Piecing Together Multicultural Community: Cultural Differences in Community Building Among Grass-Roots Environmentalists*

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This paper draws on a participant-observation study of two grass-roots environmental movements to illuminate difficulties in multicultural alliance building between activists. It focuses on different, taken-for-granted cultural patterns in the ways grass-roots movements create group bonds, and it conceptualizes these patterns as different forms of "movement community." A "personalized" form of movement community in local U.S. Green movement groups contributed to difficulties in multicultural alliance building. These difficulties arose despite the U.S. Greens' explicit multiculturalist ideology and their validation of the "environmental justice" ideology upheld by some activists of color. The paper suggests that U.S. Greens share with other contemporary activists a way of building movement community that places cultural barriers in the path of multicultural alliances. It also suggests that the personalized form of community may be a reasonable, if problematic, response by activists like Greens to difficult cultural predicaments in multicultural alliance building.

In 1990 large U.S. environmental organizations such as the Sierra Club received letters from minority activists charging them with neglecting racial diversity in personnel and program agendas. However, some white, grass-roots environmentalists had already recognized a lack of diversity in their small, volunteer groups. Like feminists, new leftists, and other grass-roots activists before them, these activists hoped to build bridges across race lines. They attended a "multicultural alliance-building workshop" at which they told stories of racisms they had practiced in their own lives that they were now trying, sometimes tearfully, to exorcise. Despite such efforts, these environmentalists accomplished relatively little in their multicultural alliance-building quest, and appeared fated to remain a largely white, highly educated middle-class group, similar to radical feminist, anti-nuclear, and other recent movement groups.

Impediments to multicultural alliance building have received little theoretical attention. Both movement scholars and activists have remarked on difficulties in relations between mostly middle-class whites and people of color from varied socioeconomic backgrounds in the civil rights movement (Carson 1981; McAdam 1988a); the new left and youth movements (Breines 1982; Mansbridge 1983; Kazin 1995); the women's movement (Albrecht and Brewer 1990; Anzaldua and Moraga 1982; Adams 1989); and, in anti-toxics activism (Bullard 1993). These works have not developed a cultural analysis of barriers to multicultural alliances. In the 1980s and 1990s, activists of color protesting toxic waste siting practices they

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1. Data suggest activist memberships in grass-roots anti-nuclear and radical feminist movements remained largely white, middle-class based, and well-educated through the 1980s. See Epstein (1991); Taylor and Whittier (1992); Echols (1989); for evidence on class and education specifically, see Scaminaci and Dunlap (1986); Ladd, Hood, and Van Liere (1983). For parallel European cases, see Kriesi (1989); Melucci (1989); Ofre (1985); Klandermans, Kriesi, and Tarrow (1988).
deem unfair have entered grass-roots environmentalist arenas previously dominated by middle-class, well-educated whites (Bullard 1989, 1990, 1993; Capek 1993; Commission on Racial Justice 1987; Russell 1989). Grass-roots environmentalism thus offers an important opportunity for conceptualizing difficulties in multicultural alliance building.

This paper analyzes everyday group practices within U.S. Green and anti-toxics movement organizations in order to illuminate systematic cultural differences that I propose play an important role in alliance-building efforts. I conceptualize these practices as two different ways of building “community,” or togetherness, in movements. The U.S. Greens constructed a personalized movement community that accentuated individual responsibility and individual voice within a collective effort. Anti-toxics activists created a local communitarian movement community that emphasized the collective effort of a united membership. These two forms of community were an often taken-for-granted part of group life in both movements’ organizations. The differences between them became clear when I observed everyday patterns of interaction in movement organizations. The group-building practices treated here are analytically separate from explicit ideologies about movement building, like multiculturalism, that activists articulate. During this study, the Greens converged with minority anti-toxics activists on crucial ideological points, yet they experienced alliance-building difficulties at both local and national levels (Moses and Spretnak 1989). The paper focuses primarily on the meaning and practice of community within the Green movement, highlighting what is culturally specific about Green practices of community and limiting for multicultural alliance building.

I first review other studies that examine factors internal to movements or movement organizations that could impede alliance building. I present my treatment of movement community and contrast it with other available conceptualizations. I then contrast the ways Green and anti-toxics organizations practiced community and examine the Greens’ efforts at multicultural alliance building in light of how they practiced community. I propose that the Greens’ practice of community is very similar to that of some preceding grass-roots movements, which suggests that the Greens’ alliance-building experiences can shed light on those of other activists. While the Greens’ practices of community limited their effectiveness in multicultural outreach, I conclude that for activists such as U.S. Greens, these practices are a reasonable response to a difficult cultural predicament.

Factors in Alliance-Building Difficulties

Scholars have identified several internal factors that can inhibit or complicate alliance building between organizations within the same movement. Though the present study treats two different environmental movements, these factors are worth considering because the two movements shared some political analyses and goals. One such factor involves differences in organizational structure. For instance, in the women’s movement, some tensions derived from differences between decentralized, consciousness-raising groups on the one hand and the formalized, National Organization for Women on the other (Freeman 1972-73, 1975). In the civil rights movement, tensions in alliance work resulted partly from different forms of leadership in the bureaucratic NAACP and the charismatically directed SCLC (Morris 1984). Anti-nuclear alliances of the late 1970s and early 1980s were severely stressed by disagreements accentuated by consensus decision-making processes (Barkan 1979; Vogel 1980; Epstein 1991). Staggenborg (1988) has argued that coalitions of formalized movement organizations will maintain themselves more readily than coalitions containing informal social movement organizations (SMOs). And more broadly, Gamson (1975) held that centralized leadership and bureaucratic structure increased chances of success for movement groups.
Scholars also have attended to some internal cultural differences that can frustrate alliance building between informal groups or formal organizations within the same movement. For instance, different group ideologies led to tensions within the women's movement of the 1960s and 1970s, the new left, and the anti-nuclear movement of the 1970s and 1980s (Freeman 1975; Gitlin 1987; Epstein 1991). Recent work on nuclear disarmament movement "frame disputes" (Benford 1993), building on other treatments of issue frames (Snow et al. 1986; Snow and Benford 1988), specifies types of ideological differences and suggests fruitful avenues for further research. Different constructions of collective identity can also create difficulties in building alliances, as when members of lesbian, radical feminist, and self-named queer movement groups have brooked disagreements over how they should relate their sexual, racial, and gender identities to each other (Adams 1989; Anzaldúa and Moraga 1982; Echols 1989; Taylor and Whittier 1992; J. Gamson 1995; see also Freeman 1975).

In analyzing movement community, the primary goal is to expand our understanding of cultural factors in alliance building between activists. Movement community is a cultural factor that illuminates why a movement like the U.S. Greens may have difficulties building alliances even when it validates potential allies' ideologies and identity claims. This discussion also will clarify and extend observations by researchers such as Freeman (1975), Barkan (1979), and Gamson (1975) who named structural factors. Internal structural factors such as leadership figure into my account, but I agree with McAdam (1994:43) that an overly "structuralist" bias in the field may have resulted in less attention to the ways that organizational and decision-making structures are embedded in activist subcultures. This study builds on that insight. Meanings and practices of movement community offer a crucial cultural context: Different cultural contexts can give the same organizational "structure" different forms in practice, with different empirical consequences. I demonstrate this point below with case material.

Movement Community: A Cultural Practice

Defining Movement Community

Movement community refers to the character of group bonds, the shared practices of mutual responsibility and obligation that active participants in social movement groups mostly take for granted. In short, "community" will refer to the form of togetherness that a movement group practices. This analytic meaning differs from more popular usages: Anti-toxics activists and the U.S. Greens both talked a great deal about community. Talk of building community can be a persuasive device that validates both internal movement processes and external goals with appealing symbolism; constructing community becomes "a crucial part of collective action" (Williams 1995:139). In fact, it is important to note that both the Green and anti-toxics organizations in this study hoped that specific issues would build or strengthen "community" at the local level over a long haul; neither sought to win particular campaigns only as ends in themselves. But they did not tend to take their particular forms of togetherness as objects of critical discussion. Without excluding other possible forms, I focus on two ways of piecing together community I found in this study.

The personalized form of movement community creates an interdependence of empowered individuals. In this form, individuals carry a great deal of responsibility for realizing

2. One of the local anti-toxics leaders, for instance, surprised me by her lack of excitement over good attendance at a forum intended to pressure local businesses on their pollution control policies. She said she feared those attending the forum would not get further involved or stay involved in her anti-toxics group. The group wanted to create activists, not just victories.
group values through both collective and individual efforts. This personalized form of community is indeed a kind of togetherness and not a temporary or spontaneous coming together of individuals. In this form of movement community, activists depend on each other to integrate a strong individual voice into the whole. In contrast, the local communitarian form of movement community creates an interdependence that weights the group as a whole more, and individuals less, in the pursuit of common goals. The accent is on allegiance to local communal standards as constructed by the group, rather than on preserving individual autonomy within a group effort. In the local communitarian form, "empowerment" gets carried more by the group as a whole than by individual members who would each contribute to the group in a very individuated way. A choral metaphor is useful in distinguishing between the two forms of community: Within the personalized version of community, individual voices resonate strongly within a collective harmony, while in the local communitarian activists' version, community members launch a hearty chant in unison.

The notion of "movement community" introduced here draws on scholarship on the character of community life in the contemporary United States. I borrow selectively from concepts put forth by Bellah et al. (1985) and Wuthnow (1991). Bellah and his colleagues contrast an historical sense of interdependence in traditional communities with "lifestyle enclaves" whose participants share weak bonds based on similarities in private tastes ("lifestyle") rather than a commitment to the communal, public good. In different terms, Wuthnow's (1991) study of volunteering distinguishes between volunteers' understandings of social bonds as obligations to others and understandings that emphasize the goal of self-fulfillment. The present inquiry is indebted to these studies because they, like Etzioni's recent statement on community (1993), focus on mutal obligation. The two forms of movement community proposed here, however, do not map tightly onto the conceptual distinctions nor the implicit evaluative stances in other works. The local communitarian form of community is similar to the sense of obligation that Bellah et al. (1985) associate with groups or locales that maintain and represent local pride, an ethnic heritage, or labor solidarity. But the personalized form of community is not the same as "lifestyle enclaves" because in the personalized form as defined here, members share a practice of public obligation, not solely an enthusiasm for private consumer tastes. Complementing Hewitt's (1989) critique of "community" concepts, I do not define personalized movement communities as fundamentally self-centered or privatizing.

The conceptualization of movement community here benefits from, and also adds to, treatments of the concept in social movement research. Some of these treat community as a quality of group life, inspiring the treatment proposed here, but they discuss community in terms reserved here only for the "personalized" form. Buechler's seminal statement defines "social movement community" as "informal networks of politicized individuals with fluid boundaries, flexible leadership structures, and malleable divisions of labor" (Buechler 1990:42). This definition complements the personalized form of community described here, but Buechler uses it to describe "social movement community" in general. Somewhat similarly, Breines's (1982) account of the new left defines "community" as those relationships that are "more total and more personal" than those "characterizing state and society" (1982:6-7). Breines's sympathetic account also tends to adopt activists' own equation of "community" with a very personalized version of it, and the account takes at face value that new leftists' prefigurative politics express a spontaneous, liberatory impulse within individuals. The present treatment does not assume personalized movement community is intrinsically more spontaneous or liberatory than other forms of community.

The treatment offered here also differs from social movement research that has defined movement community as an ideologically coherent collection of activist groups across time, space, or both. McAdam (1994, 1988) refers, for instance, to the community of activists who have worked from the civil rights frame, while Meyer and Whittier (1994:291) refer to a
"progressive social movement community" that shares a number of left-liberal stances and norms of expression. Taylor and Whittier's (1992) discussion of the nationwide lesbian feminist social movement community builds on Buechler's definition, emphasizing a community's shared collective identity as well as shared counterinstitutions and activist projects. These works treat important cultural parameters of activists' collective life. My treatment of community differs from and complements these by emphasizing the different bonds of obligation or responsibility that constitute the meaning of membership itself, rather than the shared political stances, interpretations of reality, or identities that movements construct.

Some recent work on movements has mentioned mutual obligation or group bonds specifically (W. Gamson 1991, 1992; also Melucci 1988) without distinguishing their different cultural forms. Lo (1992) usefully highlights how a long history of social movements has drawn on resources and a sense of obligation that develop in a community—defined as a physically contiguous population that shares ties to a geographical locale (1992:238). This community in some ways parallels the "local communitarian" form of movement community defined here, but it is used to denote community in general. This study attends to different forms of togetherness that have not been addressed, or else have been taken as qualities of "community" itself.

Community as an Ongoing Cultural Practice

To study movement community in cultural terms, I have borrowed Bourdieu's use of "practice" (1990, 1977). Practice refers to routine, patterned ways of speaking and acting, patterns that people follow in everyday settings. Studying practices means studying the often taken-for-granted assumptions through which people sustain relationships. With this focus on culture as everyday practice, studying movement community means focusing on the way activists create and sustain group bonds "in the time of action" (Bourdieu 1990:81), during routine activities.

I found Bourdieu's notion of practice useful because it highlights the way taken-for-granted, everyday routines and assumptions may reproduce larger patterns of interaction—a culture or subculture.3 Taken-for-granted practices can continue to reproduce these patterns in spite of efforts to change the patterns. For instance, when Greens defined their organizational structure as frustrating some of their goals, their attempts to change the structure relied on some of the same routine practices that made the structure sometimes frustrating to begin with. Bourdieu's work accomplishes a useful link between micro and macro levels of cultural analysis. In the present case it enables us to conceptualize the place of large cultural repertoires or traditions within everyday group action. We can understand the personalized form of community building, for instance, not as a recent group invention from scratch but as one particular implementation of an ongoing tradition that has been termed "expressive individualism" or the "culture of self-fulfillment" (Bellah et al. 1985; Taylor 1991, 1989; see also Rieff 1966). This tradition differs from a religiously inspired, African American political culture that shaped community for some anti-toxics activists.

Two Dimensions of Movement Community

Differences between Green and anti-toxics activists' community-building practices became clear from observations of how the activists carried a collective identity and how they formed common opinions. I treat each of these group practices as a dimension of movement community. Activists must actively define for themselves one or more collective identities—a sense of "we" that is not pre-given by grievances or structural conditions (Melucci 1988,

3. We need not uncritically assimilate the argument about class reproduction that Bourdieu has attached (1977, 1979, 1984) to his theory of practice. The present discussion brackets the argument.
1989; Touraine 1981; Cohen 1985; Taylor and Whittier 1992; Benford and Hunt 1992; Hunt, Benford, and Snow 1994). Focusing on community building means taking a particular analytic angle on collective identity. It means focusing on the cultural common ground that underlies collective identity, the often unarticulated assumptions activists share about how to carry their collective identity. The task of sustaining a collective identity for a multicultural movement community can be especially challenging if activists come with different routine ways of creating group bonds.

A second dimension of community-building practices is the production of a common opinion. This dimension concerns the routine assumptions about togetherness that shape the way activists arrive at a shared opinion, even if these assumptions are not explicitly articulated as part of the group structure. These routine assumptions matter especially for understanding grass-roots movements that aim to democratize decision making that otherwise would take place behind closed corporate or state agency doors. Both movements in this study, like other contemporary grass-roots movements (Habermas 1987, 1970; Cohen 1985; Epstein 1991; Kitschelt 1985; see also Breines 1982), aimed to increase democratic participation by empowering local, non-professional activists to speak out. They wanted to build ongoing “alliances” of grass-roots groups that work together over a long haul as part of a collectivity (Albrecht and Brewer 1990). Different routines for creating and representing shared opinion, and for representing collective identity, would have to be negotiated in some way for groups to sustain a grass-roots alliance. I turn now to the empirical work.

The Methods and the Movements

I carried out a two-year participant-observation study in local Green and anti-toxics organizations on the West Coast and at regional and national conferences of the U.S. Green and anti-toxics movements. Each local organization professed the desire to produce citizen activism over a long haul, although they practiced “activism” differently. The anti-toxics organizations went on to pursue new toxics issues with the same core membership when older issues had been resolved; they did not form as temporary or “NIMBY” (“not in my back yard”) responses to a single neighborhood environmental problem. Each organization was open to unrestricted volunteer participation.

During participant-observation, I took field notes on all general meetings, coordinating or executive meetings, task group meetings, public events, and petition and door-knocking drives I attended as a participant-observer. More than 900 pages of notes were collected in the two years of the study, which were coded borrowing category- and hypothesis-generating methods formulated by Glaser and Strauss (1967). I developed my argument in counterpoint to existing theoretical approaches, borrowing from Burawoy’s (1991) explication of the extended case method of participant-observation.4 Arguments presented here rely mostly on data from participant-observation field notes; the larger study includes interviews with 25 core local activists and surveys of a national sample of each movement, along with analyses of primary source material from each movement and secondary sources on recent grass-roots movements.

During the time of this study, the U.S. Green movement was a loose, national network of more than 200 local chapters, which, like Green movements in other countries, proposed both political and cultural change as the answer to environmental problems. Born in the mid-1980s, the U.S. movement stems from members’ commitments to a new paradigm of “Ten Key Values”—feminism, non-violence, “ecological wisdom,” and others distilled from

4. The category- and hypothesis-generating methods discussed by Glaser and Strauss were useful in initial coding of group differences, but the ultimate conceptual goal of the study was to refer back to established theory, rather than to generate “grounded theory” (Strauss and Corbin 1991; Glaser and Strauss 1967) as an end in itself.
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middle-class, left-of-center movements of the past 30 years. Local Green movement groups have initiated various projects—rain forest advocacy, anti-toxics advocacy (including assistance to local anti-toxics campaigns), protests of genetic engineering, and increasingly, Green party organizing in several states. All were efforts to enter aspects of “Green values” into public, political debate, mostly at the local level. This paper uses field note data from two demographically similar, local Green organizations, the Seaview and Ridge Greens. The majority of core members of both Green organizations were white and had completed at least four years of college, and most identified themselves as having middle-class backgrounds.

Activists from both organizations participated in a Green-run multicultural organizing workshop.

Anti-toxics activists in the United States, including those in this study, frequently identified themselves with one or both of two national networks, the Citizen’s Clearinghouse on Hazardous Wastes and the National Toxics Campaign. Lois Gibbs (of Love Canal fame) and other leading organizers and technical assistants at the Citizen’s Clearinghouse on Hazardous Wastes (CCHW) count more than 7,000 local citizen organizations in their “Grassroots Movement for Environmental Justice” (Cable and Benson 1993). Movement organizers treat the groups as local community advocates in the tradition of Saul Alinsky-inspired citizen action groups (CCHW 1986; Gibbs and Collete 1983; Delgado 1986; Reitzes and Reitzes 1987). Leaders envisioned the movement as a confederation of local efforts tied together by mutual aid at the regional or national levels (Gibbs 1989; Newman 1991). They also advocated local groups adopt a concern for “environmental justice” among diverse communities in the United States, rather than pursuing a NIMBY approach that remains silent on the ultimate destination of toxic wastes.

To provide a contrast with the Greens’ community-building practices, this paper examines Hillviewers Against Toxics (HAT), a largely African American group based in a small, industrial, predominantly minority-populated city. HAT officially describes its constituency as “low to moderate income people,” which fits most core members of HAT. Greens in a nearby city established preliminary contacts with HAT, but during this study these did not lead to an ongoing alliance. I will make brief references to a mostly white, suburban anti-toxics organization, Airdale Citizens for Environmental Sanity (ACES), to further underscore the importance of seeing organizational structure embedded in a cultural context; the primary comparison in this paper is between the Green activists and HAT.

These two movements represent two ways of producing togetherness at the local level. Anti-toxics activists in HAT imagined themselves primarily as representatives of the common will of a specific locale, although they also represented nationwide claims made for environmental justice. Greens imagined themselves spokespersons for a less geographically specific community of people committed to Green ideology. In practice, local groups in both movements strongly emphasized the value of local effort and were wary of highly centralized, national campaigns, though they also sent representatives to regional and national movement gatherings. Local Greens tried to ally with local anti-toxics activists, and they validated the importance of toxic threats identified by those activists. The kinds of group togetherness described here, then, are not simply derivatives of differences in the groups’ geographic spheres of action.

5. In the early 1990s, Green electoral organizing had advanced furthest in Michigan, California, Connecticut, and Alaska—where a “Green” gubernatorial candidate won roughly 3 percent of votes cast.
6. Demographic information about Green and anti-toxics activists are available in Lichterman (forthcoming).
7. HAT’s form of community might seem to derive simply from a shared sense of immediate threat from toxic sites. But we should not assume forms of movement community spring logically from grievances any more than do issue frames develop logically or naturally out of “real” conditions (Snow et al. 1986; Snow and Benford 1988). Other anti-toxics groups fighting local threats have developed community forms based on a culture of self-interest rather than the culture that shaped community in HAT (CCHW n.d.). Also, leading members of HAT did not claim to have been
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Building Collective Identity in the Green Movement

Greens practiced their “Green” collective identity with the assumption that an activist would carry “Greenness” as an empowered individual—as much or even more than as a member duty-bound to a particular organization or well-established community. During a meeting to draft bylaws, for instance, one Green asserted that “grass roots” itself described a group in which diverse individuals participate intensively and make different kinds of contributions, all of which may be “Green” contributions. Greens also took their way of carrying collective identity into milieux outside those directly connected to their movement. Greens referred to outreach efforts, for instance, as the “greening” of other groups: The image was that Greens as empowered, politicized individuals could participate in other groups—a local task force on police violence, for instance—representing a “Green” perspective in discussions presumed to value individual inputs the way Green meetings did. Greens assumed that their voices would matter as those of individual Greens more than as relays of an organization’s fixed mandate.

This personalized way of carrying the Green identity did not simply derive from an explicit choice of organizational structure alone. It came from an often taken-for-granted, shared practice of community that shaped the choice of an organizational structure and other arrangements as well. For instance, both Green groups became frustrated with their organizational structure during the time of this study and tried to alter it. These attempts at change themselves perpetuated the personalized culture of the organizations: To overhaul their organizations, the groups held lengthy “group process” sessions whose main product was highly personalized statements, oral and written, from individual members assessing the organization. So both groups tried to retool their organizational routines through highlighting individual empowerment within the group, perpetuating the culture that made those routines initially seem the most preferable.

Creating Shared Opinion in the Green Movement

Greens’ assumptions about a good community often highlighted a consensus decision-making process that was practiced through intensive discussions between individuals. Discussions used “facilitators” whose difficult task was to keep track of discussions and interject summary statements or clarifications so that the group might proceed towards a consensus. A turn-taking queue would often form as participants waited their turn to speak. It is important to recognize that a consensus-based decision-making structure can be embedded in different everyday cultural understandings, with different consequences for action. The ACES anti-toxics group, for instance, practiced “consensus” decision-making in which plans of action resulted from discussion and agreement by the entire group. While the ACES decision-making structure was thus formally the same as that of Greens, participant-observation and interviews reveal that ACES members took for granted that usually a leader would do most of the talking while other members gave “input.” ACES practiced the same “consensus” structure as Greens but with different assumptions about individual expression. Greens never characterized their talk simply as input. An informal “leading” decision maker also arose in the Ridge Greens, causing much consternation since the group culture was different from ACES’s.

The Greens’ way of creating shared opinion made sense given the way Greens carried Green identity: It assumed individual contributions and feelings mattered a great deal for the individually harmed by many of the toxic threats they identified in Hillview; they appealed to residents more immediately at risk to act on a communal sense of obligation and join the cause for the good of “the community.”
collective will. Greens would judge a “good” discussion in terms of the degree to which members participated rather than the number of tasks they accomplished. “Community” itself implied a convergence of politicized individuals who value discussion even apart from the strategic decisions that might result. A popular Ridge Green sub-group was the “Community of Concern,” described as a “weekly talking circle and support group for people trying to make sense out of their concerns for the world, and build community together.”

For Greens, both collective identity and group opinion was constructed through a coming together of people who saw themselves as empowered individuals. Greens certainly valued “community” and togetherness; they talked with great enthusiasm about the feelings of unity they derived from reaching a consensus. They built this unity on a highly personalized culture of community.

A Local Communitarian Route to Collective Identity in HAT

HAT publicly enunciated a collective identity as “low-to-moderate-income people” in a secular organization fighting corporate incursions. It carried that identity as dutiful members more than as personally empowered individuals. HAT’s own particular form of “communitarian” togetherness was characterized by African American Christian fellowship and loyalty to local residents defined by HAT as “the people.” These bound HAT as a group more closely together than were Green activists. Of course, not all anti-toxics groups rely on the same bases for togetherness. The point is that HAT’s particular bases for togetherness were not just given naturally by its collective identity as low-to-moderate-income people. HAT might just as logically have carried this identity as a group bound by mutual self-interest, rather than by fellowship or loyalty to one’s community.

HAT officially welcomed participants regardless of faith or race, but it practiced togetherness partly in terms of an African American Christian unity in struggle. While there are several historically black Christian denominations, scholars feel justified in referring to African American Christianity, or “the Black Church,” because of these denominations’ common roots in the experience of slavery, a common articulation of that experience in terms of redemption, and a communally oriented definition of human “freedom” (Lincoln and Mamiya 1990). Supportive as well as critical observers identify a widely adaptable but distinctive African American political culture that draws heavily from religious themes and holds at least some appeal for Blacks of varying socioeconomic background (Henry 1990; Lincoln and Mamiya 1990; Reed 1986). This broad political tradition flows through a history of black social justice activism carried on by recent anti-toxics activists.8 This tradition influenced the practice of togetherness in HAT: Members judged others according to whether they contributed to a community pieced together in terms of an African American fellowship. Frustrated with the intransigence of some local churches on toxics issues, one member exclaimed, “They don’t have enough God in them!” Even the more secular-minded staff organizer held that HAT was in fact doing the work that local churches “should have been doing.” Greens, in contrast, validated a great range of individual expressions of “Green” identity, as long as individuals offered them sincerely. Being “a good Green” was a more individualized matter than being a “good HAT member.”

Unity around the HAT identity also got shaped by a populist sensibility, not articulated in racial terms, that HAT shared with other groups in the Grassroots Movement for Environmental Justice.9 The staff organizer sometimes described the Hillview anti-toxics struggle as

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8. See, for instance, Morris (1984) on the civil rights movement. On-black church political involvement more generally, see Lincoln and Mamiya’s (1990) historical study and survey research on seven major black Christian denominations. For more on the social justice themes in recent black anti-toxics activism, see Bullard (1989, 1990, 1993).

9. CCHW organizing manuals and pamphlets (for instance, CCHW 1986) are thick with anti-bureaucracy and anti-corporate themes that anti-toxics activists share with earlier community activism (Delgado 1986).
one of "community control." He announced during one particularly fiery speech: "It's a question of who's going to rule in our community. Is Petrox going to rule... or are the people, the residents that live in our community, going to rule? HAT says that the people are going to rule." New members would learn that local officials and residents who took the other side in environmental policy battles had either been "bought off" by corporate interests or were simply not loyal members of a "community" that HAT members often spoke of as an undifferentiated entity. Populism as practiced in HAT further strengthened a tight sense of commonality.

HAT's practice of populism differed from that of the Greens, who also cared about "the people" and defined corporate foes, but for whom populism meant validating individual alternative consciousness. Greens talked of the new Green political party as an opportunity to expand the participation of ordinary people alienated by two large political parties indebted to environmentally destructive corporate interests. Sometimes advocating an undifferentiated "people" over "big interests," Greens sounded themes from the U.S. populist tradition (Kazin 1995), as did HAT. But they also expected Green activists to be people with new values who could talk articulately about those values, applying them with individualized nuance. HAT spoke as being of "the people," eliciting a loyalty to non-elite local residents, while the Greens spoke more often for "the people," eliciting tolerance for and empowerment of people in their locale with culturally and politically radical values. HAT's populism beckoned Hillview residents to practice loyalty to the group identity HAT constructed for them and for HAT. The Greens' populism invited a confederation of individually politicized people to inflect a Green group identity in highly individual ways.

While Greens wanted to give individuals room to represent the Green identity in somewhat different ways, HAT leaders stressed that HAT needed to "speak with one voice" at public hearings on toxic waste policy. In turn, HAT claimed to represent the best interests of Hillview as a unitary community, such that all "good" or "faithful" members of that community would also speak with one voice through HAT. Witness the staffperson's genuine incredulousness that some church leaders would not openly support HAT's fights against polluting industries. While Green organizing wanted to preserve the political empowerment of individuals, HAT wanted to groom a few "grass-roots leaders" who would help empower the organization as a whole.

Creating Shared Opinion in HAT

HAT's assumptions about communal loyalty underwrote a style of deliberation that put less emphasis on individual participation and more emphasis on the unity of a group will than did Green decision making. New members sometimes explained to me that they were not speaking much at board meetings because they were "still learning." This statement implies that participants did not necessarily take themselves as equally empowered individuals, that they defined themselves as needing to assimilate a group's shared background knowledge. Few Greens, in contrast, would have situated themselves as "still learning" for more than their first meeting; other Greens would have considered such restraint a sign of disinterest or else evidence of impediments to free expression. There was less individual participation at HAT, compared to the Greens' meetings. During this study, HAT's co-chairs, executive director, and technical assistant did most of the talking, sometimes holding the floor for 10 or more minutes at a time. The non-office holding active members would take a turn with a

10. This is a pseudonym for a chemicals plant that HAT often targeted for its waste disposal practices.

11. While this may sound like unimpeachable common sense when dealing with state power, ACES went to some lengths encouraging individuals to bring their own questions and complaints to public hearings. A leading member of this organization assured me that hearings were "not a set-up" and that "we don't plan exactly how they will come out." Individual participation by organization members and non-members alike was a good in itself.
question or comment two or three times in a typical meeting and perhaps follow up the response to their initial comment with another question. In contrast, core members of the Ridge Greens occupied the floor up to six or eight times in one meeting and often engaged in a quick repartee of answers and further questions that could easily catch the facilitator off guard.

HAT's decisions came with a unity different from that achieved by a Green-style consensus of individuals. Nearly every HAT issue submitted for a vote was approved unanimously. After deliberations — usually weighted heavily toward board officers' opinions — HAT did "speak with one voice." While Greens might have eschewed HAT's form of unity as insufficiently participatory, HAT activists shared a sense of group obligation that made its form of unity seem unremarkable, simply the sign of a serious group. As we will see, different practices of community could easily lead to difficulties and misunderstandings in alliance building, even when groups agreed on ideology.

Multicultural Ideology From Theory to Practice: The Case of the Greens

Articulating Multicultural Ideology

The U.S. Green movement used anti-toxics activists' own terms to frame anti-toxics struggles (Snow et al. 1986; Snow and Benford 1988). Placing cultural diversity high on their own list of priorities, Green groups in the United States wanted to initiate alliances with anti-toxics groups partly because the anti-toxics movement's local base includes strong minority participation (Bullard 1993, 1990; Taylor 1993). Greens in the late 1980s and early 1990s wrote platform statements upholding multiculturalism and criticizing cross-cultural power relations. Greens grounded their multiculturalism in a simplified version of the internal colonialism thesis articulated forcefully by Blauner (1972). They drew from their ideology an imperative to oppose racism and to join with communities of color to fight environmental deterioration in their locales:

The USA began with the invasion of the Western Hemisphere by Europeans . . . To amass wealth, the ideology of racism was created justifying the genocide of Native Peoples, the enslavement of African Americans and the exploitation of Hispanics, Asians and other people of color around the globe . . . Greens are actively anti-racist. We oppose institutional, interpersonal, and cultural racism. We acknowledge that the environmental movements of the 1970s and 1980s often were unable to see that the most intense environmental degradation destroys the lives and communities of people of color. And we also acknowledge that these communities organize in resistance to this destruction. We actively seek their leadership and wisdom" (Green Committees of Correspondence Program 1990:81-82).

Greens officially articulated their understanding of racism as an institutionalized set of arrangements. Their 1990 movement program defined racism as "prejudice plus power," meaning that prejudice is "systematically enforced by the distribution and use of resources and institutions and those who have access to them."

Both Green movement literature and everyday deliberations I observed enunciated a concern for cultural diversity within environmentalism and an agreement with a race-sensitive "environmental justice frame" being used by anti-toxics activists (Bullard 1993, 1990; Capek 1993). For example, an entire issue of the main Green movement publication, Green Letter/In Search of Greener Times (Volume 6, no. 2), was devoted to "movement-building" and excerpted an article on multicultural organizing written originally for a national anti-toxics newsletter. An anti-toxics advocate characterized the main Green movement publication as providing "substantial sympathetic coverage" of environmental justice issues (Taylor
1993:55). Seaview and Ridge Greens stated in their own meetings that “social justice” was integral to Green activism. One Seaview Green said, only halffacetiously, that when asked to characterize the Greens, he would say on “odd days” that it was an environmental movement and on “even days” that it was a social justice movement.

A Personalized Route to a Multicultural Community

There could be more than one way to put Green multiculturalist ideology into practice, and the Green practice of multiculturalism followed the same lines as its community building generally. During this study Greens participated in several “multicultural organizing” workshops and conferences designed to strengthen their ability to work with cultural minority activist groups, such as HAT. A Seaview Green workshop on “race and power” combined a critique of institutions with a highly personalized approach to building multicultural alliances. The 20 Greens in attendance learned that making the Green “community” more culturally diverse meant being an individual culture-bridging agent. This workshop assumed that activists could take individualized, critical stances on their backgrounds as a matter of course. One of the workshop exercises, for instance, called for attendees to briefly describe “something positive” and “something negative” that they “got from their heritage.” With a format that highlighted individual agency, the workshop assumed not only that activists would create a broader movement as individual political agents, but that targeted groups would accept and appreciate the efforts of activists as individual culture-bridgers. Small discussion groups pondered both “What is the next step for me personally?” and “What is the next step for the Greens?” Two attendees conveyed to me their surprise that there was not more “information” presented, but both decided the workshop had been appropriate. One approved of the emphasis on individual exploration because to make the Greens more multicultural, “individuals would have to change, and the Greens is people.” In the words of the other, “you have to start within and work out.” Next, I describe efforts by the Seaview and Ridge Greens to initiate multicultural alliances, and then I illustrate how the two dimensions of movement community—carrying a collective identity and forming shared opinion—worked together to limit Green multicultural outreach.

The workshop’s combination of a social-structural imagination and a personalized practice of community influenced the Seaview group’s first alliance-building meeting, one week after the workshop. Only one activist from another organization—East Asian Coalition for a Demilitarized Pacific (EACDP)—showed up for this meeting; representatives from labor, Rainbow Coalition, and anti-toxics groups said they would attend but did not. Greens listened intently to the EACDP’s grievances against U.S. military bases in the eastern Pacific, asked sympathetic questions demonstrating the Greens’ willingness to condemn U.S. military practice in the region, and voiced no objections over allying themselves with the EACDP. A Green then suggested that the EACDP and the Seaview Greens plan a combined meeting and social event with food, at which EACDP participants could “bring something from [their] culture.” Other Greens added that everyone could “bring something from their culture.” Again, multicultural alliances would build through contacts between individual culture-bridging agents. There was relatively little talk at the meeting or afterward about how the Greens might plan an organization-wide agenda for multicultural alliances.

Even though the Seaview Greens clearly put much work into trying to broaden their cultural horizons, the goal of multicultural alliance building did not get institutionalized as a routine priority for Seaview activities during this study. Decisions about alliances were made centrally by the Seaview coordinating committee, but since Greens carried the Green identity

12. For more detail on the precepts of “anti-racism” workshops presented in Green circles, see Adair and Howell (1988). Similar, personalized approaches to racism and multicultural alliances have characterized workshops among feminists (Albrecht and Brewer 1990) and community organizers (Gregory 1994).
as empowered individuals, it would be up to confederations of individuals in a voluntary task
group to implement the decision and keep the multicultural goal alive. The coordinating
committee did approve Seaview's entry into the EACDP as a coalition member, and individ-
ual Seaview members did sometimes talk about cultural diversity, as when a new Green
electoral organizing group discussed openness to a diverse constituency. Yet, the seemingly
large issue of multicultural alliances did not enter a general discussion of a handbook for new
members that was being assembled around the same time. Neither did Seaview's already-
established toxics task group receive extra support for cross-cultural alliance-building work,
although this seemed an obvious site for institutionalizing the alliance-building priority. And
the Seaview Greens' most active core remained almost entirely white.

It would be easy to conclude that a largely white group simply had higher priorities than
multicultural alliance building. Yet the Seaview Greens were willing to sponsor the daylong
workshop described above, a speakers series on related issues, and an open-ended commit-
tment to multicultural organizing. Green activists seemed very open to accepting even the
stark way in which other activists at a discussion panel had framed U.S. race issues. One
panelist, an African American minister with activist involvements, had supported the thesis
that there existed a "government agenda for genocide" against Blacks. No one spoke against
the thesis, and two Greens at the alliance-building meeting told me they believed it.

We arrive at a better interpretation by examining how group opinion and collective
identity worked within Seaview's culture of community. First, group opinion—even when
articulated and authorized by the central coordinating committee—did not necessarily result
in an ongoing organizational mandate, because of the community practices underlying it. A
common way that Greens in this study acted on shared opinion was by setting up a task
group regarding the issue involved: Greens could then say that their collective endorsement
of some particular stance was represented by the existence of a task group. One such group
formed to engage with the EACDP. The task group would depend on the initiative of self-
empowered volunteers who were autonomous, but it required coordinating committee over-
sight for alliance work. Oversight guaranteed that Seaview Greens outside the task group
would not feel like their Green identity was saddled with disagreeable policy stances they
could not respond to through speaking at coordinating committee meetings. This arrange-
ment made sense within a community form that accentuated the empowerment of individu-
als to create Green opinion and a confederated Green project. The will to implement
multicultural alliances devolved onto those individuals who wanted to carry it out and were
available to do so.

It could be suggested at this point that Greens simply preferred an organizational struc-
ture amenable to a gratifying, "expressive" politics that downplayed strategic considerations.
But Seaview Greens found their practice of movement community frustrating as much as
expressive. Some task group leaders had complained that they felt isolated from the organi-
zation, yet sometimes dictated to by the coordinating committee. Core Seaview members
spent several months and much emotional energy trying to overhaul their organization so
that it could function more effectively in their eyes. Thus, a desire to make politics "fun" or a
lack of strategic will alone is not enough to explain the Greens' approach to multicultural
organizing. The Greens mostly took for granted the assumption that, as one Seaview Green
put it, a good "grass-roots" group depends on intensive, individual participation. HAT would
have defined "grass roots" very differently.

The personalized way Seaview Greens carried their collective identity could also create
difficulties because of its implications for representing Greens to outsiders. Greens carried the
"Green" identity more as individuals than as interchangeable representatives of a group.
They could act as individual Greens on however much initiative they had for alliance work,
and they assumed other groups would appreciate such efforts, even if Green representatives
could not speak for all individually empowered Greens. A group like HAT, on the other
hand, assumed its allies were “communities” in its sense of the term: HAT’s organizer told representatives of other groups to “bring your people” to a protest event—imagining these groups as communities of volunteers who “speak with one voice” and were little concerned with individually selecting ways of enacting their group identity. Activists like HAT members who “fought for the community” could expect to be asked to work on group events, while the Green form of group identity gave less basis for prevailing upon individually empowered Greens. The Greens’ individual-oriented efforts risked sending the message that the Green organization as a whole had only weak interest in other groups or else could not act fast enough. For their own part, Greens occasionally chafed at what they considered insufficiently democratic process in other groups.

Ridge Greens attempted cross-cultural contacts at the same time that Seaview Greens kicked off their organizing campaign. Again, the identity-building and opinion-forming practices of a personalized movement community made it difficult to sustain a group mandate for a multicultural alliance despite good intentions. In this case, HAT’s staffperson had initiated contact with the Ridge Greens, asking them to send representatives to a board meeting. A Ridge Green particularly committed to alliance building had started an “outreach group” that would display the interest in alliance building by Ridge overall. He then needed to get the Ridge coordinating council to approve participation with HAT in specific events and to get more assistance for his group’s efforts, while HAT waited for a decision. The council decided to make a HAT-sponsored rally the Ridge Green collective event of the month. HAT’s organizer had authority to reschedule the rally at relatively little notice, and he did so three times over a two-month period. Ridge Greens with their particular culture of deliberation were not able to keep up and also could not have guaranteed that many Ridge Greens would attend the rally. HAT leaders were severely disappointed with how few people from any other activist groups actually did attend. The Ridge group did not attempt further contacts with HAT during this study.

These scenarios show that movement community is a cultural element that can shape alliance-building efforts even apart from matters of explicit ideology. They also illustrate how accounts of alliance-building difficulties that stress organizational structure (Barkan 1979; Freeman 1975; Gamson 1975), while an important start, may lead us to ignore significant empirical differences that a cultural approach to movement community can bring to light. Structural accounts suggested centralization of power and decision making would ease alliance building. But Greens’ decisions about alliance building, as pictured above, were in fact some of the most centralized ones in their organizations; both Ridge and Seaview Green task groups sometimes chafed at just such centralized direction. The context of a personalized practice of community made such direction frustrating for Greens, yet it was seemingly necessary to preserve the input of all individuals into important decisions.

This logic of individual input may then suggest that consensus decision-making structure was a central problem for Greens, in line with Barkan’s (1979) analysis of difficulties maintaining and building the anti-nuclear movement. Yet we saw that consensus decision making need not be practiced within a form of community as personalized as the Greens’. The ACES group, unlike the Green groups, had no formalized task groups during this study and was only starting to write bylaws, but securing consensus for work with other groups, or for other issues, was usually relatively simple. In the field and in interviews, ACES members characterized consensus as an “informal” way to get things done. But Greens never used that term to characterize the virtues of a consensus process, and their intensive version was hardly informal.

Finally, personalized community suggests the possibility of a structural “tyranny” of friends (Freeman 1975, 1972-73) who are not accountable and create an exclusive clique that will not work with other groups. Yet Seaview and Ridge Greens talked of “learning how to work with” individual Greens they did not personally like, and they went out of their way
to integrate such individuals into their organizations and keep them involved. The terms of a
cultural analysis help us avoid equating the "personalized" community form with the psycho-
logical affinities of friendship that may or may not be present.

Personalized Movement Community as a Bounded Culture

While I have argued that in the Greens' case, difficulties building multicultural alliances
ought not be ascribed simply to race bias in organizational ideologies or personal beliefs, I
want to suggest how personalized movement community as a cultural practice could perpet-
uate unintended race or class barriers. Earlier scholarship suggests certain social characteris-
tics that would give some groups more access to personalized community building than
others. Personalized community resonates with a tradition of individualism that has been
associated with a middle-class way of life (Bellah et al. 1985; Tipton 1982) that highlights the
inner self. A focus on self-realization has spread to other strata, especially since the 1960s
(Yankelovich 1981; Wuthnow 1994). But a political group that uses this individualistic tradici-
tion to create leaderless groups of articulate, intensively participating individuals is also one
that assumes specific cultural skills—individual verbal ability and confidence in self-presentation,
for instance. Scholars have associated these skills with highly educated middle-class
groups more than others (Bourdieu 1984; Mansbridge 1982; see also Bernstein 1976, 1975).
A personalized movement community would result as systematically more accessible to
highly educated middle-class groups despite activists' attempts to reach out to diverse
constituencies.

It is important to note that personalized community draws on a tradition and a set of
cultural skills that have been characterized as more accessible—not necessarily more desira-
ble—to highly educated, and/or middle-class groups than to others. Middle-class and highly
educated groups have also produced some forms of communitarian movement community
(Lo 1992). Arguments that tie "self-realization" to "post-materialist" movements with highly
educated middle-class constituencies (Inglehart 1990) risk the misleading suggestion that
most or all highly educated activists would prefer a "self-realizing," highly personalized form
of community.

If middle-class, highly educated groups are more likely than other groups to be able to
create personalized community, then in the U.S. context this increases the probability that
participants will be white. Non-white activists with educated, middle-class backgrounds may
find personalized community accessible, though perhaps not as desirable, as other forms of
community. Some African American activists, for instance, can be accomplished with per-
sonalized forms of community, while at the same time preferring to participate in a specifi-
cally black-identified form of togetherness. To illustrate, one core member of HAT articulated
a personalized approach to community building, in contrast with other members. He joined
the group after college graduation, and he had chosen to settle in Hillview so he could work
to better "his community." He referred to the taken-for-granted Christian faith of other
members as "maybe one of our biggest problems," yet he also assumed he had a place within
HAT's bonds of black fellowship and expressed reverence for the "elders of the community."
His relatively privileged existence facilitated a cultural self-consciousness different from that
of other members but did not reduce his allegiance to HAT. A community that practices a
black-identified political culture may make more sense to many African Americans than one
that does not (Henry 1990), even if Blacks maintain different forms of loyalty to it.

So cultures of community may be bounded by social parameters, even though they have
no easy one-to-one correspondence with activists' socioeconomic or racial backgrounds.
Further research might ascertain social characteristics of personalized movement community
suggested here. A tendency for personalized communities to be composed of highly educated
middle-class whites might turn out to be perpetuated through recruitment patterns:
Micromobilization research has noted the role of friendship networks in movement recruitment (McAdam 1988a, b; Friedman and McAdam 1992). Friends of activists who like participating in a personalized movement community might have similar backgrounds and similar orientations to group togetherness, reproducing a culture of activism that ends up limiting recruitment even if the activists are trying to attract a socially and culturally diverse constituency.

These suggested social parameters of personalized community take on added significance when we consider that the personalized form of community appears to have characterized not only U.S. Greens but other recent social movements with different specific issues and tactics. Breines's account suggests that new leftists carried notions of personalized community into efforts at organizing low-income minority neighborhoods, with frustrating results (1982). Grass-roots feminists of the 1970s and 1980s practiced personalized forms of community similar to those of Greens (Buechler 1990; Echols 1989; Foglia and Wolffberg 1981). Anti-nuclear activists participated in personalized community too, some of them having spilled over from the women's movement (Meyer and Whittier 1994). In fact, a member of the Ridge Greens claimed that the group's organizational arrangements had been influenced by those of the Livermore Action Group (LAG), an early 1980s anti-nuclear network.

In LAG, as in the Seaview and Ridge Green groups, "community" meant melding highly personalized commitments into a collectivity, rather than evoking commitments to traditional standards of a pre-existing community the way HAT did. For LAG, activists' communal feeling resulted from the decision activists made as individuals to get arrested for blocking entrances to nuclear weapons facilities:

...Each person was confronted with a decision... When people made the decision to step over the line and get arrested, they found that they also made the decision to step into a community that felt fulfilling and liberating (in Epstein 1991:8).

Sometimes participants in personalized communities have assumed that their form of community building satisfies universal desires. The LAG activist quoted above, for instance, stated that "people crave a certain kind of community" (Epstein 1991:8, emphasis mine). But different activist groups create different kinds of community bonds; a group that assumes all people desire personalized community may be unwittingly perpetuating class or race divisions within a movement.

The personalized form of community may be an unrealistic as well as socially limiting basis for a multicultural alliance. But neither Greens nor other activists would readily drop a form of community that they already take for granted, at least not in initial multicultural contacts. While it is possible that Greens in this study modified their practice after my observations, this examination helps explain why their multicultural outreach attempts had already left them frustrated — without an explanation for their frustrations—by the end of the 1980s.

**Conclusion**

The notion of movement community developed here turns our attention to routine cultural repertoires that can shape alliance building even apart from explicitly stated ideologies. "Practice" here is an analytic category that illuminates everyday interaction, and ought not be confused with a group's goal. Greens did not set the goal of advocating individualistic lifestyles. The scenes from movement practice described here show that cultural diversity and

13. Though not based on field observation, Buechler's (1990) documentary account of the contemporary women's movement strongly evokes personalized community in its discussion of "movement communities."
environmental justice were salient goals for Greens. Less salient were differences in community-building practices that they usually took for granted. We can think of these routine practices as elements of “political culture” (Tarrow 1992). We cannot, of course, use movement community as a concept to explain why opposition movements develop. We can use it to distinguish between forms of group togetherness that can have important consequences for the breadth of a movement’s or alliance’s appeal. Doing so, we learn more about how culture works in social movements: A focus on routine practices of togetherness contributes something new to recent work that has treated movement culture in terms of explicit interpretive frameworks, public discourses, rituals, or forms of consciousness (Taylor and Whittier 1995).

The focus on movement community produces a new analytic approach to intercultural tensions that have marked a number of recent movements. Other movements with personalized forms of community need to be examined in greater depth to determine how their community-building practices—along with framing decisions and other factors—contributed to intercultural difficulties. Further research could also treat other versions of communitarian movement community besides that examined in HAT. This account of personalized movement community very tentatively suggests one of the reasons why new left, radical women’s, and anti-nuclear movement organizations have been characterized by a preponderance of highly educated, middle-class whites despite some well-meaning attempts by these activists (Breines 1982; Anzaldua and Moraga 1982; Gregory 1994) to reach out to people of color from varied socioeconomic backgrounds. The personalized community-building practice is part of a culture of activism I have called “personalized politics,” one that continues to influence grass-roots activism, as in the identity politics of sexual minority groups (Taylor and Raeburn 1995). This presentation has revealed limits in personalized politics, but elsewhere I treat its strengths and argue that it has sustained some activists’ commitments over the long haul where other movement cultures could not (Lichterman forthcoming).

It is reasonable to imagine that personalized community has appeal for significant numbers of potential activists in the United States: The dilemmas that well-intentioned Greens faced as dissenters from the dominant culture may be dilemmas for other members of cultural majority groups who want to participate in multicultural grass-roots activism and, like Greens in this study, identify only ambivalently with specific ethnic or racial groups, faith communities, or geographical locales. Cultural dissenters like Greens imagine they are individuals freeing themselves from an oppressive cultural heritage so they can act in solidarity with oppressed minority groups. While the empirical evidence in this study suggests the limitations of this stance, we cannot dismiss the cultural dilemma that underlies it. Theorists of political community have asked where culturally diverse citizens will find shared cultural bases for participatory, democratic activism (Mouffe 1993; Taylor 1992; Bellah et al. 1985; Boyte 1989). One answer is that some form of shared individualism may be necessary for political community in a society whose members do not all share the same civic traditions and hold different notions of what constitutes “participation” (Mouffe 1993). It is an open and difficult question how activists would meld individualism into a democratic community that avoids the limitations Greens experienced without appealing to a specific cultural authority that not all members could share. But we cannot expect activists like Greens to will themselves into the form of community that activists like those in HAT could take mostly for granted.

Activists dealing with this cultural dilemma in their everyday practice may gain from the perspective offered here. A practical knowledge of “how other cultures do things” could mean more than knowing how to enunciate the “right” multicultural ideology. It could mean developing something like a field worker’s critical, reflective approach to taken-for-granted group-constructing routines. Reviewing their frustrations with multicultural alliance
building. Green leaders asked whether the problem could be traced to "psychological dynamics" (Moses and Spretanak 1989). A focus on cultural practices might have instead enabled them to take their own person-oriented approach less for granted. A cross-culturally informed political platform may do frustratingly little for activists if their cultural means for building community around it ends up limiting diverse participation.

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