in-group’; the message put forward is that “everyone should be an environmentalist”. As such, the boundaries and barriers to entry into the environmentalist identity are lowered and softened. The Sea Shepherd Conservation Society, however, seems to differ in some respects from this conversionary model. SSCS adopt a high-risk confrontational approach to conservation, characterised by a focus on placing themselves between the whalers and the whales. SSCS and similar grassroots movements arose from the sentiment that larger organizations, such as Greenpeace, had lost their ‘radical edge’ (Carter, 2001). Therefore SSCS has arisen from and is ideologically centred on direct action, a frustration with supposed inaction, and a minimal marketing model. This means there seems likely to be more prescriptive identity boundaries as members engage in a political struggle of “us” against “them” - the outgroups being whaling and fishing industries, the regulatory agencies (e.g. the International Whaling Commission), and even other conservation groups (e.g. Greenpeace). Thus, SSCS members take on a
somewhat distinct and oppositional identity from the mainstream culture, engage in
behaviours that are often met with disapproval (because they are seen as potentially
violent), and they are required to continually justify their actions. These relations must
be continually negotiated, and one way this process of negotiation can be understood is
through the rhetorical strategies used to manage identity.

**Identity content (norms).** In addition to identity boundaries (the “us” and
“them”), the content of identity (the sense of “who we are”) makes an understanding of
boundaries more meaningful (Lamont & Molnar, 2002), and determines the extent to
which different identities impinge upon each other (Baray et al., 2009; Roccas &
Brewer, 2002). The content of the identity creates constraints on the level at which an
identity can be flexible, and how identities can overlap. For example, Baray et al. (2009)
explored the identities of members of an extreme right wing political group, and found
that strong, prescriptive ideological identities like these have implications for all levels of
self, including personal identity. Indeed, they found that members of such groups often
report a stronger sense of personal identity, representing a blurring between ostensibly
personal and social levels of self. In the environmental conservation context an example
of this might be that some groups have norms for behaviour that include prescriptions
on personal behaviours (e.g. not eating meat). However, Hunt and Benford (2004)
argue that it is not so much a question as to whether collective and personal identities
relate, but how they are negotiated, managed and experienced. Other qualitative
research speaks to this point, illustrating the ways in which these potential identity
conflicts can be managed rhetorically (e.g. Antaki, Condor, & Levine, 1996; Hopkins,
2011; Jaspal & Cinnirella, 2010). For example, Hopkins (2011)identified rhetorical
strategies used by British Muslims to understand their superordinate (British) identity
that allowed them to retain subgroup (Muslim) distinctiveness. We employ a similar approach in this research to demonstrate how conservation activists negotiate the potential conflicts created by their collective identities.

“Extreme” Social Movement Organizations

Given these points around the cultivation of symbolic identity boundaries and the role of identity content, or norms, in managing multiple identities, it is timely to consider what this would mean for the identities of people committed to social movements and particularly more radical or extreme factions of a social movement. Indeed, identity is central to how groups come to develop a sense of themselves as political actors, and also more extreme, potentially radicalized, sense of themselves as collective agents. Recent developments in the social psychology of protest have sought to distinguish between those groups that are politicized (Simon & Klandermans, 2001) and those that are radicalized (Simon & Grabow, 2010; Simon & Ruhs, 2008; van Stekelenburg & Klandermans, 2010b). Politicization of identity is understood to have occurred when a struggle becomes embedded in a broader societal context; a battle between “us” and “them” for the hearts and minds of a bystander public (Simon & Klandermans, 2001). Importantly, because politicized groups – and politicized identities – are embedded in a societal context, politicized identity promotes activism which usually falls within the accepted rules and laws of mainstream society: so-called “normative” protest (Becker, Tausch, Spears, et al., 2011; Simon & Ruhs, 2008). Conversely, radicalization of identity is understood to have occurred where groups come to reject the involvement of (or feel rejected by) mainstream society and with it “normative” methods for bringing about social change (Simon & Grabow, 2010; van Stekelenburg & Klandermans, 2010b). Radicalization tends to be associated with an
ideology which suggests that ‘the means justify the ends’ and a lack of voice which leads
to dissatisfaction and disenchantment with processes which might promote more
mainstream forms of activism (van Stekelenburg & Klandermans, 2010b). Given its
separation from (and in some cases, rejection of) “mainstream” norms, it stands to
reason that a radicalized identity would require significantly more rhetorical work to
manage and negotiate than a politicized one.

This is not least because the term ‘radical’ often has pejorative and contested
connotations (see Hopkins & Kahani-Hopkins, 2009, for a discussion of this point).
Oppositions groups can frequently work to illegitimatise, repress, or sometimes even
criminalise activists (Linden & Klandermans, 2006; Polletta & Jasper, 2001). For
example, Adair (1996) documented the subtle ways that supporters of nuclear power
worked to re-define the (anti-nuclear) activist identity, with the eventual result that
members of the movement no longer identified with the cause. In the anti-whaling
context that forms the basis of the current research, Japanese authorities and others
routinely label the activities of direct action groups like SSCS as ‘ecoterrorist’. In the
current paper we consider the actions of SSCS as radical in the sense that they adopt
more extreme, direct-action measures (e.g. confronting whalers) as a solution to
combating whaling, but we do not wish to imply that their activities are illegitimate
(indeed, as we will see, this is a notion that is hotly contested within the group
themselves). Rather, given their endorsement of more extreme actions we seek to
interrogate how group members negotiate an understanding of themselves and their
group without passing judgement on those strategies as ‘radical’ per se (Hopkins &
Kahani-Hopkins, 2009).
The implication is that people who take on these identities have to be prepared for the positive and negative “baggage” that accompanies them, and that activists’ engagement with oppositional others plays an active role in the development of their identities (Einwohner, 2002a). Indeed, we argue that the management of identity boundaries and conflicts can aid activists’ ability to attract political attention by distinguishing them within broader social movements. However, as illustrated in the opening quote by Paul Watson, they can also result in backlash and social ostracism: ‘we recruit enemies faster than we recruit supporters’. In this paper we aim to investigate the content of the identity of members of the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society, and the extent to which there exist constraints that opens them to the risk of public disapproval that needs to be managed and mitigated.

**The Present Study**

Consistent with the renewed focus on the ways in which multiple identities are negotiated, some recent research has sought to consider the rhetorical strategies that can be deployed to manage conflicting identities. The concept of ‘framing’ has been employed extensively in social movement literature to analyse the dynamic discursive/rhetorical processes involved in mobilizing ideas, and for understanding the mechanisms that facilitate the alignment of personal and collective level identities in social movements, in which the personal meaningfulness of collective action can be understood (Benford & Snow, 2000; Snow et al., 1986). Similarly here, through the analysis of commentary and interviews with the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society, we aim to analyse the discursive framing of the identities of these conservation activists, and to understand how such identities are experienced, negotiated and made meaningful.
Many researchers thus now recognise the value of using qualitative methods to understand the production, negotiation and management of social identities (e.g. Antaki et al., 1996; Hopkins, 2011; Hunt & Benford, 1994; Linden & Klandermans, 2007), and the ways in which narrative can demonstrate the complex internal and external conflicts people face in their commitment to activism (e.g. Barr & Drury, 2009; Mills & Smith, 2008; Polletta, 1998). Antaki et al. (1996, p. 488) argued that studying talk allows researchers to see how identities shift in context, and how identities are deployed to tell stories, “the speakers are…invoking social identities, negotiating what the feature or boundaries of those identities are and accumulating a record of having those identities”. The approach employed in this research is to demonstrate how conservation activists negotiate the potential conflicts created by taking on their SSCS identity.

This study involved two separate data sources: first we analyse web commentary published on the official Sea Shepherd website, written by Paul Watson. We focus this part of the analysis on the organizational identity statements Watson makes, and create an understanding of the framing of the public identity that SSCS promotes and that a SSCS member would then need to regulate. We seek to establish if, and indeed how, being a SSCS member poses the potential for social ostracism and thus how conflict is managed. We use this data to set the scene for the next section, in which we analyse interviews with key members of a local SSCS chapter. In the interview section we investigate how it is that particular SSCS members adopt and negotiate their identification with the collective identity of the SSCS, as framed by Watson, and how they manage the particular identity conflicts that occur as a result. We seek to find out how they balance the complex task of managing their identities so as to both draw attention to their distinct (and often controversial) approach to conservation, yet be
seen as legitimate and justified in their strategies. Doing so will shed light on the symbolic boundaries and possible constraints that exist around their multiple identities. This research therefore aims to respond to Snow and McAdam’s (2000) call for greater understanding of the ways in which identities are constructed and maintained at individual and collective levels.

Method

Data Collection

Web Commentary. Twenty-one editorial and commentary articles written by Paul Watson (except Article 13) were selected from the official SSCS website (http://www.seashepherd.org/news-and-media/commentary-and-editorial.html), covering the time period of June, 2009-March, 2011 (catalogue in Appendix A). To hone in on the symbolic identity boundaries and content associated with the SSCS identity, we selectively chose articles that made “we” statements about the SSCS, rather than reports on their activities.

Interviews. One of the authors made contact with SSCS members through local networks, such as through a café where many members spend their time. Participants then passed on the researcher contact details to other members of the SSCS. The interviews were conducted in public places (usually a café). The participants were core members of a local chapter, and therefore we gained valuable access to highly engaged activists.

Six interviews took place between August and September, 2010. They ranged from 39 to 113 minutes (average of 77 minutes), participant ages ranged from eighteen to sixty five (average just under forty). There were five men and one woman, and they
self-identified as activists for an average of two and a third years. Two participants reported having been on the anti-whaling missions to Antarctica, the others were land-based and responsible for marketing and fundraising. One participant was paid an income by the SSCS. Informed consent was gained from all participants. All interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed orthographically. All names and identifying information have been removed or changed.

The interviewer used an interview guide but oriented the questions towards participants’ responses, and referred to previous interviews as a guide to the subsequent ones. The main interview questions this analysis centred on were, “do you think it takes a particular kind of person to be involved in SCSS?”, “do you feel like becoming a part of SCSS changed you as a person?”, and “would you say there are any qualities that Sea Shepherd members have in common?”.

**Methodological Approach and Procedure**

The thematic analytic approach as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006) was used as a guide for both of the data sources. This approach is highly flexible and has no pre-existing epistemological or theoretical framework. As such it can be used within any chosen epistemology, so long as the chosen epistemology and its assumptions are made clear and consistent. The process of undertaking thematic analysis involves identifying, interpreting and analysing repeated themes or patterns within talk. The interpretations that can be made from these themes again depend on the epistemological position (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

We adopted a critical realist epistemology, which acknowledges that people actively construct their identity and meaning through language and social context, but that also believes that social reality while jointly constructed, can be known and analysed
within certain limitations (Sullivan, 2010). Critical realism rejects the notion that language simply reflects ‘reality’ (Sullivan, 2010), while also creating a path forward from some of the restrictions of the social constructionist perspective, in particular the difficulty in asking questions about social structures that could constrain or influence discourses (Marsh & Smith, 2000; Sims-Schouten et al., 2007). The critical realist thematic analytic approach we have adopted therefore could be considered a hybrid method, one which is being developed by qualitative researchers in order to move beyond the ‘relativism-realism debate’ (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Sims-Schouten et al., 2007; Sullivan, 2010).

The hybrid approach allows us to both attempt to interpret participants’ sense of subjectivity and meaning-making, and the ways in which such reflected their belonging to an existing social organization (a socio-political reality), while also identifying discursive practices and rhetorical devices (as in discursive psychology, Edwards & Potter, 1992). In our analysis of how participants rhetorically construct their identities, rather than focus on the within-interaction talk, we refer to the broader context, or non-discursive element in which the SSCS organization fits; for example, the ways in which Watson’s collective level construction of the SSCS identity may be a reflection of the organizations’ position and history within the conservation movement. Braun and Clarke (2006) argue that while thematic analysis may not allow interpretation of the functionality of talk as much as discourse analysis may there is still the ability to identify certain discursive actions, such as the deflection of criticism or the establishment of reasonableness.

The analytical procedures for the web commentary started with identifying the most common statements Watson made about who the SSCS are, and what
distinguishes them from other groups. Many of these articles were written by Watson in response to either critical media coverage or correspondence between SSCS and Greenpeace, and conveyed arguments by Watson that functioned to justify and legitimise SSCS actions. Therefore, these articles allowed us to address research questions regarding how the SSCS collective identity is constructed in response to public and other social movement groups’ perceptions of SSCS. It also created an understanding of the types of conflicts and criticism that individual members are likely to have to rhetorically work with, and thus grounds the second part of our analysis.

For the interviews we focused the analysis on identifying themes which were directed both by our research questions and our adaptation to what the interviewees said. We focused our research questions on: how members joined and fitted in with the organization; the perceptions of the organizations’ influence on their identity; how ideological conflict, and conflict over labelling strategies, are managed both within the group, and between the group and the general public; and how much ‘space’ or flexibility they had in their identities as members.

Analysis and Discussion

Web Commentary Analysis

We structure the commentary analysis around the main organizational value statements and “we” statements Watson made. It can be seen that Watson establishes several striking, apparently paradoxical, claims about who the SSCS are. Firstly, Watson explicitly owns (and reinterprets), the “pirate” label often ascribed to SSCS, as seen in the following response to an editorial in *The Australian* newspaper:
I have no problem with the headline of your article that “Whaling protesters are behaving like pirates”, except with the word “protesters.” We may be pirates, but we are not protesters. I hate that name actually, it sounds so submissive, “please, please don’t kill the whales.” I’ve never seen a banner, petition, or a hunger strike that has saved a whale - not a one. We on the other hand have cut Japan’s kill quota by a quarter to a half each year for the last five seasons.

No Natalie, we don’t protest. We intervene against illegal whaling.

We don’t like coming down here year after year. But we come because the signatories to the treaties and laws are doing nothing, just as the British did very little to stop piracy in the Caribbean in the 17th Century. Governments are doing even less today to stop the pirates diminishing life in the sea. Thus we have no choice than to be pirates of compassion in opposing the pirates of greed. (Article 16)

The identity of SSCS as pirates, as stated by Watson, was self-chosen. He states that they had “no choice” but to become “pirates of compassion” because governments do nothing to stop “pirates of greed” from killing marine life. Watson, in fact, objects to being called a protester because he claims it is submissive and ineffective; thus he distinguishes SSCS from other conservation groups (c.f. Greenebaum, 2009, who found that the animal rights workers actively disavowed the label "activist"). The “pirates of compassion” rhetoric is one example of the deliberately paradoxical labels the SSCS have adopted; another example is the notion of being “gentle terrorists”, in which SSCS position themselves alongside other activists who have been labeled as terrorists and criminals.

It’s a funny world where vegetarians who have never injured a single person can be denounced as terrorists by nations that have committed gross and horrific acts of genocide and habitat destruction. It’s killers flashing peace symbols as they denounce the “viciousness” of writers, poets, philosophers and teachers.

In a world where the Dalai Lama is a “terrorist” then there is only one possible thing to be ourselves.

And so I stand with His Holiness the Dalai Lama, in the noble memory of Gandhi and King, and in respect for gentle terrorists around the world from Nelson Mandela to Aung San Suu Kyi.
For in the end, it will be the pirates that bring down the pirates, the outlaws that will uphold the law and the gentle terrorists that will prevail over the brutal terrorism of nation states, corporations and organized crime. (Article 19).

The danger the SSCS face is thus positioned as selfless sacrifice, ‘us against an unjust world’. Watson argues that in fact they are the ones who are being treated violently by the ‘real’ terrorists and pirates, and that SSCS, like few others in the world, will work to “prevail over the brutal terrorism of nation states, corporations and organized crime”. The rhetorical work distinguishing SSCS and justifying their choice in strategy is furthered by another seemingly paradoxical notion, of “aggressive non-violence”. In the article below, in response to accusations of violence from Greenpeace, Watson draws on a Buddhist notion of “compassionate wrath” in which they practice “intimidation without injury”.

**Greenpeace**: We believe that throwing butyric acid at the whalers, dropping cables to foul their props, and threatening to ram them in the freezing waters of the Antarctic constitutes violence because of the potential consequences. The fact that the consequences have not been realized is irrelevant.

**Captain Paul Watson**: After three decades of operations, we have proven our expertise in getting results without causing injuries or committing felonies. The test of non-violence is consequences, and Sea Shepherd has exercised extreme caution to save lives without causing injury. We practise non-violence in the spirit of Hayagriva, the Buddhist idea of aggressive non-violence or the exercise of compassionate wrath. In others words, intimidation without injury for the purpose of achieving enlightenment. (Article 6)

The constitution of violence differs- Greenpeace state that violence is determined by its potential consequences, while Watson states that violence is determined by actual consequences. The key to the concept of aggressive non-violence seems to resolve around intention; they do not intend to cause injury, despite the fact that their actions put people at risk.
Overall Watson continually throughout the web commentary works to create an identity of the SSCS as an altogether different kind of conservation movement. As he says below, “we are not your old school greenies”

The fact is that Sea Shepherd Conservation Society cannot be categorized as a “terrorist” organization, because we are something completely different. We are not your old school greenies. We don’t hold banners, bear witness, sit in trees, hold picket signs, collect petitions, and write to politicians. What we do is get in the faces of those who are illegally—and violently—destroying our oceans. We practice aggressive non-violent direct action. We don’t hurt people, but we have no hesitation about taking out of commission the instruments of death that are used to illegally kill living beings. (Article 1)

Indeed, clearly coming through in this example is the frustration SSCS have with “old school greenies” and protesters, as discussed earlier. There is both a strong sense of justification for their choice in strategy, while also distinguishing themselves from other conservation groups, stating that SSCS avoids “categorization”. Therefore Watson rhetorically works to avoid categorization or classification, by establishing SSCS as unique. Further, what is described as unique about SSCS is that they are especially “passionate”, in a way that protesters are not.

I am sometimes simply awed by the drive and determination of these incredible people. They are what makes Sea Shepherd what it is – the most passionate, most active, most effective marine conservation organization in the world. (Article 10)

Sea Shepherd could not exist nor accomplish anything without our volunteers. Volunteers bring passion to a cause, the kind of passion that can’t be hired or bought. It is that passion that makes us effective, and defines who we are. (Article 14)

It seems clear that Watson develops a representation of the SSCS identity around seemingly paradoxical principles of non-criminal piracy, compassionate wrath and aggressive non-violence; he also represents members as distinctive through their passion. On the basis of this analysis we conclude that there are indeed problematic or
controversial aspects of the SSCS identity which require rhetorical management amongst people who take on such an identity. Indeed, the SSCS webpage offers crucial insights as to the sorts of conflicts that are likely to require identity management amongst members of this group (e.g. the use of direct action, the label of ‘pirates’, ‘ecoterrorists’, and perhaps even ‘protesters’). This analysis also yields insights into some of the strategies that may be deployed in this management. Of note are Watson’s use of rhetoric to characterize the SSCS as the aggressed against, rather than the aggressors, and his insistence that the SSCS can’t be classified because of their distinctive or unique passion. In the interview analysis, we further interrogate how these identity complexities and conflicts are managed by members of the SSCS themselves.

**Interviews**

In the interview analysis our aims were to examine how members adopted and negotiated the SSCS identity, how they established themselves as unique and yet also as unremarkable or ‘normal’, and how they managed identity conflict in relation to their public identity as SSCS members. We present the most common ways of talking about these topics from across the interviews, but we also note some novel cases of variation in talk between the interviewees. We have grouped the findings first into how members negotiate public perceptions of SSCS, and then we examine how the members negotiate their own (personal) identification with the organization.

**The Public Identity of SSCS**

In this first section of the interview analysis we focus on the aspects of SSCS member identity that the interviewees talked about in relation to their interactions with the public. It was apparent that the self-chosen identity as ‘pirates’ required continual
justification. In addition an expectation that SSCS members are vegans was reported to have caused some issues both within the organization and with the general public.

**Pirates**

As discussed in the web commentary analysis, the ‘pirate’ identity is explicitly taken on by SSCS and the use of rhetoric to negotiate around the negative connotations of this label was a key feature of these interviews. In talk about the labels ‘pirate’, ‘hardcore’ activists, or ‘renegades’, instances of public backlash and the implications this has for members became evident. The uses of these terms at times were positive or non-serious, yet at other times identified as something that SSCS need to move away from. There was seen in much of the talk, as the following example displays, a contrast between at times describing themselves as somewhat ordinary or indistinguishable people, and then also discussing the extremity of some of the groups’ actions, particularly when it comes to life endangering missions to Antarctica.

Extract 1

P3 yeah well it’s kinda like, almost like they’re [SSCS] hardcore, you know, like pirates of the sea, that actually go out and do something and it’s all exciting and all that, but in reality it’s probably not haha

INTVWR yeah

P3 most of the year it’s probably pretty boring

INTVWR I imagine so. Yeah I’m dreading the next Antarctic mission there, like err operation no compromise?

P3 yeah

INTVWR just about... just if things keep escalating.

P3 I think it’s going to get rather rough, I think someone will lose their life soon.

INTVWR yeah. It’s going that way isn’t it

P3 mm. Like Paul Watson says, you know … his question is, would you give your life for a whale?

INTVWR yeah I know. He asks that of everyone on his crew doesn’t he?

P3 yeah. so, well... I wouldn’t. haha

INTVWR well yeah

P3 would I give my life for a whale? mmm maybe... would I give my life for Paul Watson if he told me to go and stink bomb a ship? mmm probably not. At all. haha
P3 speaks of the possibility of someone losing their life, and although he clearly speaks of his unwillingness to do so, there is a sense of inevitability of escalating danger in their missions. What is of particular interest in this extract is the mixture of both laughing off the stereotype of SSCS as “hardcore…pirates of the sea”, because “in reality it’s probably not [exciting]”, and then also speaking of the potential of someone losing their life.

As seen above, the issue was raised on occasion whereby non-members and new members expect SSCS to be an exciting ‘put your life on the line’ organization. The radical image of SSCS apparently attracts some people, but was also said to turn other people away - either because they do not like the idea of being ‘pirates’ or even in some cases when SSCS does not turn out to be as extreme as they would like. Indeed, P1 described the “crazy” nature of the SSCS as what attracted him to the group originally.

Extract 2

P1 I was watching the news at night time and there was all this stuff about…what was going on in Antarctica, and they were mainly extenuating Greenpeace, and then they just mentioned there’s this other group, down there, who are a little more hardcore… and the more I read about them, the more I thought these guys are CRAZY you know, I gotta support them for sure

P1 describes the “hardcore” nature of the SSCS as an attractive factor to him. The statement, “these guys are CRAZY”, is in this context a compliment to their confrontational style. Therefore the labelling of the group as pirates or “hardcore” activists seems to have negative or positive connotations depending on the context. In this case being “a little more hardcore” or “crazy” was an exciting and attractive drawcard. Yet, as we demonstrate later, sometimes the notion of being hardcore was undesirable.
Overall, it was evident in the interviewees talk the ambivalence they possess towards the pirate identity, and its utility when engaging with the public, as seen below.

Extract 3
P4 We don’t have enough support with our group to do what we need to do. The general public is the mass that we have to move forward. So if we can pull more from the masses into support us and think that we’re not a radical group of, you know, whatever, I think that’s the message.
INTVWR but then, Sea Shepherd’s kinda become the radical group, it’s like the um
P4 it has, I mean, the colour, black, with the skull and cross bones, that speaks for itself.

Extract 4
P2 there’s a lot of people out there that... but, I mean, they're just... they can’t... they live in their box world where they can’t see outside. Umm, I don’t know its, the public reaction is always constantly changing, you can’t put a finger on it. I mean, most of Australia is anti-whaling, and it’s always going to be that way, but yeah, it just seems like, everything constantly changes, like, so one year we’ll have the whole... every person who walks past will go yeahhhhh and then one year everyone will be like really, aggressively against us.
INTVWR yeah. So do you encounter much hostility when you’re at the stalls then?
P2 yeah a lot. A lot of people think we're criminals
INTVWR yeah
P2 <unclear> if you boarded our ship we’d cut your throat and throw you overboard type thing. He’s like, people on... Australia as a society is sort of...very set in their ways I think

Extract 5
P5 I think even negative media promotes Sea Shepherd? Sure, if they’re showing us interfering with the whalers down there, great. You know? If they call that criminal, great.
INTVWR and I think a lot of people are even lured to the fact that they’re slightly renegade? Just like the flag’s a giveaway.
P5 well Paul... well he said you’ve gotta send a pirate to catch a pirate. And, he thinks that, this is Watson, thinks that... well doesn’t think... we are, we're pirates of passion against pirates of profit.

P4, who has marketing experience, speaks of the desire to move away from the radical image in order to gain the much needed support from “the masses”, yet acknowledges the SSCS flag carries the skull and cross-bones image. P2 tells how the public reactions to the SSCS actions can vary greatly, sometimes the public is supportive
while at other times they are “aggressively against us”, and “a lot of people think we’re criminals”. Yet P5 says that even negative media helps their organization, “if they call that criminal, great”. This talk varied greatly between members, indicating an intrinsic dilemma for the group as they seek to position themselves as both legitimate and distinctive; as a group that is willing to take necessary actions that no one else will.

**Vegans/Vegetarians**

The other aspect of ‘public’ identity conflict that was raised in all of the interviews was the perception that SSCS is a strictly vegan organization. It became apparent that there is, or has been in the past, an expectation that the organization is vegan both from members and from the general public.

Extract 6

P1 …some of them are vegans, they…. some of them seem to think that Sea Shepherd is a vegan organization... we’ve had a few, well we’ve had one guy in particular who thought it was, but then…
INTVWR I thought, I thought the diet on the ships was vegan?
P1 oh don’t believe everything out there…
...
P1 yeah it’s not vegan it’s vegetarian and there’s also rumours of people having meat on board and shit... I think they’re trying to get away from that a bit because it’s… it’s kind of hard to… err... you don’t really want to be known as a hard lined vegan
INTVWR yeah
P1 it kind of detracts… you want to be more mainstream, popular, mum-and-dad, and...
...
P1 we had one, who, as I told you, or think I told you, he disappeared when I bought a pizza for [name] that vegan, a peperoni pizza, he thought we were all vegans and when he found out we weren’t, he was gone like he’d seen the devil was after him
...
P1 well he thought we were all hardcore vegans.

Extract 7

P2 …the vegan presence in the organization is... it’s not what it’s made out to be type thing. And like, people are vegan for their own reasons
P1 attends to perceptions of the organization as “hard lined” or “hardcore” vegans, and that there are attempts to pull back from this image. He dismisses the issue as “rumours” and clarifies that rather than the SSCS ships being vegan, they are vegetarian, and that there is a need to be “more mainstream, popular”. Being vegetarian seems then to be indicated as milder, more mainstream. The notion of being “hardcore vegan” appears to imply an unwieldy and inflexible ideological position that they are keen to move away from. Likewise, P2 in the extract above attends to a normative expectation of veganism, and states that “it’s not what it’s made out to be”, indicating a clear history of discussion around the issue. He also defends the possibility that SSCS may play a role in influencing people’s choices; rather “people are vegan for their own reasons”.

In addition to perceptions of the organization as vegan, one interviewee did say it had caused some conflict among group members also.

Extract 8

P3 A lot of people are the vegans you know?
INTVWR yeah yeah
P3 and um, there’s not many, but a few of them are. And they like to, you know, almost wear a badge. Like I’m a vegan, and so should you be. But people aren’t, so... there’s a few things like that that people can get a bit narky about, but
INTVWR so do you have a regular diet? Or are you vegetarian?
P3 oh I just eat whatever I want, whenever I want.
INTVWR fair enough.
P3 yeah it doesn’t worry me. But if I go off and like, if I take my children with me to a stall, which they, they really enjoy it as well, they like to have Hungry Jacks or something like that,
INTVWR yeah sure
P3 which the vegans don’t like, so you can’t eat it in front of them?

There is some backtracking in P3’s description of the extent to which veganism is normative within the SSCS. At first he states “a lot of people are the vegans”, then “there’s not many, but a few of them are”, perhaps an attempt to minimise its importance overall. In the story of taking his children to the stalls with burgers he
describes a need at times to negotiate social situations in order to avoid a clash of ideologies between himself and “the vegans”, who are described as “wearing badges” and quite outspoken.

As seen in the extracts below the interviewees described their own reasons for being vegetarian.

Extract 9

**INTVWR** are you a vegetarian or a vegan or?

**P2** err vegetarian I guess you could call me yeah

**INTVWR** and um, is that because, like, you didn’t feel any obligation to um, do that?

**P2** no um, like it wasn’t sort of because of Sea Shepherd and all that, just sort of like probably a couple months in, obviously there’s animal rights activists in Sea Shepherd and um, I saw a documentary on one of the tables…And I watched *Earthlings*, and was like oh, maybe I shouldn’t (be like that) and it’s like, it was sort of just, and at the same time it was more like I sort of needed a change in lifestyle to eat more healthy and stuff

Extract 10

**P1** yeah I just discovered that all the people that I that I deal with at the stall, most of them are vegetarians or vegans, they all seem pretty switched on and pretty healthy, thought there must be something in it

Both P1 and P2 within a short period of time of joining the SSCS decided to reduce meat-eating or become vegetarian. However the position they take is that while it often goes hand in hand with being a member of the SSCS, the members are in no way pressured to be vegetarian. They seek to describe the SSCS as an inclusive and accepting organization, in which normal differences and debates exist. In contrast to the excitement of being “hardcore” expressed in extract 2, present in the talk of veganism was a movement away from being known as “hard lined” or “hardcore”. This demonstrates how the boundaries of the identity can be flexibly negotiated in response to the connotations resulting from the adoption of that identity, and provides an answer to our question as to how members of the SSCS negotiate prescriptive identities
through their talk in ways that allow them to emerge as both ‘ordinary’ and ‘extraordinary’.

**Personal Identification with SSCS**

This section deals with members ‘personal’ identity management rather than their management of the public and collective SSCS identity (though it is difficult to truly separate the two; Baray et al., 2009). By ‘personal’ we are referring to the processes of integration within the overall self with this specific aspect of the collective self. Our aims in this section are to identify how members align their personal identities with the group, what it is that members say they have in common, and also how they distinguish themselves as individuals, which was heavily emphasised throughout the interviews.

**Adoption of the SSCS Member Identity**

All but one of the interviewees described a smooth unproblematic transition from being interested in the SSCS cause, to joining and becoming core members of the organization. They described personal motivations for the origin of their interest in conservation. For example:

**Extract 11**

P6 I thought there was inherently something wrong with the world and the way that our current system operates in the world, but I couldn’t put my finger on it until I started reading a lot of Captain Paul Watson’s writings, and then I was like, that’s exactly how I feel about the world, and I wasn’t alone and there was a group of people out there that saw that there was something wrong with the world.

**Extract 12**

P3 so I just went down there, take the kids

INTVWR yeah that’s a pretty good entry.

P3 had a look around, spoke to a few of the guys there. Went back the next day, bought some t-shirts... and then went down again, and asked how you volunteer. One of the leading directors here said, yep, come down to the next stall, so I did, and then, met all everyone and seemed to fit in quite well, so.
Note that the participants did not appear to experience the joining of the organization as a transitional process, but as an easy alignment with a group that already met their personal values (“[I] seemed to fit in quite well”). However one interviewee expressed initially expecting an incompatibility between SSCS and her own identity.

Extract 13

INTVWR so you identify with them even [[Sea shepherd]]?
P4 yeah definitely, I didn’t, and I’ve said this to [name], I didn’t know much about the truth of Sea Shepherd before I got involved, I thought it was this group of radicals, who went out like pirates of the sea
INTVWR yahoos, sort of thing?
P4 yahoos. And, not in a bad way, in a very political, adventurous, risk-taking kind of way, and I didn’t want to associate myself with them, because I thought I’m not that person, would they accept me? Probably not. I mightn’t be the right fit, so I didn’t join, because I was more concerned with whether they would want me?

P4 describes a concern that she would not be “the right fit” with the SSCS, which she had visualised according to a stereotype; a stereotype that was changed upon meeting members of the group. Her expectation of the group as being “radicals” or “pirates” was not necessarily a negative label but rather did not fit with her sense of herself overall. It can be seen in this one example at least, that people can experience reservations about an activist group based on a socially available stereotype or expectation that has the potential to pose barriers to interested parties joining the organization, in particular with SSCS the idea of being a ‘radical’ or ‘pirate’. P4 however presented her concerns as normal and unremarkable, in which she overcame this barrier and later on described feeling positively integrated with the organization.

‘It does take a particular passion’

In our attempt to determine whether participants perceived there to be a typical SSCS identity, we probed interviewees for what qualities or characteristics the members have in common. They seemed to at times have difficulty articulating precisely ‘what it
takes’ to be a member of the SSCS and did not identify any particular identity requirements. However as seen in the web commentary analysis previously, an emphasis on “passion”, “caring” and “compassion” arose. In the talk about passion it was at times implied as something extraordinary, which few people possess.

Extract 14

P2 I think it takes um someone with a level mind and um, whose. I think there’s a realisation in humans that’s like, it’s hard... like even... how do I put this? I think um, you know, when someone’s like, think about, people are really selfish and divulged into their own lives and couldn’t give a shit about the environment or human rights or whatever it may be, and it’s very commonable now and I think, it takes a person to actually give a shit, or actually care. And it’s like, it’s really rare now I think?

... INTVWR like [[SSCS]] gives you the opportunity to make a difference or?

P2 yeah I mean it sort of, if you want to positively effect the world around you, or make a change, then yeah, it would, but it’s sort of like, usually the people we’ve come across already done that before? There’s not many people that think oh, this is a new concept, you know

INTVWR oh so you’ve found that Sea Shepherd will bring in the people that already care, but won’t get, can’t make other people care?

P2 yeah I mean like, the thing with Sea Shepherd is, like you really really hate it or you really really like it. And it’s sort of like,

INTVWR yeah that’s one of the things we’ll talk about

P2 those parts of people, the people that are really really gonna like it are those that are caring and compassionate, and.

Extract 15

P3 um... there’s a lot of hardcore people, activists type, who um, you know really feel for the environment and the whales and all that sort of stuff, they obviously like stay and join because they think they’re doing something really important. Other people get excited by it. They turn up for... have a look around, say they’re gonna turn up but never do, or turn up for the last two hours and think, well this is really boring. You know, standing out in the middle of the street shaking a can, or, um, and that maybe don’t fit in with the local members that have maybe been members for a while, so they don’t come back.

The interviewees said that the people who like SSCS are those who are caring and compassionate. Passion was described as being “rare”; therefore by association SSCS members are implied to be a rare sort of person. A polarisation of people who oppose or support the cause was also indicated in Extract 14, people “really really hate”
or “really really like” SSCS. The terms “hardcore” or “activists” (extract 15) were also often used to indicate a distinctively passionate person, who was likely to become a dedicated member.

Passion was also identified as distinguishing SSCS from other conservation groups, such as Greenpeace. This rhetorical differentiation of SSCS and Greenpeace was a re-occurring theme in the interviews overall.

Extract 16

**INTVWR** Do you think it takes like a particular type of person to be a Sea Shepherd member? Or does anybody, can anybody fit in?

**P5** I think anybody can, but it does take a particular passion to errr... follow it through the whole way I think

**INTVWR** what do you mean by follow it through?

**P5** as in you can put your donations into Sea Shepherd... but... I think Sea Shepherd encourages more of the either ... not so much outspoken but, more of the radicals as compared to Greenpeace, in people that are passionate about wanting to make a difference. Sure Greenpeace has got it, but it does take a different type of person to be involved with Sea Shepherd.

**INTVWR** ok. Um, so if you had to say anything that like, all members had in common, would you say that kind of passion or radical flare or something?

**P5** no I wouldn’t say radical flare, I just think they’re passionate about the earth, and where it’s heading. Ummm... yeah I think that’s as close as we can put it. I’m sure there’s a lot of Greenpeace members out there that are passionate about what’s happening with the world, but umm I guess things don’t happen quick enough in big organizations for a lot of people, and therefore a niche becomes available for Sea Shepherd.

**P5** draws on comparisons to Greenpeace, by claiming the SSCS organization cares more, are more “passionate about what’s happening with the world” (and thus more willing to take direct action) than the Greenpeace organization. P5 pulls back a little from the description of SSCS members as “radical”, and rephrases this to being “passionate about the earth, and where it’s heading”. Passion was also translated across to the notion of being action-oriented, in which other types of actions were classed as not doing anything.
Extract 17

P1 Greenpeace doesn’t, hasn’t saved any whales they just err just go down and take pictures, they err, I get pissed off ‘cause they bring so much money in on the backs of whales, and then they don’t do anything.

The style of activism carried out by Greenpeace (such as taking photographs, petitions, through diplomatic channels, and raising public awareness) is described as not doing anything. Thus in the talk about passion we can see hints of the symbolic boundaries that distinguish the committed SSCS members, the defining quality being ‘passion’ which carries the implication of them being people who are actually ‘doing’ something or making a difference.

‘SSCS is diverse’

In an ostensible contrast to the emphasis, described above, on the ‘particular passion’ of SSCS members, SSCS was also described by interviewees as a diverse organization that welcomes people “from all walks of life”, and that is composed of a range of people who have different reasons for being members.

Extract 18

P2 I think Sea Shepherd um attracts people from all walks of life and it’s not like some people are like well I’d rather... it’s like weird, because you get animal rights people that believe you shouldn’t be killing any animals at all, and then there’s also scientists, that say you’re decimating an endangered population, then you’ve got you know redneck territorial guys that are like yeah do it in Japans waters, get the fuck out of you know Australia sort of. So it’s like everyone has a different reason, and everyone’s got different levels of compromise for wanting to support the organization.

P2 says that different sub-groups of people have integrated into the same organization, which he describes as “weird” to have “animal rights people”, “scientists” and “redneck territorial guys” who all support the SSCS. Thus the SSCS was described as an inclusive and welcoming organization, and this was packaged as seemingly contrary to expectation, particularly once again when contrasted to Greenpeace.
Extract 19

P2 it’s obvious, Greenpeace are out for money, and it’s like, they’re a very cut throat type organization. Like, um, sort of like, they’re very specific in the type of environmentalist they want.

In contrast to extract 16 where P5 said “[it takes] a different type of person to be involved with Sea Shepherd”, in this extract P2 describes Greenpeace as being very specific in the type of environmentalist they want (and by implication that SSCS does not require a specific type of environmentalist). This talk appears to serve a different function to that in extract 15, in that P2 is defending an allusion to the possibility of SSCS placing strict requirements on its members.

In addition, the apparent diversity and flexibility in the SSCS organization was often described by the interviewees to be based on the voluntary nature of their membership, which was also tied to their direct action approach.

Extract 20

P3 …the thing is there’s no contracts so it’s, if people don’t, how do you say it? They need members, period. In the local [city] chapter, and they need people who are actually going to do something about it. So they can’t, they can’t, be allowed to, or want to, say “look if you want to be Sea Shepherd, you have to be this or this or this”, because they’ll go, the people who are trying to work, will just leave.

Extract 21

P1 He’s (Paul Watson) just... brilliant. He’s on a different plane from most of us, the way that, the depth of his thinking, what he’s interested in. He writes poems, and he’s a hopeless romantic with girls and whatnot... yep. Most amazing man I’ve ever met.

INTVWR sounds like that yeah

P1 makes it sound like we’re some sort of... err... he’s the guru or what do they call them? not a clique?

INTVWR a cult?

P1 cult that’s it. But it’s not that way at all.

…

P1 But that’s sort of our strength, is our diversity, like, everybody, ‘cause we’re not all cut from the same cloth, everybody has different context. Somebody knows a band, somebody knows a reporter.... and you know? And that makes us makes us, sort of, strong

…

P1 yeah I don’t think we're a movement or a cause
INTVWR oh I see
P1 I don’t know what the hell we are.

In extract 20, P3 suggests that the SSCS simply need members who are going to “do something”, i.e. are action-oriented and willing to put in the work rather than fit a certain image, and that if members were pressured to fit a particular image they would leave. Additionally in extract 21, P1 says that the organizations’ diversity is their strength. This then forms the basis of his next striking statement, that SSCS are not “a movement or cause”, he says, “I don’t know what the hell we are”. He also anticipates the notion that SSCS could be similar to a cult, particularly in their admiration of Paul Watson. Even what would be considered quite loose descriptions (“movement” and “cause”), did not sufficiently capture for him, the unstructured nature of the SSCS. This resembles the statements Paul Watson made in the web analysis; that SSCS is not like “old school greenies”. The identity being created in this rhetoric is that of an organization that escapes definition, in which they understand themselves as a ‘collection of individuals’.

However, P4, although stating something similar to in the previous extract, implies that there is a certain ‘brand’ within SSCS.

Extract 22

P4 and one thing I was worried about initially is that I’m not a vegetarian, and that I work in a corporate world, and deal with mining companies, and all those kind of things, and it doesn’t make a difference.

INTVWR so potentially touchy things, but it was ok?
P4 yep…. [Australian coordinator] from the top down will say that, you know, that it’s your choice to follow us, and you have to adopt our ethos for you know, the planet, but you don’t have to be any particular thing, all you have to do is remember you represent the brand, and don’t do anything that we wouldn’t endorse. But you don’t have to be a vegetarian or anything like that.

P4, who as described earlier was the one interviewee who had experienced reservations about whether she would be the right fit with SCSS, speaks further of her
initial concerns: of the fact that she isn’t a vegetarian and that she works in “a corporate world”. She then goes on to say that SSCS coordinators tell their members they “don’t have to be any particular thing”, however they do have to “remember you represent the brand, and don’t do anything that we wouldn’t endorse”. While explicit rules or expectations of members do not seem to be present, there is the allusion in this talk to an implicit brand or ethos, thus making the boundaries of the collective SSCS identity somewhat indistinguishable.

**Conclusion**

This research sought to contribute to an incipient but growing body of literature which considers the ways that multiple, competing identities are managed in social and political contexts (e.g. Baray et al., 2009; Hopkins, 2011; Jaspal & Cinnirella, 2010). Our research also contributes to a large body of social movement literature on how collective action frames align with individual actors (Benford & Snow, 2000; Snow et al., 1986). As discussed below, our analysis develops an understanding of the “us” and “them” boundaries drawn by SSCS, and thus the potential identity conflicts that might be experienced by members of the organization. Our focus was on identifying the rhetorical negotiation of identity boundaries at a collective level, and then on developing an understanding of how SSCS members negotiate and manage their overall sense of themselves, given the aspects of the SSCS collective identity that pose the potential for conflict. Below we consider the findings and implications for these two questions.

**Group-level Symbolic Boundaries**

In regards to the boundaries of the collective SSCS identity defined through the website commentary, we found that Paul Watson made strong and ostensibly paradoxical claims regarding who the Sea Shepherds are: non-criminal pirates; gentle
terrorists; aggressively non-violent. The juxtapositions used by Watson serve to avoid categorization as “old school greenies” or “protesters”, despite also somewhat paradoxically owning controversial labels (e.g. “pirates”). By redefining notions of terrorism or piracy in positive terms through the use of a nuanced new language, the sense of “us” is framed in relation to both oppositional groups (“pirates of profit”) and more moderate environmental groups (“protesters”). Emphasising their distinctiveness was a demonstration of how the claims of a social movement group can be expressive of identity, and can be used to rationalise action (Polletta & Jasper, 2001); that is, the identity of a “pirate of passion” allows them to undertake controversial and confrontational activities in a way that refutes (or reinterprets) arguments that what they are doing is illegitimate, irrational or unreasonable. The identity claim that they are ‘aggressively non-violent’ acts to rhetorically re-cast the SSCS from the perpetrators of aggression (as they are accused of being, most notably by Japanese authorities and Greenpeace; see Article 6) into the victims of it. By arguing for an identity characterised by a respectful, strategic use of aggression, Watson characterises SSCS as positively and uniquely committed to action on whaling.

Interviews with core members of the group showed analogous processes whereby interviewees shifted between disavowing and owning the ‘radical’ label. By disavowing a radical identity they normalise their identities, and in doing so they reflect the view that ‘everyone could be an environmentalist’ and espouse what Wright (Wright, 2009, p. 871) would consider a conversionary collective action focus (where the focus is on conversion to the cause rather than confronting un-equal intergroup status relations per se). Here, the sense of “us” was at times defined by presenting the identity boundaries to becoming a SSCS member as being minimal; people from “all
walks of life” can become members so long as they are passionate. Yet ‘passion’ seemed to be presented as an essential and un-learnable quality rather than an adaptable behaviour, and although they stated there were no identity requirements per se, the frequently stated view that there are few people in the world who are passionate enough works to account for SSCS’s position on the radical fringe as not a deliberate, exclusionary choice, but as an unfortunate reflection of the scarcity of passionate commitment to conservation.

Therefore, the identity boundaries of the SSCS as defined through the web commentary were shown to be dynamic and responsive to the criticisms that were being defended against (c.f. Einwohner, 2002a). This belies an identity which needs to be continually defended, maintained and negotiated by Watson and members of the organization, in order to legitimise their (in Watson’s words) “completely different” approach to conservation. We found a nuanced rhetorical negotiation of their identities as both ‘ordinary’ (and thus the boundaries as being minimal), but also ‘extraordinary’ (and thus emphasising their uniqueness).

**Individual Level Management of Identity Content**

A secondary focus of the current research was to consider how individual members rhetorically manage their multiple identities, and how they manage an overall sense of themselves (“self”). Here the key findings centred around an emphasis on personal agency and diversity. Interviewees managed the prescriptive social (i.e. being seen as a radical) and personal (i.e. dietary requirements) consequences of their SSCS identity through rhetorically re-positioning perceptions of the organization as individual level decisions. That is, when being ‘hardcore’ or ‘passionate’ implied a rigid or extreme ideology, it seemed that SSCS members’ method of reducing such implications was to
emphasise personal (individual) freedoms and flexibility. In contrast, when being ‘hardcore’ or ‘passionate’ highlighted their willingness to create change in marine conservation it was presented as positive and uniting.

The talk about the perceptions of the organization from outside groups also highlighted the need for constant negotiation of the SSCS identity, and it was clear that this identity work was not straightforward for the members to negotiate. For example, before P4 met SSCS members she was concerned that she would not be the “right fit”, and that they were “a group of radicals”. Further examples were evident in the range of discourses around wanting to be seen as effective and exciting, while also wanting to pull back being too “hard lined” or “radical”. The talk around the suggestion that SSCS was a vegan organization demonstrated the members’ attention to, and even anticipation of, the suggestion that the organization might impose vegan requirements upon its members. The “vegan presence” they said, was not what it was “made out to be”, and veganism/vegetarianism was heavily emphasised as personal choice.

In addition, the talk about “passion” demonstrates how personal identities can come to be seen as congruent with the collective interest, as the individuals’ level of passion was presented as uniting all SSCS members around their common cause. Although passion was not portrayed as being ‘required’ by the organization, it was drawn on to explain how these otherwise disparate individuals came together as members of the only conservation organization that sufficiently met their passionate commitment to ‘really do something’. In a way this rhetorical work did actually serve to create a particular identity; an identity as freely choosing individual volunteers who are members of the SSCS (only) because of a shared passion for conservation. That is, the predominant way in which members achieved collective identity distinctiveness, while
maintaining legitimacy, was to actively disavow any sense of a ‘compulsory’ or uniform identity, and emphasize the diversity amongst members.

The construction of SSCS identity here also works to limit the kinds of inferences that may be drawn about a person based on their membership; by emphasising the ‘amazing’ diversity among members, an individual member can distance him/herself from particular behaviours or characteristics in other members that they may not wish to personally ‘take on’. This was particularly evident around the question as to whether or not each member is willing to risk their life for a whale (extract 1); it serves as a strategy for reducing danger to an individual level decision, as oppose to attributing SSCS as dangerous. By reducing danger to an individual level decision they demonstrate a rhetorical method in which activists can negotiate the potential conflicts created between personal and collective identities.

Indeed, one striking feature of their talk was a general absence of references to social influence processes or group standards, but at the same time there was a repeated reference to Watson’s rhetoric and logic. That is, on the one hand, participants disavowed that group members might have subtle influence over each other, or how they might establish implicit group norms in which standards are not imposed but could create the potential for sanctions for those who do not adapt to these norms (e.g. about meat-eating). On the other hand, members were clearly influenced by the ideological and mission statements of SSCS leader Watson, often citing him explicitly and repeating some of his key phrases to explain or manage aspects of their beliefs (see Extract 21 in particular).
Concluding Comments and Limitations

This research explored in-depth interviews with members of the direct-action conservation group, the SSCS. It drew on this unique sample – members of a group with often controversial ideologies and actions – to consider the multiple ways that identity is negotiated and constituted in such high-level social movement organizations. The framing of the SSCS identity (at collective and individual levels) shows signs of having developed a highly dynamic and reflexive identity through interactions between the conservation cause, their audience, and opposition. The expressions of agency and individuality within the SSCS is likely both a cause and effect of frustration with other ‘institutional’, ‘ineffective’ environmental organizations, in which their identities as ‘pirates’ is an expression of an unhindered, action-oriented approach.

We make these arguments based on a small number of participants and it is unclear whether the issues described in the interviews here can be generalized to other members of the SSCS and/or other members of ‘hardcore’ environmental conservation movements. It is worth noting, however, that there was strong convergence amongst the themes and ideas across the interviews, as well as many striking parallels amongst their statements and Paul Watson’s writing, which leads us to believe that these are common, consensual features of the SSCS in a broader sense. As such this provides what is a representation of the collective level, in which SSCS members adopt organizational values and norms, as well as demonstrating some individual level variation. It is also the case that the interviews were conducted by an ostensible ‘outsider’, which may have altered participant responses, and plausibly resulted in greater defensiveness. However, given that a key question here is the ways that SSCS engage with and negotiate their interactions with outsiders, this seems less
problematic than it might otherwise be. A final concern relates to the external validity of findings: Would results obtained here generalize to other groups? Our suspicion is that the particular ideological nuance expressed by this group is unique (“gentle terrorists”) and largely as a result of the identity entrepreneurship of Watson. We would expect to find similar processes of negotiation and rationalization in other groups which adopt more extreme measures, but we expect that these would take a different rhetorical form.

This research highlights the personal impact that taking a more ‘radical’ or extreme position has within a broader social change movement. For the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society their direct actions aligned with a ‘pirate’ identity shows them to be distinctively passionate and effective at immediately preventing whaling (and there is less need to expend effort on diplomacy efforts). In turn, however, their conversion of others to the cause becomes more complicated. By turning their back on more traditional forms of action, and by claiming to be unconcerned with how the media or the public view them (e.g. article 16, extract 5) they become targets of controversy even from within the broader movement that shares the same goals as them. This process, which della Porta (1995) calls “double marginalization”, poses the potential for their actions being undermined by both the general public and other, more moderate, groups.

SSCS members appear to manage this “double marginalization” in part by making it a deliberate choice to be controversial, but also through dynamic and responsive rhetorical strategies that emphasise both agency and commonality; both ‘personal’ identification and shared, ‘collective’ identification with the organization.

Putting aside the immediate efficacy of the SSCS direct action, it is also the case that this adoption of more extreme solutions to the problem of international whaling may be highly consequential at the macro social level. Dissensus theorists (Piven &
Cloward, 1977) in political science distinguish between those groups which follow conventional protest strategies (those that adhere to the norms of an advantaged group or mainstream society) and more disruptive strategies (which violate the norms of an advantaged group or mainstream society). It is argued that, in order to progress social change, the social milieu requires both extreme and more moderate social strategies because the former polarizes public opinion and draws attention to the cause, while the latter is able to capitalise on the new attention in a way that the bystander public find more palatable (see Louis, 2009, for a review and discussion). Thus, the rhetorical interplay between Sea Shepherd and Greenpeace, evident in the talk of participants and the statements of Watson himself, may be exactly what is required to facilitate positive social change in this context.

These processes thus have broader implications for the social psychology, sociology and political science of protest. Perhaps most importantly, the current research points to the ways that collective identity is not a constant, nor is it simply something that people either possess or do not possess (an individual differences variable of sorts). Rather, identity is always dependent on context (Reicher, 2004), and activist identity in particular is often accompanied by a set of motivational rhetoric that helps to maintain commitment to the cause (e.g. Barr & Drury, 2009). While much work in the social psychology of protest emphasises the important role of identity, it is also the case that much of this work also treats identity in rather static ways. An important alternative contribution here, then, is to explicitly recognise that identities are flexible and can be dynamically used in rhetoric to justify strategy and ideology. Indeed, this work demonstrates that the position advocated by SSCS members is not an easy one to maintain: it requires continual and nuanced rhetorical work.
It is also the case that there is little research that investigates the consequences of taking on an activist identity or collective action participation more generally (Louis, 2009; but see Drury & Reicher, 2000, 2005). Activist identity adoption (and perhaps particularly for more extreme social movement organizations) is often implicitly treated as a relatively unproblematic transition from sympathy to engagement. In this paper we have contributed to this gap by demonstrating that activists do indeed experience consequential changes to their sense of self-hood as they develop their commitment to a cause (see also Becker, Tausch, & Wagner, 2011). We have highlighted the way activists are required to do rhetorical work to manage conflict among multiple identities, and the possible challenges they are faced with in regards to public scrutiny.

Finally, Klandermans and colleagues (Klandermans, 1997; Oegema & Klandermans, 1994) have discussed the potential for barriers to participation in social movement activities, focusing on the pragmatic (e.g. transport to a protest) barriers that confront potential supporters. Our findings provide a neat complement to this literature by pointing to the strong potential for identity conflict in the early stages of participation in social movements, particularly where the requisite collective identities are controversial. Thus, identity requirements can also be a barrier to action, perhaps particularly during initial stages of involvement. For example, P4’s talk (extracts 13, 22) reflects the boundaries of the SSCS identity she perceived before becoming a member. At a practical level, an emphasis on the ability to retain one’s individuality (even) as a member of a ‘radical’ organization, potentially alters the level of controversy or risk involved in joining.

We titled this paper with a quote from Paul Watson denouncing the use of the word ‘protester’ to describe Sea Shepherd identity and their controversial, emphatic
approach to stopping commercial whaling: ‘we may be pirates but we are not protesters’. Through analysis of the SSCS website (an organizational statement of who they are) and interviews with highly committed members, we have demonstrated that even people who engage in ostensibly high-level activism often do not identify as ‘activists’ or ‘protesters’ as such. Rather, there is a disconnect between the labels applied to people who fight for social justice and the subjective experiences of those who undertake those actions. This is likely to be even truer of people who are less committed to the cause: further empirical investigation awaits this point.
CHAPTER 4.

Context Statement

The previous chapter ended with the argument that even people who engage in social justice actions do not necessarily identify with the labels ascribed to them. We also suggested that this issue should be investigated with people who are sympathetic or less committed to these causes, to understand the implications identity rhetoric has for their participation in actions. Chapters 4 and 5 develop this point - on the connection or disconnection between people’s self-understanding and the representations or stereotypes of protesters and activists. Chapter 4 uses an inductive qualitative approach to understanding how aspects of collective action identities, particularly those of protesters or activists, can possess characteristics that pose barriers, or shape people’s engagement in collective actions.

One of the discussion points in this next study is that people commonly equate all collective actions with protesting. Thus, it is in the following chapter in particular that we develop and extend the argument that sympathizers who do not attend protests are not necessarily always unmotivated or apathetic, but can be concerned about the meaning that others may attribute to these actions, or because of a desire to disassociate from negative perceptions of protesters. What this means is that they do not necessarily cease participating in collective actions altogether, but rather that they might specifically avoid more visible forms of collective action in order to disassociate from aspects of collective action that are seen as illegitimate or having other negative social consequences. Thus this can impede a progression into what might be considered more high-level engagement.
Taking the view that shared understandings about collective action can shape people’s willingness to engage in collective actions, we investigate subjective accounts of collective action participation from a range of people at various levels of engagement in social movements (N=101). The analysis focuses on their reported reservations or concerns about participation, finding that there is often ambivalence about being a part of a social movement group even amongst people who participate in some collective actions. Rather than lack of interest in the issues, participants perceived negative consequences of participation, such as being derogated by others or loss of individual voice when being part of a group. These insights are used to generate theoretical and practical implications for understanding the ways that barriers might push against other motivations for participation, with implications for collective identity formation. Findings are also discussed in relation to socialization into social movement groups.
“I don't really want to be associated with the self-righteous left extreme”: How Self-reflections on Collective Identity can Hinder Participation in Collective Action

Collective action and social movement research in social psychology has recently moved through a period of innovation and integration (see Becker, 2012; van Zomeren & Iyer, 2009). Research in this tradition has emphasised action as an outcome of subjective feelings of injustice, group efficacy (the belief that the group’s actions can be effective), and social identification with disadvantaged others (see van Zomeren et al., 2008, for a meta-analysis); the fluid and dynamic nature of identity in action (Drury & Reicher, 2000, 2005; Thomas et al., 2009a; van Zomeren, Leach, & Spears, 2012); and, more recently, the diverging predictors of different forms of social action (e.g. violent and non-violent, Becker, Tausch, Spears, et al., 2011; Tausch et al., 2011). Little research, however, considers what has been termed motivated inaction (Stroebe, 2013; see also Eliasoph, 1998). That is, little research considers inaction as a psychological state in its own right. This constitutes a significant oversight as, as we show below, deciding not to act is not the same as being ‘insufficiently’ identified or motivated (cf. Klandermans, 1997).

Indeed, erosion and attrition in social movements have been explained as lack of motivation (Klandermans & Oegema, 1987), instrumental or pragmatic hard barriers (Klandermans, 1997), and structural factors that restrict access to opportunities (Klandermans & Oegema, 1987; McCarthy & Zald, 1977). But inaction can also have more subjective and interpersonal explanations. For instance, Klandermans (1997) suggested that social incentives, where concern about significant others’ reaction to one’s involvement in social actions can function as barriers to participation. However, Oegema and Klandermans (1994; Klandermans, 1997) suggest that the social incentive barrier is
surmountable if individuals are sufficiently motivated and, hitherto, the social psychological origins of non-participation in action have not been further articulated in the literature. This is an oversight because the identities of people who are experienced members of social movement groups may be qualitatively different in content to those of people who are inexperienced, or who cease participation in collective action (e.g. see Corrigall-Brown, 2012, for an analysis of people who leave social movements). Other research suggests that people can expend significant energy into avoiding politics (Eliasoph, 1998) and inaction can be a meaningful response to current circumstances (Drury et al., 2005; Stroebe, 2013). In short, there are good reasons for considering the nuanced ways in which people understand their (lack of) participation in action.

The current paper seeks to develop a bottom-up analysis of motivated inaction. The development of collective identities (i.e. identity as a member of an organization) is a process of socialization whereby people must learn to “take on the values of the non-membership group to which they aspire, find readier acceptance by that group and make an easier adjustment to it” (Merton, 1968, p. 319; see also Klandermans, 1997; Levine & Moreland, 1994). This process of socialization is integral to the process of identity formation (Klandermans, 1997; Levine & Moreland, 1994), and in turn the adoption of ingroup norms (Livingstone et al., 2011). In collective action terms specifically, this means that frequent collective action participation (the normative group behaviour) results from the development of psychological attachment to the collective action group. Indeed, Stürmer and Simon (2004) demonstrated that an inner obligation to be a ‘good’ group member mediated the relationship between identity and action.

It is through socialization experiences that potential participants may encounter barriers, of various forms, that can create ambivalence and make people develop an
aversion to further involvement in collective action. It is this specific focus on barriers that forms the investigation of this study – not socialization processes per se, but in adopting the view that collective identities go through a process of development, we investigate barriers that might interrupt that identity development. This is pivotal because, as we argue below, barriers have the potential to forestall the development of psychological attachment to a group (specifically, social identification) – which is, according to the social identity approach, crucial for understanding participation (Klandermans & de Weerd, 2000; McGarty et al., 2009; Turner et al., 1987). Thus, the current research contributes a rich investigation of the ways that social meanings associated with collective action could function to alter or halt participation in collective action. We discuss this further in two ways – how individuals align with collectives, and how individuals interpret the perceptions of others.

Socialization, Social Identity Realization and Collective Action Participation

What are the facilitators and hindrances to the formation of subjective, psychological attachment to a group? The current research adopts the perspective of the elaborated social identity model of collective action (ESIM; following Drury & Reicher, 2000, 2009; Reicher, 1996; Stott & Reicher, 1998) whereby social identities and social meaning are understood to emerge and continually be contested through social interactions. These iterative processes of identity development result from ongoing participation in actions, and interactions with ingroup and outgroup members (Drury & Reicher, 2000; Reicher, 2004; Reicher & Hopkins, 2001a; Reicher et al., 1995; also Thomas et al., 2009a). In contrast to a more static identity approach that might consider non-participation to be a lack of ‘sufficient’ identification, the ESIM explains how through certain social conditions and interactions identity empowerment is facilitated (or conversely impeded, Drury et al.,
Research in this tradition has typically focused on crowd dynamics as an analogue to social change processes (Drury & Reicher, 2009).

The current research adopts this framework to further understand barriers to engagement, but also seeks to broaden the analysis beyond participation in crowd actions per se. While in crowd actions people can have life-changing and empowering experiences, participation in crowd action is only one form of action available to the engaged. Rather, arguably much of early engagement in collective action takes the form of contact with an existing group or organization, groups that target the bystander public as part of the “mobilization potential” (Klandermans, 1997). This suggests that, in order to form group affiliations people need to interact with group members in their early experiences of participating in collective actions or events (this can occur online or through other media). That is, it is through early interactions (cf. ESIM) that people gather information about the nature and content of group membership, and make motivated decisions about whether these are consistent with who they feel themselves to be now, and who they want to be in the future (Reicher & Hopkins, 2001b). Put differently, people evaluate activist identities by looking at the enactment of those identities by existing group members, and in turn use those reflections to evaluate their own self.

Indeed, some previous research has shown that activists and non-activists have different evaluations of the activist community (Barr & Drury, 2009). Barr and Drury’s (2009) analysis of the 2005 G8 summit direct actions showed that those experienced in collective action can draw on their experience to access resources (instrumental and

\[ ^4 \] It is also likely the case that people with prior involvement in social movements can have experiences that cause them to reassess their group memberships and disengage.
social) that facilitate enduring empowerment; some of those less experienced felt alienated or disconnected from the activist community, however.

Identity Performances as Barriers to Participation

One particular collective action barrier relates to what Klandermans (1997) termed “the social incentive”. Klandermans noted that the expectations of valued others can function as barriers to participation if people are concerned about how significant others react to their involvement in collective actions. The social incentives concept highlights that an important factor in collective identity formation is not only the individual aligning with the collective, but it is also about being “read” through that identity by others. This is also a fundamental basis of other social psychology literature – for example, classic social theory on labelling and identity negotiation, where through interactions people establish who each person is, and what role they are to play (Goffman, 1959). More recently the identity performance component of the social identity model of deindividuation effects (SIDE, Klein et al., 2007; Reicher et al., 1995) explains that social identities are performed much like personal self-presentations. Social identity performances mean that people need to be willing to perform their social identities to different audiences, and according to perceived ingroup norms. Moreover, according to the SIDE tradition, identity performance feeds back into cognitive self-categorization, which means that if one is unwilling to engage in identity performances this could in turn impact self-categorization as an ingroup member. Thus the knowledge that one’s identity as a collective actor can be read by others could plausibly constitute a psychological barrier to forming attachment to the group, and thus participation in collectively organised activities.

Overtly politicized collective identities (Simon & Klandermans, 2001) may be particularly susceptible to identity performance concerns, due to their often strong
ideologically prescriptive norms. While activists can be held in high esteem (by similar-minded others), they can also be delegitimized by outside groups and bystanders (Adair, 1996; Linden & Klandermans, 2006; Taylor & Raeburn, 1995). Some social movement organizations, particularly those that take more extreme actions, face a complex task in making themselves more palatable to a bystander public (Louis, 2009; Stuart, Thomas, Donaghue, & Russell, in press; Thomas & Louis, in press). While negative perceptions of activists have been examined in the aforementioned research, we are not aware of any research that has considered these processes as potential barriers to engagement by those who are sympathetic to political causes. To further this aim we investigate people’s subjective concerns or reservations about participating in collective action.

The Current Study

The current research examines subjective accounts of barriers to the development (or continuing development) of social identification and participation in collective action. We examine their accounts of why they do not participate, rather than why they do; to understand how undesirable aspects of collective action may work against other motivations and function as a barrier to identity realization and ongoing participation.

Given the pragmatic difficulties associated with studying those who do not turn up to events, we intentionally recruited participants in an open-ended way by encouraging anyone who has participated in, or was interested in participating in, collective action to complete a survey. Given also that we are seeking to explore barriers to socialization in general terms, we did not specify one social movement or cause.

We draw from subjective experiential accounts to understand a range of people’s forays into collective action; their perceptions and expectations of social movements and how these might align with their sense of who they are (“identity”).
These perceptions include that of group culture (customs, routines, narrative and jargon; Levine & Moreland, 1994; Taylor, Kimport, Van Dyke, & Andersen, 2009), as well as social movement groups’ concrete behaviours and strategies.

Given the highly ambivalent nature of participation in action (that is, the potential for extreme positive and negative emotions), our focus was on generating inductive (that is to say, bottom-up) accounts of people’s understanding of themselves as (potential or actual) social movement participants, their willingness to ‘perform’ their identity, and how these perceptions might shape the actions seen to be available to them. We analyse the content of these accounts – because content should be considered integral to understanding what drives categorization processes (see Spears & Klein, 2011). We identify the nature of ongoing ‘soft’ identity barriers that have the potential to impact on participation. These are conceived of as ‘soft’ because they are contestable and contextually meaningful, and thus can change over time, and are in contrast to ‘hard’ barriers relating to structural factors.

**Method**

**Participants**

One hundred and one participants were recruited via convenience sample – composed of both university students and general members of the Australian community. Fifty-one are Australian university students (80% psychology, 20% law or environmental science); they received either credit towards course requirements, or entered a pool for a $50 voucher. Fifty participants are from a database of people from the wider Australian community; they received $6 each. The majority of participants are female (64%) and the mean age is 32.5 (SD=13), which ranges from - 42% are 18-25 years, 27% are 25-40 years; 29% are
41-68 years old. Eighty percent report being White Australian or European, the others described themselves as Asian, Iranian, Maori, or did not specify ethnicity.

Responses are anonymous; participants are assigned a unique response number. They wrote an average of 250 words (ranging from 120-752). Anyone “with an interest or experience in collective action” was invited to take part in the research. However, given this study took place in Australia and the participants recruited were mostly structurally advantaged people (university students and community members with internet access), the type of causes represented mostly involve the actions of structurally advantaged people. The common causes participants reported an interest in were: environmental degradation/conservation (54 occurrences), climate change (25 occurrences), poverty (23 occurrences), minority rights (women, indigenous, refugees, LGBQT – 25 occurrences), human rights abuses (22 occurrences), animal abuse (20 occurrences), child abuse (10 occurrences), and federal political issues (e.g. capitalism, censorship, political corruption, involvement in war, working conditions – 25 occurrences).

Two participants report no participation in collective action, and the remaining participants have at least participated in some form of collective action, at some point in their lives. The average frequency of reported participation was between monthly and every few months. The most common actions are signing petitions and donating money (80% of participants), around half of participants have boycotted goods or companies, purchased fair trade goods or signed up to an online collective action group. More than a quarter (28%) have attended a protest, and 17% of participants have joined an (offline) activist group. On the basis of this the sample can be described as moderately engaged overall and we have captured a continuum of engagement from those sympathetic, to relatively inexperienced, through to those who were more active.
Materials

The study was executed via an online survey comprised of a series of mostly open-ended questions. The series of 13 questions were intended (except for one question, see below) to be as non-leading as possible. Questions focused on – 1) their own personal reasons and feelings associated with engaging in collective action (e.g. “How does being involved in collective action make you feel?”), 2) anticipations/experiences of being involved with groups of people who are engaged in social change (“Please explain why being part of a collective is/isn't important or helpful to you”). This section did include a question aimed to encourage participants to move beyond concerns about pragmatic barriers: “There are a lot of people who are concerned about social or environmental issues but, for various reasons, have difficulties becoming involved in collective action. Apart from it making demands on your life, in terms of issues like time, money, or difficulty travelling, do you feel like you experience any further reservations or concerns about your involvement?” The final section, 3), contained questions about their perceptions of the types of people involved in social change movements (e.g. “Do you feel like you are the kind of person who can make a difference?”). Thus each section was aimed at accessing different aspects of social movement participation – motivations and emotions, experiences of being in a group, and perceived self-efficacy.

Procedure

The project was advertised, through campus notice-boards, newsletters, and an online community database, as “wanting to hear about the experiences of a broad range of people who have ever participated, or wanted to participate, in any form of collective action”. Collective action was defined as:
either groups of people coming together to try and create social change around a particular issue (e.g. a protest rally), or it can also include individuals each making their own contribution towards a common goal (e.g. sponsoring a child).

Collective action can include activities such as writing letters to politicians, boycotting goods, donating money, attending protests, signing up to activist organisations, attending group meetings, reading information published by a social movement/collective action organisation, and many more activities. Collective action can also include online (internet) actions. Examples of online action are things like joining a Facebook group, or receiving an email newsletter from a collective action group.

Participants completed the survey online, in their own time.

**Data Analysis**

The analysis was guided by the principles of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), which is a systematic method of carefully noting re-occurring themes. Data were sorted into themes according to the types of barriers that participants mentioned in initiating or continuing involvement. We then began to reflect on the interpretations that could be made.

With thematic analysis, how data is interpreted depends on the adopted perspective and level of analysis, which must be kept clear and consistent throughout (Braun & Clarke, 2006). We take the critical realist perspective, which is about taking participants’ accounts as a reflection of their ‘real’ and contextually meaningful experiences, but also acknowledging the way that language constitutes reality and in turn shapes the kinds of behavioural and identity-related opportunities that are made available to them through that constitution of reality. One example of this is how participants reflections on what
interpretations other people might make about their behaviour can shape their own willingness to participate in those behaviours. That is, what others really think is not directly relevant, but rather the assumption made by the individual is. This analytic approach also allowed for complexity and ambivalence to be present in participants’ responses. The use of the open-ended survey methodology sought their views about collective action over a series of questions that were intended to evoke elaborated but slight different responses. We viewed any conflicts and contradictions in responses to be seen as evidence of the complexity of the issues being discussed, rather than viewing them as inconsistent – and thus we did not attempt to resolve these inconsistencies to form conclusions about their overall accumulative reasons for engagement or disengagement.

As similarly noted by Reicher and Hopkins (1996), a data analysis process such as this cannot be claimed to be stringently objective, thus we provide extracts as evidence for all of our claims.

**Analysis**

Firstly, participants often cited efficacy concerns; a known factor in participation (e.g. Bandura, 2000). Other re-occurring themes we do not detail here included personal safety concerns, and instrumental barriers (e.g. time constraints). Consistent with our aims, however, we focus the analysis on the social, normative and identity related concerns in the participants’ accounts. To understand why people may not participate in collective action, the analysis focuses on the concerns and difficulties (rather than the positive experiences) that people reported. We present example extracts for each theme and analyse their content.
Hostility Towards Protesters

The first theme of people’s reservations about participation that are reported appear to hinge upon quite particular ideas about collective actors, and the perceived social consequences of embodying this identity. That is, there is an assumption that collective actors are protesters. Some of the terms used to describe protesters included: rabid, professional protesters, irrational, taking actions too far, counterproductive, hypocritical, and aggressive. In contrast to groups or individuals who might seek to de-legitimise protesters because of opposition to the cause, these labels were invoked in rather different ways. For example, in response to the question of why a collective is/is not important to you, one person wrote:

“I think sometimes people tend to ignore large protest rallies, or dismiss them as being rabble.” (P#11505)

The reason given for not participating in protest here is based on others dismissing them as “rabble”, not necessarily because he sees them that way. In another example, however, the individual did report holding a negative perception of protesters; but this was because of a disagreement with the perceived typical method of communication in protests (“shouting righteous slogans”):

I don't really want to be associated with the self-righteous left extreme… I'd far prefer to argue sensibly and scientifically, with proven fact rather than unproven rhetoric, to get my point across than stand the other side of a picket line shouting righteous slogans and feeling good about myself. (P#:11469)

The “self-righteous left extreme” is described in this extract as being in opposition to sensibility and science. This person reports wanting to “argue...with proven fact”, and to “get my point across”, which shows that they are not simply dismissive of protesters due to a general opposition to efforts for social change, but rather because protesters
typically do not engage in their preferred method of communicating this need for change (what are deemed “sensible” and “scientific” approaches). Moreover, as seen in the above and the following example, protests are described as encouraging the “extremist” fringe of a movement. Here, extremists are implied as disingenuous people “simply looking for a cause to fight and be dramatic about”:

My main concern is that, in my opinion, collective action groups can unwittingly attract extremists or people of a particular political mind who are simply looking for a cause to fight and be dramatic about, rather than necessarily attracting people who are purely there to fight the corner of that particular cause. For me, it is about trying to make a difference for the subjects that matter to me rather than getting mixed up with a crowd of professional demonstrators. (P#:11514)

The solution to this problem - that “collective action groups can unwittingly attract extremists” – is that she makes the choice to not become “mixed up with a crowd of professional demonstrators”. While to some extent it is the case that negative perceptions of protesters may be perpetuated by media and oppositional groups (McLeod & Detenber, 1999), these findings demonstrate that even moderately active people can have poor perceptions of the archetypal protester. While these people stated that they are involved in actions occasionally, they dissociate themselves from some types of collective events (protests).

**How Collective Action is seen by ‘Others’**

The second main type of reported concern, one that was touched on in the first example, is the reflections on how involvement in collective action might look to other people. While in some cases (like the earlier example) a vague reference to “other people” was made, there were some specific “others” mentioned as well:

I feel some level of concern for the way these actions may be perceived by other people. Particularly when these actions show up during internet searches of my name, I have some concern for how this may be perceived by future employers. (P#:11492)
[I am concerned about] The false portrayal of my views by an extremely biased and/or ill informed media. [television channels] 7, 9, & 10 only care about headlines. The ABC [Australian Broadcasting Company] is so far to the left that they can not see the right (in either a political or moral sense). (P#:11464)

…there may be personal repercussions. You can get boycotted both personally and professionally. You then may be treated like a leper, alienate those people you hold dear to you. Suffer health wise. (P#:11507)

In the first of these examples, a concern about future employers and the public availability of information on the internet is mentioned; in the second the concern is about the “false portrayal of my views” by media; in the third example the concern is both personal and professional, in particular that you may “alienate those people you hold dear to you”. These represent a range of references to different others that may not support one’s involvement in collective action, and these have different relational repercussions (that is, professional ramifications versus threats to interpersonal relationships and friendships).

It is also important to note, however, that they rarely reported feeling unambiguously negative emotions associated with being seen to be participating in collective action. In fact, they often expressed mixed feelings of both pride and self-consciousness. For example, regarding how collective action makes them feel:

I would feel proud for standing up for what I believe in but at the same time, have a doubt in my mind of what others will think of me and also whether collective action is the best way of approaching this problem. (P#:11365)

proud also feel silly if people looked , anxious that it may turn disruptive. (P#:11355)

Consistent with expectations, we consider this to be an expression of ambivalence, indicating that participation in collective action can be experienced as a dilemma (cf.Klandermans, 2002); necessary in order to be heard (and even making them
feel proud), but in being heard one was exposed to the potential for derogation by others. Some did identify strategies for dealing with these concerns, for example, by making a distinction between visible and invisible actions. Visible actions were described as having social consequences, whereas invisible actions were not.

For invisible actions, such as signing petitions or being on a newlist, I have no reservations. For visible actions such as protesting, I might feel embarrassed, not for being part of the cause, but for making a display of myself. (P#:11483)

This example demonstrates that there can be distinguished a variety of actions – where some types of actions are weighed up as being more socially consequential or more visible than others; this affects willingness to participate in those actions considered more visible. Thus, alternative and less visible (even anonymous) forms of action can be taken up instead. As the person above (P#11483) states, they do not feel embarrassed for being part of the cause, “but for making a display of myself”. Overall, for many of these participants they did not express issues of misaligned values or goals, but rather discomfort with the form in which these values are expressed.

**Autonomy in a Collective**

In relation to the survey questions regarding being a member of an organization or collective, the main re-occurring theme in the data related to autonomy: the notion that becoming a member of a group would threaten their ability to act as an individual. A term used in this section was the notion of *voice* - such as the desire to have a “quieter voice”:

Sometimes the collective voice may come across as a little too rabid and I may prefer to be a quieter and more conservative voice. I am involved in collective voices on occasion, however I do believe that individuals can still make a difference with actions and behaviours. (P#11421)

Again, this makes reference to the way collective action can “come across”; this person makes a distinction between “collective voice” (described as “a little too rabid”),
and an individual “quieter and more conservative voice”. This demonstrates a reason for opting out of collective events, but still wanting to act independently towards a collective goal. The two examples below connect voice to the anticipation of a potential loss of autonomy if they were to join a collective:

Perhaps [collective action] would change me to the extent that I become one of many, and may lose my ability to voice and think for myself. This would be concerning. I rather be independent and contribute where I feel it may make a difference. (P#:11510)

When joining a group or organization you are basically lending your approval and voice to its cause. However these groups favour many causes some of which I agree with, some I do not. I rather not have my voice lent to those I do not agree with. (P#:9911)

In the first example, the concern about loss of “ability to voice and think for myself” conveys a view that collectives are difficult to untangle from, or that they subsume individual expression. In the second example, the individual describes lending voice to the group, with whom they do not agree on in all aspects. This notion of joining a collective is contrasted to being able to be “independent and contribute where I feel it may make a difference”.

Some of the descriptions of a concern about loss of individuality within a group related specifically to the interpersonal, face-to-face aspects of groups. That is, the idea of having others working together towards a goal is described positively, but the day to day activity was not always described as necessary or positive. For example:

_How collective action makes you feel: “collective action is better than going it alone”; Why being part of a collective is/isn’t important to you: “Sometimes there is too much talk and not enough do. There are a lot of opinions and not all of them are compatible and then it is hard to go in a direction you prefer.” (P#9687)

In this example, feeling as though they were not “going it alone” was described as preferable, yet they also said interpersonal difficulties make it difficult to be part of a
collective. This points out that there is merit in making a distinction between working in a physical collective, and being part of a psychological group. Overall, when the participants referred to face-to-face groups they commonly defined the work as interpersonally difficult and ineffective (see also Harré, Tepavac, & Bullen, 2009). However, when referring to the knowledge that they were part of a group in a psychological sense (part of a broader movement), they commonly expressed feelings of satisfaction and empowerment. This creates a sense of ambivalence about what direction to continue in – ‘going it alone’, or attempting to make the group work well together.

**Self-capability as a Collective Actor**

This final section of the analysis is on whom participants thought “is capable of making a difference” and their own perceived abilities (or lack of abilities). The aim was to understand if perceptions of collective actors were different to self-perceptions, and thus this was the one area of the analysis where we did specifically look for inconsistencies or contradictions in their accounts. In order to further our aim of understanding non-participation, we discuss the examples of when people did not see themselves as capable.

One pattern of occurrences was where the ideal person was described as quite extraordinary – highly capable, knowledgeable and skilled, but their own self-description did not match this ideal. Some examples are:

*Who is capable of making a difference?* Someone who is knowledgeable without being overbearing, approachable, willing to listen to others and able to take rejection from the general public well; *Are you capable...?* No I hate public speaking and pushing an agenda in public is my idea of a nightmare and I've been told I can be dismissive of people. (P#:9451)

*Who is capable of making a difference?* Someone has to be intelligent, articulate, passionate and energetic, and to be honest, it probably helps if they have gone through some kind of massive life altering experience, usually for the negative. That kind of thing tends to forge great leaders...; *Are you capable...?* Perhaps, I think of myself as fairly intelligent. But I have had a pretty good life, so I do not have that rage or militancy in me to lead such a social change. (P#:11505)
One can see from the above examples that in these cases the descriptions are not like the negative descriptions of protesters; that in fact collective actors could be described in quite positive terms, e.g. “passionate”, “knowledgeable”, “articulate”, “energetic”. The downside however, is that they do not see themselves as meeting these qualities; where they would state that “I hate public speaking and pushing an agenda in public is my idea of a nightmare” (P#:9451), or “I do not have that rage or militancy in me” (P#:11505).

What is most notable about the ways that people use these judgments about ‘the type of people’ that are involved in social change movements, is how they are used to make relative judgments about their own identity or abilities. The implication is that when these self-judgments fall short, this may result in inaction, or uncertainty about how to take action.

**Discussion**

The current research considers the subjective experiences of a range of people involved in diverse collective actions. Our aim was to investigate ‘soft’ social or identity related barriers that might preventing initiating or sustaining participation in social actions. We argued that a better understanding of the content of barriers is needed in order to understand how people might overcome them.

Most of the findings centred on the issue of identity acquisition, socialization and performance. Here, participants displayed signs of deep consideration of the efficacy of their actions and where it was best to direct their efforts, in ways that allowed them to retain agency or voice, and avoid negative social ramifications from relevant others. We conceptualise these as ‘soft’, social (versus ‘hard’, instrumental or pragmatic) barriers to participation – in that the meaning and relevance of these barriers
would change along with the contestation of identities (Reicher, 2004; Sani & Reicher, 2000). We will now further discuss the findings, first we discuss the two types of perceptions of collective actors (protesters) present in the data, and then discuss identity formation and socialization processes – including concern about autonomy or agency (‘voice’) in a group.

**Perceptions of Collective Actors**

People drew on particular understandings of kinds of people that engage in collective action. This reflects an aspect of social identity formation where people can draw, indirectly, on references to stereotypical content of a group member (e.g. “professional demonstrator”), and use that understanding to reflect back on their own self, which in turn can shape or limit one’s behavioural repertoire (Elcheroth, Doise, & Reicher, 2011).

There were two distinct and contradictory sets of ideas about social movement participants. On the one hand, participants reported highly idealized descriptions of the type of people who are capable of making a difference; for example that these people possess high level knowledge, and excellent communication skills. These descriptions have an analogy in the pervasive “old psychology of leadership” - the image of a charismatic individual who leads the people (Haslam, Reicher, & Platow, 2011). Ultimately, we argue, this focus on ‘the activist’ is misleading and demotivating. As Corrigall-Brown (2012) argues, “despite the larger-than-life nature of this image, the lifelong, intensely committed, and passionate activist is far from typical” (p. 123) and that politics are pursued by a large number of people whose trajectory of participation fluctuates over time. To the extent that people use this image as a guide for whether (or
not) they should engage with a movement, it is likely that these seemingly high-bar, prescriptive, requirements can form a barrier. Indeed, in the examples above (see P#9451, 11505) the participants stated as much.

In the second instance, the more negative description of the “professional demonstrator” or “self-righteous left extreme” suggests that protesters can be seen as self-serving or illegitimate. These findings show that this negative image presents a different type of barrier, in which the behavioural options seen to be available to some people who do want to take actions precludes or devalues protests specifically. We would like to stress that these descriptions were not just made by people opposed to social change (who might wish to preserve the status quo). Participants stated that they wanted to be able to have influence, but not through associations with such people.

It is also the case that these participants reflected an awareness of how their behaviour (were they to engage in social actions) could be interpreted by other people. People often make assumptions about other people’s perceptions (Elcheroth et al., 2011; Goffman, 1959). Thus even when people are engaging in (what are to them) meaningful collective actions, they infer their behaviour as potentially being interpreted by others as meaningless (or having a different, illegitimate meaning). The lack of recognition of one’s self-definition by others can result in psychological threat that makes it difficult for individuals to participate in the public sphere (Hopkins & Blackwood, 2011). In these data, the consequence may be that only the people who are willing to accept public rejection or disapproval have the option of participating in “visible” forms of collective action. For example, they can risk being seen by others as a “professional” demonstrator (that is, someone who is participating for economic benefit or because they have no other
“more legitimate” form of employment), rather than someone who is expressing important values.

This finding reflects the social incentives of collective action (Klandermans, 1997; Klandermans & Oegema, 1987), and as argued in identity performance literature, identification is not just about cognitive self-categorization of self-as-group-member but also involves a consideration of whether one is willing to perform that identity according to perceived norms (Klein et al., 2007). The contribution that this study makes this literature is to further highlight experiences of ambivalence in which social incentives do not form concrete barriers per se, but rather can alter the extent to which people will participate. In particular, it interferes with socialization processes, if people are ambivalent about joining a social movement group.

The overall conclusion of these findings is that both positive and negative stereotypes of activists or protesters have a potential to act as a barrier to straightforward participation in collective actions. By equating participation with protest (and, by implication, the ‘protester’), collective action has the potential to be seen by participants as an oversimplified homogenous category of actions, while the range of actions that people can participate in, and the variety of groups that they can associate with, are rendered less apparent.

**The Potential for ‘Soft Barriers’ to Interrupt Identity Formation**

This research contributes to theory on social identity formation by highlighting that there can be problematic points in where people meet with unwanted identity performance or behavioural obligations. In particular, the anticipation that once becoming a group member, one would lose the ability to retain individual agency in deciding which actions to participate in (and be seen to be supporting) was a common anticipatory theme.
The notion of voice relates to identity performance (Klein et al., 2007), where “lending” voice, or adding voice to the group is a performance, and could be misinterpreted by the audience. It is important to note that this rejection of identity was not because of an incompatibility of interests, but rather becoming a group member was constructed as an unacceptable loss of self.

Ironically perhaps, research shows the opposite; that is, rather than promoting a loss of self, participants accrue very positive personal benefits from engaging in activism, including an enhanced sense of self (Boehnke & Wong, 2011; Gecas, 2000; Klar & Kasser, 2009), and increased sense of personal agency (Baray et al., 2009; Blackwood & Louis, 2012). More generally, social group membership is associated with increased self-esteem and well-being (Iyer, Jetten, Tsivrikos, Postmes, & Haslam, 2009; Jetten, Branscombe, & Spears, 2002). Nevertheless, we argue that it is important to pay attention to people’s concerns about autonomy because the anticipation of loss of autonomy could halt group socialization processes if people avoid experiences that might change those perceptions; for example, avoiding protests or direct actions because they are concerned about losing themselves in a crowd. Therefore this particular concern – about loss of autonomy – could be more operative during periods of transition and/or when a new identity is not yet formed (Jetten, Haslam, Iyer, & Haslam, 2010). Future research might consider how different barriers become operative at different stages in the socialization process.

**Practical Implications**

Although the current research considers barriers, we do not suggest that they are insurmountable. Ambivalence about participation can be overcome, as demonstrated in crowd research where situational factors can lead to previously disparate individuals
developing a shared identity (Drury & Reicher, 2000, 2009). Accordingly, it is worth briefly considering how some of these identity management concerns may be alleviated to promote participation.

One option is to strategically re-define the identity through top-down social movement communications (Elcheroth et al., 2011; Reicher et al., 2005). Such communication could work to break down strong prescriptions on behaviour and seek to re-define involvement in terms of a variety of (visible and invisible) actions open to potential participants. Prescriptive identity barriers may also be challenged in a more bottom-up fashion, through small group interaction where potential participants discuss their motivations, beliefs, and concerns and in doing so normalise a more moderate and varied repertoire of actions (McGarty et al., 2009; Thomas & McGarty, 2009; Thomas, Smith, et al., 2010). Thus, where a person experiences unease about the way their identity is being represented, this unease can be shared with others, and through social communication it becomes possible to redefine the identity in a way that is positive and affirming.

Identity performance and identity management concerns could also be managed through a sensitivity towards the existence of alternative, less visible forms of activism - such as personalized lifestyle movements (Haenfler, Johnson, & Jones, 2012), or online social movements (Brunsting & Postmes, 2002). The notion of ‘invisible actions’ (a term used by a participant), could be conceptualized as behind the scenes work, or work that does not require the organization or commitment of a collective (more than one person; e.g. private donations, changing consumer habits, anonymous blogging). Social movements could seek to emphasize to sympathizers that there are options for
individualized or so-called invisible actions that reduce identity performance concerns - at least, in those initial stages of socialization.

**Concluding Comments**

Although our research methods (specifically, our efforts to survey across a range of social issues) sought to consider barriers to participation in a general sense, the concerns illustrated by these research participants are likely specific to a particular cultural context and may have played a more prominent role amongst our relatively advantaged participant sample. These concerns may particularly relevant for those for whom participation in social movements is reflective of an intrinsic expression of self (Polletta & Jasper, 2001), rather than based on the desire to meet instrumental goals. As to whether negative accounts of collective action are mere rationalizations to justify inaction, as Spears and Klein (2011) argue, even if accounts are post-hoc, they still inform future actions.

This study involved an examination of subjective experiences where individuals drew on shared understandings of collective action, and considered how these understandings shape strategic (in)action. We identified how anticipations of what is required for one to be a collective actor can function as a type of barrier. The research has highlighted that involvement in collective action is often experienced as a dilemma (Klandermans, 2002). Results suggest that potential participants need to have positive evaluations of the groups that they seek to join, and they need to experience socialization activities that result in transformations in their sense of self (and groups also need to alter to meet individuals needs, Levine & Moreland, 1994). Social incentives, identity performances, and the way in which they feed into self-
categorization, therefore should be considered alongside other important predictive factors of participation.
CHAPTER 5.

Distinguishing Participation in Visible and Low-visibility Actions: Activist Stereotypes, and Identity Performance Concerns

This Chapter directly extends upon the findings from Chapter 4 (Study 2) where we examined qualitative accounts of the barriers people can face that shape or constrain their participation in collective action. The main themes from Study 2 that I extend in this study relate to concerns about the visibility of certain actions, being associated with negative stereotypes of protesters, and a perception that joining a group can challenge one’s ability to express an individual agency. All of these were raised as potential barriers – not necessarily to all forms of collective action, but rather what are deemed as more visible, group-based actions.

In this study a quantitative survey methodology is used to investigate two main questions: first, we aim to determine the content of activist stereotypes and how these stereotypes relate to identification as an activist. As discussed in Chapter 4, narrow or negative representations of activists may hinder identification as an activist. By ‘activist’ we are not referring to the literal definition - that is, being someone-who-participates-in-activism, but rather the social meanings associated with an activist identity. I argue that people engage with stereotypes of activists in ways that are meaningful for their self-understanding as a (potential or actual) actor within a social movement (see McGarty et al., 2002).

The second aim of this study is to establish predictors for participation in different classes of collective actions – namely distinguishing what are considered more visible, group based, actions from less visible actions that can conceivably be
undertaken individually. These relationships are expected, based on the findings in Study 2, to be related to concerns about identity performances (i.e. willingness to be seen engaging in actions), and perceptions of group belonging and autonomy or agency within a group.

**Activist Stereotypes**

This research adopts the sense-making approach to stereotypes - whereby stereotypes are understood to function to allow people to explain and make sense of different social groups (McGarty et al., 2002). This means that stereotypes of activists have social meanings and allow people to make sense of the activists whom they come into contact with; it informs the way that they interact with activists, and we would expect also informs the likelihood that individuals will be willing to identify as activists themselves.

A sense-making approach to stereotypes also allows us to understand how people can actively work to reject or change stereotypes. There are a growing number of qualitative studies demonstrating that people discursively distance themselves from (various forms of) activist or political identity – for example, a study with women’s menstruation ‘activists’ found that despite ongoing participation in social actions, many of them did not call themselves activists because they saw the label as descriptive of a perfect standard that meant being “super active” (Bobel, 2007). In another interview study, a participant demonstrated a reflexive turn away from any form of identity label, instead saying “I don’t see myself as an activist, I see myself more as somebody who cares” (Mills & Smith, 2008). Sometimes the identity rhetoric is specific to the particular movement – for example, animal welfare workers reject an activist label because animal welfare is seen as different to animal activism (Greenebaum, 2009). People participating
in direct actions can reject a protester label because protesting is seen as passive relative to direct actions (Stuart et al., in press). In a further example, young girls in the US who would speak at length about their frustration with U.S. government practices, would then say that they are not a “politics person” (Taft, 2006). These examples demonstrate the long-standing difficulty with applying labels that do not necessarily match individuals’ self-definitions; but also, that the rejection of some labels may be based on a resistance to the social meaning that that label has come to represent.

There is one potentially similar area of literature where the relationships between stereotypes and barriers to activism have been examined – in feminist research. Described as the “I’m not a feminist, but…” literature, it identifies a general trend where young women (post 2nd wave feminism) do not identify as feminists or are ambivalent about the identity despite holding feminist values (e.g. Crossley, 2010; Liss, Crawford, & Popp, 2004; Williams & Wittig, 1997). For example, Crossley (2010) argues that feminist stereotypes are narrow and this limits identification as a feminist. One argument from this literature that is relevant to general activist stereotypes is that people may need to have a positive evaluation of activists in order to want to participate in actions (Williams & Wittig, 1997; see also Corrigall-Brown, 2012).

What this (and other) research demonstrates is that identities are contestable and in flux (Drury & Reicher, 2000; Reicher, 2004). That is, identity can be used to achieve social goals, such as emphasizing one’s similarity with group members in order to work together towards a common goal, or to distinguish oneself as an individual in order to distance oneself from a group (as seen in Stuart et al., in press). The complexity with research in this area is that rhetoric is by nature fluid and contested, making it difficult to quantify. Therefore one aim in this study is not only to create quantifiable data on
how many people identify as activists and the relationship this has to their participation in actions, but I also aim to determine if it is possible to alter people’s identification as an activist by stimulating activist stereotypes. Accordingly, a manipulation is used to activate stereotypes of activists and explore effects on activist identity endorsement. That is, whether people identify as an activist when activist stereotypes are highlighted. This would give support to the idea that ‘activist’ is a particular identity that is contestable rather than a straightforward label that describes the associated behaviours (i.e. participation in actions). So I treat people’s explicit endorsement of an activist identity label (i.e. by indicating agreement on a Likert scale) as a form of rhetoric that is potentially changeable. However this study can be considered somewhat preliminary in that rather than focussing on a specific sub-type of activist identity, we aim to examine activist stereotypes quite broadly. That is, activist identity is typically measured in relation to activism on a specific issue (e.g. climate change, environmentalism, animal rights). Here, however, I consider the activist identity in a more a-contextual way, with the goal of trying to determine if there is utility in locating a ‘core’ representation of the activist prototype (see Guimelli, 1993, on how representations have a core or central aspect). As far as I am aware, no research has examined a general broad activist stereotype as a potential barrier to participation in collective actions by people who are sympathetic to these causes, although there is research on public attitudes towards protesters (e.g. McLeod & Detenber, 1999).

In terms of the goal of developing an account of activist stereotypes, the current research draws on the framework provided by the stereotype content model. The stereotype content model (Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, & Xu, 2002) has established two components of stereotype content that are broadly applicable - these are competence
and warmth. Competence relates to power in intergroup relations - how much ability and social influence a group is seen to have. Warmth relates to how sociable and relatable a group is perceived to be. Often one is traded off for the other; for example, feminists can be viewed as higher in competence but lower in warmth (Fiske et al., 2002). These stereotype dimensions are consequential for intergroup relations because they determine hierarchical social relations in a given society, and who is seen as friend or foe. An additional component that Leach, Ellemers and Barreto (2007) argue is more important (than competence and warmth) is morality – where they show that people will rate morality as the most important component of their ingroup stereotype. All three components will be examined in this study – to determine the stereotype content of the “activist”. If we are to draw parallels between feminist stereotypes, and activist stereotypes, one might similarly expect high competence/low warmth content; and perhaps high morality content given the nature of activism, based on a desire for social change (e.g. equality, social justice).

**Predicting Participation in Different Types of Actions**

The second aim is to determine predictors for different types of collective action. I conceptually distinguish between ‘visible’ and ‘low visibility’ actions. Based on Study 2 (Chapter 4) it is expected that the drivers behind each type of action are differently determined by identity performance concerns, perceptions of belonging and also sense of agency within a collective action group. The potential implication this aspect of the research has is to investigate indications that people could be on a trajectory of participation in occasional actions, to commitment and identification with a group - which would in turn lead to more sustained participation (Klandermans & de Weerd, 2000; McGarty et al., 2009).
Visible actions are conceptualised as including actions where people work face-to-face with group members in public settings – involving identity performances where people engage in practices that display or express their social identities according to perceived ingroup norms (Klein et al., 2007). What this means is that, for example, engaging in a group-based, face-to-face action like a protest or direct action means performing your identity to whoever is witnessing that action (which can include media coverage). Moreover, given that these types of actions involve interpersonal interactions, it is reasonable to expect that people’s perceptions of their ability to belong and feel supported by a group should play an important role in determining their participation (i.e. as a component of social identification, Leach et al., 2008). An additional reason for calling attention to group belonging specifically is because in Study 2 participants remarked on their ambivalence about interpersonal conflict that can occur within groups. Finally, based on the findings in Study 2 where participants stated that they avoided group actions because of a concern about loss of self or agency in the group, we would also expect that people who do participate in these types of actions feel a strong sense of agency within the group. This would be consistent with research showing that strong identification as an activist corresponds with a stronger sense of personal agency (Baray et al., 2009; Blackwood & Louis, 2012).

Low visibility actions, on the other hand are conceived of as not requiring identity performance or face-to-face interaction. Examples might include changing purchasing behaviours to support fair trade or local farmers, or making private donations to a political organisation (see also Haenfler et al., 2012 for a discussion of 'lifestyle' movements). In these types of actions we would expect people higher in identity performance concerns (but nominally sympathetic to a social movement) to participate
in low visibility actions. Moreover, we would expect people to more frequently engage in low visibility actions if they feel that they would not belong/feel supported by a group, and if they are concerned about a lack of agency within a group.

**Hypotheses**

**H1:** It is expected that when the activist stereotype is highlighted people will be less likely to identify as an activist, because “activist” is a highly specific identity that does not encapsulate all of those individuals who participate in a range of actions.

**H2:** Positive stereotypes of activists will predict identification as an activist. Based on the similarities that could be drawn to feminist stereotypes, we might expect that activists are seen as high in competence (having power in intergroup relations), but less warm/sociable.

**H3:** Higher levels of participation in visible actions should be negatively predicted by identity performance concerns, and both belonging and agency within the group should positively predict participation as people should feel good about belonging to and feeling supported by a collective action group but also feel agentic within the group.

**H4:** Higher level of participation in invisible actions should be negatively predicted by group belonging, because people have less positive perceptions of group support, but agency within the group should positively predict participation in invisible actions because it reflects taking action independently. Moreover, identity performance concerns should also predict participation in low visibility actions.
Method

Participants

Participants (N=203) were composed of general Australian community members recruited from a community database (N=112), psychology undergraduate students (N=65), and people recruited from the researchers’ social networks (N=26). The mean age was 36 (SD=15.54) and ranged from 17-72. All participants were Australian citizens, and 68% were female.

Half the sample was politically left/centre leaning, where a quarter of participants rated themselves as centre-left, and a quarter as centrist. Federal voting preferences were majority left-leaning also (33% Australian Greens, 19.2% Australian Labor Party), with over a quarter being conservative voters (29% Liberal/National Coalition), and 17.7% selecting other, or no party. They were also highly educated - the majority (75%) had a bachelor or higher education degree.

Design

The research employs a quasi-within groups design with activist stereotype activation as the manipulated variable. Participants first responded to a pre-test item which asked them to indicate how much they identified as an activist where activist was embedded in other descriptive labels. Subsequently, participants were asked to generate responses to the question: “When someone identifies as an ‘activist’, what thoughts immediately come to your mind about them?” That is, participants were asked to focus on their stereotype of an activist. Activist identity was subsequently measured again in a post-test (see ‘measures’ below). This method of making identity salient is intended to determine simply if placing and ordering of identity questions within a questionnaire can alter participant responses.
Measures

**Activist Identity Pre-test.** Following the suggestion of Ashmore, Deaux and McLaughlin-Volpe (2004), we allowed people to classify themselves by asking them to select the extent to which they endorse different identity terms. An activist identity item was listed amongst other choices, where participants were asked to rate on a scale of 1 (“Strongly disagree”) to 7 (“Strongly agree”) what “they consider themselves to be” for each item. Other items included “volunteer”, “citizen”, “community member”, and “just someone who cares”.

**Activist Identity Post-test.** Subsequent to completing the stereotype activation task participants responded to 3 items assessing activist identity on a scale of 1 (“Strongly disagree”) to 7 (“Strongly agree”), for example, “I think of myself as an activist”, α = .82 (adapted from Fielding, McDonald, & Louis, 2008).

**Actions.** A question about actions they typically participate in “on an ongoing basis” was a list of options on a scale of 1 (“Never”) to 5 (“Frequently”), and including text for other. A mean of all actions was calculated, as well as separating them into two further scales: visible actions - “protest”, “meet with a collective action group”, “talk to my friends about social/political issues”, “attend an information event”, “volunteer my time”, α = .84; and low visibility actions - “sign a petition”, “participate in online forums”, “change purchasing behaviours”, “write letters to politicians”, “donate money”, α = .67.

**Activist stereotypes.** Participants were asked to rate how characteristic the list of traits was of a “typical activist” on a scale 1 (“Not at all”) to 7 (“Very much”). Following the stereotype content literature (Fiske et al., 2002; Leach et al., 2007) 4 items were used for competence (competent, intelligent, skilled, knowledgeable, α = .86), 3
for warmth (warm, friendly, caring, $\alpha = .86$), and 5 for morality (sincere, trustworthy, deceitful (reverse), honest, immoral (reverse), $\alpha = .86$).

**Perceptions of collective action groups.** The following items were worded to account for either speaking from experience, or anticipating becoming a member of a collective action group, which was assessed by asking participants if you “consider yourself to be an active member of any collective action organizations (informal or formal)” (Yes/No).

**Group belonging.** To assess people’s perceptions of the support or belonging that comes from group membership (rather than how they derive their sense of self from the group), 4 items were used: “I feel that I have[could] made friends in collective action groups”, “Being part of a collective action group makes[would make] me feel like I belong”, “Joining a collective action group has[would] provide(d) me with the support I need to continue my commitment”, “I enjoy the feeling of when people come together as a group to bring about change” ($\alpha = .81$).

**Agency in the group.** 5 items measured whether participants felt like they could be individuals and autonomous in a group: “An individual voice can be unheard in a collective” (reverse), “Even if I become a member of a collective action group, I will still be an individual”, “Collective action groups rarely say exactly what I would like to say” (reverse), “I would rather make a difference on my own, without belonging to a group”, “In joining a collective action group I would be free to pick and choose which particular actions to participate in” ($\alpha = .61$).

**Identity performance concerns.** Two items measured identity performance concerns: “I worry what my friends and family [would] think of me”; “[If/When] I join in collective actions I [might] feel silly”.

Other exploratory measures were included but are beyond the scope of this paper.

**Procedure**

The online survey was advertised on an Australian community research database, and via the researchers’ social networks, and a psychology undergraduate subject pool. The survey was entitled “Survey about your efforts to bring about political or social change”. We intentionally avoided use of the words activist or activism in any of the information about the study. Anyone with an interest was invited to participate, but they were told that they did not have to have a *strong* interest in the topic. The sequence of questions followed such that they were asked the pre-test activist identity question, and later the activist stereotype activation and stereotype rating questions were asked towards the end of the questionnaire (Appendix E).
Results

Preliminary Analysis. The relevant correlations can be seen below.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics and correlations between the main variables (N=203)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Mean(SD)</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Visible Actions</td>
<td>2.49(.84)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.651&quot;</td>
<td>-.294&quot;</td>
<td>.174*</td>
<td>.219**</td>
<td>.211**</td>
<td>.334**</td>
<td>.313**</td>
<td>.570**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low vis. Acts</td>
<td>2.86(.78)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-.260&quot;</td>
<td>.124</td>
<td>.145*</td>
<td>.069</td>
<td>.223**</td>
<td>.298**</td>
<td>.490**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ID perform.</td>
<td>2.99(1.43)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-.131</td>
<td>-.268&quot;</td>
<td>-.199&quot;</td>
<td>-.144*</td>
<td>-.455**</td>
<td>-.300**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competence</td>
<td>4.68(1.09)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.670**</td>
<td>.684**</td>
<td>.427**</td>
<td>.424**</td>
<td>.347**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morality</td>
<td>4.86(1.09)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.769**</td>
<td>.312**</td>
<td>.424**</td>
<td>.371**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warmth</td>
<td>4.46(1.11)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.411**</td>
<td>.438**</td>
<td>.373**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belonging</td>
<td>4.48(1.18)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.467**</td>
<td>.405**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agency</td>
<td>4.55(.98)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.363**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identification</td>
<td>3.12(1.65)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). *. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

All variables, except visible and low visibility actions, were assessed post-stereotype activation.
As seen in Table 1 there are moderate-high correlations between all three stereotype components, indicating a general positive/negative evaluation of activists. Those higher in identity performance concerns see activists less positively on all stereotype components, are lower in identification as an activist, and feel less like an individual within a collective action group. Visible and low visibility actions are both negatively correlated with identity performance, but visible action participation is correlated with activist warmth whereas low visibility actions are not.

**Does activating the activist stereotype affect identification?** To determine the effect of activist stereotypes on identification as an activist (H1), a repeated measures t-test was used. It was found that people were more likely to identify as an activist before they completed the stereotype task (M=3.76, SD=1.96), than after (M=2.66, SD=1.81), \(t(201)=9.69, p < .001\). This suggests that, as expected, activating stereotypes associated with the typical activist acted to reduce identification as an activist. Table 2 (Appendix A) shows that participants were just as likely to identify as volunteers as they were activists. Subsequent analyses utilise the post-test measure of identification as an activist.

**What role do activist stereotypes play in precipitating identity and therefore action?** The means and standard deviations of the three components identified in the stereotype content model are displayed in Table 1. These are all above the scale midpoint, revealing an average slightly positive stereotype of activists. In order to determine if activist stereotype content predicts identification as an activist (H2) a multiple regression was conducted, with warmth, morality, and competence entered as
independent variables, and identification as activist as the dependent variable. Table 3 below shows that the individual predictors are not significant, but the overall model is significant, predicting 16.5% of variance ($F(3,198)=13.02, p < .001$). Examination of multicollinearity diagnostics reveals that warmth and morality share high proportions of variance (.85 and .70 on a single small eigenvalue, Field, 2009). Given that they are correlated at $r=.769$, this indicates that while the model does predict identity, individual predictors cannot be determined.

Table 3.

Unstandardised (B) and Standardised ($\beta$) Regression Coefficients for Each Predictor Variable of Identification as an Activist (N=198).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>$\beta$</th>
<th>$t$</th>
<th>$p$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Competence</td>
<td>.194</td>
<td>.128</td>
<td>1.37</td>
<td>.172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warmth</td>
<td>.241</td>
<td>.162</td>
<td>1.49</td>
<td>.137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morality</td>
<td>.243</td>
<td>.160</td>
<td>1.50</td>
<td>.134</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Predicting participation in visible and low visibility actions. The final section of the analysis examines whether there can be distinguished different predictors for participation in high visibility versus low visibility actions (H3, H4).

For visible actions belonging, agency in the group, and identity performance concerns were entered into the multiple regression analysis. Table 4 shows that agency was not significant while identity performance concerns were a significant negative predictor, and belonging is a positive predictor. The model was significant and predicted 18% of variance ($R^2 = .18, F(3,199)=14.45, p < .001$). Multicollinearity statistics show that there may be some shared variance between belonging and agency (.55 and .43 respectively, on a single eigenvalue).
Table 4.

Unstandardised (B) and Standardised (β) Regression Coefficients for Each Predictor Variable of Visible Actions (N=202).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>β</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agency</td>
<td>.081</td>
<td>.095</td>
<td>1.17</td>
<td>.242</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belonging</td>
<td>.184</td>
<td>.259</td>
<td>3.55</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ID performance concerns</td>
<td>-.125</td>
<td>-.213</td>
<td>-2.94</td>
<td>.004</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For low visibility actions, belonging, agency in the group, and identity performance concerns were entered into the multiple regression analysis. Table 5 shows that identity performance concerns are a negative predictor, but contrary to visible actions agency is a positive predictor of variance, but belonging is not significant. The model is significant and predicts 12% of variance ($R^2 = .12, F(3,199)=9.028, p < .001$). The multicollinearity statistics are the same as stated in the visible actions regression – with some shared variance between belonging and agency.

Table 5.

Unstandardised (B) and Standardised (β) Regression Coefficients for Each Predictor Variable of Low Visibility Actions (N=202).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>β</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agency</td>
<td>.131</td>
<td>.165</td>
<td>1.969</td>
<td>.050</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belonging</td>
<td>.080</td>
<td>.122</td>
<td>1.610</td>
<td>.109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ID performance concerns</td>
<td>-.091</td>
<td>-.167</td>
<td>-2.230</td>
<td>.027</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Therefore, identity performance concerns were predictors for both types of actions, whereas agency and belonging were only important to low-visibility and visible actions, respectively.

**Discussion**

The results partially supported all of the hypotheses – where manipulating activist stereotypes could alter identification as an activist (H1), and activist stereotypes predicted identification as an activist (H2). However stereotypes were not high in competence/low in warmth as expected. For H3, visible action participation was predicted by belonging, and negatively predicted by identity performance concerns. Agency in the group was not a significant predictor, however. For H4, identity performance concerns were a predictor of low visibility actions, as was agency in the group, but belonging was not a significant predictor.

**Activist Identity Endorsement**

These results demonstrate that the endorsement of the activist identity label reduced simply by asking people to think about a typical activist – which we find especially interesting considering we did not provide any evaluative information in this prompt about activists. This provides support for the argument that identity label endorsement does not necessarily simply reflect an internal self-concept, but can serve various types of ideological, self-presentational, or protective functions (e.g. Higgins, 1999; Swann Jr, 1987). Future research could explore these processes.

Corrigall-Brown (2012) found that of two individuals who participate in the same amount of actions one may identify as an activist, while the other does not. She argues
that this is because those identifying as an activist hold a specific political orientation (leftish), and belong to particular organizations or traditions that consider themselves activists. There may be some support for this argument in these data also, but while these results did indicate variability in identity endorsement it should not be overstated. There can be a certain amount of collective action that people participate in without identifying as an activist per se, but the correlations between identity and actions were reasonably strong. This result is partially explained by the fact that while one may participate in some actions, but not identify as an activist, it is unlikely that the opposite scenario would apply – where people identify as activists, but do not participate in actions. Moreover, we suspect that when presented with the activist label, many who might rhetorically differentiate themselves using different identity terms would still endorse the activist identity measure, and this could be unpacked in further research.

The activist stereotype was overall slightly positive, and stereotypes did predict identity significantly. The overall positivity of stereotypes may indicate that even those who do not identify as activists may not see activists negatively, but instead as a slightly positive ‘other’. These stereotype results are limited, however, by a lack of differentiation between the stereotype components. For instance, if we had found that activists were seen as low in warmth, then this would have had practical implications for ways that activists might communicate their identities. The overlap between morality and warmth in these data also indicates that seeing activists as warm is highly dependent on seeing them as moral, and vice versa. Although, there are different levels of correlation between some of the stereotype components and actions which could indicate some potential differences that could be further investigated – for instance, between activist warmth and participating in more visible actions.
One suggestion for what could be explain these results on activist stereotypes is as similarly investigated by Clausell and Fiske (2005). They found that for some seemingly neutral stereotypes (e.g. gay men) there were a variety of subgroups that were cancelled out at a superordinate level of analysis. That is, in the case of activist stereotypes, what could be occurring is that different stereotypes of activists exist and that they cancel each other out and create an overall indistinguishably neutral/slightly positive stereotype. While on the one hand we argued in Study 2 (Chapter 4) that activist stereotypes appear to be very specifically associated with protesting, it was also argued that two potential stereotypes could exist (one positive, one negative). Here, context is likely to be important because social context is what gives meaning to particular identities, and the ways in which identities organize particular actions (Reicher, 2004; Reicher & Hopkins, 1996). Further analyses could determine these relationships, for example by selecting a specific political issue and/or organization and evaluating stereotypes about ‘activists’ who belong to that group. It might also be helpful to determine how these traits are evaluated by sub-groups in the sample. For example, activists might view other activists as positively distinctive, whereas people who do not identify as activists might view positive traits as a high-bar prescriptive requirement of which they fall short (as suggested in Study 2, Chapter 4).

Visibility of Actions

The low visibility action participation regression demonstrated that identity performance concerns and concern about lack of agency in a group might lead people to more frequency engage in these more solitary actions. Causality cannot be determined from these data, but future research could determine if either: 1) they have not yet experienced socialization activities that would nurture more positive perceptions
of collective action groups, and lower identity performance concerns; or 2) whether they actively avoid participation in visible, group-based, actions because they anticipate (or have experienced) negative interactions with collective action groups, or have experienced negative social consequences for participating in visible actions. It seems fairly evident that people need to have positive experiences of group interaction in order to foster identification with the group, but in Study 2 (Chapter 4) we argued that the anticipation of negative experiences may prevent people from actively seeking out those experiences that might change their perceptions.

For the more visible actions, people were lower in identity performance concerns as we would expect, and they rated a more positive sense of belonging and support coming from a collective action group. Again, this could be related to socialization experiences, whereby positive social interactions increase sense of belonging, but it could also be possible that feeling like one does not belong to a group could make some people unwilling to engage in visible actions. Desire for agency within a group was not a predictor, however, and this was unexpected. In examining the correlations, one can see that the more concerned individuals are about identity performances, the less they feel like an individual within a group. Or, put the other way around, the more you feel like an individual within the group, the less concerned you are about identity performances. This does reflect the rather nuanced interrelationship between social and personal identities, where social identity can enhance personal agency (Baray et al., 2009; Blackwood & Louis, 2012; Jetten, Postmes, & McAuliffe, 2002; Postmes & Jetten, 2006). The moderate correlation between belonging and agency also supports this premise – one experiences a lower sense of belonging if they do not feel agentic. It could also mean that both belonging and agency belong to a shared latent variable.
Limitations and Suggestions

This study has made some initial contributions to investigating relationships between activist stereotypes, different types of collective actions, and identity performance concerns. Some of the measures used in this study, however, could be improved in order to improve certainty in the conclusions. For instance the agency measure used was not very reliable. Future research could benefit from differentiating between positive sense of agency (where one feels independent but still positively supported by a group), from negative agency concerns (a feeling that being part of a group results in loss of autonomy/self). This may explain the lack of significant results for agency in the visible actions regression. In addition, there would be merit in developing an expanded list of items to measure identity performance concerns. As it stands, there were also small negative correlations (see table 1) between both visible and low visibility actions, and identity performance concerns – meaning that generally speaking, people lower in identity performance concerns participate in more actions and this would also need to be accounted for.

A final consideration is that to establish relationships between the salience of activist identity, and identification as an activist this could have benefited from a between-subjects design, rather than the quasi-experimental within-subjects design. Moreover, if we had asked the stereotype component questions first, and then assessed identification as an activist, we would have a more concrete understanding of what stereotypes people were drawing on and comparing themselves to. However the method used in this study was intended to be exploratory, and has given us some indication of support for our hypotheses.

Overall, while some of the measurements used to assess these different predictors for visible and low visibility actions could be improved, this study has made some
interesting contributions to establishing different pathways or predictors for different types or sets of collective actions. This is a somewhat novel approach considering most collective action research considers all types of collective actions together. One implication from this study was to gain an understanding of how low visibility actions might be undertaken by people at an early point in a trajectory of participation in occasional actions, to commitment and identification with a group. This study has shown that identity performance concerns are indeed relevant to people’s decisions to participate in actions, and that they therefore warrant further investigation as to how they might interact with or interfere with socialization into social movement groups.

I also demonstrated a novel finding of manipulating people’s agreement with an activist identity label, which is again an important contribution to identity research because while variability in identity is well established in social identity theory it is not necessarily measured as such in survey or experimental research. The fact that broad activist stereotypes can significantly predict variance in identification as an activist also sets up interesting questions about how specific activist stereotypes might work in more detailed intergroup and interpersonal ways to influence social movement processes.
Appendix A

Table 2.
Means, standard deviations, and correlations of self identity selections with action participation
(N=203)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mean (SD)</th>
<th>Visible Actions</th>
<th>Low vis. Actions</th>
<th>Volunteer</th>
<th>Community member</th>
<th>Activist</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Visible Actions</td>
<td>In table 1.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.651**</td>
<td>.585**</td>
<td>.412**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low vis. Actions</td>
<td>In table 1.</td>
<td>.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.465**</td>
<td>.323**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteer</td>
<td>3.75 (2.02)</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.443**</td>
<td>.588**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community member</td>
<td>5.04 (1.76)</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.304**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activist</td>
<td>3.75 (1.96)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Correlations marked with ** are significant at the p<.01 level.*
CHAPTER 6.

Context Statement

Where Chapter 5 drew out the broad relationships between activist identity and actions, this next Study involves a detailed examination of individual variations and within-movement specific language use, identities, and patterns of actions. Through an analysis of interviews with people who have extensive experience of working in various social movement causes, the aim of this study is to understand how highly committed actors align their identities with specific actions, why they distance themselves from some identities or actions, and how they connect strategic goal-oriented decisions with their personal choices and well-being concerns. That is, we look at how ongoing involvement in collective action can be maintained as meaningful both politically and personally.

In investigating the particular nuances of identity and strategy that these collective actors adopt this research makes particular contribution towards understanding ongoing relations within groups of people who share similar social change goals or similar political orientations. This also contributes to an aim stated in the thesis introduction, and again discussed in Chapter 4 (Study 2), where collective action might be seen by outsiders as a homogenous whole. That is, we argued that not all forms of collective action are visible from the ‘outside’, and that by examining variation within movements we might understand how different people, with different ideas, values and psychological needs, can come to be equally committed to social change. This study also, therefore, contributes to the aim in this thesis of understanding how people rhetorically protect and/or establish the meaning of their identities and action.
Abstract

Not all activism is visible, and from the ‘outside’ activists can all appear to be the same. In this interview study we unpack the differences between various activists, advocates, volunteers, and organizers, working in a range of social causes in Australia. Their causes include various environmentalisms, animal rights and human rights. While they were all committed to some form of collective action, they understood and made sense of their identity, community, methods, and goals in meaningfully different ways. For instance, some interviewees discussed their ‘soft’ advocacy approach, which is contrasted to more direct or combative actions. In explicating the nuances of identity and strategy that these collective actors adopt, we contribute to understanding the ongoing relations within groups of people who share similar social change goals, granting theoretical and practical insights into politicized collective identities (Simon & Klandermans, 2001), and the ways that participants manage and sustain their participation in collective action.
Taking a Look Inside: Identity and Strategy Alignment within Social Movement Groups

The social identity perspective suggests that strong, salient social identities predict intentions to participate in coordinated collective actions (e.g. van Zomeren et al., 2008). However some scholars have pointed out the need for a better understanding of how identity content (norms) relates to collective action (e.g. Baray et al., 2009; Livingstone & Haslam, 2008; Thomas & McGarty, 2009), because it has implications for how groups see themselves as different to other groups in specific (valued) ways (Livingstone & Haslam, 2008). While the study of collective action does always involve intergroup relations in some way, in this study we are also interested in how identity content is implicated in within-group relations, or within-movement relations. We consider it important, as indicated in the title, that research should look inside the undertakings of social movements, in order to make the identities and practices that occur within collective action more apparent. This is important because collective action is often treated (including by ourselves) as one broad activity rather than more specific sets or repertories of actions that might go together, or come into conflict (see Carmin & Balser, 2002; Wright, 2009).

The relevant point of investigation for this paper is that the meaning or content of social identity is important for understanding the formative processes around which individuals will come together to coordinate actions. The content of identity is composed of shared beliefs and opinions, normative practices/behaviours and emotions (Livingstone & Haslam, 2008; Thomas et al., 2009a), all of which are collectively generated and contested in interactions with ingroup and outgroup
members (e.g. Reicher, 2004; Sani & Reicher, 2000; Stott & Reicher, 1998). Contextually specific research can extend our understandings of how these opinions, practices, beliefs, and emotions align and are made sense of by the individuals who make up these groups. The narratives of those who are engaged in collective action are a valuable source of data for understanding how individuals make sense of their identity within a broader network of social movement communities. Thus, this study reports on interviews with people who are heavily involved in various forms of social movement activities.

**Social Identity and Social Movements**

The social identities measured in much of the collective action research is based on membership with a broad social category (e.g. ethnicity, gender, Bliuc et al., 2007), but the opinion-based group concept is more specific - it explains that people develop commitment to a group of people with whom they share opinions (Bliuc et al., 2007). They argue that this is an important distinction to make because “the focus on social categories per se can overlook the social meaning of the categories for members and often does not capture what is psychologically meaningful for group members with respect to the issue at hand” (p. 2). Similarly, the politicized collective identity concept is based on commitment to a specific political organization (Simon & Klandermans, 2001), and has been found to be a better predictor of action than an identity based on social category membership (finding supported by meta-analysis, van Zomeren et al., 2008).

The study of personal narratives is a generative way in which to understand the psychological meaningfulness of identity and strategy for those who are engaged in social movements. It is through narratives that people weave connections between their
choices of strategy with their sense of who they are (Polletta, 1998), and how they committed or converted to their cause (e.g. Linden & Klandermans, 2007). Studies on the personal experiences of collective action have looked at the importance of feelings of personal integrity, efficacy, and community in activism (Harré, 2007; Harré et al., 2009), and how activists maintain resilience and happiness (Einwohner, 2002b; Mills & Smith, 2008), for example strategies that people can employ for coping with setbacks include seeing the positive in small steps in the right direction, and claiming credit for successes (Einwohner, 2002b). Harré et al. (2009) use the term ‘identity projects’ to describe how people actively create their lives as political activists, and that in these projects they strive to meet certain psychological needs or well-being concerns (in addition to political goals).

Our agenda in regards to progressing research on the narratives of activism is to consider the ways in which personal experiences and concerns are also integrated, shaped, or at times constrained, by the strategic aspects of social movement dynamics. A more detailed examination of the meaning that specific identities hold for individuals engaged in specific collective actions should take in to consideration that identities also involve the strategic and rhetorical work to build up and communicate collective identity as a part of social movement framing (e.g. Bernstein, 1997; Snow et al., 1986). Mills and Smith (2008, p. 433) argue that more research could be done to “catalogue the finely grained complexity of activists’ emotional experiences and value judgements in social movements”, beyond the initial causes of these emotions. We aim to therefore connect the personal choices of committed actors (in their decisions about where they invest their energies), with the strategic components of social movement activity. Thus
we examine both their strategic choices and how they might relate to ongoing social movement activity, with the consequences of their work on their personal well-being.

**Strategic Within-group and Inter-group Dynamics**

Identities are shaped by interactions with out-groups and also within groups (e.g. Adair, 1996; Drury & Reicher, 2000; Drury, Reicher, & Stott, 2003). Collective identity content can contain (amongst other elements) prescribed norms for executing social movement strategy in the form of identity performances to various audiences (Klein et al., 2007). For example, some groups may feel the need to downplay personal stake or emotional investment when communicating with opponents (Einwohner, 2002a).

Groups that have politicized (i.e. realised the greater context of their political struggle) will attempt to influence the general public (Simon & Klandermans, 2001), meaning that they will communicate their identity in campaigns to the public. These performances and communications contain not only calls for action and change but also communications about “who we are” (Klein et al., 2007; Polletta & Jasper, 2001).

Strategic performances of identity that are undertaken for both public and oppositional audiences then have implications for within-movement and counter-movement dynamics (see Della Porta, 1995; Meyer & Whittier, 1994; Tarrow, 1995). Within-movement dynamics can also be conceptualised as intergroup relations in that they involve changing alignments with or against social movement groups that share the same end goals. It is within movements that what is referred to as “diffusion” takes place - where through informal networks and social interactions people affiliated with different organizations evolve their preferred strategies and develop more specific understandings of their identity and place within the broader movement (Oliver & Myers, 1998). An example Oliver and Meyers illustrate is the rhetorical diffusion of
groups changing from calling themselves “feminist” to “women’s liberation”, indicating ongoing processes of meaning contestation occurring along with shifting political conditions. Diffusion also likely has historical elements, where groups can make attempts to move away from past representations of their identity in order to re-establish or re-invigorate their calls for change (see Haslam & Reicher, 2012; Liu & Laszlo, 2006). Movements can also influence other movements; for example, the women’s movement impacted on the peace movement in the 1980s (Meyer & Whittier, 1994).

The ways in which these movement dynamics and diffusion processes relate to identity is illustrated in recent research involving members of the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society (Stuart et al., in press), where they say they are not “old school greenies” and instead call themselves “pirates” because of their controversial strategy of directly intervening against whaling. This identity construction served to establish themselves as uniquely effective in contrast to “protester” groups such as Greenpeace, whose methods were described as ineffective and outdated. This example demonstrates dynamics in which groups sharing the same social change goals can disagree over method, and that one way this disagreement manifests is through identity rhetoric. Another example of how collective identity content is implicated in cycles of protest and long-term political change is Gamson’s (1995) paper on “queer” identity, where being queer is embraced as a distinctive identity separate from mainstream heterosexual culture. Gamson argues, however, that this identity would “self-destruct” if the movement’s end goal was met (i.e. equality and eradication of heterosexism). This demonstrates that collective identities are not only actively reconstructed over time, but could even cease to exist if/when political conditions change.
What this research also tells us is that collective actors can adopt creative ways of managing their identities to establish and protect feelings of collective efficacy (Bandura, 2000), to make connections to communities that they belong to, and to manage against threats to their legitimacy (serving several psychological needs and group functions, see Harré et al., 2009; Klandermans, 1997). It also demonstrates that groups can evolve over time, not just from interactions with outgroups, but also from interactions within groups or within similar social movement groups. However, little research has considered these meaning making processes within groups or within broader social change movements.

We consider it important to pay attention to within group processes because with the ongoing construction of identity and strategy of social movement groups, the extent of identity management work required by committed actors can be quite intense. For example, one interview study found that people committed to activism can be uncertain about labelling themselves as an activist because of self-doubt about whether the work they are doing is enough to meet what is perceived to be a high-bar identity (Bobel, 2007). This means that the strategic and rhetorical aspects of social movements can have personal consequences – both positive and negative - for those engaged in these activities. This is because what affects groups also affects the individuals within the group (Blackwood & Louis, 2012).

Our aim in this study is to undertake a detailed examination of the narratives of those engaged in ostensibly political organizations to further ‘see inside’ these movements, that we may understand the ways in which personal narratives connect and make sense of ongoing and changing movement dynamics and political circumstances. Through semi-structured interviews with highly committed collective actors, we
examine how they describe or identify themselves and how these self-descriptions relate to the kinds of activities they engage in, their alignments or debates with other similar organizations, the ways that they try to gain support from the public or potential new members, and their experiences of being part of a community of people working together. We therefore aim to make connections between the choices that individual collective actors have made with how they relate to debates and controversies within a broader political context. This allows for a connection of personal narratives with some of the broader social movement dynamics.

Method

Participants

Thirteen people were interviewed (8 female). The terms they used to identify themselves or job titles they held were: activist (pps 3, 8, 9, 10), advocate (pps 1, 2, 6, 12), manager (pps 4, 7), coordinator (pp 11), local councillor (pp 13) and eco-realist (pp 5). They belonged to various non-government organizations, and local government bodies that cover causes including environmentalism (sustainability, climate-change, anti-coal, conservation; n=7), global poverty reduction (n=2), animal rights (n=1), asylum seeker/refugee rights (n=2) and community volunteering (n=1). Details about participants are kept anonymous, including their demographics and affiliations, but all had years - some had decades - of experience. In addition, areas of talk that may have allowed interviewees to be identified have been removed to preserve anonymity.

Interviewees were recruited both through the researchers’ networks and through cold-calling. Interviews were conducted face-to-face or over video call (but only audio recordings were made). The interviewer followed an interview guide, but this was
adapted to each participant’s area of work (so that questions they had no experience in were omitted), and we were responsive to topics they raised. The interviews ranged from 30 to 90 minutes (average 57 minutes). Transcription was verbatim.

Interview questions focussed on how they describe themselves (identity), what kinds of activities they are regularly engaged in, what kinds of opposition they face (if any), and how they deal with this, the ways that they try to gain support from the public or potential new members. We also asked them questions arising from previous studies (Chapter 4, 5) about activist stereotypes, or whether there exist ideas that activists are ‘superhuman’ (see also Bobel, 2007).

Data analysis

Individual transcripts were read closely, and notes were taken on each interviewee so as to gather a comprehensive insight into their personal stories, experiences, hopes and goals – this is done by drawing on the principles of interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA, Shaw, 2010; Smith, 1996). In IPA individual variations are retained in the analysis (rather than focussing on similar themes and consistencies between interviewees), and IPA requires that contextual details are retained and that the analysis is illustrated with quotes from interviewees, which we provide.

After considering individual cases we also coded for similar organising themes so as to structure the written analysis: 24 main themes were coded, and these were then organised into 5 overarching themes: “identity”, “community”, “movement philosophy and strategy”, “personal philosophy, emotions, and struggles”, and “learning over time/varying participation” (note these themes are not all reported on separately in the analysis section, but are often interwoven).
The next stage of the analysis was to be selective in reporting findings according to our research aims, while also giving each participant’s views a fair representation and describing the variation in their narratives. This achieves our research aim of balancing sensitivity to individuals’ meaning-making while also drawing out contributions to research.

**Analysis and Discussion**

The analysis has three sections: on ‘soft versus hard activism’, ‘community’ and ‘personal wellbeing’ – we focus on content in the interviews that was identified by the researchers as novel (and therefore an interesting contribution to existing research), in addition to themes that were set out in our research aims on understanding individuals strategic choices along with their personal experiences and understandings. We discuss the variation between interviewees as well as the similarities, and our intent is to communicate their views (as per an interpretive phenomenology approach).

**Soft Advocacy Versus Hard(er) Activism**

A novel finding from the interviews is the use of what was termed a “soft” or “quiet” approach, in contrast to “hard” activism. Activists were described as primarily engaged in protesting/direct actions (even those who self-identified as activists said this, with the exception of P8 who wants to change this definition). Activism was never described in negative terms, but either as strategically limited or that a “soft” approach was simply personally preferred. The most commonly occurring alternative term used was “advocate”.

The first example of this is P12 – who describes herself and her organization as animal advocates. She explains that this sits between animal welfare (soft), and animal activism (hard):
“I guess we advocate for better conditions for animals. It’s as, you know, welfare is kind of a bit soft, animal activist is a bit hard... like animal activist, the guys that lock on to the ships and the trucks, and um, you know, we’re actively trying to get better conditions, but we’re more, um, just a more subdued, and we have an advocacy role.” (In 299)

She further says there is room for activist and advocacy approaches in the movement, and that part of her respects the “hard” approach but is concerned that in the long term it undermines the potential success of the movement because it alienates part of the public – creating the reputation of “feral ratbag, hippy, you know, tree huggers” (In 310). But her stance is not only a strategic one; she also states that in hard activism you can “put your body and your mind and your psyche on the line, like, for irreparable damage if you believe in something that strongly” (In 394), and so she is ambivalent about her own capacity to withstand that stress.

Similarly, P1 and P2 said that in the asylum seeker rights movement the activists and advocates have different but complimentary roles. Put simplistically - the activists protest, and the advocates assist with individual asylum seeker cases and appeal to policy makers (on the basis of individual cases). P1 describes advocacy as a way of maintaining “legitimacy” and “power”, “rather than going out and being like an outspoken activist” (In 62), although this makes her concerned that activists might see her advocacy work as “not really doing anything” (In 139). However her approach has changed somewhat recently when after a major set-back for the movement she decided to attend a protest:

“I guess before that happened you’re always working towards something. Trying to do quietly quietly response I guess and, to kind of manage those hats of having the non-activist identity [laughs] to be able to influence stuff but you know then I just thought f- it was about, “well fuck it”, like...what... there’s nothing else to do now, I’m actually just incre- I’m always incredibly outraged but I was just absolutely fuming” (P1, ln 685)
A sense of “nothing else to do” made her decide to attend this protest, which indicates that in advocacy work she felt a greater sense of achievement (until recently). While part of her decision to take up an advocacy role is strategic - because it might be enable her to “influence stuff” - P1 and P2 both also said that it was the personal connections to the individual asylum seekers that led them to an advocacy role:

“I think if I hadn’t actually started meeting the people? Meeting the asylum seekers in detention? … I probably would have been an activist”… “because you will meet activists in say [activist organization] for example who visit detention and who kind of have taken on board an advocate role because they met the people and become more personally engaged with those people rather than the political, broader political stuff.” (P1, ln 713)

One can see from this example that personal connections to individuals (or animals etc) can lead to a different approach that is seen as more personal when contrasted to the “broader political stuff”.

P9 (environmental activist) said she had recently transitioned to a softer approach in order to “broaden” the types of actions supporters are asked to take:

“I think I made a bit of a transition recently from, um, a very like adversarial approach to a slightly more softly, softly approach but not terribly softly, softly. [laughs]” … “you know, I really believe in building our movement, and broadening our movement, and I think that we can't do that if all you ask anyone to do is get out and, um, protest or get out and lock themselves to something” (ln 240)

Thus she describes a more “softly, softly approach” as a way in which she might be able to broaden the movement and increase their supporter base. The idea of mobilizing a larger number of people came up in the global poverty cause as well – P7 said the primary objective of her organization is to “increase the number and effectiveness of people taking action, so the movement in this context is more powerful and better able to effect change, and we do that through education and advocacy.” (In 237).
The education and advocacy approach, she says, is aimed to target:

“those who are kind of passive, but interested, sorry interested in something, but passive about kind of being ... doing something about it, so we don’t really try and target those who are anti doing something about extreme poverty.” (In 388).

This approach, of educating people who are already sympathetic, seems quite a contrast to an adversarial or combative style of promoting social change in which energies are directed mostly at opposition groups.

Another method for increasing support was described by P6 (renewable energy advocate) – which is to be “pro” renewable rather than “anti” fossil fuels.

“what I say to people is that sustainability isn't anti-nuclear, or it isn't anti-coal, it's not pro-climate change, it's not demonstrating for action on climate change, it's just pro-renewables, advocate renewables as a positive base solution, for our own benefits.” (In 118)

He said his organizations’ “soft advocacy” approach was an “outflanking manoeuvre” (In 152) to separate themselves from an anti-nuclear activist group; they do not participate in events with an anti-nuclear or anti-coal message. He speculates that their soft advocacy “Yes” approach might be what attracts people to them - “we attract a broad spectrum that we can get the traction from the whole people spectrum, whereas most “No” campaigns tend to be from the left” (In 1207). He also states this choice of strategy as a personal one, although he is unable to articulate why – “I don’t know why activist and going on demonstration thing has never been for me, but I think...I don't know” (In 1013).

An interesting contrast to the above is that P5 was a member of the same organization as P6, and P5 recounted his reasons for leaving that organization:

“They had this…what, guy turned out to be a climate change denier and I just basically lost my shit and”...“I basically said to them I’m not trying to give you an ultimatum, but either he goes or I go. And they were like, oh no, no, you
know, we’ve got to accept all views. And I went, no, I’m not…I’m not wasting my time on a group that is going to accept that as a valid viewpoint.” (In 516).

So while for P6 the apolitical approach was ideal, P5 found it unacceptable and left the organization despite an interest in the same topical area (i.e. promoting renewable energy). This demonstrates that there can be layers of reasons for why people will affiliate with groups, where agreement over end goals is not always sufficient for retaining members.

Another interviewee, P4 (volunteering manager), started out in student politics but found people to be quite argumentative – “you have these things that you want to do and you want to contribute something but you spend so much of your time just…arguing with the people that are meant to be working with you.” (In 54). In contrast, in her volunteering work they aim to give people concrete “experiences” that might make them think about broader social and political issues:

“[volunteering project] is trying to…by giving people those experiences, get them to think about those things early on– which is why we want to do it with the younger kind of people so that hopefully this whole idea of doing good it makes them think about, those things, like climate change or some of the more political...issues. Um even though we don’t touch that stuff, we don’t talk about climate change or any of the political stuff, it kind of hopefully just through having the experience introduces you to some of those other...other things.” (In 497)

Thus, while she is still involved in climate change activism (and feels that it is important), in the volunteering role she believes that volunteering can introduce people to a whole range of possible ways they could get involved in either apolitical social issues, or political issues – but without the argumentative aspects of activism. The potential for conflict between her activism and volunteering work is made sense of by a desire to help young people have positive and fun experiences of “doing good” and with the hope that it might bring about more long term change.
The need for rational discussion, rather than arguing, also came through in other interviews. For example P13 (local government) appeals to “rational” and “evidence-based” discussions:

“unfortunately we’ve had these fractious debate which I think hasn’t...um been helpful either so, I mean I think it’s... I think terms like ‘climate deniers’ is probably is no more helpful than calling people... you know people that are ‘climate change zealots’ I think both of them are kind of quasi-religious in many ways, the whole point of this is actually about evidence and...and therefore rational policy choices and based on the evidence that we’re presented with.” (In 183)

Thus similarly to P4, distaste for argumentative, name-calling, “quasi-religious” political debates has lead him to adopt a personal philosophy of emphasising “rational” policy, and that “when the facts are on your side, and evidence is on your side then you’ve got no need to be defensive” (In 166).

Overall, the distinction between hard (and confrontational) and soft approaches seems to stem from various reasons for distinguishing oneself or one’s group from the association of activism with being ‘outspoken’ or from working on ‘anti’ campaigns involving protesting and direct actions. Even P10, who describes himself as an environmental activist, had a specific idea about what an activist is:

“when I think of an activist I think of like mostly, like protests, and non violent direct action, but then there are activists out there that just do like kind of door-knocking and more public outreach kind of stuff...and...but it’s just not the kind of stuff that I picture when I think of an activist.” (In 184).

In sum, for those who said they were not an activist it was based on a delineation of strategy, and the idea that “soft” approaches might be more appealing to a wider audience. Also often personal reasons were given, where personal preference or personality descriptors were invoked as leading to their decision to take up a particular organizational affiliation. However, it is important to note that “hard” approaches were
still described as being important for the broader movement, as one interviewee (P11) stated, for reasons of wanting to be seen as “prepared to go the extra yard”:

“we do seek to portray, as an organization, a strong identity as a sort of environmental organization that is prepared to go the extra yard, and you know...do things that others may not do”… “an activist focus and encouraging people to sort of be active, um, and not to be afraid to sort of stand up and be seen, and all those kinds of things” (In 372).

Community

The next section looks at the different ways that the interviewees talked about their community of collective actors. Attachment to a group of people who share the same views is considered to be vital to understanding when people will participate in collective action (McGarty et al., 2009; Simon & Klandermans, 2001; Turner et al., 1987). For these interviewees their views about the importance of community varied – some felt that support from others and being friends with the people they worked together with was vital to their ongoing involvement; others described their group as peripheral, or important for the coordination of actions but not necessarily important for emotional support.

For instance P8 (environmental activist) said that when she first started going to meetings she was shy and found it hard to speak up. She says, “if I didn’t have the friends to help me build that confidence…I think I probably would have dropped out and found it really hard to go back” (In 359). She had to learn about herself and what she is best suited to:

“I think for me, I had to find my own way of doing things. I had to go...I had to realise that I was never going to be someone to yell slogans at a rally, and that was okay, and that there was still space in the movement for me. Like yeah, that's something I'd like to talk to people about, like to say, is that, like there's room for everyone, no matter what you want to do. You don't have to fit into one activist...” (In 368).
One can see from this example how there may be cases where people who feel lacking in self-confidence, or feel inexperienced, might drop out from social movements. Thus the support of friends can be important in these early stages.

Similarly, P3 (international aid and development) described her fellow activists as her best friends. Before becoming involved in activism she says she was lonely, “I worked in agriculture and I didn’t connect with the people. I mean, I did at one level, but I didn’t find my soul mates.” (In 110); until she went to a meeting to save native forests and “click, I thought, oh, these are the people I want to hang out with.” (In 117).

P1 described her connection to the community of advocates as limited at first (“I don’t think I felt like part of a movement in a sense”, In 601), but says that those links were slowly built over time. Therefore, she does not attribute the initiation into advocacy to community or friends, but rather to her own experience of outrage, “I mean the reason if you’d asked me why I got involved in the first place it was because I couldn’t turn away.”(In 606).

For P12 despite her entry into the movement through friends, she does not attribute her commitment to them, “I got involved because my friends were involved... but now they're still that like 20% involvement and I'm like 100% so they've just stayed where they are” (In 506). She says that she does not need the presence of others to keep going, “I'm a bit of weirdo, you know. I'm a bit of a loner, and I prefer to get all the support, I guess, from like facts and research, and have that on my side, rather than people that go, "Oh yes. I agree with you", you know” (In 495). She also talked about the conflict created between her personal values (and friends’ values) and her organization’s goals:
“You know, my circle of friends now is kind of 95% vegan, so they all have the same, well, similar ideas about live export. Some of them don’t agree with our message, you know, that we have to put out there to get the public on side, which is, “Hey, let's slaughter them here and keep jobs in Australia”... so it's not really a vegan ideal. It's promoting slaughter, they're going to get slaughtered anyhow, so that's kind of picking the lesser of two evils... but a few of them have a problem with that, and I have a problem with that... occasionally too, when I've got to publicly declare that we're in favour of slaughtering animals locally and processing locally, and shipping off the meat.” (In 482).

Her situation is interesting because she shares quite similar views with her friends, and became involved in the movement through them initially, but they are only “20% involvement”, and they also disagree with her organization’s approach. This is an example of where organizational goals can create constraints on the expression of personal values, and a person’s multiple identities can in some respects be complimentary, but conflicting in other respects.

Likewise, P10 (environmental activist) said he did not feel the need for the social aspect of activism, which he felt meant he was not a “typical activist”:

“I don’t feel like I’m a typical activist in a way [laughs] ... because I talk to so many others and it seems as though the only reason why they’ve gotten involved is because they’ve known someone, and just kind of been brought into the social circle?...so...so many stories seem to be revolved around that.” (In 124).

His reasons for becoming involved he says is because:

“ah, well just the fact that climate change is such a major threat to everything, and I've been dreaming about it ever since I was fairly young, and, ah, feeling that something should happen, but I just never did anything personally, which in retrospect makes me feel pretty horrible, um, and so now I feel like I have a responsibility to do everything I can.” (In 135)

Thus he talks about his involvement as not coming about through social networks, but from a sense of personal responsibility and concern; but he notes that this seems to be in quite strong contrast to so many others who have “been brought into the social circle”.
Overall in the talk around community most embraced the usefulness or support that can be provided from one’s group of fellow collective actors, but they did differ in their stories of the points at which in their entry into the movement or organization community was important, or whether their continuing involvement was attributable to community.

**Personal Consequences of Ongoing Participation**

The final section of the analysis looks at some of the personal consequences for their well-being, experiences of burn-out and dealing with stress, as well as personal or intrinsic motivations. Some interviewees were quite candid, while others were not or did not experience many personal difficulties with their work. We focus this section on those who did talk more about their personal difficulties.

In terms of mental health and well-being, two of the interviewees disclosed to the interviewer that they have struggled with depression and anxiety. This was not described as being an outcome of their work but rather as interconnected. For instance, P5 says he struggles with depression and social anxiety, and remarked that perhaps working on climate change issues may not have been the “wisest idea” for his well-being, but that “it’s the kind of thing you can’t un-look, you can’t un-know it” (ln 309). He did not attribute the cause of the depression as originating from his work, but did see it as interconnected with issues of “toxic culture” caused by the “same systemic flaws” that are causing climate change (ln 305). P8 (environmental activist) also said that depression and activism are connected:

“So I find activism, when I find the right way to be active, and the right people to be active with, and the right messages to be promoting, and the right way to be doing it, that can be helpful with my depression, it can kind of lift me out of it a bit, because you’re feeling you’re making a difference, and that kind of thing, but a lot of the time I have had to be careful not to take on too much, and to
think about too many different issues at once. I have to kind of protect myself a bit.” (ln 222).

So she says her happiness can be helped by her activism when she’s working on positive-message campaigns, but also can worsen if she over commits. The theme of protecting oneself, or balancing demands, was stressed as necessary to avoid burnout – however balancing demands was also described as something that had to be learnt the hard way, through experience. For example, P3 (international aid and development) said:

“I’ve had to learn to balance that. I’ve had my breakdown. I’ve had my burnout. Um, no, you can feel that, you can get, you know, I have days where I, uh, climate change freaks me out completely...I really worry about it. But you’ve just got to keep going, you know, you can’t...you’ve got to measure...got to, um, well, for me, I’ve had to measure those things.”...“And so now I’ve come back, I’m very busy at the moment with the [current role], but I say, well, this is a certain period of time. I will cut back again, I will shift my role.” (ln 157)

So she stresses that she’s “had to learn” to balance, despite ongoing moments of where she “freaks” out, but “you’ve just got to keep going”.

P2 said that with asylum seeker advocacy it is hard to do it “part-time”; “I think it’s much more of a um all or nothing, we’re obsessive.” (ln 202), but she had to take a break this year because her life is full of the people that got out of detention:

“I decided at the beginning of the year to not to go [to detention centres] this year, cause they’re all out. [name] and I seeing somebody on Saturday, um. We see somebody virtually every weekend”...“Um our lives are full. Of the people that got out. So it’s very difficult to take more on.” (ln 83)

She expressed feelings of bitter-sweetness; joy experienced at seeing asylum seekers claims accepted (and released from detention), but also the exhaustion that comes from having one’s life now full with those who “got out” and whom they remain close with. This seems to fit with the findings of Mills and Smith (2008), whose interviewees ups and downs were related to the ups and downs within the movement; in
particular they labelled one person as experiencing “frustrated happiness” which is a kind of constrained but balanced sense of meaningfulness.

We also asked interviewees about whether there is an idea that activists are ‘super-humans’ (see also Bobel, 2007). Perhaps unsurprisingly, none of the interviewees described themselves as such, but P9 (currently campaigning full-time against coal exports) did identify this trait in others. She said, “I definitely come across a lot of super humans. It makes me feel, inadequate” (ln 521), but then she thinks:

“Like, I think some of them don’t have lives, and um, are yeah, you know they work really long hours, and yeah, I don’t know how they do it, hey? Like, I can’t do that kind of stuff. Um, and then some I just think, “Oh yeah. They’re on the path to burn out”…“I don’t need that, you know, the pressure in my life of living up to these standards of people who just give everything.” (ln 540).

So while she does feel this way sometimes, she also thinks that what they are doing is unrealistic and likely to lead to burn-out. But it does not entirely resolve her concerns of whether she is living up to that standard.

P10 also talked about feeling uncertain when he first started coordinating his local environmental group:

“I really felt that when I was first starting, and I guess that’s probably one reason why people don’t do it, is because they feel, they don’t feel like they can and yeah, that’s…that was true for me. I didn’t feel like I could, but once you start doing it you realize that it’s not rocket science, it’s just sending out some emails and some texts, and organizing stuff, it’s incredibly easy.” (ln 433)

What he describes is that perhaps before taking on a role or becoming involved in a movement it can seem harder than it really is. Once he started managing the local office, however, he came to realize that “it’s incredibly easy”.
Another learning process described by an interviewee was negotiating between personal sacrifices for the sake of a moral ethos, with the ability to enjoy activities he loves:

“I just kind of gradually came to the realization that, um, this sort of environmental aesthetic, like, you sacrifice everything to…to minimize your footprint…Well, it … it doesn’t mean anything. And it can even be counter-productive because you make it appear to everyone else that that level of sacrifice and loss of, um, you know, the things that we value in life, is… is the only way that this problem can be addressed. But not only is it not the only way, but it’s not even…it doesn’t even work, because these are…these are systemic problems” (ln 911).

In this situation he even described a concern that making personal lifestyle sacrifices could work against the movement, by indicating to other people that they would also have to commit to that level. With this realization, he made an adjustment to his approach – this is an example in which personal decisions are made in connection with movement strategy. In this case, an initially self-imposed constraint was then removed with the hope that it would send a better message to others, and importantly he also changed his behaviour because it made him happier.

Finally, some interviewees had some interesting reflections on how to connect to people on personal levels; for instance the idea of activating values that a person already has. P7 (global poverty) said:

“what you want to do as somebody campaigning for social justice issues, is activate intrinsic value, so that in things like social justice, universalism, um, benevolence, like broad fluffy feelings” (ln 339).

Thus, activating intrinsic values was described by P7 as a way of encouraging people to be active without making them feel forced or obligated to help. This method was also identified by P4, who had a nuanced reflection on the role of guilt or obligation in compelling people into doing more:
“I think the original thing that drove me into, into getting involved with social issues was guilt, coming from the background that I came from. But I think has to be a, I think this is very much my own view but that has to be an internal thing. I don’t think… I don’t think other people can make you feel guilt. I think that just results in pushback the other way. I think people get very defensive, if you try to make them feel guilty, fair enough I do too. So I-I think that it has to be...it has to be an internal thing that you go through, and I think that if you give people the opportunity to have those experiences and to see the things other people are doing and all that sort of stuff and hopefully that leads to their own internal reflection.” (In 393)

Therefore for her volunteering work, she believes that a fun, social entry into volunteering might potentially lead people to reflect internally, and that this could lead on to further engagement in social issues. P8 also took the perspective that people stay around for internally motivated reasons, when they are “at the right place”:

“I think [people stay] when they're ready to. When they've got their own reasons to be there. Like…and when it suits, when what you're doing suits what they want to be doing…And if they're at the right place in their life.” (In 417)

Thus, the theme that comes through here is the idea that holding group gatherings gives people the opportunity to activate something already ‘inside’ them, when they are ready. The idea of personal transformation and experiences leading people to engage in activism is not new, but the explicit intention of giving people the opportunity to experience that personal transformation is intriguing.

Conclusion

The aim of this analysis was to examine how people’s narratives make connections between group dynamics, strategic, and personal consequences of long-term engagement in social movements. Several novel and interesting contributions result from this analysis – particularly regarding the soft(er) advocacy approach; the idea that activism/advocacy/etc involves a process of learning; and the ways in which strategic choices could also sometimes be supported by personal choices (or in opposition).
Soft Advocacy Approaches

The interviewees oriented to specific meanings associated with activism, which previous work (Study 2, Chapter 4) has noted comes under a narrow definition involving protesting primarily. Others took up different terms to describe what they do, and who they are. They did not avoid the activist label for the same reasons as others might avoid it – for example, a belief that activists are “feral, ratbag, hippies” (P12) – but rather because the strategies they adopt are different. We will consider some of the reasons for their differentiation from activism.

Firstly, what constitutes a softer or quieter was movement specific. For the animal advocate (P12) and environmental activist (P9), protests were seen as softer in contrast to harder actions such as locking oneself onto a ship/tree/etc. For the asylum seeker and renewable energy advocates, the harder or louder approach is protesting. So it is important to consider the point of comparison. In terms of the perceived efficacy of a quieter approach, this varied as well. For P1 the setback the movement received changed her perceptions of the efficacy of advocacy, and directed her towards attending a protest. Yet for P9, softening her approach was seen as potentially being more effective at broadening the movement. Again, this is relative to the context and contemporary socio-political events.

The next novel finding was that the “quieter” approach was often stated as personally preferred, as well as being a strategic choice. This indicates that group strategy is determined by the individuals who make up that group; for instance, in the case of the renewable energy advocate he said that the people who started the organization wanted to manoeuvre away from the activist group. This suggests an additional nuance to the opinion-based group concept (Bliuc et al., 2007), where
individuals gather with people who share the same opinions about specific strategies as well as opinion about the issue at hand.

The idea of broadening the movement through a quieter approach provides support for some of the criteria that constitute a conversionary movement, as argued by Wright (2009). The foundational social identity and self-categorization literature is based on studying intergroup conflict and competition. However conversionary aims were often present in these interviews – where the goals of the movement are not based on resisting domination, but the aim is to get everyone, or as many as possible, on-side (Wright, 2009).

These findings also contribute to the concept of the politicized collective identity (PCI), particularly as it relates to the inclusion of third parties. The necessary components for a politicized identity are shared grievances, adversarial attributions, and inclusion of society/third parties (Simon & Klandermans, 2001). While in these interviews, these three components appear to be present (in one shape or another), the inclusion of third parties is described in the PCI literature as a part of intergroup competition for power whereby: “these group members try to transform the confrontation into a more comprehensive power struggle forcing society at large to take sides either with their in-group or with their opponent” (p. 326). Even though these interviewees talked about campaigning to the public, it does seem not match with this idea of forcing society to take sides - indeed some of them emphasized that they do not want to make people feel guilt or obligation. Again, Wright’s description of being open-handed to those who are not currently on-side (or in the words of P7, those who are “interested” but “passive”) fits well here. It also raises questions about who are considered outgroup(s) – which may include people who are not currently part of the
ingroup. In order to make sense of this, one needs to see identity as an ongoing construction rather than being fixed, static, social identities (Drury & Reicher, 2000; Reicher, 2004).

However, an important clarification about the conversionary movement concept is that it does not just refer to approaching opposition or general public by being gently persuasive. Rather, the distinction is that the aims of the movement are to convert people’s behaviour and world view, as opposed to competitive collective action that challenges an illegitimate system of relations (Wright, 2009). Other literature has made distinctions between different approaches that may be relevant here as well, such as Postmes and Brunsting’s (2002) distinction between persuasive and confrontational approaches; or Doise, Spini and Clemence’s (1999) distinctions between sceptics, governmentalsists, advocates and personalists. For example, asylum seeker advocates might take softer approaches, but they are trying to challenge illegitimate social relations. Therefore there is a non-perfect alignment here with the target of change and method of change. That is, some ‘soft’ actions can have political targets; some ‘hard’ actions can target individuals/animals. Thus the distinct classification of movements into these groupings is complex, and beyond the scope of this study. The relevant point is that, as demonstrated in this study, the types of approaches people have are not only relevant to broader social change, but are also related to the personal choices that people make about who they are, and what they believe is the best way to approach the issue.

**Learning to Be a Collective Actor**

There were several points in which these interviewees talking about learning processes involved in their engagement in their relevant social movements. These
learning processes involved – adapting strategies to suit their personalities (or make them feel happier), learning to balance a fine line between over-commitment and also the stress that comes from the feeling that they are not meeting their self-set obligations. That is, they seemed equally troubled by not doing ‘enough’ as they did by doing ‘too much’.

They also talked about their first experiences of participating in actions, where they had varied experiences of connecting with other people in the movement, or how those bonds are formed or change over time. However, some interviewees did reject the notion that the social aspects of activism are important (e.g. pps 10, 11, 12). The notion that they could not “look away” (P1) or that you cannot “un-know” (P5) perceived atrocities, feelings of obligation (P10) and guilt (P4), show that ideological and/or emotional conviction is an important driver as well (see also, Harré et al., 2009; Thomas & McGarty, 2009; van Zomeren, Postmes, & Spears, 2012).

The implications of this research for group socialization is insight into how individuals seek out groups that meet their needs (Levine & Moreland, 1994). We suggest that it seems important, both for social movement theory and for practical applications, to highlight different identity-action projects that individuals can take up (see Harré, 2007). The desire to avoid being seen as an “outspoken activist” could result in joining a group with more subdued methods, such as an advocacy group involving personal case work, and appealing to policy makers through letter-writing. An individual who wants to stand up and not be “afraid to be seen” joins a protest demonstration or direct action group. And even an apolitical identity-action project, such as volunteering, can be seen as contributing to social cohesion. Thus this adds further detail to what can
sometimes be described as a straight-forward progression from inaction to action, or disengagement to engagement.

The findings around community are also relevant to group socialization. Some interviewees expressed the strength of their closeness to group members, while others expressed the frustration of interpersonal difficulties (e.g. P4, arguing with the people you work with; P5 quit an organization over a dispute). The interpersonal difficulties reported reflect themes from those found in Harré et al (2009), where activists commented on disliking some aspects of working with groups of people. Following from these findings, Harré et al argue that community should perhaps be considered as shaping events within activism, but not as defining individual’s overall commitment to activism. This, however, would be in strong contrast to a social identity reading which emphasizes a primary role for subjective attachments to groups. While we do not form conclusions from this study, the findings do indicate that small group and interpersonal processes – socialization and the ongoing shaping of groups (Levine & Moreland, 1994)- are indeed important to examine empirically if we are to understand within-group activity that contributes to social movements processes more broadly. These findings also may be the result of different levels of psychological attachment - to a broad community (i.e. as argued in opinion-based groups), in comparison to day-to-day social interactions.

**Personal Commitment and Consequences**

This study also contributed to research on how social movement engagement is intertwined with personal happiness. Interviewees in this study described how participating in actions can help alleviate depression, but also makes them feel overwhelmed at other times. Learning to balance aspects of their lives was talked about
as being a skill acquired through experience and yet, even with experience, difficult to maintain the right balance. We saw examples of people describing potentially competing aspects of their life (or life-spheres, Passy & Giugni, 2001), for example between friendship groups and organizational strategy (P12), or between reducing of carbon foot-print, with being able to participate in personal interests (P5). Interviewees resolved these by seeing compromises as a set in the right direction (e.g. P12), or as seeing personal and strategic goals as complimentary rather than opposing (P5). Overall, however, the philosophy was that “you’ve just got to keep going” (P3).

Another novel finding in this section was the idea of activating internal motivation in others. While the idea of personal experiences leading people to have a transformation is not new, and while most organizations would implicitly be trying to achieve this in their mobilization strategies, the idea that organizations can be structured primarily for the explicit intent of giving people the opportunity to experience a personal transformation is intriguing. As far as we are aware, this has not been identified as a strategy in previous research, yet it is being employed by P4 in particular, but also participants 7 and 8.

**Concluding Comments**

A note on limitations - this sample of interviewees is not representative of the broad spectrum of groups active in Australia. While attempts were made to recruit interviewees from a wider range of types of groups, more success was had recruiting people who had formal organizational membership (many were being paid some amount of money in their role) rather than loosely organized grassroots groups. This could explain the predominance of this “quieter” approach; more formal groups seem likely to adopt moderate approaches (and perhaps would be more likely to have the
time and interest in assisting with research). However, our aim was not to conduct representative research but rather examine individual variations in meaning-making and sustaining action – which we have done.

Social movements are constantly evolving – they reference their past, and respond to opposition groups that have played a role in defining who they are and what they do now (Einwohner, 2002a; Liu & Gastardo-Conaco, 2011). We have shown some of the ways in which individuals reflect on and make sense of these changes, and how they as active agents might play an active role in shaping the directions their groups take – in all cases these interviewees are attempting to pursue the actions they see as most efficacious and personally satisfying and sustainable. While broad level studies of intergroup relations are important for understanding social change, it is also important to consider the smaller scale individual variations and personal choices that people who dedicate themselves to social movements make, as part of their everyday lives.
CHAPTER 7.

General Discussion

The following concluding chapter will discuss the findings and implications of this research, and relate them back to the stated aims of the thesis. I first provide a discussion of each study separately, including suggestions for future research, and then discuss more broadly how this research has made contributions to the study of political processes and social movements. The chapter concludes with some practical implications, limitations, and closing remarks.

Summary of Each Study Contribution

Chapter 3: “We may be pirates, but we are not protesters”: Identity in the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society

This study examined the collective identity content and identity boundaries of members of the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society. I examined the ways that the normative content of their identity – containing identity rhetoric where they call themselves “pirates” and have a preference for direct actions – might open them up to criticism, and how they manage aspects of their collective identity that are controversial. This study also involved an analysis of the ways that they might rhetorically lower or raise the boundaries (or ‘requirements’) of their collective identity, and therefore who might have access to that identity.

One particularly important finding was the creative use of language, especially in the commentary published by Captain Paul Watson, which allowed him to assert their legitimacy and establish their unique contribution to the social movement. The juxtaposition of seemingly contradictory concepts (“non-violent aggression”) is the
work of an identity entrepreneur (Reicher & Hopkins, 1996; Reicher et al., 2005). Creative language use has been associated with historical resistance movements, and is a method used by groups to empower themselves (Haslam & Reicher, 2012). For example, Watson recast what might be deemed as violent actions into “compassionate” acts of aggression with restraint. The members also alternated their rhetoric at times to imply that they might be more radical than other environmental groups, which is a discursive method that enables them to distinguish themselves as uniquely effective because (only) they are willing to do what is deemed necessary. By becoming (or seeming) more radical, they step apart from “protesters”. Other ways that individuals differentiated themselves was to not participate in collective action at all (see later discussion on barriers), or by creating an advocacy/ “soft” approach that is aimed at converting more people to the cause (see later discussion on conversionary movements).

An additional contribution from Study 1 that I highlight here is the way that some individual members managed these identity conflicts – and this was through expression of individuality or personal agency. Previous research has noted that groups can have norms of individuality (Jetten, Postmes, et al., 2002), and in this group expressions of individuality could be seen to serve particularly strategic purposes. Personal or individual agency was invoked as a way of electing not to take up particular parts of the collective identity that might be controversial, and to defend against notions that their group membership might in some way subsume their agency. That is, the individual members did not identify the existence of prescriptive group norms. Moreover, they did not describe their group as uniform, but as people “from all walks of life”. In the web commentary, Captain Paul Watson states that SSCS cannot be
categorized, “because we are something completely different”. These strong statements were an interesting finding that seemed to be in contrast to social identity literature on self-stereotyping, in which strong social identities mean that group members see themselves as interchangeable with one another (Turner et al., 1987; Turner, Oakes, Haslam, & McGarty, 1994). However, the notion of personal agency being compatible with, and even enhanced by, group membership is an emerging area of interest in other social identity literature (e.g. Baray et al., 2009; Blackwood & Louis, 2012; Jetten, Postmes, et al., 2002).

The extent of the collectivism of particular groups (rather than cultures or individuals) is rarely analysed (Deaux & Reid, 2000). One suggestion I make is that groups that attract particular controversy, and/or seem radical, may have norms of individuality because radicalism brings with it notions of irrationality and the idea that individuals lose themselves in a crowd (deindividuation, Zimbardo, 1969). Therefore individualised rhetoric and identities could have developed to defend against such notions. SSCS are also a group that has developed in Western nations (e.g. U.S, Australia, France) where there is a pervasive ideology of individualism and self-regulation, resulting in a lack of available discourse to identify social influence (Rose, 1996; Stuart & Donaghue, 2012). As Jetten et al (2002, p. 205) state, “When we hear people argue that ‘we are all individuals’, this may disguise (and paradoxically convey at the same time) the underlying social influence that permits individualism to endure.”

Another argument initiated in this study, and carried throughout the thesis, is about the anticipation of entry ‘requirements’ for acquiring an identity. For SSCS members I argued that the boundaries of the identity changed reflexively in their talk in ways that have implications for who can become a member. At times they presented
their membership as nothing unusual and not requiring any particular characteristics – making the identity accessible to all. However, at other times they talked about their rare passion, radical edge, and willingness to do what no one else will do – in this case the boundaries of the identity are higher, and less accessible to people who are ‘unwilling’ to take potentially dangerous actions. This means that it would be difficult for some newcomers to take on that identity even when they are ‘passionate’ about conservation.

In all, the findings around expressions of individuality, the rejection of a “protester” identity, and the boundary work around the collective identity were themes that set the stage for the subsequent studies of this thesis. For instance, in Study 2 (Chapter 4), findings related to how those less-engaged in collective action anticipate what collective action entails, and how they manage feelings of ambivalence between wanting to retain individual identity or agency, and also wanting to participate in collective actions.

Chapter 4: “I don’t really want to be associated with the self-righteous left extreme”: How self-reflections on collective identity can hinder participation in collective action

The second empirical chapter focussed on barriers to participation in collective action. I argued that there is a need to expand on the understanding of the ‘soft’ social incentives and social meanings of collective action and how they can interfere with motivation. These barriers can result in feelings of ambivalence. In investigating social barriers to action we can see how people reflect upon their perception of (a) the normative content and performances of collective identity, and (b) use those reflections
to make decisions about their own self, and their willingness to engage in actions perceived as normative.

What was found in this study is that people held quite specific associations for collective action that may in turn present them with a perceived narrow range of collective actions to participate in. This was where they referred primarily to crowd actions or protests. Protesters and activists were seen as either highly committed, outspoken and confident; or as rabid, extremist, and self-righteous (or potentially a combination of both). Negative terms like the “professional demonstrator” imply an individual who protests as a full-time job, rather than because they are genuinely concerned about “fight[ing] the corner of that particular cause” (P#11514). The negative stereotype functions as a barrier if people do not want to be seen to be associated with “self-righteous”, “extreme” protesters. On the other hand, the more positive stereotype of the high level committed activist could function as high-bar perceived requirement where some individuals may feel they fall short.

The other key findings from this study, which were extended in the subsequent study (Chapter 5), relates to people’s concerns about identity performances, such as how participating in protests (‘visible’ actions), might appear to other people such as friends, family, and employers (“social incentives”, Klandermans, 1997; Klandermans & Oegema, 1987). Another similar concern expressed was that being associated with the more negative stereotype of protesters would result in their actions being ignored or wasted. The former concern relates to the views of significant others (i.e. fearing disapproval), and the latter concern is more related to efficacy (i.e. having one’s efforts wasted because they are associated with the “self-righteous left extreme”).
The pertinent point I concluded in this study was that the associations and assumptions that people make about collective actions and political organizations could limit newcomers’ perceived ability to contribute effectively, or to find good fit with a particular social movement group. Lay understandings of collective action (e.g., perceptions of protests as “attracting” extremists) can therefore be barriers to participation in collective action. Thus so-called inaction can be a meaningful state of action that is a form of resistance to being associated with practices that are perceived as illegitimate or ineffective.

I further argued in this study that people inexperienced in collective action can hold perceptions of collective action that could prevent them from seeking out experiences that could change those perceptions. Overcoming these perceptions does not always necessarily entail seeking out protests or direct actions, because I also argued that there are other types of actions and groups that people could become involved in. An argument made at the beginning of this thesis is that if activists are seen as extraordinary (or extreme) people, then it may be that activism is a pathway not commonly seen to be available to an ‘ordinary’ individual. Thus this leads to the conclusion in this chapter that emphasising the variety of options that individuals can take may be a way to alleviate some ambivalence about participation.

Another broader implication I began to discuss from this study is the theory of how group socialization occurs (Levine & Moreland, 1994). I argued that processes of socialization into the membership of political organizations (where membership of political organizations is linked to higher levels of participation, Simon & Klandermans, 2001; van Zomeren et al., 2008), has somewhat evaded research scrutiny. If most activism research examines people who are already socialized into (and thus strongly
socially identified with) political groups, then we continue to lack a full understanding of why that process can be unsuccessful. Socialization is important because group membership gives people the opportunities to learn how to access the resources they need to effectively participate in collective action (Klandermans et al., 2008; Simon & Klandermans, 2001) – and I would further emphasise that this includes social and interpersonal resources, not just instrumental resources.

Thus I suggest that further research is needed to understand what precedes the solidification of political group membership. This is a long-term research goal that ideally would involve longitudinal research. However this thesis has made contributions to group socialization research, specifically by drawing on the notion of anticipatory socialization (Merton, 1968). We examined people’s anticipations of becoming a group member (i.e. member of a collective). The prominent concerns they reported that relate to group socialization were related to feelings of conflict between belonging to a group and also being autonomous or agentic. For example, one reported concern was that groups might not allow them to express individual “voice”. While they expressed positive feelings of empowerment and support coming from knowing that they are part of a group, they also expressed concerns about the interpersonal difficulties that are part of working in a group. Thus, one implication from this is that the everyday practicalities and interpersonal interactions that are part of being in a group could be distinguished from the psychological attachment to a broader ingroup (see also Harré et al., 2009).
Chapter 5: Distinguishing participation in visible and low-visibility actions: Activist stereotypes, and identity performance concerns

This study investigated predictors for participation in different types of collective actions, the influence of activist stereotypes on identification as an activist, and the relationship between activist stereotypes and participation in collective actions. Drawing on qualitative findings from Chapter 4 (Study 2), measures were generated to distinguish predictors for participation in low visibility versus high visibility types of collective actions, and these factors related to perceptions about working in groups (i.e. perceptions of belonging and group support, personal agency, and identity performance concerns).

What was found in this study is that prompting people to simply think about activists was enough to significantly reduce their identification as an activist. This is evidence of the reflexive nature of identity, and one implication from this finding is to reiterate the importance of being sensitive to the ways we measure identity. It was also found in this study that the activist stereotype components indicated a general positive stereotype, where stereotypes of activists did predict identity but individual components of stereotype content did not contribute unique variance (and were highly correlated). I argued that future research could perhaps focus in more specifically on particular types of activist groups in order to untangle whether there are multiple types of stereotypes that exist about activists, where different types of stereotypes can be held by different groups, and thus have different implications for attitudes and behaviour (and certainly, the findings from Study 4, discussed below, contributed to this aim).

Finally, regarding predicting participation in visible compared to low-visibility actions, initial findings from this study suggest that there can be different predictors for
visible, group based activities, from actions that can be undertaken individually. Overall people who had identity performance concerns were less frequently participating in all types of actions. This finding poses questions for future research about whether people intentionally avoid actions because they are concerned about identity performances, or if it is the case that they have not yet had experiences that might change those perceptions (anticipatory vs experiential). There could be potential for both explanations, because while I have argued that negative perceptions can result in avoidance of actions, I also found (e.g. in Study 4) that people talked about engagement in actions as a learning process where they had to ‘find’ the types of actions that they felt suited them, and that were personally sustainable. This again reflects the argument that participation in actions can (initially) be an experience that provokes feelings of ambivalence, and that requires certain processes of socialization to take place in order for that ambivalence to be overcome.

Chapter 6: Taking a look inside: identity and strategy alignment within social movement groups

The aim of this final study was to understand some of the individual variations in meaning making, identity, and the everyday impact that working in social movements has for those who dedicate much of their lives to social change movements. The analysis focussed on variations as well as similarities across the interviews, and analysed personal narratives to understand how individuals can make sense of their choices about where they direct their efforts, what strategies they find personally preferable, and how they have learnt to balance the demands of their work.

One of the main findings from this study was a stated preference for what were referred to as “softer”, “quieter”, or more “subdued” methods of bringing about social
change. These softer approaches were primarily centred on converting and mobilizing people who are already somewhat sympathetic to the cause, or where ‘harder’ approaches might have the potential to undermine the success of the movement (based on concerns about legitimacy and public reputation).

Another one of the findings from this study was the importance of emphasising different routes or repertoires of collective action – that is, there are alternative ways in which people are trying to create social change. It also seems likely that these alternative approaches involve equal amounts of commitment and passion, and that deviation from traditional activism is more related to current socio-political circumstances, and personal choices made by these individual actors, rather than what might seem like a lack of commitment or motivation.

A commonly occurring alternative identity term found in this study was “advocate”. What constitutes an advocate did vary somewhat between different movements and was used by people working within several different movements – such as global poverty movements, animal rights, refugee rights, and renewable energy movements. The use of “advocate” as an identity term is also indicative of the debates and disagreements that can occur within broader social movements. This study therefore also contributed insights into not only the strategic reasons why groups can disagree over methods, but it also indicated that the ways in which individuals make sense of their actions and identities is important. For instance, some may avoid ‘harder’ activism because they are afraid of “putting your psyche…on the line for irreparable damage” (P12), or because it is just “not for me” (P6).

Thus, this study contributed to the thesis aims by demonstrating how those committed to collective action can rhetorically maintain the meaningfulness of their
identity and strategy, but it also indicated that such management work is never entirely resolved, or without personal consequence.

**General Discussion of Implications**

This section draws out some of the broader implications of the research for understanding collective action and social movements, and theory on identity development and identity management. It is separated into four parts; 1) the rhetorical management and rejection of identities, 2) understanding multiple identities, 3) the history and evolution of activism, 3) barriers to participation and socialization into groups, and 4) studying conversionary social movements.

**The Rhetorical Management (and Rejection) of Identities**

“Fixed identity categories are both the basis for oppression and the basis for political power” (Gamson, 1995).

Throughout this research I have referred to the ways that the different terms used to describe collective actors all capture a phenomenon of individuals coming together to voice their dissent in relation to a social issue or problem. But I also contended that, to the extent that people differentiate between these different identities, there may be meaningful differences between them. That is I have treated the meanings and content associated with these identities (‘activist’, ‘protester’, ‘advocate’) as a point of interest and interrogation. Illustrated in this thesis are variations and creativity in language use – for example, in Study 1 (Chapter 3) in Captain Paul Watson’s commentary he juxtaposed terms like “non-violence” and “aggression”. In other instances, however, people were able to reject or redefine their identities to soften their approach – such as calling themselves “advocates” rather than “activists”.

The rejection of some identity labels could be a strategy for coping with identity threat (Branscombe, Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 1999). However, the seemingly simple solution of ceasing to use a term that is seen to carry too specific an association (e.g. activist), by replacing it with something less definitive (e.g. ‘somebody who cares’, as stated by a participant in Mills & Smith, 2008), only addresses one rather superficial aspect of this concern. What is important is the broader contexts that give meaning to what is encapsulated within these terms, that is - the norms and practices that make up these identities (‘activist’, ‘protester’, etc.). For instance the perceived normative content and performances associated with an ‘activist’ identity can constrain who has access or entry into that identity. While it could be said that one could change the language (or the items in a questionnaire) in order to resolve such concerns, an alternative and more considered argument is that terminology forms an important part of the political process. I will illustrate this further by drawing on two contrasting examples - from Study 1 (Chapter 3), and some further material from the interview with P12 in Study 4 (Chapter 6).

Firstly, P12 talked about making a conscious choice to start using the term “advocate” rather than “activist” because, she said:

“everyone on the pro export side tends to refer to everyone who's opposed to it as animal activists so I just put out as much as I can. I just call ourselves animal advocates ... just to ... so maybe it will get into their consciousness too, although then that will probably become a dirty word, I don't know.” (In 296).

Here, a change in identity terminology is a meaningful response to opposition (pro-export) groups who refer to all anti-live animal export campaigners as “animal activists”, where “activist” has become associated with those who condone illegal activities. P12 was keen to disassociate from such activities because:

“I think there's a lot of ... a lot of us, and certainly part in me that would like to lock on to the ship, if we knew it would stop, but it never does stop, because you just get
cut off with bolt cutters ... so all it effectively does is bring, um, bring media and public attention to that plight, and that's a good thing, but we think we can do that in a way that isn't endangering, ah ... other people, isn't making the police pissed off with us...”

That is, P12 saw direct (and illegal) actions as ineffective, potentially dangerous, and as making the police angry. These all counted as reasons for her to dissociate from “activists”. In contrast, Captain Paul Watson and members of the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society (Study 1, Chapter 3) rejected some identities (“old school greenies”, “protester”) for quite different reasons. They call themselves “pirates of compassion” and “gentle terrorists” because they saw other activist or protest groups as passive and ineffective, and argued that the use of “compassionate aggression” was necessary and in fact the only effective method of ending whaling.

The important point is that the language they use to describe themselves is primarily used to organize their actions, and creative language use forms an important part of resisting opposition and oppression (Haslam & Reicher, 2012; Reicher & Hopkins, 2001a). As shown in the quote at the beginning of this section, fixed identity categories can be used for oppression and for political power. Moreover, what I have demonstrated in this research is that this rhetoric is not only important for interactions with opposition groups, but also is important for shaping groups within broader social movements that share similar ideals (e.g. ending animal cruelty).

Some have argued that the rejection of an activist identity means that collective identity is not as important to understanding participation in collective action as previously thought (Bobel, 2007; Liss et al., 2004). However, I argue that this explanation conflates identity labels with identity content. Through nuanced rhetoric, people can avoid unwanted connotations of being an activist, and reclaim their identity in terms that

6 This could also be a point of interdisciplinary difference between collective identity in sociology and social identity in social psychology and the ways in which they are conceptualized.
are more meaningful to them and more descriptive of how they see themselves, and the people that they feel connected to. Thus the phenomenological experiences of empowerment that come from being part of a group (Drury et al., 2005) can still be present. However, while experienced actors can demonstrate resourcefulness in managing these threats to identity meaning, the ongoing and complex nature of this identity management, I have argued, makes it difficult for newcomers seeking to join and become active members of these political organizations.

What I have put forward in this thesis then is that identity re-construction by highly committed individuals and groups, and the rejection of activist identity by those pursuing a ‘softer’ approach to social change, and disengagement by sympathizers can all be understood as reflexive attempts to reclaim meaning and or protect against threat to the meaning of one’s identity. That is, disengagement by sympathizers can, in part, be symptomatic of the perceived potential for one’s actions to be seen as illegitimate; similarly to the way that creative language use by committed actors is a response to threats to their legitimacy. Thus, disengagement can be a meaningful response, not just a lack of compulsion (see Chapter 4, Study 2, in particular).

The broader implications of this research for understanding social movement processes are that identity management can be problematic for groups as they seek to have social influence. Identity rhetoric can be used to de-legitimize groups, and thus influence intergroup relations. The dilemma for groups is: do we make ourselves distinct and oppositional, or do we make ourselves relatable and palatable? The problem is that oppositional identities can undermine the potential success of the social movement, if collective identities no longer fit with the self definitions of the people they are meant to mobilize (see Polletta & Jasper, 2001), and if those new identities
become reified and thus are able to be used by oppositional groups to demonize group members (Bernstein, 1997; Reicher & Hopkins, 2001a). This was evident in Study 1 where the SSCS endorsement of the “pirate” label allowed them to have political power, but was also used to dismiss them by media and opposition groups.

On the other hand, reconstructing identities to be more relatable and ‘softer’ (as seen particularly in Study 4, Chapter 6) could undermine the movement by decreasing their visibility – that is, controversy is useful (Piven & Cloward, 1977). Additionally, more inclusive identities can alienate people if the group is seen to be accepting viewpoints that contradict the goals of the movement. An example of this was evident in Study 4, where P5 said he left the renewable energy advocacy organization because the group accepted a member who was a “climate change denier”.

Therefore terminology is important because of what it conveys. Rhetoric is a resource for people to draw on to challenge existing ideas, but this is always meaningful within the contexts that shape identity, and to divorce from these contexts is to reduce or lose much of that meaning. Whether or not it is useful to measure (explicit) activist identity in future research, I would suggest that this is conditional on whether it is a relevant and meaningful term to the research participants themselves.

**Understanding Multiple Identities**

An additional reason for calling to attention the specificity of activist identities in this thesis is to contribute to research on understanding the integration and maintenance of multiple identities. Social identity and self-categorization theories posit the multiple and dynamic nature of the self-concept, but the empirical examination of which identities are important and when, how they influence different behaviours, and
how personal and social identities are interrelated is an ongoing and important project for researchers working in this area. Multiple identities are also relevant to political processes because politicized identities contain content that includes strong morally prescriptive norms, antagonism to the status quo (or antagonism towards threats to the status quo), and often highly visible identity practices (Klein et al., 2007; Wiley & Deaux, 2010). Multiple identities are also of interest to sociology and social movement research because of the potential for politicized identities to come into conflict with a persons’ other apolitical identities. A concept used in sociology to understand multiple identities is ‘life-spheres’, where people have multiple life-spheres and these need to be made congruent and continuous in order for people to participate in activism (Passy & Giugni, 2000).

Some examples of recent research that have contributed to the understanding of multiple identities are Baray et al’s (2009) research on extreme-right political group members, where they found that members expressed strong personal identity (agency) while also strong social identification with the group. They argue that personal identity strength is derived from the endorsement of ingroup norms. Another example of research that examines multiple identities is the dual identity literature - which refers to the congruency and maintenance of superordinate and subordinate identities7 (e.g. Hopkins, 2011; Hopkins & Kahani-Hopkins, 2004; Hornsey & Hogg, 2000). Dual identity literature has noted the ongoing complexity in managing identities that tend to come into conflict, especially given that both superordinate and subordinate identities are contestable (Hopkins & Kahani-Hopkins, 2004).

7 Examples of dual identities are being British and Muslim (Hopkins & Kahani-Hopkins, 2004; Jaspal & Cinnirella, 2010).
In terms of understanding participation and non-participation, it is during early socialization experiences that multiple identity conflict (or multiple embeddings) would need to be resolved, in order for people to continue their commitment and come to view activism as a central life project (Harré et al., 2009; McAdam & Paulsen, 1993; Passy & Giugni, 2000). This is a point that McAdam and Paulsen (1993) make in reference to reasons why having social ties to other activists does not inevitably lead that person to participate in actions:

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. (p. 642).

I argue that this is a point that could be made about social psychology collective action research as well, where a “tendency to study activists after the fact” treats non-participation as the opposite of participation. That is, identity should be viewed as an iterative process where people experience transitions or transformations in their self particularly during early group socialization experiences.

In more specific ways this thesis has made some contributions to these calls for understanding the management of multiple identities by those who are engaged in collective action. In Study 1 (Chapter 3) SSCS members demonstrated rhetorical strategies for resolving conflict by emphasising personal agency in order to reject implications of any prescriptive group norms, or to anticipate the implication that their individuality was restrained by the collective. Another example is found in Study 4.
(Chapter 6) where experience of incompatibility between identities was reported by P12, the animal rights advocate. She expressed conflict between her vegan identity (which was also an identity she shared with friends), and organizational identity. This example was particularly interesting because these identities could be seen as complimentary in that they are both identities based on animal rights. However her organizational and strategic directives meant that she publically advocates for animal slaughter (albeit kinder forms of animal slaughter) and this contradicts her veganism. Despite sometimes “having a problem” with this, she was able to resolve the conflict by seeing kinder forms of animal slaughter as a step in the right direction.

Multiple identity management also relates to identity performances, as conceptualised in the strategic component of the SIDE model (Klein et al., 2007; Reicher et al., 1995), where they argue that maintaining multiple identities is a process of facilitating between the audiences who are connected to those identities (see also Wiley & Deaux, 2010). Examples of this could be seen in this research, such as in Study 4 (Chapter 6), P5 talked about ceasing his ethos of self-sacrifice for the environment. He did this for both personal reasons and for potential audiences – that is, it allowed him to participate in activities he enjoys and it changed what he felt was the wrong message he was communicating to others. Thus both strategic and personal considerations influenced his behaviour.

Further examinations of these questions about how people manage identity conflicts, and how identity conflicts can interfere with the development of social identities, would contribute to understanding commitment to ongoing collective action, and towards developing theory on multiple identities. As a final note, it seems likely to be the case that these collective actors are not resolving conflicts between their multiple
identities in unconscious ways, but rather that they resolve conflicts consciously and strategically (see Hopkins & Kahani-Hopkins, 2004; also positionary theory, Louis, 2008). According to the participants in this research, they make choices about how to balance competing and conflicting demands in order to further their social change goals while also maintaining personal satisfaction; conversely they make active choices to not participate in actions or be associated with groups that are seen as illegitimate or that could result in a loss of individuality or agency. Thus, I reiterate that it is important to study the subjective aspects of how people make sense of their various identities.

The History and Evolution of Activism

Another implication from this research relating to engagement and disengagement in collective action is the role of historical and cultural meanings associated with activism. I have argued that it is important to highlight that activism is not just a means to an end, but that activism has become a social practice of democratic society. While protests, and other collective actions, are to some extent normalized (Verhulst & Walgrave, 2009) they tend to be more so within particular cultural/sub-cultural spaces - typically left-wing⁸ (Corrigall-Brown, 2012). In the absence of dire and compelling social conditions (i.e. the type of social movements focussed on in this thesis) people need to view collective action, or particular types of collective actions, to be an effective (Bandura, 2000), desirable and potentially even enjoyable social practice. People need to want to be a part of a group, to interact with and be seen with other activists; they need to like activists (Passy & Giugni, 2001; Zuckerman, 2005). Thus, I have emphasised in this research that the ways that people form associations and impressions of collective actors, and activism, is important to understanding (dis)engagement in actions.

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⁸ However there is also rising right-wing political activity globally
In the empirical chapters (particularly Chapter 5) I addressed this concern about the impressions that people hold about activists by investigating activist stereotypes. However, here I would like to discuss how a richer social explanation of stereotypes could be employed by adopting a social representations perspective (Moscovici, 1981, 2000), where it is understood that people make meaningful social assessments and inferences about their current socio-political circumstances. Social representations theory, when combined with a social identity approach, is suited to considering how people’s social representations relate to self and identity and how they reflexively respond to the knowledge that they can be categorized by others according to that social representation (Elcheroth et al., 2011; Liu & Hilton, 2005; Liu, Wilson, McClure, & Higgens, 1999). That is, people do not just operate through their concrete experiences of interacting with activists, because they also operate under shared assumptions about social reality.

The ways in which adopting a social representations perspective could be employed to further make sense of activist stereotypes, and the relationship between stereotypes and identification as an activist, is to understand that identity does not merely involve self-categorization with a group of like-minded others in the same social movement but that it also requires identification with a broader tradition of activism. Drawing on social representations of activism would involve referencing the history of activism, because it is history that provides the narratives of who we are now (Liu & Hilton, 2005). Activists (and active people who do not call themselves activists) are contesting their identities based on the history and social meanings associated with activism, such that those who might be considered (e.g. by researchers) to be activists, might no longer see themselves as such. Therefore the rejection of activist identity could be understood as resulting from the evolution of activism, whereby those not engaging in visible protest actions no
longer identify as activists. For example, evidence of this could be seen in Study 4 where P6 (renewable energy advocate) said:

“I think that's...lots of people maybe in activism and don't, perhaps don't ... no, not understand that, perhaps don't get that, it's like, "What are we going to do?" "Well, we have to combat Barnett [West Australian Premier], and hammer on Barnett's door"...and, well, he's never going change, because he's a wally.... If you change everyone else, and he gets voted out then he can't do anything so even though he's going to always say, for the rest of his life, probably even when his house is under water, that gas is the way to go.” (P6, ln 782).

In the above quote P6 makes a reference to “activism” as involving a method of calling for social change that his organization has moved away from. He no longer sees ‘combative’ approaches (that directly target opposition) as effective, and prefers ‘advocacy’ and ‘education’ of the general public (‘changing everyone else’).

A social representations approach enables researchers to be sensitive to the variety of representations about activists, as employed by different groups in meaningful ways. For example, in Study 4 (Chapter 6), according to self-identified activists being an activist means “to be active…and not to be afraid to sort of stand up and be seen” (P11); and “when I think of an activist I think of like mostly, like protests, and non violent direct action” (P10). Conversely, in Study 2 (Chapter 4) activists and protesters were talked about in two different ways. Either the negative descriptions of “rabid”, “self-righteous left extreme” or “professional demonstrators” or the more positive descriptions of “…intelligent, articulate, passionate and energetic…” (P11505), “Someone who is very determined and who has the capacity to recruite [sic] and inspire others to action” (P11377), “brave, loud, forceful ....or pushed to the brink” (P 11456), “Someone who not only talks about change but who puts it into action. They need to be resilient and determined” (P11349), and so on. There are a variety of representations that exist

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9 These examples were not in Chapter 4, but are further illustrations from the data.
about collective actors can be employed by different groups to make sense of intergroup and intragroup relations.

Participants in Study 2 (Chapter 4) also appeared to be drawing on particular lay theories, or social representations, of crowds. The notion that being part of a crowd results in deindividuation (and thus people becoming ‘mindless’) has been thoroughly challenged (Reicher, Levine, & Gordijn, 1998; Reicher et al., 1995), however an analysis of recent media coverage of riots for instance will reveal that this rhetoric still persists. In Study 2 the implications of this perception of crowds was that people stated they were concerned about a loss of self, or loss of voice. Thus, a social representations analysis of people’s understandings of crowds could examine how these inferences about crowds inform decisions about participating in crowd actions. For example, mass media has had some role to play in perpetuating some of the ideas of irrationality or ‘mob mind’ (see Reicher, 1984; Reicher & Potter, 1985; Reicher & Stott, 2011).

The history of relations between groups was also invoked in participant’s accounts of their choices for participation (and non-participation). Thus, narratives that draw on the history of intergroup relations could be studied to understand not only relations between oppositional groups but also between groups and individuals who share the same or similar social change goals. This was identified particularly in Study 4 (Chapter 6) and Study 1 (Chapter 3) where disagreement over method, and who is included in the identity, can result in conflict between similar social movement groups – such as between SSCS and Greenpeace (Study 1), between anti-nuclear activists and renewable energy advocates, between animal rights activists and advocates, and between asylum seeker rights activists and advocates (Study 4). These groups drew on their history of disagreement over strategy to establish the legitimacy of their chosen deviation from
that approach to social change. That is, various social movement groups also draw on and make inferences about a core representation of ‘activists’ and they use these representations to develop their own unique role within a broader movement. Groups can evolve such that they distance themselves from the core group of activists that typify that representation. In doing so, new identities can take on new meanings, and groups can attempt to create resistance in new ways (Haslam & Reicher, 2012).

One can see how, from the above discussion, a cognitive-based stereotype explanation of activists is not sufficient for understanding the complex narratives used by individuals and groups to reference the history of social movements, and their contemporary identity content (Liu & Gastardo-Conaco, 2011; Liu & Hilton, 2005).

**Barriers to Collective Action Participation**

In the introduction to this thesis I raised a discussion about socially nuanced theories of agency and socially embedded views of identity and practices. I gave the example of how cultural norms can shape the behaviours that are available to individuals – as in Cleaver’s (2007) study on cultures with traditional gender roles where women’s straightforward access to public participation in meetings is culturally constrained. The reason for this discussion point is that socialization practices and socio-cultural norms have the potential to explain why people can appear disengaged from social movements despite the appearance of opportunities for engagement.

The way that people adopt social norms, and foster identification with a group, comes about through processes of group socialization. Individuals learn to adapt to group norms (and groups need to adapt to accept new individuals, Levine & Moreland, 1994). I have argued in this thesis that a similar explanation could be applied to non-participation in collective action, where, connecting to my above arguments about the history and
evolution of activism, there can be a disconnection between supporting a cause in principle, and participating in the normative practices (i.e. collective actions) that social movement groups promote as the solution. That is, if the more typical and visible practices of activism (i.e. protesting) come to be viewed as ineffective or in other ways unhelpful to the social movement (even by highly committed individuals!), then these perceptions could also influence sympathizers willingness to engage in any form of collective action. Research on participation and non-participation should take into account barriers to group socialization that include social incentives, concerns about identity performances, and (positive and negative) social representations of activism (in addition to instrumental barriers).

I have argued that these socialization and learning processes are a neglected area of social movement research, but that they also well fit with existing frameworks for understanding how people make sense of and actively construct their identities (e.g. Drury & Reicher, 2009; Hopkins, Kahani-Hopkins, & Reicher, 2006). That is, how people subjectively anticipate the formation of their identity and make inferences about their fit with the groups that they aspire to join are an important part of social identity formation. In Study 2 and 3 (Chapters 4 and 5) group socialization barriers identified included anticipations of loss of voice or agency in a group, and ambivalence about identity performances. These barriers can be overcome, but I have highlighted the complexity of this process. People need to learn the tools of the trade; the committed actors in Study 4 (Chapter 6) indicated that they have had to learn much along the way, and that it was only over time they were able to make informed and agentic decisions.
The Psychology of Conversionary Social Movements

Much of the social movement literature (in sociology) and collective action literature (in social psychology) focuses on collective action in contexts of intergroup conflict or competition (e.g. Klandermans, 1997; Stürmer & Simon, 2004; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). This has been a fruitful focus. However, I have made reference throughout this thesis (particularly Study 4, Chapter 6) to the distinction between competitive forms of action where groups draw competitive boundaries between “us” and “them”, and conversionary forms of action where the aim is to include more people in the ingroup (Wright, 2009). For example, in environmental movements this translates to the message that “everyone should be an environmentalist” (Wright, 2009, p. 871). In this section of the general discussion I draw out findings from the empirical studies that contribute to the understanding of conversionary social movements, and set out some questions for future research on explicating the social psychological processes that underpin them.

The distinctions between competitive and conversionary forms of action, as set out by Wright (2009), are that competitive action is described as occurring when “the identity supporting it contains normative ideological components stressing the competitive nature of the intergroup relationship and the culpability of the out-group.” (p. 864). In competitive action outgroups are seen as villains, the associated emotional drivers of action are anger, resentment (and contempt, Becker, Tausch, & Wagner, 2011), and the end goal is higher status/equality for the ingroup.

Conversionary action in comparison contains short term goals of “rallying the troops” where the intent is to change people’s behaviour and beliefs through education. Thus, “the broad goal is not to improve the status of the in-group relative to some out-
group per se, but rather to convert as many non-members as possible to join the in-group and to take on the in-group’s normative worldview” (p. 871). Conversionary movements involve neither clear-cut nor static social category boundaries, because the “us” and “them” are continually being reworked, and ostensible outgroups are seen as misguided and/or naïve, and in need of education. Thus, groups that may previously have been in opposition, or bystanders, can become part of the broader ingroup (while this can still happen in competitive collective action, it is a more direct aim of the conversionary approach).

Other literature has made some potentially similar distinctions between different types of social movements. For example, between persuasive and confrontational methods (Postmes & Brunsting, 2002), or between contentious politics and lifestyle movements, where Haenfler et al (2012) argue that there is a lack of theorization on groups such as:

…vegetarians, Promise Keepers, green lifestyle adopters, locavores, slow fooders, voluntary simplifiers, and virginity pledgers, groups that profess to change the world but focus more energy on cultivating a morally coherent, personally gratifying lifestyle and identity rather than issuing direct challenges to the state/social structure. (p. 3)

That is, the core distinction between these movements seem to be between combative and confrontational methods that make direct challenges to opposition; and the more ‘subdued’, conversionary or ‘lifestyle’ movements that do not make direct challenges to opposition or the state.

There are some obvious ambiguities in these distinctions, which would need to be clarified before we can understand the impact these different approaches have on social
change and social movement processes. If I were to map out some of the groups from the empirical chapters in this thesis it becomes apparent that the distinctions are not clear-cut. For example, the Sea Shepherd Conservation society, according to Wright’s criteria, might fit into competitive action based on their clear opponents (whalers) that they see as culpable and that they wish to hold to account. However, the SSCS end goal does not fit with the competitive form and would fit better into the conversionary form - i.e. they want everyone to become conservationists/ environmentalists like them. Competitive groups can also want to ‘rally the troops’ by bringing the general public on-side, and this is what the politicized collective identity concept articulates (Simon & Klandermans, 2001). So the first stage in future research would be to more clearly distinguish the differences between these types of movements.

We also need to establish why it might be important to create these competitive/conversionary or persuasive/confrontational distinctions. What are the consequences – politically, socially, and personally – for the people engaged in these different movements, and for the likelihood of their success? There are a couple of indications from this thesis as to what these might be. For one, there may be differences in the rhetorical and strategic identity boundary work employed to call for social change. For example, it may be that under some definitions of feminism men may not become part of the ingroup (competitive), whereas in other (conversionary) forms of feminism men can be welcomed into the ingroup. Thus, this has obvious implications for mobilization.

A second consideration is the different classes of collective actions that different forms of social movements engage in. This is a suggestion made by Wright (2009), but also demonstrated in the empirical work of this thesis where “harder” approaches were
contrasted to “softer” approaches by different sets of actions that these groups engaged in (although these were are also contextually specific). For example, in Study 4 the renewable energy advocate (P6) and environmental activist (P8) said they preferred not to be associated with campaigns that have an “anti” message, preferring only “pro” or positive messages. This means that different approaches include or exclude different types of actions and different types of communications. Another example from Study 4 is P7, who works for a global poverty awareness raising organization. She stated that her organization aims to encourage those who are already sympathetic, but not active, to become more active. They do this though education, where they equip people with the knowledge and tools that enable them to go on and raise awareness within their own communities. The above approaches were described as more subdued, and can be contrasted to Sea Shepherd Conservation Society’s direct action approach (Study 1) which also excluded some types of actions – that is, protests, documenting evidence of Japanese whaling, signing petitions, or speaking to the Japanese public (i.e. the actions that Greenpeace engage in, who in turn exclude direct intervention against whaling on the basis that it is “violent”).

Another difference between competitive and conversionary movements is the location of the individual within the more inclusive social identity. In competitively oriented rights-based movements, the broader social category is at the centre of the political struggle. People come together because of their shared identity, and fight for recognition and equality for that identity. Even the PCI concept, typically understood as membership of a political organization, is conceived of as a nested identity that sits within a broader social category; “in that it presupposes identification with the more inclusive social entity that provides the context for shared grievances, adversarial
attributions, and the ensuing power struggles for social change (or resistance to such change)” (Simon & Klandermans, 2001, p. 326).

In Study 2 (Chapter 4) in particular, I discussed the need to understand why people take action in situations where there is a lack of compelling social conditions to motivate action, or when people are not embedded in social networks that give opportunities to express shared grievances. The conversionary approach seems to be underpinned by people coming together to fight against social issues based on a shared ideology or worldview rather than injustice against their own group. In environmentalism for instance, while identification with other environmental activists creates support and solidarity, it is not the case that the ideological origin of environmentalists struggle has come about as the result of a dominant group oppressing them and denying their rights as environmentalists (although the oppression of environmentalists attempts to create change could alter or even radicalize their identities, Drury & Reicher, 2009).

If we employ the traditional social identity approach - the question is, how can collective action on behalf of others be based on my identity operating at a higher level of abstraction, if I am not nested or contained within that social identity? For example, I am not contained within the broader entity that is the Great Barrier Reef, but I may care about ‘Saving the Reef’. This is where, if we are to rely on a social identity explanation at all, the opinion-based group concept (Bliuc et al., 2007; McGarty et al., 2009) is the logical conclusion. It is inclusive of “me” because “we” are a group of people who care about others' injustices, or injustices against the environment.

The opinion-based group concept could be utilized as a starting point for predicting models of collective action specifically underpinned by conversionary aims; in particular
because the opinion-based group concept articulates the understanding that identities are not always based on inherent stable characteristics within a person’s self-concept, but are formed over time and emerge from social interactions that facilitate the formation of social bonds and attachments to like-minded others (McGarty et al., 2009; Thomas, Mavor, & McGarty, 2012; Thomas et al., 2009a). Therefore, it makes sense that, for example, if an individual turns up to an event to campaign to ‘Save the Reef’, they could connect with like-minded others and form a social identity with other concerned conservationists. Thus, I suggest that conversionary/persuasive movements are perhaps underpinned by identities that emerge through opportunities to share opinions and grievances; rather than primarily forming through depersonalization.

A final closing remark regarding the distinction between conversionary and competitive action is about the efficacy of the approach for creating social change. If conversionary action involves the strategic expansion of the boundaries of the ingroup identity then this in some respects works against the strong affiliation and community bonds that come from activist communities, and therefore being more inclusive means becoming more diverse and less unified (and less noticeable). However, while a more clearly politicized collective identity might lead to stronger ties to those with whom one shares that identity, it can also result in separation and polarization from other groups, and in the case of radicalized identities – segregation from the general public (Becker, Tausch, Spears, et al., 2011; Della Porta, 1995; van Stekelenburg & Klandermans, 2010b). This relates back to that overarching political strategy question - should political movements make themselves distinct and oppositional, or more relatable and palatable? (Louis, 2009; Piven & Cloward, 1977).
Implications for the Sociology of Social Movement Engagement

The implications of this research for sociology is about reconciling situated and embedded aspects of social movement participation, with the personal and psychological meaningfulness of social movement engagement. In particular, I highlight the learning processes in both early engagement and sustaining engagement, because it provides a framework for understanding how people make decisions about their participation in collective action in situations that are shaped by wider political processes, and it also accounts for individual transformation experiences and how engagement can wax and wane over time.

Chapter 6 (Study 4) contributed insights into the ongoing learning involved in engagement in social movements. This learning involved finding balance between strategies they felt were both strategically and situationally effective, but that also suited them personally (or made them feel happier), balancing the line between achievement and over-commitment, and allowing themselves to accept the times when they fall short of goals or self-set obligations. I argued that those highly committed to their movements can be equally troubled by not doing ‘enough’ as they are by doing ‘too much’.

These findings resonate with other sociological literature, such as Groves (1995) who argues for need to study the sociology of emotions – where people learn over time what emotions are appropriate to feel and express in different contexts, and to different types of ‘others’. Moreover he demonstrates that these are not ‘raw feelings’ that might arise spontaneously (such as pity or anger) but are shaped and directed by education and knowledge, development of rational strategies, and the need for restoration of justice.
In the education literature, another type of learning (commonly referred to as ‘deep learning’) is understood through transformation theory (Kovan & Dirkx, 2003) or transformative learning (Mezirow, 1991). Based in Jungian ideas of individuation, people pursue activism as a life-long vocation or calling, and can experience periods of great transformation during burnout (Kovan & Dirkx, 2003). Kovan argues that people need to be willing to experience downturn, loss of meaning, and feelings of inefficacy and that these experiences feel deeply personal, inward, and are difficult to articulate (Kovan & Dirkx, 2003).

The two strands of learning described above tend to be treated separately – one is sociological and strategic, the other personal and individualized. Chapter 6 (Study 4) demonstrated how strategic and personal considerations can be interconnected and synergistic, and can even be used to balance each other out. For example, people can rationalize their current position as strategically important even if they personally hold a different set of values or ideas. That is, reason can be used to justify and shape emotion, and emotions can shape and give weight to reason. The ability to balance emotions, values, and strategies, requires time and the opportunity to learn and be empowered through experience, much like any other new skill. This is what Van Dyke and Dixon (2013) label ‘activist capital’ – where organizers play a key role in fostering skills and empowering individuals to become (longer-term) activists.

My suggestions to sociological researchers are that studying learning and socialization processes are necessary to understand how people arrive not only to their current level of (non)engagement, but also how these processes direct their forward movements. People’s psychological and social needs are not static but can vary across different stages of engagement and experience levels, and these also change according
to wider political and historical events. Research on recruitment and retention should not only study the framing of communications towards potential supporters (to encourage initial engagement), but also recognise participation as a trajectory that goes through various socialization and learning phases and that can take on diverse forms or pathways (see also Corrigall-Brown, 2012). On one hand, someone with decades of experience might be able to adjust to times of change, but it might be incredibly difficult for someone just starting out. On the other hand, after years of setbacks a more experienced member may experience fatigue and no longer find the work personally satisfying. These different ‘lenses of experience’ filter their perceptions (e.g. about efficacy, strategy) and shape emotions (e.g. excitement, outrage).

While many researchers and organizers recognise the detrimental effects of long term stress and burnout, there is limited knowledge of how to address the social and psychological needs of newly active participants in a social movement, or for that matter, those sitting somewhere between inexperienced and highly experienced (Saunders, Grasso, Olcese, Rainsford, & Rootes, 2012). The development of research and programs enabling people to meet well-being needs could achieve this goal by training people in a diversity of roles and methods, which seems to serve the double purpose of aiding both personal and political goals. The parallels between activism and vocation and learning literature in aforementioned education literature can also offer some insights here – as activism can be for some a meaningful, life-long, pursuit.

Learning processes also relate to the role of activist communities in individual engagement trajectories. In Study 4 some interviewees expressed the strength of their closeness to group members, while others expressed the frustration of interpersonal difficulties (also seen in Harré et al, 2009). While there are many rich narrative accounts
of communities of activism in sociological literature, the ways in which these systematically vary, either between individuals or between groups, and at what points in the participation trajectory communities are important, is poorly understood. I suggest that future research should look for the systematic patterns between types of activist communities (close, distant), levels of debate or conflict within groups, and individual’s relationships to their activist communities. This research would form part of an investigation of small group socialization processes (Levine & Moreland, 1994). It could also be a useful aid to sociological analyses of political networks, alliances and schisms between political groups. Typically network analyses understand mobilization as resulting from access to resources and personal networks, where people are more likely to join political groups that are embedded in their existing networks. This ‘top-down’ view of activism might explain the likelihood of that initial mobilization, but it does not explain how those social bonds relate to ongoing participation – such as how motivation is maintained, how people help each other through difficult times, or how people learn or adapt over time (see Zuckerman, 2005, who calls for a returning interest in the ‘social logic of politics’).

**Research Limitations**

One complexity that underlies this research project is that cognitions cannot be easily inferred from rhetoric, because rhetoric is reflexive. While some researchers will argue, and can demonstrate to a degree, that rhetoric shapes cognitions and cognitions shape rhetoric, there is a limit to which the degree of this can be determined in any given instance of talk. The epistemological stance that I adopt in my research, critical realism (see Chapter 2), carries the assumption that there can be inferred a connection between cognitions and rhetoric, as opposed to a discursive psychology position which
makes no reference to mental states. This is akin to saying that we tentatively take people’s talk as a reflection of their real experiences, but retain a critical reflection on the function that their rhetoric could serve.

The value that this epistemology and research methodology serves is that it is a progression from a rather rigid or fixed social constructionist perspective. The qualitative findings from the studies in this thesis were aimed at generating and challenging theory through examining the subjective experiences and language used by people who are experienced in the topics of investigation. I draw this approach from the foundations of grounded theory – where it is argued that theory needs to be developed from studying specific micro-contexts initially, and then broadening out the examination into broader contexts (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The broadening of findings can be done with qualitative or quantitative methods (or both).

Another methodological limitation is the issue of selectivity in qualitative research. The qualitative research analysis process is typically driven by a combination of sensitivity towards ‘what the data is telling me’, and predetermined research aims and theoretical perspectives. It is practically impossible for a whole qualitative dataset to be analysed and presented within the restrictions of an academic manuscript. This, however, is not a concern unique to qualitative research. The way in which this limitation can be addressed is, for example in Study 2, we state that we focussed the data analysis on our research questions, but acknowledge that other themes were present in the data.

The approach I have taken also differs from some approaches to qualitative research analysis where the researcher will aim to quantify qualitative data in terms of counting themes – that is not what I have done here because both a critical realist
examination of discourse, where we examine the functionality of language (Study 1, 2),
and the interpretative phenomenological approach (Study 4) are not data that are
suitable for turning into counts of themes. For interpretative phenomenology in
particular, this would defeat the purpose of the method. I also particularly wanted to
allow for ambivalence in people’s accounts – whereby they can hold both positive and
negative experiences, which do not necessarily add up in straightforward ways. I also
address this limitation by aiming the research findings towards theoretical gaps as well
as delivering context-specific empirical findings.

Another limitation from this work is its socio-cultural specificity. For example, it
is unlikely that people who participated in the movements in Tunisia or Egypt in 2012
were concerned about ‘looking silly’ in their struggle to overthrow a dictatorship. Many
of the concerns illustrated by these research participants are likely specific to Western,
democratized, mostly white, privileged, demographics. But the investigation of this
group of people formed part of the basis of the research aims – to understand why the
relatively structurally advantaged will take action when the issues are of relatively lesser
personal consequence. It may be the case that concerns such as social incentives and
identity performances are more pertinent to movements seeking to mobilize structurally
advanced groups. This is in itself an interesting insight into social movement
processes.

A final note regarding limitations is the association of activism with left-wing
politics (Corrigall-Brown, 2012; Pitcher, 2011). For increasing everyday citizens’
engagement in democratic societies – which is what this thesis stated as an aim at the
beginning – we should not be picking political sides, but rather encouraging all forms of
moderate and lawful democratic participation where citizens take an active interest in
their future. The majority of the participants in this research were left-wing, but possibly less so than other research in this area (e.g. Study 3 had around one quarter centre-right/conservative participants). Two participants in Study 4 in particular said that they did not want to take political sides (Participants 6 and 4), yet they were committed to their attempts to create positive social change (promoting renewable energy; community volunteering, respectively). While not a direct investigation undertaken in this research, the attention paid to alternative non-activist types of social movement participation may provide a contribution to understanding a wider spectrum of engagement from various political orientations; future research should pursue this point.

**Practical Suggestions**

Drawing on the empirical findings, some practical suggestions can be made for mobilization and for sustaining participation. As discussed in Study 2 (Chapter 4), the aim of focusing on barriers was to understand how ambivalence about participation can be overcome. One example suggestion we made for overcoming identity management concerns is that organizations can strategically re-define their identity communications to minimise prescriptions on behaviour (Elcheroth et al., 2011; Reicher et al., 2005). This was also relevant to the Sea Shepherd members in Study 1 (Chapter 3), who talked about how they need to manage public perceptions about prescriptive membership requirements – such as the belief that their members are required to be vegans. They talked about how this perception makes them appear “hard line” and detracts from their “mainstream, popular” appeal (see Chapter 3, P1, extract 6). While they indicated that they do actively try to change the perception that they are “hardcore” or “hardline”, they also alternated to at times purposely claiming to be
“hardcore” and “pirates”, and thus their alternating rhetoric makes their position difficult to maintain. It also indicated that they had different targets for this rhetoric – where some people report liking the “crazy” nature of SSCS, others might find it too “extreme”. Changing identity communications, therefore, is a complex and ongoing task, so I do not suggest that it is a complete solution. Moreover, groups do not have ownership of what is said about them.

Another suggestion I make is that social movement organizations could emphasize the availability of a range of options for individualized or so-called invisible actions that reduce identity performance concerns particularly in those initial stages of participation and socialization into the group. Over time, as people become more comfortable and efficacious, they can learn that - in the words of one interviewee in Study 4, “it’s not rocket science”. The interviewees in Study 4 (Chapter 6) talked about how they needed to find their niche within a movement – for example, P8 said that she “had to find her own way of doing things”. One can see how it might be the case that those who do not manage to find their “own way of doing things” can drop out if that initial interest or motivation is not sustained, and this is something that groups could pay closer attention to.

I also suggested in Study 2 (Chapter 4) that small group interaction is a good opportunity for potential participants to discuss their motivations, beliefs, and concerns (see also Thomas & Louis, in press). These interactions could facilitate the normalization of their identity and generate ideas about a more varied repertoire of actions that they might feel personally suit them and promote personal agency (McGarty et al., 2009; Thomas & McGarty, 2009; Thomas, Smith, et al., 2010). That is, if people express and share their unease with others then they can redefine the identity from the bottom-up.
This also relates to the idea of different identity projects that people can take up. For instance, an advocacy path could be defined as helping individuals rise out of their disadvantaged circumstances, whereas activism could be defined as participating in actions designed to execute social change by targeting an unfair system.

Other suggestions for increasing engagement were made in Study 4 (Chapter 6), where several interviewees (Participants 4, 7 and 8) said their strategy was to provide people with opportunities that might help them experience their own personal transformation. That is, they did not want to make people feel guilty or obligated to help, but rather wanted to educate people and give them positive experiences that might “activate” internal motivations or values when they “feel ready”. This approach fits with a broader push from organizations and academics looking for positive-based, pro-social campaigns that provide people with hope, a sense of viability rather than doom, and even allow people to have fun while engaging in movements for social change (e.g. Crompton, 2010; Harré, 2011; Thomas, McGarty, & Mavor, 2009b). For example, Harré emphasizes that rather than focus on the “problem” (of sustainability, but this could equally be applied to other social justice concerns), “see yourself not as solving a problem, but as helping to create a viable alternative to our current way of life” (p. 6). However, I do caution that these strategies likely need to be empirically validated further, because such goals are in danger of being too broad and diffuse (Thomas, McGarty, et al., 2010). Furthermore, one can overemphasize positivity and overlook the motivational force that some more ‘negative’ emotions, such as anger and fear, can have (Harré, 2011).
Closing Remarks

I began this thesis with the aim of contributing to the understanding of how we can promote pro-social change as undertaken by everyday citizens. My aim was to find ways that we could overcome people’s motivated avoidance of politics, and offer alternative means for people to express their democratic voices. I also aimed to challenge the idea that activism is only for extraordinary (or extreme) people. Through a number of empirical studies employing complimentary research methods, this research has illustrated a rich variety of social movement activity that people from ‘all walks of life’ are engaging in. In particular I have emphasised the importance of people’s early experiences of collective action, where ambivalence about self-capabilities, capacities and efficacy, can be averted through the provision of positive and exciting ways for people to become involved in their communities – whether local, national, or global – and where being active does not necessarily mean being an activist.
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