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Resistance, Acceptance, and Quiescence: The Role of Social Networks in Predicting Responses to a New Natural Gas Pipeline

Shannon Elizabeth Bell, Stephen Gerus, Danielle R. Mullins, and Michael Hughes

ABSTRACT

As a wide body of social movement scholarship demonstrates, inaction in the face of environmental injustice is far more frequent than mobilization. Using the case of the Mountain Valley Pipeline (MVP)—a highly controversial natural gas pipeline that has been under construction through the Appalachian Mountains of Virginia and West Virginia since 2018—we ask: what conditions predict whether a person who has experienced negative quality-of-life impacts from this pipeline will take action or resign themselves to quiescence? Through our analysis of responses to a 92-question survey questionnaire that our team mailed to residents living in 10 of the counties through which the MVP is being constructed, we find that the most powerful predictors of quiescence are variables related to social networks. Among respondents reporting negative quality-of-life impacts from the pipeline, those with neighbors supporting the pipeline were nine times more likely to be quiescent, and those who were not sure how their neighbors felt about the pipeline were five times more likely to be quiescent. On the other hand, those who had joined a social media group focused on stopping the pipeline were nine times more likely to take part in resistance actions than those who had not. We situate our findings within existing scholarship on social movements, which points to the centrality of social networks for predicting social movement participation and quiescence, while also adding nuance to discussions of neoliberalism and sites of acceptance.

Keywords: quiescence, natural gas pipelines, Appalachia, power, social networks, social movements

INTRODUCTION

SOCIAL MOVEMENT SCHOLARS have long recognized that when faced with an environmental injustice or a potentially harmful industrial development project,

people are far more likely to choose *inaction* than resistance.^{1,2} The reasons for inaction vary across sites, ranging from communities' *acceptance* of risky industrial projects as a cost of economic growth and

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¹Doug McAdam and Hilary Schaeffer Boudet. *Putting Social Movements in Their Place: Explaining Opposition to Energy Projects in the United States, 2000–2005*. (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2012).

²Shannon Elizabeth Bell. *Fighting King Coal: The Challenges to Micromobilization in Central Appalachia*. (Cambridge, The MIT Press, 2016).

“progress”^{3,4,5} to communities’ *quiescence*—or resigned silence—resulting from elite coercion^{6,7} or feelings of powerlessness produced by repeated defeats.⁸

However, communities are not monolithic. Within any given community targeted for new industrial development, some residents may accept the project (either actively or passively, often due to an internalization of neoliberal logics⁹), others may attempt to resist the project (either through individual or collective action), and still others may respond with *quiescence*—neither consenting to nor fighting against industrial development, despite holding deep objections to the project.

An important distinction between passive acceptance and *quiescence* is the potential for action. Those who have accepted an environmental harm as simply a cost of societal “progress” are not likely to take action against that harm. However, just as a volcano that is in a state of *quiescence* could erupt in the future under the right conditions, a person who is *quiescent* also has the potential to become an activist if the conditions are right.

There is currently little research examining the factors that distinguish those who resist a perceived injustice from those who suffer in resigned silence; it is within this gap in the literature that we situate our study. Using the case of a highly controversial natural gas pipeline that has been under construction through the Appalachian Mountains of Virginia and West Virginia since 2018, we apply insights from Steven Lukes¹⁰ and John Gaventa’s¹¹ understanding of three-dimensional power to ask: what conditions predict whether a person experiencing negative quality-of-life impacts from this pipeline will take action or resign themselves to *quiescence*?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Resistance, acceptance, and quiescence

As social movement scholars have noted, inaction in the face of injustice is far more frequent than mobilization¹²; and even within communities that have mobilized against an injustice, there are many more people who remain passive than who take action.¹³ Stephanie Malin’s research on “sites of acceptance” in uranium communities¹⁴ and unconventional oil and gas extraction communities^{15,16} sheds important light on how the internalization of neoliberal logics can facilitate the acceptance of industries that pose environmental risks to local populations.

As Malin found, small-scale farmers in the Marcellus Shale region of Pennsylvania “normalize[d] fracking’s impacts using market-based logic” that privileged individual economic benefits over the collective health and well-being of local residents and ecosystems.¹⁷ Similarly, in their study of inaction in Cushing, Oklahoma—where legacy pollution from two former oil refineries continued to plague the community after 20 years of remediation efforts—Shriver *et al.* found that residents accepted the legacy pollution as unavoidable. As one of their interviewees noted, “...in a refining town, that’s just the way it goes...It’s the environmental price you pay for the economic cornerstone of the community.”¹⁸

Scholars have also demonstrated how industries can cultivate acceptance through cultural manipulation tactics. For instance, in their research on the public relations strategies of the coal industry in Central Appalachia, Bell and York highlight the ways that the coal industry draws on masculinized cultural values to promote a “community economic identity” that is tied to coal production.¹⁹ They find that this cultural connection to the industry fosters loyalty and acceptance of harm, even among residents who reap no direct economic benefits from coal mining.^{20,21}

Shriver, Adams, and Bray caution that inaction does not always mean acceptance; *quiescence*—or silent resignation—also leads to inaction.²² Articulating the

³Stephanie A. Malin. “When is ‘Yes to the Mill!’ Environmental Justice? Interrogating Sites of Acceptance in Response to Energy Development.” *Analyse & Kritik* 36 (2014): 263–285.

⁴Stephanie A. Malin. *The Price of Nuclear Power: Uranium Communities and Environmental Justice*. (New Brunswick, Rutgers University Press, 2015).

⁵Shannon Elizabeth Bell and Richard York. “Community Economic Identity: The Coal Industry and Ideology Construction in West Virginia.” *Rural Sociology* 75 (2010): 111–143.

⁶Alison E. Adams, Thomas E. Shriver, Laura A. Bray, and Chris M. Messer. “Petrochemical Pollution and the Suppression of Environmental Protest.” *Sociological Inquiry* 90 (2020): 64–668.

⁷Thomas E. Shriver, Alison E. Adams, and Laura A. Bray. “Political Power and Manufacturing Consent: The Case of the 1953 Plzeň Protests.” *The Sociological Quarterly* 60 (2019): 26–45.

⁸John Gaventa. *Power and Powerlessness: Quiescence and Rebellion in an Appalachian Valley*. (Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 1982).

⁹Malin, “When is ‘Yes to the Mill!’ Environmental Justice?”

¹⁰Steven Lukes. *Power: A Radical View*. Second Edition. (MacMillan International and Red Globe Press, [1974] 2005).

¹¹Gaventa, *Power and Powerlessness*.

¹²McAdam and Boudet, *Putting Social Movements in Their Place*.

¹³Bell, *Fighting King Coal*.

¹⁴Malin, *The Price of Nuclear Power*.

¹⁵Malin, “When is ‘Yes to the Mill!’ Environmental Justice?”

¹⁶Stephanie A. Malin, Adam Mayer, Kelly Shreeve, Shawn K. Olson-Hazboun, and John Adgate. “Free Market Ideology and Deregulation in Colorado’s Oil Fields: Evidence for Triple Movement Activism?” *Environmental Politics* 26 (2017): 521–545.

¹⁷Malin, “When is ‘Yes to the Mill!’ Environmental Justice?” 18.

¹⁸Thomas E. Shriver, Chris M. Messer, Jared R. Whittington, and Alison E. Adams. “Industrial Pollution and Acquiescence: Living with Chronic Remediation.” *Environmental Politics* 29 (2019): 1–20.

¹⁹Bell and York, “Community Economic Identity.”

²⁰Bell, *Fighting King Coal*.

²¹Rebecca R. Scott. *Removing Mountains: Extracting Nature and Identity in the Appalachian Coalfields*. (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2010).

²²Shriver, Adams, and Bray, “Political Power and Manufacturing Consent.”

distinction between passive acceptance (acquiescence) and quiescence is crucial for understanding the origins of inaction under unjust circumstances. Through their study of silence among sexual assault survivors in the Canadian military, Pider and Harlos provide important theoretical insights into the differences between these two causes of inaction: acquiescence “implies a deeply-felt acceptance of...circumstances, a taking-for-granted of the situation and limited awareness that alternatives exist.” On the other hand, quiescence “connotes disagreement with one’s circumstances, in effect suffering in silence while being aware of existing alternatives to change the status quo.”²³

In his classic work, *Power and Powerlessness: Quiescence and Rebellion in an Appalachian Valley*, John Gaventa argues that quiescence is “a function of power relationships” between elites and marginalized groups.²⁴ Drawing on Steven Lukes’ theory of three-dimensional power, Gaventa demonstrates how “power works to develop and maintain the quiescence of the powerless” by influencing how less powerful groups view the prospects for challenge. When power is wielded in this way, powerful groups are able to prevent “issues from arising, grievances from being voiced, and interests from being recognized.”²⁵

In their 2014 study, Shriver *et al.* reveal how these processes functioned in a community experiencing ongoing pollution from a decommissioned zinc smelter. In this community, local elites exerted both “proactive” and “coercive methods of control” to retaliate against outspoken opponents and to stymie the emergence of collective action.²⁶ As Adams *et al.* argue, in places politically and economically dominated by one industry, challengers can be particularly susceptible to vilification campaigns, which may incite “widespread threats and retaliation” against those who speak out, leading to quiescence.²⁷

Bell’s Photovoice project in five coal-mining communities in Central Appalachia reveals that within certain community contexts, even subtle silencing processes can be effective at fostering quiescence.²⁸ As Bell’s analysis demonstrates, many Photovoice participants’ fear of acquiring an “outsider stigma” was enough to silence those who had previously expressed grievances with coal-industry practices in their photostories and in small-group reflection sessions. As she notes, in many Appalachian coal-mining communities, large-scale outmigration has depleted social networks, and the fear of isolation and

damaging important relationships powerfully influences individuals’ willingness to speak publicly against coal-related injustices.²⁹

Bell’s findings align with a wide body of social movement scholarship that has pointed to the centrality of social networks for predicting social movement participation and non-participation.^{30,31,32} Drawing on this understanding, we posit that social networks are a key determinant of whether an aggrieved individual will resist a perceived injustice or resign themselves to quiescence. In the section that follows, we describe the background of our case before outlining our methods.

The case: The Mountain Valley Pipeline

The Mountain Valley Pipeline (MVP) is a 303-mile long, 42-inch diameter natural gas pipeline that has been under construction through the Appalachian Mountains of West Virginia and Virginia since the first quarter of 2018. This interstate pipeline, which is being built to transport natural gas from the Marcellus and Utica Shale regions, was first announced in 2014 and was certified by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) in October 2017. Once complete, the MVP will have a 1115-foot-wide Potential-Impact Radius³³—commonly referred to as the “blast zone”—where a pipeline failure could have devastating impacts for all humans, wildlife, vegetation, and structures within the area.

The pipeline traverses extremely rugged and steep mountain slopes that are riddled with karst terrain and shrink-swell soils in an active seismic zone, which together create an especially risky pipeline project.³⁴ Since the MVP was announced in 2014, the project has been met with considerable opposition from community groups, environmental organizations, and affected municipalities. Anger over the pipeline company’s right to seize private property through the use of eminent domain and concerns about water pollution, habitat destruction, the loss of forest and agricultural land, pipeline explosions, and quality-of-life impacts are primary grievances among opponents.

However, as is typical of new industrial and infrastructure development, reactions among local populations are

²⁹Ibid.

³⁰William Gamson. “The Social Psychology of Collective Action.” In *Frontiers in Social Movement Theory*, ed. Aldon D. Morris and Carol McClurg Mueller. (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1992).

³¹Alan Schussman and Sara A. Soule. “Process and Protest: Accounting for Individual Protest Participation.” *Social Forces* 84 (2005): 1083–1108.

³²Doug McAdam and Ronelle Paulsen. “Specifying the Relationship between Social Ties and Activism.” *American Journal of Sociology* 99 (1993): 640–667.

³³Federal Energy Regulatory Commission. “Mountain Valley Project and Equitrans Expansion Project: Final Environmental Impact Statement.” 2017, 4–561. <https://www.ferc.gov/sites/default/files/2020-05/Final-Environmental-Impact-Statement_1.pdf>. (Last accessed on March 26, 2022).

³⁴Ernst H. Kastning. “An Expert Report on Geologic Hazards in the Karst Regions of Virginia and West Virginia.” FERC filing 20160713-5029, 13 July 2016.

²³Craig C. Pider and Karen P. Harlos. “Employee Silence: Quiescence and Acquiescence as Responses to Perceived Injustice.” *Research in Personnel and Human Resource Management* 20 (2001): 331–369, 348–349.

²⁴Gaventa, *Power and Powerlessness*, 4.

²⁵Ibid., vi–vii.

²⁶Shriver, Adams, and Bray, “Political Power and Manufacturing Consent,” 289.

²⁷Adams *et al.*, “Petrochemical Pollution and the Suppression of Environmental Protest,” 663.

²⁸Bell, *Fighting King Coal*.

mixed, with only a portion of the affected population engaging in actions to contest this new project. What factors have led to differing responses among affected residents?

HYPOTHESES

Drawing on the literature outlined earlier, we propose the following hypotheses:

- Hypothesis 1: People who have not taken action against the pipeline will include both individuals who *accept* the pipeline (either actively or with indifference) and people who are *quiescent*.
- Hypothesis 2: Among respondents reporting negative quality-of-life effects from the pipeline, those with neighbors supporting the pipeline or who are not sure how their neighbors feel about the pipeline will be more likely to be quiescent than respondents with neighbors who oppose the pipeline.
- Hypothesis 3: Among respondents reporting negative quality-of-life effects from the pipeline, those who have joined an online social media group focused on stopping the pipeline will be less likely to be quiescent than those who are not part of an online network oriented around pipeline resistance.

METHODS

In fall 2019, our research team mailed a 92-question survey to residents living in the 1115-foot-wide Potential-Impact Radius (Blast Zone) of the MVP in six counties in Virginia and four counties in West Virginia and to a control group of residents living at least 10 miles away from the pipeline in the same counties.³⁵ To draw our sample, we built a Geographic Information System database of land parcel addresses falling within the Blast Zone of the Virginia MVP corridor (Montgomery, Giles, Craig, Roanoke, Franklin, and Pittsylvania Counties) and four of the counties in the West Virginia corridor (Monroe, Greenbrier, Summers, and Fayette Counties).

From that database, we also drew a random sample of land parcel addresses falling at least 10 miles away from the pipeline in those same counties to serve as our control group. Corporate landholders, federal and state-owned property, and properties owned by the pipeline developer were eliminated, and multiple parcels owned by one landowner were consolidated. After accounting for surveys that were returned as undeliverable, our sample included 2654 addresses in Virginia and West Virginia. We first mailed a letter outlining the study, which was then followed by the survey one week later. Four weeks after mailing the survey, we sent a reminder postcard to non-responders. Five weeks after sending the postcard, we sent a replacement survey to non-responders.

The survey asked a variety of questions about residents' quality of life, land use, feelings toward the pipeline, participation in regulatory agencies' public input opportuni-

ties, involvement in activities oriented toward resisting the pipeline, measures of psychological distress, as well as demographic and open-ended questions. We received 783 responses to our mail survey (a 29.5% response rate). Of these responses, 433 were from people living in the Blast Zone of the MVP and 350 were from people in our control group. Surveys were entered into an Excel database by a team of research assistants, and each survey entry was checked for accuracy by one of the authors.

Variables in the analysis

To measure whether or not a person had taken action against the pipeline, we asked, "Have you been involved in any of the following activities in response to concerns about the Mountain Valley Pipeline? Please check all that apply." Respondents who stated that they had done any of the following were coded as a pipeline *resister*, and those did not report taking any of these actions were coded as being a *non-resister*:

- Submitting a written comment against the pipeline during the draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) public comment period
- Giving oral testimony against the pipeline during a public scoping meeting.
- Speaking against the pipeline during a Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ)/(WVDEP) Water Control Board hearing.
- Photographing or filming problems caused by pipeline construction.
- Submitting a complaint about pipeline construction to the [DEQ]/[WVDEP] or other agency.
- Attending a protest or rally against the pipeline.
- Joining a community group focused on stopping the pipeline.
- Writing a "letter to the editor" of a newspaper about pipeline concerns.
- Signing a petition against the pipeline.
- Contacting government representatives about concerns with the pipeline.
- Donating money or supplies to anti-pipeline groups.

In this study, *quiescence* is defined as not taking action against the pipeline, despite feeling negative quality-of-life impacts from it. We measured how the pipeline had affected respondents' quality of life by asking: "Do you feel that the Mountain Valley Pipeline project has affected your quality of life?" The response alternatives were: (1) The pipeline has negatively affected the quality of my life, (2) The pipeline has positively affected the quality of my life, and (3) The pipeline has had no effect on the quality of my life.

The independent variables in our analysis included whether or not the respondent lived in the blast zone of the pipeline, political ideology, educational attainment, and two measures of network connections to others who oppose the pipeline.

The individuals from our sample whose property fell within the 1115-foot-wide Potential-Impact Radius were coded as being in the blast zone (1), and those who were in our control group were coded as being outside of the blast zone (0).

³⁵Study approved by Virginia Tech IRB; Protocol #19-405.

We measured political ideology by asking, “How would you identify yourself on the political spectrum?” Seven choices along a continuum were provided, from “Extremely Liberal” to “Extremely Conservative.” We collapsed responses into three categories: liberal (coded as 1), moderate (coded as 2), and conservative (coded as 3).

Our first measure of network connections to others who oppose the pipeline was drawn from a question that asked how the respondent thinks their neighbors feel about the pipeline. This question was designed to both gauge whether respondents live near others who oppose the pipeline and to determine whether respondents actually *know* how their neighbors feel about the pipeline. The question asked: “Overall, would you say that most of your neighbors support or oppose the construction of the Mountain Valley Pipeline?” Response alternatives were: (1) Most neighbors support the pipeline, (2) Most neighbors oppose the pipeline, and (3) I am not sure how my neighbors feel about the pipeline.

As another measure of network connections to people who oppose the pipeline, we asked respondents whether they had joined “an online social media group focused on stopping the pipeline.” We created a dummy variable where 1 indicated the respondent had joined an online group to stop the pipeline, and 0 indicated the respondent had not.

RESULTS

Twenty-eight percent (218) of our respondents engaged in at least one political or activist action against the pipeline; we categorize these individuals as having resisted the pipeline. In keeping with the literature on social movements, however, the vast majority of our respondents—72% (561)—did not engage in any political or activist actions against the pipeline. Does this mean that most people accept the pipeline, or is the story of non-action more complicated?

To test our first hypothesis—that the category of people who have not taken action against the pipeline includes both individuals who *accept* the pipeline (either actively or with indifference) and people who are *quiescent*—we examined how these non-resisters responded to a survey question asking how the MVP had affected their quality of life.

Respondents were asked to select one of three answers: “The pipeline has positively affected the quality of my life”; “The pipeline has had no effect on the quality of my life”; and “The pipeline has negatively affected the quality of my life.” As shown in Table 1, among non-resisters who answered this question, the most common response was that the pipeline had produced no effect on their quality of life (77%). We categorize this group of people as being *indifferent* to the pipeline.

Seven percent of non-resisters indicated that the pipeline had positively affected the quality of their lives; we categorize these individuals as *supporting* the pipeline. The third category of people—which includes 16% of the non-resisters—are those who stated that the pipeline had negatively affected their quality of life. These respondents

TABLE 1. DISTRIBUTION OF NON-RESISTING RESPONDENTS BY PIPELINE'S QUALITY-OF-LIFE IMPACTS ($N = 549$)

Variable	Frequency (%)
Pipeline has positively affected the respondent's quality of life (Support)	37 (7) ^a
Pipeline has had no effect on the respondent's quality of life (Indifferent)	424 (77) ^b
Pipeline has negatively affected the respondent's quality of life (Quiescent)	88 (16) ^c

Pairs of percentages with differing superscripts are different from each other at $p \leq 0.05$.

have reasons to resist the pipeline, but they have chosen to remain silent; we designate this group as being *quiescent*. These results indicate that—as we hypothesized—not all of the non-acting respondents accept the pipeline. There is a substantial proportion of the sample who have remained inactive despite their negative feelings toward the pipeline.

Predicting resistance and quiescence

Of the 255 people who stated that they had been negatively affected by the pipeline, 167³⁶ respondents (65%) engaged in political or activist actions against the pipeline, and 88 took no such actions (35%). What distinguishes those who were quiescent from those who took action? We posit that the key difference between these two groups are the network ties they hold or do not hold to others who oppose the pipeline. To test this hypothesis, we ran a logistic regression analysis on the 255 individuals who responded that the pipeline had “negatively affected” the quality of their lives to examine various demographic and structural factors that may have played a role in their decisions to act or not to act.

We regressed quiescence (1 = quiescent, 0 = resistance) on variables that could be predictive of resistance and quiescence: living in the blast zone, political ideology, the respondent's highest level of education, neighbors' support for the pipeline, and being part of an online social media group opposing the pipeline. In preliminary analyses, we also included age and gender, but neither of these was a substantively or statistically significant predictor, so we dropped them from the analysis (analyses available on request). Table 2 provides percentages, means, and standard deviations of the predictor variables in our analysis.

³⁶Although there were 213 people in our sample who engaged in political or activist actions against the pipeline, only 167 of these individuals stated that the pipeline had negatively affected the quality of their lives. It can be assumed that the others who took action against the pipeline became engaged for reasons other than being directly affected by the pipeline (such as concerns about climate change, water quality, forest health, wildlife, environmental justice, historical/cultural impacts, etc.)

TABLE 2. PERCENTAGES, MEANS, AND STANDARD DEVIATIONS OF PREDICTOR VARIABLES AMONG THOSE WHOSE QUALITY OF LIFE WAS NEGATIVELY AFFECTED BY THE PIPELINE ($N=255$)

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Mean or percentage</i>	<i>Standard deviation</i>
Quiescence (did not resist the pipeline)	34.5%	—
Resistance (resisted the pipeline)	65.5%	—
Respondent lives in Blast Zone	80.4%	—
Respondent does not live in Blast Zone	19.6%	—
Liberal-conservative in three categories	2.18	0.85
Education in seven categories	5.16	1.53
Not sure how neighbors feel about pipeline	19.6%	—
Most neighbors support pipeline	4.8%	—
Most neighbors oppose pipeline	75.6%	—
Joined social media group opposing pipeline	29.8%	—
Did not report joining social media group opposing pipeline	70.2%	—

As is shown in Table 3, the most powerful predictors of quiescence were those variables related to social networks, confirming our second and third hypotheses. If a respondent's neighbors supported the pipeline, they were more than nine times more likely to be quiescent than those who knew their neighbors opposed the pipeline, and if a respondent did not know how their neighbors felt about the pipeline, they were more than five times more likely to be quiescent than those with neighbors opposing the pipeline.

Similarly, respondents who joined an online social media group focused on stopping the pipeline were much less likely to be quiescent than others. The odds ratio of 0.11 for this variable means that those who joined an online social media group were more than nine times

more likely to engage in political or activist actions against the pipeline than those who had not joined a social media group opposing the pipeline.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study provides support for the assertion that people who live near new industrial development do not simply sort into the dichotomous categories of those who resist and those who accept. Through examining how the MVP has affected the quality of life of those who have not taken action to resist the pipeline, we found evidence for three categories of non-resisters: those who support the pipeline, those who are indifferent to the pipeline, and those who are quiescent. Only 7% of the non-resisters in our sample reported that the pipeline had a positive effect on the quality of their lives, whereas 77% reported that the pipeline had no effect on the quality of their lives.

In addition to those who supported and those who were indifferent to the pipeline, 16% of the non-resisters reported that the pipeline had a negative effect on their quality of life, but nevertheless, they have remained silent. Why have these respondents chosen inaction, despite their negative feelings about the pipeline?

Our analysis demonstrates that the most powerful predictors of quiescence are variables related to social networks. Among respondents reporting negative quality-of-life impacts from the pipeline, those with neighbors supporting the pipeline were nine times more likely to be quiescent. Similarly, these respondents were five times more likely to be quiescent if they were not sure how their neighbors felt about the pipeline. On the other hand, among respondents expressing negative quality-of-life impacts, those who had joined a social media group focused on stopping the pipeline were nine times more likely to take part in resistance actions than those who had not.

Although the silent acceptance of acquiescence likely indicates an internalization of neoliberal progress narratives, the reluctant silence of quiescence might suggest a refusal of this ideology, perhaps presenting an opportunity for intervention. As the work of Gaventa has demonstrated, quiescence is a product of power relationships between elites and marginalized groups.

TABLE 3. LOGISTIC REGRESSION OF QUIESCENCE ON PREDICTOR VARIABLES AMONG THOSE WHOSE QUALITY OF LIFE WAS NEGATIVELY AFFECTED BY THE PIPELINE

<i>Predictor variable</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>OR</i>
Not sure whether neighbors support or oppose pipeline ^a	1.68	0.40	5.37***
Most neighbors support pipeline ^a	2.22	0.83	9.23**
Political ideology (three categories)	0.24	0.22	1.28
Whether respondent lives in blast zone ^b	-0.72	0.41	0.49
Whether respondent joined social media group opposing pipeline ^c	-2.20	0.64	0.11***
Education (seven categories)	-0.20	0.11	0.82
Constant	0.22	0.89	1.24

1 = Quiescence, 0 = Resistance.

^aReference category is "Most neighbors oppose the pipeline."

^bReference category is respondents who live outside the blast zone.

^cReference category is respondents who did not report joining an online social media group opposing the pipeline.

** $p \leq 0.01$; *** $p \leq 0.001$.

OR, odds ratio; SE, standard error.

Through a variety of mechanisms, ranging from overt intimidation and coercion to subtle hints of social consequences, powerful groups can foster quiescence among aggrieved populations. However, what is particularly important about quiescence is that—similar to a dormant volcano—there is still *the potential for action*, given the right conditions. This insight has implications for environmental justice groups' organizing efforts, pointing to the importance of both amplifying the visibility of local residents who are resisting the environmental harm in question and making *personal* contact (through door knocking or other similar mechanisms) to build relationships with community members who are not yet involved.

As radical Brazilian educator Paulo Friere argues, a key step in the process of overcoming oppression is for less powerful groups to move from believing that there are “insurmountable barriers” standing before them to recognizing that change *is* possible.³⁷ Crucially, this change in perspective happens within the context of community social networks. As Bell notes, social connections with others seeking change are critical “for overcoming deeply entrenched (and continually reinforced) beliefs that change is not possible,”³⁸ for, as David Meyer argues, “the sense of stepping into history as a force, in conjunction with people who share your beliefs, is a powerful motivator.”³⁹

Conversely, if people do not observe their neighbors or social media contacts taking action against—or even opposing—the pipeline, they may believe that resistance is pointless and may fear social repercussions for rocking the boat. It is possible that these fears may be particularly amplified in rural communities, where there are fewer social networks and the consequences of alienating oneself from one's neighbors may be especially high.

This work has quantitatively demonstrated the importance of social networks for predicting quiescence and resistance in rural communities faced with a new natural gas pipeline. It has also pointed to the multiple positions—acceptance, indifference, and quiescence—that can be represented among people who have chosen not to take action against a new environmentally harmful infrastructure project. However, many questions remain—questions that would best be answered through future qualitative studies.

For instance, qualitative research could help illuminate what leads some individuals within a community to in-

ternalize neoliberal progress narratives and ultimately accept a project while others in that same community do not. Qualitative research could also help refine our understanding of the mechanisms by which social networks function to promote resistance or quiescence. Such understandings could help environmental justice organizations know where and how to target their recruitment efforts when seeking to grow their constituencies.

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³⁷Paulo Freire. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. (Continuum, 2000[1970]), 35.

³⁸Bell, *Fighting King Coal*, 47.

³⁹David Meyer. *The Politics of Protest: Social Movements in America*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 52.