VALUING THE CAUSE: A THEORY OF AUTHENTICITY IN SOCIAL MOVEMENTS*

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ABSTRACT

Scholars of contentious politics expect that social movement organizations (SMOs) are valued according to their ability to craft resonant frames or to enact displays of worthiness. We offer an alternative, relational perspective highlighting the critical role of authenticity in shaping an SMO's perceived value. Unlike frames and intentional displays, calculated efforts to proclaim authenticity often backfire. We distill two orthogonal types: *grassroots (in)authenticity*, based on idealized notions of civil society, and *institutional (in)authenticity*, rooted in cultural-cognitive schemas used to judge fit with established SMO categories. Grassroots authenticity benefits an SMO's fundamental legitimacy, while lacking it entirely (i.e. "astroturfing") severely harms public support. Institutional authenticity increases resources and survival chances, intelligibility to elite observers, and clarity of collective identities; still, lacking this (via hybridity) may assist in recruitment and outreach. We build propositions that elaborate these expectations and argue that authenticity should become a more central concept in social movement research.

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INTRODUCTION

How diverse audiences evaluate social movement organizations (SMOs) and activists is a perennial topic in the study of contentious politics, institutional change, and the legitimization of novel ideas and practices (Edwards and McCarthy, 2004; Gamson, 1976; Rao, Monin, and Durand, 2003; Sine and Lee, 2009). Social movement organizers benefit from positive valuations when seeking to recruit new participants (Heaney and Rojas, 2014), communicate effectively (Babb, 1996; McCammon, 2009), find support from funders (Aksartova, 2003), or transform the dominant operating logics of institutions (Rao, Monin, and Durand, 2003). Social movements target a range of institutions for change (Armstrong and Bernstein, 2008; Van Dyke, Soule, and Taylor, 2004; Walker, Martin, and McCarthy, 2008), and audience judgments of a movement's participants, leaders, and the cause more generally are likely to be consequential in assessing a movement's propensity to be successful in generating change (Amenta, Caren, Chiarello, and Su 2010).

And yet, strikingly, the predominant conceptual frameworks for understanding social movement valuations and their consequences – frame resonance (Babb, 1996; Benford and Snow, 2000; McCammon, 2009; Snow and Benford, 1988) and, to a lesser extent, Charles Tilly's influential notion of collective displays of Worthiness, Unity, Numbers, and Commitment (WUNC) (see Tilly, 1994, 1995, 1999, 2003, 2004) – offer only partial accounts of how these processes unfold. We argue that these accounts are limited because they rely far too heavily upon *direct and intended displays* by social movement actors: a frame is developed by activists and then either resonates or does not; the intention to display a movement's degree of Worthiness, Unity, Numbers, and/or Commitment either makes the movement credible to authorities or does not. In our view, such perspectives do not systematically address the roles of various audiences in judging such displays, nor are they sufficiently relational. These analyses also underestimate the potential for such displays to backfire, resulting in perceptions of inauthenticity, which can be particularly damaging for campaign outcomes and organizational survival.

In this theory-building paper, we argue that valuations of social movement organizations are driven not only by whether their frame resonates or whether their WUNC displays are

effective, but also by *whether audiences – including policymakers, journalists, the general public, and other observers – judge them to be authentic*. Authenticity is a key factor shaping valuations of social movements and other advocacy causes, as others have observed in a variety of cases (see Lee, 2014; Polletta, 1998, 2006; Skocpol and Williamson, 2012; Sobieraj, 2010). Authenticity regards the extent to which practices are taken as “real” due to the perceived sincerity and/or moral commitment of the actor(s) in question (Carroll and Wheaton, 2009; Johnston and Bauman, 2007: 179) or when the evaluators take the actor(s) as “real” in the sense that their practices are aligned with broader cultural-cognitive expectations and categorizations (Glynn and Lounsbury, 2005; Lehman, Kovács, and Carroll, 2014; Zuckerman, 1999).

Critically, one may enjoy perceptions of authenticity even, or perhaps especially, *without intending to appear authentic*. In fact, when an individual or organization takes direct measures to proclaim authenticity, such efforts are likely to backfire (Kovács, Carroll, and Lehman, 2017), because authenticity is meant to appear inherent rather than staged through calculated impression-management. Still, though successful signaling of authenticity makes it appear inherent, authenticity is dynamic and relational, and not an inherent attribute (Luna 2017). Authenticity is expected to be a “by-product” of an actor’s other activities (Elster, 1981). Authentic experiences also provide a feeling of narrative “emplotment” and facilitate deeper engagement (Polletta, 1998, 2006). As Josée Johnston and Shyon Bauman (2007: 179) review, qualities that lend themselves to socially constructed judgments of authenticity by observers include hand-crafting (Bendix 1997), being local and anti-commercial (Grazian 2003), employing rhetorics and practices that are seen as inherent and not calculative or strategic (Kirschenblatt-Gimblett 1998), appearing honest and/or principled (Taylor 1991), addressing new, cutting edge social issues (Jung, King, and Soule 2014), highlighting embodied authenticity that is proximal to the constituency a group claims to represent (Luna 2017), and being distant from institutionalized power (Zukin 2008). Further, evaluators perceive as authentic those who successfully navigate the tensions between conformity and originality (Johnston and Baumann 2007; Peterson 1997).

We develop a theoretical approach that distills two particular types of authenticity that, we propose, affect the processes and outcomes of activist campaigns: *grassroots authenticity* and *institutional authenticity*. Although advocacy causes may attempt to indirectly *signal* each type of authenticity in a variety of ways, these are generally done in a much less direct fashion than a

calculated framing effort or a strategic WUNC display. As stated above, directly proclaiming one's authenticity is likely to generate perceptions of inauthenticity (see Elster, 1981; Kovács, Carroll, and Lehman, 2017). And studies by Caroline W. Lee (2014) and Edward T. Walker (2014) and both underscore the risks associated with participatory processes that seek to strategically produce authentic public participation; doing so runs the risk of generating serious perceptions of inauthenticity. Many additional studies beyond these touch upon other aspects of authenticity in social movements (e.g. DeLuca, Lawson, and Sun, 2012; Skocpol and Williamson, 2012; Sobieraj, 2010; Weber, Heinze, and DeSoucey, 2008).

The first type of authenticity that we examine and theorize here, *grassroots authenticity*, involves valuations made on the basis of movement actors' perceived alignment with idealized notions of civically engaged publics and un-coerced engagement in the public sphere (see Habermas, 1996; Cohen and Arato, 1994). Much more so than in fields of established (and especially commercial) organizations, it is particularly incumbent upon social movement groups to cultivate a socially constructed reputation as "craft" rather than "industrial" actors, motivated by moral principles and ideologies (Keck and Sikkink, 1998), which helps build trust (Hahl 2016). SMOs with grassroots memberships, then, are expected (perhaps unrealistically) to be primarily self-funded and to act as true representatives of marginalized constituencies who are directly impacted by often-underappreciated social issues, motivated by moral principles (Keck and Sikkink, 1998), disconnected from established sources of political power and authority (Boyte, 1980), and participatory rather than professionally-driven (Skocpol, 2003; for an analogous argument, see Fine, 2006). Although there continue to be debates about the relative merits of each of these factors in terms of their empirical prevalence and to what extent each factor is consequential for successful activism (Bob, 2005; Prakash and Gugerty, 2010; Walker and McCarthy, 2010; Walker, McCarthy, and Baumgartner, 2011), there are reasons to believe that perceptions of grassroots authenticity may be powerful as ideals in their own right (e.g. Polletta, 1998; Snow and Moss, 2014). Further, the absence of grassroots authenticity, and/or the use of strategic efforts to stage the appearance of it, may come with penalties for activists and SMOs. Professionalized groups are believed to lose some of the enthusiasm that inspired early activism (Staggenborg, 1988). And, in the extreme case, when an SMO is revealed to be a "front group" or ersatz effort by elites to manufacture the appearance of authentic public support for their interests, public audiences tend to discredit such action significantly (Walker, 2014; Pfau, Haigh, Sims, and Wigley, 2007; Mix and Waldo, 2015).

The second type of authenticity that we examine and theorize here is *institutional authenticity*, in which movement actors are judged as “typical” or “atypical” relative to other movement actors. SMOs that fit the mold of other groups within the same Social Movement Industry (SMI) must differentiate themselves in order to gain public attention, funding, and the like (McCarthy and Zald, 1977; Soule and King, 2008), but are still largely judged by how well they fit into the category of other groups in their shared movement issue domain. Activists and outside publics regularly employ cultural-cognitive background assumptions about the clustering of issue claims, tactics, and selection of protest targets among movement groups (Larson and Lizardo, 2015), and there is some evidence for how this may be consequential (Olzak, 2016; Wang, Piazza, and Soule, 2018). When politicians seek endorsements, when congressional committees are searching for organizations to provide testimony, or when funders convene prototypical representatives of particular interest communities, one would expect that they would favor groups that are clear and obvious representatives of, say, a “civil rights,” “environmental,” or “pro-life” SMO, for example, with implications for organizational survival. Thus, in social movement fields, judgments of institutional authenticity may mean that groups that fall outside existing cultural categories (or especially those who blend or hybridize them) will face the “illegitimacy discount” identified long ago by Ezra W. Zuckerman (1999) and supported by a body of organization-theoretic work in the years since (e.g. Hsu, Hannan, and Koçak, 2009; Leung and Sharkey, 2013; Sharkey, 2014). We build on this approach from organizational theory, but argue that it does not fully capture the effects of hybridity for SMOs.

In what follows, we first describe existing approaches to social movement valuation, highlighting frame resonance and Tilly’s WUNC approach, and noting how authenticity offers a critical source of valuation that extends beyond these intentional displays. We also build on the relational aspect of certification, which focuses on the external authorities. We then unpack our theory of authenticity, contrasting the types: *grassroots* versus *institutional* authenticity. As we discuss, we see these as orthogonal perceptions that may or may not be aligned. We then expand on the characteristics specific to each type and examine how they may be signaled and received by different audiences. Following this, we develop a series of propositions about how each type of authenticity is likely to shape the judgments of particular audiences, including other SMOs, potential activist recruits, policymakers in the state and other institutions, journalists and the media, and general public audiences. We conclude by discussing contributions of the study for theories of social movements, institutions, and political processes more generally.

OVERVIEW OF VALUATION IN SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

Valuation is a general process through which actors develop agreement in their social judgments, and the subjects of such valuation may include nearly any topic or actor – although examples include determinations of the “correct” price of a good or service (Zuckerman, 2012), the quality of a work of art or musical performance (Karpik and Scott, 2010), or the degree of innovativeness of a scientist’s research (Foster, Rzhetsky, and Evans, 2015). Such judgments tend to be mediated by audiences, especially including specialized observers such as professional critics, industry analysts, award panels, or funders (Negro, Koçak, and Hsu, 2010), as well as lay audiences in the mass public, often according to different criteria (Rossman and Schilke, 2014).

A common theme in research on valuation is that actors will work to obtain positive judgments, whether by reorienting practices to match the standards set out by critics (Espeland and Sauder, 2007), creating cultural products that mimic those that have been consecrated as having exceptional quality (Rossman and Schilke, 2014), or engaging in other status-seeking behaviors (Bowers, Greve, and Mitsuhashi, 2017). Yet it is also clear that social judgments of an actor are often driven by processes outside their control, such as stochastic processes of social influence among observers (Salganik, Dodds, and Watts, 2006), status dynamics (Sauder, Lynn, and Podolny, 2012), and shifting public preferences and agendas (Weber, Heinze, and DeSoucey, 2008).

Surprisingly, there has been less attention to similar dynamics when examining social movement actors. We suspect that this holds for a few reasons. First, understanding perceptions of social movement actors and their diverse targets has not been as much of a priority for scholars, relative to questions of political impacts (see Amenta et al., 2010), mobilization processes (e.g. Han, 2014), and, recently, fields (Fligstein and McAdam, 2011, 2012). Framing approaches also continue to be predominant (Snow, 2013), but, as we describe below, come with limitations in understanding valuation. Second, the still dominant approach of utilizing newspaper data on social movement protest events (Earl, Martin, McCarthy, and Soule, 2004) tends to focus attention more on event features than durable features of organizations and networks (but see e.g. Wang and Soule, 2012). And third, as we describe below, there are particular limitations to existing approaches to understanding movement valuations.

This is particularly true for what is arguably the predominant approach to understanding movement valuations: frame resonance. Although resonance can be understood more broadly (McDonnell, Bail, and Tavor, 2017), with respect to social movements the argument has been that certain collective action frames will be more effective in appealing to a targeted audience (McCammon, 2013; Snow and Benford, 1988). Frame resonance captures the alignment between frames and wider cultural signifiers (McCammon, 2013). As such, framing effects are conceptualized as intentional efforts to shape public perceptions on the part of social movement actors (Snow and Benford, 2000). Frame resonance has two sub-components: credibility and salience. Credibility has to do with the frame's consistency, empirical credibility, and the status, expertise, and/or past truthfulness of the individuals or organizations who articulate the frame (ibid.). Salience is more about the audience, and has to do with the centrality of the frame's ideas to (potential) recruits, how commensurable the frame's ideas are with the audience's everyday experiences, and how well the frame fits with broader personal and cultural narratives (ibid.).

A key limitation of a focus on framing is that it emphasizes only those valuations that are part of a movement actor's intended effort to shape public perceptions. As such, it inherently privileges, for instance, an SMO's image of how it hopes to be seen by its observers, although there may be internal conflict of about which particular image the SMO should project (Benford, 1993) and at certain moments there may be more of a "discursive opportunity" for the frame (McCammon, Sanders Muse, Newman, and Terrell, 2007; Vasi, Walker, Johnson, and Fen Tan 2015). For example, frames are more likely to resonate with external audiences in contexts of heightened emotion, which shapes the cognitive processes of those external audiences (McDonnell, Bail, and Tavor 2017). While observers may reject the image an SMO aims to project (i.e. the frame may not resonate), this perspective downplays the independent perceptions of audiences, which may have relatively little to do with the frame that is "proffered" (Snow and Benford, 2000: 619) by organizers. Frame resonance has proved to be a concept that has substantial analytic utility, but is nonetheless a "movement-centric" (McAdam and Boudet, 2012; Walder, 2009) approach that draws attention away from perceptions that originate outside the movement or develop independent of a movement actor's preferred image of itself.

A second predominant approach emerges from Charles Tilly's (1994, 1995, 1999, 2003, 2004) field-reorienting work. Tilly, in seeking to understand the likelihood of success of social

movements, proposed an approach that relies on valuations of popular protest by authorities and other influential polity members. According to Tilly's original WUNC formulation (1994), movements that feature public displays that are dignified and appropriate (Worthiness), unified (Unity), of a large size (Numbers), and with activists who are deeply engaged and willing to sacrifice something for the cause (Commitment), will be the most likely to be successful. These four factors are seen as part of an interdependent system of perceptions that shape a movement's credibility; each factor stands on its own, but Tilly argued "If any of the [four WUNC] elements visibly falls to zero, a social movement loses credibility" (Tilly, 2002: 120).

Although Tilly's approach has an unassailable elegance and extensive capacity for explaining a wide range of movement phenomena, it nonetheless has a movement-centrism similar to that of frame resonance that does not fully analyze the role of various external audiences, the potential for an SMO's actions to backfire, and the impacts of perceptions of inauthenticity. Although frame resonance highlights, naturally, the strategic packaging of a movement's ideas for audiences, Tilly's WUNC framework emphasizes instead the public behaviors that occur through events in particular, and the primary audience of interest is the state rather than other activists, critics or reporters, or non-state institutions. But perceptions of movement actors extend well beyond judgments about the displays that activists enact through public events, and may be affected by a variety of valuations over which they have varying levels of control. These valuations may be based on background information about a movement's participants that affect their credibility with audiences (consider, for example, Gary T. Marx's (1974) discussion of agent-provocateurs and other "specious activists" in movements), ties to funders that may either legitimize or discredit an SMO (Useem and Zald, 1982), links with political authorities that affect how a movement is viewed (Meyer, 1990), or associations with other organizations that have a different status (Jung, King, and Soule, 2014).

We maintain that understanding movement valuations requires an approach that goes beyond focusing on strategic efforts to shape public perceptions (frame resonance) or behaviors intended to display a movement's strengths to authorities (Tilly's WUNC framework). Indeed, as we will argue, one of the central valuations of movement actors involves judgments of authenticity,ⁱ a judgment that by its very nature is particularly challenging for SMO strategy and is susceptible to backfiring, resulting in perceptions of inauthenticity. Authenticity is also, we note, distinct from the notion of movement certification.ⁱⁱ

AUTHENTICITY AS A KEY ASPECT OF SOCIAL MOVEMENT VALUATION

Social movement organizing efforts, we argue, are likely to benefit from being judged to be authentic. Although to date there has not been a coherent framework for conceptualizing authenticity in social movements, a variety of studies have illustrated its relevance for diverse organizing processes. William G. Roy's (2010) influential account of folk music and Freedom Songs in the Old Left and Civil Rights movements makes clear that experiences of authentic musical performance provided an essential source of meaning for movement activists. Luna's (2017) work on authenticity construction processes in reproductive justice SMOs reveals the centrality of embodied authenticity in contested claims to representation and collective identity construction. Polletta's (1998, 2006) studies on narrative and storytelling in social movements illustrate that stories are particularly compelling because they tap into popular imaginaries of authentic experience, which serve as a motivating force that is more open-ended and inviting than what a calculated framing effort might allow. And studies by Walker (2014) and Lee (2014) both underscore the risks associated with participatory processes that seek to strategically produce authentic public participation; doing so runs the risk of generating serious perceptions of inauthenticity.

As a wide range of scholars have recognized (e.g. Carroll and Wheaton, 2009; Goldberg, Hannan, and Kovács, 2016; Negro, Koçak, and Hsu, 2010; Sharkey, 2014), authenticity is a socially constructed attribution about the extent to which an actor or practice is regarded as "real" or "genuine." Importantly, rather than being simply an individualistic judgment of the social and cultural value of a particular practice or idea, evaluations of authenticity reflect shared sentiments and meanings. Authenticity construction processes are dynamic and contested, as competing organizations use boundary making in an attempt to undermine their opposition's claims (Luna 2017). Authenticity often cannot simply be claimed, in fact, and direct efforts to label oneself as authentic are likely to backfire (Kovács, Carroll, and Lehman, 2017). Still, as we argue below, organizations may *indirectly signal* authenticity to various audiences by drawing attention certain characteristics and practices.

Audience attributions of authenticity have been identified as significant in fields ranging from music (e.g. Grazian, 2003; Peterson, 1997, 2005; Phillips, 2013; Roy, 2010), to art (Becker, 1982; Fine, 2003, 2006), cuisine (Johnston and Bauman, 2007; Kovács, Carroll, and Lehman, 2013; Lehman, Kovács, and Carroll, 2014; Rao, Monin, and Durand, 2003), production and manufacturing (e.g. Carroll and Swaminathan, 2000), deliberation processes (Lee, 2014),

and literature (e.g. Griswold and Wright, 2004). Authenticity has consequences not only for specific actors, but also for the structuring of entire fields (Rao, Monin, and Durand, 2003). Organization-level features such as resources and investment (Zuckerman, 1999), socio-political support (Walker, 2014), and generalized trust in an organization's quality of products and leadership (e.g. Avolio, Gardner, Walumbwa, Luthans, and May, 2004) are also linked to authenticity. Notably, although authenticity is critical to fields of political organizations, relatively few studies have directly examined the importance of authenticity among social movement organizations, Luna (2017) being a notable exception.

The dominant thread in organizational research on authenticity emphasizes its importance in terms of an organization's conformity to broader social codes and expectations, particularly related to how well an organization fits with broadly shared classification systems. As Zuckerman (1999) identified in his classic paper on the "categorical imperative," organizations that fail to conform to defined institutional categories, especially by spanning or hybridizing the cultural contents of multiple categories, tend to be penalized by external evaluators (see also Hsu, Hannan, and Koçak, 2009). Of course, this depends on the extent to which categorical boundaries are sharply defined and well established; in cases when they are not, categories may be fuzzier, audiences may value atypicality, and the accompanying penalties may be less harsh for those who fail to conform (see Goldberg, Hannan, and Kovács, 2016).

Hybrid organizations, as Minkoff (2002: 381) argues with respect to SMOs, "operate in multiple functional domains and are subject to distinctive environmental pressures compared with organizations that operate within clearly defined technical and institutional boundaries," thus often presenting challenges for such groups. As Julie Battilana, Matthew Lee, John Walker, and Cheryl Dorsey (2012: 51) put it, "like hybrid species in nature, hybrid organizational models can be a fountain of innovation. But they also face distinct challenges that may prevent them from thriving. When organizations combine [divergent goals], they create unfamiliar combinations of activities for which a supportive ecosystem may not yet exist." Still, it is not always clear whether evaluators are skeptical of category-spanning organizations because they have unclear identities, or whether instead this reflects a lack of perceived expertise (Kovács and Johnson, 2014).

In an important intervention on which we build presently, Glenn R. Carroll and Dennis Ray Wheaton (2009) note that the dominant understanding of authenticity in organizational

theory has privileged *type authenticity* regarding institutional categories and often overlooked perspectives on authenticity that are more widely deployed in cultural sociology: that is, *moral authenticity* that has more to do with evaluations of sincerity and the extent to which an actor is believed to be following their own ideals rather than simply enacting “socially scripted responses” (ibid.: 255). Whereas type authenticity has to do with whether an actor performs true to expectations associated their institutional category, *moral authenticity* instead involves judgments of whether the actor is engaged in practices that are consistent with that actor’s own sincere beliefs and ideals (an idea rooted in the work of Lionel Trilling (1972)). When violated, moral *inauthenticity* follows: an actor is perceived to be driven by such instrumental concerns as obtaining resources, generating political power, or simply seeking out status, as Seeman (1966) identified long ago. As Carroll and Wheaton (2009) further elaborate, whereas type authenticity lends itself to judgments of whether an actor meets categorical standards in terms of using appropriate techniques (i.e. the authenticity of one’s craft), those who are seen to have moral authenticity more often are valued instead for their idiosyncrasies (which send overt signals of their non-pecuniary, non-instrumental motivations). Carroll and Wheaton conclude that, in reference to both type and moral authenticity, authentic practices are more strongly resonant with evaluators when included as a formal and visible component of organizational structure (ibid: 274-5); this provides evidence that an organization “walks the talk.”

As we describe in greater detail below, authenticity is a critical feature of social movement organizations and activism. Strikingly, although most organizational research has focused on institutional authenticity (we believe this is because of the greater degree of institutionalization present in most fields under examination by organizational analysts), studies of social movements working outside conventional institutions tend to describe processes of grassroots authenticity. As we will explain, however, this is usually described in other terms, leaving key processes unexplained by existing theories.

MOVEMENTS IN CIVIL SOCIETY: GRASSROOTS AUTHENTICITY

Social movement organizing emerges from the structures and networks of civil society (Diani, 2015; Hasenfeld and Gidron, 2005; Sampson, McAdam, MacIndoe, and Weffer-Elizondo, 2005) and the broader public sphere (Koopmans, 2004; Oliver and Myers, 1999). Even if this is not the anodyne, non-contentious space of public engagement originally imagined by Habermas (Fraser, 1990; Adut, 2012), civil society is typically understood to be a social realm relatively

free of the influences of the state and the marketplace, in which the independent interests of the citizenry may find expression through a variety of forms, including especially associations (Cohen and Arato, 1994; Foley and Edwards, 1996). Socio-political inequalities and efforts to influence civil society by state and market actors may alter or distort the processes of civil society, as is increasingly the case in many contemporary capitalist democracies (Lee, McQuarrie, and Walker, 2015). Given popular imaginaries of SMOs as representing distinct constituencies in civil society, observers often use the category of practice of “grassroots” as a sensemaking tool for understanding the link between an SMO and the segments of society it claims to represent (Walker, 2009). Robert J. Brulle’s (2000: 91) neo-Habermasian definition of a grassroots association fits this notion well: “a grassroots organization is an *authentic* and legitimate representative of community that is based on open and undistorted communication in the lifeworld, and a substantial nexus of control of the organization by the members exists through a formally specified democratic organizational structure” (emphasis added). And, indeed, it is often in this kind of language that questions of grassroots authenticity are assessed by actors, rather than in the language of simple honesty or tradition; for instance, when Facebook made efforts to fight back against Russian influence campaigns on its site in 2018, it referred to such efforts as “inauthentic behavior” (Gleicher 2018).ⁱⁱⁱ Similarly, discussions of the use of hired actors deployed at staged political events – such as in the work of the consulting firm Crowds on Demand – tend to call out the authenticity of such “fake” forms of political engagement (Schneider 2015; see also Walker, 2014).

The idea that social movements represent authentic “grassroots” engagement is one that has pervaded the social movements literature in subtle ways, perhaps more as an orienting assumption rather than a direct topic of research. Such notions are rooted in two meta-conversations that have anchored much of the social movements literature over the past century: (1) the argument, rooted in the ideas of Robert Michels, that highly participatory grassroots organizations will tend to become more formally organized bureaucracies over time, eventually becoming more conservative and (often unwittingly) finding their goals displaced (Clemens and Minkoff, 2004); (2) the accompanying expectation that grassroots engagement is a space of prefigurative experimentation (Polletta, 1999), spontaneity outside society’s normative constraints (Snow and Moss, 2014), spaces where idiosyncratic, unconventional, or counter-hegemonic practices can be explored (Morris, 1984), and/or relatively unrestricted

community-building that can generate novel or unexpected innovations in social, economic, or political practices (e.g. Rao, 2008).

These two literatures, along with classic Weberian notions of the routinization of charisma, hold that spontaneity and experimentation often give way toward more formal organization, though such shifts may be contingent and not inevitable (Osterman, 2006). Highly grassroots and participatory forms of social movement practice may be unstable and fleeting. And for SMOs in particular, the need to maintain stability and durability comes with well-known demands for funding, administrative structure, policy expertise, and support networks among critical stakeholders outside the SMO (Staggenborg, 1988; Clemens and Minkoff, 2004). Strikingly, given such a relatively strong consensus among scholars about these tendencies, we lack a systematic investigation and conceptualization of the valuation of “grassroots” as such. It is often assumed that an SMO’s claim to being grassroots is more rhetoric than reality, given resource mobilization theory’s (McCarthy and Zald, 1977) strong expectation that SMOs that eschew more formalized resources will be ineffective and/or short-lived. Similarly, others have argued that movement organizations’ claims to be moral, principled actors are less important than the more significant demands of “marketing” a movement’s cause to influential funders, policymakers, and opinion leaders (e.g. Bob, 2005; Prakash and Gugerty, 2010). Resource concerns are indeed a major driving force in much movement activity and may be decisive in shaping ultimate outcomes, but the appearance of being a morally worthy grassroots group – relying upon its own resources, enjoying few close connections to political or economic elites, and with directly impacted and often marginalized groups acting independently of the primary sources of social power – is one that may endear it to many audiences.

Impacts of Grassroots Authenticity. Without necessarily adopting “grassroots” as a category of analysis, it is worth stating clearly that we can nonetheless accept that such an idea is a category of practice with real-world consequences. While direct proclamations of authenticity are likely to backfire, SMOs may indirectly and strategically signal grassroots authenticity through highlighting organizational characteristics and/or behaviors. We therefore analyze each type of authenticity below, not as discrete categories of analysis, but in relation to how SMOs signal their characteristics to different audiences with varying, dynamic, and tenuous effects depending on the priorities of the audience in question and the broader shifting sociopolitical context. We pay particular attention to the intended and unintended outcomes of

such audience judgments and the impacts of perceptions of both authenticity and *inauthenticity* for each type.

Signaling grassroots authenticity matters because in a crowded advocacy landscape with broad democratic deficits and distrust (Norris, 2011), various audiences will look to particular proxies for sincerity, honesty, and trustworthiness based on different audiences' priorities regarding representation, participation, tactics, strategy, funding, and organizational structures. These may include congruence between a movement actor's claims and actions, which is likely to include active participation of directly impacted and generally marginalized groups, having little outside funding, professional support, and/or elite backing, more spontaneity and emotional displays, and informal and highly participatory organizational structures. These indicators of grassroots authenticity are likely to facilitate mobilization of activists and may provide deeper, more meaningful engagement for participants. They may also signal authentic values to a variety of evaluators, including movement targets, potential recruits, media, and the general public, as described in greater depth below.

Grassroots Inauthenticity. The distinction between authenticity and inauthenticity is always a matter of degree rather than a firm categorical distinction. The reality, of course, is that a movement actor that enjoys grassroots authenticity in the fullest sense is quite rare (Prakash and Gugerty, 2010), and most movement groups will fall somewhere on the continuum between authentic and inauthentic on this criterion. The extreme end of grassroots authenticity includes those types described above; in the middle are organizations that exhibit some degree of professionalism and formalization, such as non-membership advocacy organizations with varying levels of claims to representing a constituency (Skocpol, 2003; Walker, McCarthy, and Baumgartner, 2011), and at the other extreme of grassroots inauthenticity are "astroturf" campaigns, as we describe now.

Grassroots authenticity is often set in contrast to its opposite: the inauthenticity linked to being stigmatized as "astroturf" (i.e. "fake" or ersatz). Astroturf campaigns are those in which an advocacy group operates as a "front" for an undisclosed sponsor, such as a corporation, political elite, or wealthy individual (Lyon and Maxwell, 2004). Astroturf campaigns may attempt to manufacture the appearance of public support for a narrow interest (in which an elites masquerade as a mass movement), engage in fraud, and/or incentivize or materially compensate participants for their work for the cause (often popularly called "paid protesting" (Walker, 2014). Examples include the beverage industry front group Coalition for an Affordable

City, which effectively fought a soda tax in San Francisco in 2014 (Walker, 2016); Know Your Power, a front for an energy firm threatened by the opening of a rival power plant (Mix and Waldo, 2015); or the “Faces of Coal” campaign intended to advance the coal industry’s interests politically through third-party mobilization (Bsumek, Schneider, Schwarze, and Peebles, 2014). In these and the vast set of other cases of astroturfing, we find actors that lack grassroots authenticity because it is assumed that their interests are almost entirely pecuniary and secretive, thus casting doubt on the sincerity and honesty of those involved as activists. Grassroots inauthenticity may also be signaled when elites are revealed to have redirected organizational missions (Minkoff and Powell 2006) or co-opted the grassroots (Skocpol and Williamson, 2012). Initial evidence suggests that SMOs and campaigns that are revealed as inauthentic may suffer in terms of public support and trust, willingness of new donors to contribute funds, and/or to have policy effectiveness (see e.g. Pfau et al., 2007). Politicians may decertify such a group and attempt to undermine their authenticity in order to bolster their own political legitimacy (Jacobs and Sobieraj 2007). Claims of grassroots inauthenticity serve as a powerful weapon in discrediting an activist group. Such claims can be particularly damning when the group had originally directly proclaimed grassroots authenticity.

The intervening cases of professionalized advocacy organizations also run into questions about their grassroots authenticity, and the transformations associated with professionalization and formalization have been hardy perennials in the social movements literature (see Clemens and Minkoff, 2004). Many worry that as social movement fields mature and as organizations become more established, grassroots authenticity is lost or compromised.

MOVEMENTS IN FIELDS: INSTITUTIONAL AUTHENTICITY

Like other kinds of organizations, advocacy groups are categorized and classified relative to one another, and these classifications shape both internal and external movement dynamics. Of course, the classic statement on this is found in McCarthy and Zald’s (1977) grouping of SMOs into Social Movement Industries (SMIs) working on the same issue and competing against one another for constituents, funding, and public attention. The perspective generally took for granted that movement issue boundaries and classifications within them were clearly demarcated, accepted as real by multiple audiences (e.g. potential recruits, policymakers, bystander publics), and consequential for movement practices; the assumption was that movement goals were like commercial products that could be easily compared to one another

by potential “consumers,” who decide which “firm” (SMO) is offering the highest quality product. Extensions of this perspective have been used to understand competition also in terms of Resource Partitioning Theory (e.g. Carroll and Swaminathan, 2000), such that in mature SMIs that become dominated by a few large generalists, one is likely to see niches become available for specialists who operate on the fringes of the “market” (Soule and King, 2008); accordingly, in well-established SMIs you tend to find more tactical and goal specialization among new entrants (ibid.).

A variety of studies, although not generally conceptualized in terms of authenticity, have found that activist groups tend to conform to the cultural codes and expectations associated with working within a particular domain or movement industry, even if borrowing from others (e.g. Soule and King, 2008; Meyer and Whittier, 1994; Edwards and Foley, 2002; Weber, Heinz, and DeSoucey, 2008). Susan Olzak (2016: 559) finds that terrorist organizations that “span multiple and distant ideological categories” are “less lethal and end more quickly than other terrorist organizations whose membership lies squarely within a single ideological category.” And Susan Olzak and Erik W. Johnson (2018) find that environmental SMOs that span “multiple and distant” categories are significantly more likely to disband. Categorization also affects policy elites’ perceptions of social movements; for instance, a socio-demographic group may be more influential in winning new rights if policy elites see that group as categorically similar to others who were previously granted new rights (Skrentny, 2006).

Signals of this categorical similarity for movement actors may include highlighting organizational characteristics such as issue foci, organizational structures, core operational strategies, and/or characteristics of their activities (e.g. types of events and mobilizations, tactics, and strategies). They may signal how their organizational structures, professionalization, tactics, and ties to other organizations reflect expertise in a specific issue area. Such groups are likely to project credibility not because they are necessarily free from the constraints of elite ties and/or particular funding sources, but instead because they will be expected to be knowledgeable and well-versed in the particulars of the issue area in which they operate.

It is important to recognize, however, that the capacity to display institutional authenticity is conditional upon the maturity of a social movement industry; for novel issues in which there is not an established SMI – consider the early homophile groups like the Mattachine Society and the Daughters of Bilitis (D’Emilio, 1983) or environmental organizations that emerged long before the movement took off in the early 1960s (Carmichael, Jenkins, and Brulle, 2012) –

during these early moments it is not possible for a movement actor to enjoy a clear identity as a representative of an issue domain. This is similar to how field orderings are often unstable during periods in which a new economic industry emerges, requiring the creation of new status hierarchies, institutional processes, and routines (Fligstein and McAdam, 2012).

Impacts of Institutional Authenticity. Institutional authenticity matters because policymakers, journalists, and funders are cognitively constrained and may often take most seriously those groups that fit the standard profile of a “representative” on a particular issue. SMOs may establish themselves as such representatives — and amplify frame resonance — by signaling expertise through organizational characteristics of institutional authenticity, including a clear issue focus, the related use of established tactics and strategies, and position in an SMI. Though frame resonance matters across audiences, the literature on activist participation and category fit is less straightforward. People looking to join an organization that represents a particular issue may go to the one that is most well-known and typecast as central to the issue.

Institutional Inauthenticity. At the core of these investigations is the question of whether a movement actor holds a degree of institutional authenticity in the sense of being a clearly defined member of a particular category versus whether it does not clearly fit specific, recognizable categories. SMOs lacking institutional authenticity may struggle due to wide variation in their issue focus, messaging, or structure. This is likely to lead to instability over time, as such organizations struggle to gain support from funders, targets, and the media, with implications for organizational survival.

There are reasons to expect that hybrid organizations will face an “illegitimacy discount” due to being difficult to categorize (Zuckerman 1999). On the other hand, scholarship on hybridity in SMOs has often found that many instead *benefit* from hybridity. Blending multiple issue categories may facilitate recruitment and mobilization turnout (Heaney and Rojas 2014; Van Dyke 2003), and hybrids may also help “crystallize” the identity of a broader movement (Armstrong 2002). Also, Jürgen Gerhards and Dieter Rucht (1992) argue that the use of “bridging phrases” that link together diverse ideas may improve recruitment.

These diverging findings can be reconciled, however, in that they have different objects of investigation. Whereas most organizational theorists have studied the illegitimacy discount by focusing on how the organization is perceived in general (especially by critics and other professional analysts), social movement scholars have instead investigated, for instance, such factors as event recruitment (Heaney and Rojas, 2014; Van Dyke 2003) and tactical repertoires

(Wang and Piazza, 2016). This is not an apples-to-apples comparison. It remains possible, for instance, that movement organizations that span categories may be seen as illegitimate to many audiences such as policymakers and funders yet may nonetheless reach other audiences such as potential activists, other SMOs, or indeed other donors.^{ix} On a similar note, Yeheskel Hasenfeld and Benjamin Gidron (2005) point out that hybrid organizations may be compelled to adopt more mainstream cultural symbols in their practices, perhaps because there is more uncertainty about their identities.

SUMMARIZING THE TWO SOURCES OF MOVEMENT AUTHENTICITY

Grassroots and institutional authenticity are based on the perceptions of specific audiences. SMOs may signal grassroots authenticity by highlighting a range of characteristics relating their participatory organizational structure and tactics, strategies that emphasize spontaneity and/or emotional displays, their low level of formalization and professionalization, their direct funding sources, or the congruence between their sincere claims and actions. This may entail highlighting that beneficiary rather than conscience constituents (McCarthy and Zald, 1977) are at the forefront of SMO actions (Luna 2017). By contrast, activists may signal institutional authenticity by focusing their expertise on narrowly defined and well-known social movement issues, which could involve emphasizing organizational age and expertise.

Critically, these two characteristics are orthogonal. An activist group may enjoy perceptions of having one or the other type of authenticity, both, or neither. Further, these evaluations are not static valuations, but are by nature dynamic and relational processes involving multiple characteristics and the judgments of numerous external audiences, which can change over time. Table 1 illustrates the cross-classification of these characteristics, offering prototypical examples for each cell and providing evidence of the perceptions of (in-)authenticity linked to these characteristics. Recognizing that each type of authenticity represents a continuum rather than a dichotomy, we cross-classify each archetype according to characteristics of having less authenticity, moderate authenticity, or more authenticity. We underscore, for instance, the point that it is possible for a movement actor to enjoy both types of authenticity, to the extent that they are perceived as both focused on a narrow issue and holding a clear collective identity (aspects of institutional authenticity) and also that they appear to focus on participatory processes among their members and avoid heavy dependence on outside funding (aspects of grassroots authenticity). Further, we acknowledge that each prototypical

example could shift within the matrix if audience judgments of its grassroots and/or institutional authenticity were to change. Such shifts may result from efforts on the part of the SMO to signal characteristics associated either or both types of authenticity, which may backfire, collaboration or coalition with other organizations that are perceived to have greater grassroots or institutional authenticity, opposition groups or the media that assert a lack of (generally grassroots) authenticity, or other contextual shifts.

Figure 1.
Cross-Classifying the Two Types of Social Movement Authenticity

	Grassroots			
		Less	Moderate	More
Institutional	Less	Multi-issue astroturf campaigns	Multi-issue professionalized SMOs	Multi-issue grassroots SMOs
		Center for Consumer Freedom (Washington, DC)	Institute for America's Future (Washington, D.C.)	National People's Action (Chicago, IL)
	Moderate	Mixed-issue astroturf campaigns	Mixed-issue professionalized SMOs	Mixed-issue grassroots SMOs
		National Wetlands Coalition (Washington, D.C.)	Children's Defense Fund (Washington, D.C.)	Local Clean Energy Alliance (Oakland, CA)
	More	Single-issue astroturf campaigns	Single-issue professionalized SMOs	Single-issue grassroots SMOs
		National Smokers' Alliance (Washington, D.C.)	National Resources Defense Council (Washington, D.C.)	Berks Gas Truth (Kutztown, PA)

Although space constraints prevent a full discussion of each cell within Table 1, we provide brief descriptions of the types and prototypical organizations that populate each cell.

High grassroots authenticity, by levels of institutional authenticity. It is possible for an SMO to enjoy high levels of both grassroots and institutional authenticity in the eyes of varying audiences, as we mention above. Groups that are perceived to have both of these features should benefit from being seen as genuine in multiple respects, but, as we describe below, grassroots authenticity tends to be accompanied by resource constraints and challenges to a campaign's durability. Local grassroots SMOs focused on a single issue, such as many of the

environmental groups in North Carolina studied by Kenneth Andrews and Bob Edwards (2005), fit this description. As a particular example, consider the group Berks Gas Truth (Kutztown, PA),^{vi} which is a local association focused entirely on stopping the practice of fracking in Pennsylvania, funded primarily by local community members. The director of the association described its resource constraints recently, claiming that the donations they have received “don’t come close to covering more than getting photocopies made and paying for exhibit space at festivals.” Yet, this lack of institutional funding signals grassroots authenticity to participants, media, and elected officials, which allows the organization to take a strong moral stance against fracking and the industry supporting it.

We also discuss examples of groups with high grassroots authenticity but only moderate (mixed-issue) or low (multi-issue) institutional authenticity. Groups with moderate institutional authenticity are those that focus heavily on one area, but also engage somewhat on a secondary or tertiary movement issue. Here we point to the Local Clean Energy Alliance (Oakland, CA),^{vii} a coalition of 90 member organizations that focuses primary upon local energy issues, but has secondary interests in broader environmental issues, sustainable development, and community health. Funding is provided largely by donations from their member associations, as well as individual member contributions. The organization relies heavily on member participation and engagement. The group’s campaigns seek “diverse and inclusive representation of the community in decision-making.”

As an example of an association seen as having high grassroots authenticity but lower institutional authenticity due to its broad multi-issue focus, we call attention to National People’s Action (Chicago, IL),^v which describes itself as “a network of grassroots organizations with a fierce reputation for direct action.” Led by its charismatic executive director and veteran organizer George Goehl, NPA seeks to advance a broad agenda of economic and racial justice, taking on issues ranging from fighting payday lenders to challenging the Federal Housing Finance Administration to pushing for tax progressivity and anti-deportation campaigns.^{viii}

Moderate grassroots authenticity, by levels of institutional authenticity. Groups with moderate grassroots authenticity include those that have a degree of professionalization and formalization in their structure.^{ix} As an example of such a group with high institutional authenticity, we focus on the Natural Resources Defense Council (Washington, D.C.),^x a professionally-driven non-membership association that is central to the environmental movement. NRDC can be contrasted against the mixed-issue case of Children’s Defense Fund,

which is a non-membership advocacy group focused centrally on children's issues related to equity and opportunity (see Skocpol, 2003: 152), with secondary areas of focus including poverty, education, stopping gun violence, and disability rights. NRDC is widely known for its reliance upon professional expertise of lawyers, policy analysts, and scientists to advance their advocacy.

For an organization that has moderate grassroots authenticity given its professionalization and non-membership structure, we draw attention to the Institute for America's Future, which, by its own description, has a multi-issue progressive agenda that seeks to "open up the space for new thinking and bold reforms on such kitchen-table concerns as the availability of good jobs, affordable health care, accessible higher education, retirement security, improved public infrastructure, living wages, healthy workplaces, safe food, fair trade and clean energy."^{xi} The group is seen as a "strategy-center for the progressive movement," which often coordinates with grassroots associations in diverse issue areas.

Low grassroots authenticity, by levels of institutional authenticity. Groups that lack all grassroots authenticity are those that are not only professionalized but also staffed entirely by professionals and funded primarily by an outside patron. Additionally, the participation they facilitate may be discredited once revealed that it involves material incentives (e.g. "paid protesting"), the masquerading of an elite interest as a mass movement, and/or outright fraud (Walker, 2014: 33). Among such groups, however, there is variation in terms of their institutional authenticity, as some have a clear categorical focus, while others have more scattered interests. An example of the former was the National Smokers' Alliance (Washington, D.C.), which was formed by the tobacco company Philip Morris to fight against smoking restrictions in the early 1990s (see Givel, 2007); the association's sole purpose was to fight smoking bans, and the association incentivized the participation of smokers to meet those ends. Reflecting this inauthenticity, the group was described in media reports as "a puppet of the tobacco industry" and a "front group."

For a mixed-issue example, we note the National Wetlands Coalition, which was a front group founded in the late-1980s for real estate developers, energy companies, and others; the group was focused primary on general environmental policy but also engaged on issues of real estate development and oil drilling; reports described the group as part of a "corporate green masquerade" that was "bankrolled by big oil and developers to weaken wetland protections." Lastly, as an example of a group that falls short on both forms of authenticity, we identify the

Center for Consumer Freedom (now known as the Center for Organizational Research and Education),^{xii} a hybrid front for multiple industries created by notorious industry lobbyist Rick Berman; the group engages on a vast array of issues ranging from tobacco regulations to food policy to attacks on animal rights groups like PETA. The group has been described in media reports as an “industry-front group that attacks public interest organizations.” Given that the group lacks both types of authenticity, the group often finds itself on the receiving end of sharp public criticisms, including a prominent *60 Minutes* report in 2007 entitled “Meet Rick Berman, A.K.A. “Dr. Evil”: Morley Safer Speaks to a Lobbyist Some People Love to Hate.”

Having reviewed how these types overlap, we now discuss how particular audiences interpret signals of each type of authenticity, and develop associated propositions about the relationships.

HOW DIVERSE AUDIENCES PERCEIVE MOVEMENT ACTORS’ AUTHENTICITY

Judgments of authenticity, as we have argued, are tied to evaluations by particular audiences. Various types of internal and external audiences may have diverging “defaults” in terms of their expectations of an actor and its practices (Hsu and Hannan, 2005), and these expectations may shape both evaluations of movement actors as well as their practices in response to those evaluations. In this section we build from existing research findings to develop propositions regarding how particular audiences—including funders, other SMOs, potential activist recruits, journalists, and the broader public—evaluate both institutional and grassroots authenticity, drawing attention to the relative weight each audience is likely to assign to each type of authenticity. We expect that these propositions could be tested by way of experimental or observational studies of how perceptions of social movement actors’ authenticity changes, as well as what consequences tend to follow from these perceptions.

Foundations and Resource Providers. External patrons that provide resources to movement actors tend to consistently favor groups that are more professionalized and that have an established niche (McCarthy and Zald, 1977; Jenkins and Eckert, 1986; Staggenborg, 1988; Minkoff and Agnone, 2010). Professionalization tends to make it more likely that such SMOs can write effective grant applications, and it also tends to inspire more confidence in funders that their resource provision will help to generate impactful projects and campaigns. But while these findings are firmly established in existing literature, to date few studies have directly examined how SMO authenticity affects its ability to generate resources (Soule, 2012).

Institutional authenticity should be critical for an SMO's ability to raise funds for its cause and therefore survive long-term (for an initial study, see Olzak and Johnson, 2018). This is true for at least two reasons: (1) grant-makers will have less uncertainty about the type of organization they are funding if an SMO has the narrower focus (as compared to generalist organizations, which will generate worries about being a less effective jack-of-all-trades); (2) grant-makers often release calls for proposals that focus on particular areas (e.g. environment/sustainability, human rights, women's issues), thereby discouraging the applications of organizations that fail to clearly fit within that specific category.

Grassroots authenticity tends to be associated with efforts to compensate for a material resources shortages with attempts to be more resourceful through other, often more creative, means (Ganz, 2000). Having high levels of material resources may cause an SMO to lose its perception as being driven primarily by moral and principled concerns, but going without resources also obviously imposes major constraints, limiting an organization's ability to hire and retain staff, generate new resources, and, of course, survive (Walker and McCarthy, 2010). Foundations and other grant-makers do, at times, seek to fund groups that are materially disadvantaged and who want for other sources of support (see Jenkins, 1998). At the same time, such groups often lack professionalization and the ability to effectively monitor the resource environment and develop and submit effective proposals for such grant competitions.

Although the perception of grassroots authenticity is often associated with limited resources, grassroots inauthenticity often comes with the perception that an SMO has lost legitimacy due to the compromises linked to gaining outside resources. At the extreme, as in the cases described above, when it is revealed that an SMO is funded entirely by a corporation in order to ventriloquize the firm's policy preferences, public audiences tend to discredit such groups (this was the case with groups like the National Wetlands Coalition, as described above; see Pfau et al., 2007), and it also seems likely that other potential resource providers will no longer be willing to lend their support.

Proposition 1. Institutional authenticity positively affects resource flows from established funders into an SMO, while perceptions of institutional inauthenticity affect them negatively.

Proposition 2. Grassroots inauthenticity can negatively affect resource flows from additional funders. Though grassroots authenticity tends to be associated with lower overall levels of funding, perceptions of grassroots inauthenticity that result when outside

funding comes from a highly dominant funder may result in a decline in future funding from other potential patrons.

Other SMOs. Competitor and oppositional SMOs are likely to pay most attention to institutional authenticity as they attempt to outmaneuver one another by positioning themselves as the experts in a specific issue area in their competition for resources, activists' time, media coverage, and the like (McCarthy and Zald, 1977). These other SMOs should be more likely to reference and respond to SMOs that are visible on the issue at hand. However, opposition groups will likely also pay attention to grassroots authenticity in their competition for resources and legitimacy, attempting to signal their own greater grassroots authenticity and/or discredit that of their opponents. We therefore expect that:

Proposition 3. Institutional authenticity reflects a movement actor's centrality to an SMI. As such, other SMOs are likely to view institutionally authentic actors as sources of competition from which they must differentiate themselves. Groups with lower levels of institutional authenticity may have less direct competition but are likely to struggle to find a clear niche and identity. An exception to this proposition, that we develop further below, is for SMOs that are institutionally inauthentic due to hybridizing issue areas, which may facilitate coalition formation.

Proposition 4. Opposition groups may attempt to discredit SMOs by claiming they lack grassroots authenticity.

Grassroots authenticity is also relevant for SMO field dynamics. Even if they do not join in coalition, SMOs may view other groups as filling complementary niches in a field-level division of labor (Levitsky 2007). Under-resourced and non-professional SMOs may also be more likely to require outside support in order to have a greater chance of generating policy impacts. Synergistically, SMOs that lack robust grassroots authenticity may seek out SMOs with grassroots authenticity even if they lack institutional authenticity or other forms of status (Jung, King, and Soule, 2014). Earlier research has also indicated that membership and non-membership SMOs often provide mutual support (Walker, McCarthy, and Baumgartner, 2011). We therefore expect that:

Proposition 5. Grassroots authenticity may facilitate allyship and coalition formation with SMOs that lack robust grassroots authenticity.

Potential Activist Recruits. We expect that for potential activists, grassroots authenticity will matter for potential constituents' recruitment and initial engagement in SMOs. Scholarship on frame resonance tends to focus on how SMOs seek to develop messages that are salient to such an audience, whether because the message is central to the pre-existing beliefs of potential recruits, consistent with their everyday experiences, and/or that it fits with the life narratives of those receiving the message (Benford and Snow, 2000; Snow and Benford, 1992). The energy and enthusiasm that tends to accompany grassroots organizing is likely to make activism exciting, given its indeterminacy, novelty, and relative spontaneity (Polletta, 1998, 2006; Snow and Moss, 2014). At the same time, sustaining commitment in highly participatory groups is challenging given significant demands in terms of time, labor, and energy (Hirsch, 1990; but see Osterman, 2006). But for groups seen as entirely inauthentic, activist engagement will require material or other strong incentives for participation. Given these concerns, we expect that:

Proposition 6. Perceptions of grassroots authenticity will facilitate recruitment and mobilization of SMO participants. Highly participatory tactics and strategy will facilitate initial activist engagement and build trust. Groups lacking grassroots authenticity will struggle to recruit participants and will require the use of strong incentives in order to recruit considerable numbers of participants.

As for institutional authenticity, when it comes to recruitment of activists we expect that there is less of a benefit to authenticity and less of a penalty for lacking it. In fact, in contrast to organizational theory, for SMOs, there may even be a benefit to lacking institutional authenticity if it is the result of effective hybridity. We base this expectation on the growing body of research illustrating that SMOs that seek to organize and mobilize a broader constituency – often because their work straddles multiple institutional domains and issues – tend to be more effective at recruiting participants and mobilizing them in events and actions (Heaney and Rojas, 2014; McCammon, 2013; Van Dyke 2003). Single-issue organizations that occupy a relatively narrow niche may gain benefits in other respects (as we describe elsewhere), but being able to

claim a broader base allows a wider set of potential participants to identify with a movement's cause. We therefore expect that, in the perception of potential constituents, institutional inauthenticity, particularly in the form of having a broad issue focus, is not likely to be penalized; this seems to have been the case with National People's Action, described above.

Umbrella groups (or meso-mobilization SMOs, see Gerhards and Rucht, 1992) make for a useful case of category-spanning organizations that facilitate activist mobilization. Such groups often work to support large-scale mobilizations against high-profile national or transnational concerns, such as the second Iraq War, global trade meetings such as the WTO or FTAA, or, more recently, the election of Donald Trump and the rise of populist nationalism. They assemble very broad groups who may not agree on every issue ("fragile coalitions" in Robert S. Ratner and Andrew Woolford's (2008) usage), but who agree to work together on a particular issue or conflict; thus, they enjoy less institutional authenticity. But they enjoy grassroots authenticity as representatives of broad popular causes, along with visible participation of large constituencies, including adherents who likely were not engaged activists previously, that bring valuations of sincerity and moral motivation that help to provide added legitimacy.

Proposition 7. Perceptions of institutional inauthenticity based on hybridity will not negatively affect recruitment potential of an SMO, and may instead benefit recruitment by allowing for outreach to broader constituencies.

Policymakers. A broad-ranging literature has illustrated that policymakers are often put in challenging positions in which they need to make short-term decisions; they face uncertainty, cognitive constraints and information overload, and general complexity in the environment (e.g. Kingdon, 1984; Baumgartner and Jones, 1993). Richard L. Hall and Alan L. Deardorff (2006), for example, argue that the processes by which advocacy groups gain influence in the political process reflects in large part the strategic seeking out of information by policymakers, in that lobbyists "subsidize" the legislative process and assist in the work of policymaking. Although SMOs may be more influential in shaping the early stages of the policy process such as in agenda-setting, taking part in legislative hearings, and/or facilitating the initial introduction of bills (King and Soule, 2006), it is clear that SMOs may align with the interests of legislators, who may even facilitate a movement or institutionalize its claims into new policies (for a review, see

Amenta et al., 2010). In considering which movement actors should be consulted, policymakers must contend with these constraints and limitations, and judgments of the institutional authenticity of an SMO should be consequential in shaping those decisions, in addition to other expected factors such as (but not limited to) the apparent size of the movement's constituency, media attention the movement is attracting, and resources the SMO commands. In addition, given that space on the policymaking agenda is limited (Baumgartner and Jones, 1993), they must prioritize which groups are worthy of attention.

Thus, judgments of the institutional authenticity of an SMO are likely to be quite consequential in shaping which SMOs are consulted by policymakers. This is true for four reasons: (1) Policymakers are likely to seek out SMOs who appear to have expertise on an issue, as they can best subsidize the work of policymaking. Groups that are hybrid or are involved in multiple issue domains may appear to lack sufficient expertise in any one policy domain (see Hsu, Hannan, and Koçak, 2009). (2) The moments in which policymakers are likely to seek out consultation with activist groups are likely to be characterized by focused interest on a particular policy issue, thereby encouraging contact with more easily-recognized SMOs working on a particular issue. (3) Policymakers will have higher levels of uncertainty about the quality of information they will receive from SMOs that do not have specialist knowledge of a particular issue domain, and will have more confidence in those that specialize. (4) Groups that fail to gain recognition within a particular domain, if consulted, may pose particular risks for the policymaker in that being connected with an unrecognized SMO may cause reputational damage to the policymaker.

Proposition 8. Institutional authenticity benefits the policy impact of an SMO while an inability to signal institutional authenticity to policymakers will likely result in less potential for policy impact.

Grassroots authenticity is, as we have argued, associated with positive valuations of sincerity and moral worth. But the presence of such positive valuations should not be likely to shape policymakers' openness to influence by that group unless it is clear that they represent a large and well-organized body of the official's constituents. On the other hand, in the event that an organization is judged to lack grassroots authenticity, we expect that such groups will lose standing in the policy process. Such was the case in the 2009 case surrounding Americans for

Clean Coal Energy, in which it was revealed that the organization worked through a consultant to submit fraudulent, forged letters to Congress (Kaplun, 2009). An analogous form of discrediting took place after revelations of similar behavior sponsored by Intuit, the company that makes the TurboTax software (Weissmann, 2014).

Proposition 9. Policymakers' evaluations of SMOs will not be affected by positive indications of grassroots authenticity unless the group is large and well organized. Policymakers will, however, discredit groups that show signs of grassroots inauthenticity.

Journalists and the Mass Media. Like policymakers, journalists also need to make decisions under serious time pressures about which advocacy groups, if any, to include in their reporting, and editors must make decisions about the relative prominence of coverage to assign to particular stories once reported (Rafail, Walker, and McCarthy, 2015). Research on the selection bias of news media in covering particular movements reveals a few common themes. Movements with more of an organizational presence tend to receive more coverage, especially if the organizations are associated with disruptive tactics (Amenta et al., 2009; see also Gamson and Wolfsfeld, 1993: 121). Additionally, coverage may be influenced by event characteristics (e.g. violence and/or police activity), features of the newspaper (e.g. having a reporter assigned to a movement-related “beat”), or aspects of the political issue in question (e.g. the movement is connected to other policy issues being debated during an issue attention cycle) (see Earl, Martin, and Soule, 2004: 68). As in the case of policymakers, we expect that journalists and their editors and publishers are attentive to institutional authenticity. Especially given that much protest reporting is thematic and connected to particular legislative activity around a specific policy issue (e.g. Oliver and Maney, 2000), when reporting such stories it seems likely that journalists would seek out quotes and information from movement actors with expertise on a focused policy issue (rather than those that have an ambiguous level of engagement or are otherwise generalists).

Proposition 10. Journalists' perceptions of an SMO's institutional authenticity will lead to greater news media coverage of an SMO. Groups with less institutional authenticity will be less likely to receive media attention.

Groups that enjoy perceptions of grassroots authenticity are likely to be those that are less professionalized, and therefore also the communications apparatus that often helps SMOs to gain media coverage (Gamson and Wolfsfeld, 1993). However, journalists are likely to privilege specific signals of grassroots authenticity, as news media coverage is more likely to focus on displays of spontaneity and emotion over long-term and procedural social movement engagement (Sobieraj 2010). Also, as in the case of policymakers and potential constituents, journalists are likely to avoid covering groups that are known to be inauthentic representatives of a cause.

Proposition 11. SMOs that signal grassroots authenticity to journalists through seemingly spontaneous and emotional mobilizations will receive greater news coverage, though this may be hampered somewhat if they lack the infrastructure to maintain media and communications relationships. Journalists will discount groups that signal grassroots inauthenticity.

General Public Audiences. Social movements research has not typically emphasized the role of the general public in understanding the capacity of movements to mobilize resources and/or generate socio-political change, consistent with the general neglect of public opinion in political sociology (Manza and Brooks, 2012). Resource Mobilization Theory, for example, did not hold out much of a role for bystander groups, unless those segments of the public were either sympathetic to the movement or were contributing some of their time, money, and/or energy to a cause. And yet we know that the alignment of movements with shifts in public sentiments can support movements' influence in shaping policy (McAdam and Su, 2002). Compared to policymakers and media actors, general public audiences often fail to have the needed information about (or interest in) a particular SMO's position within its field, and may be likely to evaluate an SMO more on general features. These may include whether the evaluator agrees with the SMO's claims, tactics, or whether they see the movement's activists as credible. Additionally, a criterion of evaluation is likely to be whether the movement is the author of its own actions, or can be cast aside as a false front for some other outside sponsor such as a wealthy donor, a corporation, or a political party or well-established interest group. Signals that an SMO is not independent may raise questions about its legitimacy before public audiences.

For these reasons, it is reasonable to expect that grassroots authenticity, with its accompanying evaluations of an SMO's morality and the appearance of sincerity in their

practices, will play a greater role than institutional authenticity in shaping evaluations of an SMO by the general public.

Proposition 12. General public audiences, as outsiders to an SMO field, will place greater emphasis on grassroots authenticity than institutional authenticity in their evaluations of SMOs, because they do not possess the knowledge and/or interest needed in order to evaluate a group's institutional authenticity.

CONCLUSION

The valuations that audiences develop of social movement actors are critical to understanding their ability to mobilize participation, develop meaningful engagement, and influence popular discourse and policymaking. Yet the dominant approaches to valuation – frame resonance approaches and, to a lesser extent, Tilly's Worthiness-Unity-Numbers-Commitment model – remain overly movement-centric, consistent with much other research in the area (Walder, 2009; McAdam and Boudet, 2012), underestimating the role of external audiences and the potential for intentional signaling to backfire, and also underestimating the impacts of perceptions of inauthenticity. Many of the key features of movement valuation are social constructions that are partially or entirely outside the direct control of movement actors. Such valuations must be generated through third-party attributions and/or indirect signals of the moral worth and sincerity of an activist group, as well as their positioning vis-à-vis other such groups. They are thus subject to change in dynamic social movement fields as various external audiences make and revise their judgments of an SMO's authenticity. This may be through strategic, though often indirect, actions of the SMO, as they attempt to highlight various characteristics or collaborate with other organizations that are able to more effectively signal grassroots and/or institutional authenticity. It may also be an unintended result of trying to overtly signal authenticity, which may result in judgements of inauthenticity, or in attacks by oppositional groups or the media.

We argue that authenticity is a key movement valuation, and one in which actors may not directly proclaim their worth; doing so is likely to backfire and result in judgments of inauthenticity (Kovács, Carroll, and Lehman, 2017). Authenticity is a critical concept for understanding social movement organizations, which has been surprisingly overlooked by most previous accounts. Such earlier accounts focused attention toward the internal dynamics of

movement organizations and campaigns, and away from the field-level factors that affect audience perceptions of activist groups. With the more recent turn toward relational and field-theoretic approaches (Fligstein and McAdam, 2011, 2012), perceptions of movements by various audiences have become more analytically central. As a key aspect of audience perceptions of activist organizing, authenticity deserves to be incorporated as a central concept in research on contentious politics.

Our intervention has been to introduce the distinction between grassroots authenticity, which is rooted in perceptions of activists' sincerity and moral standing, and institutional authenticity, which is connected to evaluations of how well an SMO fits into a particular category of other SMOs. Building from a body of existing theory and research, we argue that institutional authenticity is critical for an SMO's ability to survive and maintain resources, as well as to gain attention from policymakers; this has to do with the cultural-cognitive frames of funders, policymakers, and journalists, who often look to prototypical representatives of a particular movement in order to provide grants and/or invitations to represent the movement before legislatures and other policymaking bodies. Grassroots authenticity, on the other hand, is key for activist recruitment and in relation to general public opinion, but overall serves as less of a support for gaining resources and policymaker support. Still, it is consequential across various audiences when it is absent: the complete absence of grassroots inauthenticity is typically referred to as "astroturf"; this discredits an activist group before a variety of audiences.

Future research can build on this by not only testing the propositions outlined here, but also by examining how and to what effect SMOs can strategically signal different combinations of characteristics of grassroots and institutional authenticity to different audiences. We expect that experimental approaches will be among the most fruitful for testing audience perceptions of each type of authenticity, although text analysis of descriptions of movement events (in newspaper and other media accounts) should also offer up a promising avenue for empirical investigations. There are many questions that such studies could investigate. How are these distinct characteristics weighted by each audience, and can SMOs that lack certain characteristics compensate by emphasizing others? Further, in so doing, how can SMOs avoid this backfiring? Additionally, how do SMOs with horizontal or decentralized network forms, which may operate by consensus and fail to have a clear organizational identity, nonetheless deepen their impact with different audiences, grow, and survive? These and other questions related to how authenticity affects key social movement processes – including the capacity to

act on political opportunities, maneuver relative to other activist groups, cultivate resource streams, and gain media attention – open up a broad new agenda for scholars of contentious politics.

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ENDNOTES

- ⁱ Some have argued (e.g. Laschever, 2017: 8) that authenticity is an aspect of a movement's worthiness, using a framework that anticipates our concept of "grassroots authenticity." We argue, however, that authenticity is better understood as a socially constructed perception rather than as a behavior, as it is in Tilly's framework.
- ⁱⁱ The concept of certification focuses on the relational aspect of validation of claims by an external authority. This is a dynamic and tenuous process, as external authorities can also decertify and the bases of certification judgments shift over time (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001). SMOs must seek certification as legitimate representatives of their constituencies from multiple—and at times conflicting—audiences, including their claimed constituencies, competing organizations, government officials, and the media (Furuyama and Meyer 2011). The bases for certification judgments vary by external audience, as elected officials may have distinct priorities from members of a constituency. In fact, these divergent priorities may undermine certification by different external audiences (Furuyama and Meyer 2011). While framing may overemphasize intentional actions of SMOs, certification goes to the other extreme in its focus on external authorities. Certification is closer to notions of a movement's acceptance by policy elites (what Tilly once called "polity membership"); this may be based upon a movement actor's authenticity or upon entirely separate grounds.
- ⁱⁱⁱ This does not rule out the possibility that such campaigns may be very politically effective when there is no evidence revealed to show the true sponsors behind such SMOs or campaigns (e.g. Cho, Martens, Kim, and Rodrigue., 2011; Farrell 2016). Policymakers who may wish to support an elite interest are, in fact, given cover and plausible deniability for doing so under such circumstances.
- ^{iv} Minkoff (2002) finds that organizations that blend service provision and advocacy strategies "may experience positive externalities from the resource procurement and legitimacy-building efforts of other populations" (ibid., 384).
- ^v They are also both shaped by the broader, shifting sociopolitical context. In the contemporary U.S. context in particular, partisanship has increasingly become a primary lens through which actors make moral and epistemological evaluations (Kreiss 2017). Partisan and political alignment therefore shape how different social movement actors construct and how different audiences perceive and contest signals of both grassroots and institutional authenticity. For example, SMOs are more likely to be perceived as having both types of authenticity if the audience in question perceives them to be politically aligned with their own beliefs and agenda. Signaling this alignment may be part of an SMO's effort to signal institutional authenticity.
- ^{vi} See <http://gastruth.org/>.
- ^{vii} See <http://www.localcleanenergy.org/>.
- ^{viii} See <http://npa-us.org/>.
- ^{ix} See <https://www.nrdc.org>.
- ^x One could further break down this category by distinguishing between long-standing professionalized membership associations and non-membership associations with a professional staff and no members.
- ^{xi} See <https://ourfuture.org/institute>.
- ^{xii} See <https://coreprojects.com/>.