

Social Networks Matter. But How?*

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Social networks do matter in the process of individual participation in social movements. Many of the African-Americans activists involved in the civil rights movement during the 1950s and later were members of Baptist churches before they devoted their time and energy to the fight against racial discrimination in American society (McAdam 1982; Morris 1984). The young students who worked on the Freedom Summer Project in 1964 enjoyed social links which greatly facilitated their commitment to that risky campaign (McAdam 1988). Most of the women who contributed to the emergence of the women's movements in the United States, and probably in other countries as well, were socially embedded in dense networks, mainly on the radical left (e.g. Freeman 1973). Similar processes occurred in European countries. For example, social ties crucially expanded individual support for what became one of the biggest street demonstrations in Dutch history, when 550,000 peace supporters went to The Hague to protest against the deployment of NATO cruise missiles in the country (Klandermans and Oegema 1987). Interpersonal ties have also played a key role in more radical forms of protest, such as terrorism. They were crucial to the involvement of activists in Italian and German left-wing underground organizations (della Porta 1995). Social networks also enable individual participation in non-democratic regimes when there is a window of opportunity. The Velvet Revolutions in Eastern Europe during the late 1980s mobilized supporters through existing networks, mainly churches and intellectual circles (e.g. Opp and Gern 1993). Finally, the crucial role of social networks in processes of individual participation is apparent not only in contemporary mobilizations like those just mentioned but also in other historical contexts as well. For example, Gould's (1995) study of the Paris Commune shows that organizational linkages among residential areas as well as interpersonal ties facilitated not only enlistment in the National Guard but also the stabilization of new recruits in the revolutionary army.

In brief, social networks play a crucial role in the process of individual participation in social movements, and numerous further studies that emphasize this aspect can be cited (e.g. della Porta 1988, 1995; Diani 1995; Fernandez and McAdam 1989; Friedman and McAdam 1992; Gould 1995; Klandermans 1997; Klandermans and Oegema 1987; Kriesi 1993; Oberschall 1973, 1993; Marwell and Oliver 1993; McAdam 1982, 1988; McAdam and Paulsen 1993; Rosenthal et al. 1985; Snow et al. 1980). The aim of this paper is not simply to provide further empirical evidence of the key role of social interactions in a given process of individual participation; it is rather to address the question of *how* networks intervene in this process. As I shall try to show, networks have multiple functions and intervene at different moments in the process of individual participation. Following the findings of scholars who have underscored the importance

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of networks for individual participation but who, at the same time, have stressed our still limited knowledge of the dimensions of networks that actually influence participation (Kim and Bearman 1997; Gould 1995; Heckathorn 1993; Marwell and Oliver 1993; McAdam and Paulsen 1993), this paper will seek to specify the various roles that networks play in the process of individual participation.

