UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA SAN DIEGO

Framing, Strategies, and Identities in Prison Reform and Abolition Work

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in

Sociology

by

Nikolai Smith

Committee in Charge:

Professor Ricardo R. Dominguez, Chair
Professor Richard Biernacki
Professor Ivan T. Evans
Professor Joseph D. Hankins
Professor Jeffrey M. Haydu

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The Dissertation of Nikolai Smith is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically:

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Chair

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA SAN DIEGO

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DEDICATION

To my family and friends for your support.

To Matthew and all the political prisoners. You will all be free.

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VITA

2005	Bachelor of Arts, Social Policy, Northwestern University
2012-2018	Teaching Assistant, University of California San Diego and Berkeley
2012-2019	Research Assistant, University of California San Diego and Berkeley
2012-2019	Graduate Reader, University of California San Diego and Berkeley
2014	Master of Arts, Sociology, University of California San Diego
2019	Doctor of Philosophy, Sociology, University of California San Diego

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Framing, Strategies, and Identities in Prison Reform and Abolition Work

by

Nikolai Smith

Doctor of Philosophy in Sociology

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Professor Ricardo Dominguez, Chair

Using scholarly work at the intersection of political sociology (with a focus on social movements) and criminal justice studies, this dissertation aims to provide an in-depth comparison of two sets of advocates for change in the prison system: moderates aiming for reform and radicals aiming for abolition, with a focus on two of the largest and most active prison advocacy organizations in the San Francisco Bay Area. The project relies on ethnographic methods -- extensive interviews with activists in organizations

representing both moderate reformists and radical abolitionists, as well as analysis of their materials.

Recent mass releases of California inmates and reclassifications of previously strict criminal justice laws present potential political opportunities for prison advocacy groups in the state (as well as nationally and globally) to not only seek further reforms, but to challenge the very existence of prisons. While there are scholars and organizations documenting and analyzing the scale and scope of mass incarceration in California, there is a significant gap in the literature comparing and analyzing the work of prison reform and abolition organizations, specifically organizations that include and are led by prisoners and ex-prisoners. The dissertation develops theoretical approaches to studies around movements and incarceration through investigating the identities, decision-making processes, and strategic challenges confronting prison advocates. The dissertation examines how these organizations make prisoners matter, not only as individuals deserving of social services and full human and civil rights, but also as members and leaders of their own liberation.

Chapter 1

Introduction: How and Why do Moderates and Radicals Engage in Prison Reform Work

I [had] been in prison rotting away and I was hungry to not be seen as a convict…Now the public sees that story and it can change them and it [telling the story] changed me.

Nathan Downs[1]

How can I sit here and not act? How can I not continue to stay informed and help as I can every day when they're sitting in that cell, in those conditions every single day for so many hours?

Donna Harris[2]

The General Problem

The U.S. has the highest incarceration rate in the world. According to the International Centre for Prison Studies, with 2,217,000 prisoners, "just under one-quarter of the world's prisoners are held in American prisons." California, the most

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[1] Nathan Downs (pseudonym) is a radical prison abolitionist organization member. Interview by author, e-mail communication, 2 August 2015 and 9 September 2016.

[2] Donna Harris (pseudonym) is a moderate prison reform organization member. Interview by author, e-mail communication, 3 August 2015 and 10 September 2016.

populous state in the U.S., has the third highest incarceration rate in the world (behind the rest of the United States and China) and spends more on incarceration than any other state.[3] A California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation report found that one of every 9 prisoners in the United States was incarcerated in California and that California prisons are holding greater than 200% of their designed capacity.[4] The majority of these prisoners are poor, and two-thirds are either Latino or African-American (James 2005, xxxvi). A 2014 U.S. Supreme Court decision mandated that California release more than 30,000 inmates while a decision by the U.S. Department of Justice in 2015 mandated a release of 6,000 inmates in federal prison, which included 571 prisoners released in California.[5] California propositions passed in 2012 and 2014 lessening the severity of third offenses ("Three Strikes" laws) and reclassifying low-level drug and theft offenses as misdemeanors instead of felonies have contributed to these releases.[6]

These recent changes in California prison populations and criminal justice laws

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[3] ICPS California Report, retrieved: October 1, 2015. http://www.prisonstudies.org/news/1400-lifers-released-california-prisons-last-3-years

[4] CDCR Population Report, retrieved: October 1, 2015. http://www.cdcr.ca.gov/Reports_Research/Offender_Information_Services_Branch/WeeklyWed/TPOP1A/TPOP1Ad141001.pdf

[5] "Meet the Federal Prisoners About to be Released," retrieved: October 1, 2015, (https://www.themarshallproject.org/2015/10/09/meet-the-federal-prisoners-about-to-be-released).

[6] Eaglin, Jessica. "California Quietly Continues to Reduce Mass Incarceration," retrieved: October 1, 2015. https://www.brennancenter.org/blog/california-quietly-continues-reduce-mass-incarceration

present potential political opportunities for prison advocacy groups in the state (as well as nationally and globally) to not only seek further reforms, but to challenge the very existence of prisons. While there are scholars and organizations documenting and analyzing the scale and scope of mass incarceration in California (CIRI Human Rights Data Project 2010; Franklin 2000; Davis and DiBenedetto 2005; James 2005; Williams 2006), there is a significant gap in the literature comparing and analyzing the work of prison reform and abolition organizations, specifically organizations that include and are led by prisoners and ex-prisoners.[7] Using scholarly work at the intersection of political sociology (with a focus on social movements) and criminal justice studies, this dissertation aims to provide an in-depth comparison of two sets of advocates for change in the prison system: moderates aiming for reform and radicals aiming for abolition, with a focus on two of the largest and most active prison advocacy organizations in the San Francisco Bay Area. The project relies on ethnographic methods -- extensive interviews with activists in organizations representing both moderate reformists and radical abolitionists, as well as analysis of their materials.

The primary goal of this research is to develop theoretical approaches to studies around movements and incarceration through investigating the identities, decision-making processes, and strategic challenges confronting prison advocates. How do these organizations make prisoners matter, not only as individuals deserving of social

[7] Lawston, Jodie. 2010. *Sisters Outside: Radical Activists Working for Women Prisoners*. New York: SUNY Press. Lawston's work does focus on an abolitionist organization, but one that does not include prisoners or ex-prisoners as members.

services and full human and civil rights, but also as members and leaders of their own liberation? Moreover, this research will explore the creative means and experiences brought to advocacy by reformists and abolitionists to understand how individuals develop into an advocate for reform or for abolition and how they maintain these efforts. I argue that the time horizons for activism used by each side (short-term for reformists, long-term for abolitionists), as well as the experiences that brought them to prison advocacy (a moral calling and a more "professional" background for reformists; personal experiences with incarceration and a more "movement" background for abolitionists), significantly affect and explain the differences in each side's advocacy efforts and their ability to maintain such efforts.

Prison Reform/Abolition Advocacy

Analysts and researchers of mass incarceration, as well as legal workers and advocates, see the growth of, and cruel conditions within, the prison state (e.g., over-crowding, inadequate social services, violence from guards, restrictions of basic rights and civil liberties) as a reflection of our society and a source of deep-rooted problems (Gilmore, 2007; Mendieta 2007: esp. 297-301; Sudbury 2008; Alexander 2009).[8] Both advocates for reform and abolition share the view that mass incarceration is harmful to both prisoners and the wider public and fails to address the root causes of crime (Critical Resistance 2015; CJCJ 2015). Both movements include a wide range of

[8] Sudbury, J. 2008. "Rethinking global justice: Black women resist the transnational prison-industrial complex." *Souls*, 10 (4): 344-360

student groups, legal collectives, lobby groups, non-profits, and social movement organizations (SMOs). Reformists seek to lessen the repressive conditions and wide use of prisons but accept that prisons are a needed form of social sanction (Sudbury 2008). Abolitionists, on the other hand, present a systemic critique of the existence of prisons, challenging reformism for trying to create "better" prisons (Davis and Rodriguez 2000, 216; Foucault 1995), and instead advocate for alternative forms of addressing social harms (Ben-Moshe 2011).

I situate prison reform and abolition movements within theories of new social movements that tie movements to the changing dynamics of the global political economy and see "contemporary movements" as showcasing "new possibilities to the rest of society" (Melucci 1996: 185). For instance, the work of abolitionist and reformist movements challenge the growth of mass imprisonment, which has developed from the U.S. and global transformation into a post-industrial society. According to Wacquant, the rise of the penal sector in the U.S. relates "causally and functionally" to the downsizing of the welfare state in the post-Keynesian, neo-liberal age (2009: 3). Put in other words, mass incarceration has seen the gradual replacement of a "maternalistic welfare state" (the more feminine Left hand of the state) with a "paternalistic punitive state," or more masculine Right hand (Wacquant 2009: 32). Thus, penality is not a generalized response to modernity or capitalism, but part of a political project, driven — apparently, though not specified — by the 'Right hand' of the state to contain the displacements of neo-liberal economic process, such as the poor and minority ethnic groups.[9] Building on Wacquant (2002), Alexander further describes how prisoners,

specifically African American prisoners, are not only marginalized, but also largely unneeded in a "newly structured economy—an economy that is no longer driven by unskilled labor" (2010: 202). Such a critique mirrors those of abolitionist groups like Critical Resistance that see the creation and growth of prisons not as institutions to prevent crime or a response to criminal insecurity, but as a political choice in response to social insecurity and based in "cultural values," social control, and hierarchies of power (Wacquant 2009: 5; Critical Resistance 2015).

While reformists aim to create more culturally-sensitive, humane, and just institutions that can better address criminals, abolitionists see prisons as existing upon a logic of "racialized dehumanization" that cannot be rooted out or reformed (Sudbury 2008: 350).[10] Thus, the abolitionist's solutions for crime reduction must lie outside of

[9] By the "Right hand" of the state, Wacquant is building on Pierre Bourdieu's work on the multiple forces at work by the state (in turn building on Thomas Hobbes's Leviathan depiction of the state): the "Left hand" being ministries of aid (e.g., health, housing, social welfare, etc.) and the Right hand "charged with enforcing the new economic discipline via budget cuts, fiscal incentives, and economic 'deregulation.'" Focusing on prisons fills the gap in Bourdieu's work by "inserting the police, the courts, and the prison" as primary forces of the state's Right hand. Wacquant continues: "It suggests that we need to bring penal policies from the periphery to the center of our analysis of the redesign and deployment of government programs aimed at coping with the entrenched poverty and deepening disparities spawned in the polarizing city by the discarding of the Fordist–Keynesian social compact." Wacquant, Loïc (2016) 'Bourdieu, Foucault, and the penal state in the neoliberal era', in D. Zamora and M. Behrent (eds), *Foucault and Neoliberalism*. Cambridge: Polity Press. pp. 116–117; Bourdieu, Pierre. 1994[1993]. "Rethinking the State: On the Genesis and Structure of the Bureaucratic Field," *Sociological Theory* 12, 1: 1–19. For a further examination on the historical development of US social policies related to welfare, the poor, and social institutions targeting the poor, see Fox Piven, Francis and R. A. Cloward 1993[1971]. *Regulating the Poor: The Functions of Public Welfare*. New York: Vintage.

[10] Sudbury, J. 2008. "Rethinking global justice: Black women resist the transnational prison-industrial complex." *Souls*, 10 (4): 344-360.

the prison walls that reformists envision. A main push-pull between reformists and abolitionists comes from the struggle for which types of reforms contribute to reinforcing and growing the prison system, and which ones serve to challenge and ultimately lead to its demise. This continuum can be traced to Knopps' *Instead of Prisons* (1976) on fighting for smaller reforms to ultimately abolish prisons, and to Mathiesen's *The Politics of Abolition* (1974), which outlined the differences between positive and negative reforms and abolition:

> Positive reforms are changes that improve the system so it will act more effectively, so that the system gains strength and abolition becomes more difficult. Examples of positive reforms in the current penal system include probation and technological monitoring systems…which, although ensure that those convicted could live outside of the prisons, further the reach of the penal regime…On the other hand, negative reforms are changes that abolish or remove parts of the system on which it is dependent (Mathiesen 1974). An example of negative reforms could be to demand better health care for prisoners in current prisons and jails, to a point where the prison system will not be able to afford these conditions and will have to start decarcerating inmates who require medical attention (Ben-Moshe 2011: 116).

Thus, the decision between reform or abolition is not only a scholarly question, but a strategic one for movements and organizations looking to challenge incarceration. Are the reforms advocates fight for beneficial to current inmates and those in the future? How does the struggle between abolition and reform play out in a region like the Bay Area with a growing number of prison reforms put forth by large abolitionist and prison reformist organizations?

Prison Movement Work in the Bay Area

The Bay Area has arguably the largest concentration of prison advocacy

organizations, including the hub of prison abolition work as the headquarters of national abolition organizations Critical Resistance, All of Us Or None, the National Network for Women in Prison, the Ella Baker Center For Human Rights, and the Insight Prison Project.[11] These listed organizations all include ex-prisoners working to challenge their discrimination, an effort that activists have called the 'new civil rights movement'[12] (Sudbury 2008, 350).[13] The Bay Area also includes a host of prison reform non-profits from policy think-tanks (e.g., California Prison Focus and the Center on Juvenile and Criminal Justice), to legal organizations (e.g., Justice Now and Bay Area Legal Aid).[14] The Bay Area is also home to San Quentin State Prison, the state's oldest prison and the site of the state's only (and the nation's largest) death row,[15] with a new jail proposed in San Francisco, that is promoted as "good for trans women" and "good for those with mental illness" and an alternative to current prisons and jails in California

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[11] Major cities include San Francisco, Oakland, and San Jose.

[12] All of Us or None, "All of Us or None: A National Organizing Effort to Strengthen the Voices of Formerly-Incarcerated People, Felons and Our Families," retrieved: October 3, 2015. http://www.allofusornone.org/pdf/allornonebooklet.pdf

[13] Sudbury, J. 2008. "Rethinking global justice: Black women resist the transnational prison-industrial complex." *Souls*, 10 (4): 344-360.

[14] A "think-tank" is a research or policy organization that attempts to influence government.

[15] San Quentin State Prison (2009). "Mission Statement". California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, retrieved: October 3, 2015. https://web.archive.org/web/20090806152712/http://www.cdcr.ca.gov/Visitors/Facilities/SQ.html

(Critical Resistance 2015b: 1). A recent (2015) project by Critical Resistance, "No New SF Jail Coalition," seeks to challenge its construction.

Additionally, the proximity of the state capital Sacramento, the center of decision-making for the budget and laws surrounding the state's prison system, to the Bay Area provides potential protest and lobbying opportunities. Given California's lead in both the number of prisoners and the number of recent prisoners released, as well as California and the Bay Area's longstanding history of social movements and advocacy work (Davis 2005; Ganz 2000b; Gitlin 2013), an examination of this geographic area can enhance the debate and discussions around the use of and need for prisons nationally and the means by which individuals and organizations seek to influence that discussion. Scholars have argued that the efforts of prisoners and prison advocacy organizations in in California have influenced prison advocacy nationally and internationally, serving to unite advocates and prisoners throughout the world (Dikotter 2007; Sudbury 2008, 2010).[16]

My two case study organizations will be the Center on Juvenile and Criminal Justice (CJCJ) and Critical Resistance, both located in the Bay Area and leaders in reform and abolition, respectively. The CJCJ is a non-profit non-partisan organization whose mission is to "reduce society's reliance on incarceration as a solution to social problems" by providing technical assistance, direct services, and policy analysis to create a "humane" criminal justice system (CJCJ 2015: 1). Critical Resistance's vision

[16] Sudbury, J. 2008. "Rethinking global justice: Black women resist the transnational prison-industrial complex." *Souls*, 10 (4): 344-360.

is the growth of “genuinely healthy, stable communities that respond to harm without relying on imprisonment and punishment.” This SMO is a member-run and member-led grassroots movement to “shrink the [mass-incarceration] system into non-existence” (Critical Resistance 2015a: 1).[17] I will delve deeper into this comparison in the “Methodological Issues: Sources of Data” section later on in this Introduction.

Radicalism and Reformism in Social Movements

The division between a social movement organization that wants to improve things versus one that wants to change the whole system can be found in many movements, including, but not limited to: trade unionists versus socialists, civil rights versus black power, women's rights versus radical feminists, Social Democrats versus Bolsheviks, etc. General social movement accounts of this split focus on the typical differences between radicals and reformists centering around five key characteristics: organizational structure, ideology, tactics, communication, and assessment of success (Fitzgerald and Rodgers 2000; della Porta and Caiani 2009; Cross and Snow 2012; Pellow 2014).[18] In terms of structure, moderate reformist organizations and activists

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[17] A social movement is a collective effort by a group of people to transform individuals, social institutions, or structures.

[18] Fitzgerald, Kathleen J., and Diane Rodgers. (2000). Radical Social Movement Organizations: A Theoretical Model. *The Sociological Quarterly, 41*(4), 573-592; della Porta, Donatella and Manuela Caiani. (2009). *Social Movements and Europeanization*. New York: Oxford University Press; Cross, Remy and Snow, David A.. (2012). "Radicalism within the Context of Social Movements: Processes and Types." Journal of Strategic Security 4, no. 4: 115-130; Pellow, David Naguib. (2014). *Total Liberation: The Power and Promise of Animal*

tend to emphasize hierarchical, formal and bureaucratic organizations and frameworks for decision-making versus more nonhierarchical, participatory organizational structures for radical organizations. For ideology, a reform organization aims to challenge within the existing political system, while radical organizations engage in activist networks for a larger anti-state, or anti-system agenda. Reformists tend to favor nonviolent, legal tactics, while radicals emphasize mass, direct action tactics. Reformists are able to "rely on mainstream forms of communication," while radicals are more "ignored/misrepresented by the media," and pushed to pursue other more grassroots media avenues. Finally, reformists have a "potential for plentiful resources" given their less combative aims for reform and support of government involvement, versus radicals who have limited resources and are more likely "subject to intense opposition and government surveillance" given their radical agenda (Fitzgerald and Rodgers 2000: 578).

My case study follows a similar distinction to the above general social movement accounts of the radicalism versus reformism split. The prison reformists studied here are part of a formal bureaucratic, hierarchical structure. They engage in mostly legal action with the state, focus on mainstream media, and measure success in terms of reforms within the existing system. While for radical prison abolitionists, their individual and collective identity, strategy, and framing efforts center around a more nonhierarchical, participatory structure. They engage in mass direct actions and rely on alternative media forms to promote their goals for structural change.

Rights
and the Radical Earth Movement. University of Minnesota Press.

However, by addressing the following questions, my findings make a case for additional attributes to the radical versus reformist organizational literature that are not as well covered:

1. How flexible is the reformist versus radical distinction for each side?
2. How much are these respective radical versus reformist actions and decision-making processes distinctions based on concerns of how they are perceived by non-activists?
3. How personal is the connection to such non-activists?

This dissertation answers these questions by finding out why respondents became and remain involved in their activist efforts, or as some activists phrased it, who they are most concerned about “disappointing” or “failing” in their efforts.

As discussed in the following three body chapters of this dissertation, for abolitionists their motivation and steadfast commitment to full abolition is tied to their personal connection to incarceration. While for prison reformist respondents, their continued motivation is tied to a moral shock to first hearing about the state of prison conditions, but not specific prisoners that the respondents had ties to. Moreover, although reformist respondents expressed concerns with being perceived as ‘radical’ by the general public, reformists still often discussed an interest in learning directly from and potentially partnering further with abolitionists. This dissertation will detail the ways in which reformists show a more flexible decision-making process for their work in context with radical abolitionism and abolitionists. Conversely, abolitionist interviews emphasized a lack of choice on the reformist-radical spectrum: I *have* to be an abolitionist because of my family or friends; I *cannot waver* from this line; and I *will not*

settle or be *coopted* by reformers.[19] The abolitionist intimate ties cementing this choice, compared to the reformist more flexible concerns for public sentiments, underscore this distinction. By highlighting the specific motivations for becoming and remaining a radical abolitionist or a moderate reformist, this research complicates and adds additional reasoning to the division between reformists and radicals in social movements. The following body chapters will shed further light on these contributions.

Social Movement Literature, Criminology, and Prison Advocacy

This project will address three key gaps in current literature around social movements and criminal justice. First, this will be the first in-depth study of a prison reform organization and prison reformists, as well as the first in-depth study of a prison abolition group that was founded and led by formerly and currently incarcerated people. Studies on the different efforts to challenge incarceration have been broad in scope and primarily focused on international and transnational abolition networks (Dikotter 2007; Sudbury 2000, 2008). The exception to this is Jodie Lawston's ethnographic work (2010) on the group *Network of Prisoners* (a pseudonym). Lawston addresses the tactical and strategic decisions of this radical California-based women's prison abolition SMO and the ways that activists frame prisoners as "sisters" and equal participants. She also reveals the balancing act that radical activists have to engage in to relate to a mainstream public that is not receptive to prison abolition. However, *Network of Prisoners* works *on behalf of* incarcerated women and is led by mostly white, middle-

[19] Emphasis occurred in multiple abolitionist interviews.

class women (Lawston 2010: 86). By studying advocates that views prisoners as members and leaders, as opposed to beneficiaries, this dissertation seeks to draw out the different organizational tactics and strategies that surround the recruitment of former and current prisoners and the means by which they come to lead.

This dissertation also aims to build on Professor of Sociology and Criminal Justice and former convict Stephen C. Richards's notion of the prisoner as a "semi-citizen" who is denied civil and human rights, such as the right to vote, housing, and employment, for being deemed a convict, or, if released, the label 'former convict' with a permanent record (2013: 5; Cohen 2013; Alexander 2012; Pager 2007). In this way I will add to Richards and Ross's "New School of Convict Criminology" (building on Taylor et. al's *The New Criminology,* 1973), which uses the voices of defendants, prisoners, and former convicts to inform and drive research around prison advocacy (Richards & Ross, 2001:180; Ross & Richards, 2002, 2003).

The justification for a system of mass incarceration depends on the perception that criminals are in fact criminal and deserving of punishment and is strengthened by the view that criminals are different, violent, and abnormal (Stern 1998; Alexander 2010). As Kilty and Swank (1997) have observed, vilifying, engaging, and eliminating "savages" is less of a moral problem than eliminating human beings, seen in the dehumanization of American Indians as a lesser race—uncivilized savages—and providing the justification for the extermination of the native peoples (106). The depiction of criminals as violent and abnormal is further reinforced through images in media and popular culture of murderers in 'law-and-order pornography' or in 'get tough on crime' political campaigns, which promote ridding towns of this underclass (Beckett

1997; Wacquant 2000, 2002, 2010: 207; Alexander 2010). Salas (2002) describes how counter-narratives emphasizing the rights and humanity of prisoners are especially needed given additional dominant "imaginaries and narratives of prison violence" that spill over outside the prison walls through media affecting society at large and the public's perception of prisoners and former prisoners.[20] Salas states, for a system of mass incarceration to change, "concepts of right and wrong must be dissolved and their lines blurred" (Salas 2002: 220).

Building on the work of scholars (Ganz 2000a; 2000b) of social movement leadership styles and tactics, this project will address not only the question of how do prison advocates humanize prisoners, but how do they provide prisoners with direct services and empower them. Studying the work of prisoners in movements expands this debate given the many limitations involved in organizing within and among prisons. These include, but are not limited to, lack of electronic communications, costs for mailing, visiting restrictions, and content restrictions on literature coming into prisons. Moreover, once released, engaging in prison abolition work by former prisoners brings up concerns of retaliation or re-arrest and restrictions on movement across state lines as well as hiring restrictions (Mauer 1999; Davis 2005; Alexander 2010). The limitations of and potential opportunities for released prisoners to engage in prison advocacy work is a site of research that has not received sufficient academic attention.

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[20] Salas, Yolas. 2002. "Imaginaries and Narratives of Prison Violence." Pp. 207-223 in *Citizens of Fear*, edited by S. Rotker. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

Second, this project will provide a comparison between a radical prison abolition non-governmental organization[21] (NGO) and a politically moderate prison reform NGO. By doing so, we will see the conflict between what these groups --- and their members --- view as necessary reforms as well as the limitations and advantages of their organizational forms and the prison advocacy field[22] in which they exist. There have been studies on the benefits and limitations of non-profit and advocacy work (Incite! 2007), the state of mass incarceration (Davis 1995), and the need for reform or abolition (Davis 2005, Alexander 2010).[23] But what about the push-pull between reform and abolition, as well as between politically moderate and radical, within prison reformist and abolitionist organizations? The moderate Center on Juvenile and Criminal Justice has elements of the more radical Critical Resistance platform embedded in their focus on social justice and their community-based work, placing an emphasis on expanding community-based services. Similarly, Critical Resistance not only engages in protest-oriented efforts, but also distributes policy papers and offers direct services. I contend that these different approaches emerge not only due to the complexity of prison

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[21] A non-governmental organization is a voluntary-run, non-profit group that is neither a governmental institution nor a private business.

[22] A loose network of NGOs, social movement organizations (SMOs), think-tanks, and other organizations advocating for changes in mass incarceration.

[23] Incite! 2007. *The Revolution will not be Funded: Beyond the Non-Profit Industrial Complex*. Boston: South End Press. Davis, Mike. 1995. "Hell factories in the field." *The Nation*. 260: 229-234; Davis, Angela Y. 2005. *Abolition Democracy: Beyond Prisons, Torture, and Empire. Interviews with Angela Y. Davis*. Seven Stories Press; and Alexander, Michelle. 2010. *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*. New York: The New Press.

advocacy, but from the continual internal debate about where each side falls on the abolitionist-prison reform spectrum.

Finally, this project will provide an updated perspective on work around prisons at a time when polls show the highest percentage of Americans ever recorded opposed to the current state of mass incarceration and the War on Drugs[24]; tens of thousands of prisoners are being released due to court and legislative mandates; and the decriminalization of marijuana is spreading across the states.[25] Prison advocacy organizations in the U.S. today operate within a setting of increasing debates in the media, courtrooms, and legislative bodies around the need for prison reform (Sussman 2015). Building on the political process approach (McAdam 1994, 1999) and the emphasis on political opportunities as a key indicator for a rise in movement activity, I argue that these legal and legislative changes reflect an increase in activity by both prison reform and abolition advocates.[26] Increased recognition by white Americans over the state of racism in the U.S. and in the criminal justice system were additionally cited by reform and abolition advocates as opening up political opportunities for increased activity (Sussman 2015). These changes in popular opinion and government can

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[24] The War on Drugs was started in 1982 by President Reagan as an effort to increase the policing and imprisonment of those who use and distribute illegal drugs. A chief argument for ending this 'War' and for the legalization of drugs is the lessening of the prison population (Alexander 2010).

[25] Editorial Board. "The Push for Legal Marijuana Spreads." *New York Times*. November 5, 2015.

[26] McAdam, Doug. 1999. Political Process and the Development of the Black Insurgency 1930-1970. 2nd ed. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

contribute to what Omi and Winant termed an “unstable equilibrium,” where organizations increasingly challenge the dominant political and racial order (manifested today through inequalities by race in mass incarceration). Challenges to the racial and political order can also trigger government attempts to filter and absorb these efforts into reforms that appease part of the population and strengthen the prevailing system (Omi and Winant 1994, 84-88.). I demonstrate that historic changes in public opinion and government action have not only led to increased activity by prison reform and abolitionist activists for their respective reforms, but specifically to increased activity challenging the state from filtering and absorbing these reforms. Moreover, reformists, while perhaps viewed as more conservative in terms of challenging the state compared to abolitionists, had an increase in reported activity relative to abolitionists, who engaged in a longer, less consistently combative time horizon for activism in order to avoid burnout.[27]

Methodological Issues

Sources of Data

For my comparison of a prison reformists and prison abolitionists in the Bay Area, I will use the qualitative methods of in-depth interviews as well as content analysis of their publications, media, recruitment materials, and presentations. My unit of

[27] These arguments and findings are discussed in the following Chapter 2 on strategy and organization.

analysis is the organization and their advocates, and my case studies of specific organizations are Critical Resistance and the CJCJ, founded in 1997 and 1985. Critical Resistance has a radical prison abolition stance and includes a diverse group representing a variety of movements in the Bay Area and nationally. This includes prisoners and formerly incarcerated, fighting the spread of HIV-AIDS, and disability and student rights activists. These different perspectives come from their founders and members **(**Sudbury 2008). CJCJ has a reformist approach to prison work and views prisoners and the formerly incarcerated as beneficiaries of the organization's services. CJCJ was founded by the former director of the Department of Youth Services in Massachusetts, Dr. Jerome G. Miller, a white male social worker without ties to the state of California.

Both organizations are national in scope, based in the Bay Area (Critical Resistance in Oakland and the CJCJ in San Francisco), and two of the largest organizations in the prison abolition and prison reform movement, respectively. The CJCJ focuses on similar prison reform advocacy efforts as Critical Resistance, but without conducting direct actions. The two organizations---and sets of advocates---are both active with and respected among other prisoners' rights organizations. They differ primarily in terms of the extent of their mission and their use of protest tactics (Critical Resistance) versus more direct service provision and emphasis on policy lobbying (CJCJ). I have fostered trust among prison advocates through my strong connections to criminal justice advocacy groups in the Bay Area, making me especially well-equipped to communicate this work to a broader audience and to create networks for education and research.

My comparative study of the two groups of advocates consisted of in-depth interviews, content analysis, and additional secondary research.

Interviews

I conducted in-depth interviews with a total of sixteen prison advocates in the Bay Area regarding their advocacy tactics and strategies, framing efforts, and views on personal and collective identity. Seven are prison reformers and seven prison abolitionists. Three of the prison reformers identified as black or African American and five identified as white, while four of the prison abolitionists identified as black or African American, one as Arab American, one as Latino, and two as white. All of the abolitionists identified as working class; however, all but two of the reformists identified as working class with the lone two identifying as middle class. Six of the abolitionists held university degrees (the remaining two passed the General Educational Development tests) with two of those six holding graduating degrees, while all of the reformists held university degrees with four holding graduating degrees. When comparing differences (when present) between the class, race, and education backgrounds between reformists and abolitionists, there were not significant distinctions that would signal that activists are strategizing, identifying,[28] and framing differently because of the kinds of people they are, rather than because of the organizations to which they belong (which are the findings spelled out in Chapters 2, 3, and 4, respectively).

[28] In terms of their individual and collective identity as a prison activist.

I documented the advocates' movement and reform work experiences as well as how information and advocacy tactics are communicated internally and externally. Interviews were conducted from the summer of 2015 to the end of 2016 in order to observe the enactment of differing strategic goals during two different points in time: the 2015 non-election year and the 2016 year of presidential and state ballot elections (see Chapter 2). In-depth interviews are essential to gain trust and to draw out actors' views on the efficacy of their work and the potential for future projects, such as creating collaborations with other grassroots advocacy groups in California and the U.S.. The perspective of members and staff are represented from every stage of a group's advocacy efforts from recruitment and education to larger public actions and lobbying efforts.

Content Analysis

The CJCJ and Critical Resistance communicate their campaigns and movement work through their websites, blogs, pamphlets, flyers, zines[29], online toolkits, and other media materials, which are distributed to diverse groups throughout the U.S. and globally. Additionally, Critical Resistance publishes a quarterly bilingual paper called *The Abolitionist,* a resource for prisoners, staff, and community members to voice their concerns and efforts for prison abolition. The CJCJ publishes *The Justice Policy Journal* (JPJ), "an international forum for researchers and policymakers to examine

[29] Zines are self-published small-circulation booklets composed of original or borrowed images and texts.

current justice issues and promote innovative policy solutions in a Web-based format" (CJCJ 2015: 1). Both organizations also put out legal briefs, academic publications, and policy memos. I analyze these different materials on the dimensions of their target audience, the frames and modes of argumentation used, and their explicit or implicit advocacy goals, using interviews with prison advocates as the means to yield data on the official strategies and tactics, as well as the means by which they came to those decisions.

Secondary Research

I complement primary data pulled from qualitative research through an examination of secondary sources on perspectives and debates surrounding prison reform and abolition in major Bay Area publications and local media, as well as articles from national mainstream publications and media discussing prisons and advocacy around prisons in the Bay Area and California. I focus on the two major Bay Area papers, the *Oakland Tribune* (from the base of Critical Resistance and the hub of abolitionist activity in Oakland) and the *San Francisco Chronicle* (from the base of the CJCJ and many of the largest Bay Area prison reform organizations). I also use more progressive free local publications (*The East Bay Express* and *The San Francisco Examiner*), which tend to cover social issues more in-depth and through the voices and perspectives of those most affected and engaged in advocacy. Finally, I examined the two major African-American newspapers in the Bay Area, *The San Francisco Bay View* and *The Oakland Post*, given the involvement of African-American civil rights advocates in prison movements and the disproportionate imprisonment of African-Americans in

California and nationally (Alexander 2010).

These sources provided further background and significance to the qualitative research and informed and directed not only the questions I asked, but also whom I asked. This media attention highlighted the major leaders and thinkers in discussions around prisons in the Bay Area and California. Moreover, looking at national coverage of the prison debate in California provided context for how local, state, and national pressure and coverage affected the work of and discussions by the prison reformists and abolitionists interviewed. The frames and discourse used by these mainstream and local media outlets will be compared with the frames and discourse that the two case studies use in their own media and discussions. Through interviews, I demonstrate how such mainstream coverage affects respondents' involvement and decision-making in prison reform and abolition work.

Organization of the Analysis

Chapter 2 examines the ways moderate prison reform organizations and radical prison abolitionist organizations determine the tactics and strategies that further their organizational goals and how each side uses such tactics over time to maintain their organization. These strategic questions further branch out into questions of outreach, recruitment and further social action. With greater numbers of Americans questioning the nation's criminal justice system, which strategies and tactics do prison advocacy organizations see as most effective to engage the public, and which groups do they see as the most receptive to prison abolition or reform? Are they engaging in coalition-

building and, if so, with which organizations? The chapter then examines the differences between a 2015 non-election year and the 2016 year of presidential and state ballot elections. I argue that prison reformist respondents are more active, particularly around coalition-building, during election years and depend on moral convictions to overcome the emotional fatigue associated with a shorter time horizon for activism. In contrast, prison abolitionist respondents, who may be seen as more 'extreme' in their anti-systemic efforts, see their decision to focus on a longer time horizon for activism, rather than election years, as a more sustainable application of their energy.

In Chapter 3, I examine the question of identity and involvement as well as the ways reformist and abolitionist movement identity shapes their organizational and strategic choices. How did the leaders and members of a reform organization come to be reformists, and how did the leaders and members of an abolitionist organization come to be abolitionists? To combine an examination of identity with organizational questions, I document personal biographies of key leaders and members of the two sides to see the path by which they became involved in the work and the ways their individual and collective identity keeps them engaged in advocacy and at what capacity. Jasper emphasizes the importance of understanding the biographies of advocates as actors' histories leave them with "different selections of cultural meanings and strategic tastes,"[30] often described as "personality, self, or personal identity" (1997: 45). This

[30] Cultural and biographical factors influence the types of tactics movement actors choose, with different actors arriving at different preferences or tastes, which can change over time (Jasper 1997: 244). Jasper, James M. 1997. *The art of moral protest: Culture, biography, and creativity in social movements*.

dissertation project seeks to explore the agency and individual, as well as collective, identities of both the non-incarcerated and currently and formerly incarcerated individuals and the means by which they come to care about incarceration, or challenge their incarceration and treatment in the outside world, respectively. Thus, this project seeks to also understand how prisoners benefitting from or working with a prison advocacy group experience their identity as a criminal and as a movement member or patron of services.

I then, in Chapter 4, examine the use of frames by both sides. I unite the issues discussed in Chapters 2 and 3 to understand how prison advocates explain their movement identity (that of a moderate reformist or radical abolitionist) and their organizational strategy to individuals outside their field, whether it be potential recruits, funders, or policymakers. These organizations work on behalf of, and/or with, a population that has been labeled guilty by the state and deserving of punishment. In what ways do these organizations humanize, decriminalize, and de-otherize criminals (or not) and frame prisoners as not only the key leaders and "drivers" for social change (Sudbury 2008) through the movement, but also citizens deserving of full rights and part of 'us' (the rest of non-criminal society).[31] How does framing differ between organizations where former and current prisoners are beneficiaries versus members and leaders of the organizations? This chapter shows how abolitionists rely on their

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Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

[31] Sudbury, J. 2008. "Rethinking global justice: Black women resist the transnational prison-industrial complex." *Souls*, 10 (4): 344-360.

“movement” backgrounds in their use of narratives from currently and formerly incarcerated members, as well as broader organizational frames emphasizing universal values and cross-movement connections. On the other hand, prison reformist respondents rely on their professional experience and expertise (given their more “professional” backgrounds) to use a different set of more narrow frames emphasizing organizational stability and specific programmatic metrics to link their non-profit staff with policymakers and beneficiaries.

Chapter 5, the conclusion of the dissertation, has three aims. First, I summarize my results and underline the ways my research into prison activists expands our understanding of strategy, identity, and framing in advocacy work. I review how the different activist time horizons and organizational structures used by both sides, as well as the different backgrounds of their advocates and the means by which they communicate their efforts, have significant effects on emotional energy and potential advocate burnout. I then examine the implications of these findings in terms of both sides’ ability to adapt to changing trends and maintain their respective efforts long-term, specifically the potential for the moderation of abolitionists or the radicalization of reformists. Finally, I examine the implications of this research for the 2020 presidential and state ballot elections and the possible shifts in prison policies going forward.

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Chapter 2

Strategy and Organization

Introduction

Strategy: Questions and Decisions

This chapter investigates ways moderate prison reform organizations and radical prison abolitionist organizations question and reflect upon the strategies that further their organizational purpose and how each employ their tactics over time to sustain organizational structure. Organizational characteristic will be the first logic of factor addressed and is followed by chapters on activist and organizational identity, and activist framing, respectively. Contrasting with past literature examining how "individual commitment" (Kanter 1972), "larger cultural discourses" (Lichterman 1996), and "historical trends" (Polletta 2002) have influenced political organizations, this dissertation looks to emphasize further both the internal debates and specific organizational questions surrounding strategy (more in line with Summers-Effler 2010, 169).[32] Questions around the link between coalition-building and its role in

[32] Kanter, Rosabeth Moss. 1972. *Commitment and community: Communes and utopias in sociological perspective*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. Lichterman, Paul. 1996. *The search for political community: American activists reinventing commitment*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Polletta, Francesca. 2002. *Freedom is an endless meeting*. Chicago: University of Chicago

organizational strategy will also be discussed. Finally, this work will develop a contrast between the two types of prison advocacy organizations in terms of how they relate to the rhythm of the electoral cycle and examine the ways prison advocacy organizations differ in their larger modus operandi. I argue that prison reformist respondents rely on moral convictions and non-election year recovery time periods to get through the burnout and emotional fatigue associated with a shorter time horizon emphasizing election years. In contrast, prison abolitionist respondents, who may engage in short bouts of high-risk activity and may be perceived as more 'extreme' in their anti-systemic goals, see their choice to focus on long-term social movements and a longer time horizon for activism, rather than political parties and election years, as allowing for a more sustainable application of their energy and resources.

When weighing strategy, and tactics within strategy, different advocacy organizations ask different questions. Ganz describes the constituent components of strategy as "targeting, timing, and tactics," and sees strategy as a way of thinking about how movement actors translate intentions into actions (Ganz 2000a: 1021).[33] A tactic, being a "specific action through which strategy is implemented," must be analyzed in terms of the specific way it was used, such as through an organization or directed at a state or cultural organization (Ganz 2000b: 2), or the specific time it was used, such as

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Press. Summers-Effler, Erika 2010. *Laughing Saints and Righteous Heroes: Emotional Rhythms in Social Movement Groups*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

[33] Ganz, Marshall. 2000. "Resources and Resourcefulness." *American Journal of Sociology* 105: 1003-1062.

within a markable historic event.[34] In interviews with staff members of moderate prison reform organizations, such as the Center on Juvenile and Criminal Justice (CJCJ), questions around strategy and tactics prompted lengthy discussions of state laws, policies within governmental organizations, and the work of other reform organizations in the Bay Area and in California. Whether in staff interviews or their organization's literature, there is a focus on the most effective ways to intervene on behalf of their "clients," or the service recipients of the organization's efforts, and a call for better "treatment" by the state and local institutions on behalf of these clients.[35]

"We are multiple organizations in one," Dave Johnson, a prison reform staff member, explains, "and our focus on the state and legislation is always there, but our clients, our clients, are at the center of everything we do." He then elaborates:

> We cannot treat the client on an island. We cannot separate them from the community they live in, from the Bay, from California, from the legislation that affects them. Yes, we provide services and programs, but the greatest service we provide is our advocacy work. How we balance these two ends is why we need this larger organization. It is the umbrella and the glue.[36]

Thus, the umbrella prison reform organizational structure serves as the strategic link

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[34] Ganz, Marshall. 2000. "Organizing Notes." Kennedy School: Cambridge, MA.

[35] For instance, the October 2016 edition of the CJCJ monthly newsletter centered on the successful completion of the Placement Diversion and Reentry Program by one of the non-profit's "youth clients." For further information, see: Center on Juvenile and Criminal Justice. 2016. "October News: New reports, a tour of DJJ & a youth client's success." Retrieved: 15 December 2016. (Available at: www.cjcj.org/news/10932).

[36] Dave Johnson (pseudonym), interview by author, e-mail communication, 9 September 2016.

between the reformer's two goals: prison reform and local and state service provision programming.

Conversely, a radical abolitionist organization looks at how their strategy can fill the gaps of reform advocacy and service provision while also reframing the purpose and intent of reform as a whole. For these organizations, questions of whether reform is a necessary step to the end goal of abolition or a hindrance that slows or blocks the potential for abolition are essential considerations. For instance, a radical abolitionist organization like CR identifies as a "member-led and member-run grassroots movement" (Critical Resistance 2015a: 1).[37] Nancy Simpson, one such abolitionist staff member, suggested the link between tactical considerations and her organization's self-defined grassroots movement identity:

> It was a strategic decision by us [to identify as a social movement]. We never wanted to limit the tactics at our disposal, and we didn't want to lose members who saw the act of becoming just another NGO as weakening to our movement. We are first and foremost and will always be a grassroots movement, even if we have non-profit status.[38]

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[37] Critical Resistance. 2015. "What is Abolition?" Retrieved: 10 October 2016. (Available at: http://www.criticalresistance.org). The terms 'non-profit' and 'NGO' were used interchangeably by interview respondents.

[38] Nancy Simpson (pseudonym), interview by author, e-mail communication, 9 August 2016. Filing as a non-governmental organization (NGO), or specifically a non-profit designation, means obtaining section 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organization status. Multiple interview respondents mentioned the main drawback of such a status is the restrictions to political campaigning. For restrictions, see: IRS. 2016. "The Restriction of Political Campaign Intervention by Section 501(c)(3) Tax-Exempt Organizations." Retrieved: 10 October 2016. (Available at: https://www.irs.gov/charities-non-profits/charitable-organizations/the-restriction-of-political-campaign-intervention-by-section-501-c-3-tax-exempt-organizations).

Simpson's words show the paradox activists can find themselves in when deciding how to characterize their organization, and the effect that can have on their decision-making. Activists voice a clear dichotomy between choosing to be more of a 'movement' than a non-profit; or more of a service provider than a community organization, when in reality they are a part of a non-profit that engages in service provision. Rather than being a case of having a stable organizational and strategic identity, both prison reformists and abolitionists are engaged in a continual internal debate about where they fit on the abolitionist-prison reform spectrum, the politically moderate-radical spectrum, and how they want their organization to be perceived (e.g., Are we being too 'activist-y' or shying away from it too much? Do people see us as just another NGO?). This chapter now explores some of the diverse aspects of this internal questioning.

Organizational and tactical questions

In discussions of how they view their organization, respondents brought up the perceived benefits and restrictions of identifying as a radical grassroots movement or of attaining non-profit status. It must be noted that this dissertation does not intend to create causal claims that a respective organization acts a certain way (beyond legal limitations on the group because of a non-profit status) due to that perceived identity (i.e., because CJCJ is an NGO, then they must be moderate). The groups studied are projects rooted in different ideological orientations, or in activists that see things in very different ways, and who then make strategic choices accordingly -- including choices about how to organize. Some respondents, and some areas of social movement literature, create sharper divisions in categorizing an organization as either a non-

governmental organization (NGO) or a social movement organization (SMO), and that groups make decisions based off these fairly clear distinctions (Herzing 2016; Lang 2012; Jenkins and Eckert 1986).[39] In the organizations studied, it is difficult to create a clear distinction between one as 'just an NGO' and one as a SMO given how mixed their varied organizational and tactical elements are (elaborated further below). Instead, given the number of respondents who addressed it, this dissertation will share the respondents' perceptions of their organization and their perceived benefits and restrictions of that (and related social movement literature to provide context to those answers).[40]

The moderate prison reform organization CJCJ blends diverse organizational and tactical elements in their advocacy work to influence state policy (more lobbying-based), their emphasis on social justice (more coalitional-based), and their community-based organizing (more direct service-based) with a focus on deinstitutionalization and an expansion of community-based services, such as their Supportive Living and

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[39] Herzing, Rachel. 2016. Black Liberation and the Abolition of the Prison Industrial Complex: An Interview with Rachel Herzing." *True Leap*. Retrieved: 10 October 2016. (Available at: https://trueleappress.wordpress.com/2016/08/30/black-liberation-and-the-abolition-of-the-prison-industrial-complex-an-interview-with-rachel-herzing/). Lang, Sabine. 2012. *NGOs, Civil Society, and the Public Sphere*. New York: Cambridge University Press. Jenkins, J. Craig and Craig M. Eckert. 1986. "Channeling Black Insurgency: Elite Patronage and Professional Social Movement Organizations in the Development of the Black Movement." *American Sociological Review*, v51 n6 pg. 812-29.

[40] Additional research, through a greater number and variety of prison advocacy organizations, is needed to make such causal claims and is outside the scope of this dissertation.

Detention Diversion Advocacy Programs (CJCJ 2015: 1).[41] Similarly, Critical Resistance not only engages in mass mobilizations and grassroots direct action strategies (perceived by reformist respondents as more radical), but also dispenses policy and academic papers (reflective of a "think-tank") and provides direct services (similar to a moderate prison reform organization like the CJCJ).[42] Critical Resistance justifies these varied approaches given the scope and complexity of mass incarceration and the need to "attack it from all different angles using many different strategies" (Critical Resistance 2015: 1).[43]

In this way, both CJCJ and Critical Resistance employ a variety of organizational and tactical practices from different points on the perceived political spectrum (with some efforts perceived as more 'radical,' such as direct actions, or more "activist-y," such as abolitionist coalitions, than others) to strengthen their influence.[44] Yet, as the exchange with Simpson showed, a main deterrent for a radical abolitionist organization to file and identify as a non-profit is the potential limitations of the organization's tactical toolkit, or repertoire, and the perceived "depoliticization" that occurs from having to

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[41] Center on Juvenile and Criminal Justice. 2015. "About — Center on Juvenile and Criminal Justice." Retrieved: 10 October 2016. (Available at: www.cjcj.org/about.html.)

[42] A "think-tank" is a research or policy organization that attempts to influence government.

[43] Critical Resistance. 2015. "What is Abolition?" Retrieved: October 1, 2015. (Available at: http://www.criticalresistance.org).

[44] Kate McConnell (pseudonym), long-time criminal justice reform staff member, interview by author, e-mail communication, 25 September 2016.

silence or avoid certain political campaigns that conflict with a non-profit status.[45] Political scientist Sabine Lang described this depoliticization as the "NGO-ization" of social movements and argues that it relies on several key transitions, such as decision-making moving from the "collective" to top-down; "charters and legal frameworks bind[ing] more than substantive ethics;" cooperation leading more to control; and recruitment occurring through an emphasis on "competence" rather than "shared values" (2012: 102). Jenkins and Eckert (1986) saw this NGO-ization in their work on African-American organizations like the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). They argue that the NAACP, originally at the center of the

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[45] Nancy Simpson (pseudonym), interview by author, e-mail communication, 9 August 2016. The study of repertoires comes out of the work of Tilly (1978) and his collaborators' (McAdam 1999; McAdam et al. 1988). These scholars looked at repertoires as a "toolkit" of specific movement tactics drawn on across contexts (McAdam et al. 2001), with CJCJ and Critical Resistance employing diverse tactics during both more internal organizational events and larger external efforts. A collection of diverse tactics is particularly important to movement decision-making as they broaden possible strategic choices (especially in the broad arena and varying fields of criminal justice) and provide movements the ability to adapt to changes in their environment (such as changes during election and non-election years, which will be discussed further on in this Chapter). For more on efforts to view movements not as simply organizations or a series of organizations, but as a diverse range of "interactive performances or protest events" in which collective actors "make claims against elites, authorities, or some other group" through a set of tactical repertoires, see Taylor et. al (2009), who observed tactical repertoires as intentional and with the potential to create collective identity. This differs from the cases of prison abolitionists and reformists where existing collective identity helped to create intentional diverse tactical decision-making (see Chapter Three of this dissertation). Taylor et. al. 2009. "Culture and Mobilization: Tactical Repertoires, Same-Sex Weddings, and the Impact on Gay Activism." American Sociological Review 74(6): 866. Tilly, Charles. 1978. From Mobilization to Revolution. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley. McAdam, Doug. 1999. Political Process and the Development of the Black Insurgency 1930-1970. 2nd ed. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press. McAdam, Doug, John D. McCarthy, and Mayer N. Zald. 1988. "Social movements." In Handbook of Sociology, ed. Neil J. Smelser, 695-737. Beverly Hills: Sage.

1960s-era Civil Rights Movement, later demobilized the organization's ties to movements through increases in elite patronage and professionalization (Jenkins and Eckert 1986).[46]

Greg Cobb, an abolitionist organization member, linked his organization's concerns with becoming a non-profit to this fate of the NAACP:

> We don't want to be another [non-profit] that exists to exist, that bows down to the system's limitations. We don't want to be like the NAACP and stay silent while millions and millions of our brothers and sisters are locked up. The state places enough limitations on us and the political prisoners that we work with, that we fight with, that we advocate with. I would never sell out my brothers and shut up on any issues or campaigns that may free them.[47]

Greg went on to describe the structural limitations imposed on former prisoners engaging in abolition work, "our organization's most important members," from concerns of retaliation or re-arrest and restrictions on movement across state lines as well as hiring restrictions.[48] He also tied the "increasing surveillance" over abolitionist work to the "non-profit industrial complex" or NPIC.[49] Greg and other abolitionist respondents'

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[46] Lang, Sabine. 2012. *NGOs, Civil Society, and the Public Sphere*. New York: Cambridge University Press. Jenkins, J. Craig and Craig M. Eckert. 1986. "Channeling Black Insurgency: Elite Patronage and Professional Social Movement Organizations in the Development of the Black Movement." *American Sociological Review*, v51 n6 pg. 812-29.

[47] Greg Cobb (pseudonym), interview by author, e-mail communication, 1 September 2016. Long ago, Simmel warned of the similar concern of an organ existing solely for its own preservation at the detriment of the group (Simmel, Georg. 1898. "The persistence of social groups." *American Journal of Sociology* 4: 694–95).

[48] Cobb, interview.

[49] Rachel Herzing, a co-founder of Critical Resistance, defines the NPIC as the planning and funding of a "collaboration between state, philanthropic,

emphasis of their organization as a "social movement" was less based on a clear distinction between that and an identity as a non-profit (as discussed earlier, such a distinction beyond specific legal requirements is quite difficult to make even though Greg and others tried to). This is especially true given radical organizations like Greg's blend elements he perceives to be chiefly designated to either a non-profit or a grassroots movement organization. Moreover, the social movement self-designation that Greg and others used to define their abolitionist organization is less fitting to the broad definition of a movement (as movements can be moderate or even conservative) as such, and more so a limited definition of a movement being a leftist radical organization challenging the state. This social movement self-designation also allowed abolitionists to distance themselves from being seen as a non-profit or NGO (viewed by abolitionist respondents as politically moderate and limited by the state).

While radical abolitionist respondents touched on the strategic reasons why they emphasize their organization's identity as an activist social movement as opposed to "just an NGO," prison reform organization respondents also provided strategic

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and corporate bodies (that is, both individual people and officials representing organizations)." Critical Resistance has focused extensively on the tactical limitations imposed by the NPIC on the work of social movements. Herzing, Rachel. 2016. Black Liberation and the Abolition of the Prison Industrial Complex: An Interview with Rachel Herzing." *True Leap*. Retrieved: 10 October 2016. (Available at: https://trueleappress.wordpress.com/2016/08/30/black-liberation-and-the-abolition-of-the-prison-industrial-complex-an-interview-with-rachel-herzing/). For more on these restrictions, see also Mauer, Marc. 2000. "The race to incarcerate." In West, W. G. and Morris, R. (eds.). *The case for penal abolition*. Toronto: Canadian Scholars Press; Davis, Angela Y. 2005. *Abolition Democracy: Beyond Prisons, Torture, and Empire. Interviews with Angela Y. Davis*. Seven Stories Press; and Alexander, Michelle. 2010. *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness.* New York: The New Press.

considerations for when their non-profit turns away from employing practices (protests, marches, boycotts) that they viewed as more 'activist.' As Kate McConnell, a long-time prison reform staff member, explained:

> We don't get arrested at events, we don't have members get arrested at events. I think that's a problem at times with activist organizations especially student ones is there's this idea that the goal is to be arrested.[50]

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[50] Kate McConnell (pseudonym), interview by author, e-mail communication, 25 September 2016. I have not heard or read anything regarding prison abolitionist events (whether it be rallies, marches, or protests) where participants have the goal of "being arrested" or being in "in conflict with the police." However, others and I have observed and reported on this phenomenon occurring throughout the Occupy movement. In discussing how some activists seek out arrest, other activists and writers have called for active 'unarrests' and different forms of physical resistance to police violence at political events (a call I have also heard from abolitionists). Speaking in response to activist mass arrests and reports of individuals seeking arrest and conflict with police, Brian Dominick, an abolitionist writer, argues that all movements should "tolerate evasion of arrest by anyone who so chooses, as well as the use of minimal necessary force short of violence in the act of unarresting fellow activists who wish not to be arrested" (2011). While abolitionist Evan Calder Williams states: "No one should not let oneself 'get' arrested. There is nothing sexy, useful, or sacrificial about doing so. It is a waste of legal fees, time, and zip ties, and it renders protest recognizable in an old-fashioned, familiar, and therefore irrelevant way. If one thinks that 700 people getting arrested makes a splash, try seeing what happens when 700 people don't get arrested, despite police efforts to the contrary. See what happens when a video is released of forty people un-arresting someone successfully. See how that will change the stakes in the way that a mass arrest never can" (2011a). Williams followed by encouraging the focus away from mass arrests and police conflict with protesters, and instead shifting attention to abolition and movements for prison reform by those with "far less media attention" and who are "arguably far more important, desperate, and powerful", such as the Pelican Bay prisoners in California on hunger strike for better conditions (2011b). Williams, Evan Calder. 2011. "Rolling hunger strike in California prisons." Retrieved: June 6, 2016. Available at: (http://socialismandorbarbarism.blogspot.com/2011/10/rolling-hunger-strike-in-california.html). Williams. 2011. "If you want to get arrested for your cause, you should rob a liquor store (And why no one should ever listen to Naomi Wolf about 'protests')." Retrieved: June 6, 2016. Available at: (http://socialismandorbarbarism.blogspot.com/2011/10/if-you-want-to-get-arrested-for-your.html). Dominick, Brian. 2011. "Pacifism and 'Diversity of Tactics': A Compromise Proposal." Retrieved: June 6, 2016. Available at: https://zcomm.org/znetarticle/pacifism-and-diversity-of-tactics-a-compromise-

> The goal is to be in conflict with the police; the more arrests the better, and so on. Many of our events are providing services to our clients or are educating the public or policymakers. Because of that, in our discussions we focus less on protests, mass rallies, marches, police confrontations, and the like where such public actions can be quite counterproductive.

Two other prison reform organization respondents, Liza Davis and Jim Sanders, echoed McConnell emphasizing that their work was "more office-oriented than in the streets," and that they "haven't gone to a protest in years," respectively.[51]

When asked about times in their prison reform work where they take on more perceived radical causes or employ more 'activist' tactics, the respondents generally focused around ancillary or co-sponsoring work for larger events or when their issues coalesce around a broader coalition. As Liza Davis described: "We tend to embrace activist groups more and engage more in protest when there's a new state Proposition, it's an electoral year, or when we're building a coalition."[52] While abolitionist respondents unanimously emphasized their 'grassroots movement' status to distance themselves from an 'NGO' label (and a perception as 'apolitical' or wavering in their aims for abolition), prison reform respondents were split on their views on radicalism and abolitionism with some shying from the ideology (for fear of being viewed as too

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proposal-by-brian-dominick/).

[51] Liza Davis (pseudonym), interview by author, e-mail communication, 5 September 2016. Jim Sanders (pseudonym), interview by author, e-mail communication, 5 December 2016. McConnell, interview.

[52] In this way, 'activist' is a descriptive term emphasizing more radical organizations as opposed to a more politically moderate organization, whose members often refer to themselves as being 'advocates' or 'service providers.' Radical prison abolition respondents further define moderate prison reform organization staff or members as 'non-profit workers' or 'part of the NPIC.' Liza Davis, interview.

'activist-y' by other reform groups) and others wanting more association with abolitionist organizations in order to not lose out on potential allies for prison reform (elaborated further in the following two sections).

Organization and questions of coalition-building

Both abolitionists and prison reformists described the limitations of coalition work but emphasized its potential for the development of new ideas and success in their work, from both organizational and strategic stand-points. Specifically, interview questions about Propositions and lobbying efforts often led to discussions over coalition-building and its role in organizational strategy. The importance of not isolating those targeted by mass imprisonment would be mentioned by respondents from both prison reform and abolition backgrounds. Acknowledgment prevailed for the need to include groups such as people of color (specifically young people), people with mental and physical disabilities, people with addictions, immigrants, refugees, LGBTQ community members, sex workers, activists/advocates/radicals, and people disproportionately targeted as suspected terrorists (e.g., Muslims, Arabs, and Sikhs) in movement work. Most commonly, abolitionists discussed wanting to engage greater numbers of prisoners, former prisoners, family members of prisoners, and victims and in

more active and leadership roles.[53] Discussions around lobbying attempts not only brought up the question of when and how much one engages in coalitions, but if a prison organization should even engage in them and what is potentially lost in this engagement. Murphy (2005), for example, found that coalitions actually have a limited geographic reach, suggesting that they concentrate action within rather than across regions; consequently, he found that they did not represent new movement growth and might actually reflect a lack of new ideas and organizations within a social movement.[54]

Coalition-building tends to be painted as a strategy that is needed to get to an end goal or to build a larger movement (McAdam 1999; Lang 2012).[55] Less attention is focused on its role in building organizations that utilize it for their own

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[53] Multiple interview respondents contributed to this overall list.

[54] Given the information received from radical prison abolitionist and moderate reformist respondents, I chose to focus more on the specific criminal justice organization or prison organization and its individual members (in order to make more supported arguments from respondent feedback), as opposed to a chief focus on ties with external organizations. Relatively few respondents touched on external ties even after questioning. Moreover, there exists less publicly available evidence of internal or external discussion about the creation processes of such ties. Murphy, Gillian. 2005. "Coalitions and the Development of the Global Environmental Movement: A Double-Edged Sword." *Mobilization* 10(2): 235–50. For more on group operations within a coalition structure, see Lawler, Edward. J. 2002. "Micro social orders." *Social Psychology Quarterly* 65: 4–17, and for more exhaustive sociological treatments on interaction above and over individuals, see Mead (1932), Goffman (1974), Durkheim (1997, 1995), Bourdieu (2000), Collins (2004), Lefebvre (2004).

[55] McAdam, Doug. 1999. *Political Process and the Development of the Black Insurgency 1930-1970*. 2nd ed. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press. Lang, Sabine. 2012. *NGOs, Civil Society, and the Public Sphere*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

survival and growth, and the interconnections that occur within the process of coalition-building, specifically the costs and benefits for each party or agent involved. Is coalition-building a utilitarian choice? Is there some kind of 'cognitive liberation'?[56] Is it just a motivational frame for activists? Are there multiple causal pathways by which advocates arrive at the same end point of coalition-building? Further research is needed in these areas.[57] Nevertheless, it could be argued that the growth of interconnectedness within coalitions and between a diversity of people achieves solidarity that can encourage the continued demand for and use of coalitions by prison reform and abolition organizations, even transforming a single organization into a larger permanent coalition structure of multiple organizations (whereas there are limits on multiple organizations registering as a single non-profit collective).[58]

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[56] Cognitive liberation factors meditation between objective conditions that aggrieved groups live in and subjective perceptions and is key to movement emergence. Such cognitive liberation most likely occurs "within established interpersonal networks" and involves people collectively defining their conditions as "unjust and subject to change through group action" (McAdam 1999: 51). Interviewed prison reform and abolitionist respondents touched on their emotional responses to such conditions leading to their seeking out established advocacy organizations (elaborated on in the following Chapter 3).

[57] Given the minimal amount of respondent feedback concerning specificities in regard to coalitions, these questions are encouraged for future research possibly with a larger number of respondents or different case study organizations.

[58] The varied sub-group structure of CJCJ and their many social services lend themselves to partnerships with different organizations to provide the best care to their constituents. Critical Resistance has a core base with a looser, broader structure with individual chapters nationally that could

In the California prison advocacy field, the debate over Proposition 34 (or the SAFE California Act) led many reformists to speak out on the limitations of reform and seek coalitional support for and solidarity with inmates on death row over demands for greater funding for state law enforcement. The ballot measure moved to replace the death penalty in California with life without parole sentences. The measure was framed with arguments around budget cost-cutting and being 'tough on crime' (using the funds saved from ending the death penalty for increased law enforcement), instead of appeals to human rights and frames humanizing inmates on death row, such as projects highlighting the voices of those wrongfully exonerated.[59] Out of 60 California death row prisoners interviewed by The Campaign to End the Death Penalty, a radical prison abolition organization that collaborates with Critical Resistance, only four inmates supported Proposition 34, which did not pass.[60]

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build ties at a larger national level as well as between the individual chapters and their respective local organizations. Collective impact theorists Hanleybrown, et. al (2011), Kamia, and Kramer (2012) propose a highly structured collective impact structure model for coalitions, where organizations from different sectors collaborate using shared metrics, constant communication, a similar agenda, and "mutually reinforcing activities." Building on their research, Turner, et. al (2012) emphasize a "backbone organization" model where a larger non-profit, such as a foundation, funds and can coordinate the work of other backbone organizations. These backbone organizations may have a small staff, but "operate using a lean staffing model and mobilize many partners to help further their work." Hanleybrown, Fay, John Kania, and Mark Kramer. 2012. "Channeling Change: Making Collective Impact Work." *Stanford Social Innovation Review* January 26. Kania, John and Mark Kramer. 2011. "Collective Impact." *Stanford Social Innovation Review* February 27. Turner, Shiloh, Kathy Merchant, John Kania, and Ellen Martin. 2012. "Understanding the value of backbone organizations in collective impact: Part 2." *Stanford Social Innovation Review* July 18.

[59] E.g., The Innocence Project. "About: The Innocence Project." Retrieved: October 1, 2016. Available at: (http://www.innocenceproject.org/).

McConnell, a prison reform staff member, described her and some of her colleagues' concerns with Proposition 34. She decried its potential to alienate those disproportionately targeted by mass incarceration and those who are directly affected by this targeting, such as family members of prisoners. She saw Proposition 34 as another "compromise with the state," which served to lessen, yet still maintain a system of mass incarceration, and believes that there is too much of a "fear" of abolition in prison reform groups.[61] Her discussion of the Proposition ended with her saying that she wished for more "democratic decision-making" in prison reform organizations and for less control by "the leaders of these groups," with some leaders having "few ties to the actual work" in the prison advocacy field.[62] In their study on the influence of external more radical organizations on insider more moderate organizations in the EU environmentalist movement, della Porta and Caiani (2009) found the more moderate organizations transitioning from hierarchical to horizontal leadership and organizational tendencies, and a shift in emphasis on solidarity and community over material incentives (della

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[60] Dewey (1910) reminds us that failure can create new understandings of future opportunities and insight into the failure itself (Dewey, John. 1910. *How we think*. Boston: D.C. Heath). For more on Proposition 34, see: Hughes, Lily. "Why did death penalty repeal fail in California?: Examining the California SAFE Act." *The Campaign to End the Death Penalty*. Retrieved: October 1, 2015. Available at: (http://www.nodeathpenalty.org/why-did-death-penalty-repeal-fail-california).

[61] Kate McConnell, (pseudonym), interview by author, e-mail communication, 23 October 2016.

[62] A prison advocacy field is a loose network of non-profits, SMOs, think-tanks, and other organizations advocating for changes in mass incarceration. McConnell, interview.

Porta and Caiani 2009: 171).[63] In this case, the shift was signaled by "more informal and flexible networks that make larger use of protest," such as coalitions, and a "growing tendency to participate in less conventional forms of collective action and to express increasingly explicit criticism of EU policies" (2009: 172). Is there a certain external force, like a rival side, or a certain period of time that can show such a transformation of prison advocates' organizational choices?

The conflict of and questions about who to partner and align with during an election period (such as the Proposition voting cycle) as compared to a non-election period provide ample ground for studying the effects of strategy, specifically which organizational structures are utilized by reformists and abolitionists. This dissertation will show that prison reformist respondents are more active externally, particularly around coalition-building, during election and Proposition ballot years in order to influence state-wide and national policies, while abolitionist respondents maintain similar external efforts regardless of the election cycle, choosing to emphasize non-electoral struggles as part of their long-term approach to systemic change.

Strategy: Structures Over Time

Examinations of temporality and comparisons across different time sets occur

[63] della Porta, Donatella and Manuela Caiani. 2009. *Social Movements and Europeanization*. New York: Oxford University Press.

prominently in social movement literature. Sahlins (1981) spoke of the importance of examining concentrated moments and key events in movements, while Tarrow (1989) wrote of larger regularly occurring "cycles of contention" and "protest cycles." Bridging these scholars and contrasting from more quantitative research examining each occurring social movement event (Oliver, Cadena-Roa, and Strawn 2003), McAdam and Sewell (2001) emphasize looking at specific events within cycles of contention and movement participants' thoughts regarding them. They argue, "If transformative events loom large in activists, we should accord them the closest possible analytic attention" (2001, pg. 102).

While McAdam and Sewell brought the focus from "long-term" change processes and regularly rhythmed "medium-term cycles of contention," to events of a contention-transformational "few hours or days" and a "short punctuated temporality" (2001, pg. 102, 112), I adopt more of O'Hearn's (2009) approach of a comparison across a limited set of years for movement groups. This dissertation sees events not as days or hours but more sustained opportunities (e.g., an election cycle) to examine differing strategic visions.[64] The differing strategic goals of the moderate prison reform organization and

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[64] O'Hearn (2009) elaborates, citing McAdam and Sewell (2001): "…such key events are neither incidents marking the progress of a patterned cycle nor random contingent ruptures of historical continuity; rather, they are 'specific and systematically explicable transformations and rearticulations of the cultural and social structures that were already in operation before the event' (McAdam and Sewell 2001, p. 102)...Events are thus important as 'concentrated moments of political and cultural creativity when the logic of historical development is reconfigured by human action but by no means abolished' (McAdam and Sewell 2001, p. 102)" (O'Hearn 2009, pgs. 493-94). McAdam, Doug, and William Sewell. 2001. "It's about Time: Temporality in the Study of Social Movements and Revolutions." Pp. 89–125 in *Silence and Voice in the Study of Contentious Politics*, edited by Ronald

the radical prison abolition organization help to explain their respective differing organizational structures. As detailed in the following sections, the enactment of these differing strategic goals (and the differing time horizons for activism which underlie them) is best seen when comparing the two organizations and sets of advocates during two different points in time: the 2015 non-election year and the 2016 year of presidential and state ballot elections.

Abolitionists in the 2015 Non-Election Year

For abolitionists, there is less of a dramatic transformation between strategies during non-election and election years. Across both years, there is a consistent use of organizational characteristics emphasizing direct action in movement settings and a lack of organizational resources for lobbying, polling, or other electoral-arena work. For Samara Ahmad, strategies are not necessarily based on catering to large political parties or the election cycle, but rather on more direct action and targeted campaigns:

> I think that any strong social movement operates through a diversity of tactics, particularly when the audience is national, and the issue is systemic. So, I think influencing mainstream conversations through political platforms aimed at the Democratic and Republican parties is necessary but politically and imaginatively very limited. CR has been quite effective at working in coalition with other local groups to mount

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Aminzade, Jack Goldstone, Doug McAdam, Elizabeth Perry, William Sewell, Jr., Sidney Tarrow, and Charles Tilly. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
O'Hearn, Denis. 2009. "Repression and Solidary Cultures of Resistance: Irish Political Prisoners on Protest." *American Journal of Sociology* 115(2):491–526.

campaigns that try to block specific policies or projects (like the Stop Urban Shield[65] campaign or the fight against the Alameda County and San Francisco Jail expansions[66]).

It's effective because they can energize people around a specific enactment of mass incarceration and try to stop its structural expansion, but even still, it is always in reaction to the state. Projects like OPP (Oakland Power Projects[67]) are a way of trying to envision alternatives and organize around the world we'd like to see. I also look to projects like the California Coalition of Women Prisoners[68], which is led by incarcerated and formerly incarcerated women with non-incarcerated people on the outside as strategic allies; their publications are poetic, political, and powerful and should be read by a larger public.[69]

Samara's emphasis on a "diversity of tactics" is reflected in Critical Resistance's

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[65] Urban Shield is an assembly of the largest militarized police special weapons and tactics (SWAT) training in the world. For further information, see: Critical Resistance. 2018. "What is Urban Shield?."

Retrieved: January 10, 2018. Available at: (stopurbanshield.org/about-the-campaign/what-is-urban-shield/).

[66] Critical Resistance. 2018. "About No New SF Jail." Retrieved: January 10, 2018. Available at: (https://nonewsfjail.wordpress.com/about-3/).

[67] The Oakland Power Projects (OPP) are an "initiative to engage Oakland residents in building community power and wellbeing without relying on cops." For further information, see: Critical Resistance. 2018. Retrieved: January 10, 2018. "The Oakland Power Projects." Available at: (http://criticalresistance.org/chapters/cr-oakland/the-oakland-power-projects/.)

[68] The California Coalition of Women Prisoners is a "grassroots social justice organization, with members inside and outside prison, that challenges the institutional violence imposed on women, transgender people, and communities of color by the prison industrial complex (PIC)." For more, see: CCWP. 2018. Retrieved: January 10, 2018. "About." Available at: (https://womenprisoners.org/about-us/).

[69] Samara Ahmad, (pseudonym), interview by author, e-mail communication, 23 October 2016.

organizational breakdown and their variety of performative events and educational and advocacy efforts. Agreeing with Samara, fellow abolitionist member Nancy Simpson added that abolitionists "do not cater to political parties"[70] while Nathan Downs emphasized (borrowing from the U.S. historian Howard Zinn) that, "Change doesn't happen only during an election year. Change doesn't just happen in the White House or the State Capitol building, but in the streets and the schools and workplaces and churches and local communities."[71]

This de-emphasizing voting approach is not without justification: CR had the biggest victories in non-voting years. Their strategy to focus less on elections has awarded them progress toward their organization's goals. The two largest CR Bay Area victories occurred on non-election years with plans ceased on a proposed new jail[72] and closure of the Urban Shield militarized SWAT training[73], and their chief publications more than doubled in subscriptions in 2015 compared to 2014.[74] During this non-

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[70] Nancy Simpson, (pseudonym), interview by author, e-mail communication, 23 November 2016.

[71] Nathan Downs, (pseudonym), interview by author, e-mail communication, 23 September 2016.

[72] For further information, see: Critical Resistance. 2015. "CR December 2015 Year End Mailer." Retrieved: January 10, 2018. Available at: (http://criticalresistance.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/CR_2015YearEndMailer_PRINT.pdf).

[73] BondGraham, Darwin. March 27, 2018. "Alameda County Supervisors Vote to End Urban Shield as 'Currently Constituted.'" Retrieved: January 10, 2018. Available at: (https://www.eastbayexpress.com/SevenDays/archives/2018/03/27/alameda-county-supervisors-vote-to-end-urban-shield-as-currently-constituted).

[74] Critical Resistance. 2015. "CR December 2015 Year End Mailer."

election year, there was more of an emphasis on working group victories and bonds as well as group boundaries, such as the ways these victories could be tied to the wider political landscape.[75] Furthermore, in keeping with this strategy, Critical Resistance's main organizational document and guide, the CR Abolition Organizing Toolkit[76], only contains references to voting in terms of fighting for the rights of the incarcerated and formerly incarcerated to vote. Similarly, abolitionist respondents found that remaining vigilant on local efforts during non-election years allowed for victories (as well as more public attention to these victories) that were harder to come by during the "media circus" that surrounds an election year.[77]

Abolitionists during the 2016 Election Year

As mentioned before, election years elicit minimal change in abolitionist organizational structure, with abolitionists instead doubling down on their critique of those who overemphasize the role of elections. For abolitionists, elections are viewed

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[75] In keeping with Eliasoph and Lichterman's findings on ground boundaries. Eliasoph, Nina, and Paul Lichterman. 2003. "Culture in interaction." *American Journal of Sociology* 108: 735–94.

[76] Agid, Shana et al. 2012. *A World "Without" Walls: CR Abolition Organizing Toolkit*. Critical Resistance. Retrieved: January 10, 2018. Available at: (http://criticalresistance.org/wp content/uploads/2012/06/CR-Abolitionist-Toolkit-online.pdf).

[77] Byron Nielson, (pseudonym), interview by author, e-mail communication, 23 October 2016.

as symbolic of the limitations and pitfalls of reform: too much attention is placed on them as the “be-all, end-all” of the political process, and they are often tied to the two major political parties (i.e., Democrats and Republicans, or as abolitionist member Beth Page termed them “big money” or simply “money”).[78] In this way, an over-emphasis and over-use of organizational resources during election periods can not only be seen as wasteful but also counter to the goals of abolition. As Samara explains:

> I think that elections -- particularly as money is given increasing sway in the "marketplace of ideas" -- are polarizing and simplifying complex political issues like prison reform, but more importantly, the whole political terrain on which these debates are being had has shifted dramatically to the right in the past 40 or 50 years. So that "reform" is a tool of liberal Democrats who are actually quite center right, and don't imagine prison abolition or more transformative solutions to mass incarceration. I think that Black Lives Matter[79] and other social movements are insurgent

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[78] Elections, and a renewed sense of opposition to the major political parties that are its key players, can also serve to raise “solidarity within boundaries” (Summers-Effler 2002, 65). For further elaborations, see also: Durkheim, Emile. [1912] 1995. *The elementary forms of religious life*. Trans. Karen E. Fields. New York: Free Press; Simmel, Georg. 1964. *Conflict and the web of group affiliations*. New York: Free Press; Collins, Randall. 2004. *Interaction ritual chains*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press; and Polletta, Francesca. 2002. *Freedom is an endless meeting*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Summers-Effler, Erika. 2002. “The Micro Potential for Social Change: Emotion, Consciousness, and Social Movement Formation.” *Sociological Theory* 20(1): 41–60. Beth Page, (pseudonym), interview by author, e-mail communication, 23 October 2016.

[79] Black Lives Matter has specifically distanced itself from the Democratic Party. In response to the Democratic National Committee (DNC) resolution expressing support for the Black Lives Matter movement, the Black Lives Matter Network, including its 26 chapters nationwide, issued this statement clarifying that the DNC’s resolution: “in no way implies an endorsement of the DNC by the Black Lives Matter Network, nor was it done in consultation with us. We do not now, nor have we ever, endorsed or affiliated with the Democratic Party, or with any party. The Democratic Party, like the Republican and all political parties, have historically attempted to control or contain Black people’s efforts to liberate ourselves. True change requires real

> movements that are forcing real conversations on prison reform with highly creative and strategic interjections of demands into mainstream conversations.[80]

Samara and other abolitionists place a strategic emphasis on aligning their cause with movements, specifically insurgent movements, that operate outside of major political parties. Zach Henton, a fellow abolitionist, defined abolitionist strategies around election years as a "how do we counter the Democratic and Republican party." He explains:

> In the past, we had to worry about the two parties' love of 'get-tough-on-crime' legislation and 'get-tough-on-crime' candidates.[81] Now, [the two

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struggle, and that struggle will be in the streets and led by the people, not by a political party.

More specifically, the Black Lives Matter Network is clear that a resolution from the Democratic National Committee won't bring the changes we seek. Resolutions without concrete change are just business as usual. Promises are not policies. We demand freedom for Black bodies, justice for Black lives, safety for Black communities, and rights for Black people. We demand action, not words, from those who purport to stand with us.

While the Black Lives Matter Network applauds political change towards making the world safer for Black life, our only endorsement goes to the protest movement we've built together with Black people nationwide -- not the self-interested candidates, parties, or political machine seeking our vote." Black Lives Matter. 25 August 2015. "Statement in Response to DNC Resolution." Official Home Page. Retrieved: September 10, 2015. Available at: (https://www.facebook.com/BlackLivesMatter/posts/488330528004864).

[80] Samara Ahmad, (pseudonym), interview by author, e-mail communication, 23 October 2016.

[81] "Get[ting] tough on crime" refers to the rhetoric and enacting of laws supporting stronger penalties for criminal acts and increased rates of imprisonment beginning in the 1960s. This practice continues today according to sociologist William R. Kelly (2015a): "We hear less of the tough-on-crime rhetoric that has characterized election campaigns at the national, state, and local levels over the past few decades, but tough is instilled in the political culture and continues to have a robust influence. Crime policy has entered the national discussion for the first time in many years. Every presidential candidate has suggested some change to justice policy…but generally they are offering safe, cautious and piecemeal ideas. None of the

> political] parties are becoming more adept at coding their language[82] and framing the debate as 'we need to change some laws, but torture and prisons are overall still cool, even private prisons, especially private prisons.'[83]

Zach agreed with Samara's view that countering the staying political power of the 'get tough on crime' trend occurs in insurgent movements.[84] Zach, Samara, and other abolitionists centered this as their organizational emphasis (insurgent grassroots movement work) as opposed to an emphasis on lobbying, propositions, and having an

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national candidates has declared a war on tough on crime and I doubt any will. While 'smart on crime' has entered the discussion of crime policy, I don't think we have even purchased tough-on-crime's coffin, let alone started pounding nails in it". Kelly, William R. 2015. *Criminal Justice at the Crossroads: Transforming Crime and Punishment*. New York: Columbia University Press. For more on "get tough on crime" discourse and policies, including an emphasis on coded language and the use of race, see also, Alexander, Michelle. 2010. *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*. New York, NY: The New Press.

[82] Coded language occurs when a phrase hides the true intent of its message. For instance, the pervasiveness of coded language in legislature campaigns is seen in the justifications surrounding calls for the increase in imprisonment of racial minorities. Racial language is purposely avoided but the coded language still creates and relies on racial stereotypes. Alexander explains: "To great effect, Reagan echoed white frustration in race-neutral terms through implicit racial appeals. His 'color-blind' rhetoric on crime, welfare, taxes, and states' rights was clearly understood by white (and black) voters as having a racial dimension, though claims to that effect were impossible to prove. The absence of explicitly racist rhetoric afforded the racial nature of his coded appeals a certain plausible deniability" (Alexander 2010: Pp. 47-48). For further discussion of colorblind rhetoric and legislature campaigns, in addition to Alexander (2010), see also, Haney-López, Ian. 2014. *Dog Whistle Politics: How Coded Racial Appeals Have Reinvented Racism and Wrecked the Middle Class*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press. Pg. 51-75; 174-75.

[83] Zach Henton, (pseudonym), interview by author, e-mail communication, 26 March 2016.

[84] Ahmad, interview.

organizational wing or characteristic catered to electoral time periods.

These responses are evidenced in the lack of organizational activity (including online or print publications by the group themselves or about the group's actions, or witnessed by the author or explained by the respondents) by abolitionists surrounding direct electoral work, such as polling for or even publicly endorsing specific candidates. As Byron Nielson explains in response to a question concerning electoral activity:

> We don't think it's worth the effort to poll, to go door to door for legislation or politicians, when all the major candidates are continuing to support laws that criminalize black and brown bodies while rewarding those in power whether they're in the White House, Sacramento, City Hall, or boardrooms. Take drug legalization. The politicians pushing for it want it legal only for larger stores, while those imprisoned for dealing or having these same to-be-legalized-drugs remain locked up, and the poor kid selling it on the corner will be locked up too. The law doesn't change the racist, exploitative prison system; it only coopts legalization for those who serve to reap major profit from it. Walmart will be selling weed and we'll still be in prison.[85]

Nancy Simpson adds:

> No, we don't put out a list of candidates or Propositions. Our organizational activity is better focused on our communities and the struggles that we build with those targeted and weakened by the PIC (Prison Industrial Complex) as opposed to hoping a candidate getting large amounts of funding from the Police Union or the Correctional Officers of California will come around if they have us pushing for them. You can't reform money; we're not convincing billionaires to join us nor do we want to.[86]

The lack of a distinction between organizational activity in election and non-election years is not only a strategic and organizational choice, but an identity (which in

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[85] Byron Nielson, (pseudonym), interview by author, e-mail communication, 23 October 2016.

[86] Nancy Simpson, (pseudonym), interview by author, e-mail communication, 23 October 2016.

turn affects strategy and organization) that radical abolitionists attach strong emotional ties to. This allows them to not be perceived as aligning with a U.S. political system at odds with the long-term goal of abolition.[87]

Prison Reformists in the 2015 Non-Election Year

In contrast to abolitionists, the differences between strategies during an election and a non-election year signify meaningful change in reformist organizational structure and influences which organizational characteristics are used and emphasized. "When there's no election, staff overseeing different programs, or broader administrative staff, focus more on our day-to-day programs as opposed to ramping up lobbying efforts, policy briefs, and so on," describes Tom Smith.[88] Jim Sanders adds:

> I think those years (non-election years) the staff and program participants become closer...different people in different departments are spending more time with each other and with the people they serve. I think it's a boost of sorts, especially given we're dealing with drug offenders, youth offenders, people with so little who are often robbed by the system. It can be real draining work.[89]

Allahyari (2000) and Summers-Effler (2010), in their work on food- and shelter-providing charities, respectively, both touch on the intimate connections that develop in

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[87] The topic of emotional ties and prison advocacy work will be further addressed in the following Chapter 3.

[88] Tom Smith, (pseudonym), interview by author, e-mail communication, 7 February 2016.

[89] Jim Sanders, (pseudonym), interview by author, e-mail communication, 11 October 2016.

direct person-to-person service provision work as well as the role of emotions, such as feelings of boosts or dealing with years of stress during the "overwhelming" election years (as prison reform staff member McConnell describes them), in the face of pervasive social inequalities. These intimate connections are central in NGO actors' discussions about their non-profit work and working with those with little resources (2010, 27).[90] As Stan Davis elaborates: “After an election year, we need to recover, I need to recover. The non-election year feels like a nice slow down. I reconnect with family, friends, neighbors.”[91] These intimate connections do not only translate to those within his close familial circle, but also with the clients and members of the organization. Davis continues:

> I think I connect further with our beneficiaries. I zone more in on each of them. I remember their personal backgrounds, stories, experiences, goals. I think that can get lost in an election year when our beneficiaries are not as active in lobbying work. When you’re seeing people more, as opposed to running around campaigning, you remember why you’re doing this work and why they matter.[92]

Davis’s observation diverges partially with Summers-Effler (2010)’s finding that “ideological commitments and espoused goals” do not serve as “good proxies for the distance of a social movement group’s focus of attention,” but that a “group’s focus of

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[90] Allahyari, Rebecca Ann. 2000. V*isions of charity: Volunteer workers and moral community*. Los Angeles: University of California Press. Summers-Effler, Erika. 2010. *Laughing Saints and Righteous Heroes: Emotional Rhythms in Social Movement Groups*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press. McConnell, interview.

[91] Stan Davis, (pseudonym), interview by author, e-mail communication, 12 October 2016.

[92] Stan Davis, interview.

attention will follow its experience of control, not its hopeful goal" (171).[93] Even though reformist respondents found their focus of attention becoming clearer when there was a greater sense of control during the non-election year (i.e., work around fostering intimate ties, recovering from fatigue, and improving direct individual care to their beneficiaries), their larger "hopeful goal" and ideological commitment remained. This larger hopeful vision was not left out in respondents' views during either the non-election year's more focused direct service goal, or the perceived greater difficulty to attain a broader national goal of an election year victory from a new external threat: a potential Trump presidency.

Prison Reformists during the 2016 Election Year

Rather than a weakness or a hurdle to be avoided, reformists emphasized the central importance of the election year to their work. Liza Davis explains:

> Our organization has so many different programs…educational for juvenile and adult former offenders, jobs reentry programs, rehabilitation work, on and on, that it does help to mobilize the different staff and beneficiaries of these programs and make sure that the state ensures further funding for this important work.[94]

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[93] Summers-Effler, Erika. 2010. *Laughing Saints and Righteous Heroes: Emotional Rhythms in Social Movement Groups*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

[94] Liza Davis, (pseudonym), interview by author, e-mail communication, 12 October 2016.

Jim Sanders adds, “Especially going against someone like Trump, we partnered with many different groups…there was so much anger and excitement over the need to stop him…especially from new volunteers. Continuing that energy after he won and deciding what’s possible to fight for was tough.”[95] Multiple respondents explained how there were additional working groups centering on the election. Time had to be given both to their regular yearly working groups as well as their new election meetings and responsibilities.[96]

Non-profit “burn-out,” a general term for both the daily toll incurred by fighting for a long-term social cause as well as the high rate of turnover at non-profits, was a real concern both during and after the long campaigning season and is a troubling trend in the non-profit world. The “2016 Non-Profit Employment Practices Survey”[97] published by *GuideStar* and *Non-profit HR* showed that turnover rates have generally increased among non-profits, with the average percentage growing from 16 to 19 percent between 2013 and 2015. Their report also revealed that the “hardest positions for staff retention are in direct service, which includes some of the lowest-paid positions in an organization” and with “whole fields of nonprofits” offering “less than a living wage to

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[95] Allahyari’s (2000) work touches on the persistent experience of volunteers who begin full of energy but begin to "burn out" when different dilemmas arise (65). Jim Sanders, (pseudonym), interview by author, e-mail communication, 11 December 2016.

[96] Liza Davis, Stan Davis, and Jim Sanders interviews.

[97] *Non-profit HR GuideStar*. “2016 Non-profit Employment Practices Survey Results.” Retrieved: January 10, 2018. Available at: www.nonprofithr.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/2016NEPSurvey-final.pdf

frontline workers" (McCambridge, 2017; pg. 6).[98] *Non-profit Quarterly* described this high non-profit rate of replacement and increasing number of low-paid positions as a "Subminimum-wage Ghetto," which are especially concerning in direct service fields, such as criminal justice nonprofits providing services to current and former felons, where turnover issues affect the "quality and continuity of care for vulnerable people" (McCambridge, 2016; pg. 36).[99] *Tech Impact* examined some of the causes of non-profit burnout and found: a lack of "upward mobility;" "excessive workloads" (their research showed employee output drops significantly when the workweek exceeds 50 hours or more; a trend in non-profit work); "inflexible schedules" (their findings demonstrated that flexibility in work hours "reduces stress and burnout"); requirements to work additional hours without compensation; and only 29 percent of non-profit leadership roles filled internally (Bur, 2017, pg. 3; *Tech Impact*, 2017, pg. 2).[100]

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[98] McCambridge, Ruth. "High Non-profit Frontline Turnover Rates Require Focus and Collective Chutzpah." *Non-profitQuarterly*. January 3, 2017. Retrieved: January 10, 2018. Available at: https://nonprofitquarterly.org/2017/01/03/high-nonprofit-frontline-turnover-rates-require-focus-collective-chutzpah/

[99] McCambridge, Ruth. *Non-profit Quarterly* "Non-profit Wage Ghettos and What We Should Do about Them." Edition: *The Non-profit Workforce: Overcoming Obstacles.* Fall 2016: Volume 23, Issue 3: pgs. 34-42.

[100] Bur, Maya. "Why the High Employee-Turnover Rate? *Non-profit Pro.* March 24, 2017. Retrieved: January 10, 2018. Available at: https://www.nonprofitpro.com/article/43895/. Kasaju, Anuja.

"Infographic: Why Non-profit Employees Quit." *Tech Impact*. February 23, 2016. Retrieved: January 10, 2018. Available at: blog.techimpact.org/infographic-why-nonprofits-employees-quit

This is especially problematic given non-profit positions are disproportionately filled (relative to private sector jobs) by people of color, women (largely women of color), and people with disabilities, with some states making use of a seventy-plus year old law that allows nonprofits to pay a subminimum wage to employees with disabilities "based on the employers' estimation of their productiveness" (Crawford and Joshua Goodman, 2016; pg 6).[101] The above statistics are particularly relevant for prison reform non-profit work where an overrepresented number of respondents (relative to non-profit employment numbers in general) were minorities, and where respondents reported excessive workload, high turnover, and inflexible schedule concerns. Together, all of these statistics paint a troubling landscape of the current toll that non-profit work takes on staff and paid and unpaid volunteers, especially during periods of exceedingly high stress, such as a heavily-contested election year. Turner (2000, 114) and Summers-Effler (2002) saw how the consuming effects of negative emotions and the resulting activist burn-out, respectively, can literally "devour" or "destroy" a group.[102] There are internal tensions and pressures, from a greater need of and lack of time for recovery, sleep, full meals, exercise, and social time due to over-work. These combine with external tensions and pressures, such as the group's believed limited effect on a larger

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[101] Matthew Crawford and Joshua Goodman. 2013. "Below the Minimum: A Critical Review of the 14(c) Wage Program for Employees with Disabilities." *Hofstra Labor and Employment Law Journal* 30, no. 2, Article 13.

[102] Turner, Jonathan H. 2000. On the origins of human emotions: A sociological inquiry into the evolution of human affect. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press. Summers-Effler, Erika. 2002. "The Micro Potential for Social Change: Emotion, Consciousness, and Social Movement Formation." *Sociological Theory* 20(1): 41–60.

electoral landscape (with California having a significant share of electoral votes, but with a number of key swing-states viewed as more telling of a potential presidential victor).[103]

Many respondents emphasized that their strong moral belief in their work helped push them through the election year and maintain an increased involvement in multiple working groups. While James (1902) and Summers-Effler (2002) saw a moralist drive leading to greater instability, the prison reform organization capitalized on their moral beliefs to maintain their larger, varied organizational structure while responding to an external stress and threat (Trump's potential presidency).[104] This is in keeping with Simmel's (1898) description of a group "remain[ing] always the foundation" while staying true to its moralist call to "its importance upon the worth of its service to the group" (694–95).[105] Liza Davis explained, "Our morals hold. No matter what. We

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[103] Lefebvre describes this differentiated time (2004): "History seems to move faster at some times than at others, not just species evolution but also political history may be a series of 'punctuated equilibria.'" For more on differentiated time in protest, see: Jasper, James M. 1997. *The art of moral protest: Culture, biography, and creativity in social movements*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Pg 22).

[104] "The moralist must hold his breath and keep his muscles tense; and so long as this athletic attitude is possible all goes well— morality suffices. But the athletic attitude tends ever to break down, and it inevitably does break down even in the most stalwart when the organism begins to decay, or when morbid fears invade the mind. To suggest personal will and effort to one all sicklied o'er with the sense of irremediable impotence is to suggest the most impossible of things.... And whenever we feel this, such a sense of the vanity and provisionality of our voluntary career comes over us that all our morality appears but as a plaster hiding a sore it can never cure, and all our well-doing as the hollowest substitute for that well-BEING that our lives ought to be grounded in, but alas! are not" (emphasis in the original; James, William. [1902] 2007. *Varieties of religious experience: A study in human nature*. Charleston, SC: BiblioBazaar. Pg 55).

[105] For the full explanation: "On the other hand, the persistence of the

remember who we are first and what we're fighting for and whether we lose or win, we're still fighters."[106] The strong moral belief in their organization, as well as in their fellow reformists, provided respondents with the emotional and physical energy needed to get through the additional work toll and fatigue associated with an electoral year.[107]

Conclusion

Liza Davis's quote uniquely characterizes the way prison reformist respondents more strongly associated their political activities with their moral convictions than prison

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group depends on the fact that the organ thus differentiated does not attain absolute independence. Rather must the idea remain ever operative (although by no means always conscious) that the organ is in fact only a corporealized abstraction of the reciprocal action within the group itself. The group remains always the foundation. Its powers, developments, purposes, only receive a peculiarly practical form in the organs. The latter only exhibit the mode in which the directly reciprocating primary elements of the group may work out their latent energies most completely and efficiently. So soon as the differentiation of the organ releases it from dependence upon the aggregate movements of the group, its preservative action may be turned into a destructive influence. I suggest two types of grounds for this: First, when the organ gains too vigorous independent life, and does not place the emphasis of its importance upon the worth of its service to the group, but upon its value to itself, the persistence of the organ may come into conflict with the persistence of the group" (Simmel, Georg. 1898. "The persistence of social groups." American Journal of Sociology 4: 694–95).

[106] Liza Davis (pseudonym), interview by author, e-mail communication, 5 September 2016.

[107] The importance of emotional energy will be touched on in the following chapter 3.

abolitionist respondents, despite the fact that it may be more practical or sustainable to implement strategies a different way (to reduce burnout and emotional fatigue). Prison abolitionist respondents, while perhaps viewed as more extreme in their goals because of their anti-systemic vision, couched their electoral and political strategies in their identity as an insurgent grassroots movement, seeing this as a realistic and practical approach to maintaining the longevity of their organization. While abolitionist respondents may engage in short bouts of high-risk activity, they see their intentional choice to focus on long-term social movements and a longer time horizon for activism, rather than political parties and election years, as allowing for a more sustainable application of energy and resources. Ironically, an organization considered more 'out there' in philosophy, described approaches that were more conservative in its strategy for survival.

Prison reformist respondents, on the other hand, were much more focused on shorter time horizons for activism, which had implications in applying sustainable strategies, the pacing of activist energy (as suggested in the above analysis of electoral cycles), and vulnerability to burnout. The reformists devoted much of their energy on elections, which for one, caused exhaustion amongst members and, for another, does not guarantee that changes will occur even if the right person or Proposition wins. Then, when they experience inevitable burnout and/or disappointment, they dig into moral beliefs rather than evaluate inefficiencies or different approaches. Prison reformists would commonly be considered more moderate (and respondents in this case politically identified as such), but, oddly, their strategies for sustainment seemed far riskier, though respondents made sure to emphasize the recovery period that non-

election years allowed. In discussions with the different groups, the activists with the more "extreme" goals in social change organizations had more comprehensive and long-term strategies for their implementation. The reformists studied with less extreme goals that, say, push for change within the existing structure, seemed to focus less on a long-term strategy and survival but instead emphasized a year-by-year perspective, which fit both the election time cycle as well as their yearly campaigns for their different service provisions.

These findings coalesce around a division between longer versus shorter time horizons for activism and advocacy. This is not to say that this contrast can be generalized to radical versus reformist political organizations more broadly. There are reformist organizations that are plodding and methodical in devising and following long-term strategies, and radical ones that imagine that immediate and dramatic action is all that is needed to set in motion fundamental social change. Again, the variable observed centers more so around the time scale of activists' goals and how they relate those goals to immediate tactical decision-making.

Liza Davis's quote also speaks to her perception of the collective identity of prison reformists, or the "who we are" of their political work.[108] This framing of and emphasis on collective identity was described by multiple respondents across both prison reformists and abolitionists in their explanations of why they embark on certain strategies and seemed to be a thread that cut across both the election and non-election years. While strategy is a negotiation between individual commitment, larger cultural

[108] Liza Davis, interview.

discourses, and current and historical trends, respondents' answers show the need to elaborate on the role of identity as another factor driving strategic choices. Chapter 3 now turns to this through examining identity-informed/identity-informing choices, involvement more broadly, and the ways reformist and abolitionist movement identity shape organizational and strategic choices.

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Chapter 3

Identity-Informed Choices: Shocks, Solidarity, and Emotions

Introduction

This chapter explores the pathways by which advocates join organizations and contribute to group movement identity, as well as the strategic choices they make that reinforce their group identity. The discussion of identity and strategy will illustrate the complex ways that identity, strategic choice, emotional investment, and selection of coalition partners interact over time with an emphasis on micro level interactions. Additionally, the focus on identity work and the choices around it will show how this work can act (among other ways) as a type of strategy for avoiding activist and advocate burnout. I will discuss the specific roles of individual and group identity as they relate to involvement. Finally, I will elaborate upon the unique ways that moderate prison reformist identity and radical abolitionist identity shape organizational and strategic choices. I argue that both reformist and abolitionist respondents rely on the transformation of negative emotional energy into feelings of solidarity and collective identity to continue and expand their work. Reformists strengthen relationships with non-activist beneficiaries and other moderate prison reform groups (centering around anger with the Trump administration). While abolitionists foster cross-movement ties

based on a shared anti-systemic identity (grounded in rage and disgust for the PIC[109] and high expectations for its demise).

Polletta and Jasper define collective identity as an individual's "cognitive, moral, and emotional" ties to a larger "community, category, practice, or institution" (2001: 285).[110] In movements, people build networks on the basis of their interests, identity, and ideology and find each other in a common cause that needs to be articulated over time. Similar to the backlash against resource mobilization (RM) and early political process models, the study of collective identity became increasingly popular due to perceived gaps in RM and process models that overemphasized "how" actors mobilize and ignored the "why" they organize (Polletta and Jasper 2001: 283).[111] The dominant way of studying social movements had been looking at "events" – driven by McAdam and the political process model (McAdam 1999; McAdam et al. 2001) and emerges from a conceptualization of social movements' strength as coming from disruptive protests.[112] An alternative approach has been to look not only at frames and the ongoing narratives that movement organizers put out, but also to examine decision making around

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[109] Prison-industrial complex.

[110] Polletta, Francesca and Jasper, James. 2001. "Collective Identity and Social Movements." *Annual Review of Sociology* 27: 283-305.

[111] As discussed in Chapter 1 of this dissertation.

[112] McAdam, Doug. 1999. *Political Process and the Development of the Black Insurgency 1930-1970*. 2nd ed. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press. McAdam, Doug, Charles Tilly, and Sidney Tarrow. 2001. *Dynamics of Contention*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

individual and collective identity.[113] This dissertation first examines the interplays between these identity sets and the different pathways by which advocates become involved in a prison reform or abolitionist organization. Although "moral shocks" provided the impetus for prison reform respondents to identify as advocates and seek an organization, and personal ties to the prison system tied abolitionists to their identity, respondents from both camps relied on their new activist identity to replace previously unwanted identities, such as "inmate," "ignorant," or "apolitical."

Identity and Involvement

There are different trajectories by which an activist comes to be involved with a specific organization or specific movement. McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald (1988) focus on pre-existing networks as the primary conduit of mobilization.[114] Reaching back to Marx, Jasper and Poulsen (1995) point out that this is a typical assumption: "the physical assumption of those with a common grievance is a prerequisite for action" (494).[115] Snow and Benford (1992) take a similar stance and describe how certain

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[113] Frames will be further discussed in Chapter 4.

[114] McAdam, Doug, John D. McCarthy, and Mayer N. Zald. 1988. "Social movements." In *Handbook of Sociology*, ed. Neil J. Smelser, 695-737. Beverly Hills: Sage.

[115] Jasper, James and Jane Poulsen. 1995. "Recruiting Strangers and Friends: Moral Shocks and Social Networks in Animal Rights and Anti-Nuclear Protests." *Social Problems* 42(4): 493–512.

master frames can mobilize complete strangers to action.[116] Alternately, Jasper and Poulsen (1995) argue that "moral shocks" are crucial for orienting people towards political action when they have no prior network connections, a motivation that clearly presented itself in my interviews. Samuel Lewis, who had no prior network ties to prison reform work or reform work in general, became involved in prison reform due to a moral "shock" (the participant's own words) from a national media story on prison conditions. A year later when asked why he continues this work, Lewis recalled that same news story, saying that he could not "unsee it."[117] Donna Harris also attributed having a "wake-up call" to her becoming involved with a local moderate prison reform organization. Harris explained how this call continued to motivate her involvement:

> I heard about the fucked up things they do in prison from a documentary, the horrible ways they treat them (prisoners). You know in Pelican Bay [State Prison] they leave them in a cell for 23 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year…that's 23 hours…23! Solitary confinement. And it's not even a cell…they can't lie down in it it's so small…they don't interact with guards, their food is slid to them, there's no light, there's no window, there's no visits, they have no rights, they have no humanity, yet they still went on hunger strike, they still said fuck you! How can I sit here and not act? How can I not continue to stay informed and help as I can every day when they're sitting in that cell, in those conditions every single day for so many hours?[118]

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[116] Snow, David and Robert Benford. 1992. "Master Frames and Cycles of Protest." Pp. 133–55 in *Frontiers in Social Movement Theory*, edited by A. D. Morris and C. M. Mueller. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

[117] Samuel Lewis (pseudonym), interview by author, e-mail communication, 2 August 2015 and 17 September 2016.

[118] Donna Harris (pseudonym), interview by author, e-mail communication, 3 August 2015 and 10 September 2016. Pelican Bay State Prison is the sole supermax state prison in California. Inmates are isolated for 23 hours a day, conditions which ignited a 30,000 prisoner hunger

For Harris, this moral shock continued to motivate her efforts to create and spread a petition to reform solitary confinement policies.

For low-risk activism, like the work that prison reformers Lewis and Harris are involved in, a "wake-up call" or "moral shock" can be enough for someone with no ties to the cause.[119] For high-risk activism, McAdam (1986) saw the need for and power of personal ties in bringing individuals to the 1964 Freedom Summer Project, which required high-risk direct action work.[120] Similarly, Greg Cobb, a Bay Area prison abolition organization member, cited his currently incarcerated friend as the primary reason for his seeking an abolitionist organization and for his continued involvement. Once involved in the organization, Cobb described how being around others who had friends or family members incarcerated gave him a "community" which "shared" his pain, "wanted to do something about it," and provided him the support to join protests with a high-likelihood of arrest.[121] Overall, five prison reformists reported some variation

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strike throughout the U.S. and Canada. For more on Pelican Bay and the hunger strike, see Reiter, Keramet. 2016. *23/7: Pelican Bay Prison and the Rise of Long-Term Solitary Confinement*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

[119] Lewis, interview. Harris, interview.

[120] McAdam, Doug. 1986. "Recruitment to High-Risk Activism: The Case of Freedom Summer." *American Journal of Sociology* 92 (1): 64–90.

[121] Greg Cobb (pseudonym), interview by author, e-mail communication, 2 August 2015 and 9 September 2016. Summers-Effler (2010) describes how the emotional current surrounding the thrills and hesitations associated with risk can actually increase involvement: "If we understand an actor to be a history of bounded evolving strategies in response to evolving fields of action, we do not need to presume that actors necessarily correspond to biological individuals. Understanding the process of expansion goes beyond theories of altruism that situate motives solely within individual actors, such as nested interest (Frank

of a moral shock as being their impetus for involvement, while six abolitionists cited personal connections to imprisonment as their motivation. There was not a distinction in terms of demographics (class, race, and education backgrounds) in determining this finding.

Over time, Harriet David, another abolitionist organization member, found her abolitionist work "went beyond" her ties to her incarcerated brother, her initial reasoning for joining the organization. She began to "view herself as an abolitionist" seeking freedom for not only her brother, but all those incarcerated.[122] Nathan Downs, a former prisoner turned abolitionist organization member, sees himself as first an abolitionist (a label which he gave himself even before his involvement in an abolitionist organization) and second as a former prisoner, although he says that he cannot separate his prison time from his abolition efforts and regularly harks back to his inmate experiences. While reflecting on his twelve years of abolitionist movement efforts, he has found that his

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1990) or expressions of individualism (Wuthnow 1991). Instead, it situates the goal that motivates action between rather than within individuals. The emotional current that pulls those participating in the interaction toward involvement and expansion, despite risk and hesitation, grows out of the interaction itself." Given the interaction *between* actors is central to understanding what attracts actors to risk, this dissertation examines actors across space and time in order to make sense of the "creation, persistence, and transformation of social actors" and in recognition that expansion is "not based in an essential self that is tied to the biological body" (62). Frank, Robert H. 1990. "A theory of moral sentiments." In *Beyond self-interest*, ed. J. J. Mansbridge, 71–96. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Wuthnow, Robert. 1991. *Acts of compassion: Caring for others and helping ourselves*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. Summers-Effler, Erika. (2010). *Laughing Saints and Righteous Heroes: Emotional Rhythms in Social Movement Groups*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

[122] Harriet David (pseudonym), interview by author, e-mail communication, 14 August 2015 and 21 September 2016.

collective identity as an "abolitionist activist" has helped people look "beyond his prison tattoos" and see him as "something bigger" than a former felon. He also described how this collective "feeling" encourages him to stay involved in abolitionist work even given the high-risk nature of a former felon participating in non-police sanctioned protests.[123] By embracing his collective identity as an abolitionist in a movement, Downs describes how he has both the will to continue his work and the ability to challenge the "criminal" or "deviant" identity that was thrust upon him by the state.[124]

Polletta and Jasper see collective identity as a way to look at movement

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[123] Nathan Downs (pseudonym), interview by author, e-mail communication, 2 August 2015 and 9 September 2016. Formerly incarcerated respondents described the risks and fears of being seen at a protest by officer(s) involved with their initial arrest. These fears were compounded for formerly incarcerated individuals who were still on parole and/or probation, and thus may face an arrest warrant, additional charges for any direct violations as per their parole agreement, and/or a revocation of an entire probation and a reimprisonment to serve out one's original sentence.

[124] As Becker described, the criminal or "deviant" is a political construct created by the dominant group. The most important effect of being labeled a deviant is a change in an individual's "public identity" (Becker 1963: 32). This change makes deviance an individual's "master status." This status then becomes a "self-fulfilling prophecy" that makes individuals conform to the image others have of them, compounded by "labeling theory" – we become deviants because we are labeled deviants, not the other way around. This dissertation responds to the call by Becker and Richards and Ross's "New School of Convict Criminology" (building on Taylor et. al's *The New Criminology,* 1973) to "demystify" deviance (Becker 1963: 190; Richards & Ross, 2001: 180; Ross & Richards, 2002, 2003). Becker, Howard. 1963. *Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance*. New York: The Free Press; Taylor, Ian, Walton, Paul, and Young, Jock. (2013). *The New Criminology*. London: Routledge; Richards, Stephen C. and Jeffrey Ian Ross. (2001). "The New School of Convict Criminology." *Social Justice* 28, no. 1: 177–90; Ross, Jeffrey Ian, and Stephen C. Richards. (2002). *Behind Bars: Surviving Prison*. New York: Alpha/Penguin; Ross, Jeffrey Ian, and Stephen C. Richards, eds. (2003). *Convict Criminology*. Belmont: Wadsworth; Downs, interview.

decisions beyond the view that they are just driven by a desire to maximize political gain. As Polletta and Jasper (2001: 292) explain, some activists "choose options that conform to 'who we are,'" such as pacifists, revolutionaries, women, prison reformists (as Lewis and Harris described[125]), or abolitionists (as Cobb, Harriet David, and Downs described above), who view their prison movement work as an extension of their identity.[126] This identity is tied to their intense moral or personal wake-up call that they cannot shake (in the case of interviewed moderate prison reformists engaging in low-risk advocacy work), or to their former incarceration or their personal tie to an incarcerated individual (in the case of radical prison abolitionist respondents engaging in more high-risk advocacy work). "Making decisions on the basis of collective identity" serves as an "alternative to relying on instrumental criteria" and reflects an "expressive rather than a strategic logic".[127] The function of identity then extends beyond being simply a tool for recruitment (Tilly 1978)[128] and becomes a key facet for sustaining

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[125] Samuel Lewis (pseudonym), interview by author, e-mail communication, 2 August 2015 and 17 September 2016. Donna Harris (pseudonym), interview by author, e-mail communication, 3 August 2015 and 10 September 2016.

[126] Greg Cobb (pseudonym), interview by author, e-mail communication, 2 August 2015 and 9 September 2016. David, interview. Downs, interview. Polletta, Francesca and Jasper, James. 2001. "Collective Identity and Social Movements." *Annual Review of Sociology* 27: 283-305.

[127] Polletta, Francesca and Jasper, James. 2001. "Collective Identity and Social Movements." *Annual Review of Sociology* 27: 292.

[128] In Tilly (1978), recruitment occurred chiefly through already existing local "solidarities," where the group's identity was used to recruit from "youth groups, guilds, and so on" (146). Tilly, Charles. (1978). *From Mobilization to Revolution*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley. Prison reformist respondents had a similar trajectory where recruitment occurred from feelings

solidarity and commitment, something people want to have in common and which compels participation (Polletta 1998).[129]

As Polletta and Jasper argue, activist identity itself can be the impetus for further activism: certain "roles within communities" can be connected with movement work "in a way that makes participation a requirement of that role."[130] Nathan Downs's explanation is fitting: the power of being an "abolitionist," and the respect that those in the abolitionist organization showed him, encouraged his movement work.[131] The role and identity of an 'abolitionist activist,' and having it be regarded and sought out by others, can be particularly important for sustaining movements during times of great flux and for movement work that is dangerous and physically taxing (such as protest work for a former felon). For example, in the civil rights movement, being a "student" (emphasis in the original) was "linked to activist" and became a "prized social identity."[132] The excitement and publicity with being a part of the wave of sit-ins and

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of existing collective identity to prison reform ("we all wanted something to change," as Lewis describes), but these were more feelings of solidarity across different loose individuals (e.g., friends, allies) as opposed to previously established organizations or organizational identity in general. This will be further discussed later in this Chapter. Samuel Lewis (pseudonym), interview by author, e-mail communication, 2 August 2015 and 17 September 2016.

[129] Polletta, Francesca. 1998. "'It Was like a Fever...' Narrative and Identity in Social Protest." *Social Problems* 45(2): 137–59.

[130] Polletta, Francesca and Jasper, James. 2001. "Collective Identity and Social Movements." *Annual Review of Sociology* 27: 290.

[131] Downs, interview.

[132] Polletta, Francesca. 1998. "'It Was like a Fever...' Narrative and Identity in Social Protest." *Social Problems* 45(2): 137–59.

seeing students 'just like me' encouraged other students to keep up and not be looked down upon by the "other colleges" who were not participating in such causes (Oberschall 1989: 35).[133]

Like Downs, who found a collective and individual abolitionist identity to replace his previous identity as a criminal or "just another criminal," Harris described her prison reform work and the collective and individual identity which it imbued as a replacement for her previous "main" identity:

> I used to mainly be known as 'apolitical' (emphasis by Downs). Some of my high school friends were more involved with politics and I was always too busy. I respected them, but I didn't really wake up [politically] until I got involved [with prison reform work]. Now everyone at the farmers market knows me as the 'prison-petition-signature-lady' and a political advocate part of something bigger. Some people there try to shoo me along but most smile and sign and listen to whatever new prison issue is up for a vote.[134]

By relaying a similar identity revival centering around their specific movement work, Harris and Downs paint a picture of how their collective and individual identity surrounding prison abolitionism and reformism helps to reinforce their prison advocacy work.

Yet, arguments like the above present complex causality issues. These identity theories cannot necessarily explain which came first; an activist identity, or activism. Moreover, these theories struggle to delineate an individual activist's identity and their

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[133] Oberschall, Anthony. 1989. "The 1960 sit-ins: Protest diffusion and movement take-off." *Research in Social Movements, Conflict and Change* 11: 31-53.

[134] Downs, interview.

individual self-interest. As Polletta and Jasper admit that, “Taken as a whole, the literature on collective identity still leaves fuzzy the relations between identity and an individual’s calculus of self-interest”.[135] These are the sociological “chicken and egg” questions that try to decipher what comes first and what is more important or what perspective to give priority to. Calhoun tries to bridge the identity versus interest debate by suggesting that activism is a way of continually constituting identity and shows the way in which identity is self-interest.[136]

As shown in my interview with Cobb, his interest in fighting for his incarcerated brother was both the primary reason by which he became an active abolitionist, and also his chief motivation for his continued participation in direct action work. When asked what makes him an abolitionist, Cobb did not even mention the goals of the organization or the direct action work that he is involved in, but focused solely on his brother. For Cobb, his abolitionist work was something that he had to do for his brother: “We’re family. It’s not a choice.”[137] Viewed in this way, his abolitionist identity is not necessarily prior to his prison reform work, and his prison reform work is not necessarily a way of legitimating his abolitionist identity.[138] As touched on earlier, there are

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[135] Polletta, Francesca and Jasper, James. 2001. "Collective Identity and Social Movements." *Annual Review of Sociology* 27: 299.

[136] Calhoun, Craig. 1991. “The Problem of Identity in Collective Action.” *Macro-Micro Linkages in Sociology*. Joan Huber, ed. Newbury Park: Sage Publications.

[137] Greg Cobb (pseudonym), interview by author, e-mail communication, 2 August 2015 and 9 September 2016.

[138] In his study on the formation of solidary cultures of resistance, even within the confines of “total institutions” like prisons, O'Hearn (2009)

theorists who focus on collective identity (e.g., the collective identity of prison reformists or abolitionists) as a tool for recruitment and also as a factor in ensuring an organization's survival. Recruiting reformist-minded or abolitionist-minded individuals can reinforce a desired movement identity and perpetuate the strategic choices of the organization that preserve focus and sustain activity. The moral shocks and personal ties discussed above not only manifest an activist identity for reformist and abolitionist respondents, respectively, but (for both groups) provide the emotional energy needed to seek out like-minded activists and create a collective organizational identity and the structures to harness it, such as intimate working groups. This chapter will now explore the paths by which these two different prison advocacy work identities come into play for their corresponding organizations.

Ways abolitionist movement identity shapes organizational and strategic choices

"I came to find others like me:" Seeking and Maintaining Common Identities

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found, in line with Calhoun's argument, that the relationships between identity and activism are reciprocal and potentially self-reinforcing. For more, see O'Hearn, Denis. 2009. "Repression and Solidary Cultures of Resistance: Irish Political Prisoners on Protest." *American Journal of Sociology* 115(2):491–526. Calhoun, Craig. 1991. "The Problem of Identity in Collective Action." *Macro-Micro Linkages in Sociology*. Joan Huber, ed. Newbury Park: Sage Publications.

Each political group's respective movement identity not only shapes their group's strategic choices but helps to explain their differing organizational structures. For Samara Ahmad, her and her organization's abolitionist identity sets parameters for what issues they work on and who they work with. Her definition of an abolitionist necessitates an understanding of the need to work beyond simply criminal justice reforms and simultaneously emphasizes the potential harms of such reforms:

> My organizing has been based in abolitionist frameworks, through which criminal justice reform appears as an amelioration of the violence and harms of the prison-industrial complex, but never the path towards their elimination. In fact, sometimes reform may allow for the spread of prisons, in number and reach, such as the proposals to build a "mental health jail" in San Francisco and Alameda County that Critical Resistance has been resisting.[139]

Any mention of reform in my questioning was quickly met by Samara with the counter-frame that reforms can 'backfire.'[140] In my second question, when asked where she sees prison reform heading, Samara repeated this counter-frame:

> I see the conversation around police brutality and the utter lack of accountability spreading further into liberal spheres, hopefully prompting some meaningful reforms at the city level (again, understanding that reform can backfire). I think it will also polarize people further, and perhaps entrench a revanchist attachment to policing/the police state, which I see in a lot of the far right.[141]

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[139] Samara Ahmad, (pseudonym). Interview by author. E-mail communication. October 23, 2016. Critical Resistance. (2018). "About No New SF Jail." Retrieved: January 10, 2018. Available at: (https://nonewsfjail.wordpress.com/about-3/). For information on Critical Resistance's victory ceasing jail construction, see: Critical Resistance. 2015. "CR December 2015 Year End Mailer." Retrieved: January 10, 2018. Available at: (http://criticalresistance.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/CR_2015YearEndMailer_PRINT.pdf).

[140] Counter-frames in prison reform and prison abolition advocacy work will be discussed in the following Chapter 4.

Additional abolitionist respondents were careful to also emphasize and "admit" to the potential positives of reform but then immediately rebutted these positives with explanations of their limitations.[142]

Like other abolitionist respondents, Samara's identity as an abolitionist came from her anti-prison and anti-police stance, which then led to her finding an organization that supported her strategic choice to avoid existing criminal justice agents (police and police responders) and provide an alternative system; thus, aligning with abolitionist goals of replacing the current criminal legal system as a whole. She explains:

> I came to the Oakland Power Projects (OPP)[143] as a healthworker interested in resisting and ultimately dismantling the prison industrial complex. I had been engaged in solidarity with anti-police violence demonstrations in Oakland, and even Cairo, as an activist; then I began studying the rise and fall of institutionalization for mental health issues and the problem of police responders to mental health crisis calls. The horror of people being hurt, killed, or criminalized when seeking medical help became a lightning rod for many health providers, who joined up with Critical Resistance for the Oakland Power Projects. The structure is that the OPP is a project of Critical Resistance, and as such, benefits from the organizational capacity, reputation, political analysis, and outreach networks of Critical Resistance as well as the diverse professional knowledges of a range of healthcare workers.[144]

The "horror of people being hurt, killed, or criminalized" that Samara described

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[141] Ahmad, interview.

[142] Greg Cobb (pseudonym), interview by author, e-mail communication, 2 August 2015 and 9 September 2016.

[143] Critical Resistance. 2018. Retrieved: January 10, 2018. "The Oakland Power Projects." Available at: (http://criticalresistance.org/chapters/cr-oakland/the-oakland-power-projects/.)

[144] Ahmad, interview.

was echoed by respondents Harriet David and Greg Cobb as an igniting force for them.[145] Like Harriet and Greg before her, Samara's identification as an abolitionist ("a healthworker interested in resisting and ultimately dismantling the prison industrial complex") led her to seek fellow healthcare workers who also wished to dismantle the prison system. Nancy Simpson described this need for "solidarity with fellow Bay Area abolitionists" who were organizing to stop hostility towards those who are criminalized and to resist further criminalizing actions. Simpson made a point to emphasize the "isolation" and "hostility" she herself felt from more moderate prison reform advocates and the need to resolve that.[146] By finding an abolitionist organization and fellow abolitionists that fit her identity (her self-identification of avoiding, condemning, and ultimately dismantling the different facets of the prison industrial complex), Nancy, Samara, Harriet, and other abolitionists worked to address the horrors, isolation, disillusionment, and hostility they felt while contending with the current state and future outlook of criminal justice reform.

"I'm sick of having to defend myself": Emotions, Solidarity,[147] and Identity

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[145] Harriet David (pseudonym), interview by author, e-mail communication, 14 August 2015 and 21 September 2016. Greg Cobb (pseudonym), interview by author, e-mail communication, 2 August 2015 and 9 September 2016. Samara Ahmad, (pseudonym), interview by author, e-mail communication, 23 October 2016.

[146] Nancy Simpson, (pseudonym), interview by author, e-mail communication, 23 October 2016.

[147] Collins (1990) lays out a useful definition for solidarity experiences and the requirements for the "development of emotional energy" in such rituals: "There must be face-to-face interaction, shared emotion, a shared

Contestation[148]

Every abolitionist interviewed described the negative emotions that they contend with in doing their advocacy work and in defending their work to others. Harriet shared the "exhaustion" and "isolation" that occurred from having to defend prisoners and argue for abolition, whether it be with family members, friends, or even on first dates, and the need to seek others who she could "be herself with."[149] These and

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focus of attention, and a mutual awareness of this focus. This shifts the participants' awareness from themselves to the group. The refocusing of attention on the group sets the stage for further emotional contagion and emotional energy generation. Emotional contagion appears to be non-

cognitive and physically based (Hatfield, Cacioppo, and Rapson 1994). Cf, Summers-Effler 2002, pg 42. Collins, Randall. 1990. "Stratification, Emotional Energy, and the Transient Emotions." Pp. 27–57 in Research Agendas in the *Sociology of Emotions*, edited by D. Kemper. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press. Hatfield, Elaine, John T. Cacioppo, and Richard Rapson. 1994. *Emotional Contagion*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press. Summers-Effler, Erika. 2002. "The Micro Potential for Social Change: Emotion, Consciousness, and Social Movement Formation." *Sociological Theory* 20(1): 41–60.

[148] Harriet David (pseudonym), interview by author, e-mail communication, 14 August 2015 and 21 September 2016. Identity contestation refers to the struggles individuals faced in finding others who matched their ideological values as well as the difficulties dealing with family, friends, and others in one's social sphere who challenged those ideological values. This is not to be confused with racial identity contestation, which concerns questions of "who is and is not typically perceived as a member of a particular racial group." For more, see Vargas, Nicholas and Jared Kingsbury. August 2016. "Racial Identity Contestation: Mapping and Measuring Racial Boundaries." Sociology Compass 10(8): 718-729.

[149] Respondents did not remark that joining a prison advocacy organization resulted in a cutting or lessening of ties with family and friends who did not share their views. The varied sub-group structure of both sets of case study organizations allows for a lessening of hardened divisions between insiders and outsiders, a phenomenon Fine (1990) and Lamont and

Samara's examples build on Summers-Effler's work around "emotional energy" and "solidarity experiences" (2002, 42).[150] Being an abolitionist even in the Bay Area, the home of abolitionist politics, is an "exhaust[ing]" identity with shared experiences of "horror," "isolation," and "hostility."[151] To counteract these emotional, social, and physical drains, abolitionists seek fellow abolitionists who strategically prioritize solidarity and create not only resistance to prisons and the current criminal legal system, but new opportunities for abolitionists and the supporting public to imagine a world where their alternative criminal justice visions are believed, supported, and acted upon.

Summers-Effler (2002), building on Collins's (1990) theory of emotions, argues that the foundations of social change and resistance are in these micro-level interactions from person-to-person, and pertain to actors' attempts to maintain this emotional energy and solidarity:[152]

> To counter repressive forces and create hope, there must be ongoing or repeated ritual (face-to-face interaction, mutual focus of attention, and

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Molnar (2002) found in more cloistered or socially-isolating groups. Fine, Gary Alan. 1990. "Organizational time: Temporal demands and the experience of work in restaurant kitchens." *Social Forces* 69:95–114. Lamont, Michele and Virag Molnar. 2002. "The study of boundaries in the social sciences." *Annual Review of Sociology* 28: 167–95.

[150] Samara Ahmad, (pseudonym), interview by author, e-mail communication, 23 October 2016.

[151] Ahmad, interview.

[152] Collins, Randall. 1990. "Stratification, Emotional Energy, and the Transient Emotions." Pp. 27–57 in Research Agendas in the *Sociology of Emotions*, edited by D. Kemper. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press. Hatfield, Elaine, John T. Cacioppo, and Richard Rapson. 1994. Emotional Contagion. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.

> emotional contagion that result in a build-up of solidarity and emotional energy) and the ability to call on past experiences that can be framed to represent the potential for success.[153]

In order to preserve one's identity as an abolitionist and one who seeks to abolish the current criminal legal framework, the abolitionist seeks out solidarity experiences (acts of "resistance") that match this heightened level of emotional contagion, such as direct actions from protests to marches to sit-ins. Byron Nielson describes these direct actions as being a part of their personal "protest DNA," and Zach Henton sees himself and his fellow abolitionists as activist "Davids" taking on the dominant prison-industrial Goliath.[154] This subversive or deviant vs dominant language matches Summers-Effler's (2002) work around female activists seeking fellow subordinated and deviant female activists, as well as Thoits's (1990) broader work on deviant emotions.[155]

By seeking out experiences with fellow abolitionists, an abolitionist builds a collective abolitionist identity, which allows for the legitimization of emotions seen as deviant, strange, or hostile by the state. It also provides support for the abolitionist's many hostile micro-interactions described earlier, from family dinners to first dates. In

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[153] Summers-Effler, Erika. 2002. "The Micro Potential for Social Change: Emotion, Consciousness, and Social Movement Formation." *Sociological Theory* 20 (1): 54.

[154] Byron Nielson, (pseudonym), interview by author, e-mail communication, 23 October 2016. Zach Henton, (pseudonym), interview by author, e-mail communication, 26 March 2016.

[155] Thoits, Peggy A. 1990. "Emotional Deviance: Research Agendas." Pp. 180–206 in *Research Agendas in the Sociology of Emotions*, edited by T. Kemper. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

this way, subcultural membership is attractive because it ends the emotional drain of emotion management and provides new sources of emotional energy. As Summers-Effler (2002) puts it: "collective identity requires repeated ritual to retain its ability to call up feelings of emotional energy."[156] However, Summers-Effler claims that normalized deviance only shifts into action-producing "critical consciousness" when there is a lessening of threat from the dominant culture with the action stemming from an individual's assessment of the cognitive risks from participation.[157] Summers-Effler's finding differs from my case study of abolitionist involvement, as the majority of actors described their reasons for shifting their emotional energy into strategic planned action (or for transforming their normalized deviance into critical consciousness) due to threat. Beth Page, Nancy Simpson, and Byron Nielson emphasized the need to counter the criminalization of their abolition work, and the emotional power this anger (as well as their anger over the criminal legal system they seek to overthrow) had in driving their abolitionist work.[158]

While Summers-Effler (2002) sees respondents requiring emotional anger, shame and fear, and an impotence for subversive action (see Figure 3.1), abolitionist respondents mostly focused on feelings of anger and hostility from increasing external

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[156] Summers-Effler, Erika. 2002. "The Micro Potential for Social Change: Emotion, Consciousness, and Social Movement Formation." *Sociological Theory* 20(1): 50.

[157] Summers-Effler, Erika. 2002. "The Micro Potential for Social Change: Emotion, Consciousness, and Social Movement Formation." *Sociological Theory* 20(1): 49-50.

[158] Page; Simpson; Nielson, interviews.

threats that led them to action while deemphasizing feelings of impotence and shame/fear (when mentioned these mostly centered around the horrors with, disgust for, and abuses of the criminal justice system). Additionally, all abolitionists mentioned having feelings of hope and some had a belief that their end goal was indeed achievable within their lifetimes (see table 3.1). Similar to Summers-Effler's (2010) findings in the case of STOP, a group working to abolish the death penalty, having strong feelings of hope are needed when committing to abolishing an institution that is "as old as the U.S. itself,"[159] which is the case for both imprisonment and the death penalty. This is especially true for Summers-Effler's study of the anti-poverty Catholic Worker House and abolitionist organizations (like the ones respondents are affiliated with) that take on the additional explicit goal of abolishing capitalism.

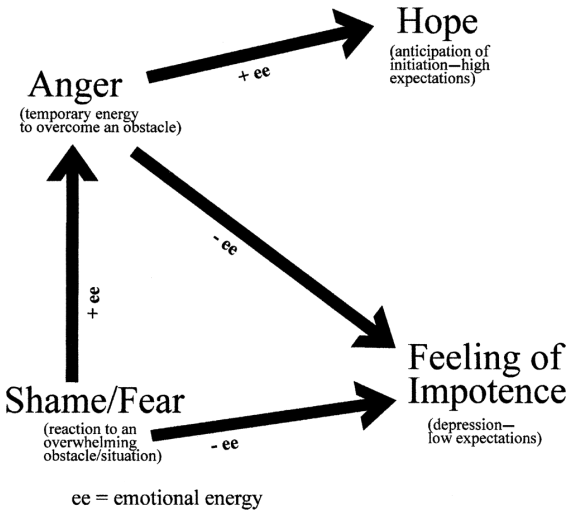

Figure 3.1 The Emotional Requirements for Subversive Action.[160] Summers-Effler (2002: 54) found emotional energy running through anger, hope, shame/fear and a feeling of impotence, with impotence leading to a depletion of energy and anger (when used positively) giving rise to feelings of hope.

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[159] Beth Page, (pseudonym), interview by author, e-mail communication, 23 October 2016.

[160] Summers-Effler, Erika. 2002. "The Micro Potential for Social Change: Emotion, Consciousness, and Social Movement

Table 3.1: Abolitionists and the Emotional Requirements for Collective Advocacy Work. Using Summers-Effler's (2002) model of the four emotional categories related to building collective identity, this dissertation found abolitionist respondents deemphasizing depleting feelings of shame/fear (and instead describing the power of threat in mobilizing their work) and impotence (mostly concerning social isolation), and instead emphasizing anger (hostility; disgust with the current system) and the power of hope in driving their search for collective identity and solidarity experiences with fellow abolitionists.

Emotion	Abolitionists Respondents Reported (out of 7)	Descriptions	Reasoning
Anger	7	"disgust;" "[treated with] hostility;" being "criminalized"	• Fed up with the current state of reform from both parties; • Being criminalized for challenging status quo
Shame/Fear	3	"threatened;" "combat zone;" "horror"	• All mentions are of the positive motivations from an external threat (police/the state)
Impotence	2	"isolated;" "exhausted;" "it's trying"	• Having to constantly defend and explain one's abolitionism to family, friends, others
Hope	7	"can't survive in this work without hope;" "it will happen;" "that's why we organize"	• A unifying core of abolitionist identity: belief that abolitionism is possible and worth fighting for

Formation." *Sociological Theory* 20(1): 54.

Where Summers-Effler (2002) and Collins (2004) and this case study agree, is that critical consciousness can only be maintained through constant cognitive work, which leads individuals to continue to seek out the company of the group in which this work is minimized.[161] Nancy Simpson emphasized the importance of abolitionist strategy which builds on and most importantly complements partnering insurgent movements.[162] Harriet David agrees: "We're not 'reinventing the wheel,' or 'repeating what's come before us.' Our organization documents what's come before and is communicating with other insurgent movements that align with abolition so that we can be strategically ready when history repeats itself."[163] As Beth Page explains, this strategic cross-movement building and the aligning of her identity as an abolitionist with other abolitionists and towards strategic action gives her hope and a feeling of being part of (quoting Karl Marx's description of revolution) a "carnival of the oppressed."[164] Beth spoke about the social aspects of such cross-activity and the singing, dancing, and feeling of a larger community connectedness that she experienced at direct action protests, echoing Jasper (1997):

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[161] Collins, Randall. 2004. *Interaction ritual chains*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. Summers-Effler, Erika. 2002. "The Micro Potential for Social Change: Emotion, Consciousness, and Social Movement Formation." *Sociological Theory* 20(1): 41-60.

[162] Nancy Simpson, (pseudonym), interview by author, e-mail communication, 23 October 2016.

[163] Harriet David (pseudonym), interview by author, e-mail communication, 14 August 2015 and 21 September 2016.

[164] Beth Page, (pseudonym), interview by author, e-mail communication, 23 October 2016.

> Singing and dancing contribute to the euphoric moods that rituals, at their most successful, create. These are affirmations of participants' identities and beliefs, as well as of their power. As Durkheim sensed, collective rituals and gatherings suggest that you are participating in something bigger than you: you are part of history, or you are morally sanctioned, or you truly belong to a group. The emotions of rituals reinforce cognitive and moral visions as well (Jasper 1997: 197; cf, Summers-Effler 2002, pg 55).[165]

Similar to Samara, Beth, and other abolitionists' responses, Durkheim (1995) and Jasper (1997) describe how solidarity and affirmations of identity can channel a group of individuals into action and to community-building.[166] While abolitionists channeled feelings of solidarity into larger public mobilization displays and broad coalitional work with different national and even trans-national insurgent movements, prison reformists grounded their energetic action in person-to-person exchanges with beneficiaries, small working groups, and "intimate interactions" with fellow criminal justice reformers.

Ways reformist movement identity shapes strategic choices

"There was a shared anger": Collective Emotions and Energetic Action

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[165] Jasper, James M. 1997. *The art of moral protest: Culture, biography, and creativity in social movements*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Summers-Effler, Erika. 2002. "The Micro Potential for Social Change: Emotion, Consciousness, and Social Movement Formation." *Sociological Theory* 20(1): 55.

[166] Durkheim, Emile. [1912] 1995. *The elementary forms of religious life*. Trans. Karen E. Fields. New York: Free Press. Jasper, James M. 1997. *The art of moral protest: Culture, biography, and creativity in social movements*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Like Allahyari (2000) and Summers-Effler (2010), this dissertation found prison reformists channeling their anger against a political opposition (in this case, Trump's presidential candidacy and eventual victory) as a means to reach out to new potential political allies (see Table 3.2). However, Summers-Effler and Allahyari, examined groups with deep ideological divides within an increasingly diverse organization (for example, "right-to-life activists, civil rights groups, anarchists, prison abolitionists, Catholics, and Quakers") where a feeling of solidarity was hard-won.[167] The prison reformists I spoke with often remarked on their solidarity and core shared identity with their fellow organization reformists and touched more on similarities than differences. Even when differences were brought up, similarities and a uniting force were still emphasized, as Dave Johnson, a long-time prison reform non-profit staff member, illustrates:

> One thing you can say about a villain like Trump is that he really does rally the troops against him. Our organization is large so we have varied backgrounds and interests, but there was a shared anger over how could we let this guy win and now what can we do to push him back. People were upset…they were disillusioned, but it grounded us in seeing that we needed to double our efforts, that we couldn't let him win. This connected and bonded us with other progressive prison reformers throughout the state, even those we do not see eye to eye with on every major prison reform issue.[168]

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[167] Allahyari, Rebecca Ann. 2000. V*isions of charity: Volunteer workers And moral community*. Los Angeles: University of California Press. Summers-Effler, Erika. 2010. *Laughing Saints and Righteous Heroes: Emotional Rhythms in Social Movement Groups*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press. Pg. 106.

[168] Dave Johnson (pseudonym), interview by author, e-mail communication, 9 December 2016.

Table 3.2: Prison Reformists and the Emotional Requirements for Collective Advocacy Work. A majority of prison reform respondents focused on anger and hope with smaller numbers discussing feelings of impotence (stemming from anger, which is in line with Summers-Effler's findings) and shame/fear. Feelings of anger, instead of deflating, served as a mobilizing force further propelling an expectation of hope for their work. This is especially significant given the difficulty of trying to influence an election in a non-swing state and challenge an "entrenched" criminal justice system.

Emotion	Reformists Respondents Reported (out of 7)	Descriptions	Reasoning
Anger	6	• "upset" • "angry" • "annoyed"	• Trump candidacy/presidency • Prison conditions
Shame/Fear	2	• "embarrassed" • "guilty"	• Ashamed of Ignorance • Embarrassed to be apolitical
Impotence	1	• "disillusioned"	• Trump presidency
Hope	5	• "more similar than different" • "we can't let him [Trump] win" • "it's needed"	• Many other similar-minded criminal justice reform groups • Prison system entrenched

Like abolitionists, the main reported emotion leading prison reformists to commit

to their work was “anger” (6 of 7 respondents reporting).[169] This anger was towards the criminal justice system, with few respondents mentioning feelings of impotence or shame/fear.[170] Words were less emotionally charged than the “rage,” “hatred,” and “disgust” described by abolitionists towards a more far-reaching capitalist system than a comparably more limited criminal justice system.[171] Such a contrast (comparing reformism to abolitionism) could also be due to three reasons:

1. Less of a reported external physical threat for reformist work compared to abolitionist protest work which is criminalized and can result in police brutality and imprisonment;
2. More understood of an ideology and long-term goal for reformists (criminal justice reform in general versus abolitionism), which results in a reduction of time spent defending one’s views and advocate identity; and
3. Less dissatisfaction with the current dominant political arena (reformist respondents identifying with the Democratic Party compared to abolitionists decrying both major political parties).

Nevertheless, the feelings of being “upset,” “angry,” and “disillusioned,” expressed by prison reformists created opportunities for new identity constructions and

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[169] Stan Davis; Liza Davis; Sanders; Smith; Johnson; McConnell, interviews.

[170] McConnell; Sanders; Harris, interviews.

[171] Page; Simpson; Ahmad, interviews.

self-reflection.[172] Dewey explains, “Emotion is the conscious sign of a break, actual or impending. The discord is the occasion that induces reflection. With the realization, material of reflection is incorporated into objects as their meaning” (1934, 14).[173]

Building on findings from Turner (2002), this dissertation found that out of these negative emotions and the resulting reflection came an increased “energy” and feelings of “solidarity,” as reformers Tom Smith and Kate McConnell touched on, respectively.[174] This is similar to Summers-Effler’s (2010) findings in the cases of the Catholic Worker house aiming to alleviate poverty and the anti–death penalty activist group STOP. Both of whom “absorbed threats but doing so generated anger, fear, and shame—emotions that build up energy and tension in preparation for action to improve an actor’s position, either in terms of physical safety or social solidarity.” This anger, fear, and shame were the “product of bracing against obstacles; frustration mobilized energy for action; constraining this momentum in turn consumed energy.”[175] Where prison reformists

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[172] Downs; Harris; Johnson, interviews.

[173] Dewey, John. (1934). *Art as experience*. New York: Minton, Balch.

[174] Turner, Jonathan H. 2002. *Face to face: Toward a sociological theory of interpersonal behavior*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press. For more on the effects of a building of solidarity within groups and an increase in negative emotions, see Turner, Jonathan H. 2000. *On the origins of human emotions: A sociological inquiry into the evolution of human affect*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press. Scheff, Thomas J. 1990. *Microsociology*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press. Tom Smith, (pseudonym), interview by author, e-mail communication, 19 February 2017. Kate McConnell (pseudonym), interview by author, e-mail communication, 30 November 2016.

[175] Summers-Effler, Erika 2010. *Laughing Saints and Righteous Heroes: Emotional Rhythms in Social Movement Groups*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press. Pg. 109.

differed from STOP and the Catholic worker house, centers around a lack of feelings of fear and shame in prison reformers' responses, much less a shame about shame or a shame spiral as Scheff (1992) refers to.[176] For prison reformists, there was also a lack of "constraining" the "momentum" that was caused from the Trump presidency and eventual election (with respondents instead emphasizing the galvanizing of the momentum).

Additionally, Kate McConnell, a prison reform staff member, and other respondents emphasized feelings of hope and an anticipation of future success, saying hope was needed to "tackle" an "entrenched" institution like the U.S. prison system with a current administration aiming to entrench it further.[177] Allahyari (2000) and Summers-Effler (2010) found these feelings of hope are especially important for organizations engaged in direct service provision, like the Catholic Worker House, which can experience disillusionment taking on a lofty goal (prison reform) through solely person-to-person exchanges. Though McConnell and other prison reform respondents also provide individualized direct service care, their work differs in that they are also involved in reform work, which provides an additional avenue to funnel the emotional energy spurred up from a Trump election. The negative emotions that transformed into energy created a shared collective identity; the prison reform organization structure provided the means by which this energy and this shared identity could be harnessed. Table 3.3

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[176] Scheff, Thomas J. 1990. *Microsociology*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

[177] Kate McConnell, (pseudonym), interview by author, e-mail communication, 11 December 2016.

illustrates the comparison of what emotional requirements prison reformists need to partake in collective advocacy efforts as compared to abolitionists.

Collective Identity and Organization

"I feel being a part of this organization, specifically my working group mates that I see almost every day, is who I am"

A prison reform organization like the CJCJ (as well as Critical Resistance) maintains a rigid broader collective identity, organizational goal, and political arena (criminal justice). They also use unique smaller working groups that adapt to changing "external conditions" with the "highest possible variability of its form," keeping with Simmel's theory on the two main group general approaches (Simmel 1898, 831).[178] Though CJCJ has a larger established headquarters in terms of a more flushed out hierarchy and a higher number of employees compared to the abolitionist Critical Resistance, CJCJ still maintains many intimate working groups and a variety of regular

[178] The full quote: "The group may be preserved, (1) by conserving with the utmost tenacity its firmness and rigidity of form, so that the group may meet approaching dangers with substantial resistance, and may preserve the relation of its elements through all change of external conditions; (2) by the highest possible variability of its form, so that adaptation of form may be quickly accomplished in response to change of external conditions, so that the form of the group may adjust itself to any demand of circumstances." Simmel, Georg. 1898. "The persistence of social groups." American Journal of Sociology 4: 831.

events for their broad membership.[179] When asked how such intimate and regular closeness is possible in large, varied, and top-down organizational structures, multiple reformist respondents pointed to "strong solidarity bonds" and "shared feelings" and how their identity as an advocate, specifically a prison-reform advocate, was so inherently tied to their prison reform non-profit.[180] As Kate McConnell, a prison reform staff member, explains, "I feel being a part of this organization, specifically my working group mates that I see almost every day, is who I am. I feel like I had always cared about prison reform before, but my work with my fellow reformers cemented it."[181] All respondents stated that they were passionate about prison reform before joining a prison reform group and many reported having had ties with other prison reformers before their involvement. They brought these experiences and existing strong feelings of solidarity to their non-profit work and aimed to maintain that regular interaction with fellow prison reform advocates. Whether they were lobbying at city hall or separated from fellow reformers, reformers made it a priority to have continued "intimate interactions" with fellow reformers.[182] This is especially important given reformists are

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[179] Fine and Harrington further touch on the effect of the intimacy of small local groups in developing unique tactics during the civil rights movement. Fine, Gary Allan, and Brooke Harrington. (2004). "Tiny publics: Small groups and civil society." *Sociological Theory*, *22*(3), 341-356.

[180] Dave Johnson (pseudonym), interview by author, e-mail communication, 9 December 2016. Tom Smith, (pseudonym), interview by author, e-mail communication, 19 February 2017.

[181] Kate McConnell (pseudonym), interview by author, e-mail communication, 25 September 2016.

surrounded by beneficiaries, such as juvenile and adult offenders who sought out the non-profit's services, but are not, say, ideologically or politically involved in fighting for prison reform. In this way, the prison reform non-profit transcends and merges Fine and Sandstrom's (1993) argument that a social cause generates two types of groups: inward-looking groups emphasizing intimate working groups and outward-looking groups with a headquarters, large member base, and rare larger group events, only falling on certain occasions.[183] CJCJ further stands out in its ability to maintain a close-knit collective identity while striving to promote varied broader social causes within the larger umbrella of criminal justice (education, health, jobs programs). This is similar to the efforts of Critical Resistance grounding their work in larger structural change in these same three arenas.

These organizations differ from Kanter's (1972) finding that groups aiming to preserve strong feelings of community and collective identity necessitate many and

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[182] Jim Sanders (pseudonym), interview by author, e-mail communication, 5 December 2016.

[183] For more on differing organizational collective identities and their response to obstacles and group concerns with an emphasis on political organizations, see Eliasoph and Lichterman 2003; Polletta 2006; Taylor and Rupp 2002. For more on a general social group level, see Simmel, Georg. 1898. The persistence of social groups. American Journal of Sociology 4: 831–2. Fine, Gary Alan, and Kent Sandstrom. 1993. Ideology in action: A pragmatic approach to a contested concept. *Sociological Theory* 11:21–38. Eliasoph, Nina, and Paul Lichterman. 2003. "Culture in interaction." *American Journal of Sociology* 108:735–94. Polletta, Francesca. 2006. *It was like a fever: Storytelling in protest and politics*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Taylor, Verta, and Leila J. Rupp. 2002. "Loving internationalism: The emotion culture of transnational women's organizations, 1888–1945." *Mobilization* 7:125–44.

incompatible subgroups which pushes groups towards a smaller approach.[184] Yes, the organizations studied have varied subgroups, but there was still a maintained consistency in their work and no presented incompatibility or emphasis towards an even smaller approach (Robinson and Smith-Lovin 1992).[185] In fact, there were often call-backs to the wider organizational structure and headquarters (as well as collaborations with other advocacy organizations), when describing the inter-activity and group solidarity felt between the more intimate groups and the larger base. A focus on this larger umbrella struggle (for criminal justice) and both local, short-term and more state-wide and national long-term efforts (varied specific prison reforms) helps strengthen the solidarity and collective identity of the individual organization members. This builds on Durkheim ([1912] 1995) and Simmel (1964) who "both point out how focusing on distant conflict helps to maintain feelings of solidarity within groups" (and in this case, in between groups as well; Summers-Effler 2010, Pg 114.).[186] The series of sub-groups served to facilitate the symbiotic interplay between the increased energy and solidarity

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[184] Kanter, Rosabeth Moss. 1972. *Commitment and community: Communes and utopias in sociological perspective*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

[185] Robinson, Dawn, and Lynn Smith-Lovin. 1992. "Selective interaction as a strategy for identity maintenance: An affect control model." *Social Psychology Quarterly* 55(1):12–28.

[186] Durkheim, Emile. [1912] 1995. *The elementary forms of religious life*. Trans. Karen E. Fields. New York: Free Press. Simmel, Georg. 1964. *Conflict and the web of group affiliations*. New York: Free Press. Summers-Effler, Erika. 2010. *Laughing Saints and Righteous Heroes: Emotional Rhythms in Social Movement Groups*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Table 3.3: Comparison Between Prison Reformist and Abolitionist Emotional Requirements for Collective Advocacy Work. A majority of both prison reformists and abolitionists emphasized feelings of anger and hope, and deemphasized feelings of shame/fear and impotence as driving forces for their recruitment to and continued involvement in prison advocacy work. Emotional descriptions were more charged for abolitionists compared to prison reformists members.

Emotion	Number of Abolitionists Reporting (out of 7)	Number of Reformists Reporting (out of 7)	Abolitionist Response Summary	Reformist Response Summary
Anger	7	6	• Brutality towards inmates & activists • Failure of both political parties • Hatred towards capitalism	• Current president (Trump) • Mistreatment of inmates and released inmates • Limitations of non-profit work (less reported than the above)
Shame/ Fear	3	2	• Threatened • Horrified	• Ashamed of ignorance • Embarrassed to be apolitical
Impotence	2	1	• Isolated • Exhausted	• Disillusioned
Hope	7	5	• Abolitionism will happen • Belief needed to continue advocacy work	• Many like-minded reformers exist • Uphill battle for reform

felt by prison reformers, and harnessed it. This was not only for intimate interactions with local beneficiaries and fellow staff and members, but also for their wider-ranging state and national reform advocacy and lobbying work with different prison reform organizations.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown the driving power of collective identity and internal feelings of solidarity and emotional energy for initial recruitment and continued involvement for both prison reformists and abolitionists, as well as being another factor influencing strategic and organizational choices. First off, there are a variety of pathways by which a prison advocate develops their identity as an advocate (including those pathways that exist independently of involvement with an established advocacy organization). For Greg Cobb and Harriet David, having personal ties to current inmates led to their self-identification as abolitionists and the cementing of that identity in their later high-risk direct action work (McAdam 1986). For Nathan Downs, his previous deviant identity as a prisoner led him to self-identity as an abolitionist to recreate a more desirable identity. As Dewey explains:

> If one is subordinately positioned, one's self, in particular the "me" part, will be filled with information about one's limited options, as well as implications for how to minimize threatening situations associated with one's undesirable identity. While the internal conversation can be made conscious, it continues without conscious effort as one negotiates one's series of day-to-day interactions.[187]

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[187] Summers-Effler, Erika. 2002. "The Micro Potential for Social Change:

Day-to-day interactions as an active abolitionist helped Downs continue to supplant his deviant inmate label. For prison reformist respondents, their development of individual interest and identification with being a reformer grew from a moral shock and the anger and disgust they felt with the state of prison reform. These shocks are especially important for someone like Donna Harris who was not an advocate or involved in politics before seeking out a prison reform organization. Yet, the moral shock left Harris feeling as part of a larger prison reform community even before joining an organization (contrasting with Summers-Effler's work on collective identity being predicated on an earlier experience of collective behavior). Working to throw off the deviant label as well as minimizing negative individual emotions, such as anger and disillusionment, brought prison advocates to their advocacy work, but there was a shared emphasis by both reformists and abolitionists on seeking an organization and a collective identity to address these negative emotions. As Durkheim (1995) found, hope and these solidarity experiences can transform a collective into a 'sacred object' (i.e., emotional energy) further establishing a community within a collective.

Secondly, once a prison reformist or abolitionist was embedded in an organization and a part of the collective organizational identity, a reinforcing energetic push occurred. Many of the respondents interviewed described the need for collective solidarity and to find others like themselves or a 'we.' They then described the energetic rush that came from the feeling of 'finding others like me' and the "solidarity

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Emotion, Consciousness, and Social Movement Formation." *Sociological Theory* 20(1): pg. 44.

rituals" they engaged in during advocacy work. Building on Collins, Summers-Effler describes this creation of "we":

> When one experiences solidarity in ritual, one's identity expands, and larger social dynamics can be revealed in the process…In intense interactions there is a buildup of both emotional energy and a shared mood. During such an experience the "we" of the group becomes more central to one's identity than one's individual experiences. As this shared mood becomes stronger and more dominant, competing feelings are driven out by the main group feeling (Collins 1990).[188]

The disgust that came from moral shocks as well as the anger and disillusionment from the current state of prison reform led to a seeking out of collective identity to harness these negative emotions for good. To maintain this collective identity, repeated face-to-face interaction as well as repeated rituals (from intimate meetings to larger events such as direct actions or organization-wide functions) are required.

Finally, feelings of collective identity, shared solidarity, and emotional energy were harnessed in prison advocacy organizational decisions, such as through series of intimate working groups, an interplay between the smaller groups and the larger organizations, and renewed alliances with like-minded organizations and movements. As Durkheim (1995) described, regular rituals can create distinctions between insiders and outsiders, or who is one's ally and who is one's enemy.[189] For abolitionists, regular communication with like-minded insurgent movements and continual contact among group members in working groups reminded and reinvigorated

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[188] Summers-Effler 2002, pg. 49.

[189] Durkheim, Emile. 1995. The Elementary Forms of Religious Life. Translated by Fields. New York: Free Press.

members of their shared agreement in needing to overthrow the criminal justice system. This regular communication also sustained emotional energy that was not being depleted from constantly having to convince or defend their position.

For reformists, the Trump presidential candidacy and eventual election provided a key galvanizing force for "rallying the troops" and entrenching the "we" identity of those in the fight for progressive prison reform.[190] The emotional energy and collective solidarity from this rush led to increased interactions with other prison reform groups (even between those with disagreements on other social issues). It also increased reformist energy as well as the amount[191] and length[192] of meetings in intimate working groups, and the development of a "plethora"[193] of new working groups. These working groups served to further reinforce the organization's collective identity:

> The greater the frequency of the interactions that produce solidarity and emotional energy, the greater the potential for creating enduring relationships…Frequency ensures that increasingly substantial proportions of one's interactions are represented by group membership. As members in the group come to count on group membership and group interaction as a source for emotional energy, they become increasingly interdependent on each other. This mutual dependence reinforces collective identity and leads to long-term group cohesion and stability (Lawler and Thye 1999).[194]

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[190] Dave Johnson (pseudonym), interview by author, e-mail communication, 9 December 2016.

[191] Johnson, interview.

[192] Tom Smith, (pseudonym), interview by author, e-mail communication, 19 February 2017.

[193] Kate McConnell (pseudonym), interview by author, e-mail communication, 30 November 2016.

[194] Summers-Effler 2002, pg. 50.

Thus, collective identity and organizational stability worked in a symbiotic self-reinforcement that was strengthened by the regular displays of solidarity described by both moderate prison reformists and radical prison abolitionists in their working groups and throughout their larger organization. Taken together, Chapters 2 and 3 show the interplay between identity and strategy both over time and in micro-level interactions. Thus far, this dissertation has examined how prison reformers and abolitionists maintain their individual and organizational identity and the different facets of their organizational structure, but how do they communicate this to the wider public. Chapter Four, through a discussion of framing, now unites these issues to understand how prison advocates explain their movement identity (that of a moderate reformist or radical abolitionist) and organizational strategy to individuals outside their field.

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Polletta, Francesca and Jasper, James. 2001. "Collective Identity and Social Movements." *Annual Review of Sociology* 27: 283-305.

Reiter, Keramet. 2016. *23/7: Pelican Bay Prison and the Rise of Long-Term Solitary Confinement*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

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Ross, Jeffrey Ian, and Stephen C. Richards. (2002). *Behind Bars: Surviving Prison*. New York: Alpha/Penguin.

Ross, Jeffrey Ian, and Stephen C. Richards, eds. (2003). *Convict Criminology*. Belmont: Wadsworth.

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Snow, David and Robert Benford. 1992. “Master Frames and Cycles of Protest.” Pp. 133–55
in *Frontiers in Social Movement Theory*, edited by A. D. Morris and C. M. Mueller. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Summers-Effler, Erika. 2002. “The Micro Potential for Social Change: Emotion, Consciousness, and Social Movement Formation.” *Sociological Theory* 20(1): 41–60.

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Taylor, Verta and Leila J. Rupp. 2002. “Loving internationalism: The emotion culture of transnational women’s organizations, 1888–1945.” *Mobilization* 7: 125–44.

Turner, Jonathan H. 2002. *Face to face: Toward a sociological theory of interpersonal behavior*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Thoits, Peggy A. 1990. “Emotional Deviance: Research Agendas.” Pp. 180–206 in *Research Agendas in the Sociology of Emotions*, edited by T. Kemper. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Tilly, Charles. 1978. *From Mobilization to Revolution*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

Wuthnow, Robert. 1991. *Acts of compassion: Caring for others and helping ourselves*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Chapter 4

Consistency and Credibility: Frames in Prison Reform and Abolition Work

Why Does Framing Matter

The differences in how moderate prison reformists and radical prison abolitionists frame messages to the public contributes to larger divides surrounding the organizational and strategic needs of the two sets of organizations. Both moderate prison reformists and radical prison abolitionists rely on framing to explain to potential adherents and supporters outside their field about their movement and collective identity and convince them of their organizational strategy. For our discussion on frames, we will rely on Snow and Benford's three-part breakdown of a frame: "(1) a diagnosis of some event or aspect of social life as problematic and in need of alteration; (2) a proposed solution to the diagnosed problem that specifies what needs to be done; and (3) a call to arms or rationale for engaging in ameliorative or corrective action" (1988, p. 199).[195] Similar to the work of Lawston (2010; who used the analytical elements of a social movement frame to describe what made her case study of a single prison

[195] Snow, David A. and Robert Benford. 1988. "Ideology, Frame Resonance, and Participant Mobilization." International *Social Movement Research* 1: 197–217.

abolitionist organization distinct), contrasting the framing work of the radical abolitionists and moderate reformists in this dissertation helps explain what makes each movement organization distinctive and different.[196] While both reformists and abolitionists chose frames to legitimate members' group goals (Benford 1997; Reese and Newcombe 2003), distinctions emerged in the way activists communicated to the public, specifically differences surrounding the credibility of their messages (Benford and Snow 2000; McCammon, Hewitt, and Smith 2004).[197]

A Brief Introduction on Framing

In the 1980s in social movement research, there was a backlash against analyzing movements through purely political or organizational perspectives. Research on framing addressed these gaps through a focus on micromobilization, an interactive

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[196] Lawston, Jodie. 2010. *Sisters Outside: Radical Activists Working for Women Prisoners*. New York: SUNY Press.

[197] Benford, Robert D. 1997. "An Insider's Critique of the Social Movement Framing Perspective." *Sociological Inquiry* 67(4): 409-430; Reese, Ellen, and Garnett Newcombe. 2003. "Income Rights, Mothers' Rights or Workers' Rights? Collective Action Frames, Organizational Ideologies, and the American Welfare Rights Movement." *Social Problems* 50 (2): 294–318; Benford, Robert D. and David A. Snow. 2000. "Framing Processes and Social Movements: An Overview and Assessment." *Annual Review of Sociology* 26: 611–39; McCammon, Holly, Lyndi Hewitt, and Sandy Smith. U.S. Woman Suffrage Movements." *Sociological Quarterly* 45 (3): 529–56.

process by which organizations mobilize or influence various groups, and frames, which serve to "organize experience and guide action" by "rendering events or occurrences meaningful" (Snow et. al 1986: 464).[198] Following Snow et. al's work, the literature on framing exploded (Gamson 1988, Snow and Benford 1988; Benford and Snow 1992; Benford 1993; Tarrow 1994; Benford and Snow 2000).[199] Framing helped political opportunity theorists connect cultural opportunities to their work and helped resource mobilization theorists, because of the newfound emphasis on cultural, individual and moral beliefs, speak of cultural resources in their research (e.g., McAdam 1999: xi).[200] Polletta challenged and expanded upon framing by emphasizing the importance of

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[198] Snow, David A., E. Burke Rochford, Steven K. Worden, and Robert D. Benford. 1986. "Frame Alignment Processes, Micromobilization, and Movement Participation." *American Sociological Review* 51(4): 464-481.

[199] Benford, Robert D. and David A. Snow. 2000. "Framing Processes and Social Movements: An Overview and Assessment." *Annual Review of Sociology* 26: 611–39; Tarrow, Sidney. 1994. *Power in Movement*. 3rd ed. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press; Benford, Robert D. 1993. "'You could be the hundredth monkey': collective action frames and vocabularies of motive within the nuclear disarmament movement." *The Sociological Quarterly* 34: 195–216; Snow, David A. and Robert Benford. 1988. "Ideology, Frame Resonance, and Participant Mobilization." International Social Movement Research 1: 197–217; Benford, Robert D. and David A. Snow. 1992. "Master Frames and Cycles of Protest." Pp. 133–55 in *Frontiers in Social Movement Theory*, edited by A. D. Morris and C. M. Mueller. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press; Snow, David A. and Robert Benford. 1988. "Ideology, Frame Resonance, and Participant Mobilization." *International Social Movement Research* 1: 197–217; Gamson, William A. 1988. "Political discourse and collective action." International *Social Movement Research* 1: 219–44.

[200] McAdam, Doug. 1999. *Political Process and the Development of the Black Insurgency, 1930-1970*. 2nd ed. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

narratives, that is, stories, tales, anecdotes, and allegories, which express and concretize frames and emphasize the evolution of identity *over time,* projecting a future (1998).[201] Walder provided a further challenge to both framing and narratives by emphasizing the power of structural and ideological forces in limiting the ability for movement activists, potential movement participants, and the larger public to be influenced or emotionally stimulated by the movement frames or narratives they hear, read, or see (2009).[202]

Differences Surrounding Frame Credibility

Framing decisions by both sets of respondents diverge in three areas:

1. credibility concerning frame consistency (how the frames match up with the beliefs and actions of the social movement organization);
2. empirical credibility (how verifiable they are to audiences); and
3. the perceived credibility of frame articulators (relating to the status and expertise of the speakers for the

[201] Polletta, Francesca. 1998. "'It Was like a Fever...' Narrative and Identity in Social Protest." *Social Problems* 45(2): 137–59.

[202] Walder, Andrew. 2009. "Political Sociology and Social Movements." *Annual Review of Sociology* 35: 393–412.

organization).[203]

Abolitionists and prison reformists emphasized the importance of appearing "credible" (also using the terms "authentic," "trustworthy," or "convincing") as advocates and having credible messages to best convince potential supporters or adherents to their cause.[204]

Different theorists (Harrington 1968; McCarthy and Zald 1977; Jenkins 1983, Paulsen and Glumm 1995; Polletta 2002; Weismuller 2012) have found that the divide between those who benefit more materially from the organization's work and "conscience constituents"[205] can create strife and tension within an organization.

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[203] These three factors are outlined in Benford and Snow's (2000) work on frame credibility. Benford, Robert D. and David A. Snow. 2000. "Framing Processes and Social Movements: An Overview and Assessment." *Annual Review of Sociology* 26: 611–39

[204] Greg Cobb (pseudonym), interview by author, e-mail communication, 2 August 2015 and 9 September 2016. Byron Nielson, (pseudonym), interview by author, e-mail communication, 23 October 2016. Dave Johnson (pseudonym), interview by author, e-mail communication, 9 December 2016.

[205] Conscience constituents may not benefit as much materially but are viewed as engaging in the work to support "underdogs" or those in need. For more on this, see: Harrington, Michael. 1968. *Toward a Democratic Left: A Radical Program for a New Majority.* New York: Macmillan; McCarthy, John D., and Mayer Zald. 1977. "Resource Mobilization and Social Movements: A Partial Theory." American Journal of Sociology 82 (6): 1212–41; Jenkins, J. Craig. 1983. "Resource Mobilization Theory and the Study of Social Movements." *Annual Review of Sociology* 9 (1): 527-553; Reese, Ellen, and Garnett Newcombe. 2003. "Income Rights, Mothers' Rights or Workers' Rights? Collective Action Frames, Organizational Ideologies, and the American Welfare Rights Movement." Social Problems 50 (2): 294–318; Paulsen, Ronnelle, and Karen Glumm. 1995. "Resource Mobilization and the Importance of Bridging Beneficiary and Conscience Constituents." National Journal of Sociology 9 (2): 37–62; Weismuller, J.P. (2012). "Social Movements and Free Riders:

Abolitionists respondents bridge such divides by using broader organizational and ideological frames emphasizing universal values, the power of narratives, and community/cross-movement connections ('we're all in this together'). This is especially important given the diverse membership and potential recruitment base for abolitionists and is important for maintaining credibility and flexibility in their organization's non-hierarchical structure. On the other hand, reformist respondents use a different set of more narrow frames emphasizing organizational stability, specific programmatic metrics, and professional expertise to bridge the divide between their staff and the beneficiaries who they serve and maintain credibility and consistency.

Frame Consistency

Frame consistency is grounded in advocates matching what they say with what they do (put in other words, the backing up of their words with action). The frames they put out reflect this corresponding action with the goal of establishing credibility for potential recruits or supporters. While Benford and Snow (2000) looked more at framing credibility in terms of consistency across an organization's frames, abolitionist respondents fit more in line with the work of Jasper (1997) who saw activists fitting their frames to the specific demographic groups they are speaking to.[206] The need to match

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Examining resource mobilization theory through the Bolivian Water War," *The Macalester Review*: Vol. 2: Iss. 2, Article 4.

[206] Jasper, James M. 1997. *The art of moral protest: Culture, biography, and creativity in social movements*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press;

a long-term, ideological goal of abolition and leftist anti-capitalism with potential recruits who fit across the political spectrum leads to a segmentation of frames and a careful consideration of when and where to use abolitionism in initial conversations (similar to the findings of Lawston 2010).[207] Abolitionist work around frame credibility, and specifically frame consistency, differs from prison reformist respondents who maintain consistency across their frames given a narrower emphasis on short-term reforms and a less politically charged organizational focus. Moreover, these reformist framing efforts are met with less hostility by a more politically homogenous potential support base and less reprisal by criminal justice reform and advocacy gatekeepers (e.g., government officials, police; Smith and Natalier 2005).[208]

Abolitionists and Frame Consistency

"We Can't Just Look at Prisons"

A theme emerged in interviews with radical abolitionist activists over the need to frame their work beyond prisoners and prison walls to reach the different social issue

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Benford, Robert D. and David A. Snow. 2000. "Framing Processes and Social Movements: An Overview and Assessment." *Annual Review of Sociology* 26: 611–39.

[207] Lawston, Jodie. 2010. *Sisters Outside: Radical Activists Working for Women Prisoners*. New York: SUNY Press.

[208] Smith, Philip Daniel and Kristin Natalier. 2005. *Understanding Criminal Justice: Sociological Perspectives*. London: Sage.

interests and levels of political radicalness of potential supporters. This need required a focus on structural and ideological forces beyond the typical criminal justice framework (e.g., prisons, jails, courts) with a multitude of frames directed at each of these different issue areas (e.g., healthcare, education, economy).[209] Research on multiple targets of frames is well-known continuing with Evans (1997) on the changes of these multiple framing targets over time and Benford (1993) on the need to find consistency across these multiple framing target efforts.[210] What set abolitionists apart is that abolitionist respondents do not seek consistency across their frames.[211] To drive collective work, abolitionist respondents compartmentalize their frames, choosing often to focus on addressing the current interests, experiences, and most importantly, "level of political radicalness"[212] of potential adherents (e.g., discussing prison mental health reforms with someone who is a politically moderate therapist).

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[209] Snow, David. A., Steven K. Worden, E. Burke Rochford, and Robert. D. Benford. 1986. "Frame alignment processes, micromobilization, and movement participation." *American Sociological Review* 51: 464–81.

[210] Evans, John H. 1997. "Multi-Organizational Fields and Social Movement Organization Frame Content: The Religious Pro-Choice Movement." *Sociological Inquiry* 67 (4), Fall: 451–69; Benford, Robert D. 1993. "'You could be the hundredth monkey': collective action frames and vocabularies of motive within the nuclear disarmament movement." *The Sociological Quarterly* 34: 195–216.

[211] Lawston, Jodie. 2010. *Sisters Outside: Radical Activists Working for Women Prisoners*. New York: SUNY Press: pgs 105-106.

[212] A phrase used by multiple abolitionist respondents: Greg Cobb (pseudonym), interview by author, e-mail communication, 2 August 2015 and 9 September 2016. Byron Nielson, (pseudonym), interview by author, e-mail communication, 23 October 2016.

Using the potential adherents' unique background as a base, abolitionists then work towards explaining their long-term ideological goal.[213] Harriet David, an abolitionist organization member, explains:

> Since the issue of prisons affects so many different areas, we need to be ready to have a frame, an issue, that reflects the background of the people we meet. If someone is an educator, there's a pre-school to prison pipeline, so we need to address policing in schools. If a doctor, our society responds to mental health and public health crises by imprisonment so we need to address healthcare.
>
> If they care about the economy, our society makes everyone check a box if they've been convicted of a crime no matter what the situation so we need to have a right to work. If they care about global matters, our country imprisons undocumented folks in secret detention centers throughout the nation so we need to address immigration…on and on and on. We need to have different responses to each of these areas…and ways to relate our cause to those we are trying to connect with.[214]

Cobb adds that their ability as abolitionists to frame their efforts "across the different tentacles of the prison-industrial complex" meant a need to have a series of, what the abolitionists Simpson and Nielson called, "pitches" to potential adherents that address all the social issue arenas and institutions that imprisonment impacts and that supporters may have an interest in.[215] Put another way, there is a perceived need for

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[213] This trend is observed in animal rights movements, such as those studied by Reese and Newcombe (2003). Reese, Ellen, and Garnett Newcombe. 2003. "Income Rights, Mothers' Rights or Workers' Rights? Collective Action Frames, Organizational Ideologies, and the American Welfare Rights Movement." *Social Problems* 50 (2): 294–318.

[214] Harriet David (pseudonym), interview by author, e-mail communication, 14 August 2015 and 21 September 2016.

[215] Greg Cobb (pseudonym), interview by author, e-mail communication, 2 August 2015 and 9 September 2016. Nancy Simpson, (pseudonym), interview by author, e-mail communication, 23 October 2016. Byron Nielson, (pseudonym), interview by author, e-mail communication, 23 October 2016.

abolitionists to have a multi-institutional approach to their work.[216] This view that oppression (manifested through mass incarceration) is distributed between different institutions (and the different types of individuals who interact with these institutions) generates questions within movements over which institutional areas to emphasize. Frames have different meanings and significance within each field, suggesting there are no clear lines between what kind of frame to use for one individual or another.

Respondents described the struggles that can occur with trying to implement their broader "we need abolition" frame. They also detailed their efforts to taper this frame down a gradient depending on the backgrounds, previous experience, and interests of the potential members or public in which they tailor their frames to.[217] This differs from the work of Evans (1997) who found that an SMO's organizational frame served as their one unifying ideology (Staggenborg 1986; Benford 1993) that allowed them to communicate clearly to their intended targets and the public. The abolitionist organizational frame (that of being an abolitionist organization) was not always clearly emphasized in their initial framing efforts where abolitionist and broader anti-systemic frames can be toned down in a careful balancing act.[218] Henton explains,

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[216] By multi-institutional approach, I am referring to systemic thinking on the part of activists and not Armstrong and Bernstein (2008) phrase referring to an approach to studying social movements in the field of sociology.

[217] Lawston, Jodie. 2010. *Sisters Outside: Radical Activists Working for Women Prisoners*. New York: SUNY Press.

[218] Evans, John H. 1997. "Multi-Organizational Fields and Social

"Our philosophy and values are [anti-systemic], but we don't always put that language out there as we don't want to scare folks away who can be influenced by our message."[219] Page described how a "fear of losing potential members" as well as potential partner organizations leads to a cautious selection process, where the level of anti-systemic framing stays within the scope of the perceived radicalness of the listener or audience.[220]

Such a downward gradation and decompartmentalization of abolitionists' core message may lead an outsider to question how fundamental the abolitionist identity is to their organization, thus blurring the supposed distinction between the radical abolitionist organization and a moderate prison reformist group.[221] Although abolitionists can tone down abolitionism and relate to an individual's political radicalness and "readiness" level[222] in the beginning of their face-to-face framing efforts, abolitionist respondents

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Movement Organization Frame Content: The Religious Pro-Choice Movement." *Sociological Inquiry* 67(4), Fall: 451–69; Staggenborg, Suzanne. 1986. "Coalition Work in the Pro-Choice Movement: Organizational and Environmental Opportunities and Obstacles." *Social Problems*, Vol. 33, No. 5, Jun: 374-390; Benford, Robert D. 1993. "'You could be the hundredth monkey': collective action frames and vocabularies of motive within the nuclear disarmament movement." *The Sociological Quarterly* 34: 195–216.

[219] Zach Henton, (pseudonym), interview by author, e-mail communication, 26 March 2016.

[220] Beth Page, (pseudonym), interview by author, e-mail communication, 23 October 2016.

[221] For more on this struggle around organizational and group identity, see Chapter 3 of this dissertation.

[222] Multiple abolitionist respondents used the term "readiness" to describe how quickly they could go into abolition politics when framing their

made clear that they define their organization as explicitly abolitionist and make a point to bring back the pitch to the issue of prison abolition (see Figure 4.1 for an example of the gradients in the framing balancing act). In this way, if an audience member responds to the initial abolition frame in a politically charged ("too radical")[223] or dismissive ('it's unrealistic') manner, the abolitionist works to bring back the discussion to the root causes of violence and crime and the role of prisons. Thus, even if an abolitionist is unable to broaden their abolition frame to include an anti-systemic framework that extends beyond prisons (an explicit goal of the abolitionists interviewed), their core broad solution (getting to the roots of social injustices through abolition) is still explained.

This finding diverges from those of Lawston (2010) and Reese and Newcombe (2003) who found activists often entirely omitting their group's radical solution and core ideology (abolitionism in the case of Lawston's study and animal liberation in Reese and Newcombe's) in many of their framing efforts.[224] The difference for these more current

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organization to prospective supporters. Nancy Simpson, (pseudonym), interview by author, e-mail communication, 23 October 2016. Harriet David (pseudonym), interview by author, e-mail communication, 14 August 2015 and 21 September 2016.

[223] Cobb described how an audience member viewed Cobb's critique of and argument for "abolition as a step towards revolution from settler-colonialism and capitalist hegemony" as "too radical." Greg Cobb (pseudonym), interview by author, e-mail communication, 2 August 2015 and 9 September 2016.

[224] Lawston, Jodie. 2010. *Sisters Outside: Radical Activists Working for Women Prisoners*. New York: SUNY Press. Reese, Ellen, and Garnett Newcombe. 2003. "Income Rights, Mothers' Rights or Workers' Rights? Collective Action Frames, Organizational Ideologies, and the American Welfare Rights Movement." *Social Problems* 50 (2): 294–318.

findings could be due to views by abolitionists that their ideas are more "accepted now," according to abolitionist Nielson, and with the lessening of the War on Drugs and a "shifting political climate" that makes it easier to "talk abolition."[225] Nevertheless, the above section shows abolitionists' need for and efforts toward decompartmentalization and frame variance in order to appeal to prospective supporters. The following section will further demonstrate how abolitionists provide empirical credibility to these frames and credibility to their frame articulators, as well as further legitimacy to their organization's non-hierarchal structure, by centering their frames around 'lay expertise' and the direct voices of those most affected by imprisonment.

[225] See Chapter 1 for further explanation on the War on Drugs and Chapter 2 for analysis surrounding temporal changes and the work of prison advocates. Byron Nielson, (pseudonym), interview by author, e-mail communication, 23 October 2016.

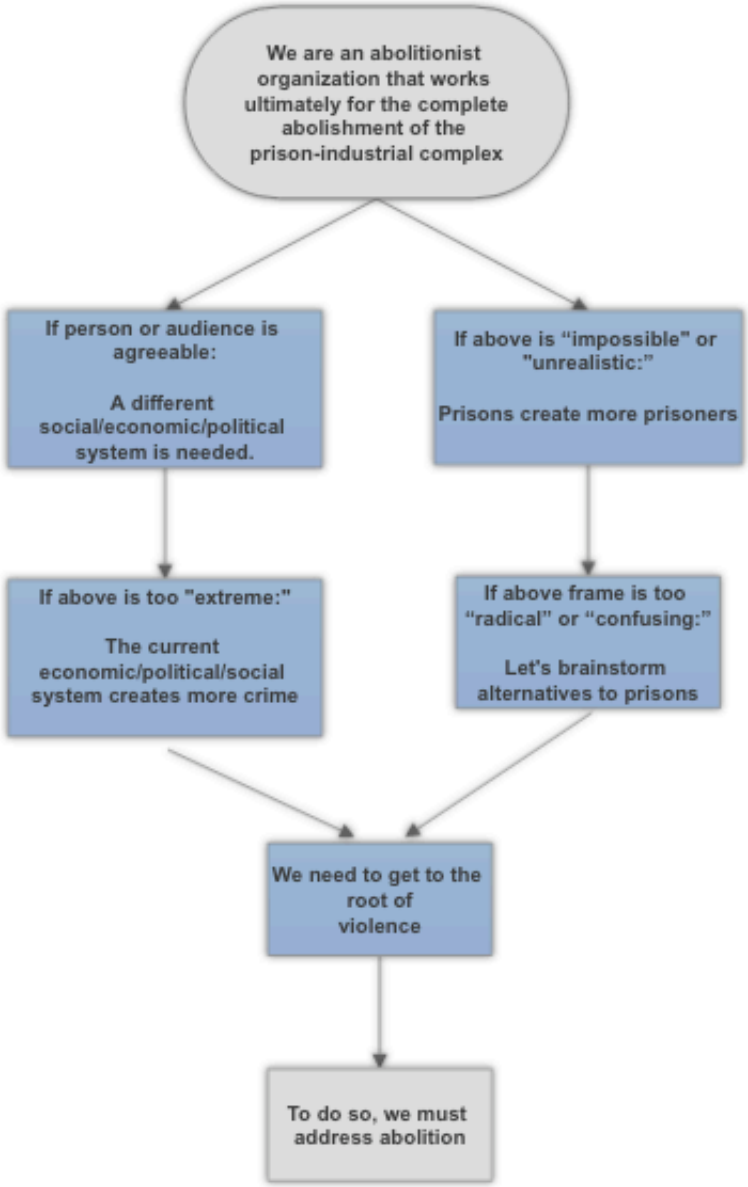

Figure 4.1: Abolition Frame. Following an initial introduction to the prospective supporter (e.g., what are you interested in?) and a discussion that is tailored to the background, interests, and knowledge of the prospective supporter, abolitionists utilize a structure similar to the above figure beginning with an explicit definition of the organization as abolitionist. Abolitionists then take the prospective supporter through a broader need to address the root cause of social violence and injustice ending with the need to address the existence of prisons. Thus, abolitionists ground their framing efforts within the realm of their targeted long-term goal and ideology (the closing of prisons) even while toning or tapering down this abolitionist philosophy when needed.

Lay Expertise and Personal Narratives

For abolitionists, the emphasis of personal stories and lay over professional expertise is grounded in abolitionist respondents' backgrounds as self-defined "movement people" whose 'expertise' is in movement work. The use of "lay expertise" and personal experience and testimony as "evidence" has been well covered within the field of science studies (Epstein 1995) and within social movement research with Nelson (2013) showing the power of lay expertise with Black Panther public health programs, Moseby (2012) for black HIV/AIDS activist organizations, and Huff (2014) with pro-life abortion organizations, all covering the topic from a health movements perspective. Huff adapted the idea to analyze the evidence behind anti-abortion movement claims tied to personal stories, such as stories relating a patient's abortion and mental health, abortion and breast cancer, etc.[226] Even those with more professional degrees, such as Nielson (below) who has a law degree,

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[226] Epstein, Steven. 1995. "The Construction of Lay Expertise: AIDS Activism and the Forging of Credibility in the Reform of Clinical Trials." *Science, Technology, & Human Values* 20(4):408–37; Nelson, Alondra. 2013. *Body and Soul: The Black Panther Party and the Fight Against Medical Discrimination*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press; Huff, April. (2014). Constructing Abortion's Second Victim: Science and Politics in the Contemporary Antiabortion Movement. *UC San Diego*. ProQuest ID: Huff_ucsd_0033D_14480. Merritt ID: ark:/20775/bb9080364x. Retrieved from https://escholarship.org/uc/item/4rr2f96t; Moseby, Kevin M. (2012). Changing the color of HIV/AIDS prevention: black community activism, U.S. Public Health, and the biopolitics of race, sexuality and citizenship. *UC San Diego*. ProQuest ID: Moseby_ucsd_0033D_12884. Merritt ID: ark:/20775/bb84655316. Retrieved from https://escholarship.org/uc/item/22q0n54

emphasized their movement and personal experience (with family members or friends who have been incarcerated) as opposed to their professional expertise and instead erring to share the stories of lay members over stories of their professional experiences.

Nielson, an abolitionist organization member, emphasized the role of prisoner narratives in providing a framing mechanism that effectively communicates issues across the many types of institutions prison advocates grapple with:

> When we first got started twenty years ago no one was talking about this [prisons]. So, our work initially was all about prison frames; educating the public about the failures of prisons, the endless spending, the lack of rehabilitation, how they worsen crime. Today, it's not only prisons. When we're talking about [drug] legalization, we're talking about a public health crisis. Protest, direct action aren't the default.
>
> We need to use frames that humanize prisoners, the victims of the War on Drugs, who are political prisoners. The problems with our healthcare and education and capitalist system as a whole. It's another massive educational program with frames centering on the stories of our members who have been victims of mass incarceration.[227]

Even when focusing on prisoners' narratives, Nielson places the focus on a narrative of their life that goes beyond their state as a prisoner and addresses the failures of other state or private institutions that led them there.

When asked which frames his abolitionist organization emphasizes for communicating abolition to the public and other advocacy groups, Zach Henton, who is formerly incarcerated, emphasized the importance of using former inmates' narratives (more in line with Polletta's (1998) work) to give personal testimony to their experiences and the need for broader change: "These testimonies allow the public and other

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[227] Byron Nielson, (pseudonym), interview by author, e-mail communication, 23 October 2016.

advocates to really relate to us [former inmates working towards abolition]" and show that "incarcerated people are not always 'bad people', not always 'criminal'…A lot of time these are people caught up in a bad situation whether that be drugs or untreated mental health problems." The narratives "humanize inmates" and show that prisons have become a "mental health depot, a place where they warehouse addicts because the state has failed them."[228]

The effect of these testimonies is twofold; they not only help abolitionists extend their framing beyond prisons to highlight the need to reform the health sector and other institutions which they see as leading to prison growth[229]; the testimonies also help

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[228] Zach Henton, (pseudonym), interview by author, e-mail communication, 26 March 2016. For more on social movements and testimonies, see Young, Michael. 2002. "Confessional Protest: The Religious Birth of U.S. National Social Movements." *American Sociological Review* 67(5): 660–88. Young argues that contentious politics theorists (e.g., McAdam et. al 1996; Tilly 1997) suffer from an inattention to personal protest and the connecting of personal and social transformation. Young focuses on testimonies as "confessional protest," bearing witness and demanding repentance, and the combination of collective action around the sins of the individual and of the nation. Confessional protests "fused programs of personal transformation and national change" (661) and were "not meant to influence or communicate with state and political actors" (680). These confessional protests differ from those given by the abolitionists I have interviewed as abolitionists' use of personal testimony is not only to influence the public (private individuals), but also state and political actors. Polletta, Francesca. 1998. "'It Was like a Fever...' Narrative and Identity in Social Protest." *Social Problems* 45(2): 137–59; McAdam, Doug, Sidney Tarrow, and Charles Tilly. 1996. "To Map Contentious Politics." *Mobilization* 1: 17-34; Tilly, Charles. 1997. "The Parliamentarization of Popular Contention in Great Britain, 1758-1834." Pp. 217-44 in *Roads from Past to Future, Legacies of Social Thought*, edited by C. Lemert. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield.

[229] Faber (2005) and Schneider (1997) found that radical groups can more easily use broader and diverse frames, such as anti-systemic, anti-colonial, and counter-cultural frames from diverse perspectives (race-based, class-based multiple sites of oppression). Faber, Daniel. 2005. "Building a

empower former inmates and abolitionist members and fuel their organizational commitment (discussed further in "Identity-Informed Choices" in Chapter 3 of this dissertation). Nathan Downs, an abolitionist organization member and former inmate, emphasized his organization's framing of prisoners as not just beneficiaries or solely members of the organization, but leaders and the faces of the movement. "The way the movement was first explained to me was that I would not be behind the scenes, that my story would be front and center." Downs described how whenever he told his story "members listened" and was told "these are the stories we want out to the public." He was made "an author, a writer" and had his personal narrative published "by me, by ME!" Downs described the experience:

> It was on the front page of their site, their newsletter. The media used to love to use me as the face of all that's wrong with the youth, with those who get caught up with drugs. But with the [prison abolition] efforts I do now my story got out there. I got the public and the media seeking out my personal story and the positive work I'm doing every day.
>
> I [had] been in prison rotting away and I was hungry to not be seen as a convict. I was a dude off his meds at the wrong time in the wrong place. Now the public sees that story and it can change them and it [telling the story] changed me. I think that's what makes our organization trustworthy is people see us showing our abolitionist mindset and struggle and putting our stories out there and the power of that.[230]

Transnational Environmental Justice Movement: Obstacles and Opportunities in the Age of Globalization." Pp. 43–68 in *Coalitions Across Borders: Transnational Protest and the Neoliberal Order*, edited by Joe Bandy and Jackie Smith. New York: Rowman & Littlefield; Schneider, Cathy. 1997. "Framing Puerto Rican Identity: Political Opportunity Structures and Neighborhood Organizing in New York City." *Mobilization* 2(2), September: 227–45.

[230] Nathan Downs (pseudonym), interview by author, e-mail communication, 2 August 2015 and 9 September 2016.

Downs' story and his description of his narrative-telling experience shows the personal and social transformation that he and his abolitionist group want to convey to the public and which they believe can affect others, as well as the effects this narrative has on the perceived "trustworth[iness]," or credibility, of the organization. The testimony of a personal transformation invites the public to discover the incarceration problem themselves and how it extends beyond prison walls, thereby allowing new participation in the framing of the incarceration problem. These findings build on Moon's (2012: pg. 1338) work around narratives and diverge from the work of Melucci (1985) who does not consider closely enough these "personal-level ramifications" of narrative work.[231]

Beth Page sees her abolitionist organization's framing as credible and verifiable to audiences due to its grounding in these former inmates/organization members' personal narratives. She explained that the organization "highlighting" these narratives (which she would "never hear from the mainstream media") drew her initially to the work. "I know other members" came to find our organization "credible…because of

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[231] Melucci saw movements fighting for "symbolic and cultural stakes, for a different meaning and orientation of social action. They try to change people's lives, they believe that you can change your life today while fighting for more general changes in society" (1985, p. 797). Moon elaborates, "Melucci understood that these movements were viscerally compelling to their participants, but his analysis did not consider where that passion came from; he did not consider closely enough the personal-level ramifications of narratives of power and collective selfhood or the effects of these narratives within movements." Moon, Dawne. 2012. "Who Am I and Who Are We? Conflicting Narratives of Collective Selfhood in Stigmatized Groups." *American Journal of Sociology* 117(5): 1336–79; Melucci, Alberto. 1985. "The Symbolic Challenge of Contemporary Movements." *Social Research* 52:789–816.

these [inmates'] stories." She continues, "It's extremely powerful and gives us...a reason to fight for abolition and to know change is possible" (Snow and Benford 1988, pg. 199; Polletta 1998).[232] When Harriet David, who has been with the abolitionist organization for decades, heard Page's answer, she added that these stories' power is in their "human quality;" their ability to inspire people more than "any policy or argument or slogan or stat can."[233]

This 'human quality' is what Moon, in her research on the Civil Judaism movement, categorizes as "humanistic dialogue," (2012, 1362).[234] While Moon uses personal narratives and dialogue in line with identity politics where a group creates stories for internal stability and protection, abolitionist respondents differ believing that successful, long-term movements must have "broad," more external narratives that allow different individuals to view them as "connecting to their own selves."[235] As the section on "Abolitionists and Frame Consistency" showed, the target audience for

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[232] Beth Page, (pseudonym), interview by author, e-mail communication, 23 October 2016; Polletta, Francesca. 1998. "'It Was like a Fever...' Narrative and Identity in Social Protest." *Social Problems* 45(2): 137–59; Snow, David A. and Robert Benford. 1988. "Ideology, Frame Resonance, and Participant Mobilization." International Social Movement Research 1: 197–217.

[233] Harriet David (pseudonym), interview by author, e-mail communication, 14 August 2015 and 21 September 2016.

[234] Moon, Dawne. 2012. "Who Am I and Who Are We? Conflicting Narratives of Collective Selfhood in Stigmatized Groups." *American Journal of Sociology* 117(5): 1336–79.

[235] Zach Henton, (pseudonym), interview by author, e-mail communication, 26 March 2016.

abolitionist narratives is broad and varied with a goal of recruiting a large grassroots base needed for larger systemic change. Where reformists diverge, and are able to have more stable and consistent framing, is through using a smaller and more demographically-limited target audience (specific policy makers and beneficiaries). Moreover, reformists' framing mechanisms appeal less to emotions (e.g., humanistic narratives and personal testimonials) and more to the work of specific organizational programs and the metrics that showcase and support that work.

Reformists and Frame Consistency

The Power of Success and Stability

While abolitionist respondents were starting broad and then fitting frame mechanisms to diverse groups of people with the goal of recruiting to a larger, anti-systemic vision, reformist respondents described their creation of frames with specific programs in mind that fit a specific demographic and for specific policymakers to fund that specific program that fit that specific demographic. The frames moderate prison reformists put out reflect this goal of appearing credible to certain potential recipients, funders, or supporters. While resource mobilization theory does not lay out the ways that disparities between recipients and advocates are resolved, reformist respondents provided consistent and stable organizational frames that demonstrate why prospective

and existing beneficiaries, voters, and policymaking supporters should believe their words (Lawston 2010: 99).[236] The advocacy frame (we put our constituents first and listen to their needs) and the consistency frame (we are a stable and grounded organization) allow prison reformist respondents to demonstrate that they are able to back up what they say with regularly funded and successful organizational programming. As Jim Sanders explains:

> The center of our work is our programming for our beneficiaries and we want policymakers and funders to see the success of that. We do programming around education, housing, drug rehabilitation, on and on but across all of those we put out one consistent message: our beneficiaries are at the heart of what we do, we do all we can to make a better society for them and their families, and here are the programs that do this.[237]

Liza Davis adds, "We tailor our programs to our beneficiaries and we highlight this specificity and these programmatic successes when targeting certain policymakers and funders."[238] As one prison reformist staff member explains:

> We communicate our credibility and consistency through our stats, our empirics. We tell people and potential clients and funders, 'It's not this change down the line. It's not a big systemic shift we're waiting for, to be able to bring results.' We're helping clients now and they know this and we make sure others know the success of our work. How many jobs we connect people with, how many graduates of our programs, and so on. We have shown the success of our organization and that we're experts who will continue doing so and our organizational frames center around this.[239]

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[236] Lawston, Jodie. 2010. *Sisters Outside: Radical Activists Working for Women Prisoners*. New York: SUNY Press.

[237] Jim Sanders, (pseudonym), interview by author, e-mail communication, 11 October 2016.

[238] Liza Davis, (pseudonym), interview by author, e-mail communication, 12 October 2016.

The 'Look at our Success' frame (we are trustworthy/credible because we help you directly) and governmental demands on funding require (in the minds of reformists) that reformists emphasize statistical evaluation and program research that centers around the organization's programmatic success and the consistency and stability upon which they ground these organization's efforts.[240]

The Consistency/Stability Frame

The consistency/stability frame centers around the argument that prison reformist organizations are foremost stable and grounded organizations. A key part of

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[239] Stan Davis, (pseudonym), interview by author, e-mail communication, 12 October 2016.

[240] Moseby categorizes this trend in U.S. non-profits as part of an "advanced liberal governmentality, "which "increasingly relies on the procurement of credible knowledge and expertise in the name of a heighten reflexive state" (2012: 122). Grundy and Smith take this further arguing that policy-making emphasizing expertise and evidence-based practices has been "explicitly formulated as a dominant rationale…across an expanded array of policy fields and within non-governmental organizations. Policy discussion is increasingly informed by what is seen as a more rational appraisal of evidence generated from selected academic and policy research, statistics evaluations, and pilot projects" (2007: 297). For more see, Dean, Mitchell. 1999. *Governmentality: Power and Rule in Modern Society.* London; Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications; Rose, Nikolas. 1993. "Government, Authority and Expertise in Advanced Liberalism." *Economy and Society* 22: 283-299; Grundy, John and Miriam Smith. 2007. "Activist Knowledges in Queer Politics." *Economy and Society*: 294-317, 295.

communicating this stability occurs in choosing frames that are not as divisive or "political" as those of abolitionists. In order for reformists to emphasize statistical data and specific program successes as described above, prison reformists saw the need to have frames that:

1. Are perceived as "less controversial"[241], thus reframing imprisonment in ways that "resonate" with policymakers unfamiliar with the lived experience of incarceration, and
2. Focused on more "realistic" goals that are "winnable," or at least likely to result in "more guaranteed successes in the short-term."[242]

McConnell expanded upon this logic: "We need to frame our work around pragmatic and realistic goals since we're dealing with policymakers and funders who do not want us being 'too political' and with beneficiaries who just want our programs to be successful.[243]

McConnell went on to give a salient example:

> Our frames surrounding the War on Drugs show what I mean. We don't just jump all in on the radical frame that all drugs should be legalized. Instead we emphasize the need for equal sentencing between crack and cocaine and most importantly the need for better rehabilitation and mental health programming outside of prisons, such as the work we do, given the

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[241] Tom Smith, (pseudonym), interview by author, e-mail communication, 19 February 2017.

[242] Nancy Simpson, (pseudonym), interview by author, e-mail communication, 23 October 2016.

[243] Kate McConnell (pseudonym), interview by author, e-mail communication, 30 November 2016.

> effects incarceration has on physical and mental health problems, like addictions, especially for minority populations.[244]

Reformists found framing programs around mental health and drug addiction are less viewed as "political" and more easily related to their direct service programming. When asked what has changed today, McConnell emphasized that "drug addiction is now so widely interpreted as a disabling addiction, as a mental health illness, that it's not controversial to address through our frames and programming."

In contrast to radical prison abolitionist respondents, prison reformist respondents did not see the need for back-up frames and found their "less controversial" and more easily "winnable" frames initially well-received. Reformists credit the credibility of their frames to their organizational work creating programmatic successes and having the metrics to back that up and promote their work, thus legitimating their role as professional experts to be trusted. An emphasis on past program successes and statistics to reinforce them can create collective energy going forward, as Summers-Effler found "…the ability to bridge frames of past success to potential" advocacy work is also "central for creating hope" in burgeoning organizations. "Once created, feelings of anticipation and hope, when supported with regular interaction ritual, become a feedback loop of high emotional energy" (2002, 54).[245] This

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[244] In this landscape, increases in funding to state and community healthcare programs are seen as alternatives to the continued criminalization and incarceration of addiction. An increasing amount of literature has shown the harmful consequences of incarceration for worsening existing and creating new mental and physical health problems (Baćak and Wildeman 2015; Schnittker, Massoglia, and Uggen 2012; Sugie and Turney 2017), as well as the extent to which incarceration worsens existing minority health inequalities (Pearlin 1989; Pearlin et al. 1981; Thoits 2010).

consistency not only serves to bolster the collective action of respondents (affirms the meaning in what they do), but also gives them credibility for their advocacy work (we are stable so we are credible and get results). The empirical credibility and the credibility of moderate prison reformists as frame articulators rests on this presentation of professional expertise and experience.

Reformists, Empirical Credibility, and Credibility of Frame Articulators

"We are Professionals"[246]

While abolitionists prioritized lay experience and the personal narratives of inmates and those formerly incarcerated to frame their cause, reformists found emphasizing the professional expertise of their staff was of the utmost importance for giving their organization the credibility to keep adherents, beneficiaries, or funders/supporters involved or invested in the organization. While abolitionists associate traditional non-profit work with mainstream politics[247] and that often more

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[245] Summers-Effler, Erika. 2002. "The Micro Potential for Social Change: Emotion, Consciousness, and Social Movement Formation." *Sociological Theory* 20 (1): 54. For more on this feedback loop of high emotional energy, see Chapter 3 of this dissertation.

[246] Tom Smith, (pseudonym), interview by author, e-mail communication, 19 February 2017.

radical ideas are stigmatized in the non-profit world (Nelson 2013; Moseby 2012),[248] reformists find their respective expertise and evidence-based policy making fits and thrives within this arena.

Benford and Snow have argued that the more credible a speaker is (the higher status or expertise they are viewed as having) the more convincing they and their frames are: "variables such as status and knowledge about the issue in question have been found to be associated with persuasiveness" (2000, 600-621, c.f. Lawston 2010: 20).[249] The increasing professionalization of advocacy work has been covered in depth by the political scientists John Grundy and Miriam Smith and more recently by sociologist Kevin Moseby. As prison reformists already view themselves as professionals, increased professionalization for their work and their organizations has been a "welcomed trend"[250] compared to abolitionists who meet this same

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[247] Abolitionists associate "traditional non-profit work" with an emphasis on "beneficiaries," hierarchal decision-making, and state funded social welfare programing, which require the non-profit actively seek the support of the Democratic and/or Republican parties. For more, see Chapter 2 of this dissertation.

[248] Nelson, Alondra. 2013. *Body and Soul: The Black Panther Party and the Fight Against Medical Discrimination*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press; Moseby, Kevin M. (2012). Changing the color of HIV/AIDS prevention: black community activism, U.S. Public Health, and the biopolitics of race, sexuality and citizenship. *UC San Diego*. ProQuest ID: Moseby_ucsd_0033D_12884. Merritt ID: ark:/20775/bb84655316. Retrieved from https://escholarship.org/uc/item/22q0n54c.

[249] Benford, Robert D. and David A. Snow. 2000. "Framing Processes and Social Movements: An Overview and Assessment." *Annual Review of Sociology* 26: 611–39; Lawston, Jodie. 2010. *Sisters Outside: Radical Activists Working for Women Prisoners*. New York: SUNY Press.

professionalization with resistance, viewing it as "hegemonic"[251] and an affront to activist community-based knowledge terrains (Nielson 2013; Moseby 2012). Reformists not only welcomed this professionalization and upholding of their professional expertise, but viewed their intellectual and professional elite status as contributing to their "thriving" community and instilling confidence in their work. Liza Davis explains:

> We have a thriving community of scholars and advocates here and we put that fact at the forefront of our work. People know that we're fighting hard…they see the results, the lessening of recidivism for our beneficiaries, the increase in social programs. We come from different fields…law, politics, academia, but we let it be known to our beneficiaries that our training, our past has brought us here to fight for you.[252]

Reformist Stan Davis added, "Our clients trust us and know that we bring some of the best minds together to propose the most effective programming to policy makers and funders."[253]

These findings are consistent with Schurman and Munro's (2010) research around the "lifeworlds" of corporate scientists and environmental anti-GMO (genetically modified organism) movement activists (xvii).[254] These activist lifeworlds ("stock[s] of

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[250] Jim Sanders (pseudonym), interview by author, e-mail communication, 5 December 2016.

[251] Nancy Simpson, (pseudonym), interview by author, e-mail communication, 23 October 2016.

[252] Liza Davis, (pseudonym), interview by author, e-mail communication, 12 October 2016.

[253] Stan Davis, (pseudonym), interview by author, e-mail communication, 12 October 2016.

[254] Schurman, Rachel and William A. Munro. 2010. *Fighting for the Future of Food: Activists versus Agribusiness in the Struggle over Biotechnology*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

culturally transmitted background knowledge that people bring to a situation") include not just actors' "shared mental and moral worlds" but also their "social circles and intellectual communities" (2010, xvi). The study of lifeworlds and intellectual communities is particularly relevant for the prison reformists interviewed given they joined, not because of a personal connection to prisons such as having been formally incarcerated or having a family member or friend who has been (as in the case of many of the prison abolitionists interviewed), but because of a moral shock that inspired their concern. Given a lack of personal experience with the prison industrial complex, there was a need for prison reformists to develop an intellectual construction, create new discourses of critique, and engage in acts of interpretation to communicate to others why prisons are bad as opposed to more of a grounding in personal experience and personal testimonies. Similar to this Schurman and Munro's findings, this dissertation found that the scientific and "insider" backgrounds of prison reformists favored a particular style of activism that emphasized a small internal cadre, or a "critical community," engaged in "thinking work" and emphasizing "face-to-face interactions" (2010, 53), or as reformist Tom Smith coined it: "we're a community of lawyers, academics, policy wonks, and non-profit leaders putting our minds together to get work done."[255]

As the prison reformist staff member Kate McConnell, who has a Capitol Hill

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[255] Tom Smith, (pseudonym), interview by author, e-mail communication, 19 February 2017; Schurman, Rachel and William A. Munro. 2010. *Fighting for the Future of Food: Activists versus Agribusiness in the Struggle over Biotechnology*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

lobbying background, stated, “I know the game. I’ve been at this a long time. I know my record speaks for itself.”[256] Through extensive biographies on the organization’s website with listings of publications, degrees received, and positions held as well as an attached CV, there is a thorough emphasis and promotion of the expertise that McConnel describes.

Moreover, building further on Schurman and Munro’s work, the prison reformists interviewed in this dissertation were comprised of a group with normative sensibilities, driven by ethical commitments and moral outrage.[257] The “insider,” “thinking,” and “scientific” work of prison reformist advocates was low-risk, prioritized professional expertise and hard evidence (data and statistics), and disregarded a diversity of tactics advocacy approach in favor of lobbying certain politicians (prioritizing frames targeting certain policy-makers than the more public actions and broader frames of prison abolitionist respondents). The self-described moral and ethical obligatory response by prison reformists is “natural” and “automatic”[258] and impedes what actions social movements can and will take. As Schurman and Munro explain, these responses can “seriously limit the worlds that actors can imagine,” which is reflective in the narrow and specific breadth of frames used by prison reformist respondents. Reformist

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[256] Kate McConnell (pseudonym), interview by author, e-mail communication, 30 November 2016.

[257] These normative sensitivities are discussed further in Chapter 3 of this dissertation.

[258] Terms used by prison reformists in describing how a moral shock propelled them into prison reform work. Liza Davis, Stan Davis, and Jim Sanders interviews.

respondents can thus “constrain the kinds of strategies they are willing to adopt,” leading actors to engage in "counterproductive and yet entirely sensible" movement strategies (191).[259]

Though prison reformist respondents recognized the burnout and limited gains associated with their strategy centering around an electoral cycle and lobbying approach, they emphasized the importance of framing their professional expertise and vast technical experience with such efforts as chief reasons why reformists should be seen as credible. This comparatively greater emphasis on “professional expertise” to the public by reformists compared to abolitionists may stem from these differences in background (reformist respondents had more “professional experience” in fields outside of advocacy as well as more professional degrees and full-time paid advocacy positions), while abolitionists had more “movement” experience (with different direct action campaigns) with many volunteering their time and relying on non-advocacy jobs as their main source of income. The corresponding professional community, as well as the organizational culture that reformists speak of, further reinforces this distinction.

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[259] Chapter 2 of this dissertation discusses such strategies, specifically the reliance on an electoral cycle strategy which reformists cited as a chief reason for their burnout as advocates. Schurman, Rachel and William A. Munro. 2010. *Fighting for the Future of Food: Activists versus Agribusiness in the Struggle over Biotechnology*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

Conclusion

Further Research Needed into Frames and Counter-frames on the *Same Side* of a Struggle

To bridge political, cultural, and social differences among potential adherents and supporters, both abolitionist and reformist respondents used diverse framing mechanisms to maintain credibility and consistency. However, prison abolitionists respondents used larger organizational and ideological frames emphasizing universal values, the power of narratives and personal stories, and community/cross-movement connections ('we're all in this together') to recruit new members. A broad human rights, revolutionary framework allowed prison abolitionists to frame their work as not only liberating prisoners, but liberating everyone. Such a framework also expands the critique of prisons to not only affecting prisoners, but also the bodies and decisions of everyone under the state (Foucault 1995). Thus, these human rights frames serve to encourage SMO members and the wider public to include criminals and the formerly incarcerated in advocacy and the struggle for abolition. Prison abolitionist respondents were able to further frame the need to decriminalize criminals by basing their work on revolutionary theories and platforms that link prisons, and the values and support surrounding the justification of prisons, as fundamental to 'White Supremacist Capitalist Imperialist Heteropatriarchy,' transforming movement participants to work beyond efforts to simply reform mass incarceration to broader demands for its abolition (Mauer 1999; Wacquant 2002; Davis 2005; Critical Resistance 2015b: 1).

Conversely**,** prison reformist respondents engaged in frames that focused on

specifics and metrics, such as facts and relatable policy brief findings. For them, the way to counter the 'violent prisoner' image is not to condemn the violence of the system, but to point out rarely discussed facts, such as how the vast majority of California prisoners are incarcerated for non-violent crimes (e.g., drug use, Alexander 2010). In this way, prison reformist respondents used a different set of more narrow frames emphasizing their organizational stability, specific programmatic metrics and successes, and professional experience and expertise to bridge the divide between their non-profit staff and policymakers and beneficiaries.

What was missing from my data was sufficient evidence of an active adversarial dialog and frame-counterframe competition between prison abolitionist and prison reformist organizations.[260] An active framing and counter-framing dialog could signal a correlation in time and a possible causal connection if, for example, a prison reform organization made a tactical move (such as a counter-frame) shortly after a radical abolition organization made a tactical move. Further research into counter-frames from organizations on the "same side" of a struggle (such as for progressive criminal justice reform) is needed to see if such dialog occurs and, if possibly over time, the competition and boundary work sharpens the distinctions between the groups' approaches. This would significantly add to sociological literature around counter-framing. In much of social movement literature, framing and counter-framing is done by opponents or

[260] By counter-frame, I mean to "rebut, undermine, or neutralize a person's or group's myths, versions of reality, or interpretive framework" (Benford 1987, pg. 75). Benford, Robert D. 1987. "Framing Activity, Meaning, and Social Movement Participation: The Nuclear Disarmament Movement." Unpublished Dissertation. University of Texas-Austin.

counter-movements.[261] However, there is further work needed around a lack of literature on framing and counter-framing done by more radical vs. less radical groups on the same side, such as frames used from a moderate reform organization and a radical abolitionist organization. Some of my data showed instances of frame disputes, such as prison abolitionist organizations framing their work in opposition to “hierarchal" trends in criminal justice reform and criminal justice reformist organizations with explicit hopes to appeal to a diverse Bay Area audience. Prison reformists, on the other hand, commented on a failure of Bay Area abolitionist and radical Leftist organizations to

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[261] Evans (1997) looked at the back and forth framing of the pro- and anti-abortion rights movements over time.[261] Rohlinger (2002) examined the framing struggle between the pro-choice National Organization for Women and the anti-choice Concerned Women for America.[261] Where Rohlinger found direct framing debates between opponents, Miceli (2005) found social movement opposing Gay rights groups and Christian Right groups remaining in separate frame arenas, where “Gay rights groups engage in framing strategies centered firmly in the arena of identity politics, while Christian Right organizations generally implement framing strategies situated within the context of morality politics.” Finally, Oselin and Corrigall-Brown (2010) examined the struggle over frame dominance between anti- and pro-U.S. invasion into Iraq protest groups, with a call for further research into SMOs’ efforts to appeal to certain “profiles of audience members” and the “localized contexts” in which they operate. Evans, John H. 1997. "Multi-Organizational Fields and Social Movement Organization Frame Content: The Religious Pro-Choice Movement." *Sociological Inquiry* 67 (4), Fall: 451–69; Rohlinger, Deana A. 2002. "Framing the Abortion Debate: Organizational Resources, Media Strategies, and Movement- Countermovement Dynamics." *Sociological Quarterly* 43(4): 479–507; Miceli, Melinda S. 2005. "Morality Politics Vs. Identity Politics: Framing Processes and Competition Among Christian Right and Gay Social Movement Organizations." *Sociological Forum* 20(4), December: 589–612; Oselin, Sharon S., and Catherine Corrigall-Brown. 2010. "A Battle For Authenticity: An Examination Of The Constraints On Anti-Iraq War And Pro-Invasion Tactics." *Mobilization: An International Journal* 15(4), December: 511–33.

reach a larger audience due to in-fighting and an "alphabet soup"[262] of organizations, with too many competing for a limited base and with almost identical organizational activity and tactics.[263] Liza Davis, a prison reformist, emphasized, in response to perceived abolitionist in-fighting, that it is important to look for commonality and not reinvent the wheel: "Reformist[s]…don't want to throw out the whole criminal-justice system. Our core values and the ones the system is built on can change."[264] Dave Johnson adds: "There's more agreement on our side. We're swaying the Democrats; they're coming to the side of closing private prisons, better rights for inmates, and on and on."[265]

Inversely, abolitionists when challenged on the potential to win the Democratic Party (to more prison reforms) repeat the same critique: "The Republicans are evil, but the Democrats are the most effective evil. You can never trust the Dems [Democrats]. We still work with reformists, but we see the vast limitations of this (emphasis provided

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[262] A term used in a derogatory nature to mock the large number of Leftist anti-capitalist, abolitionist organizations in the Bay Area: by acronym, to name a few, ISO (International Socialist Organization), ANSWER (Act Now to Stop War and End Racism), PSL (Party for Socialism and Liberation), DSA (Democratic Socialists of America), SA (Socialist Alternative), WWP (Workers World Party), and FSP (Freedom Socialist Party).

[263] Stan Davis, (pseudonym), interview by author, e-mail communication, 12 October 2016.

[264] Liza Davis, (pseudonym), interview by author, e-mail communication, 12 October 2016.

[265] Dave Johnson (pseudonym), interview by author, e-mail communication, 9 December 2016.

by responder)."[266] This abolitionist counter-frame did preclude working with some reformist organizations who chose to align too strongly with the Democrats or simply "in reaction to the state" (as the Samara describes it) as opposed to an "alternative." [267] This includes those who emphasize the need for prisons and those who philosophically or theoretically agree with abolition but do not see abolition as possible or worth fighting for. As the prison reformist Johnson explains: "I understand abolition, I really do, and I want it. I just don't think it's realistic to fight for it."[268]

Though there were the above instances of abolitionists and reformists responding to each other's' critiques, a clear frame-counterframe dialog did not sync up and reflect a correlation in time. While my data illustrates that the differences in the framing efforts of abolitionist and reformist organizations can be explained on the basis of their differing collective and individual advocate identities and experiences as well as their differing strategic priorities and organizational structures, there is the alternative scenario (possibly seen with a larger number of organizations studied or over a longer study time period) where a competition between abolitionists and reformists influences their respective frames.

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[266] Byron Nielson, (pseudonym), interview by author, e-mail communication, 23 October 2016.

[267] 'Should we work with the Democrats?' is emblematic of a larger debate, covered more extensively in Chapter 2 of this dissertation. Samara Ahmad, (pseudonym), interview by author, e-mail communication, 23 October 2016.

[268] Dave Johnson (pseudonym), interview by author, e-mail communication, 9 December 2016.

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Chapter 5

Conclusion: Solidarity, Recruitment, and Retention in Prison Reform and Abolition Advocacy

But simply punishing the broken—walking away from them or hiding them from sight—only ensures that they remain broken and we do, too. There is no wholeness outside of our reciprocal humanity.

Bryan Stevenson[269]

Implications for Strategy, Identity, and Framing

STRATEGY AND ORGANIZATION: INTERNAL CONFLICTS AND REPRESENTATIONS OF TIME HORIZONS

Using a contemporary comparison between the advocacy efforts of moderate prison reformists and radical prison abolitionists as a base, this dissertation contributes significantly to social movement literature surrounding efforts to maintain strategy and organization. First, rather than their strategic and organizational identity being set in stone, prison reformists and abolitionists are engaged in a continual internal debate about where they fit both on the abolitionist-prison reform spectrum and the politically radical-moderate spectrum. This complicates much of the radicalism versus reformism

[269] Stevenson, Bryan. 2014. *Just Mercy*. Random House Publishing Group: pg. 290.

comparisons found in social movement literature, where the sharp division between the two sides is often seen as a given, and there is a lack of examination into activists' active interest in collaboration with the other side and with how they fit on the radical versus reformist continuum. As respondents explained, the scope and complexity of mass incarceration, such as the need to convince different members of the public to care about individuals locked away, lead to intense organizational arguments over how much to learn from and reach out to the other side. Each side made efforts to emphasize that at "the end of the day,"[270] or externally, their organization maintains their political leaning and their respective reformist or abolitionist end goal. However, the internal conflicts that activists talked about show that, to varying degrees, there is potential for greater collaboration between each sides' respective movement organizations.

Abolitionist respondents consistently underlined their grassroots movement status to separate themselves from the Democratic Party and "apolitical" moderate reform organizations who they feared as roadblocks to abolition. When asked about collaborative efforts, abolitionists described wanting to work further on direct service provision efforts with other local organizations, but argued against partnering with moderate prison reform organizations for fears of being "coopted," pushed to do positive reforms (that ultimately strengthen the prison-industrial complex),[271] or straying from the need for full abolition, and thus betraying their incarcerated loved ones. As discussed in

[270] As one respondent put it.

[271] As detailed in Chapter 1 of this dissertation.

the previous three body chapters of this dissertation, for abolitionists their continued motivation for their activist work is tied to their personal involvement to incarceration, either directly as a former inmate (who continues to have ties to currently incarcerated friends) or having a friend or family member incarcerated or formerly incarcerated. In this way, not fighting for the full abolition of their loved ones, and even partnering with Democrats or other organizations who do not stand by this abolitionism, is viewed as betraying not only the movement as a whole, but these specific personal connections.

Conversely, for a large majority of prison reformist respondents, their initial and continued motivation for their activist work is tied to a moral shock to first hearing about the state of mass incarceration, but not specific inmates that the respondents had intimate ties to. Moreover, while prison reformist respondents often discussed an interest in greater partnership with abolitionists, they signaled the need to avoid appearing "too radical" or "extreme" in their work to the public, and the accompanying fear and stigma of engaging in radical political activities. Prison reformist respondents were overall divided on their opinions on abolition and radicalism with some distancing themselves from the ideology (for fear of being seen as too 'activist-y' by fellow moderate organizations) and others seeking further ties with abolitionist groups in order to not miss out on prospective allies for prison reform. Thus, while reformists showed a more flexible decision-making process for their work by often considering borrowing from and engaging further with abolitionists, abolitionist interviews emphasized a lack of choice: I *have* to be a radical abolitionist, and I *cannot* waver from this line.[272] The

[272] Emphasis occurred in multiple abolitionist interviews.

abolitionist personal ties grounding this choice, compared to the reformist more flexible concerns for public and peer sentiments, underscore this distinction.

By highlighting the specific motivations for becoming and remaining a radical abolitionist or a moderate reformist, this research complicates and adds additional reasoning to the larger division between reformists and radicals in social movement literature. Knowing that prison advocates on both sides have these debates within their organizations and personally about the strengths of the other side's work can lead to opportunities for skill and knowledge sharing. Through detailing the specific reasoning in such debates, activists on each side can have a better understanding of where to target their efforts for collaboration and where current blockages to collaboration exist. Extending this research into a longer study, one could see if such sharing and collaboration occurs and can have further implications on coalitional work in the prison advocacy field going forward.

Second, this study adds to research on the effects of activist time horizons and elections on activists' ability to maintain their work. Prison reformist respondents tied their political activity to a year-by-year electoral cycle, with an overwhelming amount of energy being devoted to election years. They then used the odd non-election years to recover. This overwhelming energy led to burnout, requiring respondents to depend on moral convictions to overcome the emotional fatigue associated with a shorter time horizon for activism. The moderate reformist respondents, with less extreme goals, utilized a risky year-by-year strategy that required digging into moral beliefs when they experienced burnout, rather than greater discussions around evaluating inefficiencies or different approaches.

Conversely, prison abolitionist respondents, who may be seen as more 'extreme' in their radical political efforts, focused on a longer activist time horizon, instead of a year-by-year electoral cycle, in order to maintain their energy. Abolitionist respondents found that remaining vigilant during non-election years provided opportunities for success (and further public attention to this success) that was more difficult during the "media circus" surrounding an election year.[273] Though abolitionists may employ short bouts of high-risk activity, they see their deliberate choice to prioritize a longer trajectory for activism, rather than election years and changing political parties, as allowing for a more sustainable application of energy and resources. While both prison reformist and abolitionist respondents are aware of and operate during an electoral cycle, reformists chose to tie their physical and emotional energy to the "uncertainty and gruel" of electoral efforts, with abolitionists describing approaches that were more conservative in strategy.[274] This has great implications on an organization's and individual activist's ability to maintain such energy and efforts which will be discussed later in the section on "Further Areas for Research."

IDENTITY INFORMED CHOICES

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[273] Byron Nielson (pseudonym), abolitionist, interview by author, e-mail communication, 23 October 2016.

[274] Liza Davis, (pseudonym), reformist, interview by author, e-mail communication, 12 October 2016.

Although “moral shocks” lead prison reformist respondents to identify as advocates and seek out an advocacy group, and personal ties to incarceration lead abolitionists to their identity, respondents from both sides depended on their newfound advocate identity as a substitute to undesirable identities, such as “inmate,” “ignorant,” or “apolitical.” These previously unwanted identities and the negative emotions that accompanied them encouraged individuals to search for a collective identity that fit their new calling. Activists maintained this collective identity through regular contact with each other within the organization, thus strengthening their group solidarity. While abolitionists channeled these feelings of solidarity into broader public mobilizations and coalitional work with diverse national and global grassroots movements, prison reformists grew solidarity through person-to-person exchanges with non-activist beneficiaries, small working groups, and “intimate interactions” with fellow criminal justice reformers. The regular displays of solidarity described by both moderate prison reformists and radical prison abolitionists in their working groups and throughout their larger organization strengthened the collective identity of the group providing further organizational stability.

FRAMING EFFORTS FOR CREDIBILITY

The differences in how moderate prison reformists and radical prison abolitionists use framing contributes to larger differences between their respective strategic and organizational needs. Reformists used the solidarity and energetic emotions described

in the section above to fuel framing efforts built on largely individual expertise given their professional backgrounds that were created before their non-profit work. Their narrower frames emphasizing precise metrics were used to give this professional expertise credibility. These frames further served to convince non-activist policymakers and beneficiaries to trust activists and believe that their internal organization was stable. Reformists prefer such frames given a narrower emphasis on short-term reforms and a less politically charged organizational strategy.

While reformists utilized precise, narrow, consistent, and stable framing practices, abolitionist framing efforts need to match a long-term ideology of abolition and leftist anti-capitalism with potential members who fit across a diverse political spectrum and different issues and movements. This leads to a segmentation of frames, rather than more consistent framing efforts, and requires careful attention to when and where to use abolitionism and how to frame it depending on the individual or potential partner organization. Thus, abolitionist frames reflect their more "movement" background and more personal experience with movement work, i.e., as a former inmate or family member of an inmate. There is an understanding that their framing needs to speak to each individual given each individual's different ties and backgrounds. Moreover, abolitionists require more flexible frames given their cross-movement work and efforts to collaborate with different types of people in different kinds of movements.

Further Areas for Research

RETENTION CONCERNS

While none of the respondents left their respective prison advocacy organizations during the time of these interviews (2015-2016), this dissertation shows that many respondents from both sides often discussed the emotional, mental, and physical energy that is exerted in their advocacy work and the emotional, mental, and physical burn-out that occurs or that the respondent is concerned will soon occur. While negative emotional energy, such as feelings of anger and shame over the current prison system, helped bring respondents to advocacy and fueled their advocacy work, these same negative emotions can also lead to burnout for social movements and organizations.[275] This is especially concerning for abolitionists who used more charged emotions, such as rage and disgust, to describe their perspective on mass incarceration and the already present exhaustion that they experience trying to communicate those emotions to family and friends. Given several abolitionists reminded me that fighting for the long-term trajectory of abolition may never occur in their lifetime, how can activists continue to counteract the burnout and exhaustion that they experience? The question of advocates' ability to maintain their respective efforts long-term is especially important in a field like U.S. prison advocacy where the institution that activists are challenging is as old as the country itself.

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[275] Summers-Effler, Erika. 2002. "The Micro Potential for Social Change: Emotion, Consciousness, and Social Movement Formation." *Sociological Theory* 20(1): 41–60.

SWITCHING SIDES: THE MODERATION OF RADICALS AND/OR THE RADICALIZATION OF MODERATES

Not only is there the potential for reformist and abolitionist activists to leave their work all together, but also to leave their respective side for the other. The moderation of abolitionists or the radicalization of moderates could lead to a flow of activists and presents an opportunity for recruitment, especially for abolitionists who view the progression of society and the arc of history as leading to abolition. In abolitionists' minds, the most readily converted to their cause would be those who are already active in prison advocacy, but who have thus far stopped short of abolitionism. Different reformist respondents explained the increasing appeal of abolitionism given the limitations and current pushbacks by the state to reforms. A longer study could show if this leads to reformists joining abolitionist organizations, and also if abolitionists respond to the same pushbacks by abandoning their cause. Though this dissertation focused on prison reform and criminal justice more broadly, questions of the moderation of radicals or the radicalization of moderate advocates translates into other current social movements. This is especially true for similar movements challenging entrenched social institutions, such as the push pull between radical and more moderate environmentalists challenging the oil and gas industry.

The Future of Prison Reform Work?

A Major Landscape Shifting

Since concluding formal interviews with respondents in 2016, there have been significant legislative and policy changes around sentencing laws within this almost past half-decade with hopes that the prison population will continue to lessen.[276] These changes have large implications for prison reform advocates' strategic choices on where, when, and how they focus their efforts. Increasing drug legalization, the subsequent criminal justice reforms and proposals, and growing public sympathy to inmates had already begun at the start of this study. While finishing the writing of this dissertation, I have continued to have informal conservations with advocates about where they see prison reform heading. Both sides have increasingly discussed the end of the Drug War and its subsequent policy changes as a key turning point for mobilizing mass public support.

Drawing on examples primarily from pro-life/pro-choice movements, Meyer and Staggenborg (1996) found that both movements and their countermovements, or opposing sides, look to exploit major landscape shifts, with the authors expecting "movement activists on all sides of an issue" to view the same shifts as "critical" (1638). Prison reformists and abolitionists represent two movements on similar sides of an issue (progressive prison reform) but opposing in their ultimate goals. With increasing public opinion supporting legalization and rescindment of state penalties for drug use, will prison abolitionists and reformists respond to exploit this shift? What will the lessening of sentencing laws and the decrease in prison population mean going forward

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[276] "U.S. incarceration rate is at its lowest in 20 years." Pew Research Center, 26 Oct. 2019, www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/05/02/americas-incarceration-rate-is-at-a-two-decade-low.

in a new decade of U.S. criminal justice policy? Advocates from both sides must decide how much energy they want to put into these changes and how the prison advocacy field will respond to this current historical moment.

FROM 2020 ON: WHO IS LEFT BEHIND WHEN THE POWERFUL ARE BEHIND REFORMS

Four years ago, Democratic presential nominee Hilary Clinton, who once lobbied for a 1994 'tough on crime' bill increasing the number of prisons and harsher sentencing laws, now called for an end to an "era of mass incarceration."[277] A few months after her statement, Republican presential nominee Donald Trump argued for the need to get "tougher" on crime.[278] Today, President Trump has opened a criminal justice forum triumphing his bipartisan legislation, which eased minimum sentences for nonviolent drug offenders, and calling for further criminal justice reform.[279] This bipartisan legislation came from a long list of proposals from both political sides ranging from

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[277] "Hillary Clinton Calls for an End to 'Mass Incarceration'." Time, 29 April 2015, time.com/3839892/hillary-clinton-calls-for-an-end-to-mass-incarceration.

[278] "Trump on criminal justice: 'We have to get a lot tougher'." MSNBC.com, 20 August. 2015, www.msnbc.com/morning-joe/watch/trump-on-criminal-justice-reform-509292611802.

[279] Bernstein, Sharon. "Factbox: Trump, Democrats at South Carolina forum on criminal justice reforms." U.S, 26 Oct. 2019, www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-election-criminal-justice/trump-democrats-to-address-criminal-justice-reforms-at-south-carolina-forum-idUSKBN1X4167.

moderate reform to abolition:

> People who do not need to be in prison should be released by giving them shorter sentences, monitoring them at home or simply leaving them alone, advocates said. Since the prison system is full of people with mental illness and addiction, treatment was a smarter option than incarceration, they said. Some called for changes at the front end, limiting the number of criminal offenses, reducing the power of prosecutors, or beefing up the public defender system and giving defense lawyers more resources to fight cases. Others called for abolishing prisons altogether.
>
> Few of these ideas figure in the new bill. But many families say even modest reform will improve a deeply flawed system. "One day makes a difference because you don't know what that one day can bring about in a person's life," said Stephanie Nodd, who was sentenced to 30 years in prison for her brief participation in a crack cocaine ring.[280]

Following Trump's opening remarks, the 2020 Democratic nominee hopefuls will each present their prison reform plans many revolving around increasing drug legalization and reductions of sentencing.

Matching changing public opinions on mass incarceration, there is a growing political consensus between key actors in the two major parties and leading national prison reform groups (both politically liberal and conservative) as they compete and praise their own side's role in recent criminal justice reforms. While lawmakers tout sentencing changes, many inmates are being retroactively or otherwise left out of such changes. With California and the overall national prison population decreasing, Arkansas, Kentucky, West Virginia, and Oklahoma are still incarcerating individuals at record levels and incarceration disparities based on race and socio-economic level

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[280] "Just How Much of an Overhaul Is This Overhaul of the Nation's Criminal Justice System?" N. Y. Times, 26 Oct. 2019, www.nytimes.com/2018/11/16/us/prison-reform-bill.html.

continue.[281] As many dissertation activist respondents argued, this work is far from over.

[281] "Are Prison Populations Decreasing? Depends On Where You Look." NPR.org, 14 June 2018, www.npr.org/2018/06/14/619827057/are-prison-populations-decreasing-depends-on-where-you-look.

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