

Chapter 14

Understanding Social Movements

Classic collective behavior theories such as Turner and Killian's Emergent Norm Perspective and Smelser's Value-Added Theory can be applied to social movements just like any other form of collective behavior. The Emergent Norm Perspective, for example, assumes that people join social movements for the same reasons that they take part in any type of collective behavior: Confusion and anxiety lead them to follow the norms within their social situation. If everyone they know seems to be taking part in a social movement, they will, too.

The Value-Added Theory also assumes that social movements arise for the same reasons as any other type of collective behavior: Strain occurs in a conducive social situation, a generalized belief forms, and people join together in an attempt to alleviate the strain. The collective episode takes the form of a social movement because of the generalized belief that grows.

However, as discussed in Chapter 13, social movements are different from other forms of collective behavior. Because of this, there are special theories designed to explain them. These theories tend to focus on the lasting and organized nature of social movements. Most social scientists prefer to use these theories to specifically explain the appearance, formation, and long-term development of social movements. This chapter will describe and discuss some of the classic social movement theories. Chapters 15 and 16 will focus on applying these theories to actual social movements.

Social Movement Theories

Mass Society Theory

In 1959, William Kornhauser published *The Politics of Mass Society*. Kornhauser's Mass Society Theory can be summed up as follows: The organization of a society leads to certain categories of behavior by its members and leaders. Any society with a lot of alienated citizens who have a lot of direct influence over their elites and who, in turn, are unduly influenced by those leaders, has the potential to become a mass society. A mass society creates mass movements. "Mass movements" are anti-democratic and seek to destroy or totally transform their society. The members of the mass movement usually believe that they are creating a perfect society. Instead, they lead to the restriction of personal freedom and make their culture an oppressive and sometimes dangerous one.

"Mass society" is a negative term that carries a connotation similar to a "herd society." A mass society is one in which everyone wants the same material goods, has the same ideas, and pursues the same lifestyles. It is dull, uniform, and mediocre. People in a mass society do not think for themselves. This is the opposite of a "pluralist society," in which a wide variety of different people and organizations all exist together but are independent of each other. The social structure determines whether a society becomes a mass society or a pluralistic society.

Mass Society Theory focuses on *mass movements*, "popular movements that operate outside of and against the social order" (Kornhauser 1959: 5). These mass movements tend to consume an entire society. They can be terribly destructive. A mass society is vulnerable to these destructive political movements which aim to eliminate freedom.

World War II was still a recent memory when *The Politics of Mass Society* was written. Everything that had taken place in Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany during the war had recently become public knowledge. Large parts of Europe were falling under Communist Soviet rule and people were learning of some of the horrors of Stalin's regime. It is from this serious, life-and-death outlook that Kornhauser critiques social structure as a source of a specific type of social movement. Mass Society Theory is intended to explain movements that could and did tear entire societies apart from the inside out. This perspective gives Kornhauser's analysis a certain force.

The mass society has specific characteristics. These characteristics make mass movements more likely to occur.

Atomization

The most important of these characteristics is what Kornhauser calls *atomization*. It refers to people being socially isolated from each other and feeling powerless in their society. Most sociologists today refer to this as "alienation."

It can also be thought of as feeling disconnected. Feeling alienated from others makes people more likely to engage in any behavior that provides meaning for them. Feeling alienated from society makes them more likely to engage in behavior that is intended to destroy, revolutionize, or totally transform their society. Combined, they produce citizens who are searching for meaning and who are willing to destroy their society in order to find it.

Access

Another important factor is the amount of direct influence that citizens have over their leaders. Kornhauser calls this *access*. He argues that too much direct access or influence by citizens creates a situation where elites feel overly compelled to follow the whims of citizens rather than leading them. The problem of access refers to any leaders who can lose their position at any moment if they do something that displeases people. In a society with too much direct influence by citizens, leaders (elected or otherwise) would have to make each and every daily decision based on what the people seem to want. It is as if the people are constantly looking over the official's shoulder, questioning and second-guessing every small decision. The loudest voices are heard the most and taken to be representative of the people. Leaders under these conditions become neurotic and insecure and begin to do whatever "the people" seem to want at that moment. Leadership therefore becomes irrational.

Availability

A third characteristic of mass societies is excessive *availability* of citizens to influence by leaders. Citizens who are too available to leaders are more easily manipulated. There is the potential for manipulation in any society where individual leaders have the ability to sway the attention and activity of the entire population. The potential for mass behavior therefore exists. "Mass society is a social system in which elites are readily accessible to influence by non-elites and non-elites are readily available for mobilization by elites" (Kornhauser 1959: 39). The accessibility of elites and the availability of citizens work hand-in-hand to produce a situation in which the mass rules over the individual. Decisions are not made based on the idea of rights and privileges. Instead, people strive to do and think what they are supposed to do and think. Leaders follow the whims of public opinion, and the public follows the commands of the leaders. The result is an unstable, unpredictable, and repressive society.

Intermediate Groups

Kornhauser consistently argues that a lack of strong, intermediate groups tends to magnify all of these characteristics. Examples of intermediate groups could include community organizations, Parent-Teacher Associations, church groups, local or regional political groups, and so on. The more in-

volved with these kinds of groups an individual is, the more connected they feel to others and to society. The group gives them connections outside of their own family but still grounded to their community. Being more socially connected leads to being more socially active which, in turn, leads to being more socially tolerant.

A mass society, on the other hand, tends to be characterized by individuals who are not involved with any organizations outside the family *or* who are only involved with official, state-run groups. The result is a “mass.” Kornhauser defines a mass as “large numbers of people who are not integrated into any broad social groupings” (1959: 14) and “an undifferentiated and amorphous collectivity” (34). A lack of ties to the community or region produces a mass of atomized individuals who are isolated and who may concern themselves too much with matters that do not directly effect them. These people develop “mass personalities.” They are attracted to mass movements rather than to independent groups. Therefore, independent, intermediate groups are key to maintaining freedom in any society.

Mass Movements

A society that has the characteristics described above is a mass society. Such a society will tend to spawn “mass movements.” It is important to remember that not every social movement is a mass movement. Mass movements are extreme in their goals and may be irrational and violent in their methods. Extremist groups are fundamentally hostile to the social order partially because they are made up of alienated, atomized people. Mass movements have specific characteristics:

1. They pay more attention to national and international events than personal and local events. Members of a mass movement view themselves as part of something much greater than their own lives, communities, or families. They are on a crusade to totally transform their entire society.
2. Response is direct. Mass groups and mass movements tend to favor activism over diplomacy. Strikes and protests are used as a first line of action, rather than a last resort. They don’t tolerate discussion. For example, they may disrupt a meeting rather than take part in it. They may try to kill a leader rather than campaign against him or her in the next election. They may use guns or bombs to get their way. They do not want their concerns brought to light for discussion, they want their own “solutions” immediately implemented.
3. They are unstable. Members of mass movements tend to be fickle. They may rapidly shift their attention toward or away from anything at any time. Similarly, the intensity of their response may suddenly increase or decrease dramatically.
4. They are organized around a program with continuity and purpose. Without organization, mass members are just a bunch of isolated people. A

purpose gives them a reason to form an actual movement. However, their objectives are usually remote (unlikely to occur) and extreme (unrealistic).

Mass movements favor activist modes of response. This means that they do not want to follow the normal ways of getting things done. Independent thought is discouraged, not encouraged. Disagreement is rarely tolerated and genuine debate is often absent. Everyone is required to agree with the “party line.”

A mass behaves like a herd of sheep. They want to be involved with social life and to gain personal meaning for their lives but don’t know how. A mass movement, with its focus on grand goals and large themes, provides the illusion of both. The demands and goals of the mass movement may seem irrational to outsiders because they are not based on realistic efforts to better society. Similarly, the techniques used by the mass movement may seem unnecessarily harsh or extreme because they are unwilling to engage in accepted political or social means of being heard. They use force, bullying, threat, and argument in place of diplomacy, discussion, or debate in order to achieve goals that are vague, extreme, and sometimes illogical.

Crisis Politics

Kornhauser states that the mass society perspective is best used to analyze extremist responses to “crisis politics.” Mass movements do not occur in healthy societies under normal circumstances. Instead, they occur at times of crisis, when a society is either in chaos or has fallen into a pattern of atomization, access, and availability.

Culture and Personality

Cultural factors and individual personalities are both important to the acceptance and growth of a mass movement because *cultural legitimacy* and *psychological support* give power to ideas and movements. In a mass society, the culture makes mass movements seem legitimate and there are a lot of people who are likely to be attracted to such a movement. The structure of the society creates a mass culture full of people with mass personalities.

Cultural Legitimacy Mass standards are uniform and can quickly change for no good reason. When a culture values the mass over the individual, people all learn to like the same things and change what they like whenever the opinion of the masses seems to change. This creates too much cultural uniformity. Once a culture comes to value uniformity, it becomes expected of everyone. People start to demand conformity from each other. This anti-democratic approach does not respect individual tastes, preferences, or rights. Mass agreement becomes the only standard of what is right and if everyone agrees on something, it is believed to be good.

Kornhauser uses fads to illustrate how mass standards tend to operate. A fad appears out of nowhere, is wildly popular for a brief period of time, and then vanishes. On the other hand, fashion changes relatively slowly and has continuity over time. New fashions gradually gain acceptance and then gradually fall from popularity. In a fad, everyone is doing, thinking, buying, or wearing exactly the same thing and only because other fad participants are doing the same. In the world of fashion, there is tremendous room for group and individual variation. People may look similar, but no one looks exactly alike. People choose the items that they like from multiple acceptable fashionable choices. From Kornhauser's perspective, fashion is pluralistic but fads are mass-oriented.

Mass standards happen when the concept of "equal rights" is confused with the obliteration of all social differences. Kornhauser argues that diversity of opinions, tastes, and preferences are good. They keep us fresh and open as a society. Mindless conformity to perceived mass standards produces an entire culture of people with no tolerance for individuality or dissent of any kind. The more diverse a culture is, the more tolerant of dissent and individuality members of that culture are. The more uniform a culture is, the more likely it is to spawn mass movements.

Psychological Factors A lack of intermediate group connections makes people feel unable to participate in their social world. This leads to a poor self-image because the individual feels cut off from society. It makes individuals more eager for activist "solutions" to the anxiety caused by their alienation. As a result, such atomized individuals become highly suggestible. They lose the ability to decide anything for themselves. Instead, they rely on suggestions from others. Eventually, atomized people begin to think of mass opinions, desires, etc. as their own. If something is popular, they like it. At this point they develop mass personalities and become what Kornhauser calls "mass men." These mass people are selfish and unhappy. They do not have close or personal ties to their communities. They have given up their thoughts to those of the mass. Their main focus is personal satisfaction, and they can't find it because they are self-alienated.

Multiple and varied social connections allow people to form distinctive self-images. This produces autonomous people who have respect for themselves and therefore respect others. In a normal society, people feel connected to their community which, in turn, makes them feel connected to society and humanity. They tolerate disagreement and understand that everyone does not have to like the same things or want the same things.

Conclusion

This theory is only intended to explain one particular type of social movement: dangerous, extreme, and potentially destructive movements such as Fascism, Nazism, Stalinism, and McCarthyism. The far more common small-

scale, local movements don't fall under this perspective. Neither do most reform movements, revivalist movements, or grassroots political organizations. Instead, Kornhauser attempts to show how social structure can produce the cultural conditions and personal attitudes that made fascism rise in Italy, Nazism in Germany, and Communism in much of Eastern Europe. Considering that most of these movements were recent when *The Politics of Mass Society* was written, this intense focus on totalitarian and revolutionary movements is understandable. However, a student today might wonder what the practical uses of such a theory are. If the goal is to understand why certain movements catch on in some societies but not others, or to understand why similar kinds of movements tend to appear over and over in the same society, then Mass Society Theory may be of use. If the goal is to understand various kinds of common social movements, the theory is not useful.

Relative Deprivation Theory

Relative Deprivation Theory is a broader and more general theory than Mass Society Theory. It focuses on the psychological reasoning behind the decision to form or join a social movement. Denton Morrison (1971) argues that there are social conditions that cause relative deprivation within the population in any society. If enough people feel this way, a social movement is likely to form.

Relative Deprivation

The term "relative deprivation" was introduced by Samuel Stouffer (1949) and Robert Merton (1949). It refers to a situation where a person has less than they believe they deserve. A person who does not have enough food, clothing, or shelter is experiencing *absolute* deprivation. A person who *feels* like he or she doesn't have enough clothes because all of his or her friends got brand-new outfits is experiencing *relative* deprivation. Relative deprivation is an important concept because it reveals that people are happiest when their expectations are met. It is the level of expectations that determines the level of contentment. People feel the most discontent when there is something that they want and believe they deserve, but cannot have.

A person can experience relative deprivation no matter how much of something they actually have. A teenager who receives a used Camaro from her parents on her sixteenth birthday may feel terribly deprived if her friends all received new BMWs. Relative deprivation only exists in relation to those who we compare ourselves to. These *reference groups* allow us to decide if we have more than enough, enough, or not enough. A poor reference group makes a person feel wealthy. Comparing oneself to wealthier people generates a feeling of deprivation relative to that reference group.

Morrison identifies two different kinds of relative deprivation that can drive social movements. The first is *decremental deprivation*. This occurs in

any situation where people believe that their opportunities have been suddenly reduced. For example, in a financial recession people believe that their chances of landing a great-paying job are suddenly reduced. They experience a blockage of their goals and do not believe that it is their own fault. The second form of relative deprivation is *aspirational deprivation*. This occurs when people's expectations and ambitions rise but their opportunities do not. If a large number of people suddenly decide that they deserve something that they have never had and most of them cannot get, they will feel blocked and discontent.

Decremental deprivation tends to produce conservative and rightist movements intended to change society back to the way it used to be (when the opportunity was more widespread). These can become nationalist or fascist movements. Aspirational deprivation tends to produce liberal and leftist movements intended to change society in new, progressive ways (to provide new opportunity to movement members). These can become revolutionary movements.

Both types of relative deprivation create similar feelings: Something that is desired, expected, and demanded by a large number of people does not seem to be available to them. Whether the problem is caused by new desires or by a reduction in former opportunities, people feel blocked from something that they expect to have access to.

Legitimate Expectations

The key to relative deprivation is the development of what Morrison (1971) calls legitimate expectations. The individuals can't just want something; they have to believe that they have a *right* to expect it, that they *deserve* it. Once people become convinced that their expectations are legitimate, they begin to feel deprived if those expectations are not met. It does not matter if the expectations really are legitimate, as long as they believe they are.

In order for a social movement to form, people must be aware of the group goal, believe that it is desirable, and believe that it is possible to achieve. Morrison argues that this happens most often through social contacts. People may develop these expectations themselves, but then they try to convince others to see things the same way. This can create large numbers of people who desire the same thing.

Blocked Expectations and Discontent

The next step in the process has to do with whether or not those expectations are blocked. If people can get what they want with a little effort, they don't need a social movement. However, if they believe that the path is blocked they will be unhappy and unfulfilled. It does not matter if it really is blocked. As long as the people perceive their fulfillment is being blocked, they will be upset and are likely to try to do something about it.

Morrison (1971) refers to this situation as a “special type of cognitive dissonance.” People want something, believe that they have a right to expect it, and believe that they won’t get it. This is not a happy situation. People in this situation experience cognitive dissonance, a psychologically upsetting state, over this “injustice” or “inequity.” There are four ways that the discontent can be reduced:

1. People can blame themselves for the shortfall. This lowers their expectations and therefore reduces the dissonance. They decide that they are either unlucky or personally inadequate. Either way, they drop their expectations and learn to tolerate their life the way it is.

2. People can psychologically discount the blockages. In other words, they can convince themselves that patience or hard work will allow them to achieve their desired goals. This gives them some positive, concrete path of action to take in order to get what they want. Even if they are wrong, their discontent is reduced because they believe they will eventually reach their goal.

3. People can change their personal situation. For example, people who believe that they will never achieve their ambitions in a small town may move to a big city. People who think that their own country does not allow them adequate opportunity may emigrate to another nation. They feel as if they are doing something that will make their expectations attainable.

4. If people do not engage in any of the first three and they come to believe that their problems are structural rather than personal, they can decide to reduce their relative deprivation by changing the system that they live in. If the society is defined as the problem, then changing the society becomes the solution. This does not immediately reduce the discontent, but it makes people feel as if they are doing something that will eliminate it eventually.

Conditions in a society that cause relative deprivation make social movements more likely to occur. People experience relative deprivation any time they expect something that they can’t get. If enough people expect the same thing and believe that society is keeping them from getting it, a social movement will form.

Morrison argues that there are specific structural conditions that make social movements likely to form. First, there must be a large population experiencing relative deprivation. A few people here and there do not make a social movement. The idea of changing society will only catch on if there are enough people with the same expectations to make the problem appear to exist within society itself, not the individuals. For example, if I am out of work but everyone I know is still working, I might feel unlucky. If everyone I know is out of work, we might collectively decide that there is something wrong with the economy. The problem has to be defined as structural before a movement can form.

Second, there must be close interaction, communication, and proximity between people in the same situation. The ideas driving a social movement must be spread and accepted. The more communication there is between people experiencing relative deprivation, the more likely they are to try to change their society to alleviate it.

Third, there must be what Morrison calls "high role and status commonality." This means that a movement requires socially similar people who are all in the same situation. The more alike they are, the more likely they are to join together.

Fourth, social movements are more likely to form in a society that has a rigid and obvious stratification system. In a society where the power differences between different social classes or castes are obvious, people are more likely to believe that their problems come from that social structure. Those who are close to the top of their own social group are most likely to be aware of the differences between their own social group and the one above them. They are also most likely to believe that these differences are unfair and should be eliminated.

The fifth factor in Morrison's list is the high presence of voluntary association activity in the society. He argues that this creates the belief that voluntary group efforts can make a difference in a society. Those who are already active in community activities are more likely to put the same kind of effort and resources into making changes on a societal level. Morrison also mentions that such groups provide a "residue" of leadership and organizational skills.

Conclusion

Morrison and other Relative Deprivation Theorists claim that individual discontent is the driving force behind social movement formation. When a large group of people want something, believe that they deserve it, and believe that their society will not let them achieve it on their own, they are likely to form a social movement in an attempt to change the society. Therefore, two totally different situations can lead to the formation of social movements: 1) the raising of expectations within a society, or 2) the reduction of opportunities in a society. Either of these produces feelings of relative deprivation. If people expect more than they have, they are unhappy.

Morrison argues that the decision to join a movement is a tough one. There are extra costs to the individual and the potential for no rewards at all. People must achieve something like faith in the group solution to a problem that they define as structural.

Although social movements tend to create social change, they also tend to be created by social change. Any time society changes in such a way that opportunities are reduced or expectations rise, relative deprivation increases and so does the likelihood of a social movement forming. As long as things stay exactly the same as they have always been, people are unlikely to feel

that they can or should be changed. When the social structure does change in some way people become more likely to want to change it back (decremental deprivation) or change it even further (aspirational deprivation).

Relative Deprivation Theory is perhaps useful in determining what conditions make a social movement likely to form in the first place. No one can deny the logic inherent within the theory: People won't try to change their society unless they are unhappy about something, believe that they can fix it by changing society, and believe that they can succeed at making those changes. However, the theory is also intended to explain why people join the movement once it forms. Many theorists, including the next two to be examined in this chapter, argue that relative deprivation is only one of the factors that create a social movement. For example, research has consistently shown that many movement members do not stand to directly gain from the success of the movement (Oberschall 1973, 1993). Relative Deprivation Theory does little to explain why, for example, Northern whites took part in the United States civil rights movement during the 1950s and '60s or why men get involved in the debate over abortion. Outside support and political factors may be just as important as a sense of deprivation. Not all members of social movements experience relative deprivation and not all people who experience relative deprivation join the movement. There are complex social, economic, and political issues that determine how successful a movement is at producing change. Relative Deprivation Theory does not include these factors and therefore doesn't fit real-life social movements well. The next two theories that we will examine specifically address these issues.

Resource Mobilization Theory

Resource Mobilization Theory first gained prominence with the publication of *Social Conflict and Social Movements* by Anthony Oberschall in 1973. Mass Society Theory was still the dominant perspective in the study of social movements at that time, so Oberschall criticized Kornhauser's theory quite a bit. According to Oberschall, Mass Society Theory fails to account for what really happened in anti-democratic movements such as McCarthyism and the Radical Right in the United States or Nazism in Germany. Research done during the 1960s contradicted many of the assumptions made by Kornhauser in his 1959 book. Like Relative Deprivation Theory, Oberschall's Resource Mobilization Theory is designed to account for the new information that had come to light over the prior decade of research.

Resource Mobilization Theory focuses on the social processes that make it possible for a movement to form and succeed. It pays much more attention to political and economic factors than Mass Society or Relative Deprivation Theory and much less attention to the psychological traits of movement members. The theory makes no assumptions about individual motivations for joining. Individual alienation is considered irrelevant. Resource Mobilization theorists assume that all societies contain enough discontent for social move-

ments to arise at any time. It is the organization and leadership (or lack thereof) that make or break a social movement (McCarthy and Zald 1977, Oberschall 1973, 1993).

“Mobilization” refers to “the process of forming crowds, groups, associations, and organizations for the pursuit of collective goals” (Oberschall 1973: 102). Average people with little or no individual power join together in an attempt to influence regional or national policy. They have to fight legitimate authorities as well as any individuals or groups who benefit from leaving things the way they are.

Resource Mobilization Theory rests on one simple assertion: No matter how upset, outraged, or righteous people feel, without organization and leadership they cannot effectively produce social change. Short-lived protests, riots, etc. may occur, but no lasting changes will come about. It does not matter how upset or deprived people feel, but how effectively they can manage (“mobilize”) the resources that they need to gain social acceptance for their cause.

Definitions

Resource Mobilization Theory uses certain terms and concepts in precise ways (see McCarthy and Zald 1977). The term “social movement” refers to the presence of beliefs within a population that support social change. “Countermovement” refers to beliefs in a population opposed to a social movement. A “Social Movement Organization” (often referred to in the literature simply as an SMO) is a complex or formal organization that attempts to carry out the beliefs of a social movement or countermovement. For example, the civil rights movement in the United States is a social movement. It can be loosely defined as the desire for increased racial equality and opportunity for blacks. Within that social movement, there were (and still are) a variety of specific SMOs such as the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People), CORE (Congress of Racial Equality), SCLC (Southern Christian Leadership Conference), and so on. Each of these organizations was created with the intention of furthering the goals of the civil rights movement.

Adherents are individuals and groups who believe in the goals of the movement. *Conscience adherents* are people who believe in the goals of the movement even though they personally will not benefit if it succeeds. *Constituents* are adherents who actually provide resources (time, labor, or money) to specific social movement organizations. *Conscience constituents* are people who actually help out SMOs even though they have nothing personal to gain from the group’s success. *Bystander publics* are outsiders who don’t particularly care about the movement. Those bystanders who personally stand to benefit if the movement succeeds are known as *free-riders*. *Opponents* are outsiders who actively try to block the movement. They often form or join countermovements.

Resources

Any SMO must successfully manage available resources. These range from material resources such as jobs, income, and savings to nonmaterial resources like authority, moral commitment, trust, friendship, skills, and so on. The main resources that any potential social movement organization must manage effectively are labor and money. There are jobs that have to be done. They can be done by volunteers or by paid employees. There are many expenses such as transportation, printing or broadcasting costs, and so on, which must be paid. They can be paid out of the pockets of movement members, donations from outsiders, or some larger organization. Any movement must successfully acquire and manage both labor and money if they are to achieve anything. Good organizational structure and effective leadership make this possible.

The success or failure of the movement depends on how many people join the organization, how determined they are, what sacrifices they are willing to make, and the resistance of their opponents (Oberschall 1993). Bystanders must be convinced to join; otherwise the group cannot grow. Adherents must be convinced to contribute time and/or money; otherwise the group will run out of resources. These decisions are influenced by individual perceptions of what others are doing for the common cause and by expectations of who else will join and what they will contribute (Oberschall 1993). Effective social movement organizations are coordinated to achieve a common goal. Individuals may be enticed by the thought of individual gain, but there must also be shared, group reasons for taking part. Otherwise the group will tend to fall apart before much can be achieved.

Organization and Leadership

Strong, existing groups can easily become mobilized as movements (Oberschall 1973). Oberschall specifies that existing social groups make social movements more likely to form if they are *segmented*. Segmented social groups draw their members from one level of society. For example, if the same people who belong to the Rotary Club also belong to the Preservation Society, the Town Council, and the local country club, then no intermediate social connections exist. Those groups do not provide their members with numerous social connections to a wide variety of different people. Instead, the same small groups of people simply associate with each other in a variety of settings.

The more segmented the group associations are in any society, the more likely those groups are to mobilize into social movement organizations. Members of those groups are alike, so their wants tend to be alike as well.

More importantly, existing groups make the mobilization easier because they already have established communications networks, partially mobilized resources, the presence of members with leadership skills, and a tradition of participation (Oberschall 1973). They also have established leaders, mem-

bers, meeting places, an activity routine, social bonds, and shared beliefs, symbols, and a common language already in place (Oberschall 1993). Leaders of a social movement organization must focus on problems of mobilization, the manufacture of discontent, tactical choices, and the infrastructure of society and movements necessary for success (McCarthy & Zald 1977). Much of the initial work is already done if they can start within an existing organization, especially if they hold a position of authority within the group. The entire existing group can be recruited as a "bloc" (Oberschall 1973, 1993). This "bloc recruitment" dramatically simplifies the process of conversion.

Leaders of social movement organizations take greater risks than ordinary followers but they also receive greater rewards. As Oberschall puts it, "No one is in a position to disregard where his [or her] next meal is coming from and whether or not he [or she] is going to have a roof over his [or her] head" (1973: 159). Leaders often gain status and authority, and sometimes wealth, from their position within the social movement organization. They become political entrepreneurs, just like politicians. If the movement is successful, they may also acquire a great deal of status within society. Leadership of a movement organization can be a stepping stone to tremendous upward social mobility.

An effective leader brings everyone together within the movement and creates a common loyalty. However, leaders do not "make" a movement in the way that some people believe. Oberschall argues that the leader often has to cater to the wants of the followers. Communication and influence frequently take place in small groups within the movement. In this way, the group has some social control over the leaders just as the leaders have some social control over group members.

In the beginning stages of a successful social movement, the organization is informal and the leaders engage in a lot of face-to-face interaction with potential members. Once the movement begins to build momentum the organization must acquire a more formal structure. Too much formal organization in the beginning reduces the attractiveness of the group for outsiders. Not enough formal organization after formation limits the growth potential and reduces the resource efficiency of the group (Oberschall 1993).

Professional Social Movement Organizations A new form of social movement, the professional social movement organization, has popped up in the United States sometime over the last three decades (Oberschall 1993). This is possible because of the technology, mass media, and political system in the United States today.

In a professional social movement organization, the leaders and primary activists are professional reformers pursuing a career in reform causes. They are not from the group that stands to benefit if the movement succeeds. They tend to move from one cause to the next, applying the same techniques of fundraising, publicity, organization, and leadership in each situation. Most of their funding generally comes from third-party sources such as churches, cor-

porations, or even the government. A small, vocal group of potential beneficiaries are used for public relations purposes and as media representatives of the movement. A large conscience constituency is accessed through direct-mail appeals and newsletters.

Oberschall himself points out that many social movement organizations have some of these qualities, and “professional” movements are not really that different from others (1993). They are more organized, more structured, and more formal, but that often leads to the most success in achieving their goals.

Goals

Those who are favored or privileged in any society have a vested interest in keeping things the way they are. Those who are disadvantaged stand to gain by changing things. Any social movement organization that seeks social change will have to battle not just legal or political authorities, but also any groups or individuals who stand to lose something if the movement succeeds.

Outsiders are crucial to the success of a social movement (McCarthy and Zald 1977, Oberschall 1973, 1993). Rarely does a social movement succeed by strong-arm tactics. Instead, they must gradually convince the majority of citizens, or the majority of elites and leaders in a society, that the goals of the movement are just. The most important people to a social movement organization are those who do not take part and are not directly affected. For example, the civil rights movement succeeded partly because the majority of American lawmakers were gradually convinced that legal segregation and discrimination were unconstitutional and the majority of powerful American citizens were gradually convinced that segregation and discrimination laws were undesirable.

Resource Mobilization Theory does not focus on the discontent of any particular group of people in society. Oberschall assumes that no society is perfect and there are always people who share dissatisfaction. When those dissatisfied people aim their hostility toward the same target, they come to see themselves as a group. If they hold those targets responsible for their grievances, hardship, and suffering, they have a focus for their dissatisfaction. All it then takes is common interest and a sense of a common fate for them to form a social movement. At that point, the mobilization of resources (or lack thereof) becomes the only factor that determines whether or not they achieve their goals.

Oberschall (1993) identifies three major tasks that must be successfully tackled in order for a movement organization to achieve its goals. The first task is to turn free-riders into contributors. Most social movements have to convert these people into members by convincing them that the goal cannot be reached without their help, by promising them special rewards for taking part, or through some sort of coercion (either force or guilt). The second task is to overcome organized opposition. Most social movement organizations face active resistance from countermovements. Countermovements are organiza-

tions that seek to block the movement from getting the changes it seeks. The organization that seeks to keep things the way they are has momentum on its side, so the organization seeking social change must work much harder in order to succeed. The third task in achieving group goals is to create, acquire, and manage (mobilize) the necessary resources for maintaining the organization and accomplishing some collective action.

Factors Encouraging Mobilization

Strong, repressive social control inhibits mobilization. Loosening social control allows and actually encourages mobilization because the relaxation of formerly rigid rules makes the further desired changes seem even more attainable. Freedom of speech and association make mobilization much easier and therefore more likely in a society. In fact, civil liberties in general are more permissive of social mobilization.

Another factor encouraging mobilization is the presence of what Oberschall (1973) calls "focal points." Focal points are people or places that tend to be watched closely for clues as to what will happen next. For example, many people keep an eye on Washington to see how a particular piece of legislation might go. Their decision as to whether or not they should mobilize may be based entirely on what happens there. Members of the NRA, for instance, take their cues from the leaders of the NRA and from political events in Washington, D.C. In this case, "Washington" and the NRA leaders are focal points for those for and against gun control. Either side may suddenly leap into action because of what happens at these remote focal points.

Oberschall also discusses outside help. He seems to argue that social movements are unlikely to succeed unless they receive assistance and support from groups or individuals who have higher social standing. He even goes so far as to argue that rural movements tend to be unsuccessful without assistance from urban individuals (1973). Urban movements, on the other hand, are unlikely to achieve national success unless they manage to get rural people to do the hard work.

Success

Oberschall argues that the ultimate success for any social movement organization is to be accepted and institutionalized into society. Once a social movement has become a part of everyday political life, they no longer have to struggle to achieve and maintain legitimacy, to win converts, and to raise the material resources necessary for continued existence (Oberschall 1993).

The most deserving social movement with the most just cause is not necessarily the one that succeeds. It really boils down to resources: Any social movement organization which gains sufficient resources to overcome social control forces and opposing social groups will tend to succeed. Any social movement organization that fails to raise, create, and manage sufficient material and nonmaterial resources will fail.

Conclusion

Resource Mobilization Theory seems to fit the pattern of social movement formation much better than Mass Society or Relative Deprivation Theory. Years of research have shown that the most successful social movements in American society do, in fact, tend to be those that organize themselves in specific ways and manage available resources to their maximum efficiency (see discussion in Oberschall 1993). In order for any movement to succeed, the organizations must acquire physical power, political power, or social support from a majority of citizens and/or political leaders. Of the three theories discussed so far, Resource Mobilization Theory focuses most heavily on movements that succeed through the persuasion and conversion. Social support has become the most valued resource for many movements.

A problem with Oberschall's theory is his insistence that massive outside assistance is required for the success of most social movements (1973: 214–215, 220, etc.). Resource Mobilization Theory is known as “elitist” because of statements such as the following:

In a sense, the [1954 *Brown v. Board of Education*] decision marks the high point of a program of reform-from-above by means of legal and institutionalized channels for bringing about social change sponsored primarily by the progressive elements within the ruling groups and elites that so often is followed by the mass action and confrontation phase of a social movement subsequent to the reform's failure (1973: 215).

One does not have to be a careful reader to conclude that Oberschall is saying that all of the important, legal reforms that took place during the civil rights movement were the work of powerful whites. In fact, as Chapter 15 will show, movement organizations led by black attorneys *forced* the Supreme Court and various national political figures to create these changes. President Eisenhower, for example, regretted appointing Earl Warren to the Supreme Court and hated being forced to enforce the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision (Bloom 1987, Greenberg 1994, McAdam 1982, Salmond 1997). Eisenhower did not carry out those decisions because of any personal conviction; he did so because it was politically expedient (Bloom 1987, McAdam 1982, Salmond 1997). Once the movement organizations had successfully won the *Brown* decision, the president of the United States had little choice but to enforce it (Greenberg 1994). The next theory is an attempt to retain some of the most effective aspects of Resource Mobilization Theory while overcoming Oberschall's elitist political biases.

Political Process Theory

The Political Process Theory of social movements was first fully formulated by Douglas McAdam in his 1982 book *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency 1930–1970*. McAdam argued that classic social move-

ment theories such as Mass Society and Relative Deprivation Theory focused too much on the psychological dynamics of movement followers. He also believes that “elitist” perspectives such as Resource Mobilization Theory focused too heavily on material resources and outside assistance and not enough on the political environment that makes movements possible in the first place. Internal and external factors are considered equally important in Political Process Theory. Ideology and beliefs are just as important as material resources, as are political connections and the overall social structure. The theory really is an attempt to combine the best of Mass Society, Relative Deprivation, and Resource Mobilization theories together into a more historical and political perspective.

Political Process Theory is similar to Resource Mobilization Theory in several ways. Like Resource Mobilization, Political Process Theory focuses on the factors that make it possible for a movement to form and to achieve success. Political and economic factors are considered much more important than personal ones. However, Political Process Theory focuses much more on the factors that allow ordinary citizens to form their own social movements in opposition to the dominant society. Some sociologists consider the theory Marxist (Dobratz and Shanks-Meile 1997, McAdam 1982) because of this focus on the potentially revolutionary power of ordinary people and the assumption that society is controlled by a small group of powerful elites.

McAdam (1982) argues that three factors most determine the creation and success of a social movement:

Organizational strength, the level of organization within an aggrieved population. The more organized a particular group of people are, the more likely they are to successfully form a social movement and the more likely that movement is to succeed.

Cognitive liberation, the perception of the odds of success within that same population. The more they believe they can be successful, the more likely they are to try.

Political opportunities, the alignment of groups within the larger political environment. The more allies a group has in the political arena, the more likely they are to be able to achieve changes in the political system.

Political Process Theory focuses much more on political connections than on material resources. A social movement is viewed as a *political* phenomenon, not a psychological one, and is examined as a continuous *process* from formation to decline, which does not develop in a set of rigid stages. Mcadam (1982) assumes that wealth and power are concentrated in the hands of a few groups in America and most people have little say in the major decisions affecting their lives. Social movements are viewed as rational attempts by excluded groups to gain sufficient political leverage to advance

their collective interests. All social movements are a struggle against oppressors for social and political power.

Organizational Strength

As in Resource Mobilization Theory, McAdam's Political Process Theory notes the importance of existing organizations for the formation of new movements. Existing organizations of any kind provide potential members, established structures of "solidary incentives," a communication network, and recognized leaders. McAdam argues that existing social groups provide social and interpersonal motivations for taking part in group activities with other members. This includes taking part in the new movement with them. Group members who do not join the movement with their fellow group members will feel guilty and may be socially shunned or punished, while those who do join will be socially rewarded and feel closer to other members.

Cognitive Liberation

Cognitive liberation is a simple concept. Before they become likely to take part in any social movement, potential members must develop the idea that their current situation is unjust and that the oppressive conditions can be changed through collective action. In other words, they must develop a sense of relative deprivation, believe the deprivation is wrong, decide that their cause is righteous, and believe that the solution to their problem is structural. McAdam never uses the term "relative deprivation," but the idea is the same. Before a movement can start there must be a group of people who want something and who believe that they can get it by acting together.

McAdam also argues that the "powerlessness" of ordinary people is often simply a matter of perception. Workers, for example, can go on strike and bring an entire company to a grinding halt. They always have this power, but only realize and utilize it under certain circumstances. This realization is cognitive liberation.

Political Opportunity

Of the three factors listed above, political opportunity is the most important. As McAdam puts it, "the ongoing exercise of significant political leverage remains the key to the successful development of the movement" (1982: 52). Movement organizations have to acquire and use political power in order to get anything significant accomplished. Social movements do not exist in a vacuum; they are products of their social and political environment. Any changes within the system make social movements possible because they can capitalize on the temporarily unstable situation. Society can become more open and therefore more friendly to social movements, or it can become more restricted and therefore discourage social movement formation. All movements exist within and must successfully navigate the political currents of

their social system. The maintenance of organizational resources over time is of utmost importance. As long as there are sufficient material resources to keep the organization afloat, political and social factors are most important in determining if the movement group will succeed.

The Social System Social movements have to adapt to changing political and economic conditions within their society in order to survive. McAdam (1996) lists four key dimensions of political opportunity that relate directly to the social system the movement exists within:

1. The relative openness or closure of the institutionalized political system.
2. The stability or instability of the various interconnected powerful groups.
3. The presence or absence of allies among society's powerful.
4. The state's capacity for and tendency toward repression.

Each of these factors directly determines how much political opportunity a social movement can have. These factors are all beyond the control of the movement members. To succeed, a movement must exist in a time and place where these factors are favorable and must use them to the fullest advantage if they are to gain any success.

Conclusion

Political Process Theory is similar to Resource Mobilization Theory in many ways, but the fundamental difference lies in the focus. Where Resource Mobilization tends to focus on social support and the movements that successfully acquire it, Political Process Theory focuses more on the acquisition of political power. Popular opinion becomes just one small tool in the quest for power. Social change does not occur because "the people" want it, but because a specific group manages to get enough political clout to make it happen. Social movements are depicted as situations in which common people join together to fight the elite forces that rule society. Social movement members are often portrayed as something like folk heroes in Political Process analyses.

Discussion

Each of these theories has some flaws and each of them has some strengths. Mass Society Theory has been criticized for its exclusive focus on extreme, mass movements. At least one author (Ferber 1998) has argued that undue attention to the most extremist social movements has led to a lack of attention to more mainstream problems and movements. One attempt to analyze the simultaneous formation of several social movement and countermovement organizations in Chicago over the course of a decade of racial tension

found that Mass Society did not adequately explain or account for the formation of any of the groups (Berlet 1999).

Research has also failed to support Relative Deprivation Theory. Although the theory appeals to common sense and seems perfectly logical, many social movement organizations are led by individuals who do not experience any deprivation at all (Oberschall 1993). Further, many members of social movements do not stand to personally gain anything if the movement succeeds. Thousands of white Northerners actively contributed to the black civil rights movement in the United States in the 1950s and 1960s (McAdam 1982, Oberschall 1973). None of these individuals were motivated by a sense of personal deprivation, and none of them expected any direct benefits if the movement succeeded. It is not that relative deprivation is unimportant, but rather that there is too much which cannot be explained by relative deprivation alone.

This leaves us with Resource Mobilization Theory and Political Process Theory. Both theories seem to work well in explaining the rise and success or failure of social movements. Both include the relative deprivation experienced by some potential members as a minor but important factor. Both have been applied in research over the years and have fared well. The biggest difference between the two theories is ideological.

Resource Mobilization Theory looks at social movements from a slightly jaded perspective. The cause of the movement is barely noticed and the goals of the movement are not considered important as long as they are realistic and attainable. Resource Mobilization Theory applies to all movements in precisely the same way. This is its strength as an empirical theory; the processes that lead to the success or failure of a movement are exactly the same whether the movement is radical, liberal, conservative, or extremist. However, the emphasis on material resources, outside assistance, and professional leadership has led some to label the Resource Mobilization perspective "elitist" (McAdam 1982). Resource Mobilization Theory pays little or no attention to why a movement forms in the first place and largely ignores values and beliefs within a movement.

In contrast, Political Process Theory paints a picture of social movements as brave collections of powerless individuals joining together to strike out against the powerful elites who run society. This viewpoint is abundantly clear in McAdam's analysis of the civil rights movement in the United States. However, it is important to remember that not all social movements have admirable goals. There is a long history of oppressive, racist, and intolerant movements in American society (see discussion in Dobratz and Shanks-Meile 1997). Political Process Theory seems to indicate that members of these movements should be admired for their courage in standing up to the elite forces that controlled their lives.

However, the theory can be applied without these ideological biases coming into play. The real factor that sets Political Process Theory apart from

Resource Mobilization Theory is the attention paid to outside sociopolitical factors that change over time. Resource Mobilization Theory focuses on the conditions that must exist within an organization for it to succeed. Political Process Theory focuses on the conditions that must exist within a society before any movement can even begin, let alone succeed.

In the Chapter 16, all four of these theories will be applied to competing social movements in the United States today. This should make each theory's strengths and weaknesses more obvious to the reader. Chapter 15 focuses on the characteristics that tend to make a movement likely to fail or succeed in achieving their goals. This includes a look at the civil rights movement and the prostitutes' rights movement in the United States.