

Shocked or Satiated?

How Long-term Activists
Manage Moral Shocks Beyond
the Recruitment Stage

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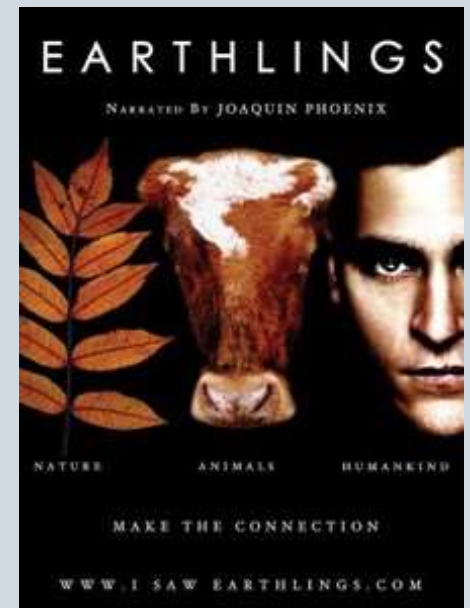
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What are Moral Shocks?



Jasper, J., & Poulsen, J. (1995). Recruiting strangers and friends: Moral shocks and social networks in animal rights and anti-nuclear protests. *Social Problems*, 42(4), 493-512.

Why Use Moral Shocks?

- ❖ Jasper & Poulsen (1995) argue that “moral shocks” can stimulate recruitment for movements,
 - ❖ Particularly for those which are less successful in recruiting through networks
- ❖ Others have suggested that, more than a recruitment tool, these moral shocks are useful for sustaining activist motivation (Fernández, 2020; Hansson & Jacobsson, 2014)





The Problem of Compassion Fatigue

Methodology

- ❖ This study hypothesizes that, rather than repeatedly and intentionally exposing themselves to morally shocking campaign materials to sustain motivation, committed activists avoid doing so as a means of preventing burnout and sustaining their activism
- ❖ Qualitative, semi-structured email-based interviews with 25 activists

Findings

- ❖ **Moral shocks not used by respondents to ‘re-up’**
 - ❖ Most **actively avoided** personal exposure, although quite a few maintained its utility for educating the public and mobilizing new activists
- ❖ Most were also very clear that they found this material deeply disturbing
 - ❖ Several specifically using the term “**traumatic**”
 - ❖ Activism clearly has a **psychological impact** on activists
- ❖ **Uncertainty** about their utility in recruitment

cripple debilitate **depressed** disempowering
distressing disturbing flashbacks haunted
helplessness hopelessness
immobilises insomnia **misanthropic** nightmares
overwhelming panic
powerless ptsd shaking tears **trauma**
traumatic triggering

Conclusions

- ❖ **Are moral shocks necessary to maintain activist motivation?**
 - ❖ According to the respondents in this study: **no**
 - ❖ The activists in this sample were **deeply ambivalent** about the utility of morally shocking imagery
 - ❖ More research needed on moral shock efficacy
- ❖ **Need for organizations to be sensitive** to psychological impacts of activism to sustain a healthy and happy activist base