

### **33: Biographical Consequences of Environmental Activism**

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#### **Abstract**

Most of us have come into contact with environmental activism in some form, such as seen news coverage of environmental protests and activists such as Greta Thunberg or participated in protests to fight or raise awareness of the climate crisis. Even though the former may leave us unaffected, the latter, participation in environmental activism, can have profound effect on our lives. In this chapter we outline and discuss the range of biographical changes, such as changes in consumption behaviours and increased well-being, that may emerge during environmental activism and activism in general. We develop a theory of self and self-change with its foundation in four identity dimensions (content, boundaries, legitimacy, power), and suggest relations within the group and with other groups as processes for environmental biographical consequences to emerge. We highlight the importance of perceived supportive interactions and relationships with other environmental activists for the biographical consequences to endure.

## **Biographical Consequences of Environmental Activism**

We get daily reports of people taking collective action against injustice, inequality and oppression, for example, the current environmental movement with groups like Extinction Rebellion (XR), activists like Greta Thunberg, or events such as Earth Day. The main part of news reports on personal consequences focus on the negative effects of participation in activism, such as activists getting imprisoned and sometimes lose their lives. However, these horrific events are only a small part of environmental activism, and only include a small number of activists. What happens to the other activists? How does moderate environmental activism, such as participating in rallies, and being part of an environmental campaign affect the everyday participants?

Collective action has been defined as actions that aim to improve the ingroup's status (Wright, Taylor, & Moghaddam, 1990) or actions in solidarity with other groups (Becker, 2012). We argue that environmental activism does not easily fit into the standard definition of collective action. In most environmental collective action, there is no distinct disadvantaged group to increase status for, nor is there a distinct group to fight in solidarity with. However, it could be argued that consequences of the climate change disproportionately affect already disadvantaged groups (e.g., Islam & Winkel, 2017), and that participation in environmental movements and actions could be conducted in solidarity with these disadvantaged groups or future generations.

This chapter describes and discusses biographical consequences of participation in environmental activism that could emerge through participation in for example Standing Rock (Elbein, 2017), Fridays for Future (Fridays for Future, 2020), or the Gezi Park Protests (e.g.,

Uluğ & Acar, 2016, 2018, 2019). More specifically, we suggest that participation in activist campaigns can have profound consequences (both good and bad) for the activists' personal lives. However, we argue that not all of the biographical consequences identified in previous research will emerge through environmental activism. Environmental activists are expected to change in line with the norms of their activist group, that is, consequences are related to identity relevant content – and in order to understand and conceptualize biographical consequences of activism we need a self-categorization perspective. We demonstrate how biographical consequences emerge through interaction with other groups (such as the police) and with their own group. We draw upon our own research within environmental campaigns (e.g., Drury & Reicher, 2000; Vestergren, Drury, & Hammar Chiriac, 2018) and develop a theory of self and self-change based on change in four dimensions: content (who we are), boundaries (who counts as ingroup 'we', and who counts as outgroup 'them'), legitimacy (what actions, both by self and others, counts as legitimate or illegitimate), and power (what actions/behaviours 'we' see as possible, connected to the restraining power of outgroups/others).

Some scholars have made the case for environmental identity to be too vague, and environmental issue too shifting to create a strong sense of collective identity and movement (Kahan, 2015; McAdam, 2017; McCright & Dunlap, 2011). McAdam (2017) argues, founded on a review of social science literature on climate change, that for most people the identity vagueness leads to other identities becoming salient as environmental issues are too big and vague to serve to create a salient self-concept as an environmentalist. However, based on our interviews with environmental activists (e.g., Drury & Reicher, 2000; Vestergren et al., 2019), we argue that environmental activists, through their involvement and interactions with other groups as well as their own group, develop an environmental identity which affects their lives within and outside the campaign, and for some have long-lasting effects. We show that

continued interaction with other activists, as crucial for the biographical changes to sustain. Lastly, this chapter makes the case for the need for a self-categorization perspective on change (e.g., Drury & Reicher, 2000; Reynolds & Branscombe, 2014; Vestergren et al., 2018) to describe and explain the emergence and endurance of biographical changes through environmental activism. In this chapter we start by outlining a typology of biographical consequences through participation in activism in general, before moving on to focussing on biographical consequences for environmental activists. This is followed by discussing the process of biographical change developing a theory of identity change along four dimensions and the endurance of these biographical changes.

### **Typology of biographical consequences in activism**

Research on collective action and social movement participation have an extensive body of work behind them, however, the focus on biographical consequences through such participation remains small (e.g., Giugni & Grasso, 2016; McAdam, 1989; Vestergren, Drury & Hammar Chiriac, 2017). Previous research on activism and collective action participation has identified a range of biographical changes (Vestergren et al., 2017), such as changes in attitudes and behaviours related to consumption (Stuart, Thomas, Donaghue & Russell, 2013) and well-being (Vestergren, Drury, & Hammar Chiriac, 2019). The range of various biographical consequences can be organised into changes in what we say that we do (objective changes) and changes in how we see ourselves (subjective changes) (Vestergren et al., 2017).

#### *Objective changes – changes in what we do*

Participation in activism in general can change our relationships with others and how we behave within those relationships. Some studies suggest that participation in activism can lead to new relationships forming (e.g., Cherniss, 1972; Passy & Monsch, 2020), and former

relationships can come under strain and break due to becoming part of an activist community (Cherniss, 1972). Several studies suggest that participation in activism change the relationship to work and education (e.g., Braungart & Braungart, 1990; Fendrich, 1974; Fendrich & Tarleau, 1973; Nassi & Abramowitz, 1979), such as activists tendency to change career more often throughout life compared to non-activists (McAdam, 1989; Sherkat & Blocker, 1997). The perceived activism context and issue of concern can change from local to global as participation in one campaign can lead to extended participation into other campaigns (e.g., Drury, Reicher, & Stott, 2003; Fendrich & Lovoy, 1988; McAdam, 1989; Sherkat & Blocker, 1997; Shriver, Miller & Cable, 2003; Van Dyke & Dixon, 2013). Furthermore, activists have been seen to make changes in their consumption patterns (Stuart, Thomas, Donaghue & Russell, 2013). In their study of activists against whaling in the Sea Shepherd Conservation Movement, Stuart and colleagues (2013) found that some anti-whaling activists changed their diet to exclude or decrease their intake of meat.

#### *Subjective changes – changes in how we see ourselves*

Previous research has also identified changes in how participants see themselves. For example, activists and protesters change their views of what they can change and achieve – a change in empowerment (e.g., Blackwood & Louis, 2012; Drury, Cocking, Beale, Hanson, & Rapley, 2005; Shriver et al., 2003; Tausch & Becker, 2012). Hence, through participation in collective action participants change their view of their ability to reshape the world and its existing power relations. Furthermore, participants have been suggested to become more liberal or progressive, or even more radical in their beliefs and behaviours after becoming involved in collective action campaigns (e.g., Adamek & Lewis, 1973, 1975; Drury & Reicher, 2000; Hirsch, 1990; McAdam, 1989; Nassi, 1981; Simon & Klandermans, 2001; Thomas, McGarty, & Louis, 2014).

Additionally, what participants view as legitimate or illegitimate action can change through participation in activism (e.g., Drury & Reicher, 2000; Marwell, Aiken, & Demerath, 1987). For example, during the Kent state sit-in, protesters became more willing to participate in, and view, civil disobedience as legitimate action (Adamek & Lewis, 1975). Activist may also shift in the view of legitimacy of actions taken by the outgroup, such as the police (e.g., Drury & Reicher, 2000). One of the most commonly observed biographical consequence of participation is sustained commitment (e.g., Macgillivray, 2005; Profitt, 2001; Whittaker & Watts, 1971). For example, Marwell and colleagues (1987) found that 1960s activists were committed to their activism and ideology 20 years after participation. Furthermore, in their study of six different protest contexts Jasko, Szastok, Grzymala-Moszczynska, Maj, and Kruglanski (2019) found that radical left-wing, pro-democratic, feminist, environmental, and labour and health care rights activists became more radical and willing to self-sacrifice both their own health and financially.

There are also consequences related to mental health and well-being reported. Some scholars point to the risk of decreasing mental health caused by burnout (Downton & Wehr, 1998; Einwohner, 2002; Lawson & Barton, 1980). Whereas others have identified an increase in well-being through both online activism (Foster, 2015) and off-line activism (Boehnke & Wong, 2011; Klar & Kasser, 2009). Engagement in activism can increase participants' positive feelings about themselves (Becker, Tausch, & Wagner, 2011), their sense of belonging (Bäck, Bäck, & Knapton, 2015), consequently making them feel fulfilled and give them personal significance (Kruglanski, Jasko, Chernikova, Dugas, & Webber, 2017; Molinario et al., 2019). Relatedly, self-esteem has been demonstrated to increase as a consequence of participation in for example the women's movement (Cherniss, 1992), and increased self-confidence has been

observed for women activists involved in the Gulf Illness Movement (Shriver et al., 2003). Former student activists have been found to change in their personality characteristics, ‘traits’, such as scoring higher on cognitive flexibility, autonomy and impulse expression (Whittaker & Watts, 1971). There are also some reports of anti-war activists (Sherkat, 1998) and free speech activists (Nassi, 1981) transforming in their religious beliefs. Sherkat (1998) found that 8 years after participation in protest, former activists had less religious participation compared to non-activists in the same cohort.

Activism can lead to transformations in more practical ways, such as gaining skills in organisation, how to manage a household, and increase knowledge in various areas. Amongst others, activists in the AFL-CIO Union Summer programme developed skills in organising, which subsequently could be applied in other contexts (van Dyke & Dixon, 2013). Skills obtained through activism engagement can come to use in activists’ everyday lives, such as manage the household economy (e.g., Beckwith, 2016; Cable, 1992; Shriver et al., 2003). The protest and movement context offer a platform for acquiring of new or developed knowledge (e.g., Klandermans, van der Toorn, & van Stekelenburg, 2008; Lawson & Barton, 1980). Most studies on biographical changes through activism, outlined above, has focused on political activism or the 1960s activists. However, some studies have identified one or a few biographical consequences through engagement environmental campaigns (e.g., Cable, 1992; Drury & Reicher, 1999, 2005; Jasko et al., 2019 [study 5]; Molinario et al., 2019; Passy & Monch, 2020).

### *Changes through participation in environmental activism*

Environmental awareness has existed for over five thousand years, though individuals such as Hippocrates and civilisations such as Mohenjo Darro (Weyler, 2018). One of the earliest

environmental protest campaigns could be argued to be the Hindu group Bishnoi. Members of the Bishnoi protested, and some gave their lives, to hinder deforestation in India in the 1730s (Temper, 2017). Environmental movements and actions, such as Zero Hour, Extinction Rebellion (XR), Fridays for Future, and Earth Day gather millions of people acting together globally for the climate and environment. Some researchers have explored how such participation affects participants, and identified various biographical changes emerging through the participation. During a protest to save a piece of land from becoming a motorway, the No M11 link road campaign, campaign participants changed in their view of what actions were legitimate to use during the protest (Drury & Reicher, 2000). Furthermore, the participants were found to change in their view of the police as a whole, from being perceived as a legitimate force, to becoming seen as an illegitimate force. Jasko and colleagues (2019) identified that the biographical changes were more intense for participants who had direct involvement in radical actions in the Białowieża forest camp compared to activists engaged outside the camp. Along with changes in legitimacy of actions, they found changes in radicalism, commitment to the cause, and well-being (Jasko et al., 2019). Additionally, in the Yellow Creek Concerned Citizens movement, Cable (1992) found that participants became empowered and consequently started to challenge power structures in their everyday lives.

In a longitudinal study of environmental activists in Sweden, 11 types of biographical consequences relating to the participants' involvement in the collective action were identified (Vestergren et al., 2019): (ill)legitimacy of action, radicalisation, empowerment, confidence, well-being, skills, knowledge, personal relationships, career, extended involvement, and consumer behaviour. For example, participants changed career or area of study, reduced or stopped their consumption of meat and dairy products to hold a diet more in line with the environmentally friendly ideology, or experienced reduced pain and depressive symptoms.



Some of the biographical consequences, such as increase in wellbeing, can seem unrelated to the activist participation; however, the participants reported between 4 and 11 changes each which they related to the environmental direct action and activist identity (Vestergren et al., 2019). The participants related their changes to their shared identity as environmental activists and discussed them based on a framework of fairness related to environmental and human rights (Vestergren et al., 2019).

Vestergren and colleagues' study (2019) demonstrates that many of the previously identified biographical consequences can occur in one activist campaign, related to identity relevant content. Hence, environmental activists will change their beliefs, relationships and behaviours in line with the values and meanings attached to the relevant environmental activism ideology and identity.

### **How do these biographical consequences come about?**

In this part, we discuss how biographical consequences emerge through activism, based on a theory of self and self-change. First, we summarize previous findings and highlight the two most prevalent processes; between-group and within-group interaction. Second, we suggest a model of emergence for environmental activists that combines the two, related to a theory of self and self-change.

#### *Interaction with an outgroup*

The first type of interaction for biographical changes to emerge is interaction with other groups. This interaction is mainly reported as a conflictual relationship with an outgroup, most often the police (e.g., Adamek & Lewis, 1973, 1975; Jasko et al., 2019; Unsworth & Fielding, 2014). This type of interaction could for example be seen in the environmental campaign to save the

Hambach forest in Germany, where after a six-year long battle and occupation of the forest, the police forcefully evicted and arrested activists from the camp (e.g., Vonberg & Schmidt, 2018). Adamek and Lewis (1973) compared students present at a protest against the Vietnam war in 1970 to students that were not present. During the protest the National Guard opened fire and killed 9 students. Students present at the protest, who had experienced police violence, had stronger ideological beliefs, were more likely to participate in future protests, and held stronger anti-government orientation (Adamek & Lewis, 1973). Additionally, by surveying the protesters' beliefs and behaviours before and after the protest they found that the intentions to participate in civil disobedience almost doubled, and the willingness to participate in violent confrontations with the police increased with 83% (Adamek & Lewis, 1975). Similarly, Jasko and colleagues (2019, study 5) noted that participants who had been involved in the more radical actions in the environmental protest camp, such as blocking logging machines, reported higher levels of self-sacrifice and future protest intentions, compared to participants who had engaged in the protest by moderate actions such as signing a petition. These studies serve as examples of how between-group interactions, especially of conflictual nature, can change participants in both beliefs and behaviours along lines of extended activism, radicalisation, legitimacy of own actions, and illegitimacy of other's actions.

### *Interaction within the group*

The second type of interaction that contribute to activists' biographical changes is interaction within the group. This type of interaction is usually referred to as 'discussions' (e.g., Hirsch, 1990; Klandermans, 1997; Klar & Kasser, 2009; McAdam, 1989; Thomas et al., 2014). For example, several Black Lives Matter activists reported that they learned how to be an activist through participation and interaction with others in the school climate strikes or XR (Murray & Mohdin, 2020). The activists highlighted how participation and engagement in the

environmental protests through interaction within the group had empowered them to continue their activism in other groups. Through discussions within the group, activists get a sense of support for their new views and beliefs, and a sense of a shared worldview (Passy & Monsch, 2014, 2020; Shriver et al., 2003). For example, a union (Unia) activist explained how interpersonal discussions enhanced and developed their working-class consciousness and how they acquired deeper understanding of issues (Passy & Monsch, 2020). Passy and Monsch (2020) argues that through conversations with other group members the group culture becomes integrated within the mind. Along with interpersonal discussions organised interaction such as workshops or seminars contribute to activists' biographical changes (e.g., Van Dyke & Dixon, 2013). Passy and Monsch (2020) describe how activists in Greenpeace talk about the knowledge they obtain in terms of both understanding and behavioural actions. For example, one Greenpeace activist described how group training sessions, pre-action meetings, exchanges with external actors and professionals, and interpersonal discussions affected their knowledge, understanding and sense of self and worldview.

#### *Combining between- and within group interaction for emergence of biographical change*

While interaction has been identified as crucial to explain the emergence of biographical consequences through activism and movement participation, the two types of interaction, between- and within-group, are mainly separated from each other and discussed in isolation (Dovidio, 2013). Dovidio (2013) emphasises the importance of including both types of interaction as they are likely to affect each other.

In his study of No M11 link road campaign, Drury (e.g., Drury et al., 2003; Drury & Reicher, 2000, 2005) analysed how the two interaction types interrelate to change participants. The participants engaged in direct action almost every day by for example occupying green areas,

they faced resistance and violent force from both security companies and police (Drury et al., 2003). Similarly, Vestergren and colleagues (2019) used the elaborated social identity model (ESIM) framework, developed by Drury and colleagues (Drury & Reicher 2000, 2005; Drury et al., 2003; Reicher, 1996; Stott & Reicher 1998), to understand the processes of participants' biographical changes in the environmental campaign in Sweden. In their efforts to save a piece of forest from becoming a limestone quarry, locals had engaged in resistance through legal processes and raising public awareness for almost 10 years. In the summer of 2012, a group of youth environmental activists set up camp in the forest and occupied it to hinder the deforestation machines to carry out their work. This was the starting-point of a month filled with both within-group and between-group interaction that subsequently led to all participants reporting various biographical changes (Vestergren et al., 2019).

To explore the interrelated process between between-group and within-group interaction we need to explore the sequence of events in the forest in more detail (see Vestergren et al., 2018; 2019). As in many environmental campaigns, the campaign as a whole involved a variety of people, some living in the area, some travelled there, from children to pensioners, women and men, and various societal classes. The youth activists spent their days in the forest camp, sitting in trees and in front of deforestation machines to hinder the preparation work for the quarry. At this point, most of the locals supported the activists from afar, afraid to be labelled by the community if they partook in the direct actions. The police arrived with reinforced numbers (the local police force is very small) and started to physically remove the activists from the area. The introduction of force from an outgroup (the police) made the locals re-position their identity and starting to see themselves as activists and joined the direct actions in the forest. Hence, the interaction with the outgroup created more unity and support within the activist group, which now included more participants. Participants explained that through the

campaigners coming together, in opposition to the police and the quarry company, they became empowered and changed in their worldviews which affected their behaviour. Many environmental campaigns and collective actions follow the same pattern as the forest campaign in Sweden and the No M11 campaign in UK. It can be suggested that participants in Standing Rock, Hambach forest, Gezi Park protests, Quidong protest, Roşia Montană protests, Fridays for Future and other environmental campaigns change in similar ways driven by the same processes.

### *Biographical consequences for environmental activists along four identity dimensions*

Many of the biographical changes, such as empowerment, legitimacy and radicalisation (e.g., Drury et al., 2003; Drury & Reicher, 2000, 2018) could be conceptualized as changes in identity. Some studies refer to a change in identity or self as a separate consequence without exploring further dimensions (e.g., Beckwith, 2016; Klandermans, Sabucedo, Rodriguez, & de Weerd, 2002; Profitt, 2001). For example, in studies of women unionists involved in the British miners' strike in the 1980s, Beckwith (2016) found that during their involvement a political and feminist identity emerged. We argue that the identity construction or re-construction is of importance for biographical changes to emerge through activist and movement participation. The basis for this argument is that we transform in ways that are relevant for the social, collective, identity. Hence, some changes may not be relevant for certain groups, or the content of the change might differ. For example, it was relevant for the 1960s activist identity to challenge family power relations, such as the nuclear family. However, in many contemporary societal contexts this type of change content is no longer relevant. The relevance of the identity content is apparent when focussing on environmental activists and movement participation.

Based on our own studies and previous research, we suggest that the identity process of biographical change for environmental activists follow the four-dimension model (e.g., Drury et al., 2003; Drury & Reicher, 2000, 2005, 2018). The first dimension relates to what it means to be an environmental activist (content). Environmental activist has been defined as ‘people who intentionally engage in the most difficult ecological behaviours’ (Séguin, Pelletier, & Hunsley, 1998, p.631). Molinario and colleagues (2019) extend this by explaining that this includes actions beyond recycling for their own home, such as actively encourage and promote environmentally friendly behaviours. Hence, being an environmental activist means acting upon the values and beliefs attached to the environmental identity. For example, for the activists in Vestergren and colleagues’ study (2018, 2019) this meant changing their consumption to exclude or decrease meat and dairy, and to reduce their use of petrol and diesel and plastic. Furthermore, the activists explained changes in their career and academic focus on the basis of what they had learnt and come to understand as important to their new activist identity. Similarly, many participants gained new knowledge and skills, such as growing their own vegetables, related to components seen as part of the environmental activist identity (Vestergren et al., 2019).

Biographical consequences of participation in environmental activism are also related to changes in social relationships, in who is considered as ‘us’ and ‘them’ (identity boundaries). Both in the No M11 Link road campaign (e.g., Drury et al., 2003) and the Swedish forest campaign (Vestergren et al., 2019) participants changed in who they saw as a member of their group. In the initial phase of the environmental forest campaign, the youth activists and the locals did not see each other as part of the same category. However, throughout the events in the forest they became united under a shared activist category. This activist category subsequently became even broader to include activists globally, such as environmentalists in

Latin-America (Vestergren et al., 2019). The changes in identity boundaries were also found to generate extended involvement as activists perceived other campaigns to be part of the same struggle, such as engagement in anti-mining protests in north of Sweden. This type of change can be seen in several environmental movements - for example the local campaign started by Greta Thunberg in 2018, which rapidly came to include more issues and more participants globally. The changes in identity boundaries also define and re-define who 'they' are. After re-positioning themselves as activists, and through the interaction with the police, the environmental activists defined the police as an outgroup, with which they would not interact within or outside of the campaign. They also included other state actors in the new categorisation of 'them' and became opposed to both the police and state (Vestergren et al., 2019), which can also be seen in, for example, some areas of the XR movement (Extinction Rebellion, 2020).

Related to the repositioning of 'us' is the change in perceived legitimacy of the actions taken by 'us'. This repositioning of who we are, for example from locals to activists, affects our own actions and beliefs such as changing aims, becoming tactical about non-violence direct action. Most environmental movements work on the basis of non-violent action. For example, both Greenpeace and XR have a core of non-violent direct action. However, as the collective action context changes so does the aims and what is seen as appropriate and legitimate action (e.g., Hayes, 2020). The change in what is perceived as legitimate and illegitimate action affects the participants in what can be understood as radical change. Consequently, resulting in more radical methods, such as minor public order offences which activists get arrested for, such as gluing themselves to doors or trespassing. For example, participants in the environmental campaign to save a piece of forest in Sweden become more willing to participate in actions

such as block roads, destroy deforestation machines, and in a few cases even break the law (Vestergren et al., 2019).

Finally, we suggest that environmental activists change as a consequence of a shift in the perception of possible actions in relation to the restraining powers of other groups (power). Through becoming united and sharing a sense of community, under a shared identity, environmental activists come to expect that other group members share their beliefs and will support their actions (Drury & Reicher, 2005, 2009; Vestergren et al., 2019). Hence, they become empowered and perceive that the collective can successfully challenge the existing power relationships. The empowerment and sense of support has a positive effect on environmental activists' well-being. Environmental activists gain more confidence in their beliefs and actions within the campaign, and these changes can be brought to other areas of their lives, such as during job interviews (Vestergren et al., 2019).

We suggest that environmental activists change in ways that are relevant to their environmental identity, based on the social relationships and context relevant for the campaign or protest. It should be noted, that we suggest the same four dimensions for activists in general; however, change in the content of the dimensions will be identity specific. For example, changing to a vegan diet makes sense for environmental activists; however, for right-wing anti-immigration activists it would make more sense to change to a diet that only include nationally produced products rather than excluding meat and dairy. Furthermore, as with most protests and activist campaigns the majority of environmental protests and campaigns does not include a physical conflictual relationship with an outgroup such as the police. We argue, in line with self-categorisation theorists (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987), that to categorise yourself as a member of a group you need to make a differentiation between who is in your



group and who is not. This categorisation is cognitive and conceptual and does not necessarily require a visible physical group in close proximity. Hence, for environmental activists such as Greenpeace or Fridays for Future participants, the outgroup could be large polluting companies, the fracking industry, the government and so forth, and through categorising themselves in opposition to outgroups biographical changes emerge in line with the salient environmental identity. In contexts such as the Swedish forest campaign where there was a physical conflictual relationship with an outgroup the biographical changes will likely emerge faster and possibly more intensely, which could explain the difference in intensity of change Jasko and colleagues (2019) found in their sample of environmental activists that had participated in the camp compared to moderate actions such as signed a petition. Taken together, the theory could help explain why some environmental protests, such as the 2015 climate talks in Paris or the anti-fracking campaign Barton Moss go from non-violent direct action to more radical actions, and how participants sustain activist commitment from campaigns such as school climate strikes to Black Lives Matter. Furthermore, it helps us understand the importance of a theory of the self in explaining both participation in environmental movements and action outside the movement, such as recycling and diet behaviour.

### **Do the biographical consequences of participation in Environmental Activism endure?**

In this third, and last part we discuss how biographical consequences can be sustained or discontinued. We discuss the available findings and the importance of within group interaction and shared environmental identity.

The main research conducted on endurance of biographical consequences through activism has focussed on left-wing activist groups. Various studies have demonstrated profound long-term

implications for the 1960s activists' in terms of their view of themselves and the world (e.g., Braungart & Braungart, 1990; Fendrich, 1974; Marwell et al., 1987; McAdam, 1989; Nassi, 1981). Similar implications have been identified for the 1980s activists (e.g., Boehnke & Boehnke, 2005; Boehnke & Wong, 2011) and in more contemporary data (e.g., Giugni & Grasso, 2016).

However, most of the studies on biographical consequences of participation in activism lack a psychological account of how the changes are sustained over time. Some scholars suggest that biographical consequences are sustained by the outcome of the collective action (Becker & Tausch, 2015; Louis et al., 2017), whereas others highlight the context of collective action as a space where activists can re-assess themselves and their worldview which can lead to future engagement (van Zomeren, Leach, & Spears, 2012). Similarly, Thomas, McGarty and Mavor (2009) argues that a shared identity needs to be created with identity relevant norms, which in turn creates a system of understanding that forms the sustained activism commitment. Passy and Giugni (2000) suggests that there is a need to create a link between the activist sphere and the personal sphere. Hence, the social becomes personal when the activist identity become relevant for the life outside of the campaign. Furthermore, characteristics of social networks has been suggested to influence the sustained commitment to activism. For example, the larger the network size the more likely we are to generalise the activist identity, consequently increasing the likelihood of commitment to other campaigns (Louis, Amiot, Thomas, & Blackwood, 2016; Thomas et al., 2014). The connection between interaction, identity, and sustained biographical consequences in environmental movements can shed some further light on the endurance of biographical consequences of participation in environmental activism.

*Intragroup interaction and support to sustain biographical consequences over time*

In our own research (e.g., Drury et al., 2003; Drury & Reicher, 2000; Vestergren et al., 2018, 2019) we have observed a relationship where intragroup processes mediate the effect of intergroup dynamics on sustained biographical consequences for environmental activists. More specifically, contradiction in the way activists expect the police to behave, to be on ‘the right side’, and the way activists experience the police behaviour, treating them all like criminals and physically removing them from the area leads to a stronger unity amongst the activists (Vestergren et al., 2018). In the anti-fracking campaign in UK, environmental campaigners, highlight issues such as human health and their right to protest to justify their actions alongside environmental issues. In many of these campaigns the police are accused of being excessively violent, threatening, dangerous, and using labels such as ‘domestic extremists’ in reference to the activists (e.g., Jackson, 2019) creating a perceived contradiction. The contradiction makes activists reposition the ‘self’ and re-assess the identity boundaries, which in turn creates more support and discussions within the activist group. The new relationships within the group facilitates the endurance of biographical consequences and make activists more open to new arguments from within the group, as they now see themselves as part of a shared identity. Biographical consequences will sustain, or further increase, only when environmental activists perceived themselves to be part of the group (Vestergren et al., 2018). The level of interactive activity with other group members predicted the endurance for the participants’ biographical consequences (Vestergren et al., 2018). Hence, perceived within-group interaction is crucial for the endurance of biographical consequences as it allows the activist to keep the environmental self salient and sustain the social values as personal values. Conversely, where the interaction with other participants discontinue so does the beliefs and behaviours attached to the relevant environmental identity and self. In a few cases, where the within-group interaction had discontinued, there was a notable decline in the biographical consequences, for example from being a vegan to eating meat (Vestergren et al., 2018). We expect the same

relationship for other environmental activist campaigns, such as anti-fracking camps and protests, and more large-scale protests such as the XR movement. Environmental activists will change, or strengthen, their beliefs and behaviours in accordance to the emerging and salient environmental identity. This re-positioning of the self and identity will stay with the activists as long as they perceive themselves to be part of the environmental movement.

## **Conclusions**

In this chapter we have overviewed research describing the range of biographical consequences in relation to environmental activism. We have explored and suggested a theory of self and self-change for environmental activists along four dimensions; content, boundaries, legitimacy, and power. Through interaction with other environmental activists, and interaction with perceived outgroups (such as the police, or fracking companies) biographical consequences, relevant for the shared identity, can emerge. Even though the heterogeneity in environmental movements is often emphasised (e.g., Giugni & Grasso, 2015), for example, heterogeneity was emphasised by some of the No M11 interviewees who denied that there was a shared identity (Drury et al., 2003) although other evidence suggested they did share identity, the shared identity can explain the homogeneity in beliefs, actions etc. in environmental movements and campaigns.

We have also made the case for the importance of sustained interaction with other environmental activists for the biographical consequences, and the shared environmental identity to endure. Hence, to explain emergence and endurance of biographical consequences through participation in activism we need to adopt a self-categorization perspective.

We argue that the advantage in researching biographical consequences relates to two areas; first, movement participation has profound impact on the personal lives of activists. Activism can benefit participants in various areas, such as personal health and future job

prospects, along with contributing to socialisation processes within society. Second, understanding the processes for emergence and endurance of an environmental identity, can help the environmental movement in creating a salient shared identity around environmental issues. Furthermore, understanding the process of endurance of environmental identity can facilitate the environmental movement in keeping participation and extending participation to similar campaigns and causes. Both which have been argued by scholars to be an issue for environmental activists (Kahan, 2015; McAdam, 2017; McCright & Dunlap, 2011). In line with Giugni and Grasso (2015) this chapter has emphasised the importance of local activism both for individual activists in terms of biographical changes, and for larger campaigns and movements in relation to sustained commitment and pro-environmental behaviours.

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