The transmission of ideas, beliefs and practices takes many forms, from time-honoured familial socialisation to innovative adoptions in radical social networks. Benjamin Lee and Elizabeth Morrow present case-studies of the Ulster Defence Association and the suffragettes.

The Ulster Defence Association, Loyalist Solidarity and the Family (Benjamin Lee)

As Simon Copeland discusses on page 10, there are a variety of roles that the family can play in transmitting ideology. But family involvement, together with the impact of peers and critical events, can be a potent combination in shaping how one thinks and acts. The case of Ken – from a study by Colin Crawford – illustrates this.

Ken was born in 1962, and lived in Brown Square at the bottom of the Shankhill Road in Belfast. He had a good relationship with his parents growing up, although a difficult time at school. From 1969 onwards, the British Army arrived at the Brown Square barracks, although a difficult time at school. Ken believed key events had a hand in leading to his hostility to Catholics, and highlighted the murder of three soldiers by the IRA. Their deaths had a profound impact on him, exacerbated by his good relationships with the local British soldiers.

Ken’s involvement in the UDA was not framed in ideological terms. Instead, he stressed how family and community solidarity, the perceived threat of Republican violence, and the impact of critical local events shaped his beliefs, feelings and actions.

Innovation Adoption among The Suffragettes (Elizabeth Morrow)

Our social environment informs the way we make sense of the world and communicate with others. In her work on the adoption of new and innovative ideas and practices, the sociologist Gemma Edwards showed how activists were influenced by debates within their own networks, and others by the decisions made by those of a similar social status.

Helen Watts and Mary Blathwayt were both suffragettes. Watts embraced the innovation of militancy – the strategy of intentional arrest and imprisonment – whereas Blathwayt rejected it.

Watts was part of an activist network whose members shared an understanding that militant tactics were a socially acceptable and recognised method of articulating a grievance. By contrast, Blathwayt’s network included non-militant members. Importantly, her mother – also a suffragette – rejected militancy.

Innovations are risky and uncertain. Of particular relevance are the experiences of others who are like us in adopting an innovation. People who occupy the same position in a social structure are referred to as being structurally equivalent. When an activist is considering adopting an innovation, she will be more likely to do so if those who are her structural equivalents have made the decision to adopt. Structurally equivalent people are likely to use each other as a frame of reference, and may also feel a sense of competition. One activist is more likely to follow another to avoid the embarrassment of being the last of her social group to adopt the innovation. By contrast, if no structural equivalents have made the decision to adopt, the activi

To read more about these cases, see Gemma Edwards (2014), Infectious Innovations? The diffusion of tactical innovation in social movement networks, the case of suffragette militancy. Social Movement Studies, 13(1), 48-69, and Colin Crawford (2003), Inside the UDA: Volunteers and violence. Pluto Press.