

**Networks, Social Influence, and Personal Plans for Dealing with Climate Change:
The Effects of Personal Network Ties to Environmentalists
on the General Public in Canada**

D.B. Tindall

**Department of Sociology
Department of Forest Resources Management
Centre for Applied Conservation Research
University of British Columbia**

E-mail: tindall@interchange.ubc.ca

ABSTRACT:

This paper examines the social influence of environmental social movement organization (ESMO) members on the general public. It sets out to answer the question, “For members of the general public, does having a social network tie to an ESMO member influence one’s concern and plans for dealing with climate change?” This paper draws upon data from two social surveys. The primary data set of interest consists of social survey data collected from a probability sample of the general public in Canada (N = 1007). A comparative data set collected from a probability sample of environmental organization members across Canada is also considered (N = 1148). With regard to this latter study, data from ESMO members were collected regarding their frequency of communication about environmental issues, and the frequency by which they encouraged others to engage in environmentally friendly activities (as well as on other topics). The findings provide evidence that ESMO members frequently engage in these forms of communication, and thus bolsters the plausibility of “social influence effects” resulting from network ties. Multivariate analyses are undertaken (to analyze the general public data), using multiple regression, and logistic regression analyses, to develop models which explain concern about climate change amongst the general public, and personal plans to take action about climate change among the general public. The major finding of this study is that the number of ESMO members that one has ties to increases the likelihood that one has a plan to deal with climate change. This effect holds even when ESMO membership status is controlled for. In other words, amongst non-ESMO members, the greater the number of ties they had to ESMO members, the more likely they were to have a plan to deal with climate change. We argue that this is a “social influence” effect, whereby environmental organization members disseminate information and moral suasion. Findings are discussed in the context of the social movements, social capital, and social network literatures. Implications for environmental organization strategizing are also discussed.