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Activism Across Domains: A Multiple Identities Analysis

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Activism Across Domains: A Multiple Identities Analysis

The present paper addresses activism across domains and social issues as an empirical reality, and as a theoretical and social challenge. Traditional approaches to collective action consider identification with each social movement as the proximal predictor, with other identities irrelevant or perhaps even functionally antagonistic (e.g., Thomas, McGarty, & Mavor, 2009a, 2009b; van Zomeren, Leach, & Spears, 2012; van Zomeren, Postmes, & Spears, 2008). Alternative approaches position the activist identity as the core driver of politicisation, mediating between distal predictors and intentions to engage in specific activism (e.g., Simon & Klandermans, 2001). The present research explores political collective action in relation to a world of multiple identity salience (McDonald, Fielding, & Louis, 2013, 2014). Specifically, we draw on longitudinal and cross-sectional studies of activism and political behaviour across three studies.

Study 1. A cross-sectional study of peace activists and students in May/June 2003 ($N=45$) was analysed to examine peace activism as well as performance on a test measuring factual knowledge of international relations in relation to alternative social movement groups and 'activist identity'. We tested the hypothesis that participation in other social movements would compete with peace activism (diluting commitment and undermining action) versus facilitate it. More specifically, we tested the hypothesis that participation in other social movements would heighten peace activism by building activist identification and by contributing to political knowledge. As expected, activist identification was associated with intentions to engage in peace activism, $r = .54, p < .001$, and also positively with number of other activist groups participated in, $r = .48, p < .001$, but it was not associated with factual knowledge of international relations ($r = .24, p = .124$), perhaps because participants were

not exclusively active in international affairs (as inspection of the other social movements in which participants reported acting revealed).

Regression analyses confirmed that the more other groups participants were members of, the higher their intentions to engage in peace activism ($\beta = .54, p < .001$; R^2 change = .30), and that when added in a second block both activist identification ($\beta = .28, p = .047$) and greater factual knowledge of international affairs ($\beta = .29, p = .022$) were uniquely, positively associated with greater activism (R^2 change = .17, $p = .005$).

Despite an apparent partial mediation of the effect of social movement participation in Block 2 (which dropped from $.54$ to $\beta = .37, p = .008$), tests of the indirect effects using bootstrapping with 5000 resamples showed neither activist identification (LL= $-.02$, UL = $.20$) nor factual knowledge (LL= $-.03$, UL = $.09$) served as mediators of the facilitating effects of other movements on intentions to engage in the peace movement.

Study 2. Study 2 built on the idea that specific rather than generic activist identities might facilitate each other – that is, some identities might be mutually inhibitory while others were facilitating. Data from a longitudinal study of peace activists with significant attrition (Time 1 $N = 155$, February 2003, before the Iraq war; T2 = 72, April 2003, after the war broke out; T3 = 35, June 2003) were re-analysed to examine the degree to which identification with peace activism, behaviour, and attrition from the survey could be predicted in relation to specific alternative identities and activism. Unsurprisingly (and as reported elsewhere: Louis, Terry, & Fielding, 2005; Blackwood & Louis, 2012) those who were more strongly identified as peace activists at Time 1 were more likely to act, and in turn this consolidated their identification at Time 2 among respondents, and reduced the likelihood of attrition (of becoming a non-respondent). In addition, respondents who identified strongly as Australian at Time 1 were not less identified at Time 1, but were more likely to disidentify

with the peace movement at Time 2, which was after Australia's entry into the Iraq war as a member of the 'Coalition of the Willing' (Louis et al., 2005; see also, Louis, 2009).

In addition, the present analyses revealed that significant inter-relationships among peace, environmental, labour, feminist, Christian, refugee, youth and other activism, as well as national and political identities, could be discerned. Among the committed activists at Time 3, respondents all approved of the goals of the peace movement, and all had engaged in activism on this topic in the last year. However, a majority also supported the environmental/green movement (100% approved; 61% active in the last year), human rights (100% approved; 57% active), and refugee support / anti-detention centres (100%; 79%). Significant minorities were also active in other movements, for example: Reconciliation with Indigenous Australians / Aboriginal rights (100% approved; 39% active); third world poverty / debt relief (96% approved; 39% active), anti-globalisation / anti-WTO (89% approved; 44% active), queer / lgbt rights (89% approved; 25% active), organized labour / unions (89% approved; 29% active), the youth / student movement (82% approved; 25%) and feminism (79% approved; 25% active). Only 33% endorsed Christian values / church movement, but a higher proportion than usual of these (25% of the sample) had engaged in Christian activism in the last year. Respondents also generated other causes, including animal liberation, health care, housing, disability rights, anti-nuclear campaigns, as well as political parties and specific Christian denominations, that they had supported recently.

The results highlight the inter-relationships among social movements but also the differences in degree of mutual facilitation, and the significant variability in the likelihood that participants' attitudinal support had been translated recently into action. Ideological similarity and positioning within the Australian political context appear to explain some of the stronger vs weaker inter-relationships, and windows of political opportunity or issue salience some of the likelihood of action. Study 2 invokes however the question of whether

social category relationships also play a role in structuring participants' political and ideological alignment.

Study 3. A convenience sample ($N=220$) of 1st year psychology students at a large regional Australian university reported their gender (women = 167; 76%), nationality (Australian = 213; 97%), ethnicity (White/European = 194, 88%), age (16-48; median = 18), religion (Christian = 144; 66%; non-religious $n = 62$; 28%), and political orientation (left-wing $n = 94$, 44%; right-wing $n = 57$, 26%; un-political or unaligned $n = 51$, 23%). Identification with each was assessed using a single item measure of centrality ("How important is this identity in your everyday life?"), and participants completed a measure of social dominance orientation.

Consistent with traditional social identity approaches, we find, for example, that among Australians, higher national identification was associated with intentions to engage in normative actions: attending Australia Day events, $r = .37$; (Endorsing) signing a petition to increase security forces' powers, $r = .38$; standing up to critics of Australian values, $r = .54$; challenging critics of Australian values, $r = .41$; and with lower intentions to engage in non-normative actions, such as concealing disagreement over values, $r = -.29$, or to sign a petition in favour of asylum seekers, $r = -.46$.

However, of interest in the present analyses, factor analysis of the identification measures (weighted such that higher scores indicated identification with the dominant group, or lower identification with a minority group) suggested different axes of identity formation for men and women. Specifically, among men, there was a three-factor solution with the first dimension accounting for 30% of the variance and defined (with varimax rotated scores $> .4$) by higher Australian, White/European, and age orientation. The second dimension accounted for 20% of the variance and was defined by Australian, male, Rightwing, and the third accounted for 15% of the variance and was defined by high Australian and Christian

identification and low SDO. For women, there were also three factors, accounting for 26, 20, and 15% of the variance. Using varimax rotated scores $> .4$, the first factor was defined by high Australian, Christian, White, and Rightwing orientation, the second by female, White, and age, and the third by high SDO.

The low N and unrepresentative sample dictate that the results should be interpreted with caution before replication, but at the same time the findings invite interpretation. For example, the isolation of women's high-power identities on one dimension with their gender identity on a second, and the different relationship to the national identity, speak to regularities in the constellations of alliances that define Australian politics and social life.

Conclusion. The present data invite consideration of the constellation of identities which define actors as multi-beings (Gergen, 2009; Louis, Mavor, La Macchia, & Amiot, 2013), such that some identities reinforce each other, while some conflict. On the one hand, engagement across domains by activists increases efficiency, knowledge transfer, and social capital across long-term relationships and networks, empowering and escalating commitment and success. On the other, consistency motives across groups promote polarization and reduce tolerance of "incongruent" activism – activism in which multiple identities or norms are politically or ideologically in conflict. Strong consistency and polarization has the potential to invigorate the dedicated core who share ideological overlap, but all other things being equal reduces the appeal and effectiveness of any one activist campaign, and the numbers and diversity of adherents to that campaign. At the same time, group members disadvantaged in one context who are relatively advantaged by being high power in another context (e.g., White women) may be empowered and disproportionately motivated to act to promote change; or they may be marginalised, cut off from both interest in and responsibility for social change because of their intersecting privileges and powerlessness (Case, 2012;

Montgomery & Stewart, 2012). These issues of norm and identity consistency vs diversity, and empowerment versus marginalisation, are of strong theoretical and social interest.

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