

Social Movements & Social Change



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UMB Be Informed Series
October 4, 2016

Dedicated to Grace Lee Boggs, 1915-2015

"You cannot
change any
society unless
you take
responsibility for
it, unless you
see yourself as
belonging to it
and responsible
for changing it."



Imagine If:

- Slavery was still legal in the United States
- Women didn't have the right to vote
- Children of color had to attend separate schools
- Workers did not have the right to organize
- A person's sexuality could be criminalized or considered a form of mental illness
- Major cities were cesspools of epidemic disease
- Most African & Asian nations were still European colonies

All of these things might still exist

**IF NOT FOR SOCIAL
MOVEMENTS!**

Focus of Presentation

1. How are today's social movements similar to/different from past movements?
2. How do social movements produce social and political change?
3. Why do some social movements succeed and others fail?
4. What role can professionals play in social movements?

**What exactly is a
“Social Movement”?**

**How, Why, & When Does
a Social Movement Develop?**

What is a Social Movement?

- “A collectivity acting with some degree of organization and continuity outside of institutional channels for the purpose of promoting or resisting change in the group, society, or world order of which it is a part.” – McAdam & Snow, 1997

**How is a social movement
different from other forms of
collective action or protest?**

**How do we know when social or
political action becomes a social
movement? Does it matter?**

Clarifying Confusing Terms

- The term “social movement” is often mistakenly applied to all forms of collective action, even those without clear political goals.
- A social movement’s collective action is often confused with actions undertaken separately by the various organizations within it.
- We often assume that social movements have internal unity, overlooking their internal divisions and conflicts, and how they change.

Common Features

- A collective challenge based on common purpose & common, broadly conceived goals
- Assert specific (new) claims on society
- Usually begin locally - Eventually expand
- Become dependent on external sponsors

How Do Social Movements Begin?

- **Conditions of Unrest or Crisis Exist**
- **Dissatisfaction with the Status Quo**
- **Perception: Existing Institutions Have Failed**
- **Hopes for New Way of Living**

In the Beginning:

- **Movements are often unnoticed. They emerge in preexisting networks or homogeneous communities, whose members share common grievances, ideology and goals.**
- **An unanticipated crisis or the deliberate, planned interventions of individuals or small groups usually crystallizes these conditions**
- **Establish legitimacy among constituents, other political actors, and the general public.**

8 Stages of Successful Social Movements

1. “Normal Times”
2. Failure of Institutions – Social Unrest
3. Ripening Conditions – Popular Excitement
4. Movement Take-Off - Formalization
5. Powerlessness & Marginalization
6. Obtain Majority Public Support
7. Success (Takes Various Forms)
8. Institutionalization/Ongoing Struggle

Why People Join Movements

- To acquire resources or access to resources
- To obtain or exercise power and/or rights
- To express their identity or enhance the status of their identity in society
- To achieve non-rational or spiritual goals

Individuals' Roles in Movements

(Moyer, 2001)

- Citizen - an informed voter who legitimates the movement
- Change agent – nurtures grassroots mobilizing at local, state & national levels
- Reformer - political insider; lobbies, educates clients, electoral campaigns
- Rebel – reframes public discourse on social problems and engages in “outsider” tactics

Key Questions

1. What is its world view & basic assumptions?
2. What are its motives for collective action?
3. What are its goals & definition of “success”?
4. What are its strategies & tactics? How does it view power and the use of violence?
5. How will it stabilize its victories?

Types of Social Movements

(Blumer)

1. General
2. Specific (Reform & Revolutionary)
3. Expressive (e.g., Religious)

Type 1: “General” Social Movements

Emerges from changing cultural values and norms. People’s self-concepts do not conform to their actual positions in society (Durkheim).

Characteristics

- Initially lack formal organization, established leadership or recognized membership
- Operate over a wide range of areas
- Activities are episodic
- Develop informally & “underground”

Type 2: Specific Movements

**Development of group loyalty &
consciousness is critical**

Evolve towards greater formality

Characteristics

- Importance of leaders & heroes (risk of cult)
- Ideology gives direction, inspiration, hope
- Importance of myths, ceremonies, rituals
- Tactics have multiple objectives
- Certainty of ultimate victory

3 Social Movement Structures

1. Segmented movements - Constantly changing coalitions of diverse groups (Black Lives Matter).
2. Polycentric movements - Incorporate two or more competing organizations into *ad hoc* alliances around common goals (Environmental Justice Movements)
3. Reticulate movements - Create loosely integrated networks with multiple formal and informal connections (Al Qaeda)

New Social Movements

- Different missions, actions, & structure
- Focus on identity, not class struggle
- Focus on a wide range of issues
- Challenge prevailing hierarchies

New Social Movements

- **Combine anti-institutional goals with attempts to acquire legal protections & tangible resources**
- **Emphasize egalitarian behavioral norms & organizational structures**
- **Focus on the creation and use of oppositional critical consciousness**

New Social Movements

- **No longer function in national boundaries**
- **Try to combine a complex array of global, local, & identity factors in a dynamic, interactive relationship**
- **Have looser structure than traditional social movements & are more likely to address both local & international concerns**

New Social Movements

- **Less driven by narrow ideologies**
- **Create increased opportunity for resource-deprived groups to have influence**
- **Have more fluid strategies & tactics**
- **Emphasize symbolic and virtual politics.**

Increased Radicalization



Implications for the Future

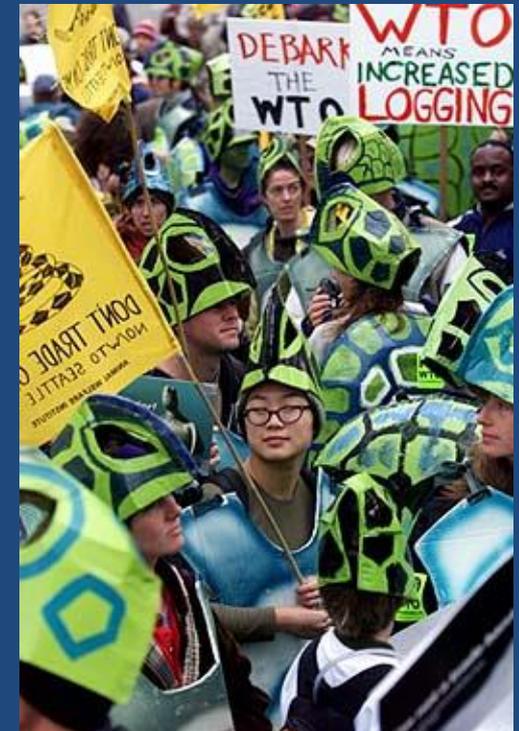
- **Movement struggles will be more diffuse**
- **Movements will focus on multiple issues**
- **More difficult to find “common ground”**
- **More difficult to define “public space”**

“One of [their] greatest strengths of NSMs– [their] plural character – is also one of [their] weaknesses” (Boyd, 2002)



Ex: Fair Globalization Movement

“The traditional protest- the march, the rally, the chants – is just bad theatre” (Boyd,2002)



Some Current Trends

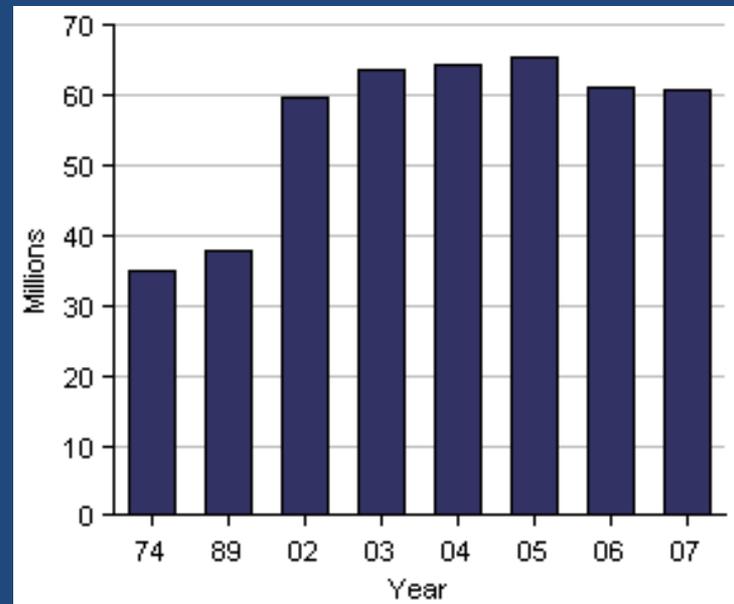
- **More contentious activity by movements**
- **“Insiders” (NGOs, interest groups, political parties, human service organizations) are more willing to use advocacy & protest**
- **More use of least contentious forms of collective action (lobbying, petitions, litigation, peaceful rallies)**

Some Current Trends

- **Less public acceptance of highly disruptive civil disobedience or violent tactics**
- **Rapid diffusion of protest tactics and symbols because of media influence**
- **Increased use of social media – for rapid mobilization, virtual organizing**

Institutionalization & Professionalization

- Professional movement organizers/organizations
- NGO – “advocacy explosion”
- Consensus Organizing



Result: Routinization of Protest

(McCarthy & McPhail, 1998)

- **Highly planned interactions between police & protesters & a shift from “escalated force” to “negotiated management policing”**
 - **Police are guardians of protesters’ right of assembly**
 - **Use of protest “marshals” & police trainings for protesters**
 - **Pre-negotiated arrests**
 - **Advance permitting**
 - **Time restrictions – e.g., not during rush-hour**
 - **Place restrictions – e.g., not at White House**

Loss of Tactical Novelty

“By informing police of planned challenges to the law—even asking lawbreakers to identify themselves with armbands—and agreeing to eschew violence, activists can make the experience of breaking the law safe and predictable. Police know what to expect ... and everyone can get home by the end of the day to observe the event on the evening news.”

- (Meyer & Tarrow, 1998)

I DON'T HAVE OH, YES, SOR
ALL DAY. YOU RY. I'LL BE
WANT TO BE PASSIVELY
ARRESTED OR RESISTING.
/ NOT? /



Differences Between Reform & Revolutionary Movements

- **Scope of Goals, Objectives & Targets**
- **Degree of Respectability & Acceptance**
- **Strategies & Tactics**
- **Characteristics of Adherents**

Which Movement Tactics Work?

Historically:

- “Unruly” groups – those that use violence or radical action – have better than average success (in terms of recognition and advantages).
- Yet, those groups whose demands were more mainstream were more likely to sustain their success

A Recent Example:

- Elite response in cities with a strong Black voting block was to increase public benefits.
- Elite response in cities with a weak Black voting block favored incarceration.

The “Radical Flank Effect”

- A movement benefits when there is a wide ideological spectrum among its adherents.
- Existence of radicals makes moderates more attractive negotiating partners to opponents.
- Radicals provide strong incentives to the state to get to the bargaining table with the moderates.
- Financial support to moderate groups increases dramatically in the presence of radicals - (McAdam, 1992).

Successful Social Movements

- Produce fundamental changes in society, its institutions, and its culture
- Create or increase awareness of issues
- Influence how issues are “framed” & keep them “alive” even in conservative times
- Make less radical reforms more palatable
- Empower their participants by involving them in critical societal processes

Successful Movements Have

- Clear Ideology & Credible Leadership
- A Focus on Organizing and Mobilizing
- Address Members' Needs, Concerns, & Hopes
- Balance Task & Process Orientation

Why Movements Fail

- **Become conservative & have few leaders**
- **Movement's values & goals are co-opted or preempted by dominant culture**
- **Lose critical assets, especially key external supporters**

Why Movements Fail

- “Opportunity structures change. Allies, neutrals, & opponents respond differently to their challenges
- Fail to accommodate new members
- Gaps between members’ & leaders’ goals widen
- Misdirect energy and resources towards internal disputes, rather than external enemies

Why Movements Fail

- **Goals & strategies are not compatible with dominant values & institutions (e.g., Socialist Movement in US)**
- **Deliberate suppression of movements through resource depletion, stigmatization, disruption, intimidation, & marginalization (e.g., FBI's Cointel-Pro Program in the 1960s & 1970s)**
- **Absence of concrete goals (Occupy Movement)**

Suppression of Social Movements

Governments:

- Engage in direct violence (Labor Movement)
- Prosecute & harass movement leaders (Civil Rights Movement)
- Blacklist movement members & conduct illegal surveillance against movement organizations (Peace Movement)

Suppression of Social Movements

Governments:

- Infiltrate groups to promote factionalism & spread disinformation through agents provocateurs & informers (US Communist Party)
- Arrest journalists & adopt a variety of repressive laws to suppress dissent (Arab Spring).

Media:

- Shape public perception often in negative ways, and distort awareness of their values, goals, and activities (Black Lives Matter).

Social Movements Can

- Influence public policy by addressing its substance and goals, the structures through which it is developed, and the processes that determine and implement societal priorities.

BUT

- The “window of opportunity” is limited
- Some movements can maintain long-term involvement in the policymaking process by building institutions which are compatible with existing political structures.

Questions for Discussion

1. What types of behavior are we likely to see among future social movements?
2. What types of behavior are most likely to produce social change?
3. What role should professionals play in movements for social change?

Thank
You