All—

I am following Marshall Ganz, Rick Fantasia and probably many others in using my social movement participation before graduate school as the data for this paper. Depending on the feedback I get, I may head back to the field and interview actors who were both central and peripheral to the movement I am studying.

Essentially, I have two goals for this workshop, to which I hope you all will be willing to contribute:

1. Is there enough data here to make this case? If there is not, does it seem like 15-20 interviews with actors from the movement would bolster the case effectively?

2. If you at least buy the general direction of my theoretical argument, what I can do to bolster it and make it more effective? If you don't buy the general direction, then, I suppose, tell me why I'm wrong!

Thanks so much. I look forward to the conversation.

Luke
Abstract

Social movement actors constantly face dilemmas and make decisions. Yet the social movements literature is surprisingly silent on decisions and how they are made. Drawing on data from a single case explored in descriptive detail, this paper asks: *What individual, interactive, cultural and/or social-structural factors affect social movement decisions, whether 'good' or 'bad'?* Future research should address the factors that account for the quality of these decisions, but this study tackles something more basic: key elements of decision-making itself. The model presented also helps to fill a gap in the social movements literature, namely inattention to the role of leaders and leadership, especially in emergent movements.

Less than a month after the Occupy Wall Street encampment began, Occupy Nashville began to take form. Lacking any significant financial center, the earliest "occupiers" selected Legislative Plaza in the heart of the city to pitch the first tent.

From this initial small group, the encampment grew week by week. The nascent movement received a significant boost when a group of anarchist-oriented activists, several of whom lived in a small Catholic Worker house in North Nashville, began to
attend on a daily basis. In the words of one participant, Stacy, they "brought leadership and stability and vision" to the encampment. These new activists had experience running meetings with the consensus model being used in the Occupy movements emerging around the globe. They began to lead "General Assembly" meetings each day, and trained others to do so as well.

Before long the encampment included a full-blown kitchen that served meals on a regular schedule; a media center complete with nearly a dozen computers, cameras and a communications team; a library filled with books on organizing, politics and social movements; a message board with an events scheduled used by regular occupiers and passersby alike; and, perhaps most importantly for the movement, a vibrant group of regular occupiers, some of whom slept in the makeshift tent city, and some of whom went home at the end of the day.

The occupation of Legislative Plaza in Nashville had a beginning and an end. And in between, many hundreds of decisions were made; several separate organizations were launched; and a number of tactical and strategic contests were waged with state agencies and corporations, with varying levels of success. Using the model below, I respond to several bodies of literature in the sociology of organizations and social movements, arguing that, at many key moments in the course of Occupy Nashville, the decision-making and leadership of several key players were decisive in the form the movement took. Though individual occupiers operated within a consensus-based organizational decision-making model, some nonetheless consistently took leadership roles in advancing strategic projects. After a brief discussion of methods, the theoretical context for the use of the leadership language is discussed at some length, shedding light on the dimensions of the model pictured on page three.

Methods

Data for this paper are drawn from my participant observation in Occupy Nashville over several months spanning late 2011 and early 2012 and a trove of emails that includes every email sent on the main Occupy Nashville listserv beginning from week two, as well
as every email sent on listservs started by two groups that emerged out of Occupy Nashville.

Rather than offer a case comparison, I seek to describe in detail the processes that unfolded in Occupy Nashville, and to highlight several key dilemmas and the role of individual decisions and actions in the outcomes of those quandaries. Focusing intently on this granular description enables certain mechanisms to come to the fore that are easily lost in comparative historical (Tilly 1964) attempts to understand social movements. The theoretical model presented is drawn from the data, and has strong internal validity. I leave it to other researchers to determine whether this theoretical model has external validity, especially in the context of emergent social movements. Coming as we are from
an overly structural understanding of social movements, this model and the empirical case from which it is drawn contribute to the emergent turn in the literature toward a more profound and thorough understanding of agency in strategic interaction (Jasper 2004, 2006; Emirbayer and Mische 1998). With this in mind, I move to a more detailed discussion of several key bodies of literature that helped to construct this model.

Theory

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<tr>
<th>Key Concepts and Definitions</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Structure:</strong> Constraints that operate independently of the strategic intent of actors (Jasper 2006)</td>
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<td><strong>Agency:</strong> The human ability to reflect, decide and act, individually and collectively; more narrowly, the capacity to do those things while facing the dilemmas endemic to strategic interaction.</td>
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<td><strong>Strategic Interaction:</strong> Engagement between at least two actors consciously seeking to achieve different and conflicting goals (Jasper 2006).</td>
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<td><strong>Social Skill:</strong> Empathy for other actors and openness to multiple goals, used to induce cooperation and move toward certain, though shifting ends. (Fligstein and McAdam 2011)</td>
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<td><strong>Leaders:</strong> Socially skilled actors in both formal and informal positions, who leverage their skill to move forward strategic projects. (Fligstein and McAdam 2011, Barker etc, 2001)</td>
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<td><strong>Dilemmas:</strong> Situations faced by socially skilled leaders that require decisions entailing difficult trade-offs. (Jasper 2006)</td>
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<td><strong>Ideology:</strong> Bounded, deeply held and relatively systematic 'idea elements' present in all social actors. (Oliver and Johnston 2000, Gerring 1997)</td>
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It is tempting to view the emergence of Occupy Nashville as the "product" of a political opportunity structure (McAdam 1982). Recent empirical work confirms the influence of material conditions on political orientation (Owens and Pedulla 2013), and so in the context of a liberal democracy, the Great Recession presented an opportunity—a "structural" grievance waiting to be capitalized on—that created the space for Occupy Wall Street and the thousands of emergent organizations that, at least initially, bore the name Occupy. But rather than identify large, so-called structural variables, this study starts from the smallest available individual-level details, and builds from these toward an understanding of the emergence and trajectory of Occupy Nashville. This theoretical approach follows a relatively new trend in the social movements literature.

The last decade has seen a wave of social movement scholarship putting into question the tradition of political process theory, which itself is a step removed from the language of political opportunity structures that preceded it. Emotions, agency and strategic interaction are finding their way into or back into social movement studies. (Jasper 2004, 2006; Goodwin Jasper and Polletta 2001; Emirbayer and Mische 1998) Even core political process theory adherents have shifted their focus to embrace a more dynamic and less structural view of social movements (Tarrow, Tilly and McAdam 2001). If the 1960s scales were tipped toward structure, the 2000s scales have begun to tip toward agency.

Structure and Agency

The antinomy between structure and agency dates back to the earliest days of sociology. The classical theorists crashed the theoretical party of the day with the insight that social and economic forces were behind much individual human behavior. Patterns of aggregated human behavior became social facts (Durkheim 1966) and real abstractions (Marx 1977). This structure-agency tension became most heightened and in some ways most fruitful in the Marxist tradition, because, unlike with Weber and Durkheim, readers of Marx tended to spill beyond the walls of academia. Indeed, Lenin (1992, 1999), Gramsci (1971) and others were theorists with a mission, and as such, their writings were attuned to the agentic and strategic dimensions of social and political life. Yet to this day,

In social movement studies, the structure-agency question has become even more pointed, and it appears at least to some that the literature is turning a corner. Drawing on the insights of the social movements and organizations literatures, and grounded explicitly in a symbolic interactionism framework, Fligstein and McAdam write boldly, "Our everyday experiences suggest that we exercise at least some agency all of the time. We show up, we do what needs to be done, and if does not get done, someone suffers the consequences. Agency is everywhere in social life. [my emphasis]" (2011:180). Perhaps it is James Jasper (2004, 2006) who has led the charge most clearly in the direction of strategic interaction. While strategic interaction may have a structural feel "in that players take [arenas] for granted, playing by their rules," (2006:167), he writes that, "Most barriers come from other players trying to block us. Structures should be constraints (and aids) that operate independent of strategic intent—a rare condition. Behind every "structure" is usually another player hard at work." [emphasis in original] (167).

From this perspective, even the Great Recession is, to some extent, the product of strategic action and interaction—many players in the banking industry picking away at regulations over decades, ultimately creating a method for transforming the cash flow from mortgages into risky, but profitable securities. Where the structuralist cries "Capitalism!" the strategic interactionist cries, "Capitalists!" Again, following Jasper, structures should be constraints (and aids) that operate independent of strategic intent. By this measure, even the Great Recession does not quite make the cut as a structural grievance, ripe for activists to exploit toward their own political ends—rather it was the result of decades of strategic business calculations, much as the formation of Occupy Wall Street was the result of a series of activist decisions in response.

Social Skill and Strategic Interaction

Fligstein and McAdam ground their theory of strategic action fields in the concept of social skill, "the ability to induce cooperation by appealing to and helping to create shared meanings and collective identities" (2011:46). Indeed in their formulation, there
are microfoundations and macroimplications. They go on to say that, "Socially skilled actors empathetically relate to the situations of other people and, in doing so, are able to provide those people with reasons to cooperate" (46). Later they suggest such actors, "will do whatever it takes to induce cooperation and if one path is closed off, they will explore others…. They keep their goals someone open-ended...." This openness is analogous to the "vacant core" that Jasper (2006) identifies at the center of strategic action: "With goals and means both shifting, a kind of emptiness may appear in much strategic action—what I call the vacant core—as though most strategic models left us nothing to in particular to be strategic about" (79). There is more to say on the edges of this empty openness, but for now it is enough to note that such formulations are especially helpful for understanding emergent social movements like Occupy Nashville, where the role and actions of individual, socially skilled actors is especially clear. This notion of social skill—with the empathy, openness and emptiness that Fligstein and McAdam and Jasper suggest—will guide much of the data analysis below.

However, following Jasper's understanding of structure outlined previously, social skill will grounded explicitly in a strategic interaction framework. For Fligstein and McAdam socially skilled actors are "prepared to take what the system will give [my emphasis]" (2012:47-48), but from the interactionist perspective, socially skilled actors are prepared to take what other socially skilled actors will give. I make the case that this interactionist framework helps to elucidate both the internal dynamics of Occupy Nashville, and the success Occupy Nashville actors had in challenging a major bank, in the process inciting activity among many socially (and legally) skilled—if often invisible—strategic corporate actors.

Dilemmas and Social Movement Leadership

From a strategic interaction perspective, socially skilled actors do not face structures, but rather dilemmas (Jasper 2006). It is worth noting that in some cases, strategic actors against whom social movement activists face off may have so many more resources (e.g. money) or skills (e.g. knowledge of the law), that certain "dilemmas" may not be dilemmas at all. As an extreme example, "occupying" the buildings owned by the
major banks was not a serious option for the Occupy movement, in New York or anywhere else—the greater resources and skills of the organizational actors in the employ of the banks would have rendered such action somewhere between impossible and inefficacious. But again, such constraints are just as easily—and, I argue, more accurately—understood as resulting from the superior skills and resources of other actors, than as the product so-called "structures."

In any case, it is clear that socially skilled actors do face dilemmas. *How formal should our movement become? Should we incorporate as a non-profit? Do we take what is offered to us by state actors?* Indeed, Occupy Los Angeles was offered a building and a budget by the city to close their encampment (Linthicum 2011). Dilemmas imply decisions. Sometimes the decision may be to do nothing at all—itself a kind of action—and of course other times the decision is to take one action over many others. In *Getting Your Way* (2006) James Jasper develops a long list of dilemmas that may be faced by strategic actors, the most fundamental of which is The Engagement Dilemma: "The decision to enter into strategic interaction is not taken lightly. Most of us, most of the time, avoid it…" (26). And indeed, once strategic interaction has begun, there is an onslaught of further dilemmas and decisions facing the actors involved. It is these dilemmas and the decisions they require to which the analysis of this paper turns, arguing that individual, socially skilled strategic actors play a vital role in determining how decisions are made, especially in an emergent social movement context like Occupy Nashville.

From a bird's eye view, movements like Occupy seem like a "natural" outpouring of the political opportunity presented by mass grievances resulting from an economic downturn; but from the granular view inside the movement, it is clear that opportunities require actors to articulate and capitalize on them, and that those actors have a determining role in the decisions that the movement must make in the face of constant dilemmas. And at the most fundamental level, without the first Occupier, there is no Occupy; without the first mover in a given arena, there is no movement.

That social movement actors face dilemmas and that social skilled actors play a special role in decision-making has implications for the social movements literature. One could speculate endlessly about why the language of leadership is largely absent from
social movement scholarship—the violence and failure of those 20th century actors committed to "vanguard" party building probably has a lot to do with the allergy. But whatever the reason, as Barker, Johnson and Lavalette (2001), Jasper (2012) and others have noted, this avoidance is restricting an accurate scholarly understanding of how social movements function.

The business-heavy organizations literature meanwhile is entirely unafraid to use the language of leadership (Fligstein and McAdam 2011; Jackall 1983; Oliver 1991; Greenwood, Oliver, Suddaby and Sahlin-Andersson 2008). Perhaps it is thanks to Neil Fligstein's research and rumination in this literature that such language makes its way into A Theory of Fields: "we all know people who are more socially skilled than others, that is, have the ability to get others to cooperate. They appear in universities, politics and the world of business. Sometimes they are leaders or managers in that they hold formal positions of power, but sometimes not" (2011:48). In this context, the authors use the word 'leader' to designate someone in an official position of power. However Barker, Johnson and Lavallette write that "leadership is exercised at all manner of levels and locations within movements, and not only by those obviously designated as 'leaders'" (2001:15). I draw on this latter understanding of leadership as present in both formal and informal settings, but ground leadership in the concept of social skill, outlined above.

In short, **socially skilled actors, whether or not they occupy formal positions of power, play a special role in making decisions when social movements face dilemmas.**

*Ideology and Decision-making*

The model presented above in figure 1 hinges on a notion of socially skilled actors engaged in strategic interaction with other socially skilled actors, making decisions in the face of dilemmas that could be resolved in multiple ways. This is the fundamental theoretical lens through which I understand the data presented below. For Fligstein and McAdam, social skill is the ability to induce cooperation and action through empathy for other actors and openness to multiple goals. But of course full empathy and full openness do not exist nor are they generally desirable for social actors. Even the most socially skilled actors bring their own ideologies to the social movements they engage. Oliver and
Johnston (2000) make the case for ideology as something deeper and distinct from framing. Quoting from Gerring (1997) they call ideology "a set of idea-elements that are bound together, that belong to one another in a non-random fashion." (2000:42) This definition distinguishes ideology from framing, because the latter draws on ideology—idea-elements bound non-randomly—to do its work of resonating, mobilizing, inducing emotions and the like. And so, whether their ideology is drawn from dominant or counter-cultural sources—or, as is almost always the case, some combination of both—it is always present.

While social skilled actors must possess empathy and openness, those qualities are always bounded at some points by ideology. Socially skilled actors are never fully empathic, never fully open to all goals; they do not, as Fligstein and McAdam suggest above, do "whatever it takes" (2012:47) Rather, empathy for some other actors is impossible, existentially and logistically, and openness to all goals is undesirable given ideological commitments however loose or strong. Put simply, ideology—the bounded, non-random idea elements present in all actors—places parameters on social skill. The very qualities that define social skill are constrained in all actors by various factors, one of which is ideology. In the context of emergent social movements, this ideological constraint is especially salient. Socially skilled actors play a special role in making decisions in the face of dilemmas, and thus identifying the ideologies of those actors is vital to grasping the constraints within which decisions happen.

Summary

The chart on page four offers definitions of key words and concepts that will do the work of analyzing the data in the subsequent section. Meanwhile the model on page three—reproduced below—offers a more dynamic view of the patterns within which social movement actors operate, especially in emergent contexts. Beginning from the circle labeled "Leaders": to the left, social skilled leaders read opportunities and constraints, a moment of agentic activity signified by a dotted line. In a sense, this is the origin of social movement activity—as Jasper (2006) argues, the most fundamental dilemma is whether or not to engage. And this dilemma emerges in the nascent thoughts and then
interactions of socially skilled actors struggling to understand the opportunities and constraints of the moment. Meanwhile, to the right, social movement participants discuss the dilemmas they face given the opportunities and constraints, as they understand them. The outcome of that deliberation is action (or non-action)—and it should be noted that deliberation itself can function as an action if targets know the deliberation is happening and seek to preempt the expected outcome. This deliberation and the action that follows is a site of agency, again signified by a dotted line with an arrow toward action.

To the left and to the right, two dotted lines are drawn close together, and another two separated by more space. The two close lines signify the fact that there are almost always multiple, parallel lines of interpretation, deliberation and action within social movements. These can indeed impact one another, and change future opportunities and constraints. Following Fligstein and McAdam (2012:48), all actors have some amount of social skill and so in a sense, each actor in a movement is involved in these processes, though to a greater or lesser extent than others.

Meanwhile, there are multiple pairs of parallel lines, because this model functions as a spiral. Social movement activity begins when socially skilled actors read the opportunities and constraints and decide to engage in strategic interaction. There is then a response from those who their actions target or impact, signified by the solid line between "Action" and "Opportunities and Constraints." The line is solid because it is not a moment of agency, from the point of view of social movement actors. Rather, the solid line signifies the response of those impacted by strategic action, hence strategic interaction. From the point of view of social movement actors, one could call this a "structuring moment" in the sense that they do not control it. Perhaps a local police department decides to arrest a key leader, in the middle of the night. The resources and social position of the police give their actions the feel of structure or a structuring moment. Viewed soberly however, their actions are a strategic response to social movement actors—perhaps constrained by other strategic actors, like city politicians—however structural the results of that action may appear.

The actions of targets and state agencies or other impacted parties completes the model's loop and induces yet another—hence the spiral metaphor. Simply put, the process proceeds as follows:
1. Leaders—that is, socially skilled social movement actors—interpret Opportunities and Constraints
2. Leaders face dilemmas and induce deliberation and cooperation about goals and actions, always constrained to some extent or another by ideology.
3. Social movement actors take action
4. Targeted and impacted actors such as state agencies respond (They go through the same goal setting and deliberation processes, though these are most often invisible both to social movement actors and to social scientists.)
5. The actions of both social movement actors and those of their targets and other impacted parties then change the Opportunities and Constraints. It is likely also that the deliberation processes change how those social movement actors understand the Opportunities and Constraints.
6. The process repeats. Each moment of strategic reflection and strategic action changes the next, and the dynamic spiral grows and changes for as long as actors continue to engage.

"Long Run Constraints" loom over the model from the corner, a nod to the reality of political opportunity structures. For example, Fillieule and Taratakowsky (2013) are right that certain historical moments call forth certain types of legitimate and efficacious tactics. These broad historic trends can however be viewed simply as a backdrop to the vital strategic interactions that make or break movements. The salience of the demonstration as a protest form cannot explain why movements choose to demonstrate on one day, as part of a particular sequence of tactics and not on another day, as apart of another sequence. Such a nuanced understanding requires a granular, strategic interaction framework. With this in mind, we turn to the data.
Evidence

Rather than attempt to understand the full arc of Occupy Nashville through this strategic interaction lens—an effort that, if done properly, would take a book or more—the analysis here will focus on several key actors and several key moments without whom and without which I will argue, the movement would not have taken the form it did. There were nearly infinite loops around the strategic interaction model presented above, even in just a few months of the occupation. At a given moment there were a dozen working groups planning multiple, parallel sometimes complimentary and sometimes conflicting courses of action. Even an army of social scientists, working around the clock could not descriptively capture anything close to the full empirical process at work in
these many actions and interactions. Rather, the method here will be to pick a moment, one moment in the strategic interaction spiral, and proceed with some detail to understand how an important element of the movement was built and led by several key socially skilled actors and then unfolded, with their guidance, through several cycles of strategic interaction. Evidence will be provided to support the basic theoretical claim that social skilled leaders influenced decisions at certain key moments that were essential to determining the course of the movement—and that ignoring those individuals and those decisions would result in an impoverished understanding of movement's form and content.

**Basic Organizational Structure**

People around the world followed emergence of Occupy Wall Street (OWS) in September 2011 (Milkman, Luce and Lewis 2013). Nashville was one of a thousand cities across eighty countries (Guardian 2011) where local activists decided to form an encampment in the style of OWS. Occupy Nashville, like OWS and most encampments around the country and the world, was committed to a "horizontal" organizational structure. In practice, this meant that there were no official leaders, and that, in theory, each individual had veto power over every official decision made within the movement. In reality, something quite different unfolded.

Officially, decisions within Occupy Nashville were made by "General Assembly", a twice-daily meeting to which quite literally anyone was invited. Day-to-day organizing and organizational work was done by "Working Groups", which were ad hoc formations, some with technical means of communication, like a listserv, and others without. Anyone could join or leave a Working Group at will, and, at least in principle, any action proposed by a Working Group had to be ratified by the General Assembly. This was the basic organizational form that Occupy Nashville took. The movement was formal, in the sense that there was a clear organizational structure and rules that governed it, but was structured non-hierarchically, and so the decision-making practices would be foreign to most organizational scholars, save a relatively handful (Rothschild and Whitt 1986).
On Saturday November 12th, an Occupy Nashville regular named Stacey hosted a meeting at the encampment: "Direct Action Organizing and Housing Rights Dialogue." Stacy had a PhD from a local university, and had invited a similarly credentialed colleague to visit from Los Angeles for an academic presentation. Her colleague Steve had worked for several years with a housing organization called the Los Angeles Community Action Network (LA CAN), and had developed some level of expertise in organizing community members to address housing issues. Since he was in town, Stacy, who had been a key participant—indeed a socially skilled leader—in Occupy Nashville since the beginning, asked him to speak at the encampment. He agreed, and on November 12th, a group of 10-15 Occupy participants gathered on the steps at the end of Legislative Plaza, and a conversation began. Steve spoke for 30 minutes, largely about LA CAN's many successful efforts to prevent evictions for some of their city's most vulnerable Skid Row citizens. A lively conversation ensued, in which those present discussed the merits and limitations of the Occupy movement, and how it might relate to long-standing organization efforts like those of LA CAN. But it was a statement made at the end of the evening that set the stage for a new direction. Stacy said gently but with a clear direction in mind, "So do we think it makes sense to form an Occupy Nashville Housing Group?" There were nods all around, and so the "Housing Working Group" was formed.

Even the most advanced social science techniques for causal inference rely on a "counterfactual" framework, at the root of which is a fundamentally philosophically unknowable proposition: If group X had been exposed to the conditions of group Y, they would have had outcomes more like group Y. (Lieberson 1985; Morgan and Winship 2007) Even if there are mathematical grounds for believing this in large N, experimental settings, the fact remains that group X was not exposed to the conditions of group Y. Counterfactual thinking, even when grounded in the most clever mathematics, requires making inferences about things that have not happened.

To understand Stacy's impact on Occupy Nashville, counterfactual thinking is helpful: What would Occupy Nashville have looked like if she had not hosted this meeting? And what would the meeting have looked like if she had not suggested that it
constitute the first of many? Stacy's social skill was clear throughout the growth and decline of Occupy Nashville; she recounted to me once how she gently recruited several Occupiers who ended up playing key roles in multiple aspects of the movement when they bumped in to one another at the wedding of a mutual friend. Stacy exhibited precisely the sort of social skill outlined by Fligstein and McAdam. She was able to empathically read social situations, and induce cooperation firmly but gently—indeed the Housing Working Group began with a question, not with a speech. Moreover, Stacy was open to multiple goals, in much the way the Fligstein and McAdam discuss. Housing was not "her issue", but rather she saw an opportunity—the combination of her friend's chance academic visit, and the stirring of housing efforts at other Occupy encampments around the country—and seized on it to form a Working Group.

Ultimately social scientists can only describe what they see and imagine what could have been. At the very least, it is safe to say that the roots of what later became "the Nashville Housing Campaign" were inflected with Stacy's intentions. At most, it is reasonable to wonder whether the campaign would have happened at all, were it not for her presence and her social skill—indeed she organized the first meeting, invited participants, and then suggested the group formation. Given this, it makes both theoretical and empirical sense to highlight this moment and her role in it as central to the arc of Occupy Nashville.

*The Plan Comes Together*

Just a few days after the meeting hosted by Stacy, a regular Occupy Nashville participant named Justine sent an email that would be fortuitous for the direction the movement was to take. Justine was at the encampment on a regular basis, though she did not sleep there. She occasionally led General Assembly meetings, and was part of the Finance Working Group, helping to deal with the movement's emergent financial situation—namely the fact that people were donating money and the movement did not have a bank account. But the bulk of Justine's work, at least initially, took place in the Outreach Working Group, where she attempted to build bridges with the broader Nashville population.
Justine was something of an Occupy Nashville anomaly. She drove a BMW and was a corporate consultant. Her hair was died pink, and she spoke with a British accent. Much later in the process of our housing work, Justine told me that she was afraid of showing up to events with her BMW. Though she had earned the respect of many Occupy Nashville peers, she was for the most part not "out" with her class status. I asked her how it was that she made it to the Occupy encampment, even though her career placed her on the edge of being in the oft-derided "1%". She recounted that she was born to a working class family in Great Britain that benefited at many turns from the social welfare state. She viewed her career and economic success as grounded in the social securities that held her family together when times were tough, and viewed Occupy as an opportunity to build a movement capable of addressing the relative conservatism of the US state—though as a socially skilled leader she was pragmatic and open about the goals for which she came to advocate. Much like Stacy, housing was not "her issue," but rather she viewed the housing work as an opportunity to craft attainable goals. In fact, Justine once said, "If I'm honest, I don't have a lot of empathy for folks who have lost their homes, but I still think this is a good opportunity for us to organize successfully."

Justine's social and strategic skill are made clear in her email of November 15th, and the responses that ensued confirm her leadership status in a formally nonhierarchical setting. In her email, Justine makes the case for a new direction:

I've noticed something about how Occupy Nashville is organized. We have divided into functional teams: Media, Outreach, Direct Action, Legal. Our adversaries in the corporate world learned some time ago that a purely functional organization is ineffective. They organize in cross-functional project teams, and pay special attention to managing the boundaries between functional processes. I wonder if we would be more effective if we organized in action teams: e.g. for the foreclosure action to have a few people from Direct Action, a few from Outreach, a few from Media, someone from Legal, to ensure that we have a fully defined and maximally effective action. Of course we say "anyone can set up a working group" but the problem is that as soon as you do that you are cut off from the existing working groups, who go on meeting without you. For this to work the existing working groups need to buy into it as an approach, with project teams that form to create actions and working groups that execute them.

Justine started off her email by lamenting that she was not able to be present at the meeting that Stacy hosted, but her email fit perfectly with the direction proposed. Many thousands of emails were sent as part of Occupy Nashville, and the majority received no response or just one or two. Justine's proposal however received 13 separate responses
from 10 different Occupy Nashville participants. The feedback was overwhelmingly affirmative and enthusiastic: "very wise insights!"; "Excellent discussion, Justine"; "Thanks for bringing this up"; "I love this discussion"; "Justine's email seems right on point to me".

Justine's email began to put form to the formation that was instigated by Stacy three days previous. Indeed tactically distinct Working Groups had been the norm at Occupy Nashville. But Justine's clear suggestion immediately following the Housing Working Group founding created a new direction for the movement, and one to which many participants were drawn. Again, a counterfactual thought experiment is useful: What would the Housing Working group have looked like, absent Justine's leadership?

Justine brought project-based corporate training that few if any Occupy Nashville participants possessed. She had the social skill to read her fellow participants and insert her suggestion at the right time—the immediate email responses indicate that she was successful at inducing cooperation, as did the participation that followed. And, as noted above, she was flexible in her goals—though housing was not "her issue", she saw housing work as an opportunity to move forward a strategic project capable of winning concrete achievements. In short, Justine brought a unique set of skills and experiences that garnered her with leadership in a formally nonhierarchical setting, and those social skills were vital to moving forward a nascent project within the movement.

The next key moment in the development of the Housing Working Group came on December 7th, several weeks after the initial formation. The group existed and had members, but no practical project. On the 7th, an email came in to two Occupy Nashville listservs, one of which many of the Housing Working Group members were connected with:

I'm an attorney here in Nashville, personally supportive of the Occupy movement, and a current client of mine is in a situation that has led me to contact you. I have read recent news stories about many of the Occupy protests turning their eyes to home foreclosures in an effort to protect unfortunate people in the 99%. I represent an elderly lady on social security who purchased a home with her two daughters back in the 90s. Long story short, the daughters left their mom high and dry, moved out and do not pay their share of the mortgage. Neither of them have any money and are currently working part time jobs. My client’s only income is social security disability, which is not nearly enough to pay her mortgage. Her lender is Chase, notorious for its foreclosure behavior. The home is in foreclosure and the bank is set to sell the home in two weeks.

My firm and I are running out of options, and I wanted to check with Occupy Nashville. Are you directing any of your action to Nashville foreclosures? If so, I would very much like to speak to
someone with the movement about what we might be able to do for this sweet old lady. If anyone with the movement can speak with me, I can provide more details and specifics of the situation.

Within the day, several members of the Housing Working Group seized on this opportunity, and scheduled a meeting with the attorney and his client. Thus began a spiral of strategizing and strategic interaction with Chase bank.

_Dilemmas and Strategic Interaction Spirals_

The full strategic interaction spiral analyzed in this paper spans just over two months, from December 7th, 2011, when socially skilled actors began analyzing opportunities and constraints, to February 14th, 2012, when Chase bank took its final action of the spiral, giving in to Occupy Nashville's demands. Several ON participants were intimately involved in this process and in the deliberations and decisions made throughout. Two players had especially key roles in the unfolding process: Justine, described in some detail above, and Sean, the lawyer who reached out to Occupy in the hopes that the movement could enhance his case.

Justine played a vital role in conceiving of and implementing the campaign strategy against Chase bank. At the most basic level, she set aside her admittedly judgmental view of those whose homes were at risk—a sign of the goal flexibility central to Fligstein and McAdam's conception of social skill—and produced much of the knowledge that was central to the deliberation of potential actions. Her relatively detailed understanding of the situation, and her ability to convey that information in a way that created confidence among Occupiers, was central to the success of the campaign. For example, in response to an email about Chase bank profits, Justine had this to say:

Chase total profits might be a fact that can be used for an emotional play in the press, but for practical purposes, it has limited relevance in making convincing arguments to Chase or to anybody who doesn't immediately feel sympathy for Ms A. [the homeowner, Hannah] Chase makes money by creaming percentages off various classes of transactions. It's a volume play. Total earnings don't even matter as much as things like EBIT percentage or return on capital employed. Ms A is one of a class of customers. They likely have a policy for that class and wish to avoid setting precedents that would further decrease the overall profitability (or increase the loss) of that class. I'm not defending it, I'm just saying that knowing how the decision makers are influenced is what will help us build arguments that are convincing either to them or the public.
Sean also played a fundamental role; when he reached out to Occupy Nashville, he was already engaged in a strategic interaction spiral of his own with Chase bank. For participants of ON, Sean presented the possibility of a new strategic interaction spiral, but in fact he was already engaged in an interactive process with Chase bank. Again using a certain kind of counterfactual thought experiment, it is impossible to imagine the following spiral of strategic interaction without Sean deciding to connect with Occupy Nashville—and hence understanding his actions is central to understanding the development of the campaign. The email quoted at the end of the previous section and the flurry of emails within ON that ensued, demonstrated Sean's social skill, his empathic capacity to induce cooperation even from a relative distance. In two short paragraphs, he painted a picture of villainous Chase and a sympathetic Hannah, sending Occupy participants scurrying to action.

The Engagement Dilemma

As Jasper (2006) argues, the most fundamental dilemma is whether or not to engage strategic interaction. When Occupy Nashville received Sean's email, many other activities were already underway. Would engagement be a drain on resources? Did Occupiers have the knowledge and capacity to take on Chase bank? What would be the unintended side effects of engagement? Between December 7th, when the email came in, and December 19th, when Occupy Nashville officially took its first action, a certain kind of deliberation ensued.

During those 12 days, email archives indicate 11 proposed or ongoing actions in parallel Occupy Nashville arenas, in addition to the basic but time-consuming daily affairs of maintaining the encampment. Engagement involves channeling limited resources, and the email archives indicate that there were as many possibilities as actualities. During the same time period that ON participants were deciding whether or not to engage Hannah's situation, Travis, an Occupy Nashville leader who became involved in the interaction with Chase bank, sent out an email announcing the formation of an "anarchists in the Occupy movement" group, one that would ultimately outlive ON itself. In the midst of these many ongoing engagements, a discussion took place in
response to Sean's email, where eight Occupy Nashville participants endorsed exploring the case further. Justine was one of those voices, as was Travis.

Ultimately, on December 15th, I traveled with another ON participant named Mary to Hannah's home in North Nashville. Though this was engagement of a certain kind, the decision to engage Chase Bank was not yet fully made. Mary and I talked with Sean and Hannah at great length about her situation, the foreclosure, and the possibility of forcing Chase to accept an $18,000 principle reduction, which would be enough to get her back on track. After the meeting, Mary and I talked in the driveway. Though we shared ambivalence about the situation, we also shared a sense that there was a possibility of victory: Hannah was a sympathetic character, an African-American who had participated in the Civil Rights movement. She was excited about the prospect of working with Occupy Nashville. Meanwhile Sean understood the legal details of the situation, and felt confident that outside pressure might move Chase bank. Standing in the now darkened driveway, Mary and I decided to report a favorable meeting to those interested and to suggest moving forward. Given the support that was already in place, our report galvanized the group further.

Up until December 18th—the last full day of this "engagement dilemma" phase—it was not clear whether Occupy Nashville would be protesting at Hannah's foreclosure auction, scheduled for December 19th. Sean held out some hope that he would be able to negotiate a hold with the bank, but ultimately this failed. Mid-day on December 18th, Justine heard from Sean that we would likely need to protest and notification of an action at the Davidson County Courthouse rippled through the Occupy Nashville listservs. The situation was strange. Though Sean's formal legal training ostensibly gave him more access to the "black box" of Chase bank, by December 18th, he simply did not know whether Chase would auction Hannah's home or not. His contacts within the bank did not reply. And so in this ambiguous context, a dozen Occupy Nashville participants including Sean, Justine, Travis, Mary and me, marched from the encampment to the Courthouse. We spoke at great length with the auctioneer, who told protesters that Hannah's house was not on the list to be auctioned. What was called an "Emergency Protest" on the Occupy Nashville listservs was ultimately not a protest at all. But it did represent an initial engagement, however small, with Chase bank.
Between December 19th and December 31st, a series of "brainstorming" meetings were held and a number of email threads unfolded. The deliberations were many: What tactics should Occupy Nashville use? In what sequence? What "messaging" should Occupy Nashville use publicly? At a meeting led by Justine and Mary on December 20th, participants produced a document comprised of a series of goals, with strategies and timelines for each. The primary of these was to work with Sean to create a stated goal, a clear demand for Chase bank. The others included organizing in Hannah's neighborhood to develop community support; connecting with local and potentially national media; coordinating with Occupy movements in other cities; meeting with local political leaders; and protesting the new auction date of Hannah's house, now scheduled for January 18th, 2012. Through email, Justine and others helped to coordinate a follow up meeting on December 28th to discuss the brainstorming strategy document and sequence possible actions. At this meeting, participants decided to draft an "Open Letter to Chase Bank", a task that Justine took on.

Between 12/30 and 12/31, a vigorous email debate took place among participants of the campaign. The debate touched on two dilemmas that Jasper (2006) highlights: the dilemma of shifting goals (75); and the dilemma of whose goals they are (67). On the surface, the debate was simply about messaging, but the conversation touched on concerns about what the impact of the messaging would be, beyond its immediate efficacy. In the email that began the thread, Justine describes her recent discussion with Sean. A new legal tactic had been devised. Chase was unwilling to accept a principle reduction, so Sean suggested a duplicitous short sale wherein they would use a sympathetic company to purchase the home from the bank, who would "write off the… the debts, fees and penalties. CHASE MAY TAKE THIS IF THEY THINK MS A WILL NOT GET TO LIVE IN THE HOUSE." This new legal tactic however presented a new problem: participants had planned to state publicly that their goal was to keep Hannah in her home. The short sale technique would have required a public framing wherein the stated goal was to "get Hannah out from under her mortgage." But later in the thread Stacy wrote, "The messaging for this seems crucial not only for this case but
for long term campaigns." Here the contradiction between Hannah's goal of staying in her home—and indeed Occupy Nashville's of supporting her in this effort—and the longer-term, partially contradictory goal of using this case to launch a larger campaign were made clear. The short-term efficacy of the proposed framing would have advanced one goal, but not the other. In this moment, goals were shifting, and it is clear that Hannah, Sean, and Occupy Nashville were not one unified, collective player, but indeed a collection of individuals and smaller collective players, each with distinct goals that overlapped only in some ways. The messaging dilemma on this email thread makes clear deeper and more fundamental dilemmas about goals and who, indeed determines what the goals are.

Warren, an anarchist-identified lawyer involved with Occupy Nashville since the early days, drafted the final email of the thread. It summed up the provisional resolution to these goal-centered dilemmas:

[H]ousing is a human right, plain and simple. I also think Hannah should remain in her home because the banks are evil.

Where we may have messaging problems is that I don't know how we can say that "housing is a human right, and the right extends to a particular property, even while people are not paying their bills on that property."

I think at that point, we rely on the economic arguments and also pathos.

The result of this debate was a firm, open letter to Chase bank that concluded with the following:

We will be using all the means at our disposal to tell her story. We will be featured in the press and TV news. We will use the Occupy Nashville website and Facebook page, which have over ten thousand followers. We will use our relationships with Occupy movements in cities throughout the United States. We will spread the story by word of mouth and public events. Therefore a swift resolution is in everyone's best interest, and we look forward to your prompt response.

The letter was ratified by consensus at Occupy Nashville's January 1st, 2012 General Assembly, and released to the media the next day. After four days of silence, Sean contacted Justine:
I just got a call from Kelly Hammond in the executive office of Chase. She informed me that she was requesting a 30 day hold on the foreclosure sale set for the 18th. She said she would follow up with me next week to make sure the negotiator and I talked. Sounds like she got your media release.

*Risks and Parallel Actions*

The responses to Sean's email included such internet exclamations as "YAYYY"; "WWWWWWWWWWWW!!!!!"; and "GREAT NEWS!!!". Clearly Occupiers interpreted this action as a tactical victory. Indeed, to use the model from page 13, this action by Chase restructured Opportunities and Constraints favorably. Corporations like Chase appear as a kind of black box to activists, but Occupiers read this action as a sign of vulnerability. A flurry of actions ensued.

During the month of January, three key lines of action unfolded in parallel: neighborhood organizing began in earnest; participants planned and executed an action south of Nashville at the law firm representing Chase bank in the region; and Warren connected with change.org to create an online petition that framed Chase as a modern enemy of the Civil Rights movement. In combination, these actions led to a flurry of local and national media attention, and represented the next strategic interaction with Chase bank. Leaders like Justine and Warren read the Opportunities and Constraints, facilitated online and offline discussions with participants, and ultimately advanced the actions that would push Chase bank to accept an $18,000 house and allow Hannah to stay in her home.

Conceived at the brainstorming meeting in late December, the neighborhood organizing was transformed into a press conference to celebrate the initial victory of Chase's delay of sale, and to spread Hannah's story in the local media. All day on January 7th and the morning of January 8th, Occupy Nashville activists canvased Hannah's neighborhood, connecting with her friends and neighbors, and inviting them to a "potlatch press conference" at her home on January 8th. The event boasted a dozen of Hannah's friends, family and neighbors, as well as approximately twenty Occupy Nashville activists. All of the major Nashville TV stations sent reporters, and Hannah herself gave a quiet but rousing speech to the cameras, discussing her own Civil Rights activism decades previous and her current struggle with Chase bank. By the end of the
day on January 8th, Occupy Nashville had moved from letter writing to taking real estate on the evening news—yet it was still of course impossible to know what deliberations were happening inside of Chase bank.

While the question of time and resources was a real concern for activists when deciding to engage Chase bank, by this time the situation had gained enough traction that previously unengaged Occupiers joined the effort. Through conversations with Sean, Occupiers had found that the legal firm representing Chase for the region was located an hour's drive from Nashville. On January 12th, a dozen Occupiers carpooled to the nearby city, and delivered a "mock foreclosure notice" to the law firm. Again, both the law firm and Chase remained something of a black box to Occupiers, each tactic seeking to provoke action.

During the same week, Warren initiated a change.org petition. He connected with an organizer at change.org who became inspired to pursue the petition seriously. At the same time that the petition was spread around the many Occupy Nashville listservs, the change.org organizer Tom contacted "national civil rights activists" who promoted the petition far beyond ON's local circles. Cornel West and other notable leaders became signatories. During Warren's interaction with Tim, Occupiers received their first confirmation that Chase was indeed making calculations: "[Tim] spoke with the secretary of the person with whom he deals at Chase, who told him they are 'aware' of the… 'problem.'"

Jasper (2006) writes of the risk dilemma: "most engagements and moves within engagements entail unknown and known probabilities of a number of outcomes, both good and bad" (18). In the moment, and indeed after the fact, the potlatch press conference and the change.org petition had relatively clear potential positive and negative outcomes: Failure to attract media or sufficient numbers of participants might have deflated those who participated in the neighborhood event, a modest though not insignificant risk. On the other hand, Occupiers had just learned that Chase appeared vulnerable to public attack, and the potential reward of media attention far outweighed the risk. The change.org petition entailed even less risk, with greater potential reward: A dormant petition was not likely to deflate anyone, but a successful one might garner national attention.
The mock foreclosure was the only action that had significant potential to stimulate unforeseen consequences. Occupiers knew very little about the law firm. Perhaps it was politically connected, and the attack would spur the partners to action in other arenas, an accidental side effect. Occupiers were poking at a black box not unlike Chase, but a black box much closer to Nashville. Given parallel processes unfolding in other arenas of the general Occupy Nashville movement—indeed the ACLU was in the process of defending the movement against eviction in Tennessee courts—this action had the potential to disrupt the movement in unforeseen ways.

In any case, this combination of actions pushed Hannah's situation into the national spotlight: By February 5th, the petition had 30k signatures; February 7th saw at least seven national and local articles highlighting the case; and on February 13th, the story found its way to MSNBC. On February 14th, Chase contacted Sean and agreed to the principle reduction necessary to restructure the loan. This restructuring action effectively ended the spiral of strategic interaction, as Occupiers achieved their initial stated goal.

*The Dilemma of Success*

In the midst of Hannah's case, there were many dilemmas. However, a core group of leaders and other participants remained committed to the strategic interaction, and to thinking and talking through those dilemmas as effectively as possible. Jasper (2006) describes two success-focused dilemmas, but neither addresses the dilemmas that ensue from actually *succeeding*, however modestly. Though there was a Housing Working Group that preceded this particular campaign—without which the campaign likely would not have happened—the group did not take full form until there was a practical project to engage. Yet once the campaign succeeded in its stated goal, practical and ideological dilemmas arose. In late February and early March, core participants in the campaign had a series of four meetings, discussing next steps. The very flexibility that enabled socially skilled actors such as Justine to enter the strategic interaction spiral also left the group unsure of what to do after achieving its initial goal.
A whole range of questions arose: Should the group take up locally or nationally focused struggles? Was the "brand" Occupy becoming stale (a question no one appeared to wonder about while engaged actively in strategic interaction)? Was it preferable to incorporate as a non-profit, or remain an informal group (a question with special importance for those with an ideologically anarchist orientation)? Especially in the context of an emergent social movement, winning a victory may well present as many dilemmas as the strategic interactions that led to the victory. After nearly two months of deliberation, the group re-branded itself as the Nashville Housing Rights Campaign, electing to continue informally but without the baggage that "Occupy" had accrued in other arenas. But that process was a complex one, bringing to the fore certain ideological tensions that were dormant during active strategic interaction. Thus, built on the confusion that followed victory, this paper seeks to add a dilemma to the long list presented by Jasper (2006): the dilemma of success.

Conclusion

The decisions made throughout the process of strategic interaction described in this case were never made unilaterally, a fact mostly ensured by the organizational rules and the culture of Occupy Nashville. Yet certain socially skilled actors—who I call Leaders—played key roles in working through the dilemmas that necessitated decisions. I argue that to tell the story of this particular strategic interaction spiral without reference to individuals and their actions, especially the socially skilled individuals who framed questions and induced cooperation time and again, is to miss the story entirely. No explanation based on structural or comparative-historical accounts of the Occupy movement can account for the way in which this spiral unfolded, or, indeed, the fact that it unfolded at all.

Fligstein and McAdam (2011) are clear that all actors possess social skill and that agency is everywhere in social life. In this sense, everyone is a leader. Yet they unabashedly argue that some actors possess more social skill than others. I argue that this social difference is the very definition of leadership—not some formal leadership as in the President, nor some hierarchical vanguard leadership as in the Dictatorship of the
Proletariat. But rather, a micro-leadership, one that unfolds through innumerable social and strategic interactions, that is flexible, that comes and goes, that is not finally, the quality of one individual, but the product of the fact that, in some circumstances, some individuals negotiate the terrain more deftly than others. Social movement studies will benefit from further attention to this strange thing called leadership, to the fact that all situations become defined by the decisions of some actors over and above those of others.
Citations


