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Protection, Prizes or Patrons? Explaining the Origins and Maintenance of Human Services Interest Groups

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Little work has been done to understand the origins of human service interest groups or how they maintain themselves once founded. This paper tests three models of interest group origins and maintenance: a pluralist approach in which groups form and continue because they protect members' interests; a rational actor model in which groups form and are maintained because they offer members "prizes" that are more valuable than the costs of joining; and a patronage model in which groups form and continue because financial backers are willing to support them financially. Results show support for the "protection" and "patrons" models for the 127 Washington D.C. based advocacy organizations surveyed.

A theme running through much of the social work policy literature is that social workers lack knowledge and power in the political process (see, for example, Albert, 1983; Dear and Patti, 1981; Ezell, 1993; Mathews, 1982; Wolk, 1981). One reason for this may be the over-emphasis placed on individual political action compared to using interest groups to affect policy. As Jones, Ericson, Brown, Trotter and Lynch argue: "Experience has demonstrated that individuals who form groups for political action are usually more effective in achieving their goals than are persons acting alone" (1993: p. 125).

Interest groups, when mentioned, are often seen with suspicion. Jansson, for example, states "Powerful interest groups and well-heeled contributors have exercised extraordinary influence

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over American elected officials, to the detriment of social reform" (1997, p. 364). Such a belief in the negative power of interest groups draws attention away from the fact that there are interest groups that fight *for* social reform, too. Little research exists in the social work literature, however, about these interest groups (with the exception of Hoefer, in press, Hoefer, 1998, and Hoefer, 1995). One area that is particularly ill-studied concerns the origins and maintenance of human services interest groups.

Interest groups have been defined in many ways, but the classic definition in the political science literature is: "any group that, on the basis of one or more shared attitudes, makes certain claims upon other groups in the society for the establishment, maintenance, or enhancement of forms of behavior that are implied by the shared attitudes." (Truman, 1951, p. 33). There are many such organizations at various levels of government which try to affect social policy. It has been estimated, for example, that there were 22,663 interest groups active in Washington, DC in 1996, an increase of 54 percent compared to 1980's 14,726 groups. Of these, an estimated 1,885 were active in social welfare issues in 1996, up 90 percent from the 994 groups existing in 1980 (Hrebenar, 1997, p. 15).

Thus, at the national level, the rate of growth in interest groups active in social policy far surpassed the growth of interest groups in general. Knowing that these organizations were founded recently and continue to exist leaves us with many intriguing questions. This paper addresses two major questions for a sample of interest groups active in social welfare issues: "How did these groups get started?" and "How do they support themselves?" The implications of this information for social work practice are also addressed.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In order to understand the origins and maintenance of interest groups we must look at two intertwined questions: "How do interest groups originate?" and "How do interest groups maintain their existence?" While these two questions at first seem to be easily separated, it quickly becomes clear that how a group is started is very much related to whether and how it continues to exist.

It should be emphasized that this study looks exclusively at organized interest groups in Washington D.C. that try to influence national policy and not the many other types of actors that exist in American politics at all levels. Social movements, for example, have an interesting and important place in the literature and in politics. There are many theories and ideas about how they originate and maintain themselves. Nonetheless, they are outside the scope of this study. Additionally, there are theories relating to the roles that nonprofit organizations play, such as Weisbrod's private sector failure theory, or Kramer's comparative work. Because this study focuses on just one type of nonprofit organization, those playing the advocacy role, these theories are also left untested.

There are three major theories that address the questions raised in this paper and that are tested: Truman's (1951) and Dahl's (1956) pluralist "disturbance" theory where societal changes activate latent groups to try to achieve some important purposes; Olson's "rational choice" theory where each potential member requires a "prize" in order to be induced to join and stay a member; and Walker's "patronage" theory where groups form and stay in existence due to financial support from one or a few large contributors. All of these theories have their critics but the empirical basis for the criticism is not always well discussed, particularly in the social work literature.

Disturbances, Protection and Pluralism

Truman (1951) believed that the process of creating organizations was spontaneous, once citizens felt a pressing need. He proposed the "disturbance theory" of group origins, arguing that groups form due to disturbances in technological and social environments which led to the need for representation of new categories and interests. Some groups thus form to protect new interests and some form to protect themselves from the changes desired by the new interests. While it may be difficult for some people with a shared interest to organize, if the problems encountered are sufficiently great, and if society does not restrain the ability to organize, then organizations will emerge to represent these interests. Truman's theory builds upon a pluralist interpretation of American society in which every potential group has power simply from the fact that it contains voting citizens. Decisionmak-

ers take into account the wishes of groups in society, even latent groups, in order to protect their hold on power. Truman's theory, while influential, does not provide specifics regarding how the interest groups actually form or maintain themselves.

Dahl (1956), a leading pluralist theorist, provides a plausible extension to Truman's ideas regarding how groups are founded. He argues that all citizens have some political capital, even if they choose not to use it. Because of this, power is widely dispersed and no one set of elites controls political decision-making. Dahl (1956) believes that people can be divided into two categories: those interested in politics (*homo politicus*) and those not (*homo civicus*). Politically interested persons naturally take charge of interest groups and political organizations, but they are always constrained by the legions of *homo civicus*. If political decisions became too out of touch with ordinary peoples' desires, *homo civicus* shifts from apathy to anger, and a new set of leaders is chosen. Thus, behind the spontaneity of organization seen by Truman lays a class of political entrepreneurs who by temperament and training lead the political system. They do so by laying out clear purposes to protect the group's interests.

Rational Choices, the Collective Action Dilemma and Prizes

Truman's (1951) and Dahl's (1956) view of the world is strongly challenged by Olson (1965). Adopting an economic perspective of the "rational, self interested person," Olson perceives that there are only two reasons to join a group which is seeking collective goods (benefits available to everyone, whether a member of the group or not). First, joining such a group makes sense if it is coerced (as is joining a union in some states) or if the selective benefits (i.e., those available only to members) one receives are of greater value than the costs of joining. The problem of convincing potential members that the benefits are greater than the costs is known as the collective action dilemma. It is a problem that every organization devoted to achieving collective goods must overcome to survive. According to this theory, it is rational for potential members to refuse to join a group dedicated to collective benefits because they will enjoy the positive results without having to contribute to the process. They are "free riders". Olson's answer to the collective action dilemma and the problem

of free riders is that interest groups, in order to continue existing, should offer material benefits available only to members, such as publications, low-cost consumer items, discounts on desired goods and services, and so on. These material benefits can be thought of as “prizes” that members value more than the cost of their membership dues. Otherwise groups must rely on coercion to survive.

Patronage

Empirically-based work by Walker (1991) has had a profound impact on current understanding of the origins and maintenance of interest groups. He shows that the commonly noted explosion in the numbers of interest groups which began in the 1960s is largely because of patrons—persons, organizations or government agencies that want a particular organization to exist so much that they underwrite all or a large portion of its budget.

“The key to the origins and maintenance of interest groups lies in the ability and willingness of the patrons of political action to expand the representative system by sponsoring groups that speak for newly emerging elements of society and promote new legislative and social values” (Walker, 1983: 404).

The existence of patrons has a profound effect on how group leaders view the task of attracting members. It means that members are no longer as necessary. The collective action problem is reduced or eliminated. The job of a group leader is simplified because organizations do not need to attract members with incentives that are subjectively worth more than the cost of joining. The result is that some interest “groups” are not groups at all but are non-membership interest organizations. Having members may be advantageous for political reasons, particularly if a group adopts a strategy using grassroots lobbying but the existence of a patron eliminates the need for members as a major source of funding.

Walker also shows that a group’s membership can usefully be categorized by its occupational base. Members (whether institutional or individual) may come primarily from the forprofit sector or the nonprofit sector. In addition to these workplace related types of groups, other groups may have members who come from

any field or from no field at all. This type of group is known as a citizen's group.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

After describing the methodology of the data collection, this paper focuses on testing these theories' applicability regarding human service interest groups' origins and maintenance.

In particular, we address the following research questions:

1. When and how have human services interest groups been founded?
2. How do human services interest groups and organizations maintain themselves, once started?
3. Which theory of group origins and maintenance appears to be most accurate in the area of human services interest groups and organizations?

METHODS

The data for this paper come from mailed surveys of interest groups based in Washington D. C. Names for the sample were culled from the *Washington Information Directory* of organizations that were active in social policy. A stipulation for inclusion in the study was that organizational activities must include trying to influence the executive branch as well as Congress. Telephone calls were made to each organization to verify the information in the Directory and to ascertain the person who should most appropriately receive the survey. In all, 317 organizations were identified as meeting all criteria and were sent surveys.

A typical mail survey process was used in this research: an initial mailing to all groups, a postcard "Thank you"/reminder ten days later, and a second full mailing to all non-respondents two weeks later (Fowler, 1988). The response rate of 40% (127 organizations) is acceptable but tempers the strength of the conclusions that we can draw.

These groups may not be fully representative of all human service interest groups, for two reasons. First, many groups do not attempt to lobby the executive branch, focusing entirely on Congress. Second, these organizations may not be representative of all actors trying to influence social welfare policy because

they have a continuing existence, as demonstrated by being in a reference book on interest groups and by having a separate phone number. Ad-hoc coalitions and movements run out of a leader's basement are thus not in the population from which the survey respondents are drawn, even though they may have some impact on social policy. Formerly solvent groups that have died out are also not included in the sampling process.

Despite these concerns, the information presented here is a strong first step in understanding the origins and maintenance of groups active in social policy. The groups chosen are good ones to learn from for two reasons. First, they are among the most politically savvy because they recognize the importance of working to alter administrative regulations and other executive branch decisions, not just legislation. Second, they are also successful, in some sense, because they are still in existence.

RESULTS

This section provides information that addresses the validity of the theories described above. Results are presented regarding when groups were founded; where start-up funds came from when the organizations began; how groups maintain themselves financially; and which incentives groups currently use to attract members. We then address the question of which theory best explains the results.

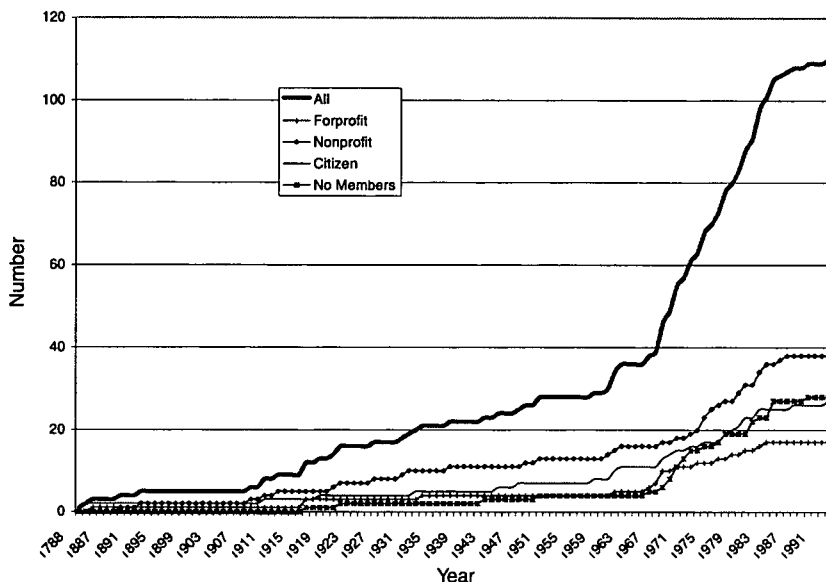
When were groups founded?

The organizations in this study of human service interest groups' origins and maintenance range in age (in 1994) from 2 to 206 years old. The median age is 23.5 years.

Walker's occupationally-based typology is reflected in the results. Of the 127 organizations which responded, 18 (14%) are forprofit based; 44 (35%) are nonprofit based; 31 (24%) are citizen-based, and 29 (23%) have no members. Another 5 (4%) have a mixed membership but are excluded from further analysis due to this type's small numbers. We use these types of groups as an important variable in our analysis because the answers for our questions sometimes differ depending on the type of group.

Figure 1 shows the cumulative number of responding organizations that existed at any one time (due to lack of response to the

Figure 1

Cumulative Number of Groups, by Type, 1788–1992

question regarding founding year in the surveys, this information is available for only 114 of the organizations). Separate lines show totals for each type of group as well as all groups. The general trend is remarkably clear: there was a steady, if slow, increase in numbers of groups from the beginnings of our country to the 1960s. In 1961 and 1962, a sudden spurt of growth occurred, followed by a few years of stabilization. But in 1968 another spurt started, lasting for two decades before ending.

Different types of groups followed the same general pattern, with only slight differences. Nonprofit and citizen groups, for example, have very similar patterns to each other and the overall curve, with there being fewer citizen groups at any time. Non-membership organizations, beginning from the lowest base, started increasing rapidly in number in 1966. Their numbers did not level off until 1989. Forprofit groups are the smallest number of organizations in the study. Their growth spurt started a bit

earlier than the nonprofits and citizens, in 1966, but ended earlier, in 1983.

Where did start up funds come from?

Table 1 indicates the source of start-up funds for the groups. There are five sources which either did or did not assist the group in its initial stage: small contributions from many individuals; private foundations; corporations and businesses; large contributions from one or a few individuals; and government. The first category indicates a broad membership drive enabled the organization to establish itself; the other four might indicate that one or more patrons were involved. More than one response is possible.

The most common sources for start-up funds are private foundations and small contributions from many individuals. Over half of groups received money from one or both of these sources. One third of the groups got assistance from corporations or businesses. Large contributions from a few persons was a source for nearly a third of the respondents, while just over one-fifth of all groups were assisted by a government agency.

There are important differences, however, in how the different types of groups began. Forprofit groups tend to have received funds from corporations as well as private foundations. Non-profit groups were likely to have received start-up money from private foundations and small contributions from many individuals. Three-fourths of citizen groups got small contributions from many individuals; about half received funds from private foundations and large contributions from one or a few individuals. Over three-quarters of organizations without members received funds from private foundations, and, to a much lesser extent, small contributions from many individuals.

Thus, while there are several sources for funds to help start a new organization, the type of membership has an important effect on the most likely strategy. Organizations for members from the forprofit world can often receive assistance from for-profit corporations and businesses, presumably part of their future membership. An organization of forprofit nursing homes, for example, might be started by some of the larger nursing home chains in order to give themselves a larger and more covert voice. Private foundations, sometimes controlled by successful business

Table 1

Sources of Start-up Funds by Type of Group

| <i>Source</i> | <i>Percent of Groups Receiving Start-up Funds From This Source</i> | | | | |
|---|--|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------------------|
| | <i>All Groups (n = 104)</i> | <i>Forprofit (n = 17)</i> | <i>Nonprofit (n = 36)</i> | <i>Citizen (n = 25)</i> | <i>No Members (n = 26)</i> |
| Private Foundation (p = .15) | 53 | 41 | 47 | 48 | 77 |
| Small Contributions from Many Individuals (p = .02) | 51 | 31 | 46 | 75 | 44 |
| Corporate/Business (p = .38) | 33 | 47 | 29 | 39 | 24 |
| Large Contributions from One or a Few Individuals (p = .05) | 28 | 25 | 21 | 48 | 17 |
| Government (p = .64) | 22 | 12 | 19 | 20 | 28 |

Note: P value is from a chi-square test of differences between the types of groups (forprofit, nonprofit, citizen and non-membership). Each row is a separate question. Answers to the question were either "Yes, funds were received from this source when the organization was founded", or "No, funds were not received from this source when the organization was founded." Only "Yes" answers are reflected in this table.

persons, are also often contributors to new interest groups for members from the forprofit sector.

Nonprofit groups rely on private foundations, too, but also on the small contributions of many individuals, presumably initial membership dues. A large majority of citizen groups needed support from many individuals to get off the ground, although private foundations and individual patrons are also important sources of early funds. For organizations with no members, private foundations are very often used to provide money in the

beginning. Even here, many such organizations used small contributions from many people to start operating. This is surprising, since the donors provide money without becoming a "member" of the group.

In sum, small contributions from many individuals is a tactic that is especially important to citizen groups, although nearly one-half of nonprofits and no-member organizations also used it. Private foundations were particularly important for no-member organizations, and, to a lesser extent, nonprofit and citizen groups. Corporations and businesses supported forprofit groups most, although over one third of citizen groups also received support from this source. Citizen groups also had strong support from a few individuals who gave large amounts. Government was prone to give start-up funds to no-member organizations.

How do groups maintain themselves financially?

There is less variation in how groups obtain their current budget compared to the types of funding sources they had at their founding. The most important source for most types of groups is membership dues. One third of all groups' budgets comes from membership dues, on average. This is highest for forprofit groups (50%) and, as expected, of no importance for non-membership groups (0%). Nonprofit and citizen groups each obtain around one-third of their current budgets from this source (39% for nonprofits and 33% for citizen groups). Foundation grants are the most important single source of income for non-member organizations (38%), followed by money from government (23%). Foundations, government and corporations provide fairly small amounts of ongoing assistance to forprofit, nonprofit and citizen groups. A residual category consisting of things such as investment income and sales provides about one-third of the budget for each type of group.

One constant problem for group leaders is to keep resources flowing into the organization. Respondents were asked how important four different potential ways of increasing income were for their group (see Table 2). Three different strategies emerge from the answers. For forprofit and citizen groups, the key strategy is to increase the number of members. This implies that the group makes a "profit" on each member: the marginal cost of

providing services or benefits is less than the income derived from membership dues.

The second strategy, employed as the dominant approach by non-member groups, is to increase the number of grant applications. Some groups must be considering becoming membership groups, however, as there were responses indicating this was a possible way to increase funds for the organization. These three types of groups put most of their eggs in one basket, in terms of increasing their budgets. Only nonprofit groups adopt a third, multi-option strategy, believing that increasing grant income and increasing membership are both important.

Fortunately for the groups, many of them had recorded increases in membership size compared to five years previously. Almost three-fifths of forprofit and nonprofit groups (57% for both types) had some increase in the size of their memberships. Almost half of citizen groups (45%) did the same.

Table 2

Importance of Tactics to Increase Group Budgets by Type of Group

| <i>Source of Increased Budget</i> | <i>Mean Score of Importance</i> | | | | |
|--|---------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------------|
| | <i>All Groups (n = 112)</i> | <i>Forprofit (n = 17)</i> | <i>Nonprofit (n = 38)</i> | <i>Citizen (n = 29)</i> | <i>No Members (n = 28)</i> |
| Increase Grant Applications | 3.96 | 2.76 | 4.16 | 3.52 | 4.86 |
| Increase Membership | 3.84 | 5.41 | 3.95 | 4.07 | 2.50 |
| Increase Fundraising Efforts | 3.34 | 3.19 | 3.51 | 3.34 | 3.18 |
| Increase Administration of Government Programs | 2.40 | 2.44 | 2.28 | 2.18 | 2.75 |

Note: Answers were on a scale ranging from 0 (not used) to 6 (most important).

What incentives do groups use to attract members?

Because membership dues are so important for the groups' survival (except for the non-membership organizations, which rely more on foundation grants and government contracts), it is vital to know which membership incentives each group offers if we are to understand how groups continue to exist. This information is available from Table 3. Ten different possible membership incentives were presented to respondents who marked how important each is to their group's members. While this is not a direct measure of the importance of the incentives to members, it is reasonable to assume that group leaders have a good idea of the services that members request and use.

The most striking result shown in Table 3 is the level of agreement across all types of groups regarding the importance of each incentive. "Advocacy of Ideas" is considered the most important incentive by all three types of membership groups; in addition the incentives in the "top three" and the "bottom three" are identical across the groups.

There are only two incentives that are ranked differently by the different types of groups. The first is the purposive incentive of "Being able to participate in public affairs" which is ranked fourth by citizen groups and seventh and eighth for forprofit and nonprofit groups, respectively. Citizen groups place a greater emphasis on involving their members in the advocacy process compared to forprofit and nonprofit groups. This implies that citizen groups are more likely to use grassroots campaigns to influence policy than are the occupationally-based groups active in the forprofit and nonprofit worlds.

The other incentive with disparate rankings is "Contact with professional peers and colleagues" which is ranked fifth by both forprofit and nonprofit groups and eighth by citizen groups. This is reasonable because citizen groups are not organized along employment-related lines, unlike forprofit and nonprofit groups. There is thus no way to guarantee contact with peers and colleagues when the membership is drawn from a variety of employment backgrounds.

Each incentive in Table 3 has been labeled according to the type of incentive it is: The assignments were first made based

Table 3

Importance of Membership Incentives, by Type of Group

| <i>Membership Incentive and Type of Incentive</i> | <i>Mean Score and Rank</i> | | | |
|---|------------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| | <i>All Groups (n = 80)</i> | <i>Forprofit (n = 16)</i> | <i>Nonprofit (n = 38)</i> | <i>Citizen (n = 26)</i> |
| Advocacy (Purposive) | 5.55 (1) | 5.69 (1) | 5.58 (1) | 5.42 (1) |
| Represent Members' Opinions (Purposive) | 5.17 (2) | 5.53 (2) | 5.32 (2) | 4.72 (3) |
| Publications (Solidary) | 5.03 (3) | 4.88 (3) | 5.18 (3) | 4.88 (2) |
| Conferences/Meetings (Solidary) | 4.64 (4) | 4.56 (4) | 4.95 (4) | 4.23 (5) |
| Training and Education (Solidary) | 4.36 (5) | 4.00 (6) | 4.76 (6) | 4.00 (7) |
| Contact with Professional Peers (Solidary) | 4.29 (6) | 4.31 (5) | 4.82 (5) | 3.50 (8) |
| Participate in Public Affairs (Purposive) | 4.16 (7) | 3.94 (7) | 3.95 (8) | 4.62 (4) |
| Friendship (Solidary) | 4.03 (8) | 3.69 (8) | 4.16 (7) | 4.04 (6) |
| Insurance (Material) | 1.44 (9) | 1.25 (10) | 1.51 (9) | 1.46 (9) |
| Consumer Discounts (Material) | 1.40 (10) | 1.82 (9) | 1.24 (10) | 1.35 (10) |

Note: Answers were on a scale ranging from 0 (not used) to 6 (most important).

on our interpretation of the literature. A factor analysis was conducted to test the categorization using both no rotation and varimax rotation options in SPSS. The results from both analyses supported the theoretical assignments of the 10 incentives into purposive, solidary and material categories. In general, it appears that purposive benefits are most important, solidary ben-

efits are second-most important and material benefits are, by a wide margin, least important. This conclusion is true across all types of groups.

Which Theory Best Explains the Results? The theories discussed in the literature review have different explanations regarding why the number of interest groups might have grown and what the pattern of membership benefits offered would be. Truman's disturbance theory combined with Dahl's (1956) pluralist theory says that something happened in society to motivate larger numbers of *homo politicus* to organize formerly latent groups. Groups exist to protect their interests. Implied in this theory is that group incentives will be primarily purposive in nature as the goal of becoming involved is to counter some threat.

We can test this in two ways. First, we compare the years that groups were founded with social policy history to determine if group formation seems to increase more in periods of disturbance. Second, we examine the types of incentives offered to determine why group members join. If Truman is correct, we will find that purposive benefits are more important than are solidary or material benefits. Because we do not have historical data on the types of incentives offered by groups in their earlier years, we cannot be sure what was offered then. We will instead use current data on the importance of incentives as a substitute.

Olson maintains that the collective action dilemma should keep groups from forming unless coercion was used to force people to join or unless material benefits are provided to members. Thus, one of these two strategies must have been used to lure members. Because these groups are voluntary in nature, we can immediately eliminate coercion as a means of having members join the human service interest groups in this study. Examining the incentives offered will determine if Olson is correct.

Walker argues that patrons emerged at this time in society to underwrite the existence of the new groups. In order to test his theory, we will look at the percentage of groups which had patrons when they were started and compare this to the time period when groups were forming at an accelerated rate.

Testing "Protection". There are three time periods of great change for social policy in American history. The first is during the Great

Depression, when the foundations of the American welfare state were laid. The signature event was the passage of the Social Security Act of 1935. The second is the time of the Great Society programs, culminating in the creation of Medicare and Medicaid in 1965. The third is the era of backlash and retreat from the social welfare state, which began in the late 1960s. (For three approaches to social welfare policy history, see Day, 1997, Jansson 1997, or Trattner, 1999.) It would be reasonable, based on Truman's disturbance theory, to see an increase in the number of human service interest groups during all three time periods.

Of these three periods, one might predict that the era of backlash would provoke the most consternation. Groups of people who have been accustomed to receiving government funding (either as clients, or as employees of government or nonprofit agencies administering services) might work harder to maintain their status than would people fighting for a new program.

In fact, social policy historians believe that the late 1960s and onward have been a time of extreme change and disturbance in social policy. Day (1997) , for example, states "The election of President Richard M. Nixon [in 1968] began the retreat into conservatism" (p. 343). Jansson (1997) considers the time between 1968 and 1980 as "the paradoxical era," with three conservative presidents, Richard Nixon, Gerald Ford and Jimmy Carter, presiding over "a major period of social reform" (p. 241). By 1980, a considerably more conservative Republican president, Ronald Reagan, was elected. Day (1997) believes that "The elections of Ronald Reagan and George Bush were the emerging tip of a reactionary iceberg" (p. 372). This meant drastic cuts in social spending and the government grants that were thought to keep many advocacy organizations solvent (Peterson and Walker, 1991).

Examining Figure 1 shows evidence that groups were more likely to form during the three time periods when social policy was in especial turmoil. There is an apparent, although slight, increase in the rate of group formation in the early 1930s, a noticeable jump in growth during the early 1960s and a steep and sustained growth in numbers from the late 1960s to the late 1980s. This pattern supports Truman's disturbance theory. The evidence on this point is admittedly more heuristic than definitive, as

many alternative explanations might be offered. Nonetheless, it is supportive of Truman's hypothesis.

Truman's model also predicts that purposive incentives will be most important. As noted in Table 3, the incentives currently considered most important for maintaining interest group membership are purposive. The data therefore support the disturbance theory of interest group formation in two ways. First, the time periods of increased interest group formation were during times of considerable change in social programs. Second, the groups' incentives are primarily purposive in nature, which is what we would expect of groups battling to protect a set of programs or values.

Testing "Prizes". The data from this research give little support to Olson's theory. The valued types of incentives offered are not material benefits and there is no evidence to support the belief that members are coerced into joining. Members do not need prizes to join an organization. Rather, they want to see values advocated, opinions represented and the chance to interact with others sharing their ideas and interests.

Testing "Patrons". If patrons are an important part of why groups start and continue, we should see more groups with patron support during the time of increased group formation than before. The data support this prediction. Patrons were more common for groups started after 1968 than before. Slightly over half of groups (56%) started prior to 1968 had a patron of some type (government agency, private foundation, business, or had large contributions from one or a few individuals). Over four-fifths (81%) of groups begun in 1968 or later, however, had a patron (chi-square = 9.67, $p = .009$).

Differences continue after a group is founded. As seen in Table 4, on average, groups begun prior to 1968 receive 40% of their current funding from membership dues, compared to 32% of groups founded in 1968 or later. This is the largest source of funding. More significantly, however, groups begun prior to 1968 receive only 27% of current funding from patrons (private foundations, government agencies and corporations or businesses) compared to 47% of current funding for groups begun in 1968 or later. The bulk of this difference is due to private foundations giv-

ing three times as much funding to the groups that began in 1968 or later compared to the groups that were founded earlier. This pattern remains even after one deletes groups with no members.

The data support Walker's patronage theory strongly. Patrons are a much more prevalent source of funds to originate and maintain human services interest groups in the years since 1968 than before. The growth in the numbers of human services interest group may be due primarily to the growth in the number of patrons available and willing to provide funds to found and maintain groups active in social welfare policy.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

While Olson's theory is not supported by the results of this study, two of the three theories examined are supported. It appears that protection and patrons are both important. Truman was not specific as to how groups started; rather he focused on when they would emerge. Dahl (1956) posited the existence of a leadership class (*homo politicus*) that would (somehow) bring together latent group members when the need for protection was great. Walker provides a financial mechanism to simplify *homo politicus'* task. Rather than choosing one theory to be the complete answer we can provide one combining two earlier theories. Thus, the answer to the question "Why do groups start?" is: Human

Table 4

Percentage of Current Funding by Source and Era of Founding

| <i>Source of Current Funds</i> | <i>Founded Before 1968</i> | <i>Founded in 1968 or Later</i> | <i>P value</i> |
|--------------------------------|------------------------------------|---|----------------|
| Membership dues | 40% | 32% | .219 |
| Foundation Grants | 8% | 25% | .001 |
| Government Agency | 12% | 13% | .763 |
| Corporations/Businesses | 6% | 9% | .383 |
| Other | 33% | 21% | .039 |
| Total | 99% | 100% | N/A |

Note: Totals do not round to 100% due to rounding error.

Note: P value is based on a two-tailed independent samples T-Test.

services interest groups tend to start when there is a distinct need to advocate for or to protect values or programs and when patrons are there to provide financial resources.

Groups may, of course, begin at any time and with any source of financing. It can be difficult, however, to get people to join an organization when everything is going well. In such cases, members of *homo politicus* may long for controversy to erupt. In fact, controversy may be manufactured if it does not exist. Liberal groups, in recent years, used the "threat" of former Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich and a conservative Republican Congress to scare people into joining. Conservative groups have profited in a similar way from using the images of President and First Lady Hillary Clinton to entice membership.

There are limitations to this study that should temper our reliance on the data gathered. First, the response rate was somewhat lower than is ideal, so the sample may not be entirely representative. A second limitation is that the choice of subject. Washington-based, national-focus interest groups that conduct both legislative and executive branch lobbying is a limited set of organizations. It does not include social movements, small or ad-hoc coalitions, locally influential groups or other potential subjects of study. More importantly, interest groups that once existed but did not exist at the time of the survey could not be contacted. The ways that they were founded and maintained (for at least some time) might provide information that contradicts or amends the data from still-existing groups.

Despite these limitations, we can draw several implications from the data. These implications should be considered empirically derived, but open to additional research to support or contradict them.

Persons working to create an interest group or advocacy organization addressing one or more social problems should keep the following statements in mind:

1. Demonstrate a need for the organization.
2. Find a financial backer who will underwrite the start-up costs of the group. Potential sources for a patron include private foundations, government agencies, businesses or corporations and individuals willing to contribute a significant amount of money.

3. The type of person you are trying to mobilize (persons from the forprofit or nonprofit worlds, or people from all walks of life), may impact the type of patron you are able to secure.
4. If a financial patron is not available, groups can be started with small contributions from many individuals. This will increase the amount of effort for the organizer, however.
5. Potential members want to know that their ideas will be represented and that their values will be advocated for. Emphasis should be on what the organization will be able to do in these areas.
6. Potential members also want opportunities to interact with others, if only through the written word. A successful group organizer must thus have both an external focus on advocacy and an internal focus on members' desires to be informed and involved.

CONCLUSION

This paper sought to answer two questions regarding human services interest groups: "How do interest groups originate?" and "How do interest groups maintain their existence?" The answers are related, in that groups originate when patrons are available to group organizers in times of social or political disturbance. Groups continue to exist by offering purposive and solidary benefits to their membership although groups founded since 1968 also rely heavily on patrons. Non-member organizations continue to exist if they are able to maintain a relationship with a patron.

The answers to these two questions allow us to test existing theories of group formation and maintenance. We have rejected Olson's "prizes" model, in favor of a combination of Truman's "protection" and Walker's "patron" models.

This information is important for several reasons. First, social workers must remember that not all interest groups fight against social work values and social welfare programs. A large number are "on our side". Second, it is helpful to understand how groups originated and how they maintain themselves. Without such an understanding, the groups may not be there to protect the values and programs that social workers believe in. Finally, understanding the issues raised in this research helps social workers develop

additional organizations and can lead to better practice in the area of community organization. If it is true that people acting together *are* more effective than persons working alone, it is a professional duty to test current theories to determine which are correct and, based on the results, to develop better ones.

Additional research should be undertaken to add to and clarify the results from this study. Particularly important questions to answer include:

What motivates patrons to provide funds?

How do patrons and potential interest group leaders connect?

Do non-member organizations commonly change to membership groups?

Do membership groups commonly change to non-membership organizations? If either shift occurs, why and how does it occur?

Once questions such as these are fully explored, social workers will have an easier time in protecting their interests and the interests of their clients against other groups and organizations that have a very different agenda.

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